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By Marguerite Jackson,
Chief Executive Officer

As educators, we continue to value learning communities for our professional growth and enrichment. The articles featured in this issue of EQAO Connects embody the spirit of evaluation and improvement.

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Coffee Break

Interview with Jim Kyte, Former National Hockey League Player

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View from the Front of the Class

Improving Literacy: A Cross-Curricular Approach

Susan Melville, mathematics, chemistry and Section 23 teacher at Sudbury Secondary School, discovered that incorporating literacy strategies into her non-language subjects pays off for both teacher and students. What's more, her cross-curricular approach to literacy is contributing to student success on the

OSSLT.

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The Key to Good Assessments

Formative Assessment: Practice Makes Perfect

Kristen Clarke, Former Cross-curricular Department Head for Assessment, Evaluation and Literacy at Applewood Heights Secondary School provides four strategies that can help junior-, intermediate- and senior-level students and teachers use formative assessments more effectively to improve student learning.

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St. Aloysius Separate School, located in Stratford, discusses its experience with teacher moderation, a collaborative assessment method used to measure and improve student achievement.

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Looking through the Demographic Lens

**Peter C. Moffatt, retired Director of Education, Grand Erie District School Board, and Education Consultant;
and Michael Kozlow, Director of Data and Support Services, EQAO**

The demographics of a school are one of its givens. While a school cannot alter its demographic context, it can certainly learn valuable lessons from it.

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Try your hand at scoring a student response!

Take a look at this writing item and student response from the

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test. How would you score it? The rubric and correct score are provided.

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Welcome



Marguerite Jackson
Chief Executive Officer

As educators, we continue to value learning communities for our professional growth and enrichment. I'm pleased that the feedback that EQAO has received on the first few issues of *EQAO Connects* indicates that this web publication, with its articles by educators for educators, is becoming an appreciated resource for Ontario's education community.

The articles featured in this issue of *EQAO Connects* embody the spirit of evaluation and improvement. You'll find an inspirational interview with Jim Kyte, the first legally deaf player in the National Hockey League, as well as articles from exemplary teachers and principals who are playing a pivotal role in the success of their students.

Our goal with this publication is to continue delivering information that inspires and informs while helping you make the most of evidence-based decision making in your support of student achievement. To that end, I encourage you to participate in this issue's survey. As we gain a better understanding of how you use the information in these pages, we too will have an opportunity to base our improvement planning efforts on solid data. ■

Marguerite Jackson

CEO, EQAO



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Coffee Break



Interview with Jim Kyte, Former National Hockey League Player

Ottawa native Jim Kyte was the first-round draft pick of the Winnipeg Jets in 1982. The first legally deaf player to ever play in the National Hockey League (NHL), he enjoyed a 17-year professional hockey career, including 13 seasons in the NHL with Winnipeg, Pittsburgh, Calgary, Ottawa and San Jose. Jim was nominated twice for the NHL's Masterton Trophy, an award given to the NHL player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.

He has been awarded many honours for his community service and was nominated for the NHL's King Clancy Award, for exemplifying leadership qualities both on and off the ice.

- 1. Your remarkable path to a career in the NHL required hard work, exhaustive preparation and a clear sense of purpose. What lessons have you learned that might be of value to those who are charged with the education of today's young people?**

A teacher can have an incredible impact on a person's long-term development. It's up to you if it's going to be a positive or a negative one. As W.C. Fields once said, "Attitude is more important than the past, than education, than money, than circumstances, than what people do or say. It is more important than appearance, giftedness or skill." A positive attitude towards your students and setting high expectations for them because you believe in their capabilities can instill confidence. Don't judge a book by its cover, because I don't know how many times people told me that I couldn't accomplish something because of my lack of hearing. My parents taught me that I may have a handicap but it isn't a disability. I can accomplish anything with the five Ps— Perspiration (working hard), Positive Attitude, Preparation (working smart), Perseverance (never giving up) and Passion (loving what you do).

- 2. EQAO's province-wide assessments are an indicator of how well students are meeting curriculum expectations. Would you share your experience of the importance of having reliable, objective information to progress toward achieving your goals?**

Reliable and valid assessment is vital for progress in every facet of our lives, not just in

"My Winning Goal Was Better Hearing"



A hockey player for the Ontario Hockey Federation, the first of many who have been named to the list of the best players in the world. The list is a testament to the hard work and dedication of these players, who have spent years perfecting their craft. The list is a testament to the hard work and dedication of these players, who have spent years perfecting their craft.

a hockey analogy, if I had a great shot and good passing and forward skating ability but

couldn't skate backwards very well, I would be a good player but not a complete player. You are only as strong as your weakest area. It is still important to focus on our strengths, because that is what we do best. However, if we are to get better in order to become complete athletes, teachers, principals, CEOs or prime ministers, we need to practise what we aren't so good at. It isn't fun, but it's necessary.

3. **You've said that a parent's role is not to fight their child's battles for them but rather to be their strong advocate and to ensure they're given fair opportunities. How does that message also apply to educators?**

Life isn't easy or fair all the time. People learn just as much, if not more, from their failures as they do from their successes. I believe that it's important for kids to develop physical, psychological and emotional calluses in a supportive environment. Students may not enjoy being held accountable for poor efforts on tests or assignments or for poor social behaviour, but they must know there is a standard to meet. Whether you are a pro athlete, an astronaut or a janitor, it takes hard work and perseverance to succeed. As an educator, you must advocate for teaching excellence in the classroom. As a principal, you must not only believe in quality education, but you must also advocate on behalf of your teachers to provide the resources to do their job effectively and to ensure that your students are treated fairly. Except in special circumstances, students need to learn essential life skills to succeed. Time management and task prioritization to meet deadlines are imperative because the hard reality is that life doesn't wait for anyone.

4. **Your successes did not come easily. You faced challenges that others may have considered incompatible with a career in the NHL—let alone a long and distinguished one. You were also not successful in making every squad you tried out for. Success for teachers and principals may also not always rise in a straight line. Given your experiences, what can you share about overcoming obstacles to meet your goals?**

I could write a book about this but the bottom line is that you can fool your colleagues, your boss, your family and your friends, but you can't fool the person looking back at you in the mirror every night before you go to bed. Only you know if corners were cut somewhere along the line during your day. If you gave a 100% effort, you worked smart, and had a positive attitude and a passion for what you were trying to accomplish



do enjoy some success, don't let it go to your head. I learned quickly in professional sport that you are only as good as your last game. It is a very quick trip from the penthouse to the outhouse. Keep your feet on the ground because tomorrow is another day.

and you still didn't meet your goal, you can look the person in the mirror straight in the eye and say to yourself "I did my best, this time." Tomorrow is another day. You only fail when you quit, so perseverance and failure cannot co-exist. How do you persevere? If you don't believe in yourself, why should anyone else? Conversely, if you

5. Traditionally, Ontario school teachers and principals will change schools several times throughout their careers.

Each school brings with it a new set of rewards and challenges. During your professional career, you played for five NHL teams, four in the IHL as well as one AHL club. What insights have you gained about joining and having an impact on a new team that may be of interest to educators?

