

Chapter 10

Education—Instruction Time

1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Ministry of Education implemented 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 division calendars. School divisions are expected to offer 950 hours of instruction time annually to students in Grades 1 to 12. School divisions submit their Board-approved calendars each year in May. We tested five school divisions and found the Ministry reviewed the total reported instruction hours, and all five school divisions met the 950-hour instruction time requirement.

The Ministry also uses annual declarations to monitor school divisions' compliance in providing the required instruction hours for core study areas (e.g., math, English). It expects school division officials to verify school divisions meet the required instruction hours for all core subjects as set out in the Ministry's guidance.

We tested five school divisions and found all five declared they would meet the required instruction hours for core study areas. We also confirmed two of these school divisions met the required instruction hours for core subjects and found both had the support to demonstrate compliance.

By monitoring that school divisions provide students with the required instruction hours for core curriculum subjects, the Ministry helps ensure students will understand key subject areas sufficiently.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

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

The Education Act, 1995, makes the Ministry responsible for establishing regulations authorizing provincial instructional hours per year and approving courses of study authorized by Boards of Education for credit purposes in accordance with *The Education Regulations, 2019*. Instruction time is any time in which school students are in attendance and under teacher supervision for the purpose of receiving instruction in an educational program.¹

By law, in each school year, school divisions must provide at least 950 hours of total instructional time for Grades 1 to 12.²

¹ *The Education Regulations, 2019*, s. 19.

² *The Education Regulations, 2019*, s. 22.



2.1 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

In 2009, we assessed the Ministry of Education's processes to achieve compliance by school divisions in delivering student instruction time as required by the Minister. Our *2009 Report – Volume 3*, Chapter 4, concluded that for the year ending September 30, 2009, the Ministry did not have adequate processes to achieve student instruction time compliance by school divisions. We made six recommendations. By 2021, the Ministry implemented four recommendations.³

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. Ministry management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To carry out our follow-up audit, we interviewed Ministry and school division staff, reviewed relevant legislation and policies, and assessed the reasonableness of supporting instruction time 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 February 29, 2024, and the Ministry of Education's actions up to that date.

3.1 Instruction Hours for Core Subject Areas 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—Implemented

The Ministry of Education actively monitored overall instruction hours required for school divisions (950 hours per school year for Grades 1–12), and it actively monitored school divisions' compliance with the required instruction hours for core curriculum areas of study (e.g., math, English, science).

Total Instruction Hours

In May each year, school divisions submit their Board-approved school-year calendars to the Ministry. The calendars outline the total instruction hours for schools in each school division for the upcoming school year. The Ministry reviews these calendars to ensure consistency with minimum requirements for students' total instruction hours.

³ *2009 Report – Volume 3, Chapter 4*, pp. 58–64; *2011 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 5*, pp. 109–111; *2014 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 20*, pp. 171–173; *2016 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 20*, pp. 243–246; *2019 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 19*, pp. 239–242; and *2021 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 22*, pp. 181–184.

We reviewed the Ministry's analysis of five school divisions' calendars. We found the Ministry sufficiently monitors total instruction time (950 hours). In addition, all school divisions submitted their Board-approved calendars to verify they would meet the 950-hour requirement for Grades 1–12 students.

Through its bi-weekly bulletin, the Ministry reminds school divisions of deadlines for submitting their school calendars.

Instruction Hours for Core Curriculum Areas of Study

Starting in May 2021, in addition to the school calendars, the Ministry required school divisions to submit a signed declaration confirming they planned to meet all instructional hours for core curriculum areas of study as required. For example, for secondary level students (Grades 10–12) school divisions are required to provide students with five credits total in English over the three Grades; each credit must include 95–100 hours of instruction time.

We found all five school divisions we tested declared to the Ministry, they would meet the minimum instructional hours for all core subjects.

Of the five school divisions that indicated to the Ministry they would meet the required instruction hours, we further assessed two school divisions on core subjects (secondary-level science, health education/physical education or social science) in two different semesters. We found both school divisions met the 95-hour instruction requirements per credit in both semesters. In addition, all school divisions declared they would meet the 95-hour instruction requirement for core subjects.

In February 2022, the Ministry added the requirement to submit the core curriculum declarations to the school calendar handbook used by the school divisions and gave instructions on how to fill out the declarations.

Monitoring instructional hours including in core study areas increases the likelihood students receive the necessary instruction to be successful in key curriculum areas.

3.2 Follow Up and Corrective Action Taken When Needed

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—Implemented

The Ministry of Education follows up and addresses school divisions not complying with instruction hour requirements for core subjects (e.g., minimum 95–100 hours per credit in high school), where needed.

The Ministry communicates the results of its review of the Board-approved school calendars for total instructional hours to school divisions. In cases where school divisions indicate they will not meet the total instructional hours for core subjects, the Ministry will follow up with those school divisions to create a plan to bring them into compliance.



In our testing of five school divisions, we found the Ministry communicated the results of its school calendar analysis to school divisions. All school divisions tested met the 950-hour total instruction requirements and declared they would be meeting the core curriculum instructional hour requirements. Therefore, Ministry follow-up was not required for these school divisions. We note none of the school divisions in the province required follow-up as they met the requirements for the 2022–23 school year.

Having ways to address non-compliance with instruction time requirements for core subjects decreases the risk of students not receiving the appropriate amount of time to learn and develop skills in core curriculum areas of study.