

Chapter 5

Regina Public School Division No. 4—Delivering Prekindergarten Programming

1.0 MAIN POINTS

Prekindergarten is an early childhood education program targeting three- and four-year old children living in vulnerable circumstances and/or experiencing developmental delays.

We assessed Regina Public School Division No. 4's process to deliver prekindergarten programming. About 560 students annually attend half-day prekindergarten programs offered by the Division at 24 schools. At January 2024, we found the Division had effective processes, except in the following areas where it needs to:

- Analyze and report on changes in prekindergarten enrolment to help identify and mitigate barriers to students entering the program. We found the Division did not utilize 21% of its prekindergarten spaces (149 of 708 spaces) in 2023–24.
- Centrally monitor and analyze its prekindergarten waitlists. The Division does not centrally monitor these waitlists for its schools, which could provide relevant information to improve utilization of its prekindergarten spaces (e.g., consider whether to relocate existing prekindergarten classes).

At February 2024, we found 75 students waiting for acceptance in prekindergarten across the Division's schools with almost 70% (over 50 students) waiting at three specific schools.

- Use sufficient measures to assess and report on the performance of its prekindergarten program, such as progress on prekindergarten enrolment and student achievement.
- Help teachers consistently track required family visits (i.e., twice each school year) for their prekindergarten students. Family visits give teachers an opportunity to learn about family activities, traditions/culture, and views on discipline—knowing these visits take place and obtaining information can help teachers plan effective learning opportunities and supports for students.
- Improve its communication with prekindergarten teachers about its partnerships with outside agencies that could provide additional support or specialized services to children (e.g., KidsFirst Regina).
- Formally assess prekindergarten classroom environments periodically against established expectations (e.g., physical classroom organization, natural light, child-sized furniture).

Without effective processes to deliver prekindergarten programs, students from vulnerable situations are at greater risk of not achieving their academic, financial, and social potential.



2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the results of our audit of Regina Public School Division No. 4's processes to deliver prekindergarten programming.

The Education Act, 1995, sets out the duties of Boards of Education. The Act also makes Regina Public School Division responsible for providing educational instruction to students within its division, which includes prekindergarten programming.¹

2.1 Prekindergarten in Saskatchewan

In collaboration with school divisions, the Ministry of Education introduced prekindergarten programming into the province during the 1990's. Prekindergarten is an early childhood education program targeting three- and four-year old children living in vulnerable circumstances and/or experiencing developmental delays.²

The Ministry provides school divisions with prekindergarten funding, program and policy guidelines (e.g., curriculum), and consultative support. School divisions hire staff, select prekindergarten students, and operate the programs. At March 31, 2023, over 5,600 students attended 316 prekindergarten programs across Saskatchewan.³ **Figure 1** sets out the Ministry's goals for prekindergarten in the province.

Figure 1—Goals for Prekindergarten in Saskatchewan

- **School and Life Success** – Children are better able to achieve their full potential and to succeed in school and life when appropriate development opportunities and supports are provided at an early age.
- **High-Quality Programming** – Prekindergarten is holistic, caring, developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive. It is delivered in a safe and caring environment providing young children with required physical, social-emotional, intellectual, and spiritual supports.
- **Family Engagement and Learning** – Families develop good relationships with educators, make connections with other families and gain a deeper understanding of their role in supporting their child's development. They are offered opportunities to provide input, actively participate in the program and share their family knowledge.

Source: *Prekindergarten Essentials—Effective Practices, Policies and Guidelines*, p. 6.

Prekindergarten provides young students with learning experiences through play and exploration. High-quality programs engage students and their families in the planning and delivery of a healthy, safe, culturally sensitive and stimulating program promoting students' abilities and interests.⁴

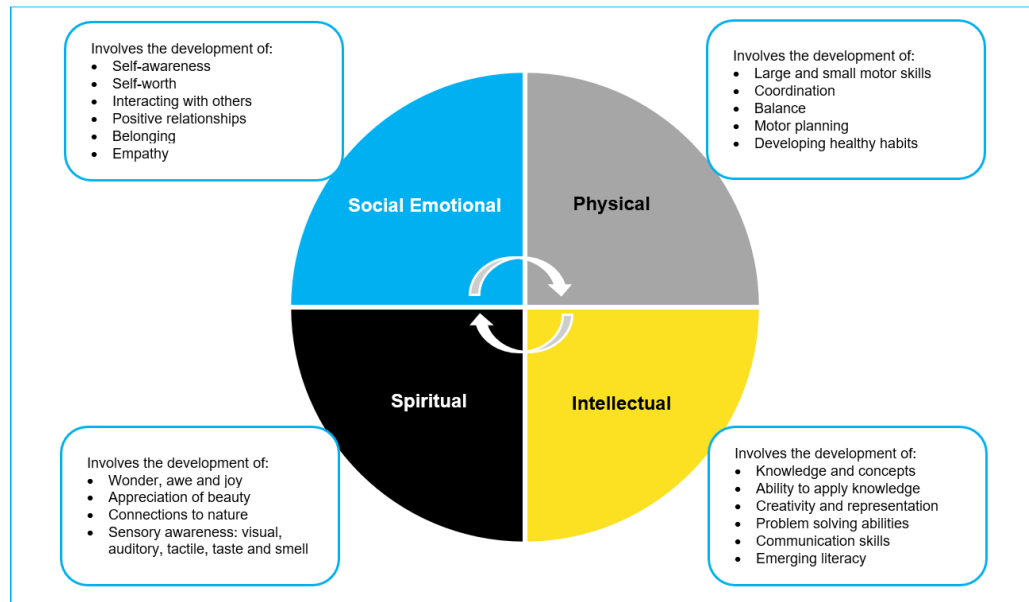
Figure 2 describes the essential learning experiences set out in Saskatchewan's prekindergarten curriculum for young students' learning development in four domains.

¹ *The Education Act, 1995*, s. 85.

² Ministry of Education, *Prekindergarten Essentials—Effective Practices, Policies and Guidelines*, p. 4.

³ Ministry of Education, *Annual Report for 2022–23*, p. 3.

⁴ Ministry of Education, *Play and Exploration—Early Learning Program Guide*, p. 1.

Figure 2—Prekindergarten Essential Learning Experiences

Source: Ministry of Education, *Essential Learning Experiences*, p. 2.

