

► [Previous Issues](#)

Special Conference Issue

Welcome

By Marguerite Jackson,
Chief Executive Officer

This issue provides you with an overview and highlights of EQAO's second provincial conference: "Large-Scale Assessment: Supporting the Everyday Work of Schools: From Knowledge to Action."

[Read More](#)



Opening Keynote Address

Improving Schools in a Data-Rich World

Steven Katz, Director, Aporia Consulting Ltd.

Dr. Katz speaks about the shift to informed professional judgment as the next wave of "evidence use" that needs to take hold in schools across the province.

[Read More](#)

Coffee Break

Interview with Noah benShea, Toronto-born poet-philosopher

"Of all the things you make in life, remember, you make a difference," says Noah benShea addressing Ontario educators.

[Read More](#)

View from the Front of the Class

Preparing for the OSSLT

Principal Eileen Clinton and her school team share the strategies that made all the difference at *Our Lady of Lourdes* in Guelph.

[Read More](#)

The Key to Good Assessments

Developing classroom tests for improved student performance

**Dr. Barbara Plake, Distinguished Professor Emeritus,
University of Nebraska-Lincoln**

In order for classroom assessments to be a sound source of information on student learning and bring about substantial student performance gains, classroom tests need to possess certain indispensable features.

[Read More](#)

Spotlight

Celebrating the success of an Ontario school

Roden Public School in Toronto's inner city is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic junior school serving 311 students from families who speak a total of 17 different languages.

[Read More](#)

Data in Action

Using Data to Inform, Improve and Inspire

**David Thomas, Director of Education, Upper Canada
District School Board**

"Sometimes we tend to look at data and instead of saying, 'What can we learn from this?' we panic. Panic makes for poor decision making."

[Read More](#)

How Would You Score This?

Try your hand at scoring a student response!

Take a look at this reading item and student response from the Primary Division Assessment. How would you score it? The rubric, correct score and rationale are provided.

[Read More](#)



[Keynote Address](#) | [Coffee Break](#) | [View from the Front of the Class](#)
[s](#) | [Spotlight](#) | [Data in Action](#) | [How Would You Score This?](#) | [Ask EQAO](#)
[Survey](#) | [Join our team](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street,
Toronto ON M5B 2M9
888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • www.eqao.com



Special Conference Issue

Welcome



Marguerite Jackson
Chief Executive Officer



View video session.

[Windows](#) | [MAC](#)

Note: When viewed on a Mac, this video works best using the Safari browser.

On November 29 and 30, 2007, EQAO hosted its second provincial conference: "Large-Scale Assessment: Supporting the Everyday Work of Schools: From Knowledge to Action."

The conference included over 30 outstanding keynote, plenary and breakout sessions. Presenters shared their expertise, best practices and insights on how to use large-scale assessments as a tool for improving student achievement.

We were pleased to welcome over 450 educators and education partners from across the province and the many others from Ontario and beyond who participated via live webcast. Our webcast audience grew from 500 to over 1500 viewers, a remarkable increase of 209% over that for the sessions offered at our 2006 conference.

This issue of *EQAO Connects* provides you with an overview of the conference and highlights a number of its sessions. I hope you will find these articles as informative and meaningful as did those who were in attendance.

I invite you to offer your feedback on these articles and appreciate your assistance in helping EQAO provide the content that would be of most interest to you in future issues and events. ■

Marguerite Jackson

CEO, EQAO



[Survey](#) | [Join our team](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street,
Toronto ON M5B 2M9
888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • www.eqao.com



Special Conference Issue

Opening Keynote Address



Improving Schools in a Data-Rich World

Dr. Steven Katz

Director with Aporia Consulting Ltd.

Permanent faculty member at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, in human development and applied psychology



View video session.

[Windows](#) | [MAC](#)

Note: When viewed on a Mac, this video works best using the Safari browser.

Speaking in November at the Toronto EQAO conference on large-scale assessment, Dr. Steven Katz talked about the shift to informed professional judgment as the next wave of “evidence use” that needs to take hold in schools across the province.

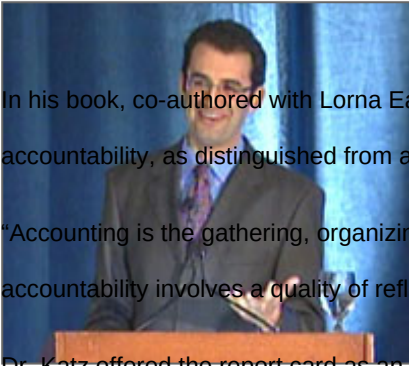
Data feed into informed professional judgment, but at the heart of this increasingly popular practice is evidence-driven conversation, not a computational or statistical exercise. “It doesn’t require a piece of software. It requires you,” said Dr. Katz.

In essence, the practice is about using data and evidence wisely to confirm, challenge or reconstruct professional knowledge and change practices accordingly. “Data are a support, not a substitute, for professional judgment,” Dr. Katz emphasized. He explained that the concept isn’t about dismissing practitioner knowledge and intuition in favour of objective evidence. Instead, it’s about co-creating new information by relating what you know to knowledge arising from evidence and research.

“It’s a valuing of deep understanding,” said Dr. Katz. “It’s about making implicit knowledge explicit by sharing the reasons and rationales that inform our practices. Sometimes this means testing our gut feeling, sometimes we confirm our intuition and sometimes we say, ‘We thought this was the case but it isn’t.’”

From data to information to knowledge to wisdom

“We have to think about what it means to move from data to information, information to knowledge, and ultimately from knowledge to wisdom,” continued Dr. Katz. “What we need to do is make sure we are not data rich and information poor.” Critical to the process is the conversation about what information means, how it fits in with everything else that



we know and how to use it to make positive change.

In his book, co-authored with Lorna Earl, entitled *Leading Schools in a Data-Rich World*, Dr. Katz highlights the role of accountability, as distinguished from accounting, in moving from data to information to wisdom.

"Accounting is the gathering, organizing and reporting of information that describes performance," clarified Dr. Katz. By contrast, accountability involves a quality of reflection and an improvement-directed conversation.

Dr. Katz offered the report card as an example of accounting. "It becomes an exercise in accountability only when the teacher and student, or teacher, parent and student, begin a conversation about what it means. It becomes accountability when they say the report card suggests we have made some good progress here, and this is where we have some work to do, and here is what we are going to do on the basis of this learning."

What's more, accountability is only useful when it is fueled by a desire to improve. Without this driving force, said Dr. Katz, "it's just empty rhetoric." He added, "But improvement without accountability is just firing without aiming. Data and evidence help us do the aiming."



Student learning needs are a proxy for teacher learning needs

"We often believe that if we just have accurate identification of student needs, we know what to do about it," said Dr. Katz. "Except we often don't because the student learning need is very often a proxy for teacher learning need."

That's because we impact on student learning through classroom practice. "There are a lot of things students are doing well that don't need an improvement focus," added Dr.

Katz. "But in areas where students are struggling, we have to ask, 'How do we create the conditions necessary for teacher learning so we can shape classroom practice in a way that translates into a response to the student learning needs?'"

The inquiry doesn't stop there. Teacher learning needs, noted Dr. Katz, are embedded in leader learning needs. "What do leaders need to learn so they can create the conditions for teachers to learn the things they need to learn so students can learn the things they need to learn? And this is embedded in community learning needs. All of this together sets up the conditions for us to have an impact."

Data and evidence are integral to informed professional judgment as these contribute to a deep understanding of student learning needs and teacher learning needs. And while data are a factor in the conversation, they're not the entire conversation.

Dr. Katz identified three core human capacities for using data wisely. The first of these is developing an inquiring habit of mind.

