

Chapter 22

Saskatoon School Division—Supporting Students with Intensive Needs

1.0 MAIN POINTS

Saskatoon School Division No. 13 continues to experience an increasing number of students with intensive needs. At December 2025, the Division had 2,215 students (K–12) with intensive needs—an increase of 44% in the last five years.

By February 2026, the Division made reasonable progress on the two outstanding recommendations we first made in 2018 to support kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.

During 2025, the Division set expected timeframes for completing professional assessments of kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs (i.e., 45 days for psychologists, 65 days for speech-language pathologists) based on historical data. By June 2026, it intended to track and report actual assessment completion times compared to expectations for the 2025–26 school year. This will help the Division know whether delays in implementing learning supports for students with intensive needs are occurring.

The Division reports the total number of students with intensive needs receiving educational services to senior management and the Board of Education. It also planned to report the average number of learning plan goals for students with intensive needs, as well as whether students met or progressed toward these goals by June 2026. Such reporting will assist the Division in assessing whether it provides students with intensive needs with learning supports consistent with those students' educational needs and abilities.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Saskatoon School Division is an urban school division in the city of Saskatoon. It employed more than 2,900 full-time equivalent staff, including about 1,550 classroom teachers and 1,000 educational staff in other positions (e.g., psychologists, educational assistants) in the 2024–25 school year.¹ The Division has about 28,000 students of which approximately two-thirds (18,823) are elementary students in kindergarten to Grade 8.² This represents a nearly 11% increase in K–8 students since 2022–23.

The Education Act, 1995, requires school boards to reasonably accommodate students with intensive needs in a regular program of instruction with their peers. Students with intensive needs are those assessed as having a capacity to learn compromised by a cognitive, social-emotional, behavioural, or physical condition. If school boards cannot accommodate these students in regular programming, the Act expects them to provide special programming to meet those students' learning needs.

¹ *The Board of Education of the Saskatoon Public School Division No. 13 of Saskatchewan 2024–25 Annual Report*, p. 9.

² *Ibid.*



At December 2025, the Division identified 1,543 K–8 students with intensive needs.³

The Education Regulations, 2019, place further expectations on school divisions in identifying students with intensive needs and providing them with learning supports. For example, upon request, a school division's Director of Education must direct staff to conduct an assessment to determine whether a student has intensive needs.⁴ Further, school boards are responsible for making programs and supports available to students with intensive needs, at no cost to parents, using qualified individuals to provide programs/supports.⁵

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up Audit

This chapter describes our third follow-up audit of the Saskatoon School Division's actions on the recommendations we first made in 2018.

In 2018, we concluded that Saskatoon School Division No. 13 had effective processes to support kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs, except in the areas of our 11 recommendations.⁶ By March 2024, the Division implemented nine recommendations and made progress on the other two recommendations.⁷

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

To carry out our follow-up audit, we discussed actions taken with Division management. We assessed the Division's processes by examining policies, spreadsheets, and reports relating to providing supports for kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.

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 27, 2026, and Saskatoon School Division's actions up to that date.

3.1 Expected Timelines for Completing Assessments Set

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

Status—Intent of Recommendation Met

³ Information provided by Saskatoon School Division.

⁴ *The Education Regulations, 2019*, section 48(5).

⁵ *Ibid.*, section 50(1).

⁶ *2018 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 11*, pp. 157–178.

⁷ *2022 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 23*, pp. 225–232 and *2024 Report – Volume 1, Chapter 20*, pp. 215–220.

Saskatoon School Division set expected timelines for completing professional assessments of kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.⁸ The Division intends to track and report actual assessment times against expectations for the 2025–26 school year.

In 2025, the Division set an expected timeframe of 45 days for psychologists and 65 days for speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to complete initial assessments of kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. It based these expected timeframes on historical data from the past three years (i.e., average time assessments took in the past three years). It updated its Student Services Delivery Guide in September 2025 to include these expected timeframes.

The Division continues to centrally track the time from when Division professionals (e.g., speech-language pathologist, psychologist) receive assessment referrals from schools to when they complete each student assessment.

We found the Division's 2024–25 tracking of SLP assessments was not always accurate. For 2024–25, we also found assessment dates were not always entered into the tracking sheet for every student with intensive needs seen by an SLP.

We tested 11 student files (who either saw one of two SLPs or one psychologist) in the 2024–25 school year and found:

- Four students had consistent data for SLP assessments completed.
- Five students did not have assessment dates properly recorded in their SLP consultation report forms. For example, only the school year (i.e., 2024–25) was documented as a consultation date, which makes it difficult to verify compliance with timelines or track the precise timing of student interventions.

