

Chapter 28

Saskatchewan Polytechnic—Supporting Success of Indigenous Students

1.0 MAIN POINTS

In 2023–24, Saskatchewan Polytechnic had total enrolment of nearly 18,000 students, of which 10% self-declared as Indigenous—a decrease of approximately 1,400 Indigenous students since 2018.¹ Sask Polytech uses its *Indigenous Student Success Strategy 2024–29* to improve post-secondary educational outcomes for its Indigenous students.

By June 2025, Sask Polytech implemented two recommendations and partially implemented two recommendations we first made in 2023 to support the success of Indigenous students by increasing student enrolment, retention, and graduation rates.

We found Sask Polytech:

- Revised and renewed its Indigenous Student Success Strategy to 2029 by holding several engagement sessions with various interested parties (e.g., students, Indigenous communities) to incorporate feedback. However, we did not see evidence of regular (i.e., quarterly) engagement or reporting on results of Indigenous student success to these parties, consistent with good practice.
- Implemented an identity verification policy to validate declarations of Indigenous ancestry for newly hired staff in Indigenous-designated positions.
- Established key performance measures and targets for evaluating Indigenous student success. It also set thresholds on when to investigate underperforming measures. We found Sask Polytech drafted an action plan to address two underperforming measures, but had not yet received approval of the plan and had not implemented it at June 2025.

Reducing disparities in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students will support more equitable outcomes in attaining higher education, as well as in their employment earnings and overall success.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act makes Saskatchewan Polytechnic responsible to carry out post-secondary applied education and research.² It provides certificate, diploma, degree, post-graduate certificate, and apprenticeship training as well as offers adult basic education and skills training programming.³

¹ Saskatchewan Polytechnic, *Annual Report 2023–24*, p. 20.

² *The Saskatchewan Polytechnic Act*, ss. 10 and 16.

³ Saskatchewan Polytechnic, *Annual Report 2023–24*, p. 11.



Sask Polytech serves students across four campuses: Saskatoon, Regina, Prince Albert, and Moose Jaw. In 2023–24, Sask Polytech had total enrolment of nearly 18,000 students (2022–23: 15,334), of which 10% self-declared as Indigenous.^{4,5}

2.1.1 Indigenous Student Success Strategy

In 2024, Saskatchewan Polytechnic released its *Indigenous Student Success Strategy 2024–29* after assessing progress against its recommendations and targets set in its *Indigenous Student Success Strategy 2018–23*.⁶ To create the Strategy, Sask Polytech reviewed leading practices, as well as evaluated its progress in meeting the recommendations outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action.⁷

Sask Polytech also gathered input from interested parties (e.g., students, Indigenous communities) on their priorities and expectations for the Strategy and obtained feedback through a series of group sessions, one-on-one conversations, paper-based questionnaires, and an online survey.⁸

Figure 1 outlines Sask Polytech's goals established in its Strategy related to Indigenous students.

Figure 1—Indigenous Student Success Strategy 2024–29 Goals

- **Hoʔá (Dene) Welcoming:** focuses on continuing to help Indigenous students navigate the transition to post-secondary and to set them up for success at Sask Polytech
- **Ombi-ah' (Nakawe) Inspiring:** focuses on continuing to provide meaningful services and supports for Indigenous students, encouraging them to keep going in difficult times, and helping them realize their potential
- **Mnihéya (Nakoda) Empowering:** focuses on continuing to celebrate Indigenous students' success and build long-lasting relationships with Indigenous graduates [of Saskatchewan Polytechnic]
- **Heca (Dakota) Belonging:** focuses on continuing to foster warm, supportive, and respectful campuses and build miyo wáhkôhtowin—good relations with our Indigenous students and their communities

Source: Saskatchewan Polytechnic, *Indigenous Student Success Strategy 2024–29*, p. 19.

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our first follow-up audit of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2023.

We concluded, for the period ended February 15, 2023, Saskatchewan Polytechnic had, other than in the areas of our four recommendations, effective processes to support the success of Indigenous students by increasing student enrolment, retention, and graduation rates.⁹

⁴ Saskatchewan Polytechnic, *Annual Report 2023–24*, pp. 5 and 18.