1. Inquiring habit of mind

Informed professional judgment is strengthened by making inquiry second nature to us. An inquiring habit of mind also calls on us to tolerate ambiguity, explained Dr. Katz, which is difficult when any practitioner's natural preference is typically to

make decisions—as quickly as possible. But that inclination can defeat the learning process.

To underline this point, he pointed to the insight psychologists have acquired by studying experts, in virtually every field, to determine what they do well that novices can learn from. “Experts are faster than novices in every area but that of problem identification,” said Dr. Katz. “They spend more time than novices mapping out requirements, defining learning needs. Once they commit to a course of action they are quicker than novices, but they spend more time on the front end, valuing deep understanding. And that means reserving judgment. It means tolerating ambiguity. Ambiguity doesn’t get in the way of new learning, it is a precursor to it.”

Learning, specified Dr. Katz, happens when we change what we believe to fit new evidence.

2. **Becoming data literate**

The second core capacity for using evidence wisely is to learn which data to pay attention to so as to become information rich. “To do this, we have to think about purpose,” advised Dr. Katz. “Define the purpose first. Ask, ‘What do we care about?’ and then figure out how we can measure it. We don’t want to just care about what others decide to measure for us. We want good reasons.”

Data are not just numbers, they can also be words or images. What matters is that the evidence is systematic and representative. But Dr. Katz emphasized that data alone have no meaning. “Is four out of 10 good or bad? It depends. If you are talking about a baseball player hitting four out of 10 consistently then it’s a good thing; if you are talking about a score of four out of 10 on a test, it may not be a good thing. Being data literate is about making interpretation paramount.

“We make meaning of data through interpretation, and interpretation is a human thing. Human beings make meaning, not software.”

In a world overrun by data, differentiation between sound and unsound data is essential, warned Dr. Katz. He noted that a recent study shows only 25% of people who consult the unregulated universe of the Internet to self-diagnose their medical ailments pay attention to the source and date of what they are reading. With this in mind, he urged greater understanding of such terms as validity and reliability, not as formulas but as concepts.

3. **Building a culture of inquiry**

The third capacity for using data wisely is to build a culture of inquiry. This necessitates a collaborative approach to interpreting and engaging with data so as to allow accountability conversations.

“Building a culture of inquiry is about embracing the concept of critical friendships,” says Dr. Katz. “Critical friends are a valuable notion. Who are the people who, in the spirit of friendship and improvement, not of judgment and surveillance, can ask you the tough questions that you can’t ask yourself because when you are so close to something, it’s unlikely you can see it? Who will ask you the tough questions that will help challenge you in ways you haven’t been challenged?”

Feedback is an equally inspiring component in a culture of inquiry. In the field of motivation, Dr. Katz notes that a concept called the “challenge-feedback sandwich” is a highly valued process. He explains it using the example of runners who are

given the challenge of beating their best time. Runners who aren't clocked and don't receive feedback will not be particularly motivated. The feedback sandwich isn't closed. If, however, the runners are told that they put in a good effort but were still off their best time, research shows that they will remain motivated, despite not meeting their challenge. "Just getting the feedback is motivating," emphasizes Dr. Katz.



Informed professional judgment as a habit of both mind and practice

Informed professional judgment is a self-directed, self-motivated quest for deep understanding in the service of strengthening practitioner knowledge. The value of deep understanding cannot be emphasized enough as Dr. Katz noted in offering the following example based on Pam Grossman's work.

It takes irreplaceable practitioner knowledge to answer the following question:

Which one of the three lines of fractions would comprise the best test question to assess whether students can correctly compare fractions?

Students would be asked to write fractions in order of size, from smallest to largest.

- a. $\frac{5}{8}$ $\frac{1}{4}$ $\frac{11}{16}$
- b. $\frac{5}{8}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{1}{16}$
- c. $\frac{5}{8}$ $\frac{3}{4}$ $\frac{11}{16}$

The answer rests with the knowledge of how students learn fractions. Teachers know that when children first learn how to order fractions they frequently ignore denominators. The first line (a) would allow students to write down the correct answer even if they discounted the denominator. In (b) students who know that 16ths are smaller than eighths or quarters would respond correctly while ignoring the numerator, also a common mistake. Only the third line would show that the student arrived at the right answer for the right reason.

Dr. Katz concluded, "The root of informed professional judgment is making the tacit explicit, defining the reasons that support the tacit, and building a new understanding not as a substitute for what we know, but as a support for what we know."

With the practice of informed professional judgment, embedded in a culture of inquiry, conversations in meeting rooms and hallways in schools become tremendously purposeful and insightful. ■

Your feedback helps us improve.

Please take a moment to grade this article and send

Grade this article

A This article is excellent. Do more of these!

Comments

us your comments.

- B** This article is interesting. It presented helpful ideas and information.
- C** This article is OK. It is somewhat interesting, but I already knew a lot of what it has to say.
- D** I did not find this article interesting.



[Keynote Address](#) | [Coffee Break](#) | [View from the Front of the Class](#)
[s](#) | [Spotlight](#) | [Data in Action](#) | [How Would You Score This?](#) | [Ask EQAO](#)
[Survey](#) | [Join our team](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street,
Toronto ON M5B 2M9
888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • www.eqao.com



Special Conference Issue

Coffee Break



Interview with Noah benShea, Toronto-born poet-philosopher



View video session.

[Windows](#) | [MAC](#)

Note: When viewed on a Mac, this video works best using the Safari browser.

Noah benShea is one of North America's most respected and beloved public philosophers. Born in Toronto, Ontario, he is a poet, scholar, long-range thinker, executive advisor, lecturer and international best-selling author. A public speaker for 35 years, he has spoken at literally hundreds of universities, as well as given countless keynote addresses, including to the Library of Congress.

Noah is the author of 20 books translated into 18 languages. With global sales of over two million copies, his books continue a tradition begun with the famed Jacob the Baker books, which have been embraced around the world as timeless fables in countries as diverse as China, Mexico, Spain, Italy, Brazil, Norway and Israel.

Of All the Things You Make in Life, Remember, You Make a Difference

Educators play a special role in society because their role is to play life forward.

Educators deal in the day-to-day, but their responsibility is tomorrow.

Educators understand that anyone can count the number of seeds in an apple, but no one can count the number of apples in a seed.

With this in mind, what's important for every educator to remember . . . in the face of exhaustion, and budgets and the ever-present time crunch . . . is that of all the things you make in life, you make a difference. And that makes all the difference.

— Noah benShea

You've been quoted as saying, "May you go from strength to strength and be a source of strength to others." This seems to be especially poignant to those in the teaching profession. What does this mean

to teachers?

None of us is wearing a large S for “Superman” or “Superwoman” under our clothing. All of us are wearing a large V for “vulnerable.” It is our shared vulnerability that is our shared humanity and the shared heroism of day-to-day courage. Strength isn’t the absence of weakness but how we come to wrestle with our weaknesses.

To each of us, “being strong” often means something quite different. For some of us it means finding the strength to do the right thing. For some of us, particularly as we grow older, we come to discover that strength can be what we’re strong enough *not* to do. Lastly, and perhaps most relevant to educators, being strong means having the strength of character to lend others a hand, because an educator isn’t someone who rules over but lifts up.

Given the significant role that teachers play in the lives of their students, what’s the one message you wish every teacher in the world could impart to their students?

To one whose work is building the next generation, the challenge is to see what might be and ask, why not? Personally—for every person—the greatest challenge in any of our lives is daring to be who we are. The greatest opportunity in any of our lives is the opportunity to embrace who we will yet become. Encouraging children to be who they are at their highest level, and to love themselves when they fall short, and not to forget they are taller for the effort is a message for a lifetime. It is a message for every student and a message for every student inside each and every one of us. The best isn’t ahead of us but within us

You have said, “Find peace not in what you are given but in who you are.” How can this message inspire teachers?

To become a teacher is not a shortcut to riches; it is a sure path to a rich life. The efforts of teachers enrich the world just as surely as ignorance impoverishes the world.

