



Saskatoon Public Schools
Inspiring Learning

Estey School - Flexible Schedule Blended Learning

Saskatoon Public Schools

PREMIER'S BOARD OF EDUCATION AWARD FOR INNOVATION AND EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION
SEPTEMBER 2023

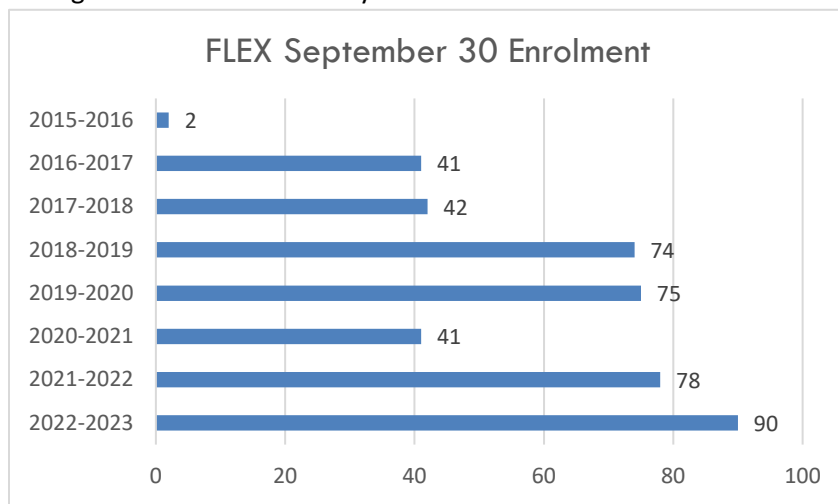


School Division: Saskatoon Public Schools
Colleen MacPherson, Board Chair
Shane Skjerven, Director of Education



Introduction

Saskatoon Public Schools' Flexible Schedule, Blended Learning (FLEX) program began in the 2015-2016 school year and is an unconventional educational offering designed to empower students to grow their skill sets as students while participating in intensive training programs taking place during the school day. FLEX allows students in grades 6-12 the flexibility to allocate class time towards honing their talents in fine arts and athletics, thereby augmenting their learning experience during regular school hours. Since its inception in the 2015-2016 school year, the FLEX program has demonstrated consistent growth, except for a temporary enrolment decline in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, in the 2022-2023 academic year, one-third of the students in the program voluntarily identified as Indigenous.



The FLEX program has fostered strong partnerships with organizations in the community for many years. The program was developed to support Saskatoon Public Schools' students who require a flexible schedule but it also supports community organizations offering programming during the school day. Listed below are the activities 2022-2023 FLEX program students participated in.

Activity – Community Program	Number of Students
Baseball - Inside Pitch	2
Basketball	1
Climbing	1
Crossfit	2
Dance	2
Diving	6
Equestrian	1
Gymnastics – Can-Am, Ritmo	9
Hockey – Indigenous Sports Academy, Saskatoon Blades, Saskatoon Contacts AAA, Serious Academy of Hockey, Saskatoon Blazers, Private Hockey Skills, Saskatoon Stars and Warman Wildcats AAA	60
Rowing	1
Skiing – Freestyle Skiing Team	1
Soccer	3
Swimming – Lazars Swim Club	4
Volleyball	2

Role of the Saskatoon Board of Education

The Saskatoon Board of Education established the FLEX program to meet the increasing demand for flexible learning schedules. Students attempting to develop their skills in fine arts and athletics during regular school hours frequently experienced challenges in keeping up with their schoolwork, obtaining assignments in advance, or finding time to work with teachers. The program began at City Park School in 2015, a school that also offered several other unique programs to students including Montessori and Ecoquest.

In the fall of 2015, the FLEX program began with 17 students ranging from grades 7-9. By the end of the first year, the program had expanded to include 24 students. In the following year, the program expanded to include Grade 10, as the initial cohort of students expressed a desire to continue.

In the fall of 2017 grades 11 and 12 were added to further accommodate students that wished to remain in the program. Grade 6 was introduced to the program in 2019 in response to requests from students in that age group.

