

Chapter 21

Education—Increasing Grade 12 Graduation Rates

1.0 MAIN POINTS

By June 2021, the Ministry of Education implemented the one outstanding recommendation we first made in our 2012 audit relating to increasing Grade 12 graduation rates. The Ministry analyzed each school division's 2019–20 annual report to determine whether the 27 school divisions used effective strategies to improve Grade 12 graduation rates. The Ministry summarized its analysis and communicated its findings to school divisions on June 1, 2021.

Evaluating strategies across school divisions allows the Ministry to effectively monitor school divisions' strategies for improving graduation rates. Moreover, analyzing and communicating findings to all school divisions can help school divisions identify common barriers and actions to improve graduation rates across the sector.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

The Ministry of Education is responsible for providing leadership and direction to the prekindergarten through Grade 12 education sector. It promotes student success and well-being for Saskatchewan children and youth, as well as family literacy as a foundation for the province's social and economic growth.¹

Graduating from Grade 12 is an important personal goal with broad societal implications. On a personal level, students who do not complete Grade 12 have fewer work opportunities, less income, and ultimately poorer health.² Over the long term, Grade 12 graduation rates affect the size of the skilled workforce and the provincial economy.

In 2013, the Ministry of Education, school divisions, and participating First Nations Education Authorities formed the Provincial Leadership Team to lead and coordinate the development and implementation of the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP).³ One goal included in the ESSP outlined that by June 30, 2020, Saskatchewan would achieve an 85% three-year graduation rate and a 90% five-year graduation rate; overall, neither goal was achieved by June 2020.⁴ As of June 2021, the Ministry and its education sector partners continued to develop a new provincial education plan to guide the sector.⁵

¹ Ministry of Education Plan for 2021–22, p. 3.

² Ministry of Education, *Keeping Kids in School: Trends, Issues and Responses*, (2008), pp. 4–5.

³ The Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) is a multi-year strategic plan focused on specific outcomes and achieving goals set out in the *Saskatchewan Plan for Growth: Vision 2020 and Beyond*.

⁴ Ministry of Education 2020–21 Annual Report, p. 20.

⁵ Ministry of Education Plan for 2021–22, p. 3.



Figure 1 illustrates the three-year, five-year and eventual graduation rates for Saskatchewan students completing Grade 12 from June 2011 to June 2020. It shows Grade 12 graduation rates improved overall during this time period. However, it also shows the disparity in graduation rates for students who identify as First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students (FNMI) as compared to students who do not self-identify as FNMI.

Figure 1—Trends for Completion of Grade 12

Completing Grade 12	Three-year (within three years) ^A			Five-year (within five years) ^A			Eventual (within eight or more years) ^A		
	All	Non-FNMI	FNMI ^B	All	Non-FNMI	FNMI ^B	All	Non-FNMI	FNMI ^B
June 2011	72.7	81.8	32.9	81.3	87.9	48.5	84.8	89.0	60.3
June 2012	73.7	82.9	35.9	81.2	88.0	49.7	85.6	89.1	63.0
June 2013	74.8	83.9	37.4	80.1	87.0	50.0	84.7	88.8	62.8
June 2014	74.7	83.4	40.3	81.4	88.1	54.2	85.8	90.3	64.0
June 2015	75.2	84.3	40.1	82.5	89.2	55.9	86.1	90.7	65.3
June 2016	75.6	84.6	41.8	83.3	89.5	59.6	85.1	89.7	65.2
June 2017	76.5	85.4	43.2	84.0	90.4	59.8	85.9	90.7	66.8
June 2018	77.4	86.5	44.5	84.4	91.1	59.4	86.3	91.2	67.1
June 2019	77.3	86.8	43.4	84.7	91.2	61.0	86.7	91.4	68.6
June 2020 ^C	79.8	89.2	46.7	85.5	91.9	62.6	87.1	92.2	68.1
Sector Goal	85.0			90.0			-		

Source: *Ministry of Education 2020–21 Annual Report*, p. 20.