But teachers also have real world economic pressures that press in on them, and those pressures can make any of us question the decision we made to make a difference. In the face of this, what’s worth remembering is that making a difference in the lives of others makes your life different—and that can make all the difference. It means that you have not subscribed to what the media and ads say you should want but to what you know will make you who you want to be. It means you have chosen to live in congruence with the values that are your balance point. And the alternative is profoundly painful, because any one of us who is in a state of dissonance with his or her true values will find no peace in his or her life.

Any blessing in your life that does not bring you peace is no blessing. And any peace you find in life is its own blessing. Find peace not in what you are given but in who you are.

You’ve also said, “Change is inevitable, progress is not—without our own willingness to change.” How do you see the need for personal growth and professional growth being fundamental for those in the teaching profession?

The best working definition of “neurosis” is when we choose to do something that is negative but familiar over something that is positive but new.

Becoming a better *anything* begins with being a better you. Personal growth and professional growth are linked. Anyone who thinks they can be one person in their 5–9 life and another in their 9–5 life is only aiming to successfully become schizophrenic.

All personal improvement or transformation requires the willingness to be an honest witness to one's self. This requires us to step outside of our title or self-importance and, in front of the mirror, to see what we look like from every angle, to see what we're "wearing" that looks good on us and what emotional and professional manner we are wearing that neither serves us nor is flattering.

Because we shut our eyes, the world does not go into hiding. We live in a dynamic world. Because we decide to park our boat for the night doesn't mean the river stops running. Personal and professional growth involves change which, even if it only means learning to find your balance, is the only way to adapt to a changing world.

We live on a little blue ball spinning in space at 1070 miles an hour. Finding and keeping our balance is 24/7 365 work. Make that work a labour of love.

Most of us have had that one special teacher who touched our lives in a positive way. Who was that teacher for you and what was it that made him or her so special?

I have been blessed to have many great teachers in my life. And as with so many teachers who don't know how much of a difference they make, neither did some of my teachers. I have a memory of lying awake, as a boy in Toronto, on the night before third grade, terrified because I had heard that the woman who was to be my third grade teacher, Mrs. Zinkteller, made her students not only memorize all the colours in the crayon box but also know how to spell them. My fears never materialized; I did learn how to spell vermillion, and the expectations of a teacher I hadn't met introduced me to the awareness that no one can frighten us as much as we frighten ourselves—a valuable lesson when I was eight *and* fifty years later.

A teacher's potential impact on students reminds me of the boy running with some friends who stomps through wet cement. That night, as the boy falls asleep, he has no idea that he has left a footprint drying in the sun. Teachers leave their mark, and all of us are marked by what we leave.

What final message would you like to leave for our educators?

My final message to educators is "thank you." Thank you for everything you do, for everything you have done, for everything you will do and, most of all, for everything you don't even know you do.

It is a great gift to plant a tree from which you will never pick the fruit. Each of you has planted seeds, and time will grant your labours orchards.

To borrow from Dante, the only thing that we need to do for evil to triumph is for good folks to do nothing. Thanks for all the tiny unwitnessed sowing of seeds, nurturing of saplings and going out on a limb that you do for the next generation.

I am the first person in my family who not only graduated from high school but also from university. Fifty years ago, I was just one more face in a small North Toronto brick schoolhouse where a teacher rang a handbell to tell us when it was time to return to class.

Today I pass to you the thanks for the learning that was passed to me, and I ask you via caring to pass that thanks along to the

next “invisible” face sitting in the next generation. And the bell’s reminder rings across time—listen. ■

Your feedback helps us improve.

Please take a moment to grade this article and send us your comments.

Grade this article

Comments

- A** This article is excellent. Do more of these!
- B** This article is interesting. It presented helpful ideas and information.
- C** This article is OK. It is somewhat interesting, but I already knew a lot of what it has to say.
- D** I did not find this article interesting.



[Keynote Address](#) | [Coffee Break](#) | [View from the Front of the Class](#)
[s](#) | [Spotlight](#) | [Data in Action](#) | [How Would You Score This?](#) | [Ask EQAO](#)
[Survey](#) | [Join our team](#) | [Contact Us](#)
Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street,
Toronto ON M5B 2M9
888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • www.eqao.com



Special Conference Issue

View from the Front of the Class



Preparing for the OSSLT

Eileen Clinton, Principal of Student Achievement and Learning

Our Lady of Lourdes
Wellington Catholic District School Board

Our Lady of Lourdes Case Study

Our Lady of Lourdes used to face a specific challenge: lack of student interest in participating in OSSLT-related activities. Many students at this Guelph high school, which serves one of the most socio-economically disadvantaged areas in Ontario, felt the OSSLT had little relevance to their lives, recalls Eileen Clinton, Principal of Student Achievement and Learning. But for the past four years, the school's students have been successful at rates well above provincial averages. At the EQAO conference, Ms. Clinton, along with English Department Head Heather McDonald and English teacher Catharine Koledin, the school's EQAO Team Leader and OSSLT Support, shared the strategies that made all the difference.

There are no fewer than 23 languages spoken among the approximately 850 students at Our Lady of Lourdes. The high school is one of only three in the relatively small Wellington Catholic District School Board, but it serves a large geographic region. About 70% of the students are bused, and 30% of those students can travel as much as one and a half hours each way.

Currently, 123 students are identified as having special needs at the school and are fully integrated — in keeping with the board's philosophy of no segregation.

The suspension rate at Our Lady of Lourdes is 50% higher than that of the other two high schools in the Wellington Catholic DSB, with about 200 suspensions in 2006-2007.

To put the school's 2006–2007 success rate of 90% into context, Ms. Clinton noted that 49% of the 188 first-time eligible writers were male and 12% of the writers were special needs students. Of the 44 previously eligible students writing, 55% were male and 27% were identified with exceptionalities.

While there are now several strategies in place at the school that have proven to be a tremendous support to students, the OSSLT

noted that there are two initiatives in particular that have been critical in allowing students to complete the OSSLT to their fullest potential.

The first is ongoing communication with parents, as much as possible in their own language. Specifically, letters relating to the OSSLT are translated. “We knew if kids didn’t really grasp the importance of the OSSLT, our families likely didn’t either,” explained Ms. Clinton.

The second key pillar for the school is emphasis on attendance. “We are attendance crazy! Skips during the year are followed up with considerable diligence. We feel if the student isn’t at school, we don’t have anything to work with, so we engage many people in the follow-up process, including guidance counsellors, special education teachers and social workers, among others. And on the day of the OSSLT, we ensure morning contacts and transportation to school to enable students who need this support to be at school to participate.”

Data collection as a first step to success

When Ms. Clinton arrived at Our Lady of Lourdes over three years ago, she expanded on the progress made towards improving the literacy skills that would translate into higher OSSLT success rates by working with staff to set up a school-based multi-disciplined EQAO team to provide direction and an action plan. One of the key priorities of the team was to flag struggling students as early as possible.

To this end, the team launched its now standard practice of collecting the following data:

- Grade 9 marks for English, math and science. The team reviews mark distribution to identify students working at level 1 and 2.
- In-class assessment information. (Class profiles for applied and locally developed classes)
- Department input and English teacher recommendations. Ms. Clinton explains that the objective was to learn from teachers how students were faring in the areas of inferencing, comprehension, writing skills, formulating paragraphs — in short, the curriculum expectations assessed in the OSSLT.
- EQAO Grade 6 scores — an indicator that allows the high school to follow up with students who were struggling in elementary school. The school does an extensive transfer of information for all incoming students from its feeder schools.
- Trends by gender.
- Information on English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Language Learners (ELL) student population. This information must be collected manually as many parents don’t have proficiency in English to complete the forms. At this time, the school is working with international language programs in an attempt to develop more user-friendly forms.
- Information about students requiring extra support and accommodations so as to develop ways to address these. The team found many students are hesitant to use the accommodations that are available as a support to them.