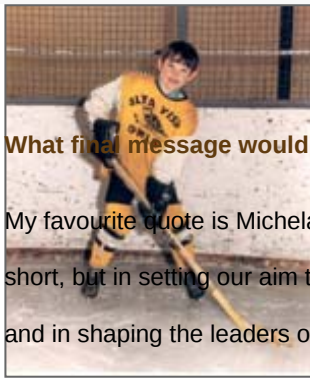


My parents always preached the 10/90 rule: life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it. The only constant thing in life is change. You need to embrace it and look at change as a new adventure. The most important aspect of moving into a new environment is communication. I could only do so much with regard to my hearing, so I needed to be proactive and communicate my needs to my coaches and

teammates and explain some of the strategies that I have used in the past, such as hand signals with the goalie coming back for an icing call, or explaining to the coach that he should not feel uncomfortable because I will always be staring at him behind the bench because I needed to do that in order to know who was up next on the ice. When you are part of a real team, you want everybody to succeed, because if the team is successful you reap the rewards individually as well. Every new team I joined was very receptive to helping me succeed. If you are new to a team, communicate by letting them know what your needs are and be receptive to new ways of doing things. If you are welcoming a new member to your team, communicate by giving them a warm welcome and introduce them to the team's norms and culture.

6. 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?

Mrs. Foster was my Grade 6 teacher. She was near retirement, so she didn't mince words when somebody got out of line. We always listened to the message and not the delivery. She shared personal stories about her life, some that were very humorous, some that were confidence boosters and others that were very sad and scary. She didn't shelter us—she was the first "real" teacher I had—however, we knew she cared deeply about us and our



success and that is why her style was successful.

7. **What final message would you like to share with our educators?**

My favourite quote is Michelangelo's "The greatest danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short, but in setting our aim too low and achieving our mark." Educators play a vital role in the development of our youth and in shaping the leaders of tomorrow. Set the bar high, because our future depends on it. ■

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helps us improve.**

Please take a moment to
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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.



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View from the Front of the Class



Improving Literacy: A Cross-Curricular Approach

Susan Melville, Mathematics, Chemistry and Section 23 Teacher
Sudbury Secondary School Rainbow District School Board

Susan Melville discovered that incorporating literacy strategies into her non-language subjects pays off for both teacher and students. What's more, her cross-curricular approach to literacy is contributing to student success on the OSSLT. She shares some of the literacy initiatives that she

uses in the classroom to help her identify gaps in student understanding and engage even her most reluctant students.

Sudbury Secondary School, an inner-city school of about 800 students, serves a mixed-income community. An arts education school, Sudbury Secondary accepts students into its music, arts, drama and dance programs. These students are bused from the Greater Sudbury Area, while other students are drawn from the city's downtown core. Forty-eight percent of the school's students are enrolled in applied programs and 47% are enrolled in academic programs.

OSSLT success rates at Sudbury Secondary School have increased over time. In 2006–2007, 80% of the fully participating students were successful, an increase of 4% from the previous year and an increase of 9% from 2005–2006.



Two-thirds of the student population at Sudbury Secondary is female. Ms. Melville says that it is particularly interesting to note that literacy strategies to advance learning in math have high appeal for girls, as well as for boys.

Even before she began teaching seven years ago, Ms. Melville was an ardent champion of literacy skills. Her interest was stoked while she worked in industry and volunteered as an adult literacy coach. She recalls tutoring a construction worker in his thirties who wanted to be a foreman but didn't have adequate reading and writing skills, even though he was a high school graduate. "It was then I started to understand that people can have very good coping skills and still be functionally illiterate," said Ms. Melville.

As a teacher and a member of her school's literacy committee, she is dedicated to ensuring today's graduates don't have such

limitations on their potential.

Communications Rubric with All Assessments

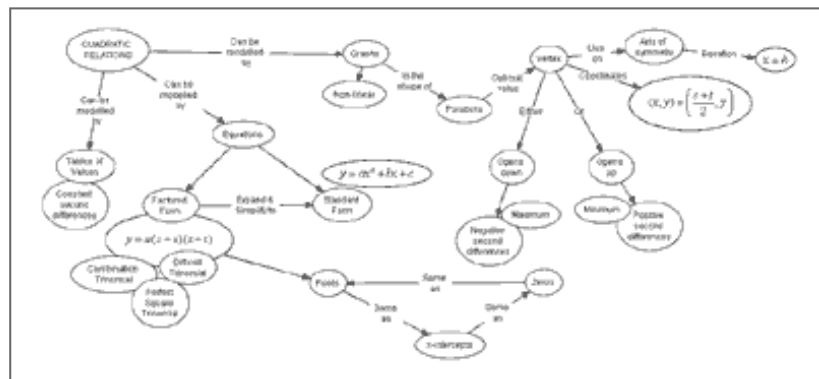
Ms. Melville drives home the message to students that the ability to read and write well is critical to success, even in non-language subjects. To reinforce the point, she gives a communications mark for every type of math assessment, including math tests, projects and journal assignments.

"I always have students write explanations as well as show math solutions," she explained. "I have students say, 'This isn't an English class; why do we have to write?' and I tell them that in whatever they do, they will need to communicate with people and explain their choices."

For every type of assessment, students receive a [communications rubric](#), which is regularly reviewed in class.

Ms. Melville built the rubric, which assesses use of conventions, clarity of expression and organization of ideas, using the Ontario Curriculum achievement chart categories and Rubric Builder software.

Concept Maps



Review of Key Terms in Quadratic Relations

“**Concept maps**, which are sometimes known as word webs, are the who, what, where and why of a topic,” said Ms. Melville. Working on concept maps together in math class not only helps students grasp how the components of a unit link together, but also deepens their understanding of how to approach all graphic information.



