

POVERTY IN REGINA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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MEASURING POVERTY

The Federal Government and Statistics Canada use three measures to find the poverty line, these are:

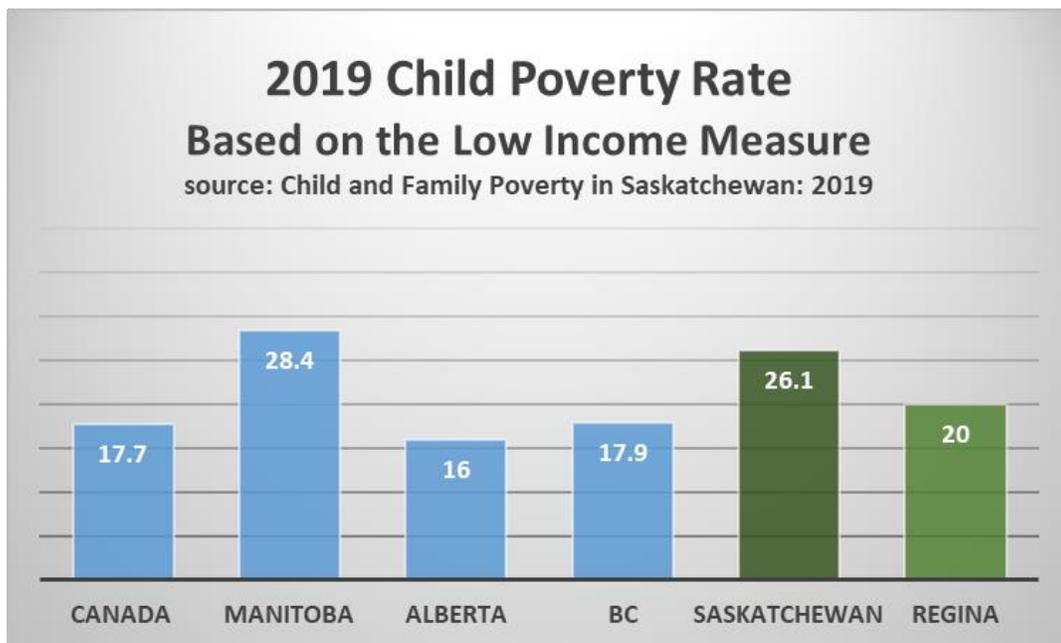
1. the Market Basket Measure (MBM),
2. the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO), and
3. the Low Income Measure (LIM) (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, n.d.).

If using the federal government’s Low Income Measure (LIM) the statistics place 26.1% of all children in Saskatchewan in poverty. Using this same Low Income Measure, in the city of Regina, 20% of all children live in poverty. (Sanchez, 2019)

Other sources measure poverty via the MBM - an income level below which a household does not have enough money to buy a specific basket of goods and services that allows it to meet its basic needs and achieve a modest standard of living. Using the MBM, approximately 12.6% of all children in Saskatchewan live in Poverty (Gingrich, 2019).

In 2019, given the population of children in Saskatchewan was 244,476, these measures tell us that between 30,803 (12.6%) and 48,895 (20%) children in Saskatchewan are living in poverty. (Canadian Child Welfare Portal, 2019)

And, what about children in our Regina Public Schools? If approximately 20% of all children in Regina live in poverty, and we have approximately 24,000 students enrolled in our schools, that means approximately 4,800 Regina Public School students are living in poverty. In my opinion, 4,800 children in our schools living in poverty is 4,800 too many.