The Ministry expects quality early learning programs, such as prekindergarten, to incorporate the following principles into their daily practice:

- **Holistic development and learning:** Integrate the domains of social-emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual development (see **Figure 2**) into learning experiences, while recognizing that individual children develop at different rates
- **Strong positive relationships:** Educators partner with children, families, and community in program planning
- **Stimulating and dynamic environments:** Facilitate and guide play, exploration and discovery, interactions with others, and encourage children’s independence, responsibility, and participation in the learning environment
- **Children as competent learners:** Children are active learners who learn best when their ideas are valued, their physical needs are met, and they feel psychologically secure⁵

2.2 Regina Public School Division

Regina Public School Division No. 4 educates almost 18,000 elementary school students in 44 elementary schools, including about 560 prekindergarten students (representing about 10% of prekindergarten students province-wide).⁶ The Division spent \$2.85 million on prekindergarten programming in 2022–23.⁷

⁵ Ministry of Education, *Play and Exploration—Early Learning Program Guide*, p. 5.

⁶ *Regina Public School Division Annual Report 2022–23*, pp. 6 and 43.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. N-13.



Figure 3 sets out the 24 schools (i.e., about half of its elementary schools in Regina) where the Division specifically offers prekindergarten programming. Each half-day program has one teacher, one teacher associate, and up to 16 students. It employs prekindergarten teachers and teacher associates in almost 21 full-time equivalent positions.

Figure 3—Schools with Prekindergarten in Regina Public School Division

Albert	Glen Elm	McDermid
Arcola	Grant Road	McLurg
Coronation Park	Henry Janzen ^A	Plainsview
Douglas Park ^B	Imperial	Rosemont
Dr. George Ferguson	Judge Bryant	Seven Stones
Dr. L.M. Hanna	Kitchener	Thomson
Connaught	M.J. Coldwell	W.H. Ford
Elsie Mironuck	Marion McVeety	Walker

Source: Adapted from *Regina Public School Division Annual Report 2022–23*, pp. 49 and 50.
^A Henry Janzen School offers a prekindergarten pilot program (i.e., Children Communicating, Connecting and in Community Pilot) to provide learning experiences and interventions for children who are deaf or hard of hearing. As this program is unique from the Division’s other prekindergarten programs, we did not include this program in our audit.
^B Douglas Park School offers both a standard prekindergarten program, as well as an Early Years Transition Prekindergarten Program designed for children requiring intensive support due to significant social-emotional, communication, and behavioural challenges. We did not include this intensive support prekindergarten program in our audit.

Prekindergarten teachers and associates use educational practices tailored to the individual and to the age of the students. They model language and behaviour, encourage and extend learning, and challenge students through play, exploration, and development of readiness skills that support learning.⁸

Prekindergarten is not a universal program available to all students in Saskatchewan schools. A student’s acceptance into prekindergarten depends on their level of vulnerability and spaces available. Outside agencies (e.g., KidsFirst Regina) can refer students to a prekindergarten program, or parents/guardians can apply for their child to attend.⁹

2.3 Importance of Prekindergarten to Children

During the earliest years of life, children develop the foundation upon which they build all further learning. Prekindergarten is especially important for children living in vulnerable circumstances because their early years have the potential to define their future.^{10,11}

Quality prekindergarten programs can help children from all backgrounds with proven long-term benefits in academic, mental health, and social outcomes (e.g., breaking the poverty cycle).¹²

⁸ www.reginapublicschools.ca/early_learning (15 March 2024).
⁹ KidsFirst is a home-visiting program designed to support children and families by enhancing parenting knowledge, providing support, and building family strengths. www.kidsfirstregina.com/ (26 March 2024).
¹⁰ Ministry of Education, *Saskatchewan’s Early Years Plan 2016–2020*, p. 3.
¹¹ Children living in vulnerable circumstances include children from families with low income/socio-economic status, children experiencing social-emotional difficulties, and children referred by other community-based agencies.
¹² McKinsey & Company, *Expanding publicly funded pre-K: How to do it and do it well*, p. 2. www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/expanding-publicly-funded-pre-k-how-to-do-it-and-do-it-well (24 March 2024).

Research shows that children enrolled in prekindergarten have higher test scores, better language development and motor skills, and often have better attendance and fewer behavioural problems in school. Studies also find prekindergarten enrolment continues to provide advantages to children later in life, including improved high school graduation rates, higher earnings as adults, and lower probability of needing income assistance or going through the justice system.¹³

In addition to building fundamental skills, prekindergarten programs can help to identify learning or developmental delays at an early stage and provide children and their families with appropriate support (e.g., speech language pathology). Early detection allows children to receive specialized help sooner, which can prevent an issue from intensifying and having to correct it at a later age, which can be more challenging.¹⁴ Prekindergarten can also help provide vulnerable children with the skills to become more successful in kindergarten and future grades.

Without effective processes to deliver prekindergarten programs, students from vulnerable situations are at greater risk of not achieving their academic, financial, and social potential. Having effective processes to deliver prekindergarten programs prepares students for entering kindergarten and helps to set them up for future academic success.

3.0 AUDIT CONCLUSION

We concluded, for the period ending January 31, 2024, Regina Public School Division No. 4 had, except in the following areas, effective processes to deliver prekindergarten programming.

The Division needs to:

- **Formally analyze and report on changes in prekindergarten enrolment to help identify and mitigate barriers to students entering the program**
- **Centrally monitor and analyze its prekindergarten waitlists**
- **Use sufficient measures to assess and report on the delivery of the prekindergarten program**
- **Consistently track prekindergarten family visits undertaken by teachers**
- **Periodically conduct formal assessments of prekindergarten classroom environments**
- **Improve its communication with prekindergarten teachers about other agencies that could provide support services to children**

¹³ McKinsey & Company, *Expanding publicly funded pre-K: How to do it and do it well*, p. 3. www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/expanding-publicly-funded-pre-k-how-to-do-it-and-do-it-well (24 March 2024).

¹⁴ TD Economics, *Early Childhood Education has Widespread and Long-Lasting Benefits*, p. 3.

**Figure 4—Audit Objective, Criteria, and Approach****Audit Objective:**

To assess the effectiveness of Regina Public School Division No. 4's processes, for the period ending January 31, 2024, to deliver prekindergarten programming.

