

Chapter 23

Saskatoon School Division No. 13—Supporting Students with Intensive Needs

1.0 MAIN POINTS

By April 2022, Saskatoon School Division No. 13 improved its processes to support Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. Of the 11 recommendations we first made in 2018, the Division implemented six recommendations and made progress on the other five recommendations.

The Division regularly analyzed trends in the number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs, and their categories of needs. The Division used this data to help it estimate future enrolment of students with intensive needs as well as the staff needed to support those students. It also maintained consistent and accessible documentation on key discussions, decisions, and steps taken to support students with intensive needs, and student assessment information in students' cumulative files. Although, the Division has not set expected timeframes for completing assessments.

The Division established expectations for school staff to retain evidence of parents' agreement on learning plans and complete regular student progress reports; however, school staff did not always do so. Not documenting agreement with parents on learning plans and formally assessing students' progress regularly may negatively affect student success.

The Division also indicated it is developing reporting that will assist in centrally monitoring individual learning plan goal attainment. Monitoring whether students are progressing against goals as expected would help the Division and its Board determine whether the Division is providing sufficient support to students with intensive needs.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 is an urban school division located in the city of Saskatoon. It has just over 2,600 full-time equivalent staff, including approximately 1,400 FTE classroom teachers, and 650 FTE educational staff in other positions (e.g., educational assistants, speech language pathologists).¹ The Division has about 25,000 students of which approximately two-thirds are Kindergarten to Grade 8 students.²

The Education Act, 1995 requires school boards to reasonably accommodate students with intensive needs in the regular program of instruction.³ Students with intensive needs are

¹ *The Board of Education of the Saskatoon Public School Division No. 13 of Saskatchewan 2020-21 Annual Report*, p. 37.

² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³ Section 178(9) of *The Education Act, 1995*.



those assessed as having a capacity to learn that is compromised by a cognitive, social-emotional, behavioural, or physical condition.

At April 2022, the Division had 1,136 Kindergarten to Grade 8 students identified as having intensive needs, a 3% decrease since 2017–18. If school boards cannot accommodate these students in regular programming, the Act expects them to provide special programming to meet those students' learning needs. Approximately 35% of the Division's intensive needs students are in specialized programs.⁴

The Education Regulations, 2019 places further expectations on school divisions in identifying students with intensive needs, and providing them with services. For example, upon request a school division's Director of Education must direct an assessment to be conducted to determine whether a student has intensive needs.⁵ Further, school boards are responsible for making programs and supports available to students with intensive needs, at no cost to parents, using qualified individuals to provide programs/supports.⁶

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our follow-up audit of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2018.

In 2018, we assessed the Division's processes for supporting Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. Our *2018 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 11, concluded the Division had effective processes, except in the areas reflected in our recommendations. We made 11 recommendations.⁷

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.

To perform our follow-up audit, we discussed actions taken with Division management. We assessed the Division's processes by examining policies and other guidance that relate to providing supports for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. We tested a sample of student files at five Kindergarten to Grade 8 schools to assess operating effectiveness of the Division's processes.

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 April 22, 2022, and the Division's actions up to that date.

⁴ The Division offers specialized programs targeted to students with specific needs (e.g., behavioural challenges, intellectual disabilities). Programs include the Autism Support Program and Functional Life Skills; the Division also has a specialized school for students with severe or multiple disabilities (John Dolan School).

⁵ Section 48(5) of *The Education Regulations, 2019*.

⁶ Section 50(1) of *The Education Regulations, 2019*.

⁷ *2018 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 11*, pp. 157–178.

3.1 Forecast and Analysis of Students with Intensive Needs and Related Staffing Completed

We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 formally estimate the future enrolment of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.

(2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 167, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 analyze trends in the number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs, and their categories of intensive needs.

(2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 169, Recommendation 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 document its determination of staff needed to support Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.

(2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 169, Recommendation 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 estimated future enrolment of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs, as well as the staff needed to support those students. The Division also regularly analyzed trends in the number of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs, and their categories of needs.

By April 2022, the Division analyzed year-over-year changes in enrolment of students with intensive needs. At April 2022, the Division had 1,136 Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs enrolled. The Division used its analysis to estimate future enrolment of students with intensive needs (i.e., for the next five years). The Division also used this analysis to estimate the number of staff it will need to support those students. We found the Division's process to prepare its estimates and analysis reasonable.