This year, the program has a projected enrolment of 100 students from grades 6-12 and the FLEX program continues to attract interest from families, organizations, and community groups in Saskatoon and the surrounding area seeking alternative educational programming that supports a student's passion for skill development during regular school hours.



The board continues to support the growth and development of the FLEX program through the move to Estey School this year. At Estey School, FLEX is the only program and space is no longer shared with other students. The additional space will support future growth as the school division and partners work together. In addition, the hiring of a principal and counsellor specifically for Estey School and the FLEX program will further support the growth of the program.

Innovation

The FLEX program is appropriately named as students are provided with a blended learning environment to meet curricular outcomes across subject areas. All classes are delivered through in-person instruction for those students who can attend. Students who are absent due to their training or competitive schedules can access lessons through an online platform. This [video](#) highlights the power of the FLEX program from the perspective of students and staff.

The school day schedule is another unique feature of FLEX in accommodating students who engage in training during the regular school day. The schedule rotates over a two-week period. In week A, students have three morning and two afternoon classes, while week B students have two morning and three afternoon classes. This model enables both students and teachers to plan accordingly based on student attendance.

Example of Two-Week Rotation:

Week A	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Class One	Science 9/10	PE 9/10	ELA 9/10	Science 9/10	ELA 9/10
Class Two	ELA 9/10	Math 9/10	PE 9/10	Math 9/10	Science 9/10
Class Three	PE 9/10	Life Trans 30	Math 9/10	Life Trans 30	PE 9/10
Class Four	Math 9/10	Science 9/10	Life Trans 30	ELA 9/10	Math 9/10
Class Five	Life Trans 30	ELA 9/10	Science 9/10	PE 9/10	Life Trans 30
Week B	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Class One	ELA 9/10	Science 9/10	Math 9/10	ELA 9/10	Science 9/10
Class Two	Life Trans 30	ELA 9/10	Life Trans 30	Math 9/10	Life Trans 30
Class Three	Math 9/10	PE 9/10	Science 9/10	PE 9/10	PE 9/10
Class Four	PE 9/10	Math 9/10	PE 9/10	Science 9/10	Math 9/10
Class Five	Science 9/10	Life Trans 30	ELA 9/10	Life Trans 30	ELA 9/10

Provincial curricular outcomes are approached in a manner designed to actively engage students in the learning process. This approach is complemented by using a variety of instructional strategies and formative assessment practices that directly involve students in achieving curricular outcomes.

The Saskatoon Public Schools' learning scale is used in both middle years and secondary classes to provide consistency in assessment standards. Feedback is consistently provided to students to foster growth and provide guidance and support toward achieving curricular outcomes.

While the program maintains high expectations for students, assessment strategies remain flexible and adaptable to individual student needs. The unique structure of the FLEX program requires that students actively participate in their learning and assessment processes, encouraging them to demonstrate their understanding of outcomes in ways that highlight their abilities.

As the name suggests, the FLEX program allows students to flexibly meet curricular outcomes through in person and asynchronous learning. Students benefit from face-to-face assessments and lessons as often as their schedule allows while remaining compliant with extracurricular demands. This hybrid learning creates opportunities for success in multiple pursuits.

Nicolette Vandersteen – FLEX program teacher

Sustainability and Future Growth

The FLEX program has moved to Estey School for the 2023-2024 school year. This transition provides an opportunity for continued enrolment growth for students in Saskatoon and the surrounding area. In addition, the location of Estey School is closer in proximity to more training facilities which allows students to be in attendance more often. The new facility has a cultural space which provides all students with the opportunity to engage in Indigenous ceremony.

Partnerships

The FLEX program is open to all and attracts numerous community groups and skill academies that are searching for daytime training/practicing opportunities. Our list of partners grows year over year and varies from one or two students to entire teams. Two important partners include:

Indigenous Sports Academy – This academy was launched in 2021 with an all-Indigenous hockey team. The program attracts athletes from all over western Canada to compete in the Canadian Sports School Hockey League. The academy plans to add more hockey teams in 2024-2025 and has plans to compete in additional sports in the future.