⁵ Saskatchewan Polytechnic, *Annual Report 2022–23*, p. 17.

⁶ www.saskpolytech.ca/about/organization/indigenous-strategy.aspx (16 September 2025).

⁷ Saskatchewan Polytechnic, *Indigenous Student Success Strategy 2024–29*, p. 13.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ *2023 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 5*, pp. 63–78.

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001). To evaluate Sask Polytech's progress toward meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the original audit. Sask Polytech management agreed with the criteria in the original audit.

To carry out our follow-up audit, we examined Sask Polytech's procedures, policies, strategies, and reports relating to implementing its Indigenous Student Success Strategy. We assessed the adequacy of Sask Polytech's processes to establish targets, communicate with interested parties, and monitor progress in improving success of Indigenous students. We also analyzed data collected by Sask Polytech around Indigenous students (e.g., enrolment, graduation rates, employment rates).

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 June 30, 2025, and Saskatchewan Polytechnic's actions up to that date.

3.1 More Frequent Indigenous Community Engagement Needed

We recommended Saskatchewan Polytechnic regularly consult with Indigenous communities to obtain feedback on its strategies, and to report results on, Indigenous student success. (2023 Report – Volume 1, p. 70, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 21, 2025)

Status—Partially Implemented

Consistent with the process used to update its Indigenous Student Success Strategy in 2017, Saskatchewan Polytechnic solicited feedback from interested parties (e.g., students, Indigenous communities) for updating its Strategy in 2024. However, we did not see evidence of regular engagement (i.e., quarterly) with these parties to obtain continuous feedback (e.g., barriers faced, community needs) and to report on results of Indigenous student success, consistent with good practice.

In November 2024, Sask Polytech engaged an Indigenous-owned consulting group to facilitate two engagement sessions with Elders, knowledge keepers, and Indigenous communities connected to the institution. The purpose of these sessions was to gather authentic Indigenous perspectives to refine Sask Polytech's strategic objective and support intentions for embracing Indigenous ways of knowing and being.¹⁰ Feedback provided included:

- When students feel connected, like they are among family, they thrive.
- Indigenous teachings emphasize balance. If one aspect of a person is neglected, the whole person suffers (i.e., need to consider mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual elements when considering the whole person).

¹⁰ Naheyawin. *Indigenous Engagement Summary Report* (November 2024).



- Importance of including Indigenous languages to show respect and recognition of diverse cultures.
- Need for education on treaties and Indigenous rights, which is foundational for true reconciliation.
- The importance of community connections and engagement (i.e., student learning deepens through direct engagement with Indigenous communities).¹¹

Sask Polytech used the feedback provided from consultations to update the actions it plans to undertake in the next five years of its Indigenous Student Success Strategy.

Sask Polytech's Indigenous Strategy department employs several Community Liaisons to meet with interested parties (e.g., First Nations communities, prospective students, high school staff) outside of urban areas across Saskatchewan to promote, and build awareness of, Sask Polytech. Sask Polytech expects Community Liaisons to submit monthly reporting on their activities undertaken with interested parties. We found Community Liaisons primarily reported attending career fairs at high schools throughout the province.

Sask Polytech also hosted three Indigenous Advisory Circles since 2023 intended to obtain feedback on key projects and updates that honour the Indigenous ways of being, knowing, teaching and learning (e.g., incorporation of Indigenous artwork across campus). Attendees included Elders, Sask Polytech staff (e.g., Indigenous Strategy, Campus Planning), and a Métis Nation-Saskatchewan representative.

Management told us it mails copies of its Indigenous Student Success Reports to certain Indigenous communities to inform them of its progress in improving educational success for Indigenous students, but we were unable to see evidence of this occurring.

