


# IMPROVING GRADUATION RATES: Innovation to Support Students' Life Opportunities

2017 Premier's Board of  
Education Award for  
Innovation and Excellence in  
Education

September 2017




## Leadership for Learning

### The Big Rocks for Regina Public Schools

- High expectations for all students
- Literacy achievement for all students
- Climate of belonging
- Authentic engagement for all students
- Focusing on Attendance Matters
- Improvement and success... celebrating what we do well
- Improving graduation rates of Indigenous students

*How are you leading the achievement of the Big Rocks in your work?*



**REGINA  
PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS**

Nominated by: Regina Public Schools

Board Chairperson: Katherine Gagne

Director of Education: Greg Enion

# IMPROVING GRADUATION RATES: Innovation to Support Students' Life Opportunities

## Introduction

For years, the three-year graduation rate for students enrolled in Regina Public Schools has been stagnant, fluctuating between 70% and 74%. Beginning with the 2012-2013 school year, Regina Public Schools began to innovate and implement changes to a number of programs and introduce new programs, in an effort to change the high school experience for all students in the division.

This award application will review the innovative practices of the division, outline the ongoing role of the Board in promoting and supporting these innovations, and provide data which demonstrates improved outcomes for students graduating.

## Program Goal

Regina Public Schools has a goal of graduating 85% of students on time. Through a series of innovative practices and programs, the division is committed to continuous improvement in meeting this aggressive goal.

## Program Description – Innovation in Programming

Regina Public Schools established a standard of innovation for years in an effort to improve outcomes for an increasingly diverse student population. Currently approximately 20% of all students in the division are of First Nations, Metis or Inuit ancestry. As well, another 20% are students identified as English as a Second Language learners. To improve graduation rates, the division began to review high school programming and made a series of innovative changes in order to better support student learning and engagement. The division built on strong partnerships in the community to deliver new, innovate programs.

## Campus Regina Public – 2012

Campus Regina Public was created in 2012 and is based on the premise that students in Regina Public Schools can access programs beyond their home school. Campus Regina Public aims to engage students in their education in an interest-based and like-minded environment. Grade 11 and 12 students can access these programs at a centralized campus, including transportation to and from their home high school. Students attend either in the morning or afternoon for a semester and are able to attain two credits, one in a core subject area and the other in an elective area. Courses are designed to provide enrichment through industry-standard, interest-based courses. Industry/career and interest based courses are linked with post-secondary, business and community stakeholders through partnerships, supporting dual credit recognition, mentorships and practical experiences.

## Martin Academy at Martin Collegiate – 2014

The Martin Academy Program is designed to graduate student athletes who are prepared for life-long involvement in sport and learning. While individual aspirations will vary, as students progress through

the program, the experiences on and off the field will prepare them for a future in sport, work and healthy living. This program's aim is to prepare student athletes for college, university and elite athletics as well as encouraging life-long health, wellness and learning. All Regina Public Schools students can access this program and equity funding is provided to students when necessary. The success of this program is self-evident with over 200 students enrolled at the Academy,

### Credit Completion – 2014

Opportunities for students to complete Grade 10 to 12 credits beyond the end of a semester has been a very important with increasing credit attainment, leading to improved graduation rates. Credit Completion is designed to provide students with both an opportunity to complete credits and to acquire the requisition knowledge, skills and attitudes to be successful for further learning. As will be shown later, credit completion rates for students in Regina Public Schools have increased over the past five years.

### Family of Neighbourhood Schools – 2015

The Family of Neighbourhood Schools model was implemented in 2015, after significant stakeholder consultation, as an innovative way to support student learning in their neighbourhood high school. The model provides for a smooth transition of students from elementary to high school. As well, high school students have access to a diverse set educational opportunities, including access to Campus Regina Public courses and access to enriched programming at their home high school, through Advanced Placement classes. Further to this, using student feedback, the Board allocated \$2.8M out of reserves to support renovations at three high schools. The intent was to enhance the learning environments and to have a school facility that students were proud of, something students identified as very important.

### Attendance Strategy and Intervention Plan – 2015

Regina Public School recognizes that consistent attendance, academic success, and school or grade completion have a positive correlation. It aims to provide direction and to involve all stakeholders in achieving consistent attendance and therefore academic success for all students. Students are encouraged to attend on a regular basis and complete all assignments on time. A division-wide intervention strategy outlines the supports which will be provided should a student stop attending schools on a regular basis. The division has also partnered with Regina United Way and Regina Catholic Schools with the "Attendance Matters" campaign, designed to bring awareness to parents and the broader community regarding the importance of attending school regularly.

### Adult Campus

Regina Public Schools Adult Campus began in 2005. The campus is intended for adults between the ages of 18 and 22, to support adult learners who have not graduated from high school. The success of Adult Campus is evident in that for June 2017, the campus had 134 graduates.

## Indigenous Education Supports

The improvement of graduation rates for Indigenous students has been the result of a sustained efforts and practices over a number of years by through targeted support, reallocation of resources, strong partnerships and professional expertise.