An action plan for success

English Department Head Heather McDonald and EQAO Team Leader and OSSLT Support Catharine Koledin outlined the following key strategies. They noted that EQAO results, as well as teacher and student feedback, confirm these initiatives are working effectively.

At the end of the first term of all English Grade 10 classes, and again at the beginning of the second term, teachers deliver a unit designed to review specific literacy skills.

In the first week of March, letters to parents are mailed, written in their language, which emphasize important dates and the necessity of attendance on those days. As well, there are follow-up phone calls, both personal and automated.

Just prior to March break, a Grade 10 assembly is held at which students receive user-friendly handouts that make it clear why they must write the OSSLT, where and when they'll write it, and the dates of the three skill-review days. The objective of this assembly is to eliminate students' anxiety over what is expected of them.

On the assembly day, a meeting is held with students who are attempting the test another time, at which they learn of extra help and supports available to help them succeed.

Upon return from March break, students who are identified as needing extra help attend 20-minute skill and confidence building sessions which are held within the school day. Our Lady of Lourdes staff believe that the high attendance rate at these sessions is partly due to the fact that the extra help is scheduled within the daily school structure - and does not infringe on social time. The school found that students did not show up for lunchtime or after school tutorials. Guidance slips are used to avoid possible student embarrassment in front of their classmates.

The school schedules three full days of literacy test review exercises following the March break for all Grade 10 students. Each student receives, on loan, a copy of the *Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test Workbook* by John Moore.

For the first two consecutive review days, the team assigns specific literacy exercises from the *Literacy Test Workbook* for each period. Prior to March break, all Grade 10 subject teachers receive in-service on facilitating these exercises with an emphasis on reviewing strategies, such as margin notes. The teachers also receive the teacher's manual which they use as a guide to help in their discussion of fully developed responses with the class. During review days, students will review three examples of every type of question on the test.

On the third review day, the students write a mock test with follow-up discussion. Students with special needs also have a trial run-through using assistive technologies to make sure everything is working properly and relieve them of any anxieties.

Gauging success of the strategies

Following the writing of the OSSLT, the school's EQAO team always meets to assess the verbal feedback of students and teachers on the process. The team is interested in, among other things, finding out if the preparation strategies resulted in decreased anxieties, increased motivation to write the test, and ensured the test held no surprises.

The scores echo students' affirming responses. Many say they are particularly glad about instruction reviews. "For the most part the feedback has been very positive," reported Ms. Koledin, "so if the wheel isn't broken, we won't tamper with it."

Subject teachers also say they are comfortable with the process, added Ms. Koledin. In particular, they appreciate the emphasis on early identification of struggling students. As well, they report that they receive the necessary tools to provide feedback to students on review days.

When the school receives the EQAO results, the team meets to start the process of analyzing the data for purposeful action. "We determined from last year's results that making inferences seems to be a bit of a challenge, so we will focus on reinforcing those skills for all students," said Ms. Koledin.

The bottom line

"Our success is due to having all teachers on board as teachers of student success, and teachers of literacy," said Student Learning and Achievement Principal, Eileen Clinton. ■

Your feedback helps us improve.

Please take a moment to grade this article and send us your comments.

Grade this article

Comments

- A** This article is excellent. Do more of these!
- B** This article is interesting. It presented helpful ideas and information.
- C** This article is OK. It is somewhat interesting, but I already knew a lot of what it has to say.
- D** I did not find this article interesting.



[Keynote Address](#) | [Coffee Break](#) | [View from the Front of the Class](#)
[s](#) | [Spotlight](#) | [Data in Action](#) | [How Would You Score This?](#) | [Ask EQAO](#)
[Survey](#) | [Join our team](#) | [Contact Us](#)
 Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street,
 Toronto ON M5B 2M9
 888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • www.eqao.com



Special Conference Issue

The Key to Good Assessments



Developing classroom tests for improved student performance



View video session.

[Windows](#) | [MAC](#)

Note: When viewed on a Mac, this video works best using the Safari browser.

About Dr. Barbara Plake

Dr. Plake is a psychometrician and emeritus distinguished professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Her research focuses on classroom assessment practices, computerized testing and on methods for determining the passing score on high-stakes tests, such as those for high school. Before becoming an academic, she taught Grade 9 math in Florida.

At December's EQAO conference, Dr. Barbara Plake, a psychometrician and emeritus distinguished professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, presented crucial criteria and a series of indicators to help teachers prepare and deliver classroom tests that are first-class.

Recent research has shown that good classroom assessment practices can be linked to increased student performance. By helping teachers understand how their students are learning, good classroom tests enable teachers to reflect on and adjust their teaching practices—a prerequisite for improved student learning.

But not every test is a good test. In order for classroom assessments to be a sound source of information on student learning and bring about substantial student performance gains, classroom tests need to possess certain indispensable features.



Why good classroom assessments are vital to student learning

While the curriculum tends to be the primary focus of instruction, classroom assessments are often regarded as a secondary element in the learning process. However, recent psychometric studies have shown a consistent relationship between good classroom assessments and important student performance gains.

"Research has shown that there are substantial learning gains for students when classroom instruction is strengthened with

classroom assessments,” says Dr. Plake. “Most interestingly, these gains are of a greater magnitude than those stemming from the implementation of combined educational reforms, and this should reinforce teachers in the work they do every day. The gains observed are also more notable among students considered at risk— those who have been struggling for years and have been impervious to most other instructional innovations.”



Key features of a first-class classroom assessment

“These research findings are wonderful news,” says Dr. Plake, “but significant student performance gains won’t happen with the use of any classroom assessment.” In fact, research has shown that classroom assessments need to have three key features in order to be of good quality and bring about substantial student performance gains:

1. Providing accurate information

In order for classroom assessments to provide accurate information about what students know and what they’re able to do, the tests need to:

- be clearly linked to learning targets;
- be clear in their purpose;
- demonstrate an appropriate match between assessment target and assessment method;
- be clearly written;
- show no bias; and
- have appropriate and accurate scoring.

In this phase, the focus is on the development of the test, as well as on its scoring and the interpretation of the results.

2. Providing high quality feedback

Developing a good-quality assessment and scoring it fairly and with accuracy are essential to being able to collect the right information about what students learned or did not learn. “But the best assessments in the world are not going to help in achieving these student gains unless they’re coupled with high-quality student feedback, because if the students don’t understand their performance, they’re not able to gain from that information,” says Dr. Plake. “And, that feedback needs to be clear, useful and timely.”

3. Involving students in the assessment process

The cycle of good classroom assessments would be incomplete without involving the students in the assessment process itself. “Students need to know more about what they know, and they need to know why it is important for them to know it. In addition, they need to know what they don’t know and why it is important that they correct that deficiency. They need to know what to do to learn it and how to recognize when, in fact, they’ve mastered the content,” says Dr. Plake. “The emphasis, here, is on communicating with and helping the students to understand their performance.”



Student-metric indicators of classroom assessments

Out of the three key features of a good classroom assessment proposed by Dr. Plake, providing accurate information is certainly the one that takes the most time as it involves test design, scoring and grading. To help achieve that, Dr. Plake defined six student-metric indicators. These indicators and the questions that they raise will help teachers deliver a classroom assessment that will provide accurate information about what students know and

what they don't know.

1. Right content—does the test cover appropriate content?

- Do the test questions align with the curriculum? A good way to know that is to ask another teacher if he or she agrees that the test questions match the curriculum.
- Is there full and appropriate coverage of the curriculum? This refers not only to the test content. We also want to check if there is an appropriate cognitive level addressed so it is possible to measure high and also low achievements through the test.

2. Right time—is the test being administered at the right time?

- Have the students been taught the material prior to the test?
- Is there a scope and sequence chart to support the timing decisions that have been made or will be made regarding the administration of the assessment?