Given the importance of community engagement mentioned during the engagement sessions between the Indigenous consulting firm, Sask Polytech, Elders, knowledge keepers, and Indigenous communities, we expect Sask Polytech would meet with interested parties (e.g., First Nations communities) at least quarterly and present updated results of Indigenous student performance measures (e.g., enrolment numbers) during that quarter. Given the Indigenous student enrolment rate is lower than established targets (see **Section 3.4**), Sask Polytech can use these engagement sessions to understand, from the First Nations communities' perspective, why enrolment rates remain low and how Sask Polytech can help improve these rates.

Continuous engagement (e.g., at least quarterly) with Indigenous communities help to establish a strong relationship with Sask Polytech, which could result in Indigenous communities recommending their members to pursue post-secondary education at the institution. This could help Sask Polytech increase its Indigenous student enrolment.

¹¹ Naheyawin. *Indigenous Engagement Summary Report* (November 2024).

3.2 Identity Verification in Place for New Hires in Indigenous-designated Positions

We recommended Saskatchewan Polytechnic verify the Indigenous identity of staff in Indigenous-designated positions. (2023 Report – Volume 1, p. 73,

Recommendation 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 21, 2025)

Status—Implemented

Saskatchewan Polytechnic now verifies proof of heritage of new staff hired in Indigenous-designated positions; it does not require existing staff to provide proof of Indigenous heritage and has rationalized why not.

In April 2024, Sask Polytech implemented its Indigenous Citizenship/Membership Verification Policy to validate employee declarations of Indigenous ancestry for new hires. The Policy clearly outlines the identity verification process for all new employees who may benefit materially from their Indigenous citizenship/membership. We found the verification policy is adequately documented and aligns with the practices of other post-secondary institutions, such as the University of Waterloo and the University of Saskatchewan.

Since implementing its verification policy, Sask Polytech hired six staff in Indigenous-designated positions. We tested three of these staff hired and found Sask Polytech appropriately followed its Policy by obtaining evidence (e.g., Provincial Métis Citizenship cards) in all instances to verify Indigenous heritage.

At June 2025, Sask Polytech continued to have 30 full-time Indigenous-designated positions. Sask Polytech validated the Indigenous identity of staff in 12 of those positions and grandfathered 13 other positions (i.e., staff member held the position prior to policy implementation) so as to not require identity verification.¹² The remaining five positions were vacant.

Having a comprehensive way to verify identity of staff in Indigenous-designated positions help Sask Polytech to identify false identity claims and protect institutional trust.

3.3 Targets Established for All Key Performance Measures

We recommended Saskatchewan Polytechnic enhance and report on key performance measures and targets specific to Indigenous student success.

(2023 Report – Volume 1, p. 74, Recommendation 3; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 21, 2025)

Status—Implemented

Saskatchewan Polytechnic established key performance measures and targets for evaluating Indigenous student success.

¹² Saskatchewan Polytechnic rationalized it did not have to obtain evidence of heritage for individuals holding positions when the policy came into effect as many of these positions were not leadership positions (e.g., Education Counsellors, Indigenous Student Advisors). Therefore, Saskatchewan Polytechnic determined it was low risk to grandfather existing employees under the policy.



To create its targets, Sask Polytech appropriately reviewed Indigenous student-specific performance measures set by other post-secondary institutions across Canada. It found that it reported more information than other Canadian post-secondary institutions (e.g., University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan, Red River College, Southern Alberta Institute of Technology). In December 2024, Sask Polytech established targets for all six of its Indigenous student-success performance measures, as shown in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2—Indigenous Student Success Measures, Targets, and Actual Performance 2019–24

Indigenous Student Success Performance Measure	2019–20 Actual	2020–21 Actual	2021–22 Actual	2022–23 Actual	2023–24 Actual	2024–25 Target
Enrolment						
Indigenous Program Enrolment ^A	2,613	2,123	1,889	1,628	1,687	2,050
Retention						
Indigenous Annual Program Persistence ^B	86%	88%	80%	84%	86%	85%
Indigenous Student Satisfaction with Learning Environment	94%	93%	94%	95%	93%	92%
Indigenization of Curriculum ^{*C}		67%	79%	100%	100%	100%
Graduation						
Indigenous Cohort Graduation Rate	63%	61%	63%	61%	60%	62%
Indigenous Graduate Overall Satisfaction with Program	94%	94%	93%	94%	94%	92%

Source: Adapted from Saskatchewan Polytech records.

