

Chapter 3

Education—Improving Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Students

1.0 MAIN POINTS

In 2018, the Ministry of Education renewed its commitment to work collaboratively with educational partners to improve Indigenous student achievement. Improving educational outcomes, including graduation rates, for Indigenous students is important as there is a significant disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

For example, 37% of Indigenous students in the Regina Public School Division were reading at or above Grade 3 reading levels in 2020–21 compared to the entire Grade 3 student population at 58%. This disparity, along with Saskatchewan’s Indigenous population growth, makes it integral for the Ministry to drive concerted efforts to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

We assessed the Ministry of Education’s processes to implement the *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework* to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. The Ministry plans to renew its Framework in 2022–23.

In 2020–21, approximately 34,000 of 184,000 kindergarten to Grade 12 students (almost 19%) in provincial schools self-identified as Indigenous.

At March 2022, we found that while the Ministry had implemented several initiatives (e.g., Following Their Voices) aimed at improving Indigenous student graduation rates, these graduation rates remained relatively unchanged since 2018 when the Ministry implemented its Framework (2021: 44% of Indigenous students graduating within three-years of beginning Grade 10).

We found the Ministry needs to:

- Expand measures and targets it sets for Indigenous student academic achievement beyond graduation rates, to allow broader analysis of outcome data which can inform required change. It is important to consider assessing Indigenous student numeracy, literacy, attendance, and engagement levels at grades well before Grade 10.
- Require enhanced reporting from school divisions on Indigenous student success related to expanded measures and targets.
- Determine actions to address root causes of underperforming initiatives related to Indigenous student success. For instance, the Following Their Voices initiative affects about 25% of Indigenous students in provincial schools, but it is not implemented sector-wide.

The Ministry’s direct involvement in supporting the education sector’s goals and strategies associated with improving Indigenous students’ achievement is essential in making lasting changes to Indigenous student educational outcomes.



2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reports the results of our audit of the Ministry of Education's processes to implement the *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework* to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

In June 2018, the Ministry released the *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework*. Through the Framework, the Ministry committed to work collaboratively with all its educational partners to strengthen relationships and achieve an equitable and inclusive system that benefits all learners.¹

The Framework is the umbrella for all actions related to prekindergarten to Grade 12 Indigenous student education as well as offers an approach to improving Indigenous student engagement and achievement.

2.1 Ministry's Role in Improving Indigenous Student Success and Graduation Rates

The Education Act, 1995, assigns responsibility to the Ministry of Education for all matters relating to early learning, elementary, and secondary education—this includes the education of First Nations, Métis and Inuit (i.e., Indigenous) students.²

The Ministry provides leadership and direction to the prekindergarten through Grade 12 education sector. It supports the sector through funding, governance and accountability, with a focus on improving student achievement.³

The Act makes the Ministry responsible for overseeing school divisions. To fulfill this responsibility, the Ministry works with elected Boards of Education and appointed directors, as well approves school divisions' budgets annually.⁴ The Act also assigns school divisions the responsibility for providing education to all students, including to Indigenous students.⁵

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).^{6,7}

The ESSP included the following goals particularly relating to the education of Indigenous students:⁸

- Improve three-year graduation rates from 35% in June 2012 to at least 65% by June 30, 2020

¹ *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework*, p. 14.

² *The Education Act, 1995*, s. 3(1) and 3(1.1).

³ Ministry of Education, *Annual Report for 2021–22*, p. 5.

⁴ *The Education Act, 1995*, s. 280.

⁵ *Ibid.*, s. 85.

⁶ 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*.

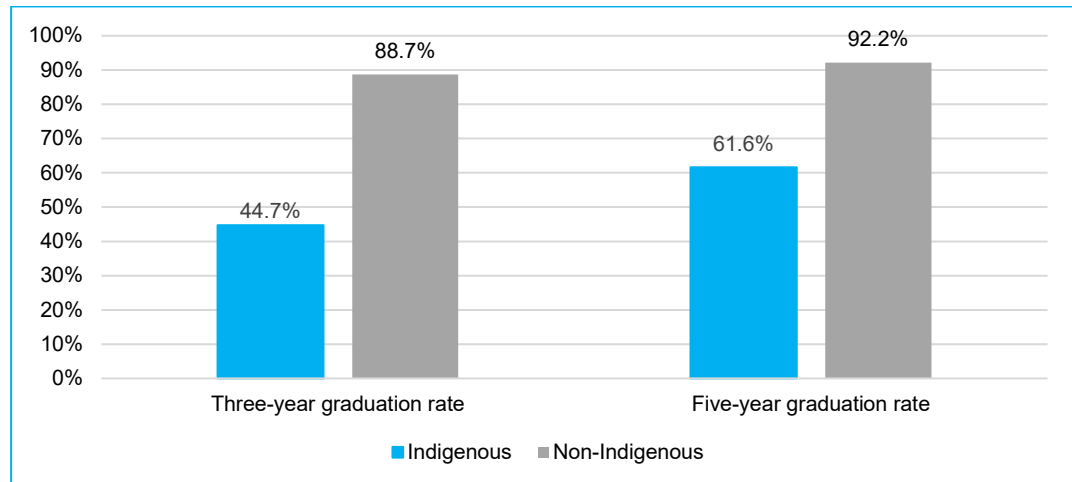
⁷ First Nations Education Authorities are legally-constituted entities established by federal statute to provide education services to participating First Nations.

⁸ The original ESSP expired in 2020; however, due to delays caused by the pandemic, the Ministry rolled forward target dates in the ESSP to June 30, 2022.

- Improve five-year graduation rates from 50% in June 2014 to at least 75% by June 30, 2020⁹

Figure 1 shows that the Ministry did not achieve these targets by June 30, 2021. At June 30, 2021, the Indigenous student three-year graduation rate was closer to 45%, rather than the targeted 65%. Although the educational attainment of Indigenous students improved over the last decade, there is still a significant disparity in three- and five-year graduation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

Figure 1—Graduation Rates for Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Students at June 30, 2021



Source: Ministry of Education, *Annual Report for 2021–22*, p. 15.

