



# Alberta Education Systems to Improve Student Attendance in Northland School Division



Executive Summary

February 2018

## Who

Northland School Division  
Alberta Education

## What

Progress report

A progress report is not an audit. We do not perform detailed audit procedures in a progress report. Instead, we base our assessment on interviews, analytical procedures and a review of management's documents.

## When

We conducted our field work between January and September 2017. We substantially completed our work on October 12, 2017.

## Learn More

[education.alberta.ca/attendance](http://education.alberta.ca/attendance)

## Why we did this progress report

In March 2015, we reported on the systems to improve student attendance in Northland School Division. We found a system that accepted poor student attendance as the status quo. The division's schools and central office did not have adequate systems to improve student attendance, and no one, at any level, was taking responsibility for poor attendance results. At that time, we made two recommendations to Northland School Division and one recommendation to the Department of Education, saying the division must develop a plan to guide its efforts to improve attendance, and the department must ensure the division does so.

When we make recommendations to government, we usually wait until management has told us they have implemented the recommendations we originally reported on or a reasonable period of time has passed to implement the recommendations. However, sometimes we believe there is enough risk of inaction to justify providing a progress report. There has been a history of inaction over the division, and we want to make sure that the division and department take the action necessary. We are using this progress report, therefore, to understand management's actions to date and their plans to complete implementation.

We will use what we found in this progress report, along with information we will gather over the next year or two on improvements made by the department and the division, to plan our follow-up audit on the implementation of our three outstanding recommendations.

# Alberta Education Systems to Improve Student Attendance in Northland School Division (continued)



## What we found

- The division still does not have a comprehensive plan to improve student attendance.
- In its role as a key oversight body, the Department of Education has not ensured the division created a plan to improve attendance and put it into operation.

Since March 2015, the division and the department have not been idle. The division has new leadership and management structures. The department has amended the *Northland School Division Act*, returning local governance of the division to its communities with the election of a school board in October 2017. The division and department have also been working collaboratively on a number of fronts, including securing the approval for increased funding to help the division stabilize and begin making targeted investments in key areas, among them attendance.

These achievements are substantial, and they form a foundation capable of supporting improved student attendance—but the division still does not have a comprehensive plan for attendance. Without a plan to guide its efforts and actions, the division will not be successful in making meaningful and sustainable improvements in student attendance.

## Why this is important to Albertans

All students in Alberta have a right and a responsibility to attend school and receive an education. The Department of Education has to ensure appropriate systems are in place to make this happen. Attendance systems are not working in Northland School Division. Improving these systems is critical to the future success of the children.

## What needs to be done

The department must ensure it oversees the division's immediate implementation of an effective plan to improve attendance.

## Consequences of not taking action

Without a specific plan to improve attendance, the division is less likely to put resources into the most critical areas to implement programs and processes to optimize student success.

Without appropriate oversight by the department, the division's likelihood of success is reduced and the risk of failing another generation of the division's children increases.

Without systematic monitoring and reporting on attendance, the division will not consistently identify and support those students with chronic non-attendance.

## Read the full report at:

[oag.ab.ca](http://oag.ab.ca)

Follow us on Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube