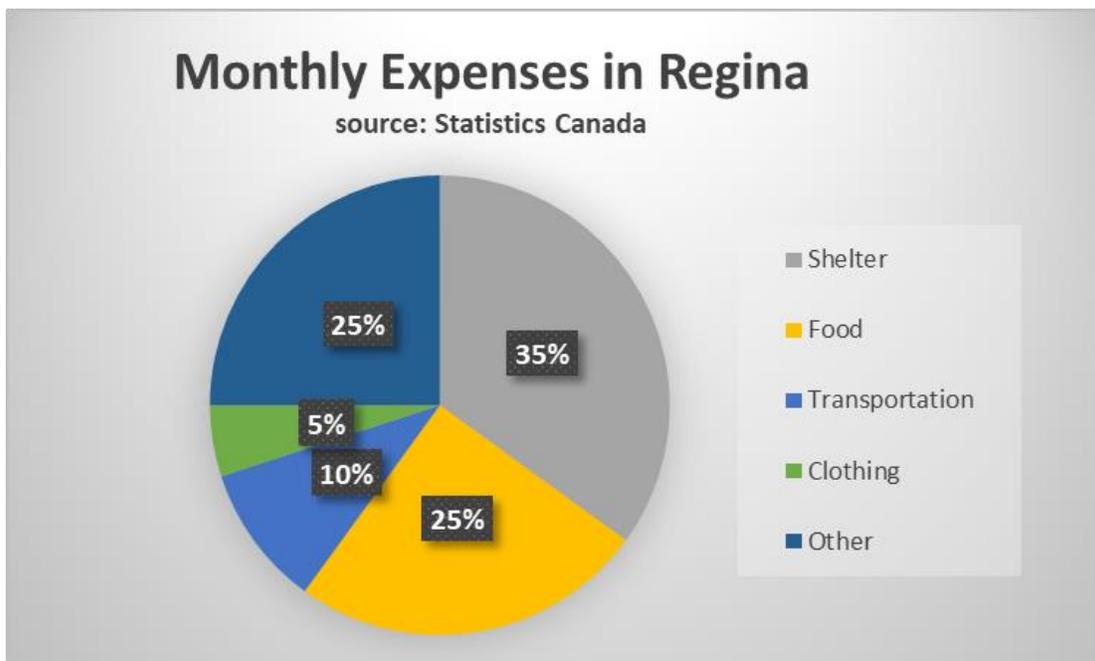
CONSULTATION

This past Fall 2021, I spoke with several Regina Public School Principals whose students experience widespread poverty. On September 23, 2021 in a Zoom discussion, I was told that “poverty affects everything that happens in our building”, and “schools are often safe-havens for families, where basic needs like nutrition, health-care, and basic physical needs” must be acknowledged and met before teaching and learning can take place (Poverty discussion with Regina Public School Principals, September 23, 2021). Unfortunately, poverty is a central driver of attendance issues and if a student isn’t consistently attending school, many of the desperately needed academic and social supports available aren’t being used.

And, as we know, attendance hinges on access to transportation - something many of our families in poverty do not have. Accessible transportation is not the only challenge for our students in poverty, since their families face a mountain of crippling expenses. The high cost of rent, high monthly utility bills (power, heat, water, internet, phone), high (skyrocketing!) cost of groceries, childcare, transportation and clothing all add financial pressure.

According to Statistics Canada, in the city of Regina, Shelter makes up approximately 35% of our expenses, Food 25%, Transportation 10%, Clothing 5% and Other 25% (Gingrich, 2020).

If we could reduce monthly expenses and increase financial assistance to those living in poverty, we would help thousands of children in our Regina schools.



SCHOOL BOARD AND MUNICIPAL INITIATIVES

More than one of the principals' schools has a free "supply store" where students can come get shoes, clothes, backpacks and school supplies, but unfortunately this operation uses a large portion of the school's yearly budget. The principals said their staff are regularly helping students with eye appointments, hearing appointments, getting health cards, identification cards, driving students to medical appointments, and so on. They often spend time writing grants to access as much financial support as possible, which isn't easy when there is no centralized, accessible service that provides all the things these children need (Poverty discussion with Regina Public School Principals, September 23, 2021).

Fortunately, our school division has access to, and provides funding for food programs in 24 of our schools. We receive funding from the provincial government's Child Nutrition Program, Breakfast for Learning, REACH, MOSAIC, Breakfast Clubs of Canada and PC Charity (and often others should the individual schools – usually in-school administrators or parents – apply). Unfortunately, there are still many schools that do not have access to nutrition funding and do not provide snacks and lunches to students. Because of this, there are still many students who struggle with food insecurity in our schools.

When students experience racism and/or discrimination, have food insecurity or unstable housing because of poverty, they often also struggle at school. Knowing this, if we are to take our responsibility for reconciliation seriously we must also take poverty seriously. Poverty rates for First Nations peoples in Saskatchewan are significantly higher than for all other citizens. According to the 2016 Census of Canada data, 45% of First Nations people in Regina are living in poverty. Compare that (45%) to all non-Indigenous people living in poverty in Regina (10%) it is clear that First Nations people are disproportionately living in poverty in our city (Gingrich, 2020). These same people also experience denial of hospital and/or medical services and live with systemic racism every day.

Notably, racism and discrimination is one of the major issues raised in the City of Regina's Community Safety and Well-being (CSWB) plan which was approved by Regina City Council on November 25, 2021. In this plan, the city outlines six priorities to create a healthier and more sustainable quality of life for Regina citizens, including the most vulnerable. These priorities include:

- Domestic Violence and Intimate Partner Violence
- Food Insecurity
- Problematic Substance Use
- Racism and Discrimination
- Safety
- Service System

Implementing the CSWB Plan would greatly benefit Regina Public School students who live in poverty by ensuring they are able to meet their needs for education, health care, food, housing, income and social and cultural expression, and create a city where everyone has the opportunity to grow, learn, work, play, connect, love and be loved (City of Regina and Canadian Municipal Network on Crime

Prevention, 2021). When these basic needs are met, and poverty is reduced, we *will* see increases in learning outcomes and graduation rates for thousands of our students!