Saskatoon Blades – The Blades are a major junior hockey team in the Western Hockey League with a long history in Saskatoon. For many years, members of the Blades attended school at Marion M. Graham Collegiate. The partnership with the FLEX program provides players with a flexible learning environment which is critical given their very busy hockey schedules.

Both the Indigenous Sports Academy and the Saskatoon Blades are partnerships that will provide a stable and sustainable enrolment that will support FLEX for many years to come.

In addition to the partnerships described above, The Saskatoon Berries baseball team will launch a baseball academy for youth in 2024. The athletes in the program will also attend FLEX.

We have been part of the program since the start and are enthusiastic promoters. The positive outcomes we have witnessed motivate us to encourage others to get involved. In the future, there are plans to establish a Baseball Academy and to continue utilizing the FLEX program.

Steve Hildebrand – Saskatoon Berries, President
and Saskatoon Blades Associate General Manager

Cost of the Innovation Related to Benefits Achieved

As the FLEX program is part of a provincial school division it is resourced in such a way that it does not incur additional costs. FLEX is staffed according to regular school division allocations and receives operating funding comparable to other schools of a similar size. Families are not required to pay any additional program fees.

Impact of Innovation on Students and Their Families

The need for the FLEX program in our community is evidenced in testimonials from students and their families demonstrating the difference the FLEX program made for them academically, and in their chosen activity. A [video](#) was developed in 2021 where students describe how the FLEX program accommodates training schedules and extended absences. FLEX is a powerful blended learning model and it supports students and their families.

My name is Rylan Wiens. I am an Olympic diver and attended the FLEX program for five years from grade 8-12 alongside my journey. Being a national level athlete, I did a large amount of traveling for sport while I was attending high school. The FLEX program allowed me to focus on my training when I needed to, but also provided me with the quality instruction and flexibility to be successful as I was going through high school. On top of that, the FLEX program helped me develop skills that have been crucial for success in university such as accountability for getting work done on time, or early, as well as the ability to work independently and efficiently.

Rylan Wiens, Olympic Diver and former FLEX program student

Having a flexible schedule forces the student to manage their time and seek the answers for learning. This creates better time management and accountability for their study habits, preparing them more effectively for future education. The FLEX program allows her to focus on her sport at the time of the day that energy level and focus is strongest, while creating balance with education, family and other work/activities. Our experience over the last four years is this unique school structure creates less opportunities for bullying and drama, as the students are very focused on their education and sport goals.

Dina Rathgaber, current FLEX program parent

Partnerships in Support of the Innovation

The success and expansion of the FLEX program can be attributed to our collaboration within the Saskatoon community. Each year, our network of partners experiences growth, and we are grateful for the opportunity to deliver educational services to our Saskatoon community partners. As previously indicated, our formal partnerships are currently established with the Saskatoon Blades and the Indigenous Sports Academy. These partnerships are poised for future expansion and are driven by the achievements of student-athletes who participate in the FLEX program.

The Indigenous Sports Academy was founded in 2021 and is making history as the first and only all Indigenous academy in the CSHL (Canadian Sport School Hockey League) and in North America. ISA is based out of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The primary objectives are to provide Indigenous youth the opportunity to participate in a program that provides excellent academic, athletic and personal development in a culturally appropriate setting. The student athlete participants at the ISA are expected to be dedicated to academic, athletic, and personal excellence. The combination of these provides our student athletes with a competitive advantage on and off the ice.

The Indigenous Sports Academy has had a partnership with the FLEX program since the inception of the academy. The FLEX program has provided an opportunity for our student athletes to get an exceptional education while still allowing them to pursue their athletic passions. The student athletes that attend the Indigenous Sports Academy come from across Canada, and the parents entrust us to provide an opportunity for a quality education that supports them academically, mentally, socially, and with the flexibility to support their athletic endeavors also. The administration and the staff at the FLEX program have gone above and beyond to support our students to reach their academic goals and we are continuously in awe of the genuine care and kindness that they show the students daily.

