

Chapter 34

Living Sky School Division No. 202—Engaging Grades 7 to 12 Students

1.0 MAIN POINTS

Living Sky School Division No. 202 improved its processes to engage Grade 7 to 12 students. By June 2020, the Division established targets related to the *OurSCHOOL* survey, and its schools analyzed the year-over-year survey results.

Having targets increases the ability of the Division to assess the impact of its initiatives to engage students in learning. Analysis of survey results at a school-level helps schools focus their resources on initiatives that engage students and reduce the potential for initiative overload.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Student engagement is the extent to which students identify with and value schooling outcomes, have a sense of belonging at school, participate in academic and non-academic activities, strive to meet formal requirements of schooling, and make a serious personal investment in learning.¹

The Education Act, 1995 gives boards of education (school boards) the responsibility for administration and management of schools, with oversight from the Ministry of Education.² It makes school boards responsible for exercising general supervision and control over the schools in their school division. In addition, it establishes the duties of students relating to student engagement, such as attending school regularly and being diligent in their studies.³

To help school divisions monitor student engagement, the Ministry makes available and expects school divisions to administer annually the *OurSCHOOL* survey. The survey is designed to collect information such as measures of students' inclusion (e.g., sense of belonging, positive relationships) and engagement (i.e., interest and effort).⁴ An external consultant contracted by the Ministry developed the survey and facilitates its use.

School divisions separately administer this survey to students in Grades 4 to 6 (elementary) and in Grades 7 to 12 (middle/secondary).

Living Sky School Division is a primarily rural school division located in northwest Saskatchewan. The Division has approximately 5,500 students, and operates 28 schools in 18 communities.⁵ It includes the communities of North Battleford, Unity, Spiritwood, and surrounding areas.

¹ Willms, J. D., Friesen, S. & Milton, P., *What did you do in school today? Transforming classrooms through social, academic, and intellectual engagement*, (2009), p. 7.

² *The Education Act, 1995*, s. 85(1).

³ *Ibid.*, s. 150.

⁴ *Ministry of Education Annual Report for 2019-20*, p. 32.

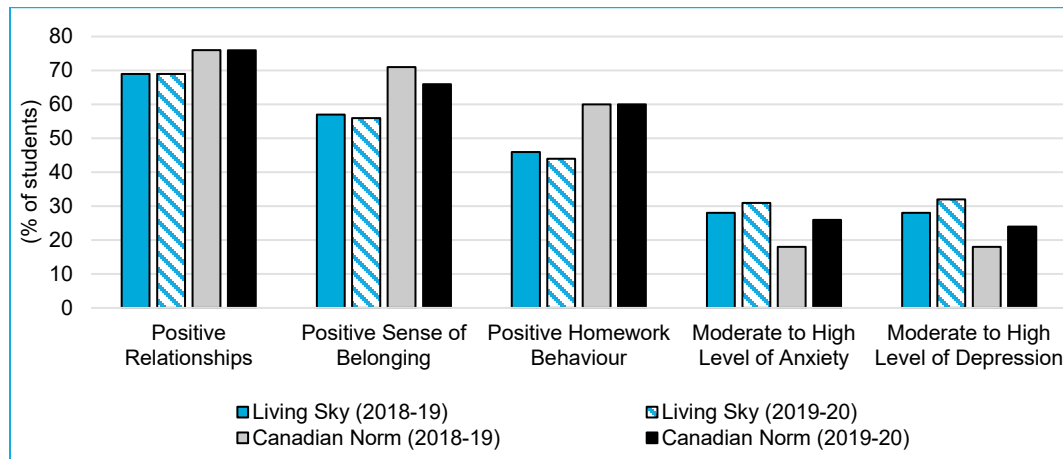
⁵ *Living Sky School Division No. 202 Annual Report 2018-19*, p. 7.



Figure 1 sets out the Division's Grades 7 to 12 survey results (i.e., positive sense of belonging, positive relationships, positive homework behaviour, level of anxiety, level of depression) from 2018-19 and 2019-20. Results were worse than the Canadian norm for all indicators.

When comparing the Division's survey results year over year, the percentage of students reporting positive relationships remained stable. While the Division's other student engagement indicators worsened, the trends were consistent with the national trends.