Audit Criteria:

Processes to:

- 1. Establish accessible prekindergarten programming**
 - Assess demand and supply for prekindergarten program
 - Determine students eligible for prekindergarten program (using reasonable criteria)
 - Set standards for prekindergarten classrooms (e.g., class size, learning environment, learning program)
 - Allocate appropriate resources (e.g., teachers, educational assistants, special supports)
 - Develop performance measures and targets to assess delivery of prekindergarten program
- 2. Deliver quality prekindergarten programming to eligible students**
 - Carry out established learning program
 - Track and assess individual students' progress consistent with good practice
 - Engage with families throughout program delivery
- 3. Monitor performance of prekindergarten program**
 - Continually align prekindergarten program with good practice (e.g., tools used, changes in teaching methods)
 - Assess achievement of program results (e.g., comparison to targets, level of engagement with families, students' transition to kindergarten)
 - Periodically report program results to interested parties (e.g., senior management, Board of Education, Ministry of Education)

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 Division's processes, we used the above criteria based on our related work, review of literature including reports of other auditors, and consultation with management. Division management agreed with the above criteria.

We examined the Division's policies, strategies, and reports relating to delivering prekindergarten programs. We interviewed Division staff and teachers responsible for delivering prekindergarten programs. We assessed the Division's processes for assessing prekindergarten demand and monitoring student enrolment, providing adequate training opportunities to teachers, and assessing program results. We visited three schools offering prekindergarten to assess, for a sample of students, the Division's processes for selecting eligible students, tracking student progress, and engaging with families. We also used an external consultant with expertise in the area to help us identify good practice and to assess the Division's processes.

4.0 KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Analysis of Program Enrolment Needed

Regina Public School Division No. 4 is not fully utilizing its available prekindergarten spaces and had yet to formally analyze its prekindergarten enrolment, including possible barriers to enrolment and associated ways to address barriers.

As described in **Section 4.2**, the Division receives funding from the Ministry of Education to operate its prekindergarten program, with each prekindergarten classroom having space available for 16 students. For 2023–24, the Division had 708 prekindergarten spaces available through two half-day programs in 17 schools and one half-day program in seven schools.¹⁵

¹⁵ The Division's 708 prekindergarten spaces for 2023–24 includes 52 spaces designated for students participating in the Early Learning Intensive Support Program (ELISP) and 656 spaces for non-ELISP students. The Ministry of Education makes this Program available to children with intensive needs who require a significant level of support to participate in an early learning program in select school divisions.

Figure 5 provides details about the Division’s utilization of its available prekindergarten spaces from 2019 to 2023. As the data illustrates, the Division is not fully utilizing its available prekindergarten spaces despite existing waitlists at certain schools (see more details on waitlists in **Section 4.2**). Underutilized prekindergarten spaces mean fewer students benefit from the Division’s spending on the program.

Figure 5—Regina Public School Division Prekindergarten Space Utilization 2019–23^A

	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–23	2023–24
Prekindergarten spaces available ^B	692	692	692	692	708
Unused prekindergarten spaces	49	259	134	134	149
Space utilization	93%	63%	81%	81%	79%

Source: Adapted from *Regina Public School Division Annual Report 2022–23*, p. 43 and additional information provided by the Division.

^A Prekindergarten utilization at September 30 of each year.

^B Includes spaces designated for students participating in the Early Learning Intensive Support Program (ELISP) and non-ELISP students. ELISP students and non-ELISP students learn together in the same the prekindergarten classrooms.

The Division experienced a marked decrease in prekindergarten utilization in the 2020–21 school year, aligning with provincial school divisions’ transition between in-class and online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Division indicated the Provincial Government’s subsidy for regulated childcare introduced in April 2023 also impacted its prekindergarten enrolment, as many families chose regulated full-day childcare rather than prekindergarten.¹⁶ Having children attend prekindergarten provides them with access to supports (e.g., speech language pathologists) and certified teachers that they may not have access to at a regulated childcare facility.

However, we found the Division had not formally analyzed its prekindergarten enrolment, including consideration of possible barriers to families and associated actions to help mitigate those barriers.

Our discussions with the Division’s early learning staff and prekindergarten teachers found a lack of transportation to prekindergarten as a common barrier for families. While staff indicated the Division used to provide transportation for prekindergarten students, it stopped over a decade ago due to safety concerns of young students riding on school buses.¹⁷

While student safety is of utmost importance, we found an example of another urban school division in Saskatchewan offering prekindergarten transportation in specific circumstances (e.g., for prekindergarten students in specific neighbourhoods). This school division takes appropriate precautions when transporting prekindergarten students, such as using child restraints on school buses. While there is a cost associated with transporting students, analyzing prekindergarten transportation could help the Division identify opportunities

¹⁶ The Ministry of Education implemented a *Maximizing Early Learning Spaces* policy in 2012 with the goal of ensuring the maximum number of young children have access to early learning programs by preventing duplication of services between childcare and prekindergarten programs. In January 2024, the Ministry provided updated guidance to school divisions recognizing circumstances where children may benefit from attending both childcare and prekindergarten. As such, the Ministry allows school divisions to accept children into prekindergarten who also attend regulated childcare for the 2024–25 school year.

¹⁷ Transport Canada research suggests that children under 18 kilograms, or younger than approximately four-and-a-half years old, do not benefit from the design of school bus seats as much as older children do. The heads of younger children are proportionately larger, causing them to move forward faster and contact the seat back in a different fashion. In addition, their bodies are not heavy enough to take full advantage of the energy-absorbing seat back design. tc.canada.ca/en/child-seats-school-buses-questions-answers (23 March 2024).



where providing transportation offers a feasible option to help remove barriers for some families and better utilize empty prekindergarten spaces.

We also found the Division does not track information about students moving in and out of its prekindergarten programs. Students may leave the program for various reasons, such as inconvenient location or issues with program expectations. In addition, families may relocate, transfer to another school division, or begin attending another early learning/childcare program (e.g., French immersion prekindergarten). While we found schools maintain information about students leaving their school, the Division does not maintain this information centrally. Gaining an overall understanding about the reasons students leave prekindergarten can provide the Division with valuable information about common possible barriers to full utilization of its program.

Without formal analysis of prekindergarten utilization, there is increased risk of the Division not appropriately responding to possible barriers (e.g., transportation, program locations) to full prekindergarten program enrolment. Significant underutilization of prekindergarten spaces is an inefficient use of public funds.