Solving Problems Involving Triangles

Ms. Melville builds concept maps together with her students, either on the blackboard or using Smart Ideas software. She explains that starting from the centre of a map, she draws branches to and between subtopics. The class discussion that guides the process allows her to assess student understanding.

Students later receive copies of the map and are asked to explain all or sections of it in their own words. Such maps have also proven to be an effective study and reference tool.

Ms. Melville also reports that the concept maps help students who have been absent to catch up. With a significantly high absenteeism rate in the school, this

Posters

A unit review exercise that doubles as a literacy-skill-building strategy is the creation of posters. Ms. Melville asks students to work in groups of two or three to choose a subject from a list of topics covered in a unit and design a poster. The poster typically must include

- an explanation of the topic in the students' own words,
- a mathematical example and
- a real-life example.

The students then present their poster to the class. "If the students can't explain the concept in their own words to classmates, they are not going to be able to explain it to me on a test," said Ms. Melville. "And when they are explaining it, I have the opportunity to identify and correct misconceptions or gaps in their understanding."

The posters, like concept maps, are also a help to students who have been absent.

QUADRATIC RELATIONS
A song about quadratic relations
to the tune of Time Warp
Written and performed by Joanne Thivierge

It's astounding / Math is fun now
 Math it / Takes control
 But listen closely / not for very much longer
 Math will never be the same
 Quadratic Relations / are not hard
 You've just / got to like them
 The map is your guide/ and you'll be yelling
 Quadratic Relations yeah!
 Quadratic Relations yeah!

[Chorus] And now you look to the left
 See the table of values
 And now you look to the right
 And see the pretty graph
 But it's the equations that really drive you insane
 Quadratic Relations yeah!
 Quadratic Relations yeah!

X-intercepts / and the climaxed vertex
 Zeros and the points / not hard at all
 The axis of symmetry/ can be as big as this country
 And the roots are / not so bad
 All of these are connected
 With our great big topic
 And math will never be the same
 Y equals x minus s and again x minus t
 Quadratic Relations yeah!

Poetry in Math

In an attempt to engage students who dislike working with numbers, Ms. Melville devised a strategy to allow them to demonstrate their understanding in ways they enjoy. She asks students to explain the concepts of quadratic relations through poetry, art or a short story. The typically creative, thoughtful responses are proof of student enthusiasm. [One student's rewrite](#) of the lyrics of the 1970s song "Time Warp" opened with the words "It's astounding / Math is fun now".

Students have the option to work alone or in pairs for this in-class [assignment](#) and can choose to express themes about graphs, equations and properties of quadratic relations in lyric poetry, poetry that follows the Fibonacci sequence, poetry for two voices modelled on the book Math Talk by Theoni Pappas, a short story, a poster or a drawing Ms. Melville says she starts this particular assignment with a demonstration of what math poetry looks and sounds like. "Students are captivated with the idea of working on poetry in math, but it's important to give them a variety of mediums to choose from," she said, adding that for many, poetry is intimidating.

Quadratic Relations yeah!

Well if you don't believe me then you'd better make a graph

Sketch a parabola and then find the zeros

Vertex and slope axis of symmetry

Imagine all the things you can do with these

Model a tough situation

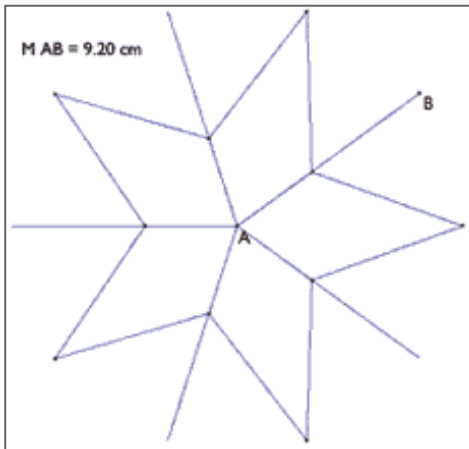
Show off your graph, show how smart you are

Quadratic Relations yeah!

Quadratic Relations yeah!

[QuadraticRelationsSong.pdf](#)

Curves Stitching



[CurveStitchPattern.gsp](#)

The art of sewing beautiful mathematical patterns has proven to be a mathematics and literacy exercise that has lured even the most reluctant students to class day after day.

The assignment is to make a parabola and a circle with thread, string or wool on cardboard. Students must then justify their work by answering a series of questions that ask them to explain, in their own words, the math behind their design. "We've had kids do some amazing work based on mathematical principles. And students who I couldn't get to come to class were there, every day, intently sewing their bristol board," said Ms. Melville.

The project was originally published in the book *Foundations of Mathematics 10*, by Robert Alexander, Barbara Canton, Peter Harrison et al. (Pearson Education Canada, 2000). Ms. Melville found great stitching ideas in the book *Curve Stitching* (second edition) by Jon Millington (Tarquin Publications, 2004).

Picture Books

In Grades 9 and 10 applied math classes, Ms. Melville keeps students intrigued by referring to a "math curse" that haunts her. At the end of the semester, she brings out the book *The Math Curse* and reads the story of a young person who sees math wherever she goes.

Throughout the term, Ms. Melville reads and refers to picture books. "It's a light moment in class, and the students enjoy it," she said. "The good thing about bringing books into class is that you have credibility when you ask the students to write, because reading has been integrated into the math class throughout the semester."

Some of the books that Ms. Melville uses are

- Rod Clement. *Counting on Frank*. Gareth Stevens Publishing: Milwaukee, MI., 1991.
- Ann McCallum. *Rabbits Rabbits Everywhere: A Fibonacci Tale*. Charlesbridge: Watertown, MA., 2007.

- Theoni Pappas. *Math Talk*. Wide World Publishing/Tetra: San Carlos, CA., 1991.
- David M. Schwartz. *G is for Googol*. Tricycle Press: Berkeley, CA., 1998.
- Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith. *Math Curse*. Viking: New York, 1995.

The Positive Outcome

"I think the fact that students in a non-language classroom are being asked to express themselves reinforces the value of literacy for them and positively affects the OSSLT results," said Ms. Melville. "Students perceive that literacy is important, not just to pass the test, but to go forward in their lives." ■

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- 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.



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The Key to Good Assessments



Formative Assessment: Practice Makes Perfect

**Kristen A. Clarke, Former Cross-curricular Department
Head for Assessment, Evaluation and Literacy**

Applewood Heights Secondary School
Peel District School Board

The following four strategies can help junior-, intermediate- and senior-level students and teachers use formative assessments more effectively to improve student learning.