Courage Bear, ISA Founding Director and Director of Hockey Operations

By practicing in the morning, our players can maintain a regular schedule that works for them, reducing the stress of attending school during traditional hours. Additionally, the blended learning school setting allows our athletes to practice discipline and learn accountability, while still having access to teachers whenever they need assistance. These teachers are sports-oriented with a solid understanding of our athletes' lifestyle, making it easier for them to relate and provide effective support." The FLEX program has proven to be highly effective, showing immediate results for athletes. It not only enhances their performance in sports, but also equips them with valuable skills that can be applied in the real world. One of the key benefits is the ability to excel academically, as the program instills a sense of confidence and motivation in learning. Overall, this program offers athletes a well-rounded experience that positively impacts their daily lives.

Steve Hildebrand, Saskatoon Blades Associate General Manager



Two other partners that are consulted on an ongoing basis are the students and parents in the program. Student schedules are created and developed with their activity schedule in mind. The classes rotate to best support student learning. Parents are consulted regularly with updates to the program, schedule changes and looking for ways to improve the program. The close working relationship between staff, students, families and community partners creates a family-like feel for all parties involved in the FLEX program.

Evidence of Student Success

The school division monitors graduation rates in all schools every year. Data for the FLEX program that was released in 2020-2021 shows that all nine students who attended in grades 10-12 graduated on time. In 2021-2022, there were only three students attending the program in grades 10-12. All three graduated on time.

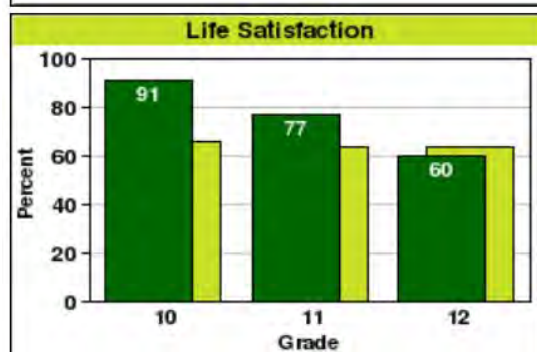
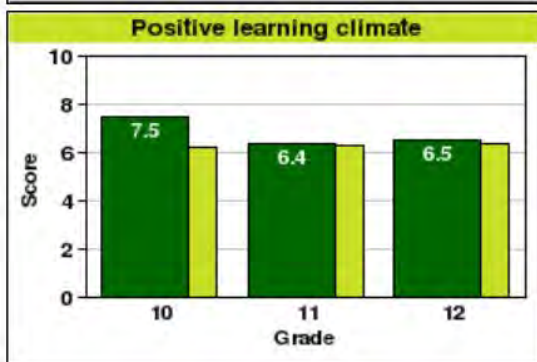
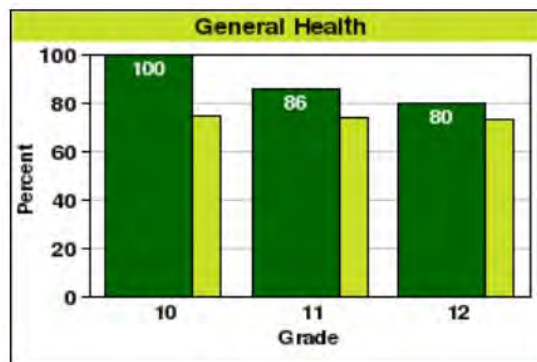
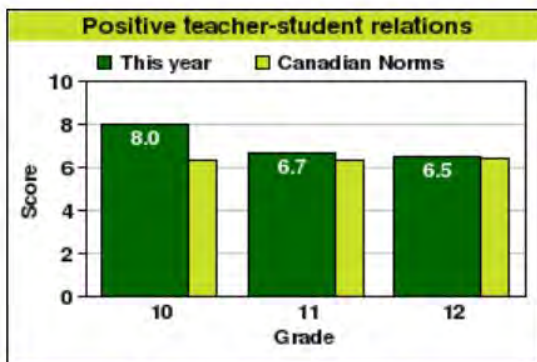
Year	Number of Students Eligible to Graduate	Number of Graduates in June
2022-2023	11	11
2021-2022	12	12
2020-2021	8	8

Another way of measuring academic achievement is through credit attainment. The 2022-2023 credit attainment data is shown below.

