STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Hansard Verbatim Report

No. 25 — February 7, 2024

Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan

Twenty-Ninth Legislature

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. Trent Wotherspoon, Chair
Regina Rosemont

Mr. Hugh Nerlien, Deputy Chair
Kelvington-Wadena

Mr. Todd Goudy
Melfort

Mr. Daryl Harrison
Cannington

Mr. Delbert Kirsch
Batoche

Ms. Lisa Lambert
Saskatoon Churchill-Wildwood

Mr. Jim Lemaigre
Athabasca

Ms. Aleana Young
Regina University

[The committee met at 09:33.]

The Chair: — Okay, folks, good morning. We'll convene the Standing Committee on Public Accounts here today. Our focus today will be primarily Education, and that'll be both the morning and the afternoon.

I'd like to introduce the members that are here: Deputy Chair Nerlien, Mr. Goudy, Ms. Lambert, Mr. McLeod, Mr. Harrison, Mr. Lemaigre, and Ms. Young, Regina University.

I'll introduce our officials that are with us here today from the comptroller's office. Chris Bayda, our Provincial Comptroller. With him is Ms. Donica Smart. Thank you both for being here.

I'd like to welcome and introduce our Provincial Auditor, Tara Clemett, and the officials that are with us here today and that'll be coming and going throughout the day. She'll introduce those officials when she focuses on her presentation of her chapters.

We have a few additional folks at the back of the room here today, with some guests in the Assembly to observe proceedings, I think primarily teachers that have joined us here today. On behalf of the committee we welcome those teachers and those members of the public here today.

The focus of this committee is an after-the-fact review and audit of government activities, and it's focused usually around performance and outcomes and processes, and you'll see that today in the chapters that are focused here for Education.

With our guests that are here today, I would just remind our guests, as I would with any guests, that as a guest in the Assembly you're not able to participate in the debate. And that would include clapping or cheering or booing or any of those things. But we certainly appreciate your presence here today. We've all straightened our ties and sat up a little straighter in our chairs since we have an audience here today, and a very important audience.

I'd like to briefly introduce the Ministry of Education officials that have joined us here today. I want to welcome DM [deputy minister] Repski, and I'd ask him to briefly introduce the officials that have joined him. We'll refrain from getting into the chapters at this point. We'll kick it back to you for a response once we've had the auditor make her presentation. Mr. Repski.

Education

Mr. Repski: — Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before I introduce my colleagues, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the work of the Provincial Auditor and thank you and your team for your advice and recommendations.

To help answer questions this morning, I have from the ministry Jason Pirlot, assistant deputy minister; Sameema Haque, assistant deputy minister; Rhiannon Shaw, executive director, corporate services; Tim Caleval, executive director, priority action team; Edith Nagy, executive director, strategic policy and planning; and Maria Chow, executive director of student achievement and supports.

We'll have officials from school divisions joining us today as well. They'll join us after the break today and they will speak to chapters pertaining to their divisions, and we'll introduce them as they come up. We also have officials from the Distance Learning Corporation with us this morning. I'll ask Mr. Gasper to introduce his folks as they come up. And together we'll provide some information and updates on the status of recommendations, and we'll be pleased to answer any questions that you may have.

The Chair: — Thanks so much, DM Repski. And just for any other officials that take a microphone at any point here today, just introduce yourself so we have it properly recorded through *Hansard*. I'll kick it over now to our Provincial Auditor, Tara Clemett, and they're going to focus on the 2023 report volume 1, chapter 3.

Ms. Clemett: — So good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members, and officials. With me today is Mr. Victor Schwab. He's the deputy provincial auditor that is responsible for the audit portfolio which includes the Ministry of Education. Also behind us I have Ms. Michelle Lindenbach. She's our liaison with this committee, and she also works though in the Education division and so had much involvement in some of the audits that are before us today.

This morning Victor's going to present the three chapters relating to the Ministry of Education and the Sun West School Division as they appear on the agenda. The presentations at the beginning will include discussions around two performance audits, and the final chapter is a follow-up audit chapter. Follow-up audits we do where we assess the status of the audit recommendations about two to three years after we've done the original performance audit. Victor's going to pause after each of the presentations, so the committee can have discussion and deliberation.

I do want to thank the deputy minister of Education and his staff for the co-operation that was extended to us during the course of this work, as well as those at the Sun West School Division. With that, I will flip it over to Victor.

Mr. Schwab: — Thank you. Chapter 3 of our 2023 report volume 1, on pages 27 to 46, reports the results of our audit of the Ministry of Education's processes to implement the Inspiring Success framework to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. This chapter includes five new recommendations.

Improving educational outcomes, including graduation rates, for Indigenous students is important as there is a significant disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. This disparity, along with Saskatchewan's Indigenous population growth, makes it essential for the ministry to drive concerted efforts to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

In 2018 the Ministry of Education renewed its commitment to work collaboratively with educational partners to improve Indigenous student achievement. In June 2018 the Ministry of Education released the Inspiring Success, First Nations and Métis pre-K to 12 [pre-kindergarten to grade 12] education policy framework. We assessed the Ministry of Education's processes

to implement this framework to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

At March 2022 we found that while the ministry had implemented several initiatives aimed at improving Indigenous student graduation rates, these graduation rates remained relatively unchanged since 2018 when the ministry implemented its framework. In 2021, 44 per cent of Indigenous students graduated within three years of beginning grade 10 compared to 88 per cent for non-Indigenous students.

In our first recommendation, on page 35, we recommend the Ministry of Education expand its measures and targets related to the Inspiring Success framework for Indigenous students beyond graduation rates. The ministry developed the education sector strategic plan, ESSP, nearly a decade ago in 2014 to outline the strategic direction of the provincial education system and to align the priorities and outcomes between the ministry and the school divisions. The ESSP contains several goals and outcomes for student achievement, but the majority of its goals are not Indigenous student-specific besides graduation rates.

The ministry should consider setting additional measures to track Indigenous student performance before grade 10. By not focusing measurement efforts before grade 10, the ministry increases the risk of Indigenous students leaving the education system before intervention occurs. Setting additional measures and targets that focus on improving Indigenous student achievement such as numeracy, literacy, attendance, and Indigenous student feedback and engagement, this would allow the ministry to analyze detailed data and identify needed improvements to share with school divisions.

In our second recommendation, on page 40, we recommend the Ministry of Education determine action plans to address initiatives not achieving expected results relating to Indigenous student success. The ministry needs to require enhanced reporting from school divisions and determine actions to address root causes of underperforming measures related to Indigenous student success.

The ministry set the framework to guide and inform the planning and execution of specific initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for Indigenous students. The ministry designed initiatives, such as Following Their Voices and the invitational shared services initiative, to improve Indigenous student academic success. However the reporting from the school divisions responsible for implementing the initiatives needs improvement. For example if the number of Indigenous students who obtain eight credits a year in the Following Their Voices schools goes down or does not hit the target, then the ministry should expect an explanation as to why that is.

The ministry also needs to intervene when results are not achieved. Not requiring reporting of reasons where results are not achieved from established baseline targets increases the risk that the ministry does not identify and address the root causes of Indigenous students not succeeding and adjust initiatives or provide necessary support.

In our third recommendation, on page 42, we recommend the Ministry of Education follow its established processes for reviewing and storing invitational shared services initiative year-

end reports about Indigenous student partnerships. The ISSI [invitational shared services initiative] brings together the provincial education system and First Nations education organizations to support Indigenous students who live on-reserve but attend provincial schools. The ministry requires ISSI partnerships to submit a year-end report by November 15th each year.

Ministry staff review the year-end reporting and verify it met ministry expectations, as well as assess the partnership's progress towards meeting established metrics set out in the partnership project plan.

The metrics included targeted three- and five-year graduation rates. However after testing 17 of the active ISSI partnerships in 2021-22 we found not all partnerships submitted all aspects of the reporting requirements and the ministry did not have copies of year-end reports for some ISS partnerships. We found for two of the partnerships tested, the year-end reporting did not contain a reconciliation of budgeted to actual expenditures. The ministry requires partnerships to return unspent funds.

[09:45]

For three of the partnerships tested, the ministry did not have copies of the partnerships' year-end reports. As a result, we could not determine whether the ministry received the reporting. By not following established processes of storing received reports in a central electronic directory, there is an increased risk that information can be lost when turnover occurs.

In our fourth recommendation, on page 43, we recommend the Ministry of Education prepare and share a summarized report for the invitational shared services initiative based on year-end reporting received from Indigenous partnerships.

We found the ministry does not receive nor prepare a summary of all partnership reporting under the ISSI initiative. However the ministry indicated it planned to prepare such a report in 2023.

Having a summary report would provide the ministry with a better picture of the initiative's impact on Indigenous student success. Also the sharing of a summarized report among ISSI partnerships could aid partnerships in identifying successful activities and barriers to implementation. Sharing effective strategies to reduce Indigenous learning gaps is important to influence positive change across the system.

In our fifth recommendation, on page 45, we recommended the Ministry of Education work with school divisions to obtain enhanced annual reporting on Indigenous student success once measures and targets are expanded in relation to the Inspiring Success framework for Indigenous students.

The Ministry of Education established adequate templates for school divisions to follow when drafting annual reports; however the level of detail reported across school divisions is inconsistent. Enhanced reporting on Indigenous student achievement is needed once measurements are expanded under the Inspiring Success framework.

The ministry's annual report template expects school divisions to analyze the results of whether all students met each outcome and

target; however we found the depth of analysis sometimes limited. For example, we found all school divisions commented on whether students met an established target, but some provided no commentary on why students did not meet the specific target, or actions to address these deficiencies. If school divisions do not establish plans to address deficiencies, there is an increased risk of continuously missing targets.

We also noted the ministry did not report on how it plans to address the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student graduation rates in its 2021-22 annual report. The ministry needs to determine action plans to address underperforming measures.

I will now pause for the committee's consideration.

The Chair: — Thanks so much for the presentation. I'll turn it over to DM Repski for brief remarks and then I'll open it up for questions. I'd also like to thank officials for putting together the status update that's been provided to us for today. I'll table it at this time: PAC 130-29, Ministry of Education: Status update, dated February 7th, 2024.

DM Repski, take it away, and then we'll open it up for questions.

Mr. Repski: — The Provincial Auditor's 2023 report volume 1, chapter 3 audited the ministry's processes to implement Inspiring Success, a First Nations and Métis pre-K to 12 education policy framework. This framework was developed to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students by working collaboratively with the ministry's educational partners to strengthen relationships and achieve an equitable and inclusive system that benefits all learners.

The ministry is pleased to report that three out of the five recommendations made by the Provincial Auditor are considered implemented and two are partially implemented. I'll briefly provide an update on each of the recommendations.

Related to the recommendation that Education expand its measures and targets related to its Inspiring Success framework for Indigenous students beyond graduation rates, this recommendation is considered partially implemented. In partnership with the education sector, the ministry has incorporated the Inspiring Success framework into the provincial education plan. Teams comprised of representatives from school divisions, First Nations education organizations, and the Ministry of Education have identified four priority action items and have created implementation plans for each action item.

The four priority actions of the provincial education plan are, actualize the vision and goals of Inspiring Success, the pre-K to 12 First Nations and Métis education policy framework; improve student outcomes through effective assessment practices that guide and strengthen responsive instruction; enhance opportunities for learners and their families and support transitions as learners enter and progress through school to graduation and determine a life pathway; and enrich and enhance mental health and well-being capacity in students.

Targets, measures, and expectations for the provincial education plan were communicated in the fall of '23. And additional tools and measures for Inspiring Success will continue to be developed this school year, with finalization expected to occur next year as the ministry and the school divisions progress through the plan.

Related to the recommendation that Education determine action plans to address initiatives not achieving expected results related to Indigenous student success, this recommendation is considered fully implemented.

A key initiative in improving Indigenous student outcomes is Following Their Voices, which is designed to improve Indigenous student outcomes by engaging and supporting students through changes in student-teacher relationships and interactions, teacher instructional practices, and the learning environment. This recommendation was specific to concerns the auditor had regarding the declining outcomes in Following Their Voices.

Prior to the audit, Following Their Voices schools were experiencing year-over-year growth in graduation rates and credit attainment. At the time of the audit, schools were feeling the full impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including significant interruptions to the learning program. Following Their Voices schools were not immune to the impacts of COVID-19, and all outcome measures dropped over the '20-21 school year.

As schools resumed in '21-22 and began to return to pre-COVID school conditions, Following Their Voices schools' outcomes began to return to pre-pandemic trends. However, it took to the '22-23 school year before this occurred. Recent data shows there are 139 more First Nations and Métis and Inuit students who graduated within three years in Following Their Voices schools compared to baseline data from '12-13. Following Their Voices schools are experiencing increases in graduation rates double that of the provincial rate over the same time period.

There are 150 more First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students who graduated within five years in Following Their Voices schools compared to baseline data from '12-13. Increases in five-year graduation rates for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students in Following Their Voices schools are similar to that of the province over the same time period.

Related to the recommendation that Education follow its established processes for reviewing and storing invitational shared services initiative year-end reports about Indigenous student partnerships, this recommendation is considered fully implemented. The ministry is following the established processes for reviewing and storing documentation, including documentation from previous years.

Related to the recommendation that Education prepare and share a summarized report for the invitational shared services initiatives based on year-end reporting received from Indigenous partnerships, this recommendation is considered fully implemented. The ministry has completed and shared the first annual report with our partners and is currently working on the report for the '22-23 school year.

Related to the recommendation that Education work with school divisions to obtain enhanced annual reporting on Indigenous student success once measures and targets are expanded in relation to the Inspiring Success framework for Indigenous

students, this recommendation is considered partially implemented. This recommendation aligns with the work being completed through the provincial education plan and is the next step after the first recommendation. We discussed it, and it's fully implemented.

So I would be happy to take any questions that you may have at this time.

The Chair: — Thanks for the presentation. I will open it up to members of the committee for questions. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much. Thank you, Deputy Minister, and to your officials, as well as the Provincial Auditor for all the work that's gone into this very important subject.

Deputy Minister, how many Following Their Voices schools are there?

Mr. Caleval: — Good morning. My name is Tim Caleval. I'm with the priority action team in the Ministry of Education, and part of my portfolio is to work on Following Their Voices. So currently we have 38 schools across the province that are participating in Following Their Voices.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And remind me how many schools are there in the province.

Mr. Caleval: — I'm not sure of the number myself personally.

Mr. Repski: — We don't have the specific number with us today, but it's approximately 650.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much. How much does Following Their Voices cost annually?

Mr. Caleval: — We provide a grant of $2.285 million to cover the implementation of the initiative.

Ms. A. Young: — And that's for all 38 schools?

Mr. Caleval: — That's to support the schools to do that work, yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. And is that the total cost of Following Their Voices? Or remind me, would the school divisions also be contributing funding to those initiatives, either directly or in kind?

Mr. Caleval: — Again, I mean I can't speak for the school divisions' commitments, but I do know anecdotally that school divisions provide some support for the work as it proceeds.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. So for my understanding, the total funding then provided for Following Their Voices is, you said, 2.85 million for the . . .

Mr. Caleval: — Sorry, 2.285 million.

Ms. A. Young: — Pardon me. So call it 2.3 million for the 38 schools.

Mr. Caleval: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. There are 11 staff listed in the branch delivering this initiative. Can you clarify, why is there a separate branch in the ministry that's delivering this initiative? What are the other priorities that they're working on beyond Following Their Voices?

Mr. Repski: — So the priority action team within the Ministry of Education, their primary focus is on Indigenous student success. The primary areas of focus are their Following Their Voices schools as well as the ISSI programs.

Ms. A. Young: — So can you expand on that? Or am I right in understanding that the sole focus of the work of those people is Following Their Voices and these partnerships?

Mr. Repski: — Yes, that's correct.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. So the ESSP had goals to improve three-year Indigenous graduation rates from 35 per cent in 2012 to 65 per cent, but only got to 45 per cent. Roughly half of that is non-Indigenous students. And then the five-year rate was targeted to improve from 50 per cent in 2014 to 75 per cent and only got to 62 per cent.

So obviously over the past decade and change, it's been clear that the strategy wasn't on track to reach those goals as targeted. So what adjustments to the strategy have been made?

Mr. Repski: — So initially, before the ESSP, the graduation rates for our Indigenous students across the province was really flatlined for a lot of years. When the ESSP was created many years ago, there was a specific attention being placed to the graduation rates of our Indigenous and Métis students across the province. That's seen in a sharp increase in the graduation rates to the levels that you see today.

And obviously, when we talked about my opening comments around the COVID period of time, there was an interruption in those rates. As kids moved to a virtual environment, the Following Their Voices schools struggled with a lot of the same issues that our non-FTV [Following Their Voices] schools faced.

So when we look at moving forward to continue to increase on the outcomes of our First Nations and Métis students across the province, that's where the important focus for the provincial education plan came in. As one of the four pillars that we have moving forward, we do have goals which is to have parity for First Nations and Métis students across the province. The specific measures and outcomes are yet to be determined.