STRATEGY

ONE: Be Informed: What Is a Formative Assessment?

Description: Providing students with a [handout](#) that outlines the term “formative assessment” and the reasons for this type of assessment’s use has many benefits. The term can hold many definitions, but in James Popham’s recent book, *Transformative Assessment* (2008), he suggests that “Formative Assessment is a planned process in which assessment-elicited evidence of students’ status is used by teachers to adjust their ongoing instructional procedures or by students to adjust their current learning tactics.” The formative assessment handout can address student issues regarding the importance of scaffolding and chunking, receiving descriptive feedback, adjusting work to improve next steps and homework and assignment completion. In addition, the use of this strategy will demonstrate support for relevant assessment policy and its continuity. It can also be the starting point for student engagement with formative assessment if you follow up with a quick [true-or-false quiz](#) to assess the students’ understanding of the term formative assessment. Please be aware that schools or boards may have their own assessment and evaluation policies and that these should be reviewed and incorporated prior to the use of this strategy.

✓ **Benefits for students:** By using the terminology in class, students can be better informed of this type of assessment and its purpose while engaging their ability to act on feedback.

✓ **Benefits for teachers:** You can be sure that both students and parents have an understanding of the benefits and positive learning effects of formative assessment. Black and Wiliam’s pivotal article on formative assessment, “Inside the Black Box: Raising Standards Through Classroom Assessment” (1998), outlines the strengths of this instructional strategy to improve student learning and the quality of teaching.

STRATEGY

TWO: What's the Big Idea?

Description: “What’s the Big Idea?” is a simple twist on a strategy called the “Ticket Out of Here,” which is available in the Beers and Howell’s Reading Strategies for the Content Areas (2003). This strategy requires students to complete a simple task prior to dismissal from class. To set the stage for student thought, use an image of Albert Einstein or another appropriate visual on the small [handout](#). Prior to the end of a lesson, instruct your students to reflect on the learning and to write down, in complete sentences, the “big idea” from the day’s lesson. The students should also be required to provide one or two details to support their “big idea.”

✓ **Benefits for students:** This strategy provides time for students to digest the lesson and to ensure that they understand the key concepts or to ask questions.

✓ **Benefits for teachers:** This strategy allows you to quickly see which students grasped the main concepts of a lesson and who needs additional support. It is a starting point for planning differentiated tasks, and it also yields data that can be collated to help build a stronger idea of a student’s overall ability. Popham (2008) explains how selecting the appropriate occasion to identify the need for adjustments to the lesson should be well planned and aligned with the correct assessment strategy in order to allow for optimal instructional adjustments. By using the “What’s the Big Idea?” slip at the end of class, a teacher has embedded an opportunity for lesson adjustment and a place to begin the next lesson.

STRATEGY

THREE: The Big Three

Description: “The Big Three” is a strategy that presents students with three multiple-choice questions to be answered during the lesson. Multiple-choice questions are a quick and easy way to assess a student’s ability as you progress. “The Big Three” can be modified to fit any situation. Provide three questions visually prior to the lesson; this will guide and chunk the learning. Have students jot the questions and their answers down on “[The Big Three](#)” [slip of paper](#), in their notes, or simply have them raise their hands for the appropriate answer. You can collect or note the responses immediately after each question and determine whether to continue with the lesson or to modify and readdress an issue with the whole class, a smaller group or an individual. Alternatively, students can self-assess. Bruce (2001) claims that teachers who use student self-assessment and engage their students in correcting their mistakes show faith in their ability and foster independence, thus increasing the likelihood of student success.

✓ **Benefits for students:** The three questions are useful for students because they guide and chunk the learning throughout the lesson. The three questions also provide an opportunity to take a short break for reflection and to ask necessary questions. Chappuis (2005) contends that teaching students to revise in a focused manner, engage in self-reflection and document their learning is key to developing their own understanding of assessment.

✓ **Benefits for teachers:** By developing the three questions prior to the lesson, you will draw up a more thorough lesson

plan along with integrated assessment strategies. This will allow you to demonstrate the elements of the Ontario College of Teachers' *Foundations of Professional Practice* (2006) that link to assessment.

STRATEGY

FOUR: The Assessment Log

Description: An Assessment Log is a chart that both teachers and students can use to track the students' learning through their formative assessments. After students receive a formative assessment back from their teacher, they take five minutes to review their own work and the teacher's comments. They then complete the [Assessment Log](#) based on their own reflections. Boston (2002) notes that students who reflect on their work and understand the objectives being assessed show greater academic improvement.

In their log, the students note something that they did well in the assessment, something they struggled with, a question or comment that they have about their work or the feedback they received, and finally, a "next step" to identify how they will improve. The Assessment Log can be provided to students as a handout and kept in their workbook, or they can simply keep their own log on lined paper. The key to the Assessment Log is that it be maintained by the student and be focused on his or her own work.

✓ **Benefits for students:** The Assessment Log promotes reflection, attention to detail and self-evaluation. It also ensures that students take responsibility for their learning, and it can be used as an essential piece of information for parents.

✓ **Benefits for teachers:** Teachers can use the log as a tool for parent-teacher interviews, as it clearly outlines students' strengths, areas for improvement and strategies to develop their skills and knowledge further. The Assessment Log comments also reflect the format teachers are required to follow on the standardized provincial report card and which are described in [The Guide to the Provincial Report Card Grades 1-8 \(1998\)](#) and [The Guide to the Provincial Report Card Grades 9-12 \(1999\)](#). (On the report card, educators are required to make three comments per subject area, one each for strengths, weaknesses and next steps.) The log is also a tool for communication between the teacher and the student and their parents if they have any questions or concerns regarding an assessment. Chappuis (2005) outlines the importance of providing descriptive feedback to students on their formative tasks; the Assessment Log will encourage teachers and students to be more descriptive in their assessment of work.

The use of formative assessment to gather data is no longer a new idea, and it is increasingly supported by both classroom teachers and research. *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting: Improving Student Learning* (2008), the new working document on assessment from the Ministry of Education, emphasizes using a variety of types of assessments and presents formative assessment as fundamental. Instead of viewing it as another onerous task that teachers must perform, practise formative assessment to see how it can work for you and your students. Try some of the following with your colleagues:

- Collaborate with a colleague or team to try out various strategies to establish which ones work best for your class or subject area.