3. Fair and unbiased—is the test fair and unbiased?

- Do all students have the same opportunity to demonstrate what they are able to do?
- Do the questions provide an advantage to some students because of their prior knowledge, their regional or cultural differences?
- Are there uses of language or topics that might upset or offend some students?

4. Right level—is the test at the right level?

- Are the questions at the right grade level?

For example, for a Grade 8 reading test it is good to have some passages that are a little higher and others a little lower than grade level. But the test cannot have Grade 3 or Grade 10 material as that would be inappropriate. It is important to calibrate the reading level of the test.

- Would students who know the material be unable to demonstrate it because of extraneous factors including the reading level being too high?
- Is the reading demand appropriate for the content?

It is important that the reading level of the test not interfere with students' ability to demonstrate that they know the skill or concept assessed on the test. Reading level is considered one of the extraneous factors that can impact student performance and should, for that reason, be minimized. Cultural differences, student background and prior knowledge are among the other extraneous or confounding factors that can affect student performance and lead to inaccurate interpretations about student achievement in other content areas, such as science or math.

5. Fair and accurate scoring—are the test results dependable?

- Are there features of the assessment that might make some students do better or worse than they should?
- Are the questions sufficiently clear so the students know what they are supposed to do?
- Are there clear and correct answers to multiple-choice questions?
- Are there enough score points to support what you want to know?
- Is the scoring fair and replicable? i.e., is the scoring sufficiently clear that the same response would get the same score by another scorer?
- Is the scoring defensible and not capricious?

6. Fair grading decisions

- Are good grading decisions being made?

It is important to reflect on this question as a score of 90% on a test could be very easy to achieve and not show a high level of performance. On the contrary, a 50% score may be very hard to achieve and show a high level of performance. Here are a few suggestions to circumvent this "illusion of equivalence."

- Decide what level of performance is needed for Levels 1, 2, 3 and 4.
- Provide examples of tasks that students at these levels should be able to do.
- Prepare test questions to elicit performance for these expectations.
- Ensure sufficient information to make intended grading decisions.

Classroom assessments are used to fulfill a wide variety of objectives, from communicating student achievement and evaluating instructional effectiveness to making instructional adjustments and reporting achievement results for accountability purposes.

These objectives are not suitable unless classroom assessments display the requisite level of technical quality that ensure they provide accurate information about student learning. "Teachers are the linchpin in making this work because they are the ones who know the students, make the decisions and deliver the instruction," concludes Dr. Plake. The lessons to be learned from good classroom assessment practices are tremendous and the rewards are invaluable. ■

**Your feedback
helps us improve.**
Please take a moment to

Grade this article

Comments

grade this article and send us your comments.

- A** This article is excellent. Do more of these!
- B** This article is interesting. It presented helpful ideas and information.
- C** This article is OK. It is somewhat interesting, but I already knew a lot of what it has to say.
- D** I did not find this article interesting.



[Keynote Address](#) | [Coffee Break](#) | [View from the Front of the Class](#)
[s](#) | [Spotlight](#) | [Data in Action](#) | [How Would You Score This?](#) | [Ask EQAO](#)
[Survey](#) | [Join our team](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street,
Toronto ON M5B 2M9
888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • www.eqao.com



Special Conference Issue

Spotlight



Celebrating the success of an Ontario school

Teresa Tafaro, Principal
Karin Kurkcuyan, Literacy Coach
Katherine McKeown, Grade 1 Teacher
 Roden Public School
 Toronto District School Board

Roden Public School in Toronto's inner city is a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic junior school serving 311 students from families who speak a total of 17 different languages. In 2005, the Ministry of

Education designated Roden as a Turnaround school.

With a view to strengthening the writing and readings skills of the great number of the primary children who were struggling at level 2 or under, Principal Teresa Tafaro and her dedicated staff launched a series of initiatives. They pooled expertise, best practices and data to devise strategies that have yielded exciting results.

The EQAO Grade 3 writing scores for 2006–07 were the highest ever at 66%, up from 53% the previous year and 31% in 2004–2005. Writing scores for Grade 3 show a similarly positive trend, with 2006–2007 at 74 %, up from 65% the previous year and 44% in 2004–2005. The Roden story shows that improvement begins with dialogue.

In 2005, with support from the Ministry, the principal set up two Professional Learning Communities. Initially, these were directed by the principal and the Literacy Coach Karin Kurkcuyan, but teachers soon took ownership.

It was at these PLCs, as well as at other staff meetings, that purposeful analysis of data became a standard, and popular, agenda item. Together, administration and staff reviewed EQAO data, CASI, DRA, report cards, special education information, suspension records and early development instruments for insights that could be linked back to classroom assessments.

“Staff at Roden, who had always viewed themselves as learners as well as teachers, added researchers to their self-descriptions,” says Katherine McKeown, Primary Chair and Grade 1 teacher. This new perspective was triggered by the PLC meetings at which EQAO data was offered as fodder for thought for all teachers, not just those in the Grade 3 and Grade 6 classrooms. “We used to feel the EQAO data didn't affect those of us who weren't teaching Grade 3 or Grade 6, but now we see our school's EQAO results, and other data, as a reflection tool that informs our teaching practice and identifies where we may improve on our practices,” says

Mrs. McKeown.

As an example, Mrs. McKeown recalls a junior division teacher shared at a PLC that her students were struggling with navigating through text. One outcome is that Mrs. McKeown now duplicates math sheets for her Grade 1 students on a white board so that together the class can identify and examine the key instruction words that appear on their sheets. “We have rich discussions about the difference between draw and print,” said Mrs. McKeown. “We no longer assume children know this unless it has been explicitly taught. We also talk about whether the illustrations are there for decoration or to help guide us. I’m hoping that if we do this repeatedly in Grade 1, students will gain the confidence to navigate between the information they need and the information they don’t need by Grade 3.”

Continual cycles of reflection

With teachers approaching data to make connections between findings and classroom improvements, the school adopted the Teaching Learning Critical (TLC) Pathway. Literacy Chair Karin Kurkcuyan explained how Roden follows that pathway. The first step is gathering data, which could be EQAO, running records, CASI, etc. The second step is to identify areas of greatest need. Next, the staff reviews current practices and creates a data wall, with rubrics, and culminating tasks using student exemplars. Together, the divisions decide on student gaps, and what the teachers will focus on in classrooms over the next six to eight weeks. The next step is moderated marking and the sharing of findings. A new cycle begins every six to eight weeks.

Areas of challenge for Roden

The TLC Pathway is instrumental in helping staff act on areas of challenge discovered through looking at EQAO data and other assessment tools. The gathering of data led staff at Roden to determine the following:

- Students needed more explicit instruction in comprehension, in particular in inferring and making connections.
- Students needed more instruction and opportunities to respond to open response questions.
- Students needed to work on conventions in writing in both primary and junior divisions.
- EQAO questions targeted a higher level of Bloom’s Taxonomy than had been sought in the classroom.

Action strategies that work

To address the identified needs, staff implemented numerous initiatives. These included:

- Reviewing professional readings for models, notably *Reading with Meaning* by Miller and *Asking Better Questions* by Morgan and Saxton to help develop higher order thinking. Other resources the staff used were *Reality Checks* by Tony Stead, *Strategies that Work* by Harvey and Goudvis, and *Units of Study* by Calkins.
- The teachers created a “living data wall” which is updated regularly (using DRA and running records scores) and used as a basis of discussion at each PLC.

- The primary division created long range divisional plans for the instruction of comprehension strategies. Teachers collaborated on a chart that lists seven literacy skills: making connections, mental imaging, inferring, asking questions, determining importance, synthesizing information, and repairing understanding.