So with the goals being identified within the provincial education plan, the action team itself right now is doing that very work that you're suggesting of let's take a look at what's working, let's take a look at what's not working, so that we can share that information across the province.

Ms. A. Young: — So you spoke to a sharp increase in Indigenous graduation rates in the province. Can you remind the committee what that sharp increase has been?

[10:00]

Mr. Caleval: — So prior to the ESSP, in and around 2010, the

three-year graduation rate for self-declared First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students was under 30 per cent. To my recollection it was around 27 per cent. The rate for the '22-23 school year is 47.9 per cent. So over the course of that period of time we've had some significant growth in that three-year graduation rate.

Ms. A. Young: — And how many students per year does that represent? I believe the minister cited something like 139 more students. Is that accurate?

Mr. Caleval: — So are we talking provincially or are we talking just about within Following Their Voices itself?

Ms. A. Young: — Provincially.

Mr. Caleval: — So right now in the province in '22-23 there was about 37,500 students that self-identified as being Indigenous, across the 27 school divisions that we have. And more than 16,000 of those students attended First Nations schools in the province. In those schools too, about 70 per cent of the students that were in First Nations schools self-identified as being First Nations, or chose to self-identify as being First Nations.

Ms. A. Young: — I'm sorry, I meant the graduation rate for Indigenous students in provincially funded schools. I think, Deputy Minister, in your opening comments you said something like there was 139 more students graduating this year than there were in 2011-2012. Was that specific to the entire provincial education sector, or just Following Their Voices schools?

Mr. Caleval: — That was just the Following Their Voices schools that we have. So what we had identified was a baseline prior to the actual implementation of the initiative. And we looked at that data compared to the data that we have in the most recent year, so '22-23. We looked at the number of students and the graduation rate at that point in time and the number of students and the graduation rate at this point in time, and then we basically determined that 139 more students in those schools have been able to graduate on time, compared to where they were in 2013.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, so roughly . . . trying to do some quick math here. If there's a 139 additional students and 38 Following Their Voices schools, so generously about four additional students a year have graduated since 2011-2012?

Mr. Caleval: — I'm not sure I understand your math with that. I would say that in 2012-13 compared to '22-23 there would be 139 more kids in those schools now that would have graduated compared to where they were in the 2012-13 year.

Ms. A. Young: — For each and every year?

Mr. Caleval: — No. It's been, you know, we compare year over year from that baseline. So I guess what I'm trying to articulate, and I'm not sure I'm doing a good job, but what I'm trying to say is, in those schools the improvements that the staff have undertaken in terms of implementation of the initiative has resulted in roughly 140 more students that are successfully graduating that year compared to the baseline year.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, cumulatively.

Mr. Caleval: — Cumulatively, yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you for that clarification. So what were or are the satisfaction rates of students, teachers, and parents concerning the Following Their Voices program?

Mr. Caleval: — So in Following Their Voices we use the OurSchool survey that gets administered to students in those schools. And we use that as sort of a reference point to be able to use a sort of norm-referenced relative measure to determine student engagement in selected measures over time. And so I can tell you a little bit about the student engagement measures and some of the sub-measures that we have that we address there. Is that kind of what you're looking for?

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah. And forgive me, my understanding was there was some sort of feedback mechanism in Following Their Voices, you know, for students and participating teachers and school divisions and families to provide feedback on how they felt the program was going, whether it was actually effective in engaging them.

Mr. Caleval: — Yes, we have surveys that we do with students, with teachers, within school administration, and with parents as well. And we've tracked that over time. I can find those numbers really quickly for you. But generally speaking, over time, again, families, participants in the initiative are finding that their level of engagement is increasing. Especially, the longer the schools are involved in the initiative, the better their outcomes are in terms of engagement.

So when they begin, generally speaking, the level of engagement or the degree to which the people in those schools perceive that they're engaging and improving outcomes for Indigenous kids is relatively low, and it increases over time. So there's that measure.

And the reason maybe I was referring to the OurSchool survey is that it's broad-based, sort of norm referenced, too old for us to be able to sort of judge those schools relative to schools across the province and across the country. So when we are able to use those engagement measures, they would stand up to more scrutiny.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah, I don't need them necessarily this second, but if you'd be willing to undertake bringing those back to the committee then for each of the last five years, that would be much appreciated.

The Chair: — I'm going to just flag it here. When there's an undertaking to provide information back — we'll just make sure we're good and clear — is four weeks, one month, reasonable to provide that back to the committee?

Mr. Repski: — Yes.

The Chair: — Okay, and that can be supplied through the committee Clerk.

Ms. A. Young: — So Inspiring Success was originally — and correct me if I'm wrong — published in 2009, roughly 14 years ago. Revised in 2018, five years ago. Obviously based on this chapter there's a great deal of confidence on the part of the ministry that Inspiring Success is going to have a positive impact on Indigenous student outcomes. Can you expand on what it is

about this framework that makes you think it will be successful?

Mr. Repski: — Yes, thank you for the question. Regarding the framework, I think your question surrounded why is there such a level of confidence in this document. And the main factor that we would point to in the development — and having some learned folks with me here today — quite importantly, it was co-developed. When this document was originally created and then taken a look at, as well as referenced in the provincial education plan discussions, the input was from all aspects of the education sector across the province. It was done with school divisions, it was done with the ministry, but it was also being done with First Nations leaders across the province.

There's a high degree of comfort in the five areas of focus within the document. And as recently as the provincial education plan there seemed to be an overwhelming sense of comfort that these are still hitting the mark and being reflective of the Indigenous perspective.

Ms. A. Young: — And can you perhaps expand on those areas of confidence then? Obviously the auditor's chapter focuses, as well as the ministry's status update focuses primarily on Following Their Voices, which we're familiar with. And I appreciate there's a great deal of time and effort that's gone into this as well as support across the sector for Following Their Voices.

And I believe that this is a real sincere priority for the ministry. But looking at the outcomes over the past decade, it's . . . Well I don't want to be dismissive of 139 more students graduating, which is fantastic. That's not a . . . That's 139 students in the past decade cumulatively. So can you help the committee understand this level of confidence in these priorities that you've spoken of in comparison to the results that have been seen in the past decade?

Mr. Repski: — So speaking to the framework, it is just that. It's a high-level guideline document that school divisions are going to be using as we work on the provincial education plan. Your question is not certainly invalid. Do we have more work to do? We absolutely have more work to do. Working through the priority action teams along with our Indigenous partners across the province, there needs to be a renewed focus on what this looks like.

Tying it back to the Provincial Auditor's report, do we have the right measures and metrics? Just waiting till graduation is probably not good enough. When we go back to the work of the committee — without having words in their mouth; we haven't seen the recommendations yet — but getting involved early is going to be important, and looking at assessment measures throughout the child's development throughout the system is going to be important.

But equally as important are the components within the policy framework: making sure languages are valued and supported; looking at outcomes which we've talked about; cultural appropriate authentic assessment. These are all areas that are still embedded. And for the discussions around the provincial education plan at a high level, there were no exceptions taken to those pieces. So that would give us a sense of comfort.

Ms. A. Young: — So then hearing that shared comfort, again given there has been this decade of concerted effort, at least strategically, to increase outcomes for Indigenous students, albeit with slow and limited results, what will be done differently in the coming years?

Mr. Repski: — To say what specifically will be done, it would be preliminary to say. We know the measures of the Following Their Voices schools, and you heard Tim speak about the impact that that's having at that level. The broader positioning outside of the Following Their Voices schools, we'll be continuing to use those learnings moving forward. But a big part of it for us is going to be working with school divisions about what's working and what's not working. That's work that is to be determined.

We know some success stories through our Following Their Voices schools. We know that having the relationship with students is highly important, and we're going to continue working with our school divisions to set those targets and have those follow-up conversations. We're just not there yet.

Ms. A. Young: — So I've heard you say that obviously close working relationship with provincial school divisions as well as First Nations leadership and schools in the province is important in terms of collaborations that the ministry has undertaken. And your status update notes that the ministry will work collaboratively to develop tools for measuring progress towards the five goals of Inspiring Success.

[10:15]

Having canvassed the partners you're collaborating with, can you tell me what tools the ministry intends to use to measure this progress?

Mr. Repski: — So as I noted, there's still some work to be done around what those recommendations are. But largely within the context of the provincial education plan, the measurements are going to be, a lot of it is going to be through the assessment framework, so measuring how well our students are doing in literacy, numeracy, attendance. Those are good markers of success.

The other piece that I would point to is the Saskatchewan School Boards Association does have a document that they've created, *Animating the Inspiring Success Policy Framework: An Education Sector Indigenous Education Responsibility Framework*. That is a document that has been created through here that school divisions refer to on a regular basis to implement the framework.

Ms. A. Young: — And forgive me, Deputy Minister, is that the document then that the ministry is going to be using to develop these tools?

Mr. Repski: — It'll be used in concert with the other resources that our members bring forward, yes.

Ms. A. Young: — And those other resources are under development.

Mr. Repski: — That's correct.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Thank you. Circling back to Following Their Voices for a moment, there's 38 schools that are Following Their Voices schools funded at — again, correct me if I'm wrong — a rate of roughly 2.3 million annually. Has that funding been consistent from implementation to date? Is it kind of a standard $2.3 million every year for 38 schools?

Mr. Caleval: — So from 2019-20 through to '22-23, the budgeted amounts were, in 2019-20, 2.313 million; in 2020-21, it was 2.712; in '21-22, it was 2.637; and in '22-23, it was 2.516 million.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And those fluctuations in the funding, is that dependent on the number of students participating? Is it a per student . . .

Mr. Caleval: — The funding amount is not per student. The funding amount is based on the number of schools that participate and are ready to participate in the work. So it has much more to do with the degree of readiness and the willingness of schools that sort of fulfill the criteria to participate in the work that determines who we work with.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And I don't need the numbers now, but if you have them it's always appreciated. Prior to, I believe it was the '19-20 school year that you started with, can the committee expect that the funding for Following Their Voices would have been comparable, somewhere in that 2.3-to-2.7-million-dollars-a-year range, each and every year? What I'm getting at is trying to figure out what the total amount that's been spent in the past 11-odd years on Following Their Voices has been.

Mr. Repski: — We could do the math now if you like, or we could table it if you'd like.

Ms. A. Young: — Sure. Even a ballpark would be appreciated.

A Member: — Can we say 10 years?

Ms. A. Young: — Sure.

Mr. Pirlot: — Jason Pirlot, ADM [assistant deputy minister] with Ministry of Education. So for the last five years, it's 11.7 million. We don't have the 10 years with us — we're working on that right now — but it's safe to say it's going to be in the 23-to-25-million-dollar range.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Thank you for that. So yeah, what I'm trying to establish basically is even just a rough ballpark of looking at the efficacy of the program in terms of graduating Indigenous students. It seems with that spend of, kind of, 23 to $25 million over the past decade, that's essentially the cost of around 170 to $180,000 per additional student graduated. That's the investment that the ministry would be making.

And so in looking at that cost which is . . . Obviously the shared goal of graduating additional Indigenous students is one held across the province by, I think, all residents and people who care about education. That is a significant investment per student. Is that the expected cost and support that there is on a per-student basis for increasing Indigenous graduation rates?

Mr. Caleval: — So when looking at Following Their Voices and the underpinnings of the work and the intention of Following Their Voices, we look at it from a long-term perspective in terms of building the capacity of teachers and schools in order to change their pedagogy and their practice. So that ultimately, that investment in pedagogy and practice, is one that is at the teacher level. And by doing so with teachers, those teachers then become different and operate differently with the children that they're working with.

And the biggest challenge that we face in many of these schools is they're not static. They change all the time. So when you go into a Following Their Voices school and we've made an investment in that school, what we're trying to do is change that teacher practice over time. And those teachers that are working in that school, they move in and out of it all the time. And when they move in and out of those schools, what they're doing is then taking their pedagogy and practice from that school to another school.

And so the investment is not necessarily just about those students. It's about the long-term impact of changing that teacher's practice and the long-term impact of changing the way those schools interact and work with those communities and those children. And so it's really about that and the ability for us to sort of create a different culture and a different way of doing business.

And so if we look at the long-term impacts and the changes that we've seen we've been able, in those small schools, to really impact outcomes in a way that these schools who were performing below that of the province are now performing almost at the same rates as the province and have been trending upward more and more.

The other challenge with these schools that I would just indicate is that they are the most challenging schools in the province in terms of outcomes, so the investment in those schools is one that hopefully we will reap long-term rewards. But it's much about changing practice in the broader scope of the work, and it's more about the teachers than just those numbers with those students.

Ms. Clemett: — I just wanted to add some context if I could, because I think there's some numbers that are being confused here as well. So basically within our chapter though, top of page 38, at the time I think there was, you know, about 40 schools that had the Following Their Voices initiative in it. Now it's 38, so it stayed relatively comparable.

The number of students in those 40 schools at the time are like 14,000 students. It looked like there was 8,600 of them would have self-declared as Indigenous. So yes, this is impacting a lot more. What the ministry's trying to articulate is the baseline would be a certain percentage of those children obviously within the three years graduate. And that number has gone up by, you know, a higher amount, which is a good thing.

But this is definitely impacting, yes, thousands of kids. And a number of the teachers are participating for sure within these schools as well. At the time it was closer to like 800 teachers that are being impacted by this initiative as well. So it's a lot bigger than the 139 that's getting thrown around. So I just wanted to articulate that.

Ms. A. Young: — I appreciate that. Hearing that there's a fluctuation in the schools that do participate as Following Their Voices schools from year to year, is there data that indicates when a school has — I'm not sure what the right term is — but perhaps aged out of Following Their Voices or isn't a Following Their Voices school?

[10:30]

So is there data that indicates whether a school that is aged out of the program continues to implement the strategies that were supported during their time as a formal Following Their Voices school? And if not, why not?

Mr. Caleval: — So I want to make sure I understand the question. And if I don't hit the question, please come around again if you could.

So schools that participate in Following Their Voices, we've had a number that have participated and some choose to no longer participate. And in the past we had a funding model where we provided four years of funding to those schools. And after four years of funding then they were up to their . . . They basically ended their relationship with us.

We've recently changed the model of funding . . . I wouldn't say we recently changed it, but we've changed the model. And we've changed the model because we know changing outcomes for Indigenous children take years and years and years, and so we've recognized that in implementation. And so instead of us funding them for four years, the model basically is one where we provide significant upfront supports for schools in terms of funding and in terms of support from my staff to these schools.

And that support sort of increases and then decreases over time. And then once they hit the four-year mark, we've worked with them to build a lot of internal capacity to do the work independently. But we recognized that it takes an additional investment in order to keep them on the path, so what we've done is we've created these sustainability schools now.

And the commitment that sustainability schools need to make is that they have to design and implement. They have to put an action plan together, and the action plan has to . . . They have to use our tools, and they have to be willing to participate in ongoing meetings we have, my staff have with those schools in order to ensure that they're doing their work. And they have to commit to coming to a couple of professional learning and development sessions and report on their action plan and the degree to which they're implementing their action plan.

So schools that no longer are participating were schools that chose to not implement that action plan. They came to the end and they just said, you know what? We're good and we're going to move on. And so they become part of the provincial system, or the federal system if they're federal schools. And so many of those schools, when they end, they still may be continuing on with a lot of the processes and practices that we've embedded in those schools, but they just have chosen to step away.

Ms. A. Young: — And so then I think I'm hearing a yes in terms of my question, that there is data within the ministry — having heard that they continue to meet with your branch, with your staff

— there is data that indicates schools who have reached the end of their time formally with Following Their Voices do continue to implement those strategies that were supported during their time as a formal Following Their Voices school.

Mr. Caleval: — So a school at kind of the mid-year, at about this time of the year, we start to ask them to look at their action plan and then think about where they're going to be at the end of the year. And in the spring we make a formal request to those schools and we say to them, are you willing to continue to participate? And if they're willing to, by the end of a school year, they have to put an action plan in place. My staff has to review that action plan, and they remain in.

If those schools are no longer . . . If they say, yeah, we're good. Thank you very much, we really appreciate but we're going to move on, then they do. We don't report on their outcomes once they're out of the initiative. Does that make sense?

Ms. A. Young: — It does. I'm trying to establish, like do you continue to track them? You know, you've talked about kind of the . . . It's a little bit of a mixed blessing of the fact that, you know, you've said that you work to impact the pedagogy and the culture in schools with the Following Their Voices program. But of course staffing assignments in schools shift every year across all divisions, and so it's a bit of a challenge in terms of maintaining . . . as people change, culture changes, right?

A school is not going to be static, but then you have the benefit of having those teachers move across systems and across a division taking those learnings, taking those professional improvements with them. But for the schools that have said, no thanks, we're out, is there any tracking or any attention paid within the ministry to see if that investment, that initial investment of the Following Their Voices program continues to pay dividends?

Mr. Caleval: — So at the teacher level, we don't track their practice. And we do have anecdotal information that many of the schools that participate continue to employ many of the practices and strategies that are in place. But once they're out of the initiative, we're not tracking their outcomes any longer.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So perhaps one last specific question on Following Their Voices. And correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe page 39 of the auditor's report says the ministry measures the success of Following Their Voices by the number of schools participating but does not collect specific information regarding the extent of student engagement. Is that an accurate . . .

Mr. Pirlot: — Sorry, what page were you referencing?

Ms. A. Young: — Page 39.

Mr. Repski: — Can you repeat your question?

Ms. A. Young: — Sure. Can I repeat my question? Page 39 of the auditor's report says that the ministry measures success of Following Their Voices based on the number of schools participating but doesn't collect specific information regarding the extent of student engagement.

It expands on that on page 38 as well. It's kind of the introductory comments around, you know, the ministry receives the number of surveys completed but not the actual information.

Mr. Caleval: — So we do obviously track the number of schools that we certainly work with. And we do have engagement data that I referenced earlier.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah, that's what I'm trying to reconcile. You reference the engagement data, and the auditor's report says:

> The Following Their Voices website reports the number of surveys used both throughout the year and since FTV inception. The Ministry does not receive any summary information on the details of these surveys other than how many surveys were completed. By only providing the Ministry with the number of surveys completed, the Ministry is missing key information from the surveys such as whether Indigenous student engagement is improving.
>
> We found the Ministry measures the success of this initiative by reviewing the number of schools implementing the FTV approach, and it summarized this measure in the 2020-2021 annual report as a key action.

[10:45]

Mr. Caleval: — So I'll just speak to . . . The FTV produces an implementation report that's available on the FTV website, so we produce one for every year of implementation. It's posted and publicly available. In those reports, we do provide data on our FTV survey, and we do provide data on the OurSchool survey. So the survey data is presented through this work.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So the new provincial education plan has four priority actions, and one of those is to actualize the visions and goals of Inspiring Success.

After 14 years, can you speak to what you believe will lead to success and why this remains a priority action, one of the four priority actions in the provincial education plan? Has there been any additional commitment to reach this goal? Is there additional funding that's been committed to reaching this goal?

Mr. Repski: — Are you speaking to FTV specifically or broader?

Ms. A. Young: — Broader.

Mr. Repski: — We do think that this will have an impact. As we work through the provincial education plan, the five areas and measures that we are talking about is student attendance will improve, graduation rates will continue to improve, the gap will continue to be shrunk, children upon kindergarten exit ready to learn in the primary grades is going to increase, student literacy and numeracy will increase year over year, and having a connection to schools in a safe environment.

These are the factors that we're looking at within the provincial education plan. And again, as we continue to develop the measures, what does it specifically look like on the ground, school division by school division? To be determined yet.

But when we talk about it in terms of attendance and graduation rates, literacy, numeracy, safety, connection, the things that we've learned through our FTV program that we have, it does speak to those pieces. So as we move forward within that spirit, I don't see why this wouldn't be impactful for our First Nations and Métis students across the province.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Thank you. And I believe I was quoting from the provincial education plan where it says one of those priority actions is actualizing the vision and goals of Inspiring Success.

So just to be crystal clear, when it comes to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students, you know, a decade and a half into this, there is real confidence within the ministry that this will achieve those goals?

Mr. Repski: — That would be the desire, yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Winding down here on this chapter. Recognizing, of course, that there is many causes for the current state of Indigenous student outcomes — systemic racism, poverty, lack of stable affordable housing — these are all external to the school system but obviously have an impact both on students at school and outside of school. So I could go on. But the perennial question for the Ministry of Education, I know, is the ministry working with other ministries and agencies to address these root cause issues, specifically through Ministry of Education programming?

Mr. Repski: — Yes, thank you for the question. As I identified, this isn't an issue that's going to be solved by one set of hands alone. When we talk about collaborating with other organizations and ministries, there are a number. We are constantly reaching out and talking to our colleagues across the province and ministries and in other organizations.

A few of the quick-hitters I'll mention on here is the children and youth strategy. Obviously ministries involved in that conversation are Social Services, Health, Corrections. Our IYS, [integrated youth services] our integrated youth strategy which was just announced, working closely with Health and those organizations as well. Mental health capacity, we are continuing to work with Health on that as well.

In addition, when we were creating the provincial education plan, the Ministry of Health was there to talk about the mental health strategy moving forward. And the other piece is that we do engage with elders throughout this as well to get a perspective from an Indigenous perspective on all of these matters. So there's a number of touchpoints we have with other organizations.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Deputy Minister. I appreciate that. So to my question, is this — can you be clear — is this specific Ministry of Education programming?

Mr. Repski: — They're shared. Sometimes we're the lead of this. Sometimes it's embedded within school divisions. Sometimes the Ministry of Health or others are taking the lead of this. So no, not all these programs are within the Ministry of Education.

Ms. A. Young: — Are there specific programs looking to address

some of these root causes? You know, personal relationship education, teen pregnancy, substance abuse?

Mr. Repski: — Specifically each area in the programs I just listed, to get into the root causes, I think all of these committees are getting at that as well. From the list that you had just mentioned, they all touch on those aspects.

Ms. A. Young: — So I am hearing that there is confidence then the ministry does have educational programming — whether specifically within the ministry or shared with other ministries — that is equitably accessible to school divisions focused on some of these more systemic issues, whether it's poverty, housing, teen pregnancy, mental health, substance abuse.

Mr. Repski: — Right. So the committees that I had mentioned previously are provincial in nature. Some are targeted toward specific communities like the IYS announcements that were just made. A lot of this work is being done at the local level with local partnerships. If you had a specific area of focus, I would have to take that back to see what the specific targeting area is.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah, I think I listed a handful. I suppose the question very, very pointedly is, you know, is the Ministry of Education working specifically on these root cause issues through Ministry of Education programming? And the areas that I believe I had listed were systemic racism, poverty, affordable housing, teen pregnancies, personal relationship education, substance abuse, and mental health. Happy to receive at a later date as well.

Mr. Repski: — So again, as you referenced the issues that are before us, I can say there are some specific areas of focus from an education perspective. FTV, as I've been going through this, it is a program to identify systemic racism, racism, prejudice. So that would be a key area of focus directly within the Ministry of Education.

The other areas around affordable housing, poverty reduction, mental health access, to say that that's a sole root cause within Education, that's where the collaborative work comes in with the other ministries. The ownership, if I can frame it that way, within one ministry is not just, and it doesn't do the issue justice. So that's why we continue to work with our ministry partners and other organizations.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And are all those partnerships inter-ministerial or any of those with external third-party organizations?

Mr. Repski: — I don't have a specific list of the members of each of these different groups, but I think it's fair to say it's mixed. There are ministries involved. But mental health as an example, school divisions are involved in this; the Health Authority is involved in this throughout the different programs that we've been talking about.

We do know that we partner with CBOs [community-based organization] as an example. But to get into a specific, that's something I would have to table. I don't have the specific makeup today.

Ms. A. Young: — Sure. I'd appreciate that undertaking. Thank you, Deputy Minister.

The Chair: — One month through the Clerk. Is that good?

A Member: — Yeah, that's fine.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. No further questions.

The Chair: — Mr. Lemaigre.

Mr. Lemaigre: — Thank you. I can definitely appreciate, you know, when we talk about improving outcomes of Indigenous students and the effort that it takes. And I commend the school divisions for taking on, and though it fluctuates, the amount of schools that participate. And also I appreciate the discussion of how we tackle some of the outcomes. And you know, I'm a product of public education and know many people that have many successes and commend the teachers that have influenced our lives.

But as we speak of our partnership and we speak about developing a relationship specific to Indigenous communities, there are some partnerships that have an impact on some of our initiatives that we deliver, and one of them is land-based learning. And I'm curious if you could provide me information on the last two to three years, the school divisions that have taken on land-based education and the amount. And I would even push it a little bit further if we can, the partnerships that it took to deliver that initiative.

[11:00]

I speak my language. Even that is a significant consideration when we do land-based and elders that get involved. So I'm really curious to see what initiatives that have been undertaken with land-based education.

Mr. Caleval: — Thanks, thanks for your question. So I can speak about the invitational shared services initiative. And as you may or may not know, the invitational shared services initiative is an opportunity for First Nation education authorities to partner with provincial school divisions to primarily support on-reserve students that are attending provincial schools. It's also an opportunity to create partnership in terms of shared professional learning and development, to provide supports for graduation, literacy, numeracy, credit attainment, all kinds of different things.

So we have right now 30 partnerships that are in place, so we've increased that number year over year by six. And many of those partnerships in their project plans have articulated that many of the means of them delivering programming to students is through land-based learning. So I could come back around and provide you with the numbers within the 30 partnerships, which ones are focusing on activities regarding land-based learning.

I can also let you know that within curricula, it is an aspect within curricula. Some of our curricula have modules that are related to land-based learning as well.

Mr. Lemaigre: — Thank you. I appreciate that and I look forward to receiving that information. In my previous time on my

First Nation council, I was part of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council school board. And I can also speak to the partnerships that we've developed and how we executed specific-to-Indigenous content. So I look forward to that information. Thank you.

The Chair: — And that's okay to supply that back within a month as well, same route. Thank you very much.

Not seeing any further questions right now, maybe just a comment I'd want to make. Good questions. Thanks for the time here today. Thanks as well to all the educators and all the partners across Saskatchewan that are involved in this very important work.

The committee that we have here today — and maybe this is for some of the folks that are here today — focuses on sort of an after-the-fact review of some of the programs that are in place. And there's been a good discussion about all of that. There's other committees, for example, like the policy field committees, where you'll see the earnest debate taken up about positions on the adequacy of funding for education, you know, for example.

Because it's sort of like swimming against the current a bit on some of these things when you look at, you know, what's within the classroom. You know, certainly you can add programs and work to improve culture and pedagogy, but there's other challenges when you have class size and complexity and all these pieces that have been, you know, are being rightly discussed across the province.

And it's hard for . . . You know, I think my hope would be that we get to a place where we're fully resourcing the actual, kind of, progress that we can have on these fronts. And points as well that you'd have other committees as well that can enter in around some of the system's failures on the social services side or on the housing or on child poverty and all these other factors that have such an impact, of course, on learning and in the classroom.

With that being said, I just want to make sure folks know there are other avenues and strong debate on these matters, different positions that are taken and advanced in various other committees.

I appreciate that committee members worked within the scope and mandate of the committee here today. And the officials that are before us here today, the deputy minister doesn't decide the budget for education. And that's where the debate, you know, would occur — at the Education estimates or at budget time. So just to kind of point out those pieces.

Not seeing any further questions at this point, I think with recommendations no. 1 and 5, I would welcome a motion to concur and note progress.

Mr. Goudy moved. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. With respect to recommendations 2, 3, and 4, I would welcome a motion to concur and note compliance.

Ms. Lambert moves. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. I think there might be a few other officials that are going to change seats here. We'll leave that to DM Repski to quarterback over there. We'll take a very brief, one-minute recess to do so, and then we'll reconvene and turn our attention to chapter 8.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

[11:15]

The Chair: — Okay, folks. We'll reconvene the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. For the teachers at the back, you know, reconvening it's sort of like coming in after recess I think. Back in, it takes a couple minutes to get everyone into their desks and focused again. But I think we're ready to go here.

Just a note as well. We really appreciate having the guests here today, members of the public, I believe over 50 teachers I'm told that have joined us here this morning. Just a note though. I already identified that you can't participate in the debate. You've been great with that.

One other point that I'm just asked to pass along as Chair: no photographs, no videos while the meeting's occurring within this room. You can use your phone to communicate, not like FaceTime or you know, a phone call, but like text or something like that or an email's just fine. But no photos, no videos while we're going here.

I'll kick it over to DM Repski to introduce the officials that have joined us here to focus on chapter 8. He can introduce them, and then I'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor.

Mr. Repski: — Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. Just very quickly regarding chapter 8, I am here to do a quick hand-off to the DLC [Distance Learning Centre]. This chapter was written under Sun West. That has since been morphed into the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre. And Darren Gasper, the CEO [chief executive officer], is here to go through the chapter and I will turn it over to him.

Mr. Gasper: — Thanks, Clint. I'd like to introduce our team that's here, but I'd like to start off first by thanking the Provincial Auditor for your work on this report.

Joining me here today, to my left is Sara Hawryluk, who is our executive director of finance for the Sask DLC. To Clint's right is Stephanie Ali, who is our director of communications. Sitting behind Stephanie in the purple shirt is Mr. Ryan Johnson, who is our principal at the Kenaston campus. And to Ryan's left is Jessica Foster, our executive director of information management.

The Chair: — Thanks so much. Welcome to those officials. I'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor to make a brief presentation on her chapter, and then we'll come back your way.

Ms. Clemett: — So thank you, Mr. Chair. To my left is Mr. Victor Schwab. He's the deputy provincial auditor responsible

for the Education division, so he will be delivering the presentation today.

I do want to say thank you to the Sun West School Division, at the time, that co-operated with us and extended a fair amount of effort into supporting us through the audit — so thank you — during the course of the audit.

I do want to just mention that while this audit was done at the Sun West School Division, we do anticipate that the audit recommendations that we made will now be able to be assessed for implementation at the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre. So we will continue on following through as to whether or not these audit recommendations do get implemented there.

With that, I'll turn it over to Victor.

Mr. Schwab: — Thank you. Chapter 8 of our 2022 report volume 1, on pages 125 to 140, reports the results of our audit of Sun West School Division's processes for supporting students to complete grades 10 to 12 distance education courses for the period ending November 30th, 2021.

At the time of our audit, Sun West School Division provided distance education courses to grade 10 to 12 students through its Distance Learning Centre. Students at the centre include both those who reside within and outside of Sun West divisional boundaries. Sixty per cent of students registered at the centre take only distance education courses, while others take some online courses to supplement their in-person classes at another school.

For the '20-21 school year, the centre taught over 3,900 courses to more than 2,100 grade 10 to 12 students. We concluded that Sun West School Division had, other than our seven audit recommendations, effective processes to support students to complete grade 10 to 12 distance education courses for the period ending November 30th, 2021.

In our first recommendation, on page 132, we recommend Sun West School Division implement a course development policy including the frequency of course reviews for distance education.

Sun West School Division has a process and methodology to design new online courses and update existing courses but does not have a policy outlining the procedures for and frequency of course reviews. Good practice suggests periodic reviews of course materials to allow for updates based on course feedback from teachers.

Sun West last updated around 19 grade 10 to 12 courses between 4 and 14 years ago. A lack of policy to guide course design methodology and regular course reviews increases the risk of course design inconsistencies and courses not being up to date.

In our second recommendation, on page 135, we recommend Sun West School Division No. 207 monitor the timeliness of teachers marking distance education courses in accordance with its policy.

Sun West School Division has set out expectations for teachers to respond to students, which includes marking assignments and exams and getting grades to students within three to five business days. Teachers and administrative staff monitor marking of ongoing coursework; however Sun West's overall monitoring

system does not accurately report on outstanding assignments. This reduces its effectiveness.

We reviewed a report of outstanding assignments in January 2022, and the system indicated there were over 1,000 outstanding assignments that students submitted between September 1st, 2021 and December 17th, 2021. However this number is likely much higher than actual because there were flaws in the IT [information technology] system and its design that prevents accurate reporting on outstanding assignments.

Sun West was aware of the issues and planned to fix them during the summer to improve the IT system in the fall of 2022. Not having a system to effectively monitor timeliness of teachers returning marked assignments to students increases the risk that Sun West is unaware of teachers who are critically behind and where students are not able to apply learning to future assignments. This ultimately can reduce student engagement and success in completing courses.

In our third recommendation, on page 136, we recommend Sun West School Division No. 207 consistently apply its student inactivity policy to engage distance education students falling behind in courses. The division has a policy to identify and engage students falling behind in courses through an inactive student phasing process, but it does not consistently follow its policy. This policy requires teachers to communicate with students falling behind.

Sun West relies on teachers' professional judgment to identify when to enter students into the phasing process because they are falling behind. This is reasonable. Teachers are to then send email notifications to students once a week indicating the details of a student's phase and advising them to contact their teacher immediately. We tested a sample of 25 students in the phasing process and found that 16 students received phasing notification emails as expected, but nine students did not receive these emails as expected.

None of these nine students completed the course in the current semester. Inconsistent application of its student inactivity policy increases the risk Sun West teachers may miss the opportunity to re-engage students to complete their courses.

In our fourth recommendation, on page 135, we recommend Sun West School Division assess the need for ongoing focused professional development for teachers working in the distance education environment. Sun West provides comprehensive three-day orientation to new distance education teachers during their onboarding process, as well as ongoing professional development to all teaching staff throughout the year. However it is good practice to provide online teachers with professional development specific to the online teaching environment, such as methods to engage students online. Some other jurisdictions in Canada, for example Nova Scotia and Ontario, provide additional 20 hours of training specific to online teaching.

