

Planning for Student Success

Prairie Valley School Division

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September 30, 2017

Introduction

In Prairie Valley School Division, we have developed and implemented an integrated and aligned approach to strategic planning, performance measurement and reporting that has resulted in real and sustained improvements in student achievement, including:

- ✓ An increase in Grades 1 to 8 students at or above grade level in reading from 57% to 75%
- ✓ An increase in Grades 3 to 9 students at or above grade level in math from 74% to 86%
- ✓ An increase in on-time graduation from 81% to 86%
- ✓ An increase in on-time graduation for self-declared First Nations and Métis students from 35% to 54%

As our Board and 1,200 staff members go about our daily work, we do so unified by common outcomes, actions and targets and with shared accountability for results. Amid much change in the education sector over the past several years, our approach has remained constant and shows sustained results. We focus on student achievement, attitude, attendance and behaviour as well as “behind the scenes” services – finance, facilities, technology, transportation and human resources that contribute to student growth and development.

Our organizational philosophy is grounded in interdependence – **“I can’t do your work and you can’t do my work, but together we can do great work.”** This philosophy starts with our Director of Education and extends to each staff member in our system. A consistent, rigorous and well-articulated organizational direction creates a shared purpose across the school division. With the Board setting the course and the full power of the organization rowing in the same direction, student achievement improves.

While the school division has had a strategic plan since its creation in 2006, early plans were rudimentary. By 2009, we were seeking ways to meaningfully unify seven former school divisions and looking for ways to harness the energy and resources of the new school division. A robust system-wide approach to planning was designed to bring everyone in the organization together and produce:

- A student-centred plan
- An open, inclusive process to develop the plan
- A durable, stable plan that did not create multiple “new initiatives” each year
- More consistent and rigorous performance measures
- A nimble, flexible, action-oriented organizational culture
- An engaging document with wide distribution so that *all* staff, schools, SCCs and education partners can align their work to the broader purposes of the school division

Prairie Valley’s Strategic Plan is based on the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP), the product of a consultative process involving the Ministry of Education, directors of education in all 28 school divisions and First Nations education partners. The ESSP includes short-term priorities and longer-term outcomes that represent the most important areas of focus for Saskatchewan’s Pre-K to Grade 12 sector as a whole, including reading, writing, math, early learning and graduation rates.

SHARED PURPOSE

As our Board and 1,200 staff members go about our daily work, we do so unified by common outcomes, actions and targets and with shared accountability for results.

Our Strategic Plan builds on the ESSP framework by adding seven division-specific outcomes that speak directly to priorities unique to our school division relating to student attendance, attitude and behaviour, extra-curricular opportunities and support services such as human resources, transportation, finance, facilities and technology services.

Our plan includes a balanced set of performance measures that track progress toward each outcome along with baseline results for Prairie Valley and, where available, for the sector. Accompanying each measure is a target – our intended level of performance for the year. We also commit to a series of actions that guide us toward achievement of the targets and outcomes. We monitor results continuously through the year, adjusting and reacting to real-time data.

At year-end, we produce a Community Report that speaks to every commitment we made and every target we set, whether we achieved what we intended, exceeded expectations or did not achieve what we set out to do.

Principals and school staff, in consultation with school community councils (SCCs) prepare annual school-level Learning Improvement Plans (LIPs) that complement the division’s Strategic Plan. Schools develop their own targets and actions and may add school defined outcomes to respond to local circumstances. SCCs support schools in achieving the outcomes articulated in their school’s LIP.

Our plan extends over four years, aligning with the term of the Board, and we prepare annual updates to actions and short-term targets and release an annual budget update that explains how our financial plan supports the commitments in our Strategic Plan.

While our planning structures are sound, people bring the plan to life, led by the Board of Education. Moving the plan off the page and into our schools requires an organizational culture that embraces the direction articulated in the plan, commits energy and effort to delivering on the action commitments, analyses results and adapts tactics based on real-time data, and continually raises the bar so that every student can find success.

Over time, many progressive initiatives have taken root and become part of who we are as a school division. Our performance results are evidence of our efforts and the contributions made by our dedicated staff.

RESULTS

Our performance results are evidence of the Board’s leadership and the contributions made by our dedicated staff.

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN PUBLIC EDUCATION

Our plans and reports should build public confidence and trust in Boards of Education, staff and the quality of education we provide to students in Saskatchewan.

