



MEDIA RELEASE
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Saskatchewan Advocate Report Seeks Improved Oversight of Registered Independent Schools

SASKATOON – Today the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth, Dr. Lisa Broda, releases a special investigative report, ***Making the Grade – Moving Forward in Independent Education*** that examines the Ministry of Education's oversight of Saskatchewan's registered independent schools.

Independent schools are required to provide a comparable education to that of the provincial system and to respect and protect the rights and interests of students. The Ministry of Education is responsible to ensure this is achieved. In establishing and monitoring compliance with educational standards within independent education, the Ministry provides a critical service to young people in Saskatchewan. "The school age years are vital to a young person's development, and children and youth have a right to a quality education. It is incumbent upon the Ministry to provide appropriate oversight to all forms of educational services," said Dr. Broda.

Immediately upon learning of the allegations of historical abuse in 2022, the Advocate compelled information from the Ministry of Education to ensure steps were taken to safeguard the protection of students currently attending the impacted schools. During this process, however, the Advocate noted concerns with potential ongoing gaps in oversight and accountability processes implemented by the Ministry.

Given the Advocate's legislative mandate to review services provided to children and youth by provincial ministries, an investigative review was launched into these concerns. The issues reviewed pertained to processes of inspection and supervision; complaint mechanisms and the right of young people to participate and be heard; safety and protection of students; quality of education related to the learning environment, teaching and learning processes; and the right to non-discrimination. "Our overarching focus has been on how the Ministry assesses and ensures the protection of the rights, interests, and well-being of children and youth within independent education and determine whether there were gaps in its oversight processes," stated Broda.

Since the fall of 2022, the Ministry of Education has made several changes to regulations, policy, and practices. In ***Making the Grade***, the Advocate acknowledges the work undertaken by the Ministry to strengthen its oversight of all registered independent schools in the province, however, the report identifies several oversight and quality of service issues that require further improvement.

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Based on the findings of this review, the Advocate issued 36 recommendations to the Government of Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Education. If fully implemented, these will:

- result in continued improvement to oversight and accountability;
- better enable students to have a voice and raise serious concerns;
- ensure policy and practice are aligned with regulatory obligations;
- lead to improved monitoring of learning output; and,
- offer clarity on how the rights and interests of young people can be further supported in independent education, while balancing the rights and freedoms of the schools and respecting the need for choice in education.

“Whether young people in this province receive education through public or private systems, we must be confident that sufficient standards are established and that all children are educated in safe environments. It is also vital that adequate processes are in place to ensure all institutions providing services to children are accountable for their obligations to respect, protect, and fulfill students’ right to access quality education that supports their development to their fullest potential,” stated Broda.

In accordance with the Advocate’s legislation, the Ministry of Education had an opportunity to review the report prior to its release and make representations on the facts presented. In its response, the Ministry indicated that it accepted the report, but required more time to review and contemplate the 36 recommendations. As such, the Advocate will continue to collaborate with the Ministry to highlight the importance of making these changes and update the public accordingly.

“Our recommendations are directly connected to the evidence we gathered and analyzed. Although the Ministry has enhanced several aspects of its oversight, our recommendations will facilitate ongoing improvements to support best outcomes for children as we move forward in independent education,” stated Broda.

Making The Grade – Moving Forward in Independent Education can be found at saskadvocate.ca.

The Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth is an independent office of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan. The Advocate leads a team of professionals who work on behalf of the province’s young people independent and apart from government. The office’s vision is to ensure children receive services to which they are entitled and that the rights, well-being, and voices of children and youth are respected, valued, and supported to assist them to reach their full potential.

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