- 1. We recommend Regina Public School Division No. 4 formally analyze its prekindergarten enrolment to help identify and mitigate barriers to students entering the program and full space utilization.**

4.2 Waitlists Not Centrally Monitored

While Regina Public School Division No. 4 monitors demand for prekindergarten programming, it does not centrally monitor prekindergarten waitlists for its schools.

The Division's assessment of demand for prekindergarten, along with its ability to meet demand, is a critical aspect of delivering prekindergarten programming. To meet the needs of families across Regina, the Division needs to offer prekindergarten in the right schools, and at the right time.

Monitoring enrolment helps the Division assess whether its prekindergarten classrooms are appropriately located across Regina. The Division receives funding (2022–23: \$2.86 million) from the Ministry of Education to operate its prekindergarten programs. As funding becomes available, the Ministry allocates prekindergarten programs (i.e., classrooms) to the highest-need communities across the province based on education, social, and health indicators.¹⁸ Each classroom approved by the Ministry creates 16 spaces for prekindergarten students.

If the Division identifies a need to adjust the locations of its prekindergarten programs, it can submit a request to the Ministry for the relocation of a program from one neighbourhood to another. The Ministry last approved a new prekindergarten program within the Division during 2014–15. The Division has not recently relocated any of its existing programs (i.e., last relocation occurred in 2018–19).

When forecasting prekindergarten enrolments, the Division considers the location of applications for prekindergarten from across Regina, along with demographic data from a

¹⁸ Ministry of Education, *Relocation of an Assigned Prekindergarten Program*.

third-party. This helps the Division with enrolment projections and trend analysis, as it provides demographic data about Regina from federal, provincial, and local sources—including current birth, population, and preschooler data for each school, along with multiple years of data for comparison. We observed evidence of school principals assessing the forecasted enrolment for their schools, including prekindergarten, and adjusting the forecast using knowledge of their schools' population.

Since school enrolment fluctuates throughout the year (e.g., due to new students moving to Regina, or existing students leaving Regina or transferring to another school or school division), the Division monitors enrolment monthly. For example, the Division had prekindergarten enrolment of 559 students in September 2023 compared to 574 students in January 2024. For three months during this period, we reviewed emails showing staff providing updated monthly enrolments to Division senior management.

Each school in the Division informally maintains a waitlist for its prekindergarten program. However, we found the Division does not centrally monitor the prekindergarten waitlists for its schools—we consider it good practice to do so.

We collected waitlist information from the Division's schools at February 2024 and found 75 students waiting for acceptance in prekindergarten across the city, with almost 70% (or over 50) of these students waiting at three schools (i.e., Arcola, Grant Road, Marion McVeety). However, the Division had 559 students enrolled in prekindergarten spaces in 2023–24 compared to 708 spaces available, which means it is not utilizing 21% of its available spaces when 149 spaces were available for waitlisted students (see **Recommendation 1**).

Figure 6 summarizes the Division's prekindergarten enrolment for 2021 to 2024. The Division is projecting enrolment of 564 prekindergarten students in 2024–25, which is comparable to prior years but does not consider waitlisted students.

Figure 6—Regina Public School Division Prekindergarten Enrolment 2021–24

	2021–22 Actual	2022–23 Actual	2023–24 Actual	2024–25 Forecast
Prekindergarten enrolment ^A	558	558	559	564

Source: Adapted from *Regina Public School Division Annual Report 2022–23*, p. 43 and additional information provided by the Division.

^A Prekindergarten enrolments at September 30 of each year.

We observed evidence (e.g., emails, online chat group) of prekindergarten teachers communicating with each other about finding placements for students on their waitlists. However, centrally monitoring waitlists can provide the Division with relevant information to analyze its waitlists across the city and improve utilization of its prekindergarten program, or determine possible classroom relocations.

By not monitoring prekindergarten waitlists centrally, there is increased risk of the Division missing opportunities to find placements for students at other schools. Analyzing waitlists may help in making decisions about the Division's prekindergarten programs (e.g., changing school locations, addressing possible barriers impacting certain families or neighbourhoods).



2. We recommend Regina Public School Division No. 4 centrally monitor and analyze its prekindergarten waitlists.

4.3 Lack of Performance Measures Specific to Prekindergarten

While Regina Public School Division No. 4 measures overall student achievement in the primary grades, it does not have measures to specifically assess the performance of its prekindergarten program.

The Division's objective for prekindergarten is to prepare students to be ready to learn in primary grades. **Figure 7** sets out the Division's expectation associated with students' readiness to learn.

Figure 7—Readiness to Learn at Regina Public School Division

Regina Public Schools believes readiness to learn is:

- Children's ability, understanding, and disposition to engage in the learning process and communicate their learning with independence, capability, competence, and confidence
- Demonstrated through children's social-emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual preparedness
- Dependent upon meeting children's basic needs and providing a developmentally appropriate learning environment that encourages independence, communication, and relationships through play

Source: Adapted from information provided by Regina Public School Division.

We found the Division does not have measures for specifically assessing the performance of its prekindergarten program. However, it did have processes to monitor and assess student achievement in kindergarten to Grade 3.

For example, we found the Division annually monitors students' readiness to learn using the Early Years Evaluation – Teachers Assessment (EYE-TA) for students at kindergarten entry, including specifically reviewing EYE-TA results for schools identified as High Count High Rate (HCHR) schools by the Ministry of Education.^{19,20} Our review of the Division's results for the 2020–21 to 2022–23 school years found the percentage of students at an appropriate level of development (Tier 1) at kindergarten entry remained relatively consistent—between 55% to 58% (this is comparable to results across the province).²¹ In addition, we found the Division established a team in 2023–24 to monitor reading levels for students in Grades 1–3 at 10 different schools (with a large focus on HCHR schools).²²

Assessment of student achievement in the primary grades provides the Division with an opportunity to consider changes to its prekindergarten program. For example, the Division indicated it took steps to further incorporate phonics (e.g., learning letters by sounds) into prekindergarten learning centres in 2021–22, based on its review of student performance in the primary grades. We observed the use of phonics programs in prekindergarten classrooms during our school visits.

¹⁹ The Division uses a skill-based assessment tool, the Early Years Evaluation (EYE), to help teachers assess the skills of kindergarten children in five domains related to readiness to learn. Kindergarten teachers across the Division administer the EYE assessment to all students at kindergarten entry, and again at kindergarten exit for those students who scored outside the appropriate EYE range (Tier 1).