Direct Board Participation

Development, approval and in-year monitoring of the annual Strategic Plan is among the Board's most important roles. Direct Board influence and participation in the initiative process is evidenced by:

- *Board Policy 1.5 Strategic Planning* commits the Board to the ongoing development of a timely and comprehensive strategic plan that is reviewed and updated annually.
- The Board consults directly with school community councils (SCCs) and students to understand their concerns, aspirations and barriers and directly addresses their feedback in the plan.
- The Board Work Plan dedicates Board time at pre-determined points during the year to consulting on, reviewing draft materials and finalizing the Strategic Plan.
- The multi-year timeframe covered by the plan aligns with the term of the Board (i.e., the 2017-2021 strategic plan will guide the school division over the remainder of the current board term to October 2020) and through to the end of the 2020-2021 academic year to ensure a smooth transition to a new board.
- Working within the Strategic Plan, the Board identifies several priorities for direct action by the Board of Education in its leadership role, such as: *strengthen First Nations and Métis influence in governance* and *Advocate for a strong public education system*. The Board reports back on its own progress at the end of the year, in our Community Report.
- On a quarterly basis, the Board receives and reviews monitoring reports on the key items within the Strategic Plan to track progress and participates in visibility wall walks with staff to understand successes, challenges and next steps.

Innovative Nature of the Initiative

All school divisions must respond to increasing expectations and standards of strategic and financial planning, measurement and reporting. The challenge is to develop and foster an organizational culture that accepts, adopts and eventually leads implementation of planning and accountability processes. When culture aligns with strategy, implementation succeeds.

Prairie Valley School Division's approach to strategic planning, performance measurement and reporting integrates and aligns efforts and resources right across the school division, from the boardroom to the classroom. Specific unique and innovative elements are described below, beginning with our approach to collecting data and monitoring student performance results.

INTERDEPENDENCE

"I can't do your work and you can't do my work, but together we can do great work."

Ben Grebinski
Director of Education/CEO

Measuring the achievement of students requires thoughtful planning and implementation to support the learning process, inform teaching and provide appropriate programming for all students. Our approach builds on the ESSP-required measures of student achievement (e.g., Grade 3 reading) by including **a robust and balanced set of measures across grade levels – reading in Grades 1 through 8, literacy in Grades 6 through 10, mathematics in Grades 2 through 9 and writing in Grades 4, 7 and 9** - as well as measures of student attendance, attitude and behaviour. We measure achievement results firstly to use the data to target effort and resources where they can do the most good and secondly to report on publicly.

The academic assessments that we use have been carefully developed or selected by our teachers to:

- Align to provincial curriculum, to ensure students are being tested on what they have been taught
- Be durable over time, so that student progress can be measured over a period of years on a cohort basis
- Provide information to guide instruction as teachers work to meet the needs of individual students
- Provide a baseline from which to establish credible targets and implement high yield strategies to achieve the targets over a period of years – this is not a quick fix, it is about sustained effort
- Provide a variety of options for data analysis, from the Division-level to individual classrooms and students

DRIVEN BY DATA

“To prepare for the school improvement journey, identify the needs of your students and what steps need to be taken to ensure their success on the journey of life. The critical evidence that guides the journey should include data on achievement, attendance, attitude, and behaviour.”

Hulley & Dier, 2009

Our plan is unique in including non-academic student measures to track our commitment to provide students with equitable opportunities for **a well-rounded educational experience that extends beyond academics to include the arts, citizenship and recreation.**

Measures in these areas include:

- Extra-curricular opportunities and participation by type of activity: arts and culture, competitive athletics, leadership and citizenship and recreation and leisure.
- Student attendance
- Student perceptions about their friendships and relationships at school