Of these five students, two students had no SLP assessment dates recorded on the central tracking sheet and the other three students had dates on the tracking sheet but not on individual consultation forms. Without dated forms, we were unable to verify the accuracy of the dates recorded on the tracking sheet.

- Two student files tested from the psychologists' list of students had dates appropriately recorded on assessment forms and these were consistent with the dates on the Division's central tracking sheet.

We also found discrepancies between the total number of professional assessments completed and total recorded instances of student contact with professionals, highlighting the need for more accurate and consistent tracking. The Division was working toward accurately tracking the number and dates of completed assessments so it can report results compared to expectations for 2025–26.

⁸ A professional assessment is a formal evaluation conducted by a qualified specialist—such as a speech-language pathologist or psychologist—to determine if a student's learning capacity is significantly impacted by cognitive, social-emotional, behavioural, or physical conditions.



Setting expected timeframes to complete professional assessments and reporting results against expectations may help to identify and mitigate delays in implementing learning supports for students with intensive needs.

3.2 Reporting on Learning Supports Improving

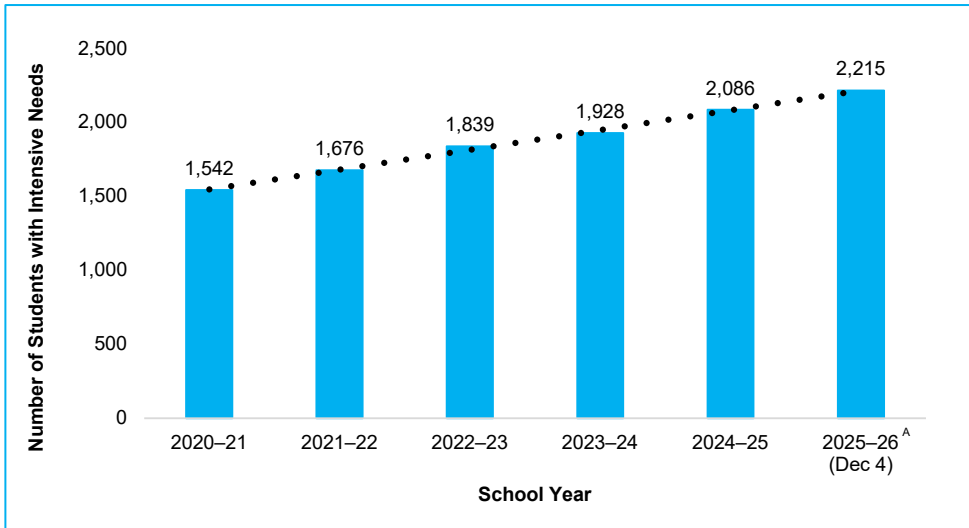
We recommended Saskatoon School Division No. 13 provide senior management and its Board of Education with enough information to determine the sufficiency of learning supports for kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. (2018 Report – Volume 1, p. 177, Recommendation 11; Public Accounts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

Status—Intent of Recommendation Met

Saskatoon School Division provides senior management and its Board of Education with information on the number of students with intensive needs. Further, it planned to report the average number of learning plan goals for students with intensive needs, as well as the overall average student progress ratings for these goals by June 2026.

During the 2024–25 school year, the Division provided its Board with information on the growing number of students with intensive needs within the Division. It reported its total number of students with intensive needs has increased from 1,928 in 2023–24 to 2,086 in 2024–25 (see **Figure 1**).

Figure 1—K–12 Students with Intensive Needs at Saskatoon School Division



Source: Adapted from information provided by Saskatoon School Division.
^A Total includes kindergarten to Grade 12 students with intensive needs as of December 4, 2025.

As illustrated in **Figure 1**, as of December 4, 2025, the number of students with intensive needs in the Division increased to 2,215 students—an increase of 44% in the last five years. Of these, 1,543 (or 70%) were kindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs.⁹

⁹ Information provided by Saskatoon School Division.

Although reporting informs senior management and the Board that the number of students with intensive needs are increasing, the reports need more details such as key information on what learning supports are provided and analysis as to whether those supports are sufficient.

We found the Division analyzed the average number of learning plan goals for students with intensive needs as well as the student progress rating for each goal. It identified for the beginning of 2025–26 (Term 1), a total of 6,282 goals are contained within Inclusion and Intervention Plans for all prekindergarten to Grade 8 students with intensive needs. Of these goals, 71% of students had achieved the outcome of the goal or were making progress, while 29% were experiencing difficulty or making progress less than expected as of January 2026. The Division had not yet shared these results with senior management and its Board. It planned to do so by June 2026.

Reporting to senior management and the Board about the sufficiency of learning supports for students with intensive needs will assist the Division in assessing whether it provides those students with educational services consistent with their learning needs and abilities.