²⁰ HCHR schools have a large number of students scoring below the appropriate EYE-TA range, as well as students among the most vulnerable (i.e., most likely to experience difficulty with developmental tasks). Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, *2021 Report – Volume 2, Chapter 23*, p. 187.

²¹ Regina Public School Division Annual Report's for 2020–21 to 2022–23.

²² The Division's Responsive Instructional Team monitors reading levels for students in Grades 1–3 to determine whether students read at or above, below, or well below expected reading levels.

However, as not all students attend prekindergarten in the Division (i.e., limited to vulnerable students only), its assessment of overall student achievement in the primary grades is not sufficient for making conclusions about the performance of its prekindergarten program. Establishing measures and targets specific to prekindergarten can assist the Division in assessing the quality of its program and identify potential areas for improvement. **Figure 8** includes examples of potential performance measures and targets the Division may want to consider for assessing its program, including measures addressing the prekindergarten environment and student achievement.

Figure 8—Potential Performance Measures Specific to Prekindergarten

Potential Performance Measure	Potential Outcome
Percentage utilization of available prekindergarten spaces	Optimal prekindergarten student enrolment
Percentage of families attending prekindergarten engagement events	Increased family engagement with prekindergarten program and support of prekindergarten students at home
Percentage of prekindergarten students at an appropriate level of development (Tier 1) in the Early Years Evaluation – Teachers Assessment (EYE-TA) at kindergarten entry	Improved prekindergarten student readiness for transition to kindergarten
Percentage of prekindergarten classrooms with high Early Childhood Environmental Ratings (ECERS) ^A	High quality prekindergarten classroom environments
Monitor future achievement (e.g., literacy) for a cohort of prekindergarten students	Increased student achievement for students participating in prekindergarten program

Source: Developed by the Office of the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan.

^A ECERS is a prekindergarten classroom assessment based on classroom observations across six quality indicators: space and furnishing, personal care routines, language-reasoning, activities, interactions, and program structure. The quality indicators use a rating scale between 1.0 (inadequate) and 7.0 (excellent).

Without sufficient measures specific to prekindergarten, the Division cannot effectively assess and report on the performance and success of its prekindergarten programming (e.g., report on achievement of prekindergarten enrolment target, including analysis).

3. We recommend Regina Public School Division No. 4 use sufficient measures to assess and report on the delivery of its prekindergarten programming.

4.4 Eligible Students Selected for Prekindergarten

Regina Public School Division No. 4 adequately reviews applications for prekindergarten and selects vulnerable students for acceptance into prekindergarten.

The Division communicates its prekindergarten program on social media and on its websites (i.e., Division, schools), where it makes prekindergarten applications available to families. We found it also works with partners to communicate its program, such as coordinating prekindergarten enrolment for immigrant families with the Regina Open Door Society, and including links to its website on partners' websites (e.g., KidsFirst Regina, 211 Saskatchewan).²³ We found the application form requests appropriate information about prospective students and their families, such as names, addresses, self-declarations

²³ 211 Saskatchewan offers a database of over 6,000 community, social, non-clinical health, and government services across the province. sk.211.ca/ (30 March 2024).



(i.e., for those identifying as Indigenous), and student background information (e.g., early learning behaviours and experiences, health history).

Parents submit their completed application to the school where they want their child to attend based on school attendance boundaries. Upon receipt of prekindergarten applications, schools select children for their program. Each school uses a prekindergarten selection committee to review applications and perform family visits to assess students' eligibility (see **Section 4.10**). A selection committee is typically comprised of:

- Prekindergarten teacher and associate
- Administrator (i.e., principal)
- Other school-based professionals (e.g., learning resource teacher, speech language pathologist)

Schools select students demonstrating the highest levels of vulnerability for enrolment—they do not consider applications that do not clearly illustrate children exhibiting vulnerabilities. As such, schools may have spaces available in their prekindergarten program if they did not receive enough applications from vulnerable children (i.e., schools would leave spaces available so they can accommodate vulnerable children as they arrive).²⁴ **Section 4.1** describes how the Division needs to analyze its prekindergarten enrolment to help identify and mitigate barriers to students entering the program.

The Division provides schools with a prekindergarten selection form staff use to document their assessment of children's vulnerabilities. **Figure 9** sets out guidance from the Ministry of Education about identifying and selecting the most vulnerable students for prekindergarten. We found the factors within the Division's assessment form aligned with the Ministry's guidance.

Figure 9—Factors to Assess Student Vulnerability

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speech or language difficulties • Challenges with social or emotional development • Little or no opportunity for contact with other children • Learning English as an additional language • Child living with only one parent • Child's family members absent from home for long periods of time • Child lives with a teen parent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child's parent(s) have less than a high school education • Impact on the family from a traumatic experience • Family experiencing financial need • Family experiencing a healthcare crisis (e.g., addiction, mental illness) • Limited extended family support • Child receiving support from other programs (e.g., KidsFirst)
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Source: Ministry of Education Prekindergarten Admission Screening Tool.

For three schools, we found all students selected for their 2023–24 prekindergarten programs had applications with documented vulnerabilities as described in **Figure 9**.

Accepting the most vulnerable children in prekindergarten provides these students with time in a classroom setting and additional supports as they prepare to begin school.

²⁴ Schools receive prekindergarten applications for three- and four-year old children. The Division indicated that three-year-old children accepted into prekindergarten typically attend as four-year-old children as well.

4.5 Program Curriculum Aligned with Good Practice

Regina Public School Division No. 4 aligns its prekindergarten program with good practice by using a provincially-established prekindergarten curriculum.

The Division uses the curriculum set out by the Ministry of Education for prekindergarten across Saskatchewan. **Figure 10** describes the prekindergarten curriculum materials set out by the Ministry. We found these materials align with good practice and provide a basis for consistent prekindergarten learning across the province.

Figure 10—Ministry of Education Prekindergarten Curriculum Materials

Document	Purpose
<i>Prekindergarten Essentials—Effective Practices, Policies and Guidelines</i>	Provides a guide to implementing a holistic, developmentally appropriate and caring learning program. It focuses on the healthy development of the whole child: social-emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual development. Family engagement and community partnerships are also foundational components.
<i>Play and Exploration—Early Learning Program Guide</i>	The Guide is an important part of Saskatchewan's early childhood development initiatives. It affirms the importance of high-quality learning experiences for all Saskatchewan children during their preschool years—three to five years of age.
<i>Essential Learning Experiences for Three-, Four-, and Five-Year Olds</i>	Supplements the <i>Play and Exploration—Early Learning Program Guide</i> and assists educators to provide holistic and responsive early learning programs for young children.