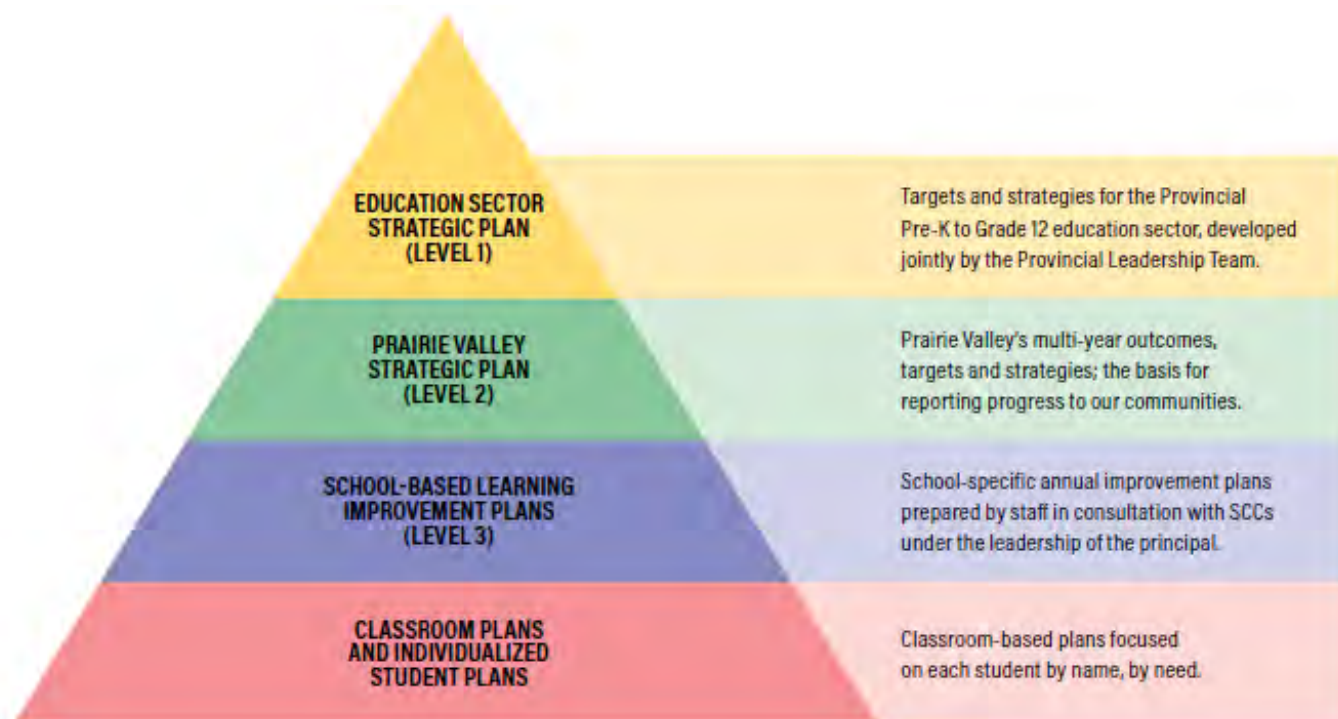
Our approach **recognizes and values the contributions from each of our 1,200 staff members**, who can all find themselves in the Strategic Plan and understand how their work contributes to our collective mission of improving opportunities and success for students. In addition to academic and student-related outcomes and measures, **our plan is unique in recognizing the important contributions that support staff make in areas such as human resources, transportation, finance, facilities and technology support services.**

For example, we have commitments to:

- Safe, effective and efficient transportation services - to track this commitment, we measure and report on bus ride times and cancellations
- Safe and inclusive work environments - we measure and report on workplace injuries
- Safe and functional buildings and technology - we measure and report on response times to facility and building service request tickets and school cleanliness

Our approach **extends from the board room to the classroom**. Individual school-level LIPs prepared by principals and school staff in consultation with SCCs align fully to the School Division’s plan while allowing local flexibility. Schools work within the Level 1 (ESSP) and level 2 (school division) plans, develop their own targets and actions and may add school defined outcomes to address local circumstances.

Thus we have a fully aligned planning process throughout the organization:



Our approach to planning engages students directly through student senates with the Board and an annual course interest survey that have led to **new and innovative programming opportunities for students:**

- The magnet concept allows students in schools with smaller populations to access specialized high school elective programming by joining with other schools in their area. The host school has the staff, equipment and facility to operate the course for students from surrounding rural areas.
- System-wide levelled literacy intervention to address reading
- Participation in the Regina District Industry Education Council (RDIEC) with the Regina public and separate systems to provide hands-on experience in the trades
- Opportunities for dual credits through the University of Regina and Sask Polytechnic
- New French immersion programs
- Learning from the Land, an integrated course Infused with First Nations’ ways of knowing and worldview that uses project-based strategies and land-based curriculum.
- Trades and Skills Construction and Apprenticeship Program (TASCAP) and a summer apprenticeship program that allow students to earn credits while getting hands-on experience
- Participation in Following Their Voices, a sector initiative to strengthen instructional practices for First Nations and Métis students.

Sustainability of the Innovation

The planning, monitoring and reporting cycle is embedded in our practice. Quite simply, it is how we work. We have built sustainability by embedding foundational pieces into our practice.

The diagram that follows shows the building blocks in our planning, monitoring and reporting processes.