Not assessing good practice for distance education teachers' professional development increases the likelihood that teachers may not receive appropriate training to have the necessary tools to effectively engage and support students in the distance education environment.

In our fifth recommendation, on page 137, we recommend Sun West School Division establish target course completion rates for its students who solely attend the Distance Learning Centre. Sun West collects key information on student success; however it does not have a specific course implementation rate target for its Distance Learning Centre-only students.

Sixty per cent of students who register for distance education courses are students solely in the Distance Learning Centre; that is, they attend no physical school, therefore only receive online teacher support. Not having a target completion rate for the majority of its distance education students increases the risk that Sun West is not appropriately assessing its students' successes and challenges and taking related action to provide support to those students.

In our sixth recommendation, on page 139, we recommend Sun West School Division analyze key information related to supporting students' completion of grade 10 to 12 distance education courses to identify potential issues and take action.

Sun West collects key information on student success that includes distance education course completion rates and course drop rates. However Sun West does not conduct analysis on this information to determine trends or possible systematic issues such as identifying courses with low completion rates.

Sun West's divisional goal was that by June 2021, 90 per cent of Sun West's face-to-face students and 60 per cent of its distance education students will graduate within three years of starting grade 10. Overall, less than 30 per cent of Sun West's distance education students graduate grade 12 within three years of starting grade 10, as compared to 80 per cent of traditional students who learn in a bricks-and-mortar school. More analysis of potential root causes for low completion rates would help Sun West determine whether additional support could increase student success, such as targeted professional development. Not analyzing student completion rates increases the risk that Sun West may not identify issues affecting student success such as course design or engagement and take action.

In our seventh recommendation, on page 139, we recommend Sun West School Division regularly provide complete written reports and analysis to its board about supporting students' completion of grade 10 to 12 distance education courses.

We found Sun West shares information on course completion rates of students attending its Distance Learning Centre and also prepares appropriate monthly financial reports such as budget-to-actual, revenue-and-expense comparatives for the board. However we found the board reports lacked consistent data and analysis for the online courses delivered by the Distance Learning Centre.

We observed the board only received one written report on student completion rates in 2020-21. The report only included completion rates for Sun West students who attended other schools within the division. It excluded students of the Distance Learning Centre. Also, the target for completion rates for the distance education courses is 90 per cent. Sun West actual rate was 76 per cent. The board reports do not provide analysis or reasons for these completion rates including whether they are lower than expected and why.

Not providing the board with regular written reports and analysis, including complete and consistent information about Sun West distance education, increases the risk that the board is unable to understand the overall successes and challenges of the Distance Learning Centre.

I will now pause for the committee's consideration.

The Chair: — Thank you. Thank you very much for the chapter, for the presentation. I'll turn it over to officials to briefly respond. Thanks as well for the status update that was provided. And then once you're complete we'll open it up to members for questions.

Mr. Gasper: — Thank you very much. The 2022 Provincial Auditor's report volume 1, chapter 8 outlines results from the audit of the Sun West School Division's processes for supporting students to complete grades 10 to 12 distance education courses for the period ending November 30th, 2021. Originally these recommendations were directed at the Sun West School Division. Since then the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation has assumed responsibility for online learning and will be addressing these recommendations.

[11:30]

Of the seven recommendations that were issued, the Sask DLC has developed processes to fully implement all of the recommendations. Related to the recommendation that the Sun West School Division implement a course development policy including frequency of course reviews for distance education, a formalized course maintenance request process was developed and implemented for all courses.

Related to the recommendation for Sun West School Division to monitor the timeliness of teachers marking distance education coursework in accordance with its policy, school administrators have access to view Intelliboard reports on a daily basis to effectively monitor staff feedback times. Courses have been improved to ensure the Intelliboard reports are 100 per cent accurate by eliminating redundant assessment items that were in there previously.

The Sask DLC continues to use Intelliboard to monitor marking. We have introduced a process that has Sask DLC admin check their staff's Intelliboard reports on a daily basis to ensure teaching staff are communicating and providing feedback to their students on a consistent basis.

Related to the recommendation that the Sun West School Division consistently apply its student inactivity policy to engage distance education students falling behind in courses, a new course activity process was developed with feedback from staff to ensure all staff were clear and consistent regarding expectations for monitoring student progress and responding to students who fall behind in their course timelines. Increased monitoring of the process by administration, along with numerous training sessions, helped to ensure teachers are following the recommended processes.

Related to the recommendation that the Sun West School Division assess the need for ongoing, focused professional development for teachers working in the distance education environment, teaching staff at the DLC are allocated 12 days, or

66 hours, of professional development built into their calendar that is focused on online instructional practices. In addition to that, staff also have access to professional development funds within their own contract area that they may direct to these areas as well.

Related to the recommendation that Sun West School Division establish target course completion rates for its students who solely attend the Distance Learning Centre, the Sask DLC has established course completion rate targets for all student groups that take courses from the Sask DLC. The Sask DLC as well will be providing course completion rate reports to each school division and will be including the data for the above student groups in its annual report as well.

Related to the recommendation the Sun West School Division analyze key information to support its students' completion of grades 10 to 12 education courses to identify potential issues and take action, academic advisors are one of the strategies, and they provide our full-time online students . . . They work together to develop educational plans, including the review of student grades, completion data, and direct feedback from the students to develop those educational plans.

Related to the recommendation that Sun West School Division regularly provide complete written reports and analysis to its board about supporting students' completion of grades 10 to 12 distance education courses, course completion data is generated for both semester 1 and 2 and is presented to the board of education in February for semester 1 courses and in August for semester 2 and year-long courses for all student groups.

Thank you. With that report I'd like to open it up and we're welcome to any questions.

The Chair: — Thanks so much, CEO Gasper, for your remarks and your work. I will open it up now to committee members for questions . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . If you're ready, you go. You go, Goudy. Lead bat. You've got it. Melfort, take notice.

Mr. Goudy: — So yeah, just a couple questions. Just one, going back to when it was Sun West, before the Sask DLC. I know you'd had some courses like power engineering, things like that. Now that Sask DLC has been working with a lot of the local industry partners, what does that mean for the students who are trying to go into those areas in the future, you know, preparing for trades and that? What has that meant for the students in the province, and how has that been working with the expansion for the SDLC [Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre] on that?

Mr. Gasper: — So in summary we've had the opportunity to bring together a really talented set of staff from all of the different online schools that were available around the province. That's enabled us to expand the course catalogue fairly significantly. I believe we added somewhere in the neighbourhood of 60 to 70 new electives, if I'm not mistaken, to expand.

So, great opportunities for students. Those include a number of ones that involve the trades or technology area where students are able to not only take an online course in the area but do a work placement in that particular industry and really get a feel for what that career path would be like. It's generated already some good success stories of students who are offered careers in that particular occupation upon completion of the course as well.

The other piece, I think, by bringing together all the staff from the different online schools, it's really allowed us to work together on best practice and the great ideas that each of the online schools were doing in the past and bringing them together in the new Sask DLC and strengthen the model in that sense as well.

Mr. Goudy: — Thank you very much. Have you found that that helps with the engagement piece for some of the students? You know, do you anticipate that grad rates, when people are able to pursue some of their interests that formerly they may not have had in their communities, are you seeing that that is helping those students keep more engaged for their other coursework as well?

Mr. Gasper: — We certainly see, you know, the electives in particular are high interest to students. And you know, when students find the courses that are their passion area, we certainly see a higher level of engagement for them. I'm not sure I'd have the concrete data to be able to prove that. That'd be anecdotal from some of the student feedback and what we're seeing come back from students upon completion of their courses.

Mr. Goudy: — And just one final one is just, the online learning facilitators, that seems to be a great way forwards. I know in the past someone taking power engineering didn't have that. How are you finding that those people, boots on the ground, how's it working out with keeping the students engaged in completing their course load?

Mr. Gasper: — Yeah. You bet. So if you're not familiar with the role, an online learning facilitator is one of our employees that's placed in a high school in Saskatchewan to support online students at the local level. So we currently have about 110 OLFs [online learning facilitator] across the province in various Saskatchewan high schools. It's a model that we had previously in the Sun West School Division where we had a dedicated learning space in each school staffed by an online learning facilitator to support students. There's a noticeable difference in completion rates; I believe it's typically around 15 per cent higher for locations that have it.

So it's a key support for students in completion, but as well, they play a significant role in terms of the student's graduation pathway. It's not unusual to see our OLFs get mentioned in grad speeches and pieces like that because of the impact they're having for students — helping them, guide them into courses that are of interest for them and a passion for them. So they are playing a key role for us across the province.

Initially with school divisions, it's a new position to the majority of them. So there's a bit of a learning curve in terms of the role and how that would work within their building. But over the last few months we've received an awful lot of positive feedback from school divisions that see the value in the role and the benefits that it's providing to their students.

Mr. Goudy: — Okay. Thank you. Thanks.

The Chair: — And I'll ask just a specific question or two before we get going. I've been told that a student can register for a course both in their school division and also the same course at

the same time in the SDLC. Is that correct?

Mr. Gasper: — Yes. I don't see why they couldn't. I'm not aware of any of those situations occurring, but yeah, as far as we know there'd be nothing there to stop it. But yeah, I'm not aware of that situation in any case.

The Chair: — And so is that by design then? Would there be purpose in having . . . I guess there'd be some level of funding and resources attached at both spaces, so I'm just wondering the efficacy, or you know, value for money on these fronts. Is that by design? Is there educational purpose that a student could register for a course both in their school division and the SDLC? Or is this sort of something that you're working out to address?

Mr. Gasper: — So I guess the first piece, so that you understand the system, maybe this will help address it a bit. The way the registration system is designed — and again because we want to stay in contact with the local school because of their responsibility around the student's graduation plan — if a student in school X in a particular community registered for a course, that registration information is sent to the school principal at the local level to approve that course so that they are aware of it and can confirm that it would fit into the student's graduation plan. So there shouldn't be any surprises at the local school level in terms of a dual registration.

The Chair: — Okay, I appreciate that information. So there's oversight, and ultimately the authority's with the students' principal at their school if they would be authorized to be taking a course, for example, both at that school and then additionally at the SDLC at the same time.

Mr. Gasper: — That's correct. The student would not be able to enter into a course until the local principal has approved it.

The Chair: — And are you aware of how many students or how many courses this would pertain to? How many students are registered for a course that they're also registered and taking within the school division?

Mr. Gasper: — Yeah, we are not aware of any.

The Chair: — Okay. Thank you for the information here today. I'm looking to other committee members for questions. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much. And thanks for being here today and all the care and work that's gone into this chapter, especially through a time of transition from Sun West to the new DLC. Perhaps I'll pick up a little bit where Mr. Goudy, MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Goudy left off. How many staff are currently employed within the DLC?

Mr. Gasper: — In our last count, over 323 employees altogether.

Ms. A. Young: — And those are FTEs [full-time equivalent]?

Mr. Gasper: — That would be an employee count, not an FTE total.

Ms. A. Young: — Do you have that FTE total?

Mr. Gasper: — No, we do not have it here but we can provide it for you.

Ms. A. Young: — Great. Thank you.

The Chair: — Maybe just for consistency, any undertakings of information to be provided back, on this side, it fair for four weeks or a month? And then that can be supplied through our committee Clerk. Thank you.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So the segue I was taking off MLA Goudy was the mention of the online learning facilitators. And I believe you said there's about 110. And to be clear, are those specifically, are those teachers? Are those folks like registered with the SPTRB [Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board] as teachers?

Mr. Gasper: — They are not, no. They would come from a variety of backgrounds. In the past, under Sun West they were often educational assistants, was pretty common. But they didn't have to be, to be in the role now.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Of the staff currently employed with the DLC, how many would be teachers?

Mr. Gasper: — Right around 170.

Ms. A. Young: — And would those be FTEs or a mix therein?

Mr. Gasper: — That would be a count as well.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay.

Mr. Gasper: — An employee count, yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — And so I believe the estimated budget of the DLC is about $23 million. Is the new DLC on target to meet its objectives within that budget?

Mr. Gasper: — Sorry. For our overall budget, the GRF [general revenue fund] operating fund is 18 million.

[11:45]

In addition to that, there's tuition collection back from school divisions for the part-time students who take courses from us. That was estimated somewhere between 10 and 15 million in total that it would amount to, depending on the usage of that.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, thank you. That's another great segue. So there is a cost to school divisions for students who take courses from the DLC, then?

A Member: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah. And you said it's roughly 10 to 15 mil depending on tuition receipts at end of . . . I was going to say end of year, but I don't know if that would be end of fiscal, end of calendar, or end of school year that you'd reconcile that at.

Mr. Gasper: — So the tuition cost is $500 per course which has been a standard amount for about the past 10 or 15 years.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And again back to the Chair's earlier question in terms of who decides whether a student can take a course and the division will pay for it, that authority rests with the local school principal?

Mr. Gasper: — The approval of the course registration rests with the principal, but with the changes in legislation in that, it is open to any student to take a course as well. We collaborate with the local school because of the graduation plan impact on all students to make sure we're all on the same page around that registration.

Ms. A. Young: — And does that differ whether the student is part-time or full-time?

Mr. Gasper: — The full-time students would register directly with us and would be working with our academic advisors on their grad plan. The part-time students would be registering and working with their career guidance teacher on their local level.

Ms. A. Young: — And of those academic advisors, how many are there currently with the DLC?

Mr. Gasper: — Employee count of five and FTE of four.

Ms. A. Young: — Great. So what would the ratio be, like the student load be like for each of those academic advisors?

Mr. Gasper: — It would be approximately about 500 students roughly per academic advisor, would be average. Where it's a little bit complicated for us is we also have adults that take courses from us as well and require some academic counselling. So they would be typically over the age of 22, and so they aren't always counted in our full-time student count. So those academic advisors provide support to them as well when needed.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. And roughly how many adults are there taking courses?

Mr. Gasper: — It's approximately 150 adults, and then we would have an additional about 300 to 350 in the correctional institutes that we work with as well.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, and is this . . . Sorry, I wasn't aware of this. I'm just fascinated. Is this largely, like, adults working towards their ABE [adult basic education] or . . .

Mr. Gasper: — Typically, yes. Occasionally it might be an adult that needs a certain prerequisite for their post-secondary plans. Many of them are doing their adult 12 with us.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. And would they then be attached to like a local, a regional college? Or direct through the DLC?

Mr. Gasper: — They would be direct through us in most cases.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. And is the tuition structure the same for adult learners as it would be for K to 12 [kindergarten to grade 12]?

Mr. Gasper: — It is, yes. It's 500 a course for them as well.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. And that would be paid for by the

individual then, as opposed to . . .

Mr. Gasper: — Correct.

Ms. A. Young: — So maybe instead of asking like a bunch of different questions about the various staffing levels, is there . . . Forgive me, I didn't reference your annual report. I don't know if it's actually out yet . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . No. Which is why I didn't reference it. Great. Do you have an organizational chart, like, for the new DLC that would identify all the different positions?

Mr. Gasper: — We can provide that to the committee.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, great. Thank you. And one thing I'm particularly interested in is the geographic location in terms of how this new distance learning centre is working. Obviously to support students, distance learning is really important in Saskatchewan and specifically, but not exclusively, for rural and remote students.

But it's also an interesting innovation perhaps for where staff are located and how this integrates with existing communities and educational institutions. So do you have that information with where folks are located as well?

Mr. Gasper: — I do, yes. And maybe a little bit of context to help as well. In the consultation process that was conducted in the early stages with school divisions, one of the items that got flagged in those discussions was the need for local connection and local context to best meet the needs of their students. And so that was part of the planning that went into having regional campuses. So they are located at 10 sites across the province with a geographic spread to cover all areas.

So from ranging in the North at La Ronge, all the way down to the southwest corner in Swift Current, to Estevan in the southeast corner as well. So 10 locations altogether. If you'd like I can give you the complete breakdown of all 10.

Ms. A. Young: — Sure, yes. I don't need it now, but that'd be great to have that information.

Mr. Gasper: — You bet.

Ms. A. Young: — And perhaps taking a step back at a higher level. Given that the initiative to kind of centralize the delivery of distance learning courses through the DLC, can you speak to the differences between the new DLC and the old Sun West DLC? Because personally I'm more familiar with that, and I suspect there's some others around the table. We have a bunch of former trustees who would be well versed with the old DLC.

Mr. Gasper: — So altogether I think the biggest pieces that we see that are a new opportunity in this enlarged organization . . . I mentioned before about the increased catalogue of courses available to students. So it broadened the high school elective base out, like I said, by 60 or 70 additional electives. So for students in all corners of the province that was a pretty regular piece of feedback was . . . quite excited about that large catalogue of opportunities for students.