Source: Adapted from curriculum.gov.sk.ca/CurriculumHome?id=406 (27 March 2024).

The Ministry expects a student to educator ratio of eight students to one educator for prekindergarten. A low ratio provides opportunity for quality interaction, modelling and teaching. For example, teachers become more actively involved in activities with students and in responding to their needs. In addition, students can interact in small groups, create friendships, and reduce behavioural challenges.²⁵ We reviewed the Division's prekindergarten enrolment and found it complied with the student to educator ratio of eight students to one educator (i.e., a maximum of 16 students per classroom taught by one prekindergarten teacher and one teacher associate).

Aligning the prekindergarten program with good practice helps ensure students receive relevant and appropriate instruction and support as they prepare to enter kindergarten.

4.6 Learning Plans Developed

Regina Public School Division No. 4 uses learning plans to guide prekindergarten students' learning toward curricular outcomes.

As described in **Section 4.5**, the Division uses the prekindergarten curriculum set out by the Ministry of Education. We found the Division appropriately communicates the curriculum to its prekindergarten teachers to ensure they incorporate appropriate content in their classroom instruction.

²⁵ Ministry of Education, *Prekindergarten Essentials—Effective Practices, Policies and Guidelines*, p. 18.



We visited three prekindergarten classrooms, and we found each prekindergarten teacher used a different method to track their learning program. All teachers used pictures to show students the general plan for the day (e.g., welcome, tabletop activities, gathering to sing and read books, free play, snack, guided activity, leave). One teacher used a desktop calendar to plan monthly activities (e.g., family engagement sessions, field trips, holiday-themed activities), while another teacher created a document to set out a general plan for each month during the school year.

While each prekindergarten teacher had their own method to track their learning programs, we found the teachers' learning plans did not clearly illustrate how they meet all expectations set out in the curriculum established by the Ministry. The Division may want to suggest teachers do so to help ensure alignment with the curriculum. However, we found prekindergarten teachers clearly assess students' progress against expected curricular outcomes (see **Section 4.9**).

Use of learning plans assists prekindergarten teachers in delivering relevant and appropriate learning to students consistent with the expectations set out in the curriculum.

4.7 Classroom Learning Environments Informally Monitored

While Regina Public School Division No. 4 established appropriate expectations for prekindergarten classroom learning environments, it does not formally assess whether learning environments meet those expectations.

Classroom environments have the power to shape the learning that takes place. When teachers create a setting reflecting what children can do and what children can be, the environment sends positive messages to everyone. The setting can teach children the classroom is a place where they are valued as people capable of exploring materials and learning with the teacher and each other.²⁶

We found the Division appropriately established its expectations for classroom learning environments based on guidance from the Ministry of Education (e.g., *Prekindergarten Essentials, Play and Exploration*). It appropriately communicated these resources to prekindergarten teachers via email at the start of the school year.

We compared the Ministry's classroom learning environment expectations to a source of good practice (i.e., Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale—ECERS) and found the Ministry's expectations to be reasonable.²⁷ We also visited three prekindergarten classrooms and found the Division and teachers maintained physical classrooms consistent with good practice (e.g., natural light, child-sized furniture, spaces arranged for play, display of students' work, child-sized toilets and low sinks).

During our school visits, principals indicated they frequently (e.g., weekly) visit prekindergarten classrooms to observe teachers delivering the program to students. However, we found none of the principals documented their assessment of the prekindergarten learning environment. We found the Ministry makes guidance available for administrators (including principals) to assess prekindergarten learning environments and

²⁶ Ministry of Education, *Play and Exploration—Early Learning Program Guide*, p. 44.

²⁷ ECERS is a prekindergarten classroom assessment based on classroom observations across six quality indicators: space and furnishing, personal care routines, language-reasoning, activities, interactions, and program structure.

programs, including a one-page checklist they may use to guide and document their assessments.²⁸ The checklist addresses areas such as:

- Physical classroom organization
- Program planning/scheduling
- Language development
- Assessment and evaluation
- Classroom management

Periodic (e.g., annual) assessments of prekindergarten learning environments reduce the risks of inconsistent learning experiences for students across the Division and not meeting the needs of students.

4. We recommend Regina Public School Division No. 4 periodically conduct formal assessments of prekindergarten classroom environments.

4.8 Prekindergarten Resources Considered

Regina Public School Division No. 4 established appropriate education and experience requirements for prekindergarten staff and provided adequate professional development opportunities. Additionally, the Division has reasonable processes to assign additional supports (e.g., speech language pathologists) to prekindergarten students. However, it needs to improve its communication to teachers about community partnerships relating to the prekindergarten program.

4.8.1 Assigning Teachers and Teacher Associates

Regina Public School Division considers its staffing requirements for prekindergarten classrooms between March and June each year for the upcoming school year. It indicated it places teachers in classrooms based on teacher qualifications, skills, and experience. The Division also considers observations from principals and, where applicable, information provided by the teachers themselves (e.g., requests for transfers to another school).

We found the Division requires all teachers, including prekindergarten teachers, to have an undergraduate degree in education, along with a valid Teacher's Certificate.²⁹ The Division indicated it is not always possible to fill vacant prekindergarten teacher positions with teachers having previous early learning experience. However, we found the Division appropriately assigns a mentor (i.e., experienced prekindergarten teacher) to new prekindergarten teachers to help address knowledge gaps. We reviewed emails showing the Division detailing mentorships to new prekindergarten teachers for both the 2022–23 and 2023–24 school years.

²⁸ Ministry of Education, *Leading for Change—Supplement to Play and Exploration: Early Learning Program Guide*, p. 22.

²⁹ Teachers in the province's prekindergarten–Grade 12 education system must hold a Saskatchewan teacher's certificate issued by the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board (SPTRB). Teachers issued a certificate and working as teachers are required to register annually with the SPTRB. sptrb.ca/SPTRB/SPTRB/Certification/Certification.aspx (26 March 2024).



The Division requires teacher associates to:

- Have a Grade 12 diploma and relevant post-secondary training (e.g., teaching assistant, early childhood education)
- Demonstrate the ability to provide personal care to students with health impairments
- Support students experiencing challenging behaviour (e.g., difficulty regulating emotions)
- Provide academic support under the guidance of a teacher

Additionally, the Division attempts to place teacher associates in schools within the communities where they live to help bring an understanding of the communities into the classroom.