Aligned Planning Structures

- Multi-year plans aligned with the term of Board
- School division plan aligned with ESSP, with division priorities added
- School-based learning improvement plans aligned with division plan, with room for school priorities

Rigorous Monitoring

- Regular monitoring practices with cascading data from the individual student level all the way up to the system level
- Quarterly monitoring by Board
- Board-staff visibility wall walks
- Community Report (public report on all measures and actions)

Expanded Programming

- Student course interest survey drives programming
- New program offerings using innovative delivery methods that maximize opportunities in rural schools
 - Magnet concept
 - Dual credits
 - Regina District Industry Education Council
 - TASCAP

Reliable Infrastructure

- Introduced infrastructure performance targets to ensure safe, clean, well-maintained schools that are equipped with current technology
 - Long term Facilities Master Plan
 - Multi-year Technology Roadmap
 - Central equipment fund

Integrated Budget Process

- The budget process is part of the overall planning process
- Annual efficiencies agenda, internal reallocation of resources to priorities in the Strategic Plan resulting in a balanced budget

Cost/Benefit Analysis

The planning process drives our budget process. Delivering on an ambitious educational agenda in tight financial circumstances requires a systemic approach. Because all parts of the organization understand and commit to the outcomes in the Strategic Plan, all willingly contribute to finding efficiencies that free up budget room in order to implement the plan.

Since 2012-2013, Prairie Valley has had a structured process to develop an annual Efficiencies Agenda. We define efficiencies as real spending reductions or productivity gains that get the same or better results (i.e., not estimated future/avoided costs). Over the period September 2012 to August 2017, we have documented, cumulative efficiency savings of \$12.6M.

Efficiency gains have been reallocated to priorities in the Strategic Plan such as:

- Instructional supports (additional teaching staff) and community school coordinators for schools with academic achievement challenges
- Creation of a central equipment/technology fund to ensure all schools have equitable instructional equipment, technology and furniture
- Magnet programming to increase the range of elective courses for small rural schools as well as RDIEC, French immersion, TASCAP and other program enhancements

Client Support for Innovation

Communication and engagement structures throughout the school division ensure that students, parents, teachers, SCCs, First Nations education authorities and others understand our strategic direction and have a voice into the process through the Board.

Specific evidence includes:

- Student feedback through annual student senates held with the Board – one for high school students, one for First Nations and Métis students and one for middle years students
- A Board directed parent survey in spring 2017 to seek input into the 2017-2018 Strategic Plan
- Director-led focused conversations with school-based administrators on the draft plan and input on specific items from a variety of staff focus groups throughout the year
- Board member-facilitated focused conversations with school community councils in spring 2017 to seek input into the 2017-2018 Strategic Plan. (Action items directly influenced by SCC comments are marked with a special symbol, so SCCs know their voices were heard)
- Focused conversations with the First Nations and Métis Advisory Council, consisting of education representatives invited from the 15 First Nations in proximity to the school division

ALL MEANS ALL

Our approach recognizes and values the contributions from each of our 1,200 staff members, all of whom can see themselves in our Strategic Plan.

Partnerships in Support of the Innovation

Education is a public enterprise. School divisions, particularly those in rural areas with limited access to specialized services and supports, must establish and maintain partnerships with other school divisions, education providers and community services. The number and range of partnerships in Prairie Valley School Division has expanded significantly as a result of our approach to planning. Specific evidence includes:

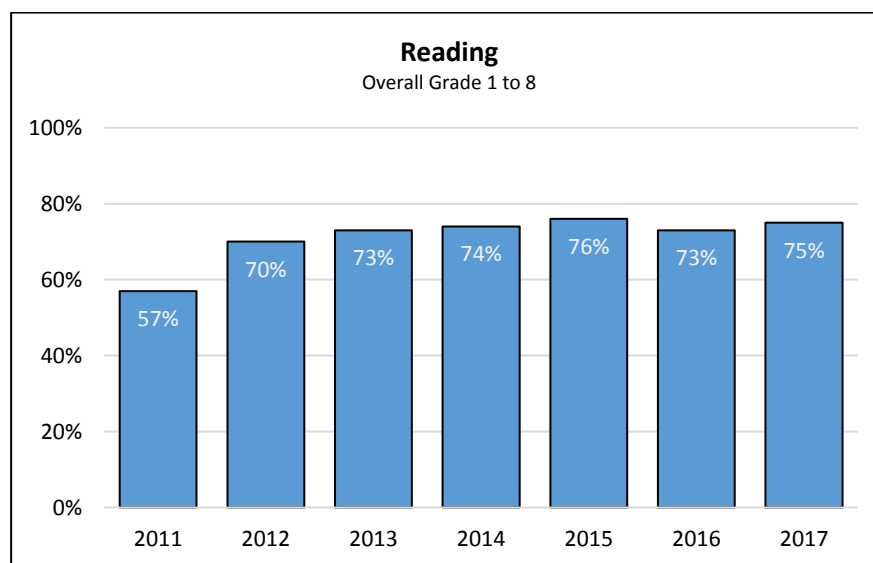
- **Schools partner with each other** to deliver magnet programming by coordinating timetables and sharing resources to host specialized high school programs that individual schools would be unable to offer
- The **First Nations and Métis Advisory Committee** provides a formal mechanism for information sharing and coordination at twice per year meetings
- **School Community Councils** contribute to both the school division (level 2) plan and to individual school (level 3) learning improvement plans and align their efforts to support the school's LIP
- The Regina public and separate school divisions and the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council have partnered to create the **Regina District Industry Education Council**
- The **University of Regina and Sask Polytechnic** partner to offer students the opportunity for dual credits
- The **Trades and Skills Construction and Apprenticeship Program (TASCAP) and summer apprenticeship program** forge connections with local employers and Habitat for Humanity