Figure 1—Living Sky School Division's 2018-19 and 2019-20 *OurSCHOOL* Engagement Indicators for Grades 7 to 12



Source: Adapted from Living Sky School Division's *OurSCHOOL* survey results.

Disengaged students are at a higher risk of falling behind, may drop out of school and not graduate.⁶ This may negatively impact future employment opportunities for these students.

At September 30, 2019, almost one-third of the Division's students had self-identified as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit/Inuk.⁷ Students living in poverty, students with disabilities, and students from ethnic minorities and First Nations, Métis, or Inuit/Inuk communities disproportionately experience disengagement from school. Disengagement has also been linked to school violence and social exclusion.⁸

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our second follow-up audit of Living Sky School Division's actions on the four recommendations we made in our *2017 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 8 on processes to engage Grades 7 to 12 students for the 12-month period ended January 31, 2017.

The Division had, other than in the areas reflected in our four recommendations, effective processes to engage Grades 7 to 12 students. By February 2019, the Division had implemented two of the four recommendations.⁹

⁶ blogs.edweek.org/edweek/inside-school-research/2013/07/pittsburgh--a_student_who_show.html (30 July 2020).

⁷ *Living Sky School Division No. 202 Annual Report 2018-19*, p. 36.

⁸ Willms, J. D., Friesen, S. & Milton, P., *What did you do in school today? Transforming classrooms through social, academic, and intellectual engagement*, (2009), p. 7.

⁹ See *2019 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 32 for the results of the previous follow-up audit.

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Division's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. The Division agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

In performing this follow-up audit, we examined excerpts of the Division's strategic plan, a sample of school survey action plans, as well as agendas from relevant meetings (e.g., Board, Administrators' Council). We also interviewed relevant Division staff.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at June 26, 2020, and the Division's actions up to that date.

3.1 Targets Established and Year-Over-Year Results Analyzed

We recommended Living Sky School Division No. 202 and its schools establish interim targets related to the OurSCHOOL survey. (2017 Report – Volume 1, p. 107, Recommendation 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 12, 2018)

Status—Intent of Recommendation Implemented

We recommended Living Sky School Division No. 202 and its schools analyze the year-over-year OurSCHOOL survey results to inform survey action plans. (2017 Report – Volume 1, p. 107, Recommendation 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 12, 2018)

Status—Implemented

Living Sky School Division and its schools established targets related to the *OurSCHOOL* survey and analyzed the year-over-year survey results. Its targets are as follows:

- By June 2020, schools will achieve parity between First Nation, Métis and Inuit/Inuk students (FNMI) [self-identified] and non-FNMI students on the *OurSCHOOL* engagement measures.
- By June 2020, 80 per cent of students will identify that they have positive relationships, including with teachers, and feel a sense of belonging.

We found the Division established targets related to the *OurSCHOOL* survey for the 2019-20 school year within its strategic plan, and communicated the targets to Board members and staff on its intranet.

In addition, the Division required its schools to establish targets for increasing student engagement within their school learning improvement plans. It provided its schools with a template form requiring staff to reflect on their school's year-over-year survey results.¹⁰

¹⁰ Our 2019 follow-up found the Division analyzed the year-over-year *OurSCHOOL* survey results at a division-level, but its schools did not perform a similar analysis.



The Division required all of its schools to submit completed forms to the Division office following completion of the *OurSCHOOL* survey in fall 2019.

We found the Division had sufficient processes in place for its schools to assess progress towards their targets (e.g., revisiting achievements in their school learning improvement plans, conducting a division-led survey each spring). Each of the two schools we tested set targets related to the *OurSCHOOL* survey in fall 2019, and completed a year-over-year analysis of their survey results (e.g., 2018 versus 2019).

As a result of the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition to remote learning in the spring of 2020, we found that the two schools we tested did not get an opportunity to assess achievement of their established student engagement targets in 2019-20. We understand that the schools plan to assess achievement of their targets in the upcoming year barring further unforeseen circumstances.

Establishment of survey targets helps the Division assess the impact of its initiatives to engage students in learning. Analysis of survey results at a school-level helps schools focus their resources on initiatives that can engage students, and help reduce the potential for initiative overload.