Elders Advisory Council – Regina Public Schools has an Elders Advisory Council, who meet regularly with Trustees and Division Management. The purpose of this council is to provide an opportunity for Elders to provide guidance to the Division regarding the education of Indigenous students.

Elders in Schools Program – Elders are hired to work directly with students in the division’s high schools, as a way to provide support for all students.

Treaty Education – Since 2002, Treaty education has been a focus for the division, including Treaties in the Classroom.

Indigenous Advocate Teachers – Seven of the eight high schools now have Indigenous Advocate teachers, whose role is to connect directly with all the Indigenous students to support these students throughout their high school years. They also help students transition to post-secondary.

Blanket Exercise – The Division has been providing opportunities for staff and students to participate in an event called the Blanket Exercise. Participants take on the roles of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Standing on blankets that represent the land, they walk through pre-contact, treaty-making, colonization and resistance. By engaging on an emotional and intellectual level, the Blanket Exercise effectively educates and increases empathy.

Through a multi-prong approach, the Division has created an environment where Indigenous ways of knowing and culture are valued, respected and celebrated.

## Awards Criteria Summary

### 1. Direct Board influence and participation in the innovation.

Direct Board influence and participation in the innovation is best identified through the following:

- **Board Policy** – Specifically connected to Indigenous Education, “the intent of this policy is to strengthen First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student academic achievement, in learning environments that are equitable, culturally responsive and meaningful. This policy also supports the belief that the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge is of benefit to all students. All students will learn about the history, culture, worldviews and issues facing Canada’s First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples, and will understand that Indigenous knowledge has a valid place in Canadian society.”
- **Board Support and Advice for Innovations** – the Board has provided guidance and support for the key initiatives identified above, especially support for Campus Regina Public, Martin Academy and the Family of Neighbourhood Schools.

- **Financial Support through Budget Decisions** – the Board has made decisions to reallocate scarce resources into areas which are high impact. For example, the Board supported budgets which reallocate funding to the Indigenous Advocate positions.

## 2. Innovative nature of the program or project.

Over the past five years, Regina Public Schools has innovated to create a high school experience which better meets the needs of its students. Through the changes identified, the Board and Administration have made decisions, sometimes very challenging ones, to provide a better educational experience for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner.

For example, Campus Regina Public was created by re-purposing a high school to a centralized campus with 20 different courses to meet the interests of a wide range of students. This required a vision to carry out a program delivery model like something never seen before in the division. Another example is the implementation of the Indigenous Advocate position at high school. Through times of shrinking budgets, the division's Board and management was willing to reallocate scarce resources into a program that now has nine advocates, who have supported students and helped contribute to improved graduation rates for Indigenous students.

## 3. Sustainability of the innovation within the present system or school.

For the past three years, the Board has been dealing with very challenging budgets. However, through prudent planning and budgeting, all the current innovations identified are sustainable due to reallocations of resources and through targeted allocations of reserves to support facility enhancements. The Board actively monitors progress toward their goals of education with updates on student achievement and graduation rates provided by the division's administration.

## 4. Cost of the innovation related to the benefits achieved.

Improved graduation rates reflect the Board's priorities and are sustained through ongoing instructional and operational budget decisions, including funding for Indigenous Advocate positions, teacher professional development, and implementing a model of continuous learning all staff. Additional revenue sources such as the "First Nations and Métis Education Achievement Fund" are accessed to provide additional, targeted support for Indigenous students.

## 5. Client support for the innovation.

The most important client for Regina Public Schools is the student. A few narratives about the changes and supports in place for students to graduate.

A recent graduate, Rain, in speaking of the supports in place, stated the following: "I ended up graduating a year late and on the honour roll after having a child. I could not have done this without the support of the Indigenous Advocate Teacher." Another graduate, "John" speaking about Campus Regina

Public, stated the following: “Attending Campus Regina Public was one of the greatest decisions I have ever made. Having the ability to earn class credits, as well as developing skills that can be used in a future career, is the best thing that anyone could want while attending high school.”

The Board holds an annual “Student Forum” where trustees meet directly with students to discuss topics important to both students and trustees. Throughout the years, trustees have relied on the voice of students to guide their decisions, including Board support for the innovations.

## 6. Partnerships in support of the innovation.

A number of partnerships have supported the innovations. At Campus Regina Public, a number of businesses have supported the programming or provided equipment. For example, the Regina Police Service provide a constable to be one of the instructors for the “Law, Public Safety and Security” course taught at the campus. As well, the division has partnered with Capital Auto Group in a mutually beneficial agreement where the division receives industry-standard equipment to students enrolled in the “Auto Technician” course. Students also have the opportunity for a work placement at one of Capital Auto Group’s auto service facilities.

## 7. Evidence of improved student achievement.

Regina Public Schools has seen continuous improvement in its 3 Year “on time” graduation rate and its 5 Year “extended graduation rate. The division has also seen even more improvement in the same rates for Indigenous students.