Improved Student Achievement

The evidence of our efforts is in our performance results. The charts that follow provide a representative sample of performance results.

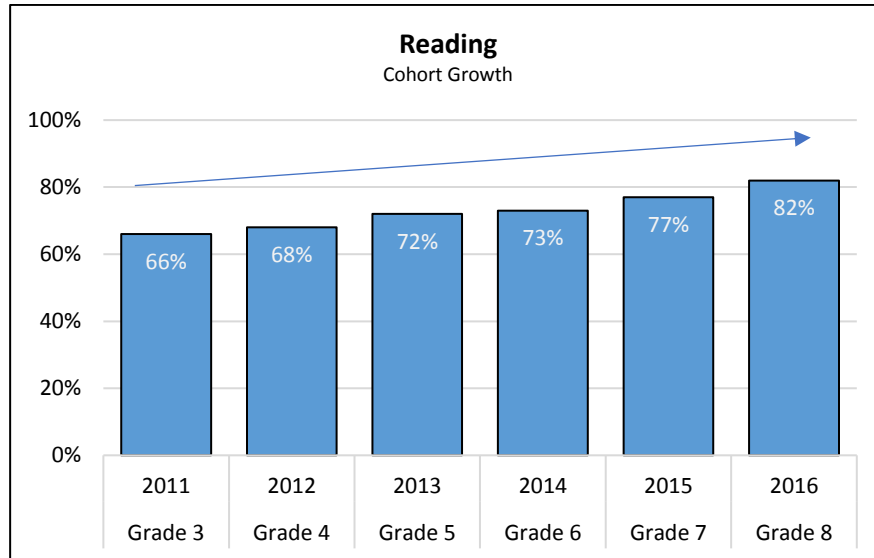
Students at or above grade level in reading has increased from 57% to 75%

Since Prairie Valley School Division started to approach reading instruction based on data, results have increased from 57% to 75% across Grades 1 to 8. Our data analysis and planning processes target specific grades and groups of students based on formative assessment results. We then target our resources effectively and efficiently to improve student achievement.

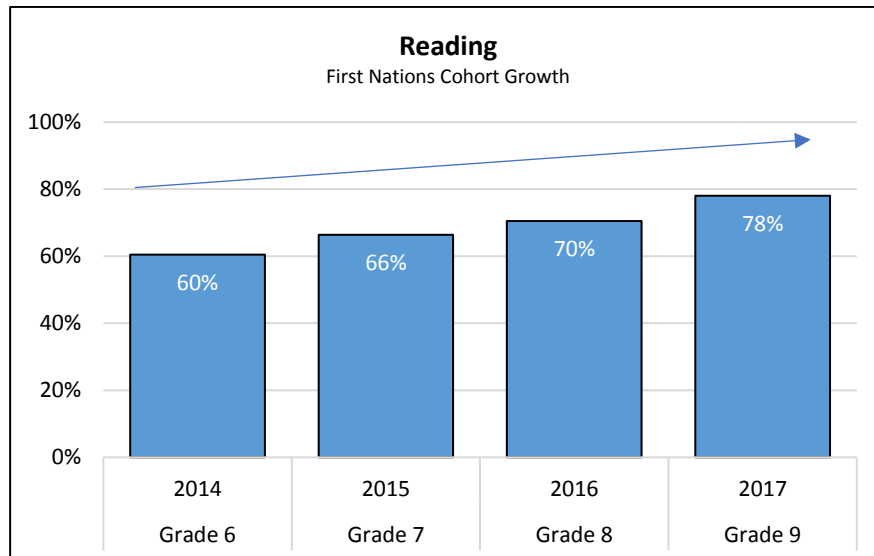


Cohorts show year over year reading growth

Looking at reading results on the cohort, the data shows that with specific, targeted instruction and support, a typical cohort of students can and will improve. The following chart shows that in 2011, only 66 percent of Grade 3 students were at grade level in reading as measured by Fountas & Pinnell. By 2016 (the end of Grade 8), 82% of the same group of students achieved grade level. With a focus on steady, incremental improvement and direct investment into leveled literacy interventions, students continue to improve year over year.