Bringing together the, like I said, policies and skill sets from the

different online schools has allowed us to improve some processes and work toward some planning pieces in the future, as well there in terms of how we support students but also how we data track and report and develop courses. All of those pieces have brought, you know, new skills and new ideas into the equation, which is a positive for it.

In terms of really having that geographic reach across the province and access, it's opened up some additional partnerships. Mr. Goudy had touched on, so for example, Prairie South had a really good class 5 power engineering program and a partnership with SaskPower. And they had roughly about three or four divisions, I believe, taking part in it now. So that now opens it up to all of the school divisions to be taking part in it as well. So the opportunities and ideas that each online provider had before can now be available to the entire province.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, so is it fair to say then those were the priorities, the concerns, the hopes that led to the transition for distance learning in the province from its kind of pre-existing state, which obviously evolved fairly rapidly during the pandemic, to the new DLC?

Mr. Gasper: — I think it's pretty safe to say that the program opportunities are one, but the consistency in quality is a key driver for us as well to ensure that that's in place for all students across the province.

Ms. A. Young: — So on that, are the courses offered by the DLC then subject to the same quality standards? And you know, say, the distance learning programs being offered by the Catholic divisions that choose to do so?

Mr. Gasper: — So the ministry itself has a quality assurance framework that all online schools need to meet, and I believe that framework is what will enable to ensure that quality is there from all providers.

Ms. A. Young: — So that does apply to the DLC as well?

Mr. Gasper: — Absolutely. Yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — So it notes in the status update that teaching staff have access to professional development funds, and it speaks to the number of days. But can you expand on this a little bit? How much is budgeted for this annually?

Mr. Gasper: — Today I don't have with me the exact breakdown for the organizational PD [professional development] budget, but with each individual teacher, through their LINC [local implementation and negotiation committee] agreement, they have access to up to $1,200 per person, per teacher to put towards professional development.

Ms. A. Young: — So consistent regardless of which school division that teacher may be homed with? I'm not sure if that . . .

Mr. Gasper: — All of our staff are under the same LINC agreement from the Sun West piece where we were initially, and there's a new local association has been formed with negotiations to begin on a new LINC agreement.

Ms. A. Young: — And when did those negotiations start?

Mr. Gasper: — They have not been scheduled yet. They have formed a new association and were working on their constitution, so I haven't received an update from them for a little bit. But my understanding is, I believe the constitution was submitted for approval through the federation.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And then who decides on what PD is accepted, and what is not? Is it a fairly consistent process with what we'd expect from other school divisions?

Mr. Gasper: — Yes, very similar process. The individual teacher would complete a professional development request, and their administrator would do the first level of approval and then on up through a superintendent, very similar to a school division.

Ms. A. Young: — Great. Thank you. When the facility in Kenaston transferred from Sun West to the new DLC, did Sun West receive compensation for that?

Mr. Gasper: — So that transfer is almost finalized yet. It's not quite completed yet, but it would be in the neighbourhood of 5 million in total for the transfer of the building and contents.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And when is that expected to be finalized?

Mr. Gasper: — This week, actually.

Ms. A. Young: — Oh, wow. Okay. Timely.

Mr. Gasper: — Yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, so then that number is fairly accurate, it's safe to say.

Mr. Gasper: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. What are the number of course registrations and number of teachers registered for the '23-24 programs at the new DLC?

Mr. Gasper: — So as of November we had 2,000 full-time students and 3,500 part-time students, taking a total of 16,000 courses at that time, with ongoing registration into semester 2 as well to grow on that.

Ms. A. Young: — Great, thank you. And do you have available the course drop rate for the first semester?

Mr. Gasper: — We are right in the process of working on that right now. The reports for each school division are being generated over the next couple of weeks to be sending out to them, so right in the middle of it.

Ms. A. Young: — Great. And is there an expected completion rate?

Mr. Gasper: — We do have targets for them as well, and so all of that will be included with the reports that go out to divisions as well.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. So all of those reports then are outward facing? They're all publicly available?

Mr. Gasper: — They are sent to the school divisions internally. They're not posted publicly, but our overall will be included in our annual report.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, great. How many students accessing the DLC would identify as Indigenous?

Mr. Gasper: — In the 2,000 full-time students, right now it's currently at approximately 10 per cent. That does not include our adults in the correctional facilities though. That would be just our full-time, under-22 students . . .

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you.

Mr. Gasper: — Sorry . . . who self-identify.

[12:00]

Ms. A. Young: — Self-identify, yeah. Thanks. And I would imagine the DLC tracks where all those students are from in terms of home division, locations in the province. Is that information that will be provided in the annual report in terms of information as to where these 2,000-odd students are located?

Mr. Gasper: — That information is provided to the individual school divisions because the students register there as secondary. But it would not be broken down that detailed in our annual report.

Ms. A. Young: — Is the information that the DLC has, that they'd be able to report to the committee?

Mr. Gasper: — Yes, we could.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. Yeah, it's a point of interest. You know, if 1,800 of those students are from Melfort, that would be an intriguing data point certainly for the province.

So looking at the restructuring of distance learning within the province, it was in the news a fair bit obviously that the piece around Flex Ed, which I know isn't necessarily . . . The ministry doesn't work the same as the DLC, but is the ministry planning on continuing to also support Flex Ed with funding? Similar to perhaps the Chair's question, are we paying for the same course offering twice?

The Chair: — Deputy Chair Nerlien.

Mr. Nerlien: — Yeah, Mr. Chair, I'm not sure that this . . . deputy ministers could be commenting on potential negotiations or whatever might be happening with Flex Ed. It's totally outside of the scope of this particular item.

Ms. A. Young: — Can you clarify why?

The Chair: — Maybe I'll just . . . what I think a fair question would be if you're able to answer a question around what's occurred. Of course this isn't a forward-looking committee, so what the state of play is, you know, at the current . . . what the reality has been. If you can speak to that, and we'll kind of watch the line of questions to make sure we're within the mandate.

Mr. Repski: — Yes, Mr. Chair. The question around Flex Ed,

it's a qualified independent school. It is funded at 50 per cent like all qualified independent schools, at 50 per cent of the per-student average across the province.

Ms. A. Young: — So to date, then, it is being funded while both . . . the DLC also continues to exist.

Mr. Repski: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — And recognizing we can't be forward looking, is there a reason that Flex Ed through its funding as an independent school through the ministry I assume is then, you know, offering quality distance learning programs and they're able to offer this distance learning program while only getting that 50 per cent of provincial average per-student funding? But you know, through reports are continuing to accumulate cash assets — about a million dollars, I believe.

Mr. Repski: — Okay. I'm trying to get your question.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah. I'm just trying to figure out if there's a reduplication and what the most cost-effective use of public dollars is for delivering distance education in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Repski: — Yeah. So I guess it's not a simple either/or situation. If you take a look at educational offerings across the province, there's multiple duplication, just to paraphrase a little bit. We do have a Catholic system, a public system, a francophone system, a distance learning centre available. But we also have the opportunity for independent schools, of which Flex Ed is certainly one of them. And they're going to make choices under the existing legislation to operate in that scope.

Right now the offering is available if you want to attend an independent school. That is absolutely the parents' option to do so. And these are the funding parameters that they work within.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. No further questions.

The Chair: — Any further . . . Ms. Lambert.

Ms. Lambert: — Yes, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wondered, I don't think we've touched on some additional supports that might be offered through the Distance Learning Centre. I think that I read somewhere that there was something like speech pathology might be a language offered, and some other supports. Could you speak to that?

Mr. Gasper: — So in addition to the OLF roles, you're correct in a lot of similar supports that you'd see in a school division. So a speech pathologist, an educational psychologist, academic advisors, and counsellors or social workers as well are available to our full-time students. Our part-time students have that provided to them in their local school division.

Ms. Lambert: — Thank you very much.

Mr. Gasper: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Any further questions . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . That's right.

Mr. Nerlien: — If I might just make a comment.

The Chair: — Yes, of course you can.

Mr. Nerlien: — Thank you. Just before we break for lunch, I too would like to thank all our guests for being here today. We really appreciate having you in this forum. This is a very good committee that looks at what has happened in the past, and it's very focused on specific chapters of the auditor's report. So we really appreciate your attention, and we know that it's a little dry sometimes but we appreciate you being here. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you for that. We have the new recommendations here. There's seven of them in this chapter that we'll deal with, we've had detailed by the SDLC and the ministry that implementation has occurred. So I'd welcome a motion that we concur and note compliance with recommendations 1 through 7. Moved by Mr. McLeod. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That is carried.

And now I'll look to the committee as well just to make an adjustment in our agenda, make sure everyone's cool with it, and that would be that we move chapter 9 which we were planning to deal with just before our lunch recess that's coming very soon here. Would folks be okay if we just bump that along and deal with it at 1 o'clock as the first item, keeping the same order of all of our considerations? That works for the ministry folks, I believe? Okay. Works for members? Sounds good.

And yeah, thanks to the folks that have joined us here today. I don't know . . . It seems like we almost have a more distinguished, older look-alike of Mitch Marner in the back of the room. Mitch, of course, an exceptional player with the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Thank you very much to all the teachers that have joined us here today. We'll adjourn at this point and reconvene at 1 o'clock.

[The committee recessed from 12:08 until 13:04.]

The Chair: — Okay, we'll reconvene the Standing Committee on Public Accounts here this afternoon. We're going to turn our attention to chapter 9.

We have some new officials that have joined us here this afternoon. I think we have a few guests that are still with us here this morning, or this afternoon as well, that were with us this morning. I'll turn it over to deputy minister of Education, Clint Repski, to introduce the officials that he has with us at this point in time. You know, after that we'll have other officials joining for various chapters and those folks will be introduced. And a reminder to any other official other than Repski that's at the table, before they speak to just introduce themself.

Mr. Repski: — Well good afternoon, Mr. Chair, committee members. We are going to be talking about volume 1, chapter 9, capital asset. Joining me today are assistant deputy ministers Sammi Haque as well as Jason Pirlot; executive directors Maria Chow and Rhiannon Shaw are with me today.

So regarding 2023 volume 1, chapter 9, education capital asset planning for schools.

The Chair: — Deputy Minister, I cut you off here. I think we'll just keep our same order. I'm going to kick it over now to the auditor to make a brief presentation on chapter 9 and then we'll come back to you for response. Thank you so much.

Ms. Clemett: — So thank you, Mr. Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members, and officials. With me today is Mr. Victor Schwab. He is the deputy provincial auditor that is responsible for the portfolio of work that includes the Ministry of Education. Along with us is also Michelle Lindenbach, sitting behind, and she is the liaison with this committee, also works in the Education division and worked on a variety of the audits that we will be considering this afternoon.

We do have in terms of . . . I'll comment on all the chapters that we're going to basically go through this afternoon. Most of them will be specific presentations on their own, but we do plan to present chapters 1 and 2 together. And there are four new recommendations for the committee's consideration in that particular presentation.

A number of the presentations are follow-up audits. Again our follow-up audits are whereby our office goes back after the original performance audit, basically two to three years later, to determine whether or not our audit recommendations and the process improvements have occurred overall and whether or not those process improvements are finalized. So a number of areas where we have seen our recommendations addressed, which is good.

I do want to thank again the deputy minister of Education and his staff, as well as all the school division staff through this portfolio of audits that we did, for the co-operation that was extended to us during the course of our work. With that, I'll turn it over to Victor.

Mr. Schwab: — Thank you. Chapter 9 of our 2023 report volume 1, on pages 133 to 137, reports the result of our fifth follow-up of the Ministry of Education's actions on recommendations we first made in 2013 about capital asset planning processes for schools. We made eight recommendations. By April 2021 the ministry implemented seven of the recommendations. This follow-up chapter considers the last outstanding recommendation implemented as of January 2023.

Effective capital asset planning helps to ensure the right size of schools are built in the right location to meet students' needs. The Ministry of Education monitors the success of its capital asset strategies by monitoring school utilization rates and facility condition indexes for provincial schools. We found the ministry, in collaboration with the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement, report on utilization and condition of facilities in schools province-wide in the Ministry of Education's annual report and capital asset plans respectively.

Our review of these reports showed the number of capital-funded schools operating beyond their designated enrolment capacity declined from 79 schools in 2019-2020 to 53 schools in 2021-22. This indicates that the ministry's capital asset strategies are yielding positive results.

While the ministry does not plan to set targets related to school

utilization rates and facility condition indexes, we found it considered these two measures when recommending capital projects for cabinet approval. Annually during the ministry's budgeting process it asks school divisions to provide a list of capital funding requests. The ministry assesses the requests against its major capital funding application evaluation guidelines, which helps the ministry set its capital project funding request. We found the ministry appropriately used measures related to school condition and utilization to decide where to best focus capital efforts and funds.

Since our 2021 follow-up, we found the ministry completed the following to monitor the implementation of its capital asset strategies. It analyzed the sufficiency of funding related to its relocatable classroom program in 2022-23. It continued to work with the Ministry of SaskBuilds and Procurement to update the facilities condition index data for schools across the province. None of the schools recently assessed were found to be in critical condition. And it created the minor capital renewal program to address projects costing between 2 million and $10 million.

The ministry began piloting its new minor capital renewal program in 2022-23 to address minor capital funding requests that fall outside of existing capital funding programs and yet go unfunded for several years. Having suitable and properly maintained schools is key to properly supporting the delivery of education in the provincial pre-kindergarten to grade 12 system.

I will pause now for the committee's consideration of this chapter.

The Chair: — Thank you. Thanks very much for the work on this front and the follow-up. This committee's already dealt with this matter. I'll turn it over for brief remarks to the deputy minister and then open it up for questions.

Mr. Repski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The ministry agrees with and thanks the Provincial Auditor for the assessment that this recommendation is implemented. The ministry continues to prioritize capital projects by considering health and safety, utilization rates, efficiency, projected growth, and building conditions. At this time we'll open it up for questions.

The Chair: — Thanks so much. Opened up now to committee for questions. Ms. Young?

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you so much. The report indicates that the facility condition index assessments will be completed by March 31, 2024 which is I guess less than two months away. So when was the last full FCI [facility condition index] completed?

Ms. Haque: — Good afternoon. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to the members of the committee. Prior to 2018 we had a standard formula for doing the FCI audits. It just used a standard rate for replacement and that's how it was used.

But after 2018 in working in collaboration with SaskBuilds, there was an update made to the formula to ensure more accuracy. This new update to the formula takes into account soft costs such as project costs, planning costs, and there was procurement of a contract through a specific expert company. SaskBuilds was undertaking this review based on the new formula and updating the data for all the schools, and based on the new formula,

developing FCI. They are expected to complete this work by the end of the fiscal year, so they are in the last stages.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So the last full facility condition index report for the province would be 2018-2019?

Ms. Haque: — That's correct.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, great. Thank you. And who's the contractor, the third-party company used by the Ministry of SaskBuilds for that work?

Ms. Haque: — Give me one second. I do have the name of the contractor. Sorry, I think I forgot to introduce myself even though I was reminded. I'm Sammi Haque, the ADM for the Ministry of Education.

This is a SaskBuilds contract and they issued a request for proposal and just recently awarded the contract to CBRE Limited.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, great. Thank you. And what was the value of that contract?

Ms. Haque: — I am not aware of that because it's a SaskBuilds contract.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, so I just want to clarify. So the contract is through SaskBuilds. Even though it's for the Ministry of Education that information isn't available to the Ministry of Education?

[13:15]

Ms. Haque: — The contract, the holder of the contract is SaskBuilds and Procurement and so the information is held by them.

Ms. A. Young: — And so then there's no costs passed on to the Ministry of Education for doing that work. I heard "not directly." Is there an indirectly?

Ms. Haque: — No costs associated with that for us.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. And you said that contract was recently awarded?

Ms. Haque: — The first two years of contract was with another vendor, and then they had to put out another RFP [request for proposal]. Instead of extending the contract they went through an open RFP and they've awarded it to CBRE Limited.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And who was that past vendor?

Ms. Haque: — It is Ameresco, I believe. Ameresco.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And the value of that previous contract, is that available? Or is that also . . .

Ms. Haque: — That is still a SaskBuilds and Procurement contract.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So as of the last FCI, what was

the total cost of deferred maintenance for the education sector?

Ms. Haque: — So based on 2018-19 data, the provincial deferred maintenance deficit for all of Saskatchewan schools is 16.4 per cent, representing a deferred liability of 1.311 billion.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And can you provide a breakdown of the results of the assessments that have been completed to this point? Understanding the final report isn't going to be complete until March 31, 2024, is there an update that you can provide?

Ms. Haque: — My apologies. I cannot provide that report. They are still undertaking that work.

Ms. A. Young: — Great. If that information is still being summarized, is it possible to request a copy of that report when the data is summarized?

Ms. Haque: — Absolutely.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Looking at the new process undertaken by the ministry, I believe it was stated that there aren't targets being set for FCI or school utilization. Is that correct?

Ms. Haque: — So we are not setting targets for school utilization. FCI is a calculation based on expert analysis.

Ms. A. Young: — Why was that decision made?

Mr. Repski: — The province doesn't have an overall target. When we look at the utilization across the entire province, it's going to look very, very different. Obviously school divisions are in a position to be making decisions around what programming goes in what facility, age of facility, size of the facility, different changing population of various different groups. To set a provincial target, it would look very, very different across the province.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah, I appreciate that. But what I'm seeking to understand is then what factors, what data drives the strategy in terms of what needs to be developed to meet educational asset needs?

Ms. Haque: — So in our capital asset planning process, school divisions submit an application for where they feel they need an asset. All those applications are then assessed based on an eight-point criteria. This is based on health and safety, which addresses the elements that pose risk to students' and teachers' health and safety; utilization which is, you know, essentially the growth pressure that reflects if a school is full and the percentage of capacity that they're full at; efficiency, which incentivizes consolidation of schools and joint-use projects; new growth, this recognizes enrolment pressures in new communities and subdivisions; functionality and contribution to program, which looks at different programs that are being offered by the school divisions; contribution to the community to recognize the impacts on the community; and facility condition is one of the other factors which reflects the general condition of the school using the FCI.

So all of those applications are then assessed based on these indices and prioritization is done based on the score, and then that

submission goes to cabinet for consideration for capital assets.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And are those submissions or those decisions made by the ministry, or are those made by SaskBuilds?

Ms. Haque: — Are you referring to the assessment that's done for . . .

Ms. A. Young: — Of the eight-point criteria you just listed.

Ms. Haque: — By the ministry.

Ms. A. Young: — By the ministry. And then just for my clarification on kind of the government's accountability, the ministry makes that evaluation of the capital submissions that come in from school divisions on the basis of those eight criteria, and the ministry then provides recommendations to SaskBuilds, and SaskBuilds provides recommendations to cabinet?

Ms. Haque: — The ministry provides the list, and SaskBuilds assists us in costing out those projects because that's their area of expertise. Once we have some cost estimates, those are part of our submission to the cabinet for consideration.

Ms. A. Young: — Great. Thank you. And you spoke a little bit about it, but can you expand on whether there's specific geographic conclusions on where the greatest needs might be? I know there's a number of factors that could be impacted by that, such as utilization or areas of new growth. But do any of those criteria specifically seek to address rural needs or urban needs? Or are they kind of at that broader, higher level?

Ms. Haque: — So the specific factor in our assessment of project submissions, the new growth recognizes future needs of the communities. As I've indicated before, if a new subdivision or anything is being developed, that's part of the assessment, is new growth.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. With the last deferred maintenance and facility condition index by school being completed in 2018-19 and the new one forthcoming, I suppose, next month, are they going to be . . . I suppose what I'm asking is, are they going to compare apples to apples? Like could an individual look at the 2018-19 FCI report for schools in Saskatchewan and then look at the 2024 report and understand them to be a fair comparison?

Ms. Haque: — I just want to clarify that that report is going to be that . . . This is year 4 of the audit. There's still one more year of the audit process left, so not just a couple of months. And so in regards to the methodology being used, it is a different methodology. We feel that it compares, but the new methodology would provide a more accurate picture of replacement costs.

Replacement costs are not strictly based on just square footage that's being built. New infrastructure projects, there is a lot of costs. There is a lot of planning involved. And there's some new realities in regards to the cost pressures that we see in infrastructure projects now. So the assessment will actually reflect the true value, we feel, of replacement costs. And that should give us a more accurate picture, probably a higher cost for projects, but that's the reality of the current market.

Ms. A. Young: — So to make sure I understand, taking into consideration all those cost pressures with which, you know, everyone would be aware — increased costs of materials, labour, transportation.

Ms. Haque: — That's correct.

Ms. A. Young: — And sorry, just on the date, just so I understand the report, the FCI assessments are being completed at the end of March, but the report is not due until next year?

Mr. Pirlot: — Thank you. Jason Pirlot, ADM. So there's five more divisions actually to go through the process before we're going to complete the work. So I think the auditor's report might have 2023 or 2024 as a conclusion. I don't think that's correct. There's actually one more tranche of those divisions to go through.

Ms. A. Young: — So on a go-forward basis, is it safe to assume that this entire process is going to be completed on like a five-year rolling cycle, or is it . . .

Mr. Repski: — Yeah, it's a five-year rolling cycle.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. In terms of the school utilization rate and condition of facilities, I see in the report the number of capital-funded schools operating beyond their designed enrolment capacity declined from '19-20 and declined in '21-22 which was stated, which is great. Can you provide the most recent years? Like how many schools were over capacity in '22-23 and '23-24?

Ms. Haque: — We have about 104 schools that are above 100 per cent utilization.

Ms. A. Young: — And forgive me, which year was that for?

Ms. Haque: — That is as of this fiscal year.

Ms. A. Young: — For the 104?

Ms. Haque: — [Inaudible] . . . utilization rate.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay.

Ms. Haque: — September 30th enrolments.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. And the previous year?

Ms. Haque: — I do not have that with me right now.

Ms. A. Young: — Great. If it's possible to get those numbers looking back to that original five-year starting point, that would be great.

Mr. Pirlot: — As of September 30th, 2022 enrolments, so one year prior, 133.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Is it available anywhere publicly or can you provide a breakdown of which schools are beyond their designed enrolment capacity? Or is it possible to get a copy of that for the committee?

[13:30]

Ms. Haque: — So the utilization data that we use is a snapshot in time. It's based on a specific date that's our cut-off when we do the calculation. We feel that that's not information that is consistent and remains the same through the school year. There are programming changes, boundary changes, use of non-instructional spaces. All of that is utilized to change essentially space pressures within the schools within the division.

In addition we use relocatables, and we allocate relocatables to school divisions in a given year. And they are moved around as well within the schools to address enrolment pressures. So it's not a consistent data that can be used to do anything other than a snapshot analysis.

Ms. A. Young: — For sure. I recognize it's not static. Nor are schools nor enrolments nor staffing or anything in a building that involves so many people and so many lives. But my understanding is that school divisions do track and maintain that information in-house, recognizing it is a point-in-time measure as you've correctly pointed out. So am I hearing that the ministry does not have that information or is prevented from sharing that?

Mr. Repski: — We have the information. Utilization is part of the major capital submissions that we make on the budget side of things. We don't post it publicly. And to what Sammi was saying in regards to why, it is a snapshot. It is a point in time. As soon as we put that information out it changes, and so we do not make it public.

Ms. A. Young: — Is the ministry able to provide a breakdown of which schools are beyond enrolment capacity and unable to utilize further relocatable classrooms?

Ms. Haque: — So in regards to our relocatable allocation, again, it is by application from school divisions. They do a need assessment and determine where they need a relocatable and how many. And so we don't have that level of analysis. These are decisions that are made by school divisions.

Ms. A. Young: — I appreciate that. I think what I'm seeking to understand is in informing capital asset planning for school divisions for the Ministry of Education, you've listed the criteria that go into it that are evaluated within the ministry and decisions are made to provide capital funding to schools. And you do this using information that is, of course by its nature, a point in time. Whether it's the condition of the facility, whether it's number of students or teachers or supplementary staff in each building, whether it's the condition of that building. And this is the information that the ministry and its experts use to make those submissions for the education sector.

But then that information is not publicly available for folks who are concerned about the state of their child's classroom. We're seeking to understand how education asset planning works.

Ms. Haque: — So capital asset planning is not strictly based on utilization, as I mentioned. I'd like to draw a distinction between capital asset planning for new schools versus relocatables, which are simply to address an enrolment pressure. They are two separate and distinct processes.

We do take utilization into account in our capital asset planning. But just to use one example, in our assessment of capital asset applications, the heaviest weight criteria is health and safety, which could be a fire code issue or something like that. So it may be that that particular school does not have an enrolment pressure but there is a health and safety issue; therefore it takes priority.

So capital asset planning takes utilization as one factor amongst many other factors and that's done. And then it goes through the cabinet approval process that I just mentioned. Relocatables is a separate item where we ask the school divisions to submit applications based on their analysis of where they have enrolment pressures, what is it that they've determined internally within the school division world in regards to boundary changes or other resources, space resources that they want to use.

Once we have that application . . . And that is not 100 per cent also based on that snapshot of utilization because there might be schools that have 120-plus utilization, but the school division chooses not to make an application for a relocatable because they feel they have internal capacity of programming changes that they are deliberating on or intending to make within their division boundaries, so they don't make an application. So it's not a one-on-one correlation and that's why we don't want to misrepresent that by making this information public.

Ms. A. Young: — For sure. No, I appreciate that. I'm also aware that there are a number of schools in the province that are beyond their capacity and do not have the ability, even where the divisions make those applications, to add relocatable classrooms to those buildings. There are simply no more spaces to attach portables to those buildings, which was the intent of my question. How many schools were at a level of capacity that they could not facilitate more relocatable classrooms?

Ms. Haque: — We don't have that information available within the ministry. Forgive me if I'm repeating myself. Because this is an application-based process, so school divisions do make some internal decisions within their structures as to how they want to address pressures within the school divisions. So we don't have that information as to what decisions the school divisions are making in regards to boundary changes or programming changes that may address those sites that you are mentioning where they might not be able to have another relocatable, because there might be other sites that they might be able to get relocatables for.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So I've heard loud and clear that because the belief in the point-in-time nature of things like FCI or space utilization in schools, that that information is not made publicly available by the ministry. Are things like the criteria, the evaluation, or the methodology used, are those available and reported out publicly by the ministry?

Ms. Haque: — So I just want to clarify the question. Like the criteria itself is published. It's available as to what criteria we use, but the individual scoring of the projects is not made public.

Ms. A. Young: — And you spoke earlier of a shift in methodology from the 2018-19 deferred maintenance and facility condition index by school in Saskatchewan to the forthcoming report. And is that methodology and the changes considered, is that outwardly available or will that be reported out on at the

time?

Ms. Haque: — Because this work is being undertaken by SaskBuilds and Procurement, I am not able to answer that question. I think as experts in that area, they have determined what evaluation criteria and what guidance they have provided to their vendor and they will provide that information. But I can't speak to that.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I have no further questions.

The Chair: — Any further questions from committee members on chapter 7, capital asset planning?

A Member: — Chapter 9.

The Chair: — That's the one. Your status update says February 7th, so that's a good catch there, Deputy Chair. I was just making sure you weren't snoozing here after lunch.

With respect to chapter 9, not seeing any further questions, there's not any new recommendations. We have implementation in place with respect to the recommendation. We have some undertaking of some information that the ministry's committed to supplying back to this committee. But I would welcome a motion to conclude consideration of chapter 9 of Education. Moved by Mr. Harrison. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. Well we'll move along here, and the next two chapters are going to be dealt with together as a group there. Those will be chapters 1 and 2 and I'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor for her presentation.

Mr. Schwab: — Thank you. These chapters include the results of our annual integrated audit of all 27 school divisions for the years ended August 31st, 2021 and August 31st, 2022. As noted in the chapter, our office works with school division-appointed auditors to carry out these audits.

In these chapters we report that the school divisions for the 2021 and 2022 years ended August 31st had reliable financial statements, complied with authorities governing their activities, and had effective rules and procedures to safeguard public resources, except for the matters we will discuss today.

These two chapters contain four new recommendations for the committee's consideration. The new recommendations are all from chapter 1 of our 2022 report volume 1. We will also include updates from the 2023 report where appropriate.

On page 17 of our 2022 report volume 1, chapter 1, we recommend the Ministry of Education work with impacted school divisions to establish a process to monitor the key financial IT system and the IT service provider. This recommendation was partly implemented at August 2022.

Certain school divisions are not adequately monitoring the key financial IT system and the related service provider. We found 13 school divisions across the province use a key financial IT system with outdated software that increases the presence of

system vulnerabilities, exposing them to increased cybersecurity risks. The third-party service provider who manages the IT system did not update the financial system's software for identified system vulnerabilities until 2022.

As almost half of the province's school divisions use this IT system and service provider, there's an opportunity for the Ministry of Education to work with the impacted school divisions to improve the monitoring of the IT system and the service provider, such as requiring standard security monitoring reports from the service provider.

During 2021-22, the Ministry of Education and impacted school divisions did not establish a process to monitor key financial IT systems and the IT service provider. Improved monitoring of the IT system and the service provider would help school divisions identify risks such security vulnerabilities and cybersecurity risks and make decisions about mitigating the identified risks.

On page 17 of our 2022 report volume 1, chapter 1, we recommend the Northern Lights School Division appropriately restrict user access to its financial system. Northern Lights has not appropriately restricted user access to its financial system. Not appropriately restricting privileged access to the financial system increases the risk of staff obtaining inappropriate access to the financial system and making inappropriate transactions within the financial system. Our 2023 report provides an update that during 2021-22 Northern Lights appropriately restricted user access to its financial system to users independent of financial processes.

On page 18 of our 2022 report volume 1, chapter 1, we made two recommendations to Prairie South School Division. First, we recommend Prairie South School Division No. 210 appropriately restrict user access to its financial system. Prairie South also had not appropriately restricted user access to its financial system.

[13:45]

Audit testing found that some business users have privileged access that allows the user the ability to grant access to other staff and change their own access in the financial system. Not appropriately restricting privileged access to the financial system increases the risk of staff obtaining inappropriate access and making inappropriate transactions.

Our 2023 report provides an update that during '21-22 Prairie South appropriately restricted user access to its financial system to users independent of financial processes.

The second recommendation is that Prairie South School Division document approval for granting new user access to its financial system. Prairie South did not have a process for approving and granting new user access to its financial system. It did not formally document the requests and approvals for granting new user access. Not maintaining documentation to support granting of user access could result in users having inappropriate access to the financial system.

Our 2023 report provides an update that during 2021-22 Prairie South sufficiently documented approval for granting new users access to its financial system.

Finally, on page 18 of our 2022 report, we provide an update on outstanding recommendation related to Sun West School Division. We continue to recommend Sun West formally document its IT disaster recovery plan. Our 2023 report provides an update on this recommendation and notes that it remains outstanding as of August 2022.

Sun West now has a documented disaster recovery plan, but it has not yet tested it. Without a tested disaster recovery plan it may not work as expected and the school division may not have ready access to key IT systems like its student data system.

I will pause now for the committee's consideration.

The Chair: — Thanks so much for the presentation. Thanks for the new recommendations as well as the follow-up on the outstanding recommendation that we've dealt with here at this committee before. Thanks for the actions that have been itemized. Any words on this before we open it up for questions, Deputy Minister?

Mr. Repski: — Yes. Regarding 2022 volume 1, chapter 1 and '23 volume 1, chapter 2, the ministry appreciates the recommendations from the Provincial Auditor on the school division's '20-21 and '21-22 annual integrated audits. The annual financial statements of each school division were found to be reliable, and each complied with authorities governing its activities related to financial reporting, safeguarding of public resources, revenue raising, spending, borrowing, and investing. School divisions were found to have effective rules and procedures to safeguard public resources except for two outstanding recommendations that are partially implemented. And I'll give a brief update on the two outstanding recommendations.

The Ministry of Education is to work with 13 impacted school divisions to establish processes to monitor the key financial IT system and the IT service provider. The ministry anticipates this recommendation being implemented by the end of '24-25 school year. The ministry's working with impacted school divisions on risk mitigation strategies such as reviewing reports that would provide assurance that the service provider follows best practices. As well, school divisions are advised to ensure any contract renewals with the service provider include internal controls to monitor system access.

Regarding Sun West formally documenting its IT disaster recovery plan, the Sun West School Division is pleased to report that implementation of this recommendation will occur in early 2024. An agreement has been signed with SaskTel for cloud disaster recovery, and final testing will occur shortly to complete this implementation. And we'll open it up for questions at this time.

The Chair: — Perfect. Looking to committee members that might have questions. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks so much. A point of clarification. On page 15 of chapter 1 footnote 1, the auditor's report has noted that "provincially funded schools . . . [doesn't] include schools under the responsibility of First Nations or private schools." So by private schools would that be like historic high schools, qualified independent schools?

Mr. Repski: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. So for the ministry are there audits that are done on those schools at all?

Mr. Repski: — Regarding independent schools, they are required to provide regular financial reporting to the ministry. The degree to which it's audited would be left at that local level.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. So in regards to them, like, safeguarding the public resources and the criteria listed here around financial reporting — revenue raising, spending, borrowing, investing — the audits would not be as comprehensive for independent schools?

Mr. Repski: — I think it would be up to the individual school. They would provide the regular financial reporting to us. After that, it would be at the discretion of the local boards.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. So just clarifying. So even though they receive increasing public funding, they are not subject to the same reporting requirements then as . . .

Mr. Repski: — They would have different reporting requirements than public school divisions.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Kind of tackling both chapters in one here. The new DLC then, is the new DLC subject to the same audit reporting requirements as the publicly funded schools or as private schools?

Mr. Repski: — The Sask DLC would be treated as a school division under *The Education Act*.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Thank you. In regards to the auditor's conclusions about Sun West, what are the IT disaster recovery requirements for the new DLC?