We reviewed the experience and educational backgrounds of the prekindergarten teachers and teacher associates at the three schools we visited. We found all had the necessary requirements set by the Division (i.e., each teacher held an undergraduate degree in education and a valid teaching certificate; each teacher associate had a Grade 12 diploma and relevant post-secondary training and experience).

In addition, we found the Division provides its prekindergarten teachers with relevant professional development. It provides teachers 12 professional development days each year and maintains a schedule of training, such as training for new prekindergarten teachers (i.e., Prekindergarten Basics) and training for creating student learning stories.³⁰ In addition, the Ministry gives prekindergarten teachers access to training materials (i.e., webinars) about prekindergarten and the curriculum.

Staffing prekindergarten classrooms with appropriate resources helps provide students with a fulfilling early learning experience.

4.8.2 Identifying and Assigning Additional Student Supports

When teachers identify a prekindergarten student requiring additional classroom supports (e.g., speech language pathologist, psychologist, occupational therapist), we found the Regina Public School Division had reasonable processes to consider and assign these supports.

The Division employs a variety of specialized support staff to help support learning for teachers and students across the Division, including those in prekindergarten. For example, the Division employs approximately 22 speech language pathologists, 14 psychologists, and four occupational therapists. The Division expects schools to request additional supports for students when deemed necessary. Upon receiving a request, the Division determines whether supports already exist at the particular school, or whether it needs to access Division-wide supports (e.g., positions shared with other schools such as speech language pathologists).

³⁰ Prekindergarten teachers use an online application (Edsby) to post pictures for families, so they are aware of what their child is learning in the classroom—these are often referred to as “learning stories.”

We visited three prekindergarten classrooms and two teachers confirmed their students had access to all additional supports they required. The third teacher indicated not all students in their classroom have access to necessary supports. For example, the teacher indicated students who needed to see a speech language pathologist or occupational therapist had yet to do so.

In response to demands for specialized student needs, we found the Division allocated additional funding in June 2023 to assist in meeting demand. For example, we found the Division posted job ads for additional speech language pathology and occupational therapy resources in June 2023 and filled the positions by October 2023.

During our review of student cumulative records at the three schools we visited, we found the Division identified and provided additional supports to prekindergarten students. For example, we saw evidence of the Division preparing Inclusion and Intervention Plans (IIPs) for prekindergarten students with special needs, as well as assessments from speech language pathologists.³¹

Identifying and assigning additional student supports contribute toward the Division providing needed supports to prekindergarten students to help them progress in school.

4.8.3 Improved Communication about Key Partnerships Needed

Regina Public School Division established partnerships with several outside agencies in relation to prekindergarten; however, inconsistency among prekindergarten teachers' awareness of these partnerships and the benefits they provide exists.

We found the Division formed community partnerships in relation to its prekindergarten program with various agencies, such as:

- **KidsFirst Regina:** a home-visiting program designed to support children and families by enhancing parenting knowledge, providing support, and building on family strengths³²
- **Regina Early Childhood Intervention Program:** provides specialized services to families of children aged 0–6 years who are either at risk for, have a diagnosis of, or exhibit developmental delay or disability
- **Saskatchewan Health Authority's Wascana Rehabilitation Centre:** provides intensive support programming (e.g., physical therapy, occupational therapy, exercise therapy, music therapy)
- **Métis Nation Saskatchewan:** provides funding for the Michif Early Learning Program the Division offers at McDermid Community School³³

³¹ An Inclusion and Intervention Plan is a document developed and implemented by a collaborative team (e.g., teachers, professional support staff, and parents) that sets out student outcomes, focusing on the key areas of development with the most impact on student success during the school year.

³² www.kidsfirstregina.com/ (26 March 2024).

³³ The Michif Early Learning Program connects children with Métis culture and immerses them in a half day Michif language program.



- **Regina Early Years Family Resource Centre:** provides a development centre working with families and children to foster the healthy development of children from prenatal to five years of age³⁴

By partnering with other outside agencies, additional services (e.g., health, mental health, social services) can further support prekindergarten students.³⁵ However, during our visits at three kindergarten classrooms, we found teachers did not have an understanding of the Division's partnerships with other agencies. Having a good understanding of the Division's partnerships can assist teachers in referring families to additional supports available for their children (e.g., specialized services for developmental delays). For example, teachers may be able to inform families about the Regina Early Childhood Intervention Program if children experience significant developmental delays.

If prekindergarten teachers do not know of the Division's partnerships with other agencies, they may not be aware of all supports available to their students. This increases the risk of students and families not receiving appropriate external supports when necessary.

- 5. We recommend Regina Public School Division No. 4 communicate with prekindergarten teachers about its partnerships with other agencies providing support services to children.**

4.9 Prekindergarten Student Progress Appropriately Assessed

Regina Public School Division No. 4's teachers use appropriate methods to assess prekindergarten students' progress at varying frequencies. This is consistent with good practice.

Prekindergarten teachers use two methods when evaluating students:

- Formative assessments—daily monitoring of student learning for providing ongoing feedback to students
- Summative assessments—evaluation of student learning at the end of an instructional unit by comparing against a standard or benchmark³⁶

We visited three prekindergarten classrooms and found the teachers used an online application (Edsby) to post pictures for families, so they are aware of what their child is learning in the classroom—these are often referred to as 'learning stories.'³⁷ When posting pictures, teachers provide a summary of the activities (e.g., painting at an easel), along with the related learning objectives accomplished (e.g., learning to work as a team and share with others). In another example, we observed one teacher preparing a fine-motor skills portfolio for each student. These portfolios illustrate students' progressive skills in writing, drawing, and using scissors over the course of the school year.

We found all prekindergarten teachers at the three schools we visited used report cards to document their evaluation of student progress in the Prekindergarten Essential Learning

³⁴ earlylearning.ca/ (26 March 2024).

³⁵ Ministry of Education, *Essential Learning Experiences*, p. 17.

³⁶ www.gre.ac.uk/learning-teaching/assessment/assessment/design/formative-vs-summative (25 March 2024).

³⁷ Edsby is a comprehensive digital learning and data platform providing a modern way for families to follow their children's progress at school and receive school updates. www.reginapublicschools.ca/edsbyparentinfo (25 March 2024).