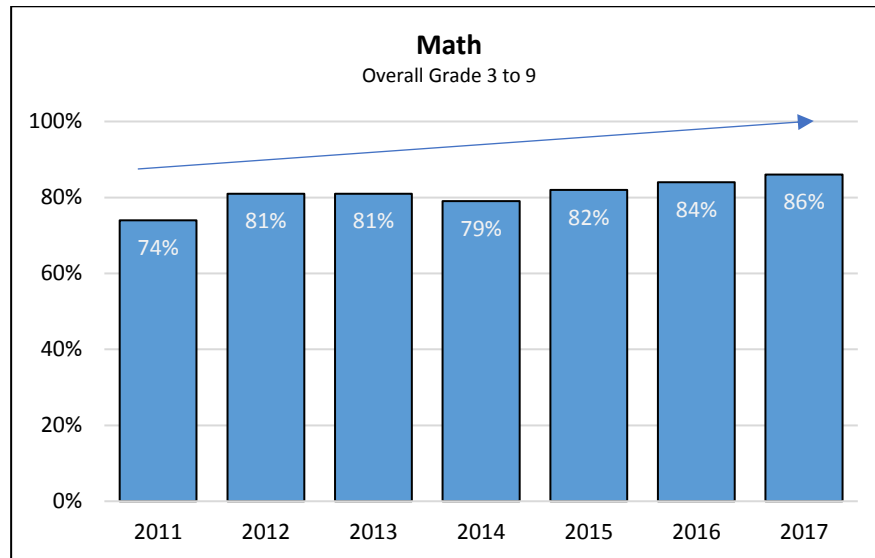


Similar results are evident for middle years students. In this cohort of self-declared First Nations and Métis students, only 60% of students were at grade level in the RAD assessment in 2014. By 2017 (the end of Grade 9), 78% of the same group of students achieved grade level. By focusing on reading comprehension in middle years, students are being prepared for high school.



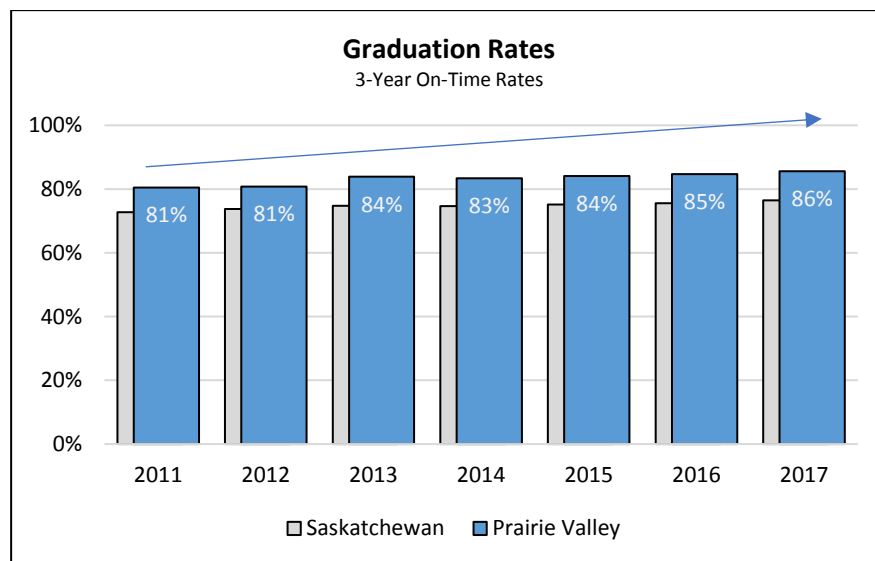
Students at or above grade level in mathematics has increased from 74% to 86%

As with reading, overall results in mathematics show sustained improvement over time. Our teacher-developed, outcome-based common math assessment allows teachers to target efforts towards challenging areas within the curriculum. For example, our data analysis identified specific outcomes related to fractions and ratios as being the most difficult for students, so extra effort is put into these concepts.