Reliable estimates of future enrolment of students with intensive needs gives the Division better information to determine resources (e.g., resource teachers, educational assistants) to support those students.

Since October 2020, the Coordinator, Special Education, provides Division senior management with monthly reports that include current statistics on the number of students with intensive needs, and their category of needs. We found the monthly reports included:

- Analysis on changes in the intensive needs students population (e.g., changes in the number of students with autism)
- Number of students recently designated as having intensive needs
- Number of students requiring the support of an educational assistant



Analyzing trends in the number of students with intensive needs, and their categories of intensive needs will help the Division make resourcing decisions, as well as inform the Division's future estimates of intensive needs students and related staffing.

3.2 Consistent and Accessible Documentation Maintained

We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 require schools to consistently document key consultations, decisions, and action items resulting from their meetings for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 171, Recommendation 4; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 require consistent and accessible documentation of key discussions, decisions, and steps taken to implement learning plans for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 174, Recommendation 8; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 requires schools to maintain consistent and accessible documentation on key discussions, including decisions and steps taken to support students with intensive needs.

The Division has guidance setting out expectations and best practices for school TEAMS meetings.⁸ The guidance includes reference materials and record-keeping templates that provide school TEAMS guidance on steps to prepare for TEAMS meetings, including documentation to gather and include in the agenda.

Further, the Division has outlined expectations for record keeping for TEAMS meetings including:

- Tracking concerns, strategies implemented, responses to interventions, action plans and staff responsible
- Tracking referrals for assessments
- Following and monitoring students who are not yet designated intensive needs, or students who are improving

School TEAMS use Division-supplied IT software (called OneNote) to record information about their meetings. The Division uses a student supports IT system (called CLEVR) to organize and track individual planning and reporting information (e.g., learning plans, progress reports) for students with intensive needs. All school TEAMS members have access to the IT software and the student supports IT system.

⁸ Each school has a group—referred to as school TEAMS—comprised of both school staff (e.g., principals, resource teachers) and Division professionals (e.g., speech language pathologist, educational psychologist) who are responsible for deciding appropriate supports for students with intensive needs.

We tested 31 files of students with intensive needs and found that the Division documented key discussions, decisions, and steps to implement student learning plans in its IT software and student supports IT system.

Maintaining consistent and accessible documentation on key discussions, decisions and steps taken to support students with intensive needs helps students to receive timely supports. This also reduces the risk of repeating intervention strategies found to be ineffective for students with intensive needs.

3.3 Student Assessment Information Maintained

We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 maintain in student cumulative files assessment information related to Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 171, Recommendation 5; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 maintained assessment information related to Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs in student cumulative files as expected.

The Division expects school staff to maintain certain information, such as student learning plans and assessment reports (e.g., diagnostic reports from psychologists or speech language pathologist), in students' cumulative files in line with its policy.⁹ We found the Division's policy aligned with guidance from the Ministry of Education.¹⁰

We tested 31 student files and found all of the files contained assessment information as expected.

Maintaining assessment information on student cumulative files allows this information to be accessible to parents and to school staff in order to provide sufficient supports to students with intensive needs.

3.4 Expected Timeframes for Completing Assessments Needed

We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 provide guidance on expected timelines for completion of assessments of Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 172, Recommendation 6; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Partially Implemented

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 analyzed average time to complete assessments, but it has not yet provided guidance to Division professionals on expected timelines.

⁹ School staff refers to staff such as school principals, vice principals, resource teachers, special education teachers, and classroom teachers.

¹⁰ Student Cumulative Record Guidelines 2019 (pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/83639/Student%252BCumulative%252BRecord%252BGuidelines%252B2019.pdf) (22 April 2022).



Division professionals (e.g., speech language pathologist, educational psychologist) track the time it takes from when they receive assessment referrals from school TEAMS to when they complete the assessment. Using this information, the Division analyzed the average time taken to complete assessments during the 2020–21 school year. Overall, there were 589 assessments completed during that period. The Division found it takes, on average:

- 51 school days (approximately 10 weeks) to complete a speech language assessment
- 41 school days (approximately eight weeks) to complete a psychological assessment

The Division indicated it plans to set out, in guidance, 30 school days as an expected timeframe to complete the assessment process for the 2022–23 school year.

Delays in completing assessments may cause delays in implementing learning supports for students with intensive needs, which in turn, may negatively impact students' success.

