

Teachers struggle to meet math demands

By Janet French, Saskatchewan News Network; Canwest News Service December 12, 2009

Teachers across the province are struggling to teach the amount of math the government requires.

The 2009 Saskatchewan Education Indicators Report says, provincially, about 60 per cent of elementary teachers are delivering the Grade 1-to-5 requirements in math-teaching time, 84 per cent are spending enough time on middle-years math, and only 9.8 per cent of Grade 10-to-12 teachers are spending as much time teaching math as they're supposed to.

Saskatoon divisions are in the ball park of the provincial averages, with the exception of high school, where time spent teaching math is significantly less than average.

According to a survey of teachers, 3.4 per cent of Greater Saskatoon Catholic high school math instructors say they're spending the required time on math, as do 5.8 per cent of Saskatoon public high school math teachers.

Catholic division director of education Bev Hanson says it's a "struggle" to get in the required number of math hours, and that struggle may partly explain why Saskatchewan students lag behind students across Canada in math skills.

The Catholic division has already changed how it teaches elementary school math, and changes are clearly needed to the high school approach, Hanson says.

"There's no doubt about it, it's a huge task."

For about the last four years, Hanson says the division has offered full-year math to Grade 9s who need more time and attention, and have some special three-semester Math 10 and 20 combination classes for the same reason. Those classes likely meet the ministry's time requirements, she said.

Hanson says teachers who responded to the survey likely didn't consider these special math programs in their answers.

The data does concern her, though, and the division is working on a way --- possibly by changing high school timetables -- to increase students' time learning math.

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