



From: Clint Repski
Deputy Minister

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

MAR 21 2024

PROCEDURAL SERVICES

Date: March 20, 2024

Phone: 306-787-2471

To: Trent Wotherspoon, Chair
Public Accounts Committee

Re: **Public Accounts Committee February 7, 2024 – Saskatoon School Division No. 13 Responses for Follow-up**

Following are responses from Saskatoon School Division No. 13 related to:

- 2022 Volume 1, Chapter 23 – Supporting Students with Intensive Needs
- 2023 Volume 1, Chapter 23 – Readiness to Learn

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Clint Repski".

Clint Repski
Deputy Minister of Education

Attachment

cc: Jason Pirlot, Assistant Deputy Minister, Education
Rhiannon Shaw, Executive Director, Corporate Services

Public Accounts Committee February 7, 2024 Follow-up

2022 Report, Volume 1, Chapter 23 – Supporting Students with Intensive Needs

1. Has Saskatoon Public been able to meet the 30-school-day goal for assessments for the 2022-23 year? No.

a. If the 30-school-day goal for assessments has not been met, please speak to why these targets have not been met, what barriers exist in accessing those assessments and receiving supports.

The Division analyzed student assessments completed in the 2022–23 school year:

- 1467 speech-language assessment reports (including initial, midyear, and final reports) compared to 1388 in 2021-2022.
- 201 psychological assessment reports compared to 215 reports in 2021-2022.

The Division analyzed the average time taken to complete student assessments completed in the 2022–23 school year:

- 86 school days to complete a speech-language assessment compared to 62 days in 2021-2022 days.
- 49 school days to complete a psychological assessment compared to 47 days in 2021-2022 days.

The Division indicated a plan to set out, in guidance, 30 school days as an expected period to complete the assessment process for the 2022–23 school year. However, we continue to experience delays in full implementation. We understand delays in completing assessments may cause delays in implementing learning supports for students with intensive needs, which may negatively impact students' success.

Barriers to full implementation:

- Finite division resources.
- Service delivery model changes due to division budget constraints.
- Undefined terms and processes result in data collection inconsistencies for staff statistics.

Factors that extend the expected assessment period (i.e., 30 days from referral to report):

- Increasing consultant caseloads due to enrolment growth.
- Increasing the intensity of need and complexity of students means more complex assessment processes, for example:
 - use of non-standardized measures for minimally speaking students,
 - language interpreters are required for parent meetings for English as an Additional Language (EAL)/English Language Learner (ELL) families and

- use of dynamic assessments across domains to inform diagnosis and intervention, in addition to academic and cognitive areas of development.
- Student attendance.

Actions taken to promote full implementation:

- Initiated use of online referral form specific to each role (Speech Language Pathologist (SLP), Psychologist, Counsellor) in September 2023.
- Analyzed data collection terms and methods for SLP and Psychologist staff statistics.
- Defined new responsibilities for Tier II coordinator, including supervision of SLP and Psychologist staff (September 2023).
- Updated central monitoring of staff statistics and student assessment data by the coordinator (February 2024).
- Calculated the average number of school days from referral to report completion for SLPs and Psychologists for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 to determine whether the division met the 30-school-day goal for assessments for the 2022-23 year and to determine if 30 days is a reasonable goal.

Next steps to promote full implementation:

- The coordinator will work with the Student Services staff to improve their understanding of terms and processes to promote accurate and consistent data collection for staff statistics.
 - Increase submission and review of staff statistics from quarterly to monthly.
 - When the timeline is confirmed, information will be added to our SPS Guide to Special Education & Student Services for Elementary School Teams.
 - To decrease the time between referral and report completion, the division is developing an online form so SLPs can generate and distribute their reports directly to parents/guardians.
2. Yesterday (February 6, 2024) the news reported a parent's experiences trying to access autism assessment after five years. He is sometimes sent home from school multiple times a week due to lack of support in the classroom. This is a significant difference from the 30-school-day goal.

Note, the article referenced can be found at this link:

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/mom-autism-backlog-complex-classrooms-1.7106484>

Are such long waits common within Saskatoon Public specifically as a larger school division, or provincially overall?

- Long waits for school-based psychological assessments are common.
- Due to school division budget constraints, the number of psychologists has not increased commensurate with enrolment growth, resulting in narrowed mandates for service delivery.

- A rubric prioritizes assessments across schools based on student needs to facilitate a triage process so more urgent needs are addressed first.
- Assessment priorities for 2023 - 2024 (in order of priority):
 - 1) To meet funding requirements for Community Living Service Delivery (CLSD),
 - 2) To support educational programming changes, such as referral to Alternative Education or Functional Integrated programs
 - 3) To determine if a student has a specific learning disability

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a medical diagnosis. In response to the increased incidence of autism, Saskatoon Public Schools provided assessment and intervention by establishing an autism diagnostic clinic. The clinic was in operation from 2012 to 2021 and provided diagnostic services for students in Saskatoon Public Schools suspected of having ASD. The clinic was serviced by pediatrician Dr. Karen Streilein, who volunteered her services, and a team of professionals from our division.

Some children in Saskatoon are diagnosed with ASD through assessment at the SHA Alvin Buckwold Child Development Program (ABCDP). We understand the current wait for an autism assessment at ABCDP is approximately two years. Most families seek ASD assessment and diagnosis with a local pediatrician; Dr. Obayan or Dr. Fahkir frequently provide ASD diagnoses. Pediatricians may assess eligible children from low-income families at the St. Mary's Wellness and Education Clinic. Some families pay for private assessments.

Is it common that children are sent home due to lack of support or assessment?

In recent years, the division has had specific challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified, experienced educational assistants to support our growing population of students with ASD and intensive support needs.

In September, the division supported continuing and new students with intensive needs registered by the end of June. Due to finite division resources and staffing challenges, deployment of educational assistants (EAs) after September 30 was challenging. If new students with intensive learning needs are registered after September 30, some families experience delays in their students starting school due to a lack of EA support. In some cases, the student was offered an alternative daily schedule of attendance (e.g., half-days) with a plan to increase the student's schedule as much as possible with additional division resources (i.e., EA support).

The division is developing an online form to implement more comprehensive data collection related to students on temporary alternative daily schedules of attendance.

3. Looking at delays in assessments that have been reported for some students, of course, there is a question of whether or not it is a matter of resourcing.

What is the cost for a school division to assess a student?

By September 30, 2022, the total enrollment was 27,258 students, and the division employed 7.5 FTE registered psychologists to work in schools. In 2022-2023, the ratio was one psychologist to 3634 students. Psychologists completed 201 psychological assessment reports, or an average of approximately 27 assessments per psychologist. 0.74% of students accessed a psychological assessment.

Regarding the appropriate ratio of psychologists to students, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends one school psychologist per 500 students to provide comprehensive school psychological services. Based on this recommendation and the 2022-23 total enrolment, the division should have 54.5 FTE vs the current 7.5 FTE.

Source: <https://www.nasponline.org/research-and-policy/policy-priorities/critical-policy-issues/shortage-of-school-psychologists#:~:text=NASP%20recommends%20a%20ratio%20of%20one%20school%20psychologist,in%20order%20to%20provide%20comprehensive%20school%20psychologic al%20services.>

Psychologists' scope of practice includes consultation, collaboration, and assessment of individual students. Based on an average psychologist's caseload, including seven assigned elementary schools and one collegiate, and regularly scheduled monthly collaboration meetings, about 75% of a psychologist's time is dedicated to student assessment, and 25% is for consultation and collaboration.

For budget planning purposes, the division calculates an average salary of \$116 164 per psychologist. With an approximate annual budget of \$871 230, the assessment portion (75%) is \$653 423 or about \$3551 per assessment.

The Psychological Association of Saskatchewan recommends a fee of \$200 per hour for psychological services. A school-based assessment may take 22.5 to 37.5 hours; the same assessment might cost between \$ 4,500 and \$ 7,500 in the private sphere.

Private assessments range in cost from \$2000-5000.