2.2 Importance of Indigenous Student Success

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have a right to:

- All levels and forms of education without discrimination
- Access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language
- Dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations, which shall be appropriately reflected in education
- Improvement of economic and social conditions, including areas such as education, employment, and vocational training and retraining¹⁰

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, Indigenous children generally have not had access to the same quality of education as other children in their country. One reason cited is that neither school leaders nor teachers are effectively prepared to teach Indigenous students, nor do they have the necessary resources to help Indigenous students develop their capabilities and confidence.¹¹

⁹ The Ministry measures graduation rates based on the number of years it takes a student to graduate after beginning Grade 10.

¹⁰ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, Articles 14.1, 14.2, 15, and 21.

¹¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Supporting Success for Indigenous Students*, p. 2.



2.2.1 Indigenous Population Continues to Grow

The growth in Canada's Indigenous peoples population further emphasizes the need for the education sector to focus on the schooling of Indigenous students, and their success.¹² Indigenous peoples represented about 17% of Saskatchewan's population based on the 2021 national census, and they are generally younger than the non-Indigenous population.

Saskatchewan's Indigenous children aged 14 and under represent 32% of the Indigenous population, while similarly aged non-Indigenous children represent about 17% of the non-Indigenous population.¹³ By 2036, Statistics Canada projects Saskatchewan and Manitoba as having the highest proportion of Indigenous peoples in their total population representing one Indigenous person per five people in the provinces.¹⁴

As the overall Indigenous population in Saskatchewan continues to grow, so does Indigenous student enrolments. As of the 2020–21 school year, over 34,000 Indigenous students enrolled in provincial school divisions.¹⁵

2.2.2 Disparity in Indigenous Educational Outcomes

The disparity in graduation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, along with Saskatchewan's increasing Indigenous population growth, makes it important for the education sector to make concerted efforts to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students, which benefits both the students and the province as a whole.

Living without a high school diploma can be a significant obstacle to employment. As of 2016, Saskatchewan's Indigenous population continued to have higher rates of unemployment than their non-Indigenous counterparts—18.6% compared to 5.6%.¹⁶ Improving Indigenous student educational outcomes will also expand the education level and skills of the labour force, as well as reduce costs in justice and corrections, child and family services, healthcare and social assistance.¹⁷

The legacy of residential schools also profoundly impacts outcomes for Indigenous peoples in terms of education, employment, health, suicide, offending and victimization rates, as well as the number of children in care.^{18,19} Saskatchewan proportionally has a large residential school survivor populace—20 schools in the province recognized in the *Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement*—causing additional barriers to educational success.²⁰ The Inspiring Success Framework helps the Ministry and its education sector partners to seek to advance reconciliation through education.²¹

¹² www.150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220921/dq220921a-eng.htm?indid=32990-1&indgeo=0 (17 January 2023).

¹³ www.saskatchewan.ca/government/government-data/bureau-of-statistics/population-and-census (13 December 2022).

¹⁴ www.150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/150917/dq150917b-eng.htm (18 October 2022).

¹⁵ Adapted from information provided by the Ministry of Education.

¹⁶ Saskatchewan Bureau of Statistics, *Saskatchewan Labour and Education: 2016 Census of Canada*, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework*, p. 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁹ In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada published its report detailing abuse experienced by Indigenous children in residential schools, where an estimated 3,200 children died from poor living conditions. The Commission also published 94 'Calls to Action' urging all levels of government—federal, provincial, territorial and Indigenous—to work together to change policies and programs in a concerted effort to repair the harm caused by residential schools and move forward with reconciliation. www.ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf%20 (23 March 2023).

²⁰ www.teaching.usask.ca/indigenoussk/import/residential_schools.php (19 October 2022).

²¹ *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework*, p. 5.

The Ministry's direct involvement in supporting the education sector's goals and strategies associated with improving Indigenous students' achievement is integral in making lasting change to Indigenous student educational outcomes.

3.0 AUDIT CONCLUSION

For the period ended March 31, 2022, we concluded the Ministry of Education had, other than in the following areas, effective processes to implement the *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework* to improve outcomes for Indigenous students.

The Ministry needs to:

- Expand measures and targets it sets for Indigenous student academic achievement beyond graduation rates
- Require enhanced reporting from school divisions on Indigenous student success
- Determine actions to address root causes of underperforming measures related to Indigenous student success

Figure 2—Audit Objective, Criteria, and Approach

Audit Objective:

To assess whether the Ministry of Education had effective processes, for the period ending March 31, 2022, to implement the *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework* to improve outcomes for Indigenous students.

Audit Criteria:

Processes to:

1. Coordinate implementation of Framework

- Determine key success factors of Framework (e.g., indicators, measures)
- Assign resources and responsibilities for Framework implementation (e.g., engage third parties, obtain personnel with appropriate skills, technology, data collection)
- Implement actions in Framework as planned
- Mitigate barriers (e.g., internal or external resource availability, continuous student transfers, COVID-19 pandemic) to Framework implementation

2. Monitor success of Framework

- Measure progress regularly (e.g., analyze data, define reporting requirements)
- Adjust actions as required (e.g., determine improvement opportunities)
- Keep key stakeholders (e.g., school divisions, Indigenous partners) informed of progress and successful actions

Audit Approach:

To conduct this audit, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate the Ministry's processes, we used the above criteria based on our related work, reviews of literature including reports of other auditors, and consultations with management. Ministry management agreed with the above criteria.

We examined the Ministry's procedures, policies, strategies, and reports relating to implementing the Framework. We assessed the Ministry's processes to establish key success measures, coordinate both internal and external resources, communicate with education partners, and monitor progress of improving outcomes for Indigenous students. We tested a sample of education partners' reporting to verify reporting met Ministry expectations and was timely. We used an external consultant with expertise in the area to help us identify good practice and to assess the Ministry's processes.