- Develop a professional learning community with a focus on formative assessment.
- Boston (2002) suggests that further training and professional development is needed for teachers in the area of classroom assessment. Seek assistance from colleagues, team leaders and consultants to fill any gaps in your knowledge.
- Keep students and parents involved in discussions about the importance of formative assessment.

Practice makes perfect when students engage in formative assessments and when teachers begin to integrate this assessment strategy into their lessons. This strategy will lead to improved student learning and stronger instructional practices. ■

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Spotlight



Larry Murray, Principal and Mathilda Martens-Flear, Literacy Support Teacher.

Celebrating the Success of an Ontario School

St. Aloysius Separate School
Huron Perth Catholic District School Board

School population: 258

Grades: Kindergarten—Grade 8

Principal: Larry Murray

Teacher Moderation in Action

St. Aloysius Separate School, located in Stratford, serves 258 students from junior kindergarten to Grade 8. The school has a relatively stable population, though changes to the school boundaries three years ago and an increasing number of maturing families have resulted in an overall reduction of 100 students. Approximately 10% of the school population is part of a special education program. The school's ESL population is very small. St. Aloysius families are supportive of the school and value education.

While the students at St. Aloysius have consistently scored at or above the provincial average in all subjects, we discovered that students scored considerably lower on open-response questions than on multiple-choice questions in both reading and writing. As a teaching team, we focused on these two areas.



Before setting school improvement objectives, we validated our findings by examining past EQAO assessments, as well as our CASI results, the results of other classroom assessments and records of teacher observations. Once we were sure all the data confirmed the areas of challenge identified by the EQAO data, we were confident in setting a course for improvement.

We wanted to understand the reasons for the areas requiring attention. What we learned was that we didn't have a response

model or consistent framework to assess student responses or to assist students in learning how to build answers using evidence from the text and their own ideas.

Larry Murray, principal

One of the primary strategies chosen by our teaching team was teacher moderation, a collaborative assessment method used to create a framework with which to measure and improve student achievement. This framework builds a common knowledge base about curriculum expectations, levels of achievement and approaches to applying this information to the assessment of student work. Teachers are better able to identify strengths and areas for growth and improvement based on evidence of student learning and develop and share effective practices to support all students. Simply put, teacher collaboration helps us answer the question: "What is an A (or a Level 4)?"

Building a Shared Understanding

Establishing an environment of collaboration and open discussion of student work, and deepening the understanding of the criteria for our own assessments as well as those contained in the EQAO rubrics, was critical to our success.

Our teaching team came together during their professional learning community sessions and engaged in several tasks aimed at building trust, shared understanding and the ability to assess student performance more consistently, effectively and fairly:

1. Each staff member received the same section of an EQAO language booklet containing an open-response question on which St. Aloysius students had a low success rate.
2. The staff read the reading selection and completed the related multiple-choice questions to better appreciate and understand their type and format.
3. An open-response question with a low success rate from the same section was selected for further examination.
4. The EQAO rubric for the question was distributed and discussed, first in pairs, then by the full group.
5. EQAO exemplar responses for the different achievement levels were copied and shared in random order without scoring codes and without the EQAO rationales. In pairs, teachers used the rubric to score each exemplar and determined rationales for their decisions.
6. The entire group shared the scores and rationales.
7. The EQAO rationales for all of the exemplars, shown in random order, were then distributed. Teachers examined the rationales and in pairs determined which corresponded to the exemplars.
8. The entire group discussed their decisions in light of the information in the EQAO Summary of Strategies for Teachers, and finally they discussed the exemplars and rationales and matched them to EQAO's.

Through this process our teachers were better able to understand the EQAO scoring rubrics for the open-response questions. Of

equal importance, our teachers compared their own assessment decisions with those expressed in the EQAO rationales, and thereby formed a shared understanding. This in turn facilitated a more consistent evaluation of student work.

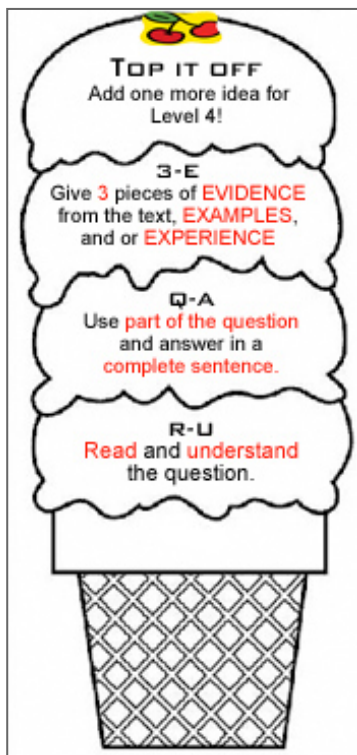
Teachers became more focused and attuned to the range of achievement levels. As a result of our efforts, teachers now have exemplars to refer to as they score their own students' work.

Integrating Teacher Learning into the Classroom

The teaching team took what they learned together in their collaboration exercises and applied it to the classroom, integrating their knowledge into planned areas of instruction, such as poetry, media, genre writing and math. The teachers used the process to assess student work as they made connections among the curriculum, their own evaluations and EQAO assessments.

Teachers implemented this process using whole-class, small-group or independent activities. In addition, when a computer or Smart Board was available, classes examined the exemplars through technology. When this framework was taken to the next logical step, students could become their own evaluators, using the exemplars and rubrics, and thereby improve their own achievement.

Outcomes



Originally developed by St. Ambrose Catholic School, Perth Catholic school Board with refinements by literacy teacher Mathhida Martens Flear and the staff of St. Aloysius Catholic School.

The collaboration built capacity for understanding what makes open-response answers successful. It engaged the teachers in all aspects of the response process, from reading the selection to responding to the test question. The individual and group work as well as the discussion helped them arrive at a deeper and shared understanding of the student responses.

The purpose of this strategy was to engage our teachers and students in a critical assessment of student work with a shared understanding of the levels of achievement in reference to the criteria set out in the rubric. The lessons in teacher collaboration are directly applicable to student instruction and promote higher-order thinking.

We also introduced the “ice cream cone” visual anchor chart to place in each classroom. The model encourages higher-level answers and the making of connections among the components of a full and complete answer. This model acts as a mnemonic device for students as they form each part of their response.

Regular professional learning community sessions supported our work in teacher motivation and built consistency of practice throughout the classes in our school. The primary staff examined the Grade 3 exemplars, and junior and intermediate staff focused on Grade 6. They examined the

questions with low success rates according to school results and the comments in the Summary of Results and Strategies for Teachers.