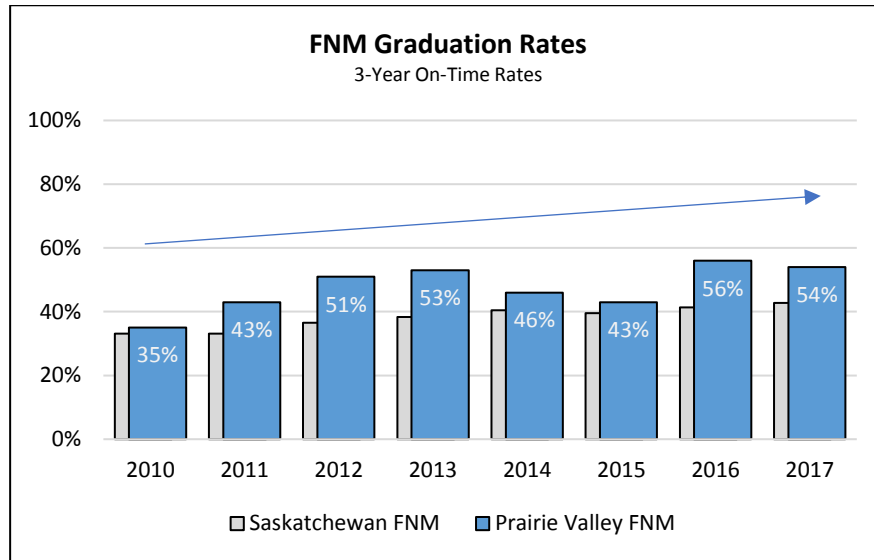
86% of students now graduate within 3 years of beginning high school, a steady increase from 81%

Prairie Valley School Division's on-time graduation rate has increased over the past seven years and is approximately ten percentage points higher than the provincial average. We carefully monitor graduation eligibility, credit attainment, and other factors contributing to successful completion of graduation requirements. Through careful monitoring and steady, incremental progress, we ensure that we are properly preparing students to graduate and transition out of high school with the skills and abilities to be successful in their adult lives.

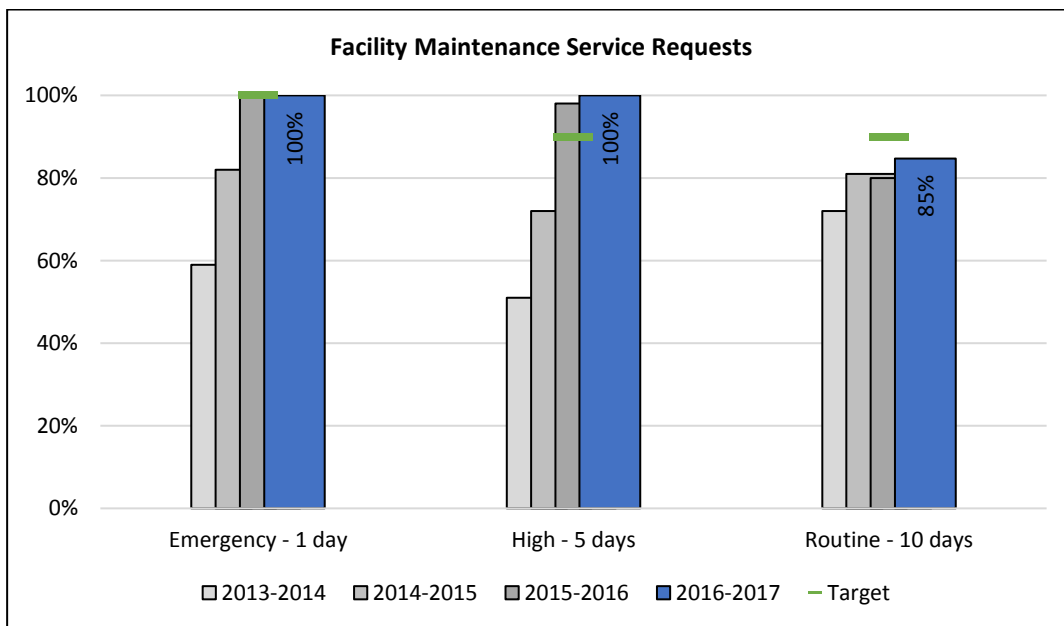


54% of self-declared First Nations and Métis students now graduate within 3 years of beginning high school, a steady increase from 35%