4.0 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Various Parties Involved in Educating Indigenous Students

The Ministry of Education is responsible for providing education to all students in provincially run schools and works alongside First Nations Education Authorities to strengthen supports available to Indigenous students learning at federally-funded schools.

The Ministry is responsible for, and the funding of, the provincial school system and oversees its 27 school divisions. Each First Nations with a school on its reserve (i.e., First Nations schools) controls its own school and is responsible for educating its on-reserve students using federal funding.

School divisions provide education services to all prekindergarten to Grade 12 students, including some Indigenous students, within 737 schools across the province.²² An additional 84 First Nations schools in Saskatchewan educate 19,709 K–12 students.²³

In 2020–21, approximately 34,000 of 184,000 kindergarten to Grade 12 students (almost 19%) in provincial schools self-identified as Indigenous.²⁴

Collaboration between the provincially-funded education system and First Nations-operated schools (i.e., federally-funded schools) is important to build greater capacity to strengthen supports and learning success for all Indigenous students in Saskatchewan.

4.2 Inspiring Success Framework Outlines Vision, Goals and Guiding Principles

The Ministry of Education released its *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Policy Framework* in June 2018 replacing the previous Framework from 2009.²⁵ It contains key elements including a vision, goals, and guiding principles.

The Ministry developed the Framework with the assistance of Indigenous education organizations, Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers, and school divisions.

The vision outlined in the Framework is to have a provincial education system that includes Indigenous systems, cultures and languages to ensure an equitable and inclusive system that benefits all learners.

The Framework intends to guide actions related to Indigenous education as follows:

- Guide the development of Indigenous education plans at the provincial, school division and school levels
- Offer an approach to improve Indigenous student engagement and achievement through policy, programs, and curriculum; partnership building; shared decision-making; and accountability

²² Ministry of Education, *Annual Report for 2021–22*, p. 10.

²³ Information taken from the Indigenous Services Canada portal.

²⁴ Adapted from data provided by the Ministry of Education.

²⁵ *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework*, p. 1.

- Support infusion of Indigenous content, perspectives and ways of knowing into renewed curricula (e.g., teaching Indigenous cultures, languages and histories)

The Framework also sets out five policy goals, as shown in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3—Framework Policy Goals

1. Indigenous language and cultures are valued and supported
2. Equitable opportunities and outcomes for Indigenous learners
3. Shared management of the provincial education system by ensuring respectful relationships and equitable partnerships with Indigenous people at the provincial and local levels
4. Culturally-appropriate and authentic assessment measures that foster improved educational opportunities and outcomes
5. All learners demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the worldviews and historical impact of First Nations and the Métis Nation

Source: *Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK–12 Education Policy Framework*, p. 14.

We found none of the goals within the Framework indicated how or when the Ministry plans to measure its success. Having measurable goals helps organizations monitor progress and whether changes are needed. See **Recommendation 1**.

The Ministry considers high school graduation to be a key step in helping young people realize healthy and fulfilling lives. The Framework highlights the current disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduation rates with one of its intended outcomes to reduce the gap.

As shown in **Figure 1**, a large gap in three- and five-year graduation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students persists. About 60% of Indigenous students graduate from Grade 12 within five years after starting Grade 10, compared to over 90% of non-Indigenous students. This potentially leaves close to 40% of Saskatchewan's Indigenous students significantly disadvantaged without a high school diploma, limiting their employment opportunities.

As shown in **Figure 4**, graduation rates for Indigenous students remain stable and have not significantly increased since 2018 (i.e., the Framework's last update), indicating the Ministry has further work to do to improve graduation rates, and expand and implement the Framework's initiatives. The Ministry indicated it plans to update and renew the Framework in 2022–23.

Figure 4—Indigenous Student Graduation Rates 2018–21

	Within 3 Years (%)	Within 5 Years (%)	Within 8 Years (%)
June 2021	44.7	61.6	67.3
June 2020	46.7	62.6	68.1
June 2019	43.4	61.0	67.2
June 2018	44.5	59.4	65.4

Source: Ministry of Education, *Annual Report for 2021–22*, p. 15. This shows graduation rates for Indigenous students in provincial schools only.



4.3 Partnerships Support Indigenous Students' Success

The Ministry of Education recognizes partnerships between the provincial education sector and First Nations education systems enhance Indigenous student learning.

As part of the Framework, the Ministry works with school divisions, First Nations Education Authorities, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous communities to carry out initiatives aimed at improving Indigenous student success (see further discussion of initiatives in **Section 4.6**).

These partners provide support ranging from feedback on improving Indigenous student success to implementing the actions associated with each initiative (e.g., revising curriculum to incorporate traditional Indigenous teachings).

4.4 Ministry Strategic Plans Lack Specific Measures and Targets for Indigenous Students

The Ministry of Education's strategic plans that strive to reduce education gaps among Indigenous students lack measurable goals related to Indigenous student success.

As noted in **Section 4.2**, none of the five goals within the Inspiring Success Framework developed in 2018 include specific measures for the Ministry to strive toward or to evaluate.

The Ministry's Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) created in 2014 is another key planning document used to coordinate plans between the Ministry and school divisions. The ESSP contains several goals and outcomes for student achievement, but the majority of its goals are not Indigenous-student specific.

The Ministry developed the ESSP nearly a decade ago (e.g., 2014–20) to outline the strategic direction of the provincial education system and to align the priorities and outcomes between the Ministry and school divisions (First Nations schools are not subject to the ESSP). As a result of the pandemic, the Ministry delayed the release of its new education strategic plan. The Ministry instead extended timeframes for ESSP outcomes in one-year intervals in both 2021 and 2022, but made no changes to targets. The Ministry plans to release its updated Provincial Education Plan (i.e., the new ESSP) during the 2023–24 school year.

The Ministry and school divisions report progress on ESSP established outcomes in their annual reports.

We found the Ministry and school divisions only consistently reported on **Indigenous student achievement** for one ESSP outcome—graduation rates. The ESSP expected the following outcome be achieved by June 2022:²⁶

- Increase three-year graduation rate from 35% in June 2012 to at least 65% and the five-year graduation rate to at least 75% for Indigenous students

²⁶ The Framework indicates a June 2020 timeframe to achieve the ESSP outcomes, but were extended to June 2022 due to disruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The remaining outcomes outlined in the ESSP, require annual reporting on an **overall student basis**. These included that by June 30, 2022:

- 80% of students will be at grade level or above in reading, writing, and math
- Saskatchewan will achieve an 85% three-year graduation rate and a 90% five-year graduation rate
- Children aged 0–6 years will be supported in their development to ensure 90% of students exiting kindergarten are ready for learning in the primary grades²⁷

These three measures apply to all students across the province with no expectation to assess or to report on how Indigenous students perform.

Setting additional measures and targets that focus on improving Indigenous student achievement (such as numeracy, literacy, attendance, and Indigenous-student feedback and engagement assessments) would allow the Ministry to analyze detailed data and identify needed improvements to share with school divisions.

Further, as noted in **Section 4.5**, the Ministry should consider setting additional measures to track Indigenous student performance before Grade 10. Undertaking broader analysis of Indigenous-student outcome data is key to understanding trends and barriers, informing change, and determining whether key strategies and initiatives are increasing success and achievement for Indigenous students.

1. **We recommend the Ministry of Education expand its measures and targets related to its Inspiring Success Framework for Indigenous students beyond graduation rates.**

4.5 Monitoring of Indigenous Student Success Needs to Start Before Grade 10

The Ministry of Education should evaluate Indigenous student achievement before Grade 10 (see **Recommendation 1**).

Graduation rates focus on student achievement once a student reaches Grade 10, specifically assessing whether a student graduates from Grade 12 three or five years after starting Grade 10. By focusing measurement efforts on an older grade level, the Ministry increases the risk of students leaving the education system before intervention occurs.

Some Indigenous students may not stay in school; therefore, waiting until Grade 10 to start measuring Indigenous student performance is too late to provide early intervention or to apply initiatives for Indigenous student success.

Good practice suggests the Ministry track and report on Indigenous student academic achievement outcomes before Grade 7. A strong start to education provides students with the opportunity to develop skills needed to be successful in school and life. As learning is a cumulative process, difficulties early on can have a lasting effect throughout a student's education.²⁸

²⁷ *Education Sector Strategic Plan Level 1 Cycle 4 Extended (2020–21)*.

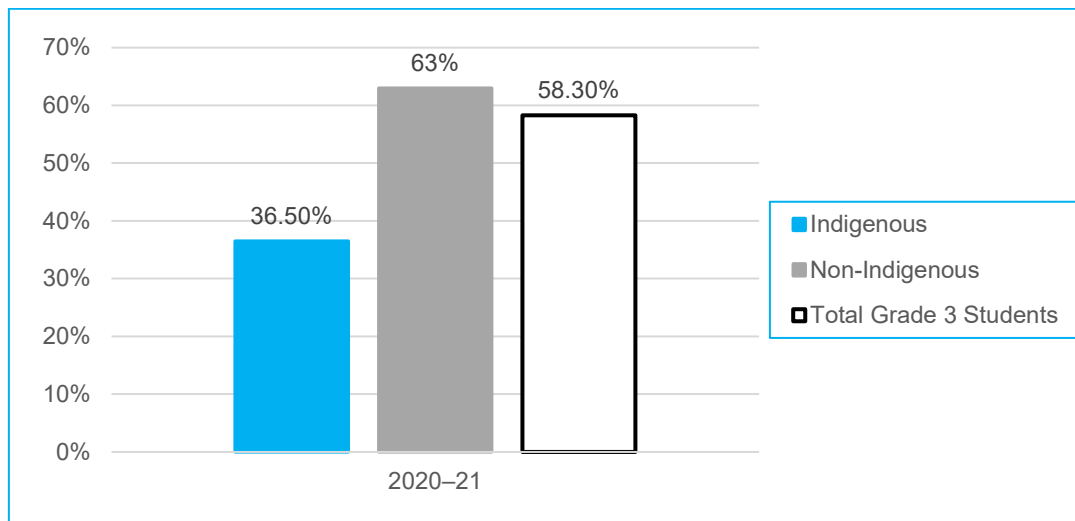
²⁸ www.sac-oac.ca/sac-work/early-identification-intervention (25 January 2023).



We found some school divisions chose to report on Indigenous student performance separately for other outcomes listed in the ESSP. The Ministry neither expects nor requires school divisions to report on outcomes beyond those of the ESSP, nor does it use the data to determine ways to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

For example, 21 out of 27 school divisions reported Indigenous student achievement separately relating to reading at grade level (i.e., Grade 3 reading levels) in their 2020–21 annual reports. As shown in **Figure 5**, 36.5% of Indigenous students in the Regina Public School Division were reading at or above Grade 3 reading levels in 2020–21 compared to the entire Grade 3 student population at 58.3%.²⁹

Figure 5—2020–21 Regina Public School Division Students Meeting Grade 3 Reading Levels



Source: *Regina Public Schools Annual Report – 2020–21*.

When students read at grade level, it helps set them up for educational success in other subjects. The Ministry and school divisions identifying key educational outcomes (like reading levels) where Indigenous students are falling behind is imperative to making improvements early enough in their learning path.

4.6 Key Initiatives Set to Meet Inspiring Success Framework Goals

While the Ministry of Education established several initiatives to assist in meeting the goals of its Inspiring Success Framework, the Ministry needs to require enhanced reporting from school divisions and determine actions to address root causes of underperforming measures related to Indigenous student success.

The Ministry set the Framework to guide and inform the planning and execution of specific initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for Indigenous students. The Ministry designed initiatives (e.g., *Following Their Voices*, *Invitational Shared Services Initiative*) to improve Indigenous student academic success; however, reporting from third parties (i.e., those responsible for implementing initiatives) needs improvement.