St. Aloysius found that the EQAO exemplars provided a wealth of information, were directly applicable to student instruction and

will have great impact on student learning and

success. ■

The outcome of all of this is to engage teachers and students in being critical assessors of anonymous student work, then moving to the work of our own students, always in reference to criteria (in the rubric), to meet a high standard of success.

Larry Murray, principal

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Data in Action



Looking through the Demographic Lens

Peter C. Moffatt, retired Director of Education, Grand Erie District School Board, and Education Consultant; and Michael Kozlow, Director of Data and Support Services, EQAO

Students' background and demographic variables, such as family income, mobility and parental education, are some of the components that define a school's demographic context and are what make the school unique. While a school cannot alter its demographic context, it can certainly learn valuable lessons from it.



For the past four years, we have both worked to help educators across Ontario understand how demographic variables can help them better define a school's context and how this insight can assist them in their work to improve student achievement.

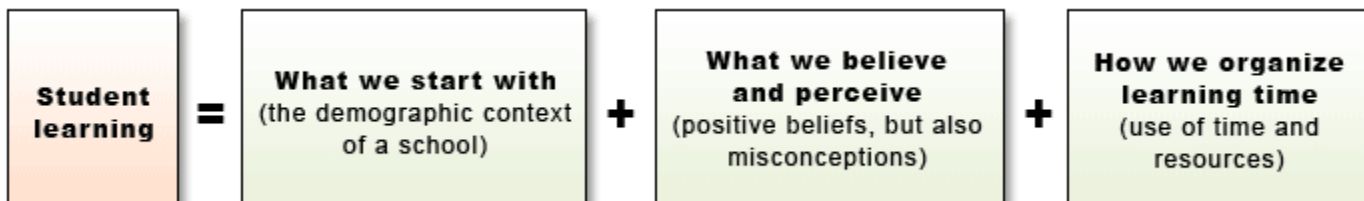


Currently, EQAO is developing an interactive web-based tool that will enable principals and school staff to link demographic variables with achievement results. Thanks to this new application, which is scheduled to be available in fall 2008, principals and school staff will be able to identify schools with a similar demographic profile to theirs but with different achievement results. EQAO's goal for this tool is to facilitate connections and conversations about student achievement and strategies to improve student learning.

Top: Peter C. Moffatt. Bottom: Michael Kozlow

How Demographics Affect Student Learning

From an educator's point of view, student learning can easily be encapsulated by the following formula:



While we should be held accountable for the final two elements of this equation—our beliefs and misconceptions and how we organize our time and resources—there's little we can do to change what we start with: that is, the demographic context of the school. However, we can learn from it and take appropriate action. As a matter of fact, this deeper understanding can help us look at our schools in a new light, change our perspective and help us better allocate our time and resources.

Understanding Demographics Can Help in Many Ways

The benefits of understanding the demographic context of a school community are many. It can help to

- challenge attitudes and preconceptions about students and communities;
- challenge attitudes and preconceptions about students and communities;
- reduce the negative stress and/or increase the positive stress associated with large-scale assessments (see example below);
- remove excuses, so that more effort can be focused on improving student performance than on demographics (see example below) and
- identify demographically similar schools, so that schools looking to improve student performance can learn from demographically similar schools that are achieving better results.

Statistics Canada Census and EQAO Variables

In our approach, we have been using two types of data: Statistics Canada Census variables and school results on EQAO tests. Statistics Canada Census data have been chosen for their reliability and the consistency with which they have been collected. Statistics Canada Census variables are the only demographic data that are available for all schools across the province in a systematic format, and they make valid comparisons among schools possible.

1. The Statistics Canada Census variables EQAO uses are

- average family income and proportion of families with low income;
- proportion of parents with some university education;
- proportion of parents with no high school diploma;
- proportion of mobile families (students moved within the last year);
- proportion of lone-parent families;
- proportion of recent immigrants;
- proportion of Aboriginal students and
- home language.

2. The school results from EQAO tests are

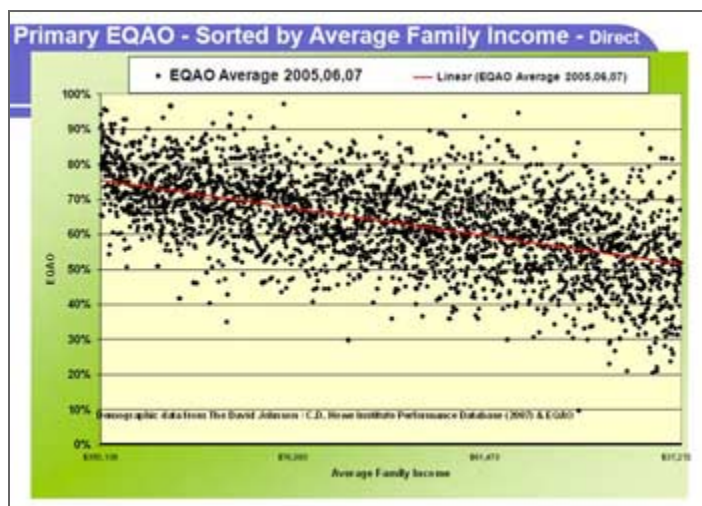
- the results from the past three years and
- improvement from year to year.

What the Demographics Tell Us

The following charts illustrate the correlation between some of the Statistics Canada Census variables, listed above, and the school results from EQAO tests. Each of the following charts indicates a similar trend: the more favourable the demographic variable is (x-axis), the better a school's results on EQAO tests are likely to be (y-axis).

Average Family Income

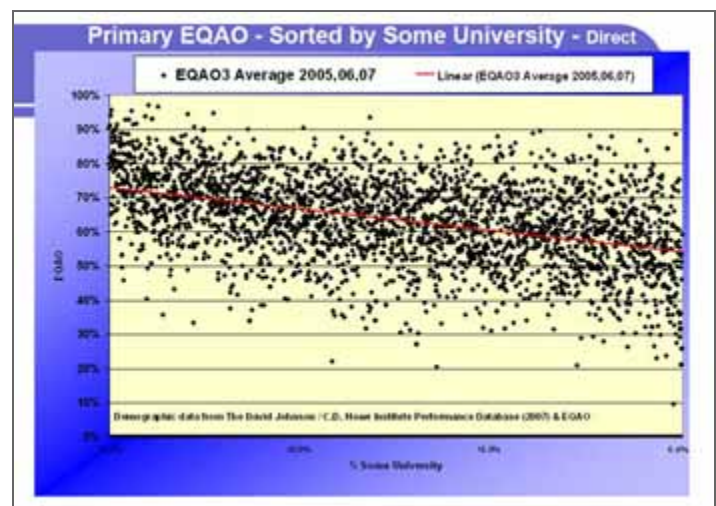
Chart #1



This chart shows the strong correlation between high average family income (x-axis) and good school results on EQAO tests (y-axis). It also demonstrates the wide range of achievement levels within all income categories.

Proportion of Parents with Some University Education

Chart #2



This chart shows the strong correlation between a high proportion of parents with some university education (x-axis) and good school results on EQAO tests (y-axis).

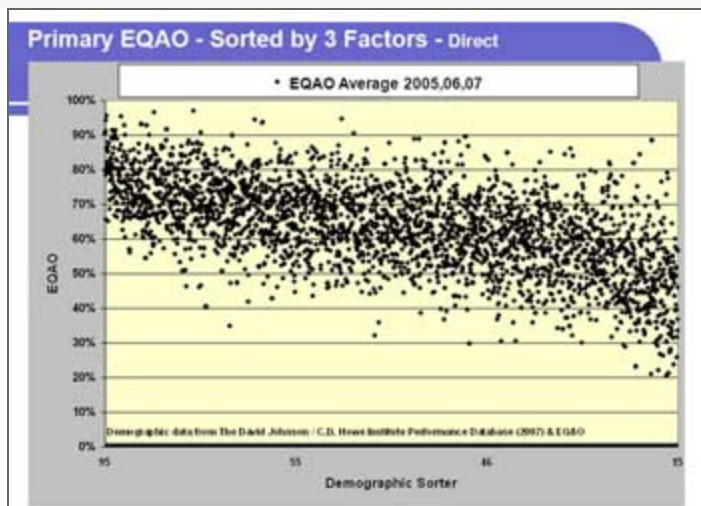
A similar but inverse correlation has been found with respect to other demographic variables, such as

- proportion of parents with no high school diploma;
- proportion of lone-parent families and
- proportion of Aboriginal students.

Chart #3

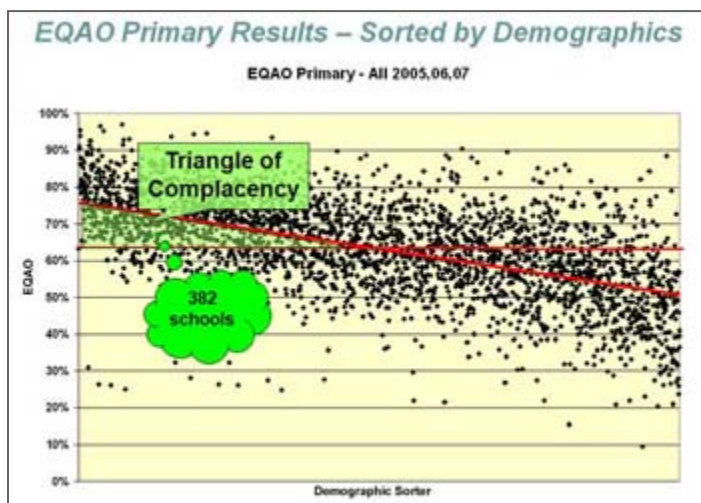
In contrast, the proportion of recent immigrants and the mobility rate within schools are two demographic variables that seem to have little impact on students' performance on EQAO tests.

Overall, if we look at all the eight Statistics Canada Census variables



Removing Excuses or How to Increase Positive Stress

Chart #4



Legend:

- y-axis: school results on EQAO tests
- x-axis: all demographic factors combined (demographic sorter)
- red horizontal line: provincial percentage of students achieving Levels 3 and 4 on the EQAO tests
- red slanted line: line of best fit for the results, based on demographics (relationship between school results on EQAO tests and the demographic sorter)
- green triangle: triangle of complacency

combined (also called “demographic sorter”) and their correlation with school results on EQAO tests, the same trend emerges: demographic indicators do have an impact on schools’ results, as chart 3 combining all factors shows.

It is known that what students bring to school accounts for more than 40% of the variance in their performance on EQAO tests. What we have been trying to do for a few years is to illustrate and quantify this fact, so that these data can become part of our collective dialogue.

Understanding a school’s demographic context can help remove excuses and increase the positive stress when a school is not performing well given its favourable demographics, as chart 4 below illustrates.

Let’s first take an example with schools located on the left hand side of the chart. These are schools from affluent neighbourhoods with positive socio-economic status indicators.

On the [chart](#), the schools that are located in the green triangle do well compared to the overall percentage of students meeting the provincial standard on EQAO tests—the horizontal line—as they perform above it. However, the slanted line shows that these schools do not perform as well as the many demographically similar schools that are above the slanted line.

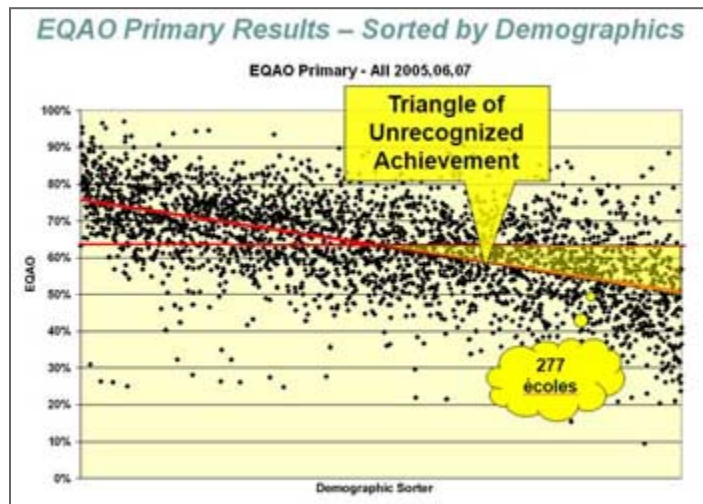
These schools in the green triangle are not living up to the expectations one would have for them based on their demographic profile. There’s very little pressure on these schools to improve their results, as they already perform better than the provincial results. Yet

these are the kind of schools that, given their advantaged demographic profile, can improve their results relatively quickly if they are nudged a little bit. Here it’s all about increasing positive stress.