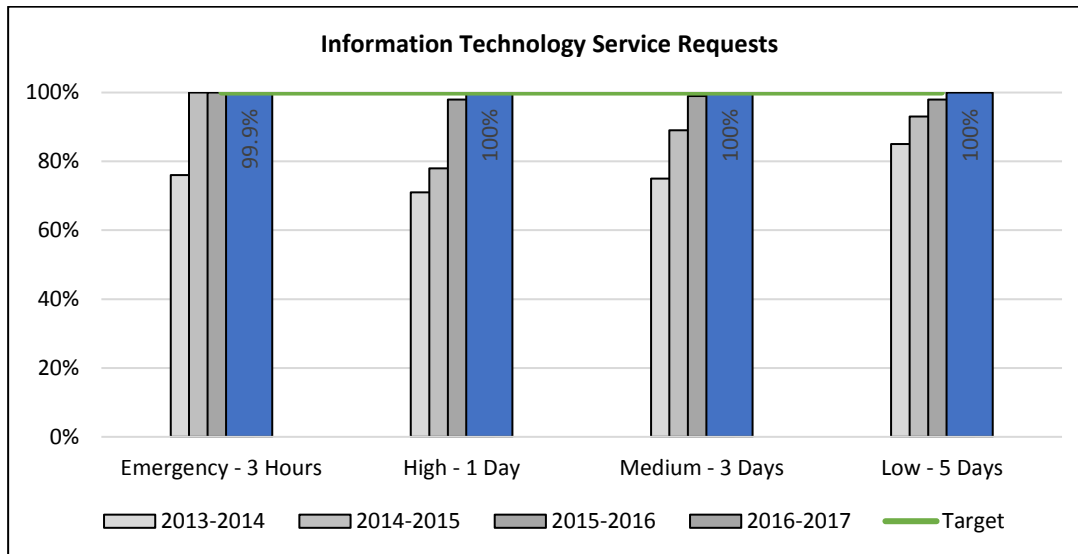
Prairie Valley School Division's on-time graduation rate for FNM students has increased over the past eight years, remaining higher than the provincial average. We monitor graduation eligibility, credit attainment, and other factors contributing to successful completion of graduation requirements.



Between 95% and 100% of facility service tickets submitted by staff are closed within targeted timeframes, an increase from 50% to 75% four years ago. This means facilities are clean, well maintained and productive learning environments.

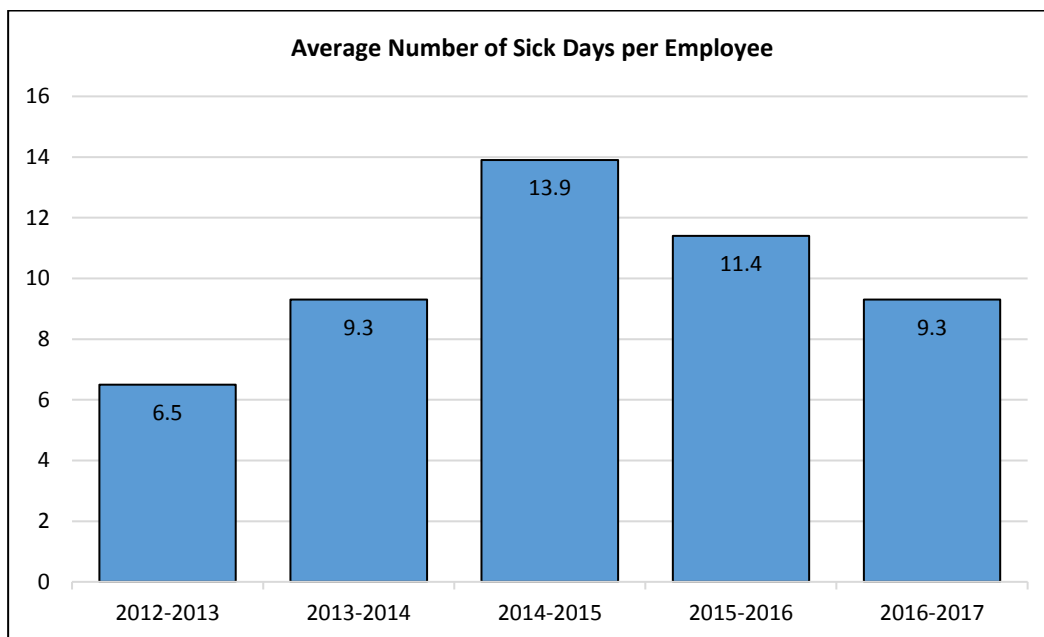


100% of information technology service tickets submitted by staff are closed within targeted timeframes, an increase from 75% to 82% four years ago. This means technology in schools is reliable and ready for instruction.



Average sick days per employee are trending down, to 9.3 days in 2016 from a high of 13.9 days.

Active and real-time data monitoring allows us to identify and respond to issues quickly. Employee absences due to sick leave trended up in 2013 and 2014; in response, we strengthened workplace safety efforts, return to work planning and absence management support services. Recent data shows the trend reversing,



For our complete plan, please see our 2017-2021 Strategic Plan at www.pvsd.ca.

A CULTURE OF PERFORMANCE

Moving the plan off the page and into schools requires an organizational culture that embraces the direction articulated in the plan, commits energy and effort to delivering on the commitments, continually analyses results and adapts tactics based on real-time data, and raises the bar so that every student can find success.