Mr. Repski: — Sorry, can you repeat that?

Ms. A. Young: — With this chapter focusing on Sun West in regards to the auditor's conclusions, and seeing that the work has been undertaken to implement these actions, what are the IT disaster recovery requirements for the new DLC? Are they subject to the same oversight and criteria as public schools, publicly funded schools?

Mr. Repski: — So just to clarify, this chapter is with Sun West School Division. It didn't transfer to the DLC, so this is still about the Sun West School Division, just to be clear. But regarding your question about does it have IT disaster recovery, it would. To say that they meet all of the criteria, it is going to look different. But making sure that the DLC and other school divisions are paying attention to if a disaster were to happen, do you store backup off site, do you restrict user access, those regular pieces would be in place. Of course the DLC would have that as well.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. So it'll be treated similarly to any other publicly funded school division, like subject to future audits by the ministry?

Mr. Repski: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, great. Thank you. Has there been work done provincially to address some of these IT security issues that would help secure provincially funded school divisions against cyberattacks?

Mr. Pirlot: — Thanks for the question. So I guess just to clarify, each school division is responsible for their own controls, whether that be financial, IT, whatever. Provincially I suppose we do provide support on student data system, MySchoolSask, any of the student-based information. So that would be managed and protected at a provincial level, but really school divisions would be responsible for their processes.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. Yeah. The Ministry of SaskBuilds has been here before and talked about a bit of a provincial strategy and best practices and lessons learned that was being rolled out to ministries. And I just assumed that was the Ministry of Education, but perhaps I'm hearing that is not.

Mr. Pirlot: — I would say certainly as we learn — because I mean government obviously has a lot of IT — as we learn information, we do our best to endeavour to share our lessons with school divisions. That's certainly something we would do, yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So are there then internal or external experts used to guide the ministry on ITS [information technology security] security issues in school divisions, or is that very much at the local level?

Mr. Pirlot: — Local level.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. And have any of the school divisions in the province been victims of a cyberattack in the sense that they had to shut down their system for a period of time or forced to pay a ransom?

Mr. Repski: — So the ministry is aware of one. Aside from that, we're not. That doesn't mean to say they're not happening at a local level, but we're only really aware of one.

Ms. A. Young: — And are you able to divulge the value of that?

Mr. Repski: — I think that would be a question best addressed to the school division.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Any further questions here? No. Good discussion, and you know, as a committee we've talked a little bit about spending a little more time even as a committee on the whole IT security piece. It's such a critical piece for any entity, public or private. And we certainly appreciate the work of the auditor on this front as well. It's so critical when you look at the threats that exist.

Not seeing any . . . Do you have any further questions? No. Not seeing any further questions at this point, I would welcome a motion that we concur and note progress with respect to recommendation no. 1 and that we concur and note compliance with respect to 2, 3, and 4.

Can we do that as one motion, Ms. Clerk? I think we can, right?

Sounds good. So moved by Mr. Nerlien, Deputy Chair Nerlien. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. So moving right along here, we're going to turn our attention to chapter 23 of the 2022 volume 1 report, and I'll turn it back over to the Provincial Auditor.

[14:00]

Mr. Schwab: — Thank you. Chapter 23 of our 2022 report volume 1, on pages 225 to 232, reports results of our first follow-up audit of management's actions on the 11 recommendations we made in 2018 about the Saskatoon School Division's processes for supporting kindergarten to grade 8 students with intensive needs.

By April 2022 the division implemented six recommendations and made progress on the other five recommendations. At April 2022 the division had about 1,100 kindergarten to grade 8 students identified as having intensive needs. We found by April 2022 Saskatoon School Division regularly analyzed trends in the number of kindergarten to grade 8 students with intensive needs and their categories of needs. It also maintained consistent and accessible documentation on key discussions, decisions, and steps taken to support students with intensive needs and student assessment information in students' cumulative files.

I'm now going to focus on the five outstanding recommendations. We recommended Saskatoon School Division provide guidance on expected timelines for completion of assessments of kindergarten to grade 8 students with intensive needs. Saskatoon School Division analyzed average time to complete assessment, but it has not yet provided guidance to division professionals on expected timelines. The division analyzed the average time taken to complete assessments during the 2020-21 school year.

The division professionals completed 589 assessments during the school year. The division found it takes on average 51 school days to complete a speech language assessment and 41 school days to complete a psychological assessment. The division indicated it plans to set out in guidance 30 days as an expected time frame to complete the assessment processes for the 2022-23 school year. Delays in completing assessments may cause delays in implementing learning supports for students with intensive needs, which in turn may negatively impact student success.

We recommended Saskatoon School Division retain evidence of agreement on learning plans for kindergarten to grade 8 students with intensive needs. We found the division did not always retain evidence of agreement. We tested 30 student files and found, for five students, school staff did not document agreement with parents on learning plans or their attempt to obtain agreement. School staff indicated they attempted to contact parents but did not document this in the learning plan. Documenting agreement of learning plans shows that school staff and parents agree on the division's approach to address students and their involvement. Not having documented agreement between school staff and parents on the learning plan may affect student success.

We recommend that Saskatoon School Division regularly monitor students' progress in achieving the goals set out in its learning plans for kindergarten to grade 8 students with intensive needs.

We found Saskatoon School Division did not always regularly monitor students' progress in achieving their learning plan goals. We found staff did not complete progress reports as expected for 2 of 24 student files we reviewed. We also found school staff did not include year-end progress reports in student cumulative files for 8 of 24 student files we reviewed. Not regularly assessing students' progress in meeting learning plan goals increases the risk that the division does not make timely adjustments to the learning goals, which may impact student success.

We recommended Saskatoon School Division centrally monitor whether schools sufficiently support kindergarten to grade 8 students with identified intensive needs to enable students to progress towards their individual learning goals. The division does not formally monitor on a division-wide basis or on a school-by-school basis whether students with intensive needs are progressing against individual learning plan goals as expected.

We found the division monitors the allocation of specialized supports such as educational assistants and assistive technology such as laptops or tablets for students with intensive needs and tracks special education program referrals and wait-lists. This monitoring is very output-focused versus outcome-oriented. The division indicated it is working with its student support IT system vendor to develop reporting that will assist the division to centrally monitor individual learning plan goal attainment. It expects to use this reporting during the 2022-23 school year.

Monitoring whether students are progressing against individual learning plan goals as expected would help the division determine whether it provides sufficient support to students with intensive needs. The information would also help the division to evaluate resource deployment to schools to support students with intensive needs.

Lastly, we recommend Saskatoon School Division 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. Saskatoon School Division provides senior management and its board of education with some information on supports provided to students with intensive needs, but it could provide more.

The division indicated it is working with its student supports IT system vendor to develop reporting that will assist a division to centrally monitor individual learning plan goal attainment. Providing senior management and the board with information to determine the sufficiency of learning supports would assist the division to assess whether it provides students with educational services that are consistent with those students' educational needs and abilities and sufficiently accommodate all students with intensive needs.

I will now pause for the committee's consideration.

The Chair: — Thanks for the focus of the work and the follow-up on this front. I'll turn it over to Deputy Minister Repski to respond. These have all been considered before, at Public Accounts before, so we've kind of canvassed some of these areas.

So you can be fairly succinct in your response, and we'll open up for questions.

Mr. Repski: — We will strive for succinctness. Regarding 2022 volume 1, chapter 23, again thank you to the auditor for your work on this as a follow-up since 2018. Students with intensive needs are those assessed as having a capacity to learn that is compromised by a cognitive, social, emotional, behavioural, or physical condition. School divisions are required to reasonably accommodate students with intensive needs in their regular program of instruction.

Saskatoon School Division had implemented 6 out of the 11 recommendations made in 2018 by April of '22. Out of the five remaining recommendations, the Saskatoon Division is reporting three as fully implemented and the remaining two as partially implemented.

Unfortunately officials from the Saskatoon School Division did plan on being in attendance today, but are unable to for a variety of reasons. So unfortunately they're not here to answer specific questions. Any specific questions regarding activities of the school division we'd be happy to take, provide a written response with the school division, and table to the committee.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. I'm going to open it up now to the committee for questions. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Thank you so much. I feel a bit uncomfortable putting questions to you about a specific school division. So I apologize, but maybe I'll start at a bit of a higher level. Can you speak to the trends in the number of students with intensive needs, and how's this categorized at the individual school level as well as at the ministry?

Mr. Repski: — Students requiring intensive supports as reported by school divisions since the school year '20-21, I'll just read these three out. The last figures I have is reported as of '22-23. So starting in '20-21 the number was 9,391. The following year was 9,274. The '22-23 year was 10,040.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much. And page 230 in the auditor's report identifies the wait times for assessments in 2020 and 2021. Similarly, how do these compare to wait times today? Are you aware, has Saskatoon Public been able to meet the 30-school-day goal for assessments for the 2022-23 year?

Mr. Repski: — That would be a question that we'd take back to the division.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you.

The Chair: — And just on that, we know that we have some of the officials that weren't able to join us here today. Thanks for committing to taking that back to them, and then if they can subsequently respond through you to the committee, that would be great.

Mr. Repski: — Perfect. We'll do that.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. I'll read out a follow-up question into the record, although I expect the response will likely be the same. So I suppose if they have been met, great. If the 30-school-day

goal for assessments has not been met, I'd ask the division to speak to why these targets have not been met, what barriers exist in accessing those assessments and receiving supports.

And perhaps a bit more topically, yesterday it was covered that a Saskatchewan parent came forward with their experiences trying to access autism assessments for children and indicated that they've been waiting, I believe, about five years for an assessment for their child and that he's sometimes sent home from school multiple times a week. And given the 30-day timeline listed here by Saskatoon Public, that seems like a significant step from a 30-school-day assessment.

So I'm curious whether such long waits are common within Saskatoon Public specifically as a larger school division, or provincially overall, and whether or not it's common that children are sent home due to lack of supports or assessment.

For recommendation no. 3, the recommendation is that the division documents its determination of staff needed to support kindergarten to grade 8 students with intensive needs. I understand this recommendation of course was implemented, but without further documentation in the status update, I was curious. I'd look for the school division or yourself, Deputy Minister, to be able to speak to how this is being documented.

Mr. Repski: — My school division card.

Ms. A. Young: — I will send these along in writing as well.

Mr. Repski: — I would appreciate that.

Ms. A. Young: — Because I have them in writing, miraculously.

Mr. Repski: — I can't read my handwriting.

The Chair: — I think probably instead of having two paths, I think if there's questions that you have — and this is a good path — I can get them on the record as you are, if that's okay.

Ms. A. Young: — I can just read through them.

The Chair: — I think that's appropriate.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay.

The Chair: — That's right. And then, as opposed to a follow-up writing, let's keep it functioning through the Public Accounts Committee. And then it closes the cycle of accountability that would flow back to us here.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, so I'll just read the questions through . . . [inaudible].

The Chair: — I would urge you to proceed. And if, you know, if the DM has any, you know, interjection or any response to any of them, that's fine. And yeah, so that's it. Proceed.

Ms. A. Young: — Great. Deputy Minister, I will look to you to interrupt me then, and I'll just put my head down and read here.

So looking at the delays in assessments that have been reported for some students, of course there's a question of whether or not

it's a matter of resourcing. So what is the cost to a school division to assess a student? And what is the average cost to a school division to support a student with intensive needs?

Is Saskatoon Public able to speak to the trends in the number of students with intensive needs specific to their own school division, and how do they categorize this?

Are wait-lists for assessments and supports for students with special needs who need necessary supports, are those getting longer or are they improving?

To the ministry: is there any kind of report or documentation available with the present wait-list for supports by school division?

And final question: has the ministry at a higher level completed any reports on classroom complexity in 2023, and if these have been completed, are these available to the committee?

[14:15]

The Chair: — Just to clarify, there's a fair number of questions that were direct to Saskatoon, and then the last two questions were for the ministry. Is that correct? Okay. I guess we can deal with the ministry ones here, and any other ones that the DM feels comfortable in addressing.

Mr. Repski: — We'll deal with the school division-specific questions as you had indicated, Mr. Chair. Regarding the questions directed to the ministry around a report of wait-lists, we do not have that information within the ministry.

Ms. A. Young: — That's all at the local school division level?

Mr. Repski: — It is.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. And the ministry doesn't aggregate that at any high level.

Mr. Repski: — We do not. No.

The Chair: — Okay. And thank you. And we thank the school division for their efforts to respond to the questions, and through the deputy minister or directly through to our committee Clerk to supply us with their responses.

Any further questions with respect to this chapter, chapter 23? These are outstanding recommendations, so there's no new ones before us, correct?

Ms. A. Young: — Sorry, just to clarify. The two chapters are both chapter 23. We're only speaking specifically on supporting . . .

The Chair: — Just the first one, just the 2022 report right now.

Ms. A. Young: — Great. Thank you.

The Chair: — So not seeing any further on this front, I would welcome a motion to conclude consideration of the 2022 report, chapter 23. Mr. Goudy moves. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — All right. We'll move along now to the 2023 report, and again chapter 23. We'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor.

Mr. Schwab: — Thank you. Chapter 23 of our 2023 report volume 1, on pages 215 to 221, reports the results of our first follow-up of Saskatoon School Division's actions on the recommendations we made in 2021 regarding kindergarten readiness to learn. By January 2023 the Saskatoon School Division improved its processes to monitor its success in readying students for learning in the primary grades when exiting kindergarten. It implemented three recommendations and partially implemented two recommendations we had first made in 2021.

At September 2022 the division had 1,942 kindergarten students. Kindergarten early years evaluation results for spring 2022 showed 79 per cent of students exiting kindergarten were at the appropriate developmental level. We found the division clearly communicated its expected frequency for assessing kindergarten students using standard assessment tools in key areas of learning and development by providing staff with guidance and related training. Key areas of learning can include literacy and numeracy. The division tracked and centrally updated a list of kindergarten students who did not participate in required learning and development reassessments. We also found the division provided teachers with a variety of online training modules such as how to perform assessments and supporting kindergarten to grade 2 students in writing. It also provided guidance on consistent application of key instructional practices.

We found the division had not yet fully implemented the following two recommendations. We recommended Saskatoon School Division confirm alternative tools used to assess key areas of a kindergarten student's readiness to learn, and collect sufficient and relevant information. Saskatoon School Division does not require teachers to vet the suitability of alternative assessment tools they plan to use in assessing key areas of learning and development. The division also does not track teachers who use alternative assessment tools.

We found the teachers have autonomy to create tools based on their classroom and student needs, but the division does not keep track or approve teacher-created tools. We also found that the principals have knowledge of the tools teachers use to assess kindergarten students, but we saw no formal evidence of approval of these tools or tracking of teachers who use self-developed assessment tools. Not confirming whether alternative assessment tools are sufficiently robust increases the risk of teachers not collecting sufficient information to identify all of a student's potential areas of struggle in a particular subject. Not having sufficiently robust assessment tools increases the risk teachers may not identify necessary adjustments to instruction or pursue other strategies to improve kindergarten students' outcomes.

We recommended the Saskatoon School Division analyze kindergarten assessment data to identify trends in common areas of struggle across all schools in the division. Saskatoon School Division prepares reports for its trustees, but it does not perform any kindergarten student data analysis to identify root causes for

school- or division-wide gaps. Our review of both board reporting and internal consultations noted that while the division collected data, it has further work to do in analyzing trends and root causes of reported results such as student attendance, teacher experience, and class size.

We also found during the 2021-22 year the division noted three schools had kindergarten students performing at lower levels than expected, resulting in it moving pre-kindergarten programs to these schools. We expected the division to review these pre-K [pre-kindergarten] students' performance once they exited kindergarten to see whether these programs improve student performance. The division had not performed this analysis. Without a robust analysis of kindergarten student data, the division may not identify root causes for issues at certain schools or division-wide gaps. A thorough analysis of kindergarten student data will also support decisions for how it directs resources to its schools.

I will pause now for the committee's consideration of this chapter.

The Chair: — Well thank you very much for the follow-up on this front and the focus of the presentation. I'll turn it over to Deputy Minister Repski to respond. Then we'll open it up for questions.

Mr. Repski: — 2023 volume 1, chapter 23 regarding kindergarten readiness to learn. Thank you for the auditor's work on this follow-up review from '21 where the Provincial Auditor initially made five recommendations related to improving processes to monitor its success in readying students for learning in the primary grades when exiting kindergarten.

As of January of '23 the Provincial Auditor agreed that three of the recommendations were fully implemented and progress had been made on the final two outstanding recommendations. Again, our officials from Saskatoon Public School Division planned to be in attendance but are not able to join us. They are reporting the final two outstanding recommendations are fully implemented, so I would ask for the same consideration as the last chapter.

The Chair: — Thank you very much, and thanks to the good folks at Saskatoon Public Schools for their work on this front and their report as well. I'll open it up to committee members for questions. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. These questions are fairly specific to the school division, so perhaps I'll just number them off and read them one by one. But again, please feel free to interrupt me.

Question 1. As the division improves the kindergarten readiness-to-learn preparation and assessments, it would be good to be able to see the patterns and results. So I wonder if there are plans within Saskatoon Public to do more of that type of analysis.

Question 2. The strategy to address areas of need identified by the assessment, as referred to in the auditor's report as "Sprint cycles," which I understand to be a key strategy for focused student improvement. Seeing this is a key strategy, is there evidence that these actions are being effective in having an impact on these learners? Is there any evidence to suggest that this impact sticks with the student longer?

Question 3. Are other services provided to students with needs identified through these assessments, and are there financial challenges in providing the support to these students?

And question 4. Seeing significant efforts undertaken by the division to improve monitoring and reporting, has this led to improved outcomes or shown an impact on kindergarten readiness numbers? What trends and results are available?

And with that last question, it's intended in a good spirit. Sometimes you start monitoring something and you see results that weren't expected. Other times you see that perhaps you have more work to do than was anticipated, especially if you're measuring something that had not been previously targeted.

And with that, Mr. Chair, I have no further questions.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. Deputy Minister, any responses to any of those questions? Or do you want to deal directly with Saskatoon Public Schools?

Mr. Repski: — I think it'll be the latter. The questions were fairly specific to a division, so we will follow the same process.

The Chair: — We thank Saskatoon Public Schools for their work on this front. They have identified implementation, that they've addressed these recommendations, so thanks for their work on this front. Thanks as well for their efforts to respond to the questions that have been put and to supply those back to the committee.

Not seeing any other questions with respect to this chapter, I'd welcome a motion to conclude consideration. Moved by Mr. Lemaigre. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Okay, that's carried. We will move along and turn our attention to chapter 27. And I think we've got a few different officials that are adjusting here as well. So thanks again for those folks that have joined us here from Saskatoon here today. I'll turn it over to our auditor.

Mr. Schwab: — Chapter 27 of our 2022 report volume 1, on pages 257 to 264, reports results of our follow-up of St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division's actions on the six recommendations we made in 2019. By January '22 St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division improved its processes to adapt technology for learning in elementary schools. The division implemented five recommendations and partially implemented one recommendation we originally made in our 2019 audit.

St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division recognizes that technology is a significant aspect of modern education. Each year the division spends about 480,000 on student technology devices used in school such as computers, iPads, and tablets. We found the division collected information from key stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, to determine the extent of technology use in the classroom and plans to continue to collect

information on future technology integration periodically through its technology refresh processes.

The division completed a cost-benefit analysis for student devices and provided a listing to schools going through the technology refresh process, showing which devices are most suited for education at the best cost. We also found the division improved its technology refresh process to link purchase decisions to its educational technology handbook, considered current technology in use, and collected insights from school staff.

We found the division has not yet fully implemented the following recommendation. We recommended St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division periodically verify the existence and location of educational technology devices available in its elementary schools. By January 2022 the division developed a process to verify the existence and location of educational technology devices, but had not yet implemented it.

The division updates educational technology devices to schools on a four-year rotational cycle. We found the division developed a listing of all schools and assigned each school a year in which a technology update will occur. In addition, the division scheduled all schools to have their educational technology devices counted. It planned to conduct these initial asset counts between January and May 2022. However the division delayed these counts because of COVID-19 restrictions.

It is important to periodically verify the accuracy of the listing of devices to decrease the risk of not detecting missing devices or not knowing the location of devices. This could result in devices being unavailable for teachers and students to use in the classroom.

I will pause now for the committee's consideration of this chapter.

The Chair: — Thanks for the presentation, the focus of the chapter. I'll turn it over to the deputy minister. We've got leadership as well from Saskatoon, Greater Saskatoon, that have joined us here today. Yeah, I'll kick it over to DM Repski and then we'll open it up for questions.

Mr. Repski: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And thank you to the auditor for your follow-up work from the original 2019 audit to assess St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division's processes to adapt technology for learning in elementary schools.

Out of the six recommendations initially made, five recommendations have been implemented. The final outstanding recommendation, to periodically verify the existence and location of educational technology devices available in its elementary schools, was implemented this past fall by updating the inventory database, with continued plans to monitor.

And joining us here today in committee from the school division is Joel Lloyd, the chief financial officer. And with that, I'll open it up to questions.

The Chair: — Thanks so much. Thanks, Mr. Lloyd, for joining us as well. Open it up to committee members now for questions. Ms. Young.

[14:30]

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you so much, and thanks to St. Paul's for being here. Nice to see you. Appreciate all the work that has gone into the implementation of the auditor's report.

To my first question, I understand the division administers surveys on technology and education to staff, parents, students rotationally — I believe about every four years or so — to help with planning and purchasing decisions. Can you speak to any trends in technology use that you've found through these surveys, whether expectations, concerns, changing uses?

Mr. Lloyd: — Sure. Good afternoon, committee Chair and committee members. We survey primarily the staff and the students. We have a four-year rotation for renewing student devices. There is an allowance provided to those schools, and through that process we would survey the teachers — how much they integrate technology into their classrooms, what are they seeing from a student device perspective — and then we use that knowledge to put together different technology offerings.

And the trend right now primarily has been either Chromebook-type devices that they can use in the classrooms. The computer lab days have gone away. We need those spaces for classrooms, and we find it is also more functional to bring a cart into a classroom and allow the teacher to use those devices at that time. The other one would be iPads as well, a different learning tool that our classrooms have been using.

Probably the third trend we've seen is students wanting to bring their own devices into our schools and use them for different learning purposes. And we are, you know, on the tail end of that as well in providing an opportunity to add their own devices to our networks. We're actually in the middle of that right now and should have that implemented over the next couple of months.

So lots of exciting things, but definitely a trend towards more of those portable type of devices, funds permitting of course.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. Is it a challenge or an opportunity for students to be bringing their own devices and integrating with the school division's networks, and I imagine safety protocols and . . .

Mr. Lloyd: — Yeah, definitely it's a challenge for sure, bringing devices in, ensuring families are aware that opportunity exists within schools. Even though it's a public-type Wi-Fi scenario, it still would go through all of our monitoring and firewall and security to ensure certain sites aren't accessed, for example. It's very, very similar to what it would be with a school device. So it's another tool for students to use, and we would manage it within the classrooms. So we would look at it as an opportunity, just a managed opportunity for sure.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So the report also notes that the division has seen a real positive response to its online program and that the teacher demand for ConnectEd exceeded the available supply of resources. Can you speak to that supply of resources from that point in time to date and what the current supply is?

Mr. Lloyd: — Sure, yes. So ConnectEd is an innovative program

that we provide to our teachers, and teachers are engaged in it. We have about 60 classrooms; 2,000 of our 22,000 students had access to it. The division provides a Chromebook cart in addition to what the regular rotation would be in the schools and the teacher can use that cart for different innovative teaching strategies.

We would gain feedback on what type of use they use it for. We have educational technology champions or representatives in each school that would collect that information. We have a division-wide educational technology committee as well that collects that data, and then we use that for guidance that we provide to all of our schools.

Ms. A. Young: — And so the current supply of resources is adequate to meet demand?

Mr. Lloyd: — With technology we can always use more resources of course. It's part of just our normal budget cycle. There's priorities in all the areas of the division. Technology would be one that would bring a number of asks forward. Unfortunately we can't approve all those asks, but we do lean also on our school community councils, and many of our schools are great supports. They provide some devices as well to provide additional learning opportunities.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks so much. No further questions, Mr. Chair. But I did want to point out I really thought the belief statements contained in this report and the previous ones from the auditors are really great when we look at the implementation of technology and its value in school divisions. So wanted to point that out and commend your division.

The Chair: — Yes, thanks. And some good words passed along to the division. Thanks, Mr. Lloyd. Any further questions from committee members? Not seeing any, I would welcome a motion to conclude consideration of chapter 27. Moved by Ms. Lambert. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. So moving right along, we will turn our attention to chapter 25 and I'll kick it over to our Provincial Auditor.

Mr. Schwab: — Thank you. Chapter 25 of our 2023 report volume 1, on pages 227 to 229, reports the results of our third follow-up audit of management's actions on the one outstanding recommendation we originally made in 2015.

In 2015 we assessed St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division's processes to promote good student health and physical fitness, and made five recommendations. By March 2021 the division fully implemented four recommendations and partially implemented one recommendation. By the end of 2022 we found the division implemented the last outstanding recommendation.

The division is Saskatchewan's largest Catholic school division with 50 schools and over 19,500 students. The school division is responsible for promoting good student health and physical fitness. Research indicates physically active and properly nourished students are better learners.

At December 2022, the division was making healthy food and beverage options available to high school students in vending machines. We found over two-thirds of items in vending machines at the two high schools we visited aligned with ministry guidance. For example, at one high school we observed 12 healthier food options in the vending machines, including granola and fruit bars and baked crackers.

Providing healthy food choices to students increases the likelihood of students having the right nourishment to learn. It also supports the division in meeting its strategic goal of increasing health and fitness of its students.

I will pause now for the committee's consideration.

The Chair: — Thanks so much for the initial work on this front. For the follow-up, I'll turn it over to Deputy Minister Repski. We'll go from there.

Mr. Repski: — Thank you for the auditor's work. Following your review from 2015 to assess St. Paul's Roman Catholic Separate School Division's processes to promote good student health and physical fitness, the Provincial Auditor reported that the final outstanding recommendation was fully implemented in the 2023 volume 1, chapter 25 report as the school division implemented physical fitness initiatives.

Again, I have Mr. Lloyd here from the school division to help answer questions.

The Chair: — Looking to committee members for questions. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks so much. Recognizing this is a follow-up audit, I'm wondering if you could tell me about the division's nutrition policy specifically and how it's been received by staff and students as well.

Mr. Lloyd: — The board was quite proud of the initial policy. MLA Lambert was part of that approval process as well. But it was quite restrictive and it required a renewal. There was a number of new guidelines came out provincially through other organizations. We established a committee to kind of review that, which included nutrition workers, school administration, student voice as well in that. And what we heard loud and clear was that it was very, very restrictive and that our cafeterias, our vendors would say, you know, what we had in the policy prior wasn't reflective of what student needs are.

So we used that as part of the guidance. We updated the policy. The policy now would align with *Nourishing Minds* and a number of other type documents that we use for that. There is an "eat often and eat less" type of narrative in that policy that we use.

And it's gone quite well. We've ensured compliance with our cafeterias and vendors. With vending machines, you know, they look at increasing the sales, and sometimes those healthy options aren't always what's in mind for them. But we do ensure that those options comply with our policy and moving forward. So overall it's been quite a positive response to it.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you so much. And last question for me,

recognizing of course that well-nourished students are the best learners, better learners, can you speak to any trends around food security for students in Saskatoon Catholic?

Mr. Lloyd: — Yeah, great question. We've definitely seen an increase in amount of students accessing our nutrition program. For our division we spend about $800,000 a year in food and staff to prepare food for our students. Obviously the food that we prepare follows our nutrition policy. In many of our schools that includes snacks and a lunch for them.

We do receive some donations for that, but it's an increasing number for sure, and we're very thankful for a number of individual donors that have come forward to support those efforts as the cost of food has gone up significantly. But also the need has gone up as well in many of our schools. And we've expanded it as well to schools that don't even have a formal nutrition program, but the opportunity for a few students to access some sort of food security.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Thanks so much for the work on this front and as well for expanding on the food security pieces there as well and some of the actions that are being taken locally. Certainly we know that learning's a non-starter if a kid doesn't have, you know, a meal in their belly or a safe roof over their head.

Any further questions? Do you want to assess the health of your lunch, Mr. Goudy, or anything here with Mr. Lloyd? I think you're a specimen of healthy eating I suspect. No Prime and Doritos for you. Yeah, all right.

Not seeing any further questions, I would welcome a motion to conclude considerations here.

A Member: — You had Mr. Harrison?

The Chair: — Oh, you had a question, Mr. Harrison?

Mr. D. Harrison: — No.

The Chair: — Oh, you're going with this motion. We'll see if the table supports you. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — And that's carried. Okay. Moving along, we'll move along to chapter 16, I think our last one. It'll focus on Regina Catholic Schools I believe. I'll turn it over to the auditor.

Mr. Schwab: — Chapter 16 of our 2023 report volume 1, on pages 175 to 177, report the results of our third follow-up audit of management's actions on the recommendations we made in 2016.

In 2016 we assessed Regina Roman Catholic Separate School Division's processes to provide English as an additional language programming to support students and made four recommendations. As reported in our 2020 follow-up audit, the division implemented three of the four recommendations by June 2020. And by October 2022 the division implemented the one outstanding recommendation.

We found the division periodically analyzes results of its kindergarten to grade 8 English as an additional language program, EAL. Since 2020-21, the division uses a data management system called Clevr, C-l-e-v-r, to track and report on its EAL program. EAL teachers input student assessment data directly into Clevr. The division analyzes EAL students' results throughout the year. The division expects EAL teachers to use the results to modify teaching and learning activities to improve student EAL attainment.

The division also uses this information to evaluate its progress in achieving its EAL goal. The division reported in its annual report that in the 2021-22 school year, 75 per cent of the division's EAL students who received EAL support increased at least one measure of success level. The division surpassed its goal of 70 per cent. Periodically analyzing and reporting to the board on EAL student achievement helps the board evaluate the delivery of EAL program and identify whether program changes are needed.

I will pause now for the committee's consideration of this chapter.

The Chair: — Thanks so much for the follow-up on this front. Thanks as well to Regina Catholic Schools for their work on this front and what they've identified here to us around implementation. I'll turn it over to Deputy Minister Repski for brief remarks and then we'll go from there.

Mr. Repski: — Again, thank you for the auditor's work on this follow-up audit from the 2016 audit to assess Regina Roman Catholic Separate School Division's processes to provide English as an additional language programming to support its students.

The Provincial Auditor reported that by October of '22 the final outstanding recommendation to periodically analyze the results of the kindergarten to grade 8 English as an additional language program was fully implemented.

And here with us today at committee is Stacey Gherasim, the superintendent of education services, to help answer any questions from the committee.

The Chair: — Thanks so much to Ms. Gherasim for joining us here today as well. And I'll look to committee members at this point to see who might have questions. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And thank you so much for being here today. Just one question which is I think probably a clarification for me. On page 177 the second-last paragraph reads as such:

> The Division reported in its annual report that, in the 2021-2022 school year, 74.8% of the Division's EAL students with a global Common Framework of Reference (CFR) level of A1.1 to A2.2 increased at least one global CFR level (2020-21: 79%).

[14:45]

Can you help me understand? Is that an improvement year over year, or a decrease year over year?

Ms. Gherasim: — So in terms of the percentage of students who acquired that?

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah, increased their CFR [common framework of reference] level.

Ms. Gherasim: — Yeah. So that one year would have been a slight decrease.

Ms. A. Young: — So then do you have information kind of on what that trend has looked like over the past five years, or for this current year? Or both?

Ms. Gherasim: — Yeah. So this current year, this past year I can give you the information. We did achieve our goal as well last year. This year we have just finished our student assessment and so we don't have that current information, but on trend to be able to meet our goal.

Ms. A. Young: — Great, thank you. Yeah, if that information is available to the committee for the last five years, that'd be great to see.

Ms. Gherasim: — For sure.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you so much. No further questions.

The Chair: — Thanks so much. Thanks for the undertaking to get information as well. Are you okay to supply that information, then, either directly through to the committee Clerk or through the deputy minister? Is a matter of a month a fair time to supply that?

Ms. Gherasim: — Oh yeah, yeah. We have the information for sure.

The Chair: — Right on. Yeah. No, thank you very much, and thanks again for the work and your time and presence here today as well.

Any further questions on this final chapter of our day here today? Not seeing any, I would — this is an outstanding recommendation; implementation has occurred — welcome a motion that we conclude consideration of chapter 16.

Moved by Mr. McLeod. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried.

Okay, folks, all good things must come to an end, and at this point in time I just want to thank all the officials, Deputy Minister Repski, but all the officials and all those that have been present today from the school divisions across the province, all the education partners that have been here.

I want to thank all those that are connected to the work here that we were discussing here today. I want to thank all the teachers — I believe over 50 teachers — that were here as guests here as well, observing and expressing their interest and their care for education in the province. So thank you very much.

Deputy Minister Repski, any final words before we shut this thing down?

Mr. Repski: — Just very quickly thank you to you, Mr. Chair, and to members of the committee. I definitely appreciate the thoughtful questions today. Thank you very much.

The Chair: — Thanks to our auditor, thanks to our comptroller and their respective teams here today. Thanks to our Clerk and the Hansard team, and of course committee members here today as well.

With that being said, I'd welcome a motion of adjournment. Moved by Ms. Lambert. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. This committee stands adjourned until February 26th, 2024 at 9:30 a.m.

[The committee adjourned at 14:48.]