The following are costs for assessment at the Learning Disabilities Association of Saskatchewan (LDAS):

- Psychoeducational Assessment - \$2200
- Autism Spectrum Assessment - \$3500

Source: <https://ldas.org/all-programs/assessments/>

Through the University of Saskatchewan's Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education and the College of Education, Counselling Assessment Intervention and Research Services (CAIRS) provides lower-cost psycho-educational assessment services for students/families to query possible diagnoses, including:

- Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)
- Intellectual Developmental Disorders (IDD)
- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)

- Anxiety Disorders

The cost is \$1800 per assessment (compared to other professionals/agencies, which may charge approximately \$2200-3500+).

Source: <https://education.usask.ca/cairs/#CAIRS>

What is the average cost to a school division to support a student with intensive needs?

Additional supports for learning costs for individual students with intensive needs range depending on the intensity and complexity of the student's learning and safety needs.

Many students with intensive support needs require continuous one-to-one EA support to maintain personal safety, student and staff safety, and access to the curriculum. For 2024-25 budget planning purposes, the division estimates the cost of an EA is \$50 074.

Some students with intensive needs may require access to other specialized services, such as Occupational Therapy (OT) or Physical Therapy (PT). The division does not currently employ OTs; we contract OTs to provide school-based consultation and assessment for individual students at \$375 per half-day. We contract SHA PTs to provide annual assessment and consultation by request for students with significant mobility and equipment needs at a rate of \$72.50 per hour. Due to budget constraints, the division does not provide direct services or therapy to students. Instead, school-based staff are responsible for implementing OT and PT recommendations.

The division supports several congregated classrooms to provide targeted interventions for eligible students. These programs are staffed with a program teacher (\$94 976) and at least one program EA (\$50 074). Additional EAs may support individual students in congregated special education classrooms.

Students requiring intensive support may need access to assistive technology for their educational programs. Equipment costs vary. Mobility devices such as portable lifts, electric change tables, and activity chairs cost approximately \$8000 each. Communication devices range from about \$800 for a communication iPad and speaking application to \$7000-\$15 000 for eye gaze communication systems, which give individuals with physical disabilities a flexible way to use a computer with their eyes. Modern technology requires students who wear hearing aids to use personal amplifiers and receivers to pick up classroom sounds, including teacher instruction. Some students require access to equipment to support sensory regulation (specialized seating for \$300+, weighted or compression vests for ~\$200), and a few students need transportation vests/harnesses for \$400 to ensure transportation safety.

In summary, a student requiring intensive supports, including 1:1 EA support, an annual OT consult, and a lower-cost communication device and specialized seating, would cost the division an estimated \$52 000 annually. A similar student accessing a congregated special

education classroom of 10 students would cost the division about \$61 000. In 2023-2024, the school division received \$9990 per pupil in base funding.

4. 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?

As part of our commitment to fulfilling the recommendations from the 2017-2018 provincial audit of processes to support the learning of students with intensive needs, we continue to analyze and report trends in the number of Pre-K to grade 12 students with intensive needs and categories of intensive needs, to provide senior management and its Board of Education with enough information to determine the sufficiency of learning supports for students with intensive needs.

On December 7th, 2023, the division provided the Ministry of Education with our division's annual snapshot of intensive support student data. One thousand nine hundred twenty-eight students with intensive needs were included in the grand count for the 2023-2024 school year.

This year, the incidence rate (total number of students with intensive needs within the total K-12 population) has risen to 7.03%:

Year	Total IS	Enrolment (Dec)	IS Incidence Rate
2014-2015*	1302	22923	5.68%
2015-2016*	1326	23485	5.65%
2016-2017*	1388	24345	5.70%
2017-2018	1488	24891	5.98%
2018-2019	1541	25209	6.11%
2019-2020	1677	25833	6.49%
2020-2021	1542	25715	6.00%
2021-2022	1676	25801	6.50%
2022-2023	1839	27197	6.76%
2023-2024	1928	27438	7.03%

*Calculated without including Pre-K students in total enrolment

The Ministry of Education continues to collect division data based on diagnostic categories. Students are included in each category based on medical documentation. Many students meet criteria in multiple categories. Monthly division student data reports are based on students' primary area of need or the Disability 1 category.