²⁹ *Regina Public Schools Annual Report – 2020–21*, p. 16.

Since 2018, the Ministry has undertaken curriculum renewal, incorporating Indigenous content, perspectives and ways of knowing across all areas of learning.³⁰ For example, school divisions have Elders teach all students about Indigenous culture (including smudging ceremonies), students participate in Indigenous-led events such as Orange Shirt Day, and students learn about reconciliation and Treaty content.³¹

This section outlines the Framework initiatives that receive the most significant annual funding (over \$1 million) from the Ministry.³²

4.6.1 Following Their Voices Initiative

Following Their Voices (FTV) is an initiative designed to improve Indigenous student outcomes by engaging and supporting students through changes in student-teacher relationships and interactions, teacher instructional practices and the learning environment.³³ It was designed for teachers to better understand the historical inequities of Indigenous peoples and to critically examine their relationships and instructional approaches with Indigenous students.

A formal FTV Leadership Team leads the initiative with representation from Indigenous education organizations, Elders, provincial school divisions and the Ministry.

Under the direction of the Ministry and the FTV Leadership Team, the Priority Action Team operates to develop, organize, and implement FTV in provincial and First Nations schools in Saskatchewan. Ten Ministry staff comprise the Priority Action Team, including an Executive Director, Executive Coordinator, four managers, and four FTV facilitators. Facilitators work with teachers at schools implementing FTV to revise instructional strategies for Indigenous students.

Schools wishing to participate in FTV must apply and receive Ministry approval. The Ministry provides funding to schools for a school-based facilitator position to work directly with participating teachers in supporting, observing, monitoring, and providing feedback as they implement a range of culturally-responsive instructional strategies for Indigenous students.

In 2020–21, the Ministry provided \$2.18 million to schools for FTV. See **Figure 6** for information on annual funding provided by the Ministry from 2018–21. We found those schools the Ministry approved to participate in FTV were either located near reserves, or in northern Saskatchewan, or within urban centres in areas with higher Indigenous populations.

In 2020–21, there were 800 teachers in 49 provincial and First Nations schools participating in FTV. They provide support to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in both elementary and high schools. **Figure 6** shows the number of teachers who participated in FTV from 2018–21, which has almost doubled since 2018.

³⁰ 2010 Saskatchewan Curriculum – *Renewed Curricula: Understanding Outcomes*, p. 5.

³¹ As part of the Government of Saskatchewan's response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's '94 Calls To Action', the Ministry of Education launched, *Supporting Reconciliation in Saskatchewan Schools*, an online resource in May 2017.

³² Other initiatives, which receive less than \$1 million in funding annually, include Leading to Learn, Help Me Tell My Story, and Help Me Talk About Math.

³³ www.followingtheirvoices.ca/#/ftv/pages/6 (5 December 2022).



Overall, there were 14,000 students in provincial schools that implemented FTV, 8,600 of whom self-declared as Indigenous in 2019–20.³⁴ This means the FTV initiative affects about 25% of Indigenous students in provincial schools, but it is not implemented sector-wide.

The Ministry does not have a target for the number of teachers or students it anticipates participating in the FTV initiative. Continuing to increase the number of teachers and students participating in FTV will enhance instructional relationships with Indigenous students. The Ministry indicated, starting in 2022–23, it is now approaching schools about the FTV initiative to expand interest.

The overall intended outcomes of FTV are to increase Indigenous student engagement, credit attainment, and graduation rates. To support the change process and provide meaningful data to participants (i.e., teachers and students), the FTV Leadership Team developed four surveys for the initiative. These include surveys for:

- Students
- Parents/caregivers
- Teachers
- Strategic Change Leadership Teams³⁵

In addition to surveys, other tools used by school-based facilitators include:

- Observation (i.e., facilitators observe teachers interacting with students)
- Goal setting (i.e., using data gathered from observations and surveys to set goals and action plans for Indigenous students)
- Walk-throughs (i.e., school-based facilitators check in on teachers' progress toward achieving established goals)
- Reflection (i.e., participating teachers review and reflect on the degree to which goals have been achieved).³⁶

The school and the division/First Nations Education Authority use the surveys throughout the year to provide information on perceptions and feedback on student/teacher relationships, interactions, and learning environment and to inform progress (i.e., gauging whether relationships are improving).³⁷ The FTV website reports the number of surveys used both throughout the year and since FTV inception.³⁸ The Ministry does not receive any summary information on the details of these surveys other than how many surveys were completed. By only providing the Ministry with the number of surveys completed, the Ministry is missing key information from the surveys such as whether Indigenous student engagement is improving.

³⁴ www.followingtheirvoices.ca/#/ftv/pages/35 (10 January 2023).

³⁵ Strategic Change Leadership Teams are comprised of the school principal, a lead teacher, division/education organization lead and a school-based facilitator who leads the FTV implementation at the school level.

³⁶ www.followingtheirvoices.ca/#/ftv/pages/35 (10 January 2023).

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

We found the Ministry measures the success of this initiative by reviewing the number of schools implementing the FTV approach, and it summarized this measure in its 2020–21 annual report as a key action.³⁹

See **Figure 6** for information on the number of schools participating in FTV since 2018. Like the number of teachers, the number of schools participating in FTV have almost doubled from 27 in 2018 to 49 in 2021.

Figure 6—Following Their Voices Statistics 2018–21

	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21
Participating schools	27	40	40	49
Participating teachers	440	570	800	800
Funding from Ministry (in millions) ^A	\$ 1.64	\$ 1.75	\$ 1.82	\$ 2.18

Source: *Following Their Voices: Year 6 Implementation Report* (www.followingtheirvoices.ca/#/ftv/pages/35)

^A Ministry of Education financial records.

Annually, the FTV Leadership Team reports to the Ministry using an Implementation Report. The Report adequately outlines the actions undertaken during the year by participating schools, any successes the FTV schools experienced, and any challenges experienced (e.g., no in-person professional development).