Research shows that those with less than a high school education stay unemployed longer than those who graduated high school (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, Advisory Group on Poverty Reduction). We also know that students who do not complete Grade 12 have fewer work opportunities, less income, and ultimately poorer health (Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan, 2021). Reducing poverty in our community is paramount to increasing high school graduation rates in our schools.

The human and financial cost of poverty is great. Knowing that so many of our Regina Public School students live in poverty should push all levels of policy-makers into action to find solutions immediately. As said in the CSWB plan’s exploration of Awasiw: A Story of Courage and Resilience: it takes a courageous heart to “bring out into the open the hidden issues of our community” (City of Regina and Canadian Municipal Network on Crime Prevention, 2021).



City of Regina Community Safety and Well-Being Plan Priorities

STUDENT VOICES

Below are several statements from the 2017 report *“Shhh Listen! We have something to say!”* by the Saskatchewan Advocate for Children and Youth.

I believe that listening to children in our schools, city and province, will give leaders clear guidance for what these children need. Together, let’s be school board, municipal and provincial leaders who show our children we really care.

“Youth need to know that someone loves them. They need to know someone cares about them and that they can talk to someone. Meaningful friendships and relationships really matter”

“Sometimes we come to school and haven’t had enough to eat. We need more food, snacks and juice.”

“We need more activities. Places to hang out with our friends such as youth centres, parks or skate parks. Family fun nights, youth conferences and camps. We need more celebrations!”

“If you want to help youth, you have to help the older people. Because there is still so much going on from residential school. We have lost most of our language, culture, and identity. Our community is fractured”

“The leaders need to provide safe places for the kids to do recreational activities, come together and talk and be kids”

“We need to stop bullying and substance misuse, and increase support and physical safety”

“Improving meaningful activities for youth improves mental health”.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Provincial Government of Saskatchewan	1. Reinstate a yearly “back to school” amount of \$100/child for school supplies to all people on Saskatchewan Income Support (SIS) with school-aged children (18 and under).
	2. Increase funding for school nutrition programs so more children receive more meals, snacks and drinks at school.
	3. Raise SIS rates by \$300 a month as a step toward raising it above the poverty line.
	4. Provide free wifi to all people who live in poverty and acknowledge that internet access is a basic human right.
	5. Provide Social Assistance (SIS) recipients with full coverage of basic utilities.
	6. Increase City of Regina funding for public transportation, so all children and youth can access the bus for free.
	7. Raise the minimum wage to \$15/hour or more so Saskatchewan offers a liveable income for all.
	8. Increase affordable, safe, community housing in Regina.
The City of Regina	1. Provide free public transportation for all children up to age 18.
	2. Centralize poverty support through a city-wide service system for poverty reduction and food security.
	3. Increase free recreation and leisure programs, spaces, community events and activities across Regina.
	4. Develop stable, consistent, subsidized grocery stores in the “food deserts” of North Central and Heritage Neighbourhoods.
The Saskatchewan School Boards Association	1. Prioritize poverty reduction advocacy in Saskatchewan schools.
	2. Bring awareness to the impacts poverty has on Saskatchewan students.

Regina Public School Board	1. Prioritize poverty reduction advocacy in conversations with provincial government leaders.
	2. Bring awareness to our community of the gravity of poverty in Regina Public Schools and how it is affecting students.
	3. Divert additional resources and support to schools in our division with high poverty rates to ensure they have a more level playing field for achieving success.
	4. Advocate for additional nutrition funding and support in more of our Regina Public Schools.
	5. Keep the children and families who live in poverty at the forefront of decision-making.
	6. Review School Nutrition Program locations and programs. Ensure the schools in our division with the most children in poverty are receiving a School Nutrition Coordinator, kitchen access and any provincial funding for food support.
	7. Provide resources and time to build relationships with families. Improve communication between schools and marginalized families (non-white, non-privileged) in our schools. Create casual, comfortable, ongoing opportunities for engagement with those families/students.
	8. Encourage relationship-building activities for students in need to encourage meaningful student-student relationships.
	9. Offer free food to families and students whenever possible.
	10. Listen carefully to the needs of those in poverty. Take action based on their recommendations.
	11. Provide professional development for school staff to assist them in working effectively with students in poverty and addressing the impact of associated trauma and chronic stress.
	12. Minimize bullying and discrimination against children in poverty.

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