This is the most recent data available at August 16, 2021, as graduation results for June 2021 will not be available until fall 2021.

^A Three-year graduation rates are calculated as the percentage of students who complete Grade 12 within three years of starting Grade 10. Five-year graduation rates are calculated as the percentage of students who complete Grade 12 within five years of starting Grade 10 (and include those who graduate within three years). Eventual graduation rates are the percentage of students who started Grade 10 in 2011–12 who completed Grade 12 in eight years or more by June 2020. Data includes students in provincially funded, independent and First Nations schools.

^B FNMI students are those who choose to self-identify as First Nations (Registered/Treaty/Status Indian, Non-Status Indian), Métis, or Inuit/Inuk.

^C Three-year graduation rates for the 2019–20 school year show a larger than usual year-over-year percentage point increase for June 2020. The provincial policy set in place in response to the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., ensuring students would receive passing grades in courses in which they were actively enrolled as of March 13, 2020), along with school operational and instructional responses, likely contributed to this increase.

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our fourth follow-up audit of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2012.⁶

Our *2012 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 2, concluded that, during February 1, 2011 to January 31, 2012, the Ministry of Education did not have effective processes to increase Grade 12 graduation rates above 2004–05 baselines. We made 10 recommendations. In our three subsequent follow-ups of the Ministry's actions on these recommendations, we found the Ministry implemented nine of the 10 recommendations by January 2019.⁷

⁶ *2012 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 2, pp. 31–47.

⁷ *2014 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 19, pp. 163–170; *2017 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 20, pp. 233–240; *2019 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 18, pp. 235–237.

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 recommendation, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. Ministry management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To perform this follow-up audit, we interviewed relevant Ministry officials and reviewed the Ministry's process to assess school divisions' strategies to improve graduation rates.

3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION

This section sets out our recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at June 1, 2021, and the Ministry's actions up to that date.

3.1 Analyzed School Divisions' Use of Effective Strategies to Increase Graduation Rates

We recommended the Ministry of Education review each school division's Continuous Improvement Plan and assess its planned use of key effective strategies before approving the school division's budget for the related school year. (2012 Report – Volume 1, p. 40, Recommendation 6; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 14, 2015)

Status—Implemented

The Ministry of Education analyzed each school division's 2019–20 annual report to determine whether the 27 school divisions used effective strategies to improve Grade 12 graduation rates. The Ministry communicated its analysis and findings to school divisions in June 2021.

The Ministry used a rubric (i.e., standard assessment tool) to analyze the annual reports. The Ministry developed its rubric through engagement with stakeholders in school divisions, review of good practice literature, and review of school divisions' actions and strategies (i.e., as described in their graduation rate improvement plans and annual reports). In January 2021, the Ministry distributed the final rubric to school divisions to guide future development of their graduation rate improvement plans.

Each school division's annual report includes information (e.g., measures, strategies) about graduation rates. By May 2021, the Ministry analyzed the school divisions' 2019–20 annual reports to assess whether school divisions' strategies aligned with the rubric. The Ministry summarized its analysis and communicated its findings to school divisions on June 1, 2021. This included highlighting areas where certain school divisions used key effective strategies for improving graduation rates (e.g., use of intervention strategies with a personalized focus, systematically identifying students at risk of not completing high school). Formally sharing effective strategies should help all school divisions develop and implement strategies to improve graduation rates.



We tested the Ministry's analysis for a sample of four school divisions and found the Ministry used the rubric to assess these school divisions' strategies. We found the Ministry's analysis consistent with the information reported by these school divisions in their annual reports.

Using a rubric to evaluate each school division's strategies allows the Ministry to complete consistent analysis and provide school divisions with relevant information to consider and to adjust their graduation rate improvement strategies as necessary. It also allows the Ministry to effectively monitor school divisions' strategies for improving graduation rates. Moreover, analyzing school divisions' actions to increase graduation rates identifies common barriers and highlights effective actions to further improve graduation rates.