Experiences (see **Figure 2**). The Division expects teachers to complete report cards for students twice per year (in January and June), but only requires students' final report cards from the end of the year to be placed on students' cumulative records.

We tested a sample of 12 prekindergarten students at the three schools we visited and found end of year report cards (for 2022–23) in the students' cumulative records for all but one student. The Division provided a reasonable explanation for not having a completed report card for this student (i.e., poor attendance [including extended overseas travel] resulted in eventual removal of this student from the prekindergarten program).

During our school visits, prekindergarten teachers indicated language barriers and poor student attendance as common reasons why students do not progress in their learning. When teachers identify language barriers for a particular student, they indicated they use available translation services or may invite an older sibling into the classroom to help translate. When students have poor attendance, teachers indicated they speak with families (e.g., phone calls, discussing concern during student pick-up or drop-off) to address these concerns.

We analyzed 2022–23 and 2023–24 prekindergarten attendance data for the three schools we visited and tested 13 students who were absent more than 30% of the time. We found teachers took reasonable actions (e.g., discussions with parents, reaching out to extended family, requesting assistance from principals) to address these students' absences.

Having a good understanding of prekindergarten students' progress is essential to supporting them as they transition into kindergarten. We found each of the prekindergarten teachers at the three schools we visited took reasonable approaches to informing kindergarten teachers about individual students' needs. For example, we found one teacher used an assessment tool to provide the kindergarten teacher with information about students' learning skills needed for kindergarten (e.g., letter recognition, number recognition). Another teacher established joint activities with the kindergarten classrooms so students and teachers had an opportunity to interact before the transition to kindergarten. The remaining teacher used a standard form to communicate important information about the prekindergarten students (e.g., additional supports required; behavioural, allergy, or attendance issues).

Performing adequate and timely prekindergarten student assessments help teachers understand their students' progress. Such information is necessary for teachers to adapt learning plans to the needs of their students and help prepare them for entering kindergarten.

4.10 Improved Tracking of Family Visits Needed

Regina Public School Division No. 4 requires prekindergarten teachers to engage with students' families throughout the year, including two family visits and monthly family engagement events. While teachers tracked families' attendance at monthly family engagement events, they did not maintain sufficient evidence of family visits conducted during the year.



Family engagement is an important part of prekindergarten and for children's learning. Research demonstrates parent engagement in children's learning creates significant benefits, ranging from improved intellectual functioning to greater school success. Teachers also benefit from direct contact with families, gaining greater knowledge and understanding of the children, their families, and the communities in which they teach.³⁸

The Division expects prekindergarten teachers to conduct at least two family visits each year—in the fall and spring. Family visits give teachers an opportunity to meet with families at their home or the school to learn about:

- Family activities
- Traditions and culture
- Values
- Expectations
- Views on discipline

Such information can help teachers plan effective learning opportunities and supports for students.³⁹ The Division also expects teachers to organize monthly family engagement events to provide families with opportunities to participate in learning with their children.

We found prekindergarten teachers at the three schools we visited appropriately communicated family engagement expectations at the beginning of the school year. Examples we observed included teachers addressing expectations within a Question-and-Answer sheet provided to families upon their child's acceptance into prekindergarten or within a prekindergarten handbook provided to families.

At the three classrooms we visited, we observed evidence of teachers holding family engagement events using a mixture of in-class and out-of-school activities (e.g., inviting parents to the classroom after a school concert, sending activities home for families to do together, museum field trips). We found teachers took attendance at these events with family attendance ranging from just under 60% to greater than 80%. Teachers indicated they reach out to families who did not attend events to acknowledge their absence and encourage participation.

While teachers took attendance at family engagement sessions, we were unable to see evidence of prekindergarten teachers performing family visits during the year. For all three schools we visited, we found teachers either did not formally track the family visits, or we found inconsistencies in the tracking provided (e.g., inconsistencies between the families attending monthly engagement events and the expected family visit schedule).

Lack of an effective method to track family visits increases the risk that prekindergarten teachers may not conduct family visits for all students, as expected.

6. We recommend Regina Public School Division No. 4 implement a consistent method for prekindergarten teachers to track family visits.

³⁸ Ministry of Education, *Prekindergarten Essentials—Effective Practices, Policies and Guidelines*, p. 16.

³⁹ Ministry of Education, *Family Engagement in Prekindergarten*, p. 18.

4.11 Board Reporting on Changes to Prekindergarten Enrolment Lacking

While Regina Public School Division No. 4 reports results associated with its prekindergarten program to various interested parties (e.g., Board of Education, senior management, Ministry of Education, public), the Division's reports do not include a detailed analysis of changes to its prekindergarten enrolments (e.g., explanations for underutilization of the program).

The Division annually provides information to its Board about student enrolment for all grades (including prekindergarten students).

Its annual report also includes information about student achievement data that provides some indication of the prekindergarten program's performance. For example, in its 2022–23 annual report, the Division reported:

- 56% of students at an appropriate level of development (Tier 1) on the Early Years Evaluation – Teachers Assessment (EYE-TA) at kindergarten entry
- 65% of Grade 3 students reading at grade level

The Division makes its annual report available to the Ministry of Education and the public, following approval from the Board.

However, as we describe in **Section 4.3**, the Division's assessment of overall student achievement in the primary grades is not sufficient for making conclusions about the performance of its prekindergarten program. Once the Division establishes associated performance measures, reporting on achievement of the measures will help to illustrate the effectiveness of its prekindergarten program.

We found the Division presented 2023–24 student enrolments, along with its 2022–23 annual report, to its Board in fall 2023. We also found the Division provided ad hoc information about prekindergarten to Board members upon request, such as providing information about prekindergarten enrolment and attendance in December 2022 and community partnerships in November 2023.

However, we found the Division did not provide its Board with an analysis of changes to prekindergarten enrolment (e.g., reasons for enrolment changes or why spaces are not filled, actions taken to address barriers to the program). As we describe in **Section 4.1**, the Division needs to analyze its prekindergarten enrolment to help identify and mitigate barriers to the program.

Not providing the Board with further analysis about possible causes for changes in prekindergarten enrolment increases the risk of the Board not having sufficient information to make decisions about the prekindergarten program (e.g., resource allocation).

7. We recommend Regina Public School Division No. 4 provide its Board with detailed analysis of changes to its prekindergarten enrolment.



5.0 SELECTED REFERENCES

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