

Chapter 22

Education—Instruction Time

1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Ministry of Education has made limited progress in implementing the remaining two recommendations from our 2009 audit about school instruction time.

The Ministry actively monitors the total required instruction hours through its annual review of school calendars. It expects school divisions to offer 950 hours of total instruction time annually to students in Grades 1 to 12. School divisions submit their Board-approved calendars each year in May, which outline the total instruction hours for elementary and high schools. We tested nine school divisions and found the Ministry reviewed the total reported instruction hours with all nine school divisions meeting the 950-hour total instruction time requirement.

However, not all school divisions in Saskatchewan meet the required instruction time for core subjects (e.g., math, English). In May 2021, the Ministry implemented an annual declaration process to monitor school divisions' compliance in providing the required instruction hours for core study areas (e.g., 95–100 hours for core subjects in high school). It expected school division officials to sign a declaration indicating whether they would meet required instruction hours, as set out in the Ministry's guidance, for all core subjects. Fifteen of 27 school divisions declared they would not meet core instruction hours, and one school division did not respond.

Moreover, the Ministry has taken limited action to follow up with those school divisions not in compliance with required instruction hours for core subjects. It needs to actively work with school divisions to resolve issues preventing delivery of the expected instruction hours in all core subject areas.

Not monitoring instructional hours delivered for core subjects and not assisting school divisions that do not provide students with required instruction hours, may result in students insufficiently understanding or not succeeding in those core subjects.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes our fifth follow-up audit of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2009 about the Ministry's processes to achieve compliance by school divisions in delivering student instruction time as required by the Minister.¹

2.1 Background

The *Education Act, 1995*, makes the Ministry of Education responsible for establishing regulations authorizing provincial instructional hours per year and approving courses of

¹ The original audit report regarding these recommendations can be found at www.auditor.sk.ca/publications/public-reports. We reported the original audit work in *2009 Report – Volume 3*, Chapter 4, pp. 52–67.



study authorized by Boards of Education for credit purposes in accordance with *The Education Regulations, 2015*. Instruction time is any time in which school pupils are in attendance and under teacher supervision for the purpose of receiving instruction in an educational program.²

By law, in each school year, school divisions must provide at least 950 hours of total instructional time for Grades 1 to 12.³

The Ministry's handbook states that school divisions are required to devote a minimum amount of hours to core subjects, such as English (language arts), mathematics, science, and physical education. For example, the handbook's guidance requires students in Grades 1 to 6 to have a minimum 210 minutes per week of instruction time in mathematics, while a core subject in high school (i.e., Grades 10–12) requires a minimum of 95–100 instruction hours. The Ministry allows for schools with classes between Grades 1 to 9 to reduce instruction time in any subject area by no more than 20% to allow for locally-developed options (e.g., religion in catholic schools).

Having minimum instruction hours for core curriculum subjects in all grades gives students sufficient instruction time to learn and understand core subjects.

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This audit follows up on two outstanding recommendations we first made in 2009. Our *2009 Report – Volume 3*, Chapter 4, concluded that for the year ending September 30, 2009, the Ministry of Education did not have adequate processes to achieve compliance by school divisions in delivering student instruction hours as required by the Minister. We made six recommendations. By January 2019, the Ministry implemented four of six recommendations.⁴

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

To complete this follow-up audit, we interviewed Ministry and school division staff, reviewed relevant legislation and policies, and assessed the reasonableness of supporting documentation.

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 September 15, 2021, and the Ministry's actions up to that date.

² *The Education Regulations, 2015*, s. 25.

³ *The Education Regulations, 2015*, s. 28.

⁴ *2019 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 19, pp.239–242.

3.1 Instruction Hours for Core Subjects Not Actively Monitored

We recommended the Ministry of Education monitor for all core curriculum areas of study the extent to which school divisions meet the Ministry's requirements for instruction time. (2009 Report – Volume 3, p. 63, Recommendation 5; Public Accounts Committee agreement May 12, 2010)

Status—Partially Implemented

The Ministry of Education actively monitors overall instruction hours required for school divisions (950 hours per school year for Grades 1 to 12), but it does not actively monitor school divisions' compliance with the required instruction hours for core curriculum areas of study (e.g., math, English).

Each year in May, school divisions submit their Board-approved, school-year calendars to the Ministry. Through its bi-weekly bulletin, the Ministry reminds school divisions of deadlines for submitting their calendars. The calendars outline the total instruction hours for schools in each school division for the following school year. The Ministry reviews these calendars to ensure consistency with minimum requirements for students' total instruction hours.

We reviewed the Ministry's analysis of nine school divisions' calendars and found the Ministry sufficiently monitors total instruction time (950 hours).

In May 2021, in addition to calendar submissions, the Ministry required school divisions to submit signed declarations confirming they are meeting all instruction hours for core curriculum areas of study as required. Fifteen of 27 school divisions declared they would not meet core subject instruction hours, and one school division did not respond.

We selected nine school divisions' annual declarations and found the Ministry reviewed and noted non-compliant school divisions. Five out of nine divisions declared not meeting the minimum instruction hour requirements for all core subjects in high school. Three of the five divisions stated in the declaration the high school semester structure affected their delivery of 95–100 instruction hours for core subjects.

The Ministry did not follow up with the school divisions to resolve the shortfall in instruction hours, also noted in **Section 3.2**.

Of the remaining four school divisions that indicated they were meeting the required instruction hours, we assessed two core subjects (Grade 10 English and math) in two different semesters and found:

- One school division met the required instruction hours in both semesters
- We were unable to confirm the instruction hours met minimums based on the information provided by three school divisions

The Ministry noted it plans to require additional information from school divisions about the reported core subject instruction hours in their annual declarations. The updated annual declaration will be included as part of the annual calendar review process in May 2022.



Not monitoring core subjects' instructional hours increases the risk that school divisions are not providing students with required instruction time. Providing students with appropriate instructional hours for required areas of study increases their understanding in core subjects and overall success.

3.2 Follow Up and Corrective Action Needed for Instruction Time Shortfalls

We recommended the Ministry of Education take corrective action where necessary to improve school division compliance with the Ministry's requirements for instruction time. (2009 Report – Volume 3, p. 64, Recommendation 6;

Public Accounts Committee agreement May 12, 2010)

Status—Partially Implemented

The Ministry of Education has not instituted a process to follow up and address school divisions that are not complying with core subject instruction hour requirements (e.g., minimum 95–100 hours per course in high school).

The Ministry communicates the results from its review of the school calendars for total instruction hours. However, it does not follow up with school divisions to resolve compliance issues declared in the annual declarations for core curriculum areas of study.

We found in our testing of nine school divisions, the Ministry communicated to school divisions the results of its school calendar analysis. All nine met the 950-hour total instruction hour requirements.

As mentioned in **Section 3.1**, five out of nine divisions tested stated in their annual declarations that they are not meeting the minimum requirements for all core subjects in high schools. The Ministry did not follow up with these school divisions to resolve the shortfall in instruction hours.

In August 2021, the Ministry indicated they met with school division officials to discuss updating its handbook's guidance on instruction hours for school divisions to reflect the change in core subject instructional time from 100 hours to between 95–100 hours. The Ministry posted this change in guidance on its website in September 2021. We noted the handbook's guidance does not require an annual declaration for core subject hours and does not outline follow up processes with those school divisions not in compliance with the required instruction hours.

Lack of processes to address non-compliance with core subject instruction hour requirements increases the risk students do not receive the appropriate amount of time to learn and understand core curriculum areas of study.