Grey shading indicates information was not reported.

^A Sask Polytech delivered programs.

^B Indigenous Annual Program Persistence is the percentage of Indigenous students at Sask Polytech delivered programs who did not withdraw from the program in an academic year.

^C Indigenization of Curriculum is the percentage of classes incorporating Indigenous perspectives, knowledge, and values into course content.

*New performance measure implemented in 2023.

In its *wītokamāhtōtān Indigenous Student Success 2023–2024 Report*, Sask Polytech tracked and reported on its key performance measures.¹³

Establishing targets and reporting results for all measures allow Sask Polytech to assess whether the Strategy is working, or if adjustments are needed, to improve the success of Indigenous students.

¹³ saskpolytech.ca/student-services/support/indigenous/documents/indigenous-student-success-strategy-report-2023-24.pdf (14 October 2025).

3.4 Thresholds Created to Address Fluctuations in Key Performance Measures, But Action Plans Needed

We recommended Saskatchewan Polytechnic establish thresholds for when to investigate and take action on unexpected changes in key performance measures related to Indigenous student success. (2023 Report – Volume 1, p. 77, Recommendation 4; Public Accounts Committee agreement January 21, 2025)

Status—Partially Implemented

Saskatchewan Polytech established thresholds for when to investigate changes and take action on unexpected fluctuations in key performance measures related to Indigenous student success. It also drafted an action plan to address underperforming Indigenous-student program enrolment but had neither received approval for the plan nor implemented it by June 30, 2025.

When setting thresholds for when to investigate reasons for measures failing to meet established targets, Sask Polytech appropriately relied on historical data (i.e., performance). **Figure 3** outlines the performance measures and associated investigation thresholds set by Sask Polytech.

Figure 3—Performance Measures and Established Investigation Thresholds

Performance Measure	Investigation Threshold (less than)	2021–22 Actual	2022–23 Actual	2023–24 Actual
Indigenous Program Enrolment	2,800	1,889	1,628	1,687
Indigenous Annual Program Persistence	82%	80%	84%	86%
Indigenous Student Satisfaction with Learning Environment	90%	94%	95%	93%
Indigenization of Curriculum	100%	79%	100%	100%
Indigenous Cohort Graduation Rate	62%	63%	61%	60%
Indigenous Graduate Overall Satisfaction with Program	90%	93%	94%	94%

Source: Adapted from Saskatchewan Polytech records.

Bolded information in **Figure** shows where actual results warranted further investigation (i.e., actual performance below investigation threshold).

As **Figure 3** shows, Indigenous student performance did not meet expectations related to:

- Enrolment: has not met threshold since 2020–21
- Graduation rate: has not met threshold since 2021–22.

In response to the lower-than-expected Indigenous student graduation rate, Sask Polytech recruited either a subject matter expert or Indigenous advisor for each faculty dedicated to Indigenizing curriculum and increasing enrolment. Sask Polytech tracks student progress toward graduation to see whether these changes increase graduation rates. Management indicated it plans to create a strategy to improve graduation rates but has not yet done so.



Further, Sask Polytech created a Dedicated Indigenous Student Recruitment Plan to address declining Indigenous student enrolment. This Plan intends to address the unique cultural, systemic, and socioeconomic barriers Indigenous students face, and includes several key actions to help increase enrolment:

- Engaging with Indigenous communities through local events and outreach such as by hosting annual community forums and cultural celebrations, attending pow wows and career fairs, establishing an Elder-in-residence program
- Collaborating with Elders, knowledge keepers, and Indigenous organizations
- Partnering with local K–12 schools for early outreach and mentorship (e.g., campus tours, hands-on workshops for Indigenous youth)
- Co-developing programs and pathways with Indigenous community input

While the Plan includes many actions to help address Indigenous student barriers to enroll at Sask Polytech, it has not yet been approved or implemented.

Not addressing underperforming measures increase the risk that educational success for Indigenous students does not improve resulting in continued inequities for Indigenous students.