For each, the teachers determined the appropriate grade in which to introduce/touch on this skill, teach & assess it or extend and review strategies to reinforce it. For example, asking questions is introduced in JK/SK, and taught and assessed in Grades 1 through 3. Synthesizing information is touched on in JK to Grade 2, and taught and assessed in Grade 3.

- The primary division also created read aloud book bins specific to comprehension strategies, such as questioning, making connections, schema, inferring, etc.
- Collectively, staff developed questions for each level of Bloom's Taxonomy for popular read alouds.

"We're now constantly thinking about how purposefully we are delivering a lesson," says Primary Chair Mrs. McKeown. "The question we ask is 'Why am I doing what I'm doing? What are the links to the teaching objectives?'"

Planning with links in mind

To help determine those links, Ms. McKeown says taking a funnel approach to planning has proven extremely effective. It used to be that she wrote out only long range and daily plans. "I had in my mind what I was going to do for the term and the week, but I only documented in detail the long range and daily plans," she explains. Now, she has added two other pieces to her reverse pyramid template. At the top are her long range goals, then using backwards planning, she fills out "term at a glance," linking curriculum expectations to culminating task and lessons, which she next narrows down to "week at a glance." At the tip of her upside pyramid are daily plans.

Kindergarten Night makes a difference

The gathering of data beginning in JK as a launching pad for purposeful discussion is a pivotal practice at Roden, and one which has already led to many significant successes, says Principal Teresa Tafaro.

A few years ago, Roden adopted the Early Development Instrument, a tool to gauge school readiness of JK and SK children by measuring such factors as social competence, emotional maturity, cognitive knowledge, communication skills and general knowledge. Data showed that the SK students scored low on language acquisition, social development and independence. Discussions about this finding prompted the administration and primary division to develop **Welcome to Kindergarten Night**, which is now held annually in May.

Every student who registers in JK (or SK for the next year) receives a bag with books, Playdoh, magnetic letters and numbers, scissors and construction paper. Teachers at Roden credit this initiative with contributing to the vast improvement in Grade 1 reading skills. Kindergarten teachers report that students are beginning school with a high level of motivation, and with greater skills, such as recognition of books in the classroom that they received in their welcome bags, and knowing how to hold scissors.

Suspension records prompt change

A review of suspension records also prompted action. Ms. Tafaro and her staff revisited suspension records and noted 14 suspensions in 2005-2006, a number she and staff were determined to reduce. They succeeded. Suspensions dropped over the years to just four between September and early December 2007. The principal has identified professional development as being a critical factor. Staff have extended their knowledge of independent learning plans and differentiated instruction which has reduced student frustration.

EQAO as launching pad for dialogue

Staff at Roden view the EQAO Detailed School Results and other EQAO documents as valuable for providing interesting insights that fuel dialogue, notes Literacy Coach Ms. Kurkcuyan. "The first time we saw the EQAO **Framework Document** we thought it was a very powerful piece, and were amazed at the detailed information it contains. We were surprised to discover that it gives you a blueprint of the assessment for a given year." The Framework Document is available on the EQAO website well before the assessment. The Item Information Reports, Student Booklets and Scoring Guides are also discussed in depth.

Dialogue is the key

"Anytime you can release people in this profession to get together and talk about their students, their classrooms, what they can change, their challenges and successes, you have an invaluable exchange," said Principal Tafaro.

With that in mind, on a recent PD Day, Primary teachers at Roden hosted teachers from a school within its family to share expertise. The teachers reported it was a "fabulous experience" added Ms. Tafaro, "Everyone loved sharing their ideas and as importantly receiving feedback."

The Principal also conducts five-minute walkthroughs, purposeful visits to classrooms with a specific objective in mind, such as to learn more about the use of anchor charts or rubrics in the room. These visits generate stimulating professional dialogue that is supportive and beneficial to staff.

As well, Ms. Tafaro has also reorganized within the school to ensure same grades are close together to facilitate exchanges and that same grade primary teachers share at least one common prep. time for planning.

There's no doubt that the students at Roden are benefiting from the informed professional conversations that happens in the school's staff rooms and in the corridors. EQAO scores shows that in 2006–2007, 66% of Grade 3 students achieved levels 3 and 4 in reading, up from 53% the prior year and 31% in 2004–2005. The improvement in writing was equally significant, with scores rising from 44% in 2004–2005 to 65% in 2005–2006 to 74% in 2006–2007. ■

**Your feedback
helps us improve.**
Please take a moment to

Grade this article

Comments

grade this article and send us your comments.

- A** This article is excellent. Do more of these!
- B** This article is interesting. It presented helpful ideas and information.
- C** This article is OK. It is somewhat interesting, but I already knew a lot of what it has to say.
- D** I did not find this article interesting.



[Keynote Address](#) | [Coffee Break](#) | [View from the Front of the Class](#)
[s](#) | [Spotlight](#) | [Data in Action](#) | [How Would You Score This?](#) | [Ask EQAO](#)
[Survey](#) | [Join our team](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street,
Toronto ON M5B 2M9
888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • www.eqao.com



Special Conference Issue

Data in Action



Using Data to Inform, Improve and Inspire

David Thomas

Director of Education and Secretary to the Board
for the Upper Canada District School Board



View video session.

[Windows](#) | [MAC](#)

Note: When viewed on a Mac, this video works best using the Safari browser.

The Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB) aims to attain a 90% graduation rate by the year 2020, which would be the highest in North America. Speaking at the EQAO conference in Toronto, David Thomas outlined some of the strategies the board is using to move forward on its journey to excellence and the critical role that data play in this process.

Mr. Thomas noted that in 2004 the board launched a 15-year strategic plan to charter a course to improvement. The board organized the multiple goals in its plan by themes: Communications, Resources, Educational Programs and Wellness (CREW). In essence, the UCDSB's overarching objectives are to strengthen communications with students, parents and staff, to ensure that its schools have equal access to resources, to enhance its world-class educational programs and to promote the health and wellness of its students, staff and community.

After a recent 1,000-day review of the plan confirmed numerous advances in every area (including increases in graduation rates and provincial EQAO scores), the board determined it will stay the course and continue to implement the vision encompassed by CREW. The use of data is helping to inform, improve and inspire the board along the way, said Mr. Thomas.



Top CREW goals

The board's goal of a 90% graduation rate by 2020 is supported by several top CREW goals and projects. These include the full implementation of the Michelangelo Project, which supports vulnerable students, takes leadership in small high schools, promotes character development programs and extends the board's wellness program.

Mr. Thomas noted that each of these goals uses data as an awareness tool to prompt a

greater sense of urgency to action. However, he emphasized that his board is careful to make the distinction between urgency and panic. “What worries me,” he noted, “is sometimes we tend to look at data and instead of saying, ‘What can we learn from this?’ we panic. Panic makes for poor decision making.”

A 90% graduation rate

Mr. Thomas explained that while many assume that every child entering junior kindergarten will graduate 14 years later with a diploma, the reality is that school boards across the province have an average graduation rate of 73%. He admitted that a 90% graduation rate is ambitious and to date has not been achieved by any board of education. However, the UCDSB has determined that its initiatives which include credit-recovery programs, new opportunities in co-operative education as well as programs that look after the whole student, such as the Michelangelo Project, are gradually helping to reach its goal for 2020.

“With our goal of a 90% graduation rate in mind, I look at the cohort in kindergarten differently now,” said Mr. Thomas. “It’s compelling to look at the class of children and say, ‘We’re going to get all of you across the line’; and that, of course, inspires the question, ‘How are we going to make good use of data, knowledge and intelligence to help you?’”



The Michelangelo Project

The Michelangelo Project is a UCDSB initiative designed to help students in crisis succeed in school.

After creating a masterpiece from a piece of marble that every other artist in Italy rejected, Michelangelo pronounced that in every piece of marble there is a beautiful statue waiting to come out. “We believe the same goes for every child,” said Mr. Thomas.

This is the philosophy that characterizes the UCDSB Michelangelo Project that, Mr. Thomas said, is an example of how data and information can contribute to making a difference in the lives of students. In the school board office, there is a Michelangelo Wall that provides a column for each of the 100 schools in the board. Under their school’s name, principals record the first name of any student who is suffering from great personal or family stress.

These students are then tracked through such tools as the board’s Dashboard Metric system, which allows administrators and teachers to access both large-scale and individual student information. The intention of the monitoring is to determine and assess strategies to ensure that these vulnerable students don’t fall dangerously behind in their learning. Support may include everything from simply delaying an exam during a time of personal crisis to offering psychosocial help.

“It’s a very powerful act for a principal to write down a child’s name on our Michelangelo Wall and say, ‘This is what we will do to get this student across the line so they get a high school diploma,’” said Mr. Thomas. “When I meet with a principal, one of the first things I do is ask how a particular student is doing. It’s wonderful to see a principal erase a name from the board and say, ‘We think we have this student on the right track.’ Now, it may be that the student’s name has to be put back on the board again in the future, but the commitment is always there to help get every child across the line.”

Austin's story

Mr. Thomas shared the story of a student named Austin as yet another example of how his board recognizes that data ultimately inspires leaders to become aware of and accountable to the individuals in its system. In Grade 3, Austin was at Level 3 in reading and writing, and at level 4 in math. By Grade 6, he had slipped to Level 2 in all three areas. "That told us something was happening," said Mr. Thomas. "So we dug deeper and took a look at various sources of data. We saw an alarming change in absenteeism patterns from the primary years to the junior years. His Ontario Student Record showed four moves, with two in Grade 4. And then we looked at attitudinal information." In Grade 3, Austin reported that sometimes he was a good reader and sometimes he liked to read. In Grade 6, he reported that he was not a good reader and he didn't like to read. In both Grades 3 and 6, he reported that at home, he did not read by himself or with an older person.

The professional opinion of Austin's teacher was that he was very capable. In reviewing the case, Mr. Thomas summed up, "Teacher-driven assessment determines this student can do it. He comes from a home that perhaps doesn't value or have the same love for literature that we would like him to have. And we see his absences have a profound impact and have increased as he has moved through the school system. So how can we use this information and data to inspire us?" Being accountable to Austin prompts such possible strategies as an in-school adult mentor, an independent education plan, meetings with his family and caregivers and connecting with community supports on his behalf.



Leadership in small high schools

The board is using data and information to become a leader in North America's small high schools. With 23 small high schools in its jurisdiction, its objective is to ensure they are the best they can be by sharing these practices. To that end, the board has been holding a series of three-day small high school summits that bring together educators from across Eastern Ontario to celebrate successes and discuss improvements.

Collaboration, innovation, accountability

The school board has created common templates for school-success planning, which are accessible online to principals to encourage the sharing of ideas. "We're moving away from the isolation of the principal in the school to the interdependence of a collaborative culture," said Mr. Thomas. "We must get away from our schools and our classrooms as being the most private act," said Mr. Thomas. "We have to knock the walls down and have people talk about successful practices as they move through."

Collaboration, said Mr. Thomas, is one of three areas of emphasis for the board. The other is innovation, which Mr. Thomas said can take many forms, including an idea that is shared. The third, but equally important factor for the board is accountability "to parents, students, to each other and to the future," said Mr. Thomas. "The moment you say you are using data to inform us, to become aware, you automatically become authentic," added Mr. Thomas. This authenticity leads to attunement, he continued: "In a system that embraces data, we don't use it to judge, but in a trustful way to ask 'How can this inspire our performance at the next

level?”

Character development program

“Another thing we did to inspire our system using data was to look at the scores of six of the highest-performing boards in North America,” said Mr. Thomas. He noted a key lesson was that each of these boards of education emphasized a character development program not just for students, but for the adults in its schools. The UCDSB has since adopted a program that took 1.5 years to develop in consultation with educators, parents, administrators, community leaders and students and encourages adults to model the character traits of caring, empathy, respect and resilience for their students. “I think our character education programming has had the single greatest impact on our board,” noted Mr. Thomas.

Last year, the board sent teams to visit 10 of its highest-performing schools to learn and share best practices with other schools. Mr. Thomas noted that the findings (summarized in the sidebar to this article) made clear the value of positive adult relationships within the school and the powerful results that occur when adults create and demonstrate a caring and respectful environment.

The UCDSB has created a systematic approach to problem-solving using a shared language and professional development, offering workshops in crucial conversation for leaders to strengthen skills in addressing controversial and emotionally charged issues safely, respectfully and nonjudgmentally.



The wellness program

The board’s goal of creating an optimally healthy workplace to facilitate staff and student focus on excellence has led to the launch of its Wellness and Work Life Balance Project. Staff members coordinating the project are analyzing baseline data related to demographics, WSIB statistics, absenteeism and long-term disability to gauge how healthy the workplace is. Staff from human resources will then design a program to

improve employee wellness in diverse categories—mental, ergonomic, cardiovascular, metabolic, dependence issues and financial.

The emphasis on wellness is also intended to address the issue of child obesity, with the view that a fit and healthy child is better able to learn. All schools in the system are looking to measure the impact of their daily physical and health education programs.

The impact of data

Mr. Thomas believes that data as a means to help tell a story are an invaluable tool for the UCDSB. But he urged that the use of data must be paired with clarity of purpose and trustworthy sources. To make his point, he shared a cartoon that portrays two astronomers looking to the sky. One, peering through his telescope, exclaims excitedly, “I think I’ve discovered the next big black hole.” The other responds, “I think we should take off the lens cap.”

The UCDSB’s 16 Traits of High-Performance Schools

1. High expectations for all students and staff
2. Caring and respectful environment where adults respect students
3. Positive adult relationships, focused on student results
4. Principals as instructional leaders
5. Character education embedded in curriculum, pedagogy and school culture, and modelled by adults
6. Strategic and targeted professional learning for all staff to strengthen instructional effectiveness
7. A strong culture of accountability
8. A School Improvement Planning process
9. The alignment of school budgets with school success plans
10. The use of EQAO data as a meaningful information source
11. Data-driven decision making
12. Systematic monitoring of student progress
13. Assessment-driven instruction
14. High levels of parental and community engagement
15. Effective, large, uninterrupted blocks of time dedicated to literacy
16. Flexible and responsive grouping of students for instruction

Your feedback helps us improve.

Please take a moment to grade this article and send us your comments.

Grade this article

Comments

- A** This article is excellent. Do more of these!
- B** This article is interesting. It presented helpful ideas and information.
- C** This article is OK. It is somewhat interesting, but I already knew a lot of what it has to say.
- D** I did not find this article interesting.



[Keynote Address](#) | [Coffee Break](#) | [View from the Front of the Class](#)
[s](#) | [Spotlight](#) | [Data in Action](#) | [How Would You Score This?](#) | [Ask EQAO](#)
[Survey](#) | [Join our team](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street,
Toronto ON M5B 2M9
888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • www.eqao.com



Special Conference Issue

How Would You Score This?

Try your hand at scoring a student response!

Use the rubric below to score this Reading item from the Primary Division Assessment and then check out the rationale for the correct code.



Sample Question and Answer

Do You Need More Sleep?

Have you ever wanted to stay up all night? It's not really as much fun as you think, and it's not good for your mind or body.

If you don't get enough sleep, you can feel grouchy, and your body might become weak, causing you to become sick. There's something else, too. Not getting enough sleep also makes it harder to remember things. You may not be able to do your best work at school.

Most people find some things, such as reading or working on math, harder to do when they don't get enough sleep. For every hour of sleep you miss, it takes more time and energy to solve problems.

Sleep is one of those things every animal needs (like air, water, food and exercise). Some animals, such as dolphins, take very short naps throughout the day. However, humans need to sleep for several hours at a time. It takes about 10 hours of sleep (fewer for adults) to help you feel well the next day.

Getting enough sleep is important, because bedtime is when your body rests its tired muscles, builds up energy and gets itself ready for the next day. It's also when your brain reviews what you've learned, which helps it make sense of the things you have seen, heard



Quick Tips:

Consider posting the open-response language rubric along with the anchor papers on your classroom bulletin board, so students can reflect on their progress toward the provincial standard.

Useful Resources:



Sample Student Assessments and Scoring Guides can be downloaded by educators, parents and students to support improvement:



and thought about during the day.



Do you think more sleep would help you perform better at school? Explain using information from the selection and your own ideas to support your answer.

Yes, I think getting more sleep will help you perform better at school because you can do work, you will have more energy, you won't get grouchy and you can get better grades.

EQAO Grade 3 Generic Rubric

Code	Description
10	• response does not refer to ideas and information from the reading selection • response indicates a significant misunderstanding of the reading selection; ideas and information from the reading selection are inaccurate
20	• response addresses only part of the question • response is developed with limited support; ideas and information from the reading selection are minimal, vague and/or irrelevant
30	• response addresses the complete question • response is developed with some accurate, specific and relevant ideas and information from the reading selection; some ideas and information are inaccurate, vague and/or irrelevant

40

- response addresses the complete question
- response is developed with accurate, specific and relevant ideas and information from the reading selection

[View score and rationale](#)

Your feedback helps us improve.

Please take a moment to grade this article and send us your comments.

Grade this article

Comments

- A** This article is excellent. Do more of these!
- B** This article is interesting. It presented helpful ideas and information.
- C** This article is OK. It is somewhat interesting, but I already knew a lot of what it has to say.
- D** I did not find this article interesting.



[Keynote Address](#) | [Coffee Break](#) | [View from the Front of the Class](#)
[s](#) | [Spotlight](#) | [Data in Action](#) | [How Would You Score This?](#) | [Ask EQAO](#)
[Survey](#) | [Join our team](#) | [Contact Us](#)
 Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street,
 Toronto ON M5B 2M9
 888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • www.eqao.com

A Teacher's Resource for Large-Scale Assessments

EQAO CONNECTS

WEBMAG

Winter 2008

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE



Special Conference Issue

Fast Facts



1. 450 delegates participated in the EQAO conference held on November 29–30, 2007.
2. 71 school boards attended.
3. 51 provincial partners attended.
4. 10 provincial schools and school authorities attended.
5. 6 plenary speakers presentations were webcast live on the EQAO web site.
6. 18 English-language and 8 French-language breakout sessions were offered for delegates to attend.



Keynote Address | Coffee Break | View from the Front of the Class
| Spotlight | Data in Action | How Would You Score This? | Ask EQAO
Survey | Join our team | Contact Us

Education Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street,
Toronto ON M5B 2M9
888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • www.eqao.com

A Teacher's Resource for Large-Scale Assessments

EQAO CONNECTS

WEBMAG

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

We appreciate learning your response to our survey question. We'll report back on significant findings in our next issue.

EQAO Connects WebMag: Survey Question Suggestions

Which of the following EQAO reports or documents do you use?	Please check			
	Elementary / Junior	Grade 9	OSSLT	How useful are these materials?
1. Detailed school reports				Not useful Useful Very useful
2. Profile of Strengths and Areas for Improvement				Not useful Useful Very useful
3. Item Information Report: Student Roster				Not useful Useful Very useful
4. Summary of Results and Strategies for Teachers				Not useful Useful Very useful

How do you use EQAO reports? (Check as many as apply)

1. In discussion during whole school staff meetings
2. In discussion with other grade team staff
3. In discussion with other subject team staff
4. In discussion with the principal
5. In discussion with feeder school staff
6. In discussion with students
7. In discussion with parents
8. On my own

Education Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street, Suite 1200, Toronto ON M5B 2M9
Telephone: 1-888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • <http://www.eqao.com/>

A Teacher's Resource for Large-Scale Assessments

EQAO CONNECTS

WEBMAG

Winter 2008

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE



Special Conference Issue

Ask EQAO!

**Curious about EQAO and large-scale assessments?
Share your questions. EQAO will answer common queries
in the next issue.**

Are EQAO's Primary and Junior Division Assessments consistent with national and international assessments?

The definitions of reading, writing and mathematics for the primary division assessment are consistent with the definitions of these terms for other national and international assessments in which Ontario students participate.

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), Administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (Grade 4)

Readers are regarded as actively constructing meaning and as knowing effective reading strategies and how to reflect on reading. . . . Meaning is constructed through the interaction between the reader and text in the context of a particular reading experience (Mullis, Kennedy, Martin and Sainsbury, 2006, pp. 3–4).

The primary division assessment shares this view of readers and how they construct meaning. PIRLS does not assess writing.

PIRLS assesses the reading skills of nine-year-old (Grade 4) students. It is conducted under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement every five years in over 40 countries around the world.

In Ontario, Grade 4 classes in 200 randomly selected schools participate.

The PIRLS assessments help to determine trends in children's reading literacy achievement and policy and practices related to literacy. Countries that participate collect valuable information about students' performance in reading, as well as home, school and classroom influences on that achievement.



Questions

Your question will be received anonymously.
EQAO will not be able to respond individually
to questions submitted through this box.

Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), Administered by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (Grades 4 and 8)

The mathematics assessment framework for TIMSS is framed by two organizing dimensions: a content dimension and a cognitive dimension. Each dimension has several domains. The mathematics content domains in TIMSS are Number, Algebra, Measurement, Geometry and Data, which are aligned with the content strands in *The Ontario Curriculum* and thus with those assessed by EQAO's primary division assessment. The cognitive mathematics domains in TIMSS include knowing facts and procedures, using concepts, solving routine problems and reasoning. These domains are detailed below.

Cognitive Mathematics Domains

Knowing Facts and Procedures: Having the factual knowledge (the basic language of mathematics and the essential mathematical facts and properties) and using it to solve routine problems.

Using Concepts: Making connections between mathematical concepts to judge the validity of mathematical statements and to create mathematical representations.

Solving Routine Problems: Solving problems similar to those encountered in mathematics textbooks.

Reasoning: Observing the facts and making conjectures to solve non-routine problems.

The mathematics component of the primary division assessment aligns with the content domains of the TIMSS assessments and considers mathematical processes and the above cognitive domains in its design and development. It also recognizes that several of these domains are present in each problem-solving task and that they cannot easily be separated. The primary division assessment does not assess every aspect of mathematics that is assessed by the Grades 4 and 8 TIMSS assessments, nor does TIMSS assess every aspect of *The Ontario Curriculum*. Notwithstanding, the primary division assessment is well aligned with the TIMSS assessments.

TIMSS assesses the mathematical learning of Grades 4 and 8 students in over 60 countries around the world, and it is conducted under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement.

In Ontario, over 7000 students in Grades 4 and 8 in randomly selected English- and French-language schools participate.

The TIMSS assessments are dedicated to improving the teaching and learning in mathematics and science for students around the world. TIMSS provides data about trends in mathematics and science achievement over time.

For questions regarding this **web magazine**, please e-mail us at eqaoconnects@eqao.com.

For general inquiries about EQAO requiring an individual response, please use our [general inquiries form](#).



[Keynote Address](#) | [Coffee Break](#) | [View from the Front of the Class](#)
[s](#) | [Spotlight](#) | [Data in Action](#) | [How Would You Score This?](#) | [Ask EQAO](#)
[Survey](#) | [Join our team](#) | [Contact Us](#)

Quality and Accountability Office, Suite 1200, 2 Carlton Street,
Toronto ON M5B 2M9
1-888-327-7377 • Fax: 416-325-0831 • www.eqao.com