3.5 Parent Agreement on Learning Plans Not Always Documented

We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 retain evidence of agreement on learning plans for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 173, Recommendation 7; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Partially Implemented

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 did not always retain evidence of agreement on learning plans for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.

Annually, the Division expects school staff to meet with parents to discuss a student's learning plan, and sign-off and agree with the plan. If school staff are unable to meet with parents, the Division expects school staff to document, in the learning plan, their attempts to meet with parents to obtain agreement on the plan (e.g., phone calls, emails).

We tested 30 student files, and found for five students, school staff did not document agreement with parents on learning plans, or their attempts to obtain agreement. School staff indicated they attempted to contact parents, but did not document this in the learning plan. These files did not contain any indication of disagreement with parents on learning plans.

Documenting agreement of learning plans shows that school staff and parents agree on the Division's approach to address student needs and their involvement. Not having documented agreement between school staff and parents on the learning plan may affect student success.

3.6 Progress Reports Not Always Completed

We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 regularly monitor students' progress in achieving goals set out in learning plans for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 174, Recommendation 9; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Partially Implemented

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 did not always regularly monitor students' progress in achieving their learning plan goals.

The Division expects school staff to complete reports on each student's progress in meeting the goals set out in each student's learning plan at least twice a year.¹¹ The Division also expects school staff to include the year-end progress report in the student's cumulative file.

We found school staff did not complete progress reports as expected for two of 24 student files we reviewed. Also, we found school staff did not include year-end progress reports in students' cumulative files for eight of 24 student files we reviewed.

Not regularly assessing students' progress in meeting learning plan goals increases the risk that the Division does not make timely adjustments to the learning goals, which may impact student success.

3.7 Division Monitoring of Results Needed

We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 centrally monitor whether schools sufficiently support Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with identified intensive needs to enable students to progress towards their individual learning goals. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 175, Recommendation 10; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Partially Implemented

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 does not formally monitor on a division-wide basis or on a school-by-school basis whether students with intensive needs are progressing against individual learning plan goals as expected.

The Division monitors the allocations of specialized supports, such as educational assistants and assistive technology (e.g., laptops, tablets) for students with intensive needs. At April 2022, the Division indicated it had 548 FTE educational assistants for students with intensive needs (compared to 336 FTEs at the time of our 2018 audit).¹² The Division also tracks special education program referrals and waitlists. For example, at April 2022, there were 24 students on waitlists for the Division's special education programs.

¹¹ Starting with the 2021–22 school year, the Division changed the expectation for progress reports to twice per year from three times.

¹² At April 2022, the Division indicated total FTE educational assistants included 94 FTEs funded through Jordan's Principle. Jordan's Principle is an initiative to provide First Nations children with access to health, education, or social supports. www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1568396042341/1568396159824 (29 April 2022).



The Division indicated it is working with its student supports IT system vendor (as well as with other school divisions) to develop reporting that will assist the Division to centrally monitor individual learning plan goal attainment. It expects to use this reporting during the 2022–23 school year.

Monitoring whether students are progressing against individual learning plan goals as expected would help the Division determine whether it provides sufficient support to students with intensive needs. The information would also help the Division to evaluate resource deployment to schools to support students with intensive needs.

3.8 Some Reporting on Learning Supports Provided

We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 provide senior management and its Board of Education with enough information to determine the sufficiency of learning supports for Kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 177, Recommendation 11; Public Accounts Committee agreement September 25, 2019)

Status—Partially Implemented

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 provides senior management and its Board of Education with some information on the supports provided to students with intensive needs, but it could provide more.

During the school year, the Coordinator, Special Education, provides Division senior management with monthly reports on the number of students with intensive needs, and their category of needs (see **Section 3.1**). We found the monthly reports also contained information on student placements in specialized programs, and related waitlists.

In November 2021, the Division provided its Board with an overview of its programs and processes to support students with intensive needs, as well as trends in the number and categories of student with intensive needs. For example, the number of students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder increased from 19% of students with intensive needs to 26% of students with intensive needs between 2017–18 and 2020–21.

The Division indicated it is working with its student supports IT system vendor to develop reporting that will assist the Division to centrally monitor individual learning plan goal attainment. This reporting would also help the Division determine whether it is providing sufficient support to students with intensive needs (see **Section 3.7**).

Providing senior management and the Board with information to determine the sufficiency of learning supports would assist the Division to assess whether it provides students with educational services that are consistent with those students' educational needs and abilities, and sufficiently accommodate all students with intensive needs.