It also provides statistics on the number of FTV tools used by participating schools (e.g., surveys, observations, goals, reflections), and statistics on graduation rates and credit attainment. According to the Implementation Report, in 2020–21, Indigenous student three- and five-year graduation rates improved for schools involved in the FTV initiative and were relatively consistent with the provincial schools' average for Indigenous students (ranging from an increase of 3–13%).

Our assessment of the FTV annual reporting to the Ministry found it met the established requirements set by the Ministry and provided adequate information for the Ministry to understand what actions the schools took during the year. The FTV Implementation Report is made available on a website for FTV schools and the public.⁴⁰

While the FTV Implementation Report includes adequate information for the Ministry to understand actions taken, it does not provide reasons for changes in Indigenous student achievement and future actions required. As shown in **Figure 7**, the eight credits per year attainment for certain FTV schools decreased in 2020–21.⁴¹ The FTV Implementation Report notes the credit attainment measure decreased, but does not provide an explanation as to why (root cause). Further, the Ministry has not determined specific action plans to address the root cause(s) of why results are not achieved (2021–22 results show a lack of notable improvement since 2015–19).

³⁹ Ministry of Education, *Annual Report for 2020–21*, p. 15.

⁴⁰ www.followingtheirvoices.ca/#/ftv/pages/35 (10 January 2023).

⁴¹ Credit attainment refers to the number of credit hours a student enrolls in for a given semester. For a student to graduate within three years of beginning Grade 10, a student must be enrolled in at least eight credit hours per year. Each class is the equivalent to one credit hour.

**Figure 7—Indigenous Students with at Least 8 Credits per Year in Grades 10–12**

Measures	Cohort 1 started in 2015–16		Cohort 2 started in 2017–18		Cohort 3 started in 2018–19	
	2020–21	Change from baseline ^A	2020–21	Change from baseline ^A	2020–21	Change from baseline ^A
Saskatchewan schools ^B	26%	- 5%	26%	- 5%	26%	- 5%
FTV schools ^C	22%	- 3%	27%	+ 2%	25%	- 7%

Source: *Following Their Voices: Year 6 Implementation Report* (www.followingtheirvoices.ca/#/ftv/pages/35). Cohort 1 includes 16 FTV schools, Cohort 2 includes 10 FTV schools, and Cohort 3 includes 13 FTV schools.

^A Baseline is measured from when each Cohort started (i.e., Cohort 1 in 2015–16, Cohort 2 in 2017–18, Cohort 3 in 2018–19).

^B Saskatchewan schools include provincial, independent, and First Nations schools.

^C 2021–22 FTV schools results for change from baseline were: Cohort 1: +1%, Cohort 2: +6%; Cohort 3: -1%.

Not requiring reporting of reasons where results are not achieved from established baseline targets increases the risk that the Ministry does not identify and address the root causes of Indigenous students not succeeding. The Ministry needs to intervene when results are not achieved.

- We recommend the Ministry of Education determine action plans to address initiatives not achieving expected results related to Indigenous student success.**

4.6.2 Invitational Shared Services Initiative

The Invitational Shared Services Initiative (ISSI) brings together the provincial education system and First Nations education organizations to support Indigenous students who live on reserve, but attend provincial schools. First Nations education organizations and provincial school divisions develop partnerships to provide supports and services to these students.⁴² For example, a partnership may determine hiring a Grad Mentor to work with school staff to identify and support struggling Indigenous students and to create an achievement plan for student success (i.e., provide tutors, and/or plans for increasing attendance and engagement).

The Ministry gives over \$2 million a year to ISSI partnerships. The number of partnerships remains unchanged over the four-year period at 16 partnerships. See **Figure 8** for funding provided by the Ministry to ISSI partnerships from 2018–21 and the number of partnerships for that period. The Ministry does not have a target for the number of partnerships it anticipates. It should consider approaching school divisions to actively increase the number of partnerships yearly.

Figure 8—Ministry Funding and ISSI Partnerships 2018–21

	2017–18	2018–19	2019–20	2020–21
Partnerships ^A	16	16	16	16
Ministry funding (in millions) ^A	\$ 2.40	\$ 2.40	\$ 2.40	\$ 2.25

Source: Ministry of Education records.

^A In 2021–22, the number of partnerships increased to 19 and the Ministry provided \$2.28M in funding.

⁴² First Nations education organizations the Ministry has made ISSI partnerships with include First Nations tribal councils or First Nations. There are 74 First Nations in Saskatchewan.

A First Nations education organization initiates an ISSI partnership by approaching a school division. Together, the partners develop a project plan (with a term of one to three years) that:

- Focuses on First Nations students living on-reserve attending provincial schools
- Is of mutual benefit to both partners
- Is not funded through other sources/programs
- Addresses at least one of the Inspiring Success Framework goals (e.g., equitable opportunities and outcomes for Indigenous learners)
- Answers at least one of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action^{43,44}

The Ministry, via its Priority Action Team, provides partnerships with a sufficiently detailed template on which to base their project plan. The template includes the rationale for forming the partnership, outlines student-specific goals, and states the activities the partnership will undertake to achieve the student-specific goals. It also indicates how the partnership plans to engage students/teachers/community, monitor and share progress on meeting the goals, and the budgeted expenditures associated with the partnership.

In addition to project plans, partnerships draft a letter of understanding outlining each partner's roles and responsibilities. This assists in reducing the risk of role misunderstandings and undertaking tasks outside of the project plan. Spreading focus by undertaking too many activities may result in the partnership not improving Indigenous student success.