In Saskatoon Public, we have observed a steady increase in the number of students with ASD in recent years. Similarly, the number of students diagnosed with both ASD and Intellectual Disability (ID) or Intellectual Developmental Disorder (IDD) is rising:

October	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024
Total Students Requiring Intensive Supports	1456	1563	1529	1536	1409	1701
ASD (Dis 1)	307	355	376	394	383	524
ID (Dis 1)	277	312	309	363	336	463
ID & ASD (Dis 1 & 2)	59	75	78	89	98	142

Students with both autism and ID have exceptionally complex needs. For instance, students with both autism and ID typically require access to EA support due to significant safety needs (e.g., elopement and/or aggression), involvement from a special education consultant and/or autism specialist, and use of communication devices. High school students with autism and ID attend special programs in high school, such as Alternative Education, but more commonly, Functional Integrated/Functional Life Skills (FLS) or John Dolan School. Among 186 students in 21 FLS classrooms across the division, 80 students (43%) have been diagnosed with autism.

5. Are wait-lists for assessments and support for students with special needs who need necessary supports getting longer or improving?

- The waitlist for assessments and support continues to get longer as more students who require assessment are added monthly. Psychologists continue to use a rubric to prioritize assessments, and those who do not get prioritized may wait until the following school year to determine priority.
- Families with private insurance or economic means may pursue private assessment.

2023 Report, Volume 1, Chapter 23 – Readiness to Learn

- 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. Are there plans within Saskatoon Public to do more of that type of analysis?**

We continue to review our EYE results annually, as well as the ministry's high-count, high-rate schools report. With the expansion of the SPS Data Dashboard, we can analyze alphabet and social-emotional assessment data across the division, impacting student readiness.

Superintendents of education review early learning data with school-based administrators during school visits. School-based administrators then share learning plans, assessment cycles, and professional development plans to address the results and trends.

In preparation for reporting to our board of trustees and senior leadership team, we, as an early learning team, analyze early learning data to identify patterns, successes, and areas for targeted support.

- 2. The strategy to address areas of need identified by the assessment, as referred to in the auditor's report as "Sprint cycles", which is understood 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?**

Sprint cycles are short-term focused periods during which educators work intensively to address specific areas of need identified through assessments. Sprint cycles are determined at the school and teacher level, based on individual/classroom student needs, often driven by classroom and school data. While schools monitor their locally collected sprint cycle data, all students are consistently monitored two or three times per year with division-required assessments (EYE, alphabet, and social-emotional rubric). With the implementation of the data dashboard, we will be able to track student data year after year.

Superintendents of education review and discuss data sets with school-based administrators during their school learning visits, which occur three times each year.

- 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?**

Yes. Kindergarten students with identified needs may be eligible for additional services such as resource support, speech and language support, and/or occupational therapy. If students meet the criteria for intensive needs, they may also access assistive technology, educational assistant support, and individualized programming.

Due to budget constraints, we have had to make many decisions and prioritize where our dollars are spent. Factors impacting these decisions include:

- An increase in students requiring intensive supports, specifically those with autism. The chart below illustrates the increase we have seen over the past four years.

Intensive Support Category / K to Grade 1 Fall Transitions	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total Kindergarten Enrolment	1823	1839	1986	2066
Total Kindergarten IS Students	89	111	139	160
Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)	35 (1.9% of K students)	48 (2.6% of K students)	65 (3.3% of K students)	86 (4.2% of K students)

- Prioritization of deploying support staff (i.e., educational assistants) to address behaviour and safety needs (over academic needs).
- With the increased immigration, we have seen many newcomer families register in Saskatoon Public Schools. Many students have limited to no English proficiency, and some have not attended school in their home country.

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?

With this question, it is intended in 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 are measuring something that had not been previously targeted.

The collection of early learning measures (alphabet knowledge and social-emotional rubric) on the data dashboard has been implemented in the 2023-2024 school year. We have set clear benchmarks for division early learning assessments and have seen an impact on kindergarten readiness. Future analysis through this data management system will allow us to review trends and results more readily.

School attendance impacts our students' readiness, and we have seen an increased achievement rate for full-day kindergarten students.

Results that are available on the data dashboard include:

- Alphabet knowledge (letter and sound identification)
- Social Emotional Rubric
- EYE assessment data is housed on a data dashboard through The Learning Bar