2022-2023	Credits Attempted	Credits Attained	FLEX %	Division %
Indigenous	218	207	95%	80%
Non-Indigenous	220	210	95%	96%
Total	438	417	95%	94%

Data from the OurSchool survey in 2023 shows high rates of positive teacher-student relations and a positive learning climate. Overall, FLEX program students report a rating of 7.1 out of 10 for positive teacher-student relations, compared to the Canadian norm of 6.3. Similarly, FLEX students indicate a positive learning climate of 6.9 out of 10 compared to the Canadian norm of 6.3.

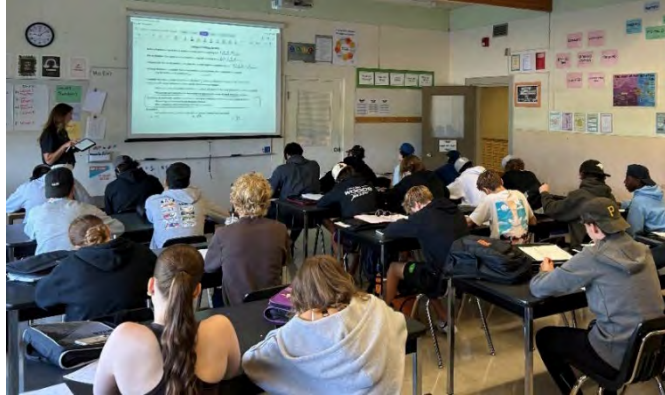
OurSchool data also shows that 90% of FLEX program students consider their general health to be positive. This is significantly higher than the Canadian norm of 74%. FLEX program students also report better life satisfaction compared to the Canadian norm with 79% positively satisfied compared to the Canadian norm of 64%.



Recognition of Student Achievement

Many FLEX alumni have found success in their area of passion and have also continued to experience success in academics. Below are examples of former FLEX students that have experienced success in and out of the classroom.

- Quinn Gariepy moved to Saskatchewan to train with the Saskatoon Dive Club and joined the FLEX program as a Grade 8 student. Quinn graduated in June 2021, and she was able to earn a diving scholarship to the University of Arizona where she is entering her third year of competitive diving.
- Elena Park was able to develop a passion for rowing during her time in the FLEX program. Elena graduated in June 2023, and is currently attending Jacksonville University studying to be a nurse.
- Brayden Yager was a part of the FLEX program from Grade 7 until graduating in June 2023. Brayden was selected in the first round of the 2023 NHL Draft by the Pittsburgh Penguins.
- Rylan Wiens graduated in June 2020, currently training with the Saskatoon Dive Club and attending the University of Saskatchewan, studying Kinesiology. He trains with the National Dive Program and is preparing for his second Olympic games in 2024.
- Caige Starr attended the FLEX program for two years as a member of the Indigenous Sports Academy (ISA), graduating in June 2023. He was a leader with the ISA, at the school and shared his culture with students throughout Saskatoon Public Schools. Caige received the Don Speidel Leadership and Culture Award and the SIMFC First Nation Cultural Youth Award for his work in these areas.
- Sage Roberts was one of the founding student athletes of the Indigenous Sports Academy. Sage became an 80% plus student in the FLEX program and graduated in June 2023. He hopes to be an engineer one day after his hockey career is completed.



Conclusion – Looking Ahead

The establishment of a dedicated facility at Estey School will serve as a catalyst for the sustained growth and prosperity of the FLEX program in the coming years. The program's ongoing commitment to forging and nurturing partnerships will remain a central strategic objective. As these partnerships grow, we anticipate a subsequent rise in enrolment, affording greater opportunities for youth in Saskatoon to pursue their education and excel in their chosen athletic or artistic pursuits.

The innovative approach to scheduling and program delivery that the FLEX program offers provides young people with the opportunity to pursue their athletics or arts passions without compromising their educational program. Together with our community partners, we will continue to shape the program to provide flexible and innovative learning environments for students.

Shane Skjerven, Director of Education