Once an ISSI partnership completes its project plan, the partnership submits the plan to the Ministry for approval. Approved project plans can receive up to \$120,000 per year based on the budget request provided in the plan (see **Figure 9** for eligible expenditures).⁴⁵

Figure 9—Eligible ISSI expenditures

- Training for teachers and support staff for both the First Nations Education Authority and provincial school division staff
- Staff costs for delivery of services (e.g., holding powwows, land-based learning activities) to on-reserve students attending provincial schools
- Salaries and benefits for short-term, non-permanent employees
- Travel expenses (e.g., costs associated with community liaison or other school division staff travelling between communities/reserves to offer homework-help nights)
- Supplies or materials (e.g., laptops for students without internet access)
- Meetings costs for the required three face-to-face partnership meetings

Source: *Invitational Shared Services Initiative: Guidelines for Participation*, pp. 2–3.

During the pandemic, ISSI partnerships were unable to complete planned activities due to physical distancing requirements. As a result, the Ministry appropriately allowed partnerships to carry forward unused funds. Each partnership had to provide the Ministry with a plan of how it intended to use the unused funds in the following year. We found the Ministry approved four partnerships to carry forward funding into 2021–22.

⁴³ *Invitational Shared Services Initiative: Guidelines for Participation*, p. 1.

⁴⁴ www.web.archive.org/web/20200506065356/http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf (6 December 2022).

⁴⁵ *Invitational Shared Services Initiative: Guidelines for Participation*, p. 6.



By November 15 each year, the Ministry requires ISSI partnerships to submit a year-end report. The Ministry provides an adequate template for partnerships to follow when drafting reports. The Ministry expects partnerships to report on actions undertaken during the year, the results of those actions, outcomes achieved (e.g., graduation rates, credit attainment, student attendance), challenges experienced and how they were addressed, partnership next steps (i.e., plans for the following year), and a reconciliation of budgeted versus actual expenditures.

When the Ministry's Priority Action Team receives year-end reporting, staff review the reporting and verify it met Ministry expectations, as well as assess the partnership's progress toward meeting established metrics set out in the partnership's project plan (i.e., targeted three- and five-year graduation rates).

For example, one ISSI partnership established a goal of increasing Indigenous graduation rates by 2% for each of its three partner schools in its 2020–21 Project Plan. In its year-end report, the partnership noted the following:

- Two of its partner schools had 50% of its eligible Indigenous students graduate
- One partner school had 100% of its eligible Indigenous students graduate

Our testing of 17 active ISSI partnerships in 2021–22, found not all partnerships submitted all aspects of the reporting requirements, and the Ministry did not have copies of year-end reports for some ISSI partnerships.

- For two of the partnerships tested, the year-end reporting did not contain a reconciliation of budgeted to actual expenditures. This increases the risk of these partnerships spending Ministry funding on ineligible expenditures. Spending on ineligible expenditures increases the risk of the partnerships not meeting established goals and not implementing actions to improve Indigenous student achievement as expected. The Ministry requires partnerships to return unspent funds.
- For three of the partnerships tested, we found the Ministry did not have copies of the partnerships' year-end reports. As a result, we could not determine whether the Ministry received the reporting.

The Ministry told us it had received the reports, but the staff member responsible recently left the Ministry and had not properly filed the reports received on the central directory. By not following established processes of storing received reports in a central electronic directory, there is increased risk this information can be lost when turnover occurs.

3. We recommend the Ministry of Education follow its established processes for reviewing and storing Invitational Shared Services Initiative year-end reports about Indigenous student partnerships.

We also found there was disparity in the information reported by ISSI partnerships. Some partnerships reported significant detail on the actions undertaken during the year (e.g., land-based learning activities), while others listed information briefly in bullet form.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Land-based learning is education, community and skills building or training that takes place outdoors in particular places of local significance, often on traditional Indigenous territories. Topics of learning include harvesting, hunting, trapping, fishing, medicine gathering and teachings, bush survival skills, traditional land-based scientific knowledge and culture. The importance of building relationships and bonding with the land is emphasized, with both participants and educators. www.nccie.ca/nccie-stories/stories-land-based-learning/ (11 January 2023).

The Ministry should consider sharing examples of strong reporting to all partnerships. This will allow partnerships to provide the Ministry with more detailed reporting of actions undertaken and the associated impact on Indigenous student educational success.

Unlike FTV, the Ministry does not receive, nor does it prepare, a summary of all partnership reporting under the ISSI initiative. Having a summary report would provide the Ministry with a better picture of the initiative's impact on Indigenous student success.

Also, the sharing of a summarized report among ISSI partnerships could aid partnerships in identifying successful activities and barriers to implementation. Sharing effective strategies to reduce Indigenous-learning gaps is important to influence positive change across the system.

The Ministry indicated it plans to prepare such a report in 2023.

4. We recommend the Ministry of Education prepare and share a summarized report for the Invitational Shared Services Initiative based on year-end reporting received from Indigenous partnerships.

4.6.3 First Nations and Métis Education Achievement Fund

The Ministry, through the First Nations and Métis Education Achievement Fund, provides funding to school divisions for initiatives related to ensuring equitable outcomes and improving student achievement for Indigenous students. These initiatives include actions to improve Indigenous student achievement in the areas of reading, math and science. For example, school divisions use funding to implement initiatives such as hiring math and literacy interventionists, undertaking Elders' consultations on establishing an Indigenous language framework, and hiring Treaty Catalyst teachers to support treaty education in schools.⁴⁷ Additionally, school divisions can use funding toward actions aimed at increasing Indigenous student engagement and high school completion rates.⁴⁸

Since 2011–12, the Ministry provided \$3.8 million in funding annually to this Education Fund.⁴⁹ Each school division seeking funding receives a minimum of \$10,000 in base funding with a proportion of funding based on the number of Indigenous students enrolled in the school division.⁵⁰

The Ministry expects school divisions using received funding to report on goals and activities undertaken during the year. This reporting is done in each school division's annual report. However, our review of school division annual reports found inconsistencies with how school divisions report this information. See **Section 4.8** for the inconsistencies found.

Providing Indigenous students with an opportunity to develop a strong understanding and foundation in reading, math, and science provides students with the skills early on in their education to become successful (i.e., graduate).

⁴⁷ www.saskatchewan.ca/government/news-and-media/2012/april/25/fund-provides-financial-support-to-programs-for-first-nations-and-métis-students (11 January 2023).

⁴⁸ 2021–22 Funding Manual: Prekindergarten to Grade 12 Funding Distribution Model, p. 28.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Education financial records.

⁵⁰ 2021–22 Funding Manual: Prekindergarten to Grade 12 Funding Distribution Model, p. 28.



4.7 Responsibility for Framework Initiatives Clearly Communicated to Staff and Third Parties

The Ministry of Education has appropriate processes to assign overall responsibility for the Inspiring Success Framework, communicate responsibilities to external parties (i.e., schools, school divisions, Invitational Shared Services Initiative partnerships), train staff, and identify risks.

4.7.1 Roles and Responsibilities Assigned

The Ministry appropriately assigned overall responsibility for the Framework to an Assistant Deputy Minister. It delegated responsibility for the Following Their Voices and Invitational Shared Services Initiatives to the Priority Action Team, specifically the team's Executive Director, who relies on staff on the Priority Action Team to assist in reviewing key initiative documents (e.g., ISSI partnership year-end reports, FTV Implementation Report).

We found the work plan for the 10 Ministry staff on the Priority Action Team adequately outlined the responsibilities related to the Framework and the various initiatives (e.g., engaging with Indigenous communities to ensure Ministry programs and services integrate Indigenous perspectives).

4.7.2 Indigenous Student-Specific Risks Identified

Annually, the Ministry undertakes a strategic planning session where it identifies risks the Ministry faces. We found that during these sessions, the Ministry considered risks specific to Indigenous students (e.g., systemic racism, increasing student populations, low graduation rates). Knowing the risks affecting Indigenous students helps the Ministry put supports in place (i.e., develop initiatives) to reduce the associated barriers to Indigenous students' educational achievement.

The Ministry uses its Annual Plan to document its planned actions for the current year related to the Framework. An example of a key action listed in the Ministry's *Plan for 2021–22* is to continue to support and promote the goals and principles of the Framework to guide actions at all levels of the prekindergarten to Grade 12 education system.⁵¹

At the end of each fiscal year, the Ministry reports on what it did during the year to fulfill the actions established in its Plan. For example, in its *2021–22 Annual Report*, the Ministry reported on steps taken to address the above key action (the Ministry provided \$140,000 in grants to school divisions to advance truth and reconciliation education). It provided each school division with up to \$5,000 in funding to collaborate with local Indigenous communities and organizations to assist with planning and implementing actions toward reconciliation in the 2021–22 school year.⁵²

4.7.3 Training Provided

The Ministry provides training to both its staff and school division staff (who then train teachers at their respective schools) on understanding Indigenous student struggles and ways to help improve educational outcomes. This is done at graduation rate symposiums and virtual monthly speaker series hosted by the Ministry.

⁵¹ Ministry of Education: *Plan for 2021–22*, p. 5.

⁵² Ministry of Education, *Annual Report for 2021–22*, p. 10.

To implement Framework initiatives, the Ministry relies on external third parties to which it adequately communicated its expectations using various methods. It uses a website, called Blackboard, to post information for school divisions to access (e.g., annual report manual) and also used virtual monthly speaker series, agreements with school divisions on the Following Their Voices initiative, an Invitational Shared Services Initiative Handbook, and a school division-funding manual.

Identifying risks associated with Indigenous student success, adequately assigning responsibility for the Framework, and providing training to staff contributes to the Ministry successfully improving Indigenous student educational outcomes.

4.8 Annual Reporting on Indigenous Student Success Needs Improvement

The Ministry of Education established adequate templates for school divisions to follow when drafting annual reports, however, the level of detail reported across school divisions is inconsistent. Enhanced reporting on Indigenous student achievement also needs enhancement when measures are expanded under the Inspiring Success Framework.

Under *The Education Act, 1995*, school divisions are required to submit annual reports to the Minister of Education. To assist school divisions in preparing annual reports, the Ministry created a template outlining the key information needed in annual reports. Consistency in reporting by school divisions allows the Ministry to assess whether divisions met Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP) outcomes and targets. The Ministry updates this template annually and provides it to school divisions electronically.

Examples of information school divisions must annually report on include:

- School division goals in relation to reading, writing, and math and the outcomes of student performance
- School division actions taken during the school year to achieve the outcomes and targets for reading, writing, and math

As noted in **Section 4.4**, the Ministry has limited measures and therefore requires limited reporting from school divisions on how Indigenous students are performing. With the expansion of measures, reporting will also have to be expanded.

5. We recommend the Ministry of Education work with school divisions to obtain enhanced annual reporting on Indigenous student success once measures and targets are expanded in relation to the Inspiring Success Framework for Indigenous students.

The Ministry's annual report template expects school divisions to analyze the results of whether all students met each outcome and target; however, we found the depth of analysis sometimes limited. For example, we found all school divisions commented on whether students met an established target, but some provided no commentary on why students did not meet a specific target or actions to address these deficiencies. If school divisions do not establish plans to address deficiencies, there is an increased risk of continuously missing targets.



The Ministry subsequently compiles all reported school division information into its own annual report each year when reporting on graduation rates. We noted the Ministry did not report on how it plans to address the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student graduation rates in its 2021–22 annual report. See **Recommendation 2** about the Ministry needing to determine action plans to address underperforming measures.

Once school divisions finalize their annual reports, a Planning and Reporting Unit staff member compiles all actions by school division related to the Inspiring Success Framework and creates a summary document breaking out this information by school division. The Ministry posts these summary documents to a website accessible by all school divisions.

We found the Ministry sharing this information across school divisions consistent with good practice as it allows school divisions to learn from each other and improve actions to support Indigenous students. For example, in relation to ensuring Indigenous languages and cultures are valued and supported, one school division reported hiring a Cree Language Mentor to assist in teaching Grades 1 to 3 Cree language.

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