Decreasing Negative Stress

On the other hand, understanding a school’s demographic context can also help decrease the negative stress on schools that are doing well on EQAO tests given their disadvantaged demographic profile, as the same chart shows below:

Chart # 5

**Legend:**

- y-axis: school results on EQAO tests
- x-axis: all demographic factors combined (demographic sorter)
- red horizontal line: provincial percentage of students achieving Levels 3 and 4 on the EQAO tests
- red slanted line: line of best fit for the results, based on demographics (relationship between school results on EQAO tests and the demographic sorter)
- yellow triangle: triangle of unrecognized achievement (group of schools that are achieving well given their demographics)

Let's now take an example with schools located at the other end of the chart, on the right hand side. These are schools from disadvantaged neighbourhoods with less favourable socio-economic status indicators.

On the chart, the schools in the yellow triangle perform below the overall percentage of students meeting the provincial standard on EQAO tests—the horizontal line. However, these schools do quite well relative to many demographically similar schools (those below the slanted line.)

We think these schools should be celebrated. While their results are below the provincial results, they are doing quite well relative to many demographically similar schools. This shows that, considering their demographic background, these schools are making the right efforts. By celebrating these schools and removing negative stress, we encourage them to keep up the good work so that they can eventually improve further.

The question school staff should ask themselves when they do this

type of analysis is: "If we think we are doing okay, how are we doing

compared to the other schools who are in the same range of demographics?" There may be schools with whom these staff members can talk to find ways to improve student achievement.

A Preliminary Glimpse of a New Web Tool

EQAO is currently developing an interactive web-based tool that will make Statistics Canada Census data and other EQAO data available to schools and school boards during its test-result reporting phase.

With this innovative tool, principals and school staff will be able to examine their achievement results in relation to achievement results obtained by other schools enrolling students with similar demographic backgrounds. It will enable them to evaluate how instructional approaches have contributed to their students' achievement levels.

The ultimate goal is to encourage conversations about student achievement and strategies to improve student learning, and to facilitate discussions about sharing effective practices, which will strengthen school improvement planning.

The main characteristic of this tool will be its flexibility, which will allow principals and school staff to sort and re-sort the demographic criteria to meet their school's particular needs and goals. The tool is scheduled to be available to schools in fall 2008.

Doing this type of demographic analysis should not scare anyone. Such analysis should not be used to cultivate status or to collect weapons or excuses. It is just a starting point, a starting point for a constructive conversation. The demographic lens is another valuable

tool that will help us all focus better on student learning.

If principals locate demographically similar schools with better achievement results, they may communicate with these schools to identify effective strategies. ■

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How Would You Score This? _____

Try your hand at scoring a student response!

Sample Question and Answer

Describe two positive features of living in Canada. Give reasons to support your answer.



One positive feature of living in Canada is the changes in Season. Many other parts of the world do not have drastic season changes like we do in Canada. It can go from -30°C in Winter to $+30^{\circ}\text{C}$ in Summer! Another positive feature of living in Canada is that natural disasters rarely occur here.

~~disasters~~
~~disasters~~

Use the rubric below to determine how you would score this response. Click the button at the bottom for the correct score. You can also use the links in the rubric to view responses that received the other score codes.

EQAO OSSLT Generic Rubric

Code	Description
10	response is not developed or is developed with irrelevant ideas and information View sample student response Sample Student Response

	Two positive features of living in Canada are that there are many activities to partake in all year round, and there is a rather small population in all of Canada.
20	• response is developed with vague ideas and information; it may contain some irrelevant ideas and information View sample student response Sample Student Response Living in Canada is probably the best place to live in the world, because there is so much stuff to do, and there are so many trees and animals. I love how you can just walk out our front door and see a deer or two.
30	• response is developed with clear, specific and relevant ideas and information View sample student response Sample Student Response Freedom and snow, these are two great things about living in Canada. Having the freedom to wear what you want, eat what you want, and express yourself the way you want to is very important in life. Being told how to live your life wouldn't be very fun! Also, the snow in Canada makes you feel happy when you go snowmobiling or snowboarding. It's nice to have different kinds of weather in Canada. Having freedom and snow are two great things about Canada.

[View Score](#)

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

Grade this article

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Comments

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Fast Facts



Observations from the 2008 OSSLT

1. Of those who wrote the test for the first time this year, 84% were successful, maintaining the record levels of 2006 and 2007 and representing an increase of seven percentage points over the past five years.
2. When all first-time eligible students (i.e., those participating, absent and deferred) are factored in, the overall success rate for the cohort is 78%.
3. 93% of students who were eligible to take the test for the first time wrote the test.
4. Students from 785 publicly funded secondary schools in Ontario wrote the test.
5. The success rate for first-time eligible boys has increased by seven percentage points since 2003 to 80% in 2008. The success rate for girls has increased by eight percentage points since 2003 to 88% in 2008.
6. In 2008, males outperformed females on more multiple-choice reading questions relating to the news report. Females outperformed males on more multiple-choice questions on all other reading selections.
7. Students responded more successfully to open-response reading questions that asked them to use information from the selection to support a personal interpretation. Students were less successful in answering open-response reading questions that asked about structural elements, such as the main idea.

8. As in 2007, students in all subpopulations (i.e., students taking academic or applied English programs, males, females, English language learners, students with special needs) performed better on short- than on long-writing tasks.

9. More than 80% of students used conventions in the long-writing tasks in a manner that did not distract from communication.



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WEBMAG

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

We appreciate learning your response to our survey question.

EQAO Connects is created for classroom teachers and school principals, offering best practices, tips and strategies to guide and inspire educators in using data to support student achievement.

Thank you for helping us ensure EQAO Connects remains of real value to educators.

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Have any of the articles provided you with strategies or insights that you've been able to apply : | Yes | No |
| 2. Have you printed or shared with colleagues any information you've gathered from these articles? : | Yes | No |
| 3. Have you forwarded articles you've read to colleagues? : | Yes | No |
| 4. Have these articles contributed to your own professional learning?: | Yes | No |
| 5. Have you downloaded materials from various articles for reference and/or future use?: | Yes | No |
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WEBMAG

Spring 2008

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE



Ask EQAO!

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

**How can elementary teachers and school administrators help parents
and guardians understand the role that the EQAO primary and junior assessments
play in their child's education?**



When discussing EQAO results with parents and guardians, it is important to remind them that EQAO tests are not designed to—nor can any single test ever—provide a complete or definitive picture of what a child has learned. EQAO test results provide a snapshot of a child's achievement, which is an indicator of whether the child has acquired the expected knowledge and skills. The tests serve a valuable purpose and provide parents with a different perspective because the tests measure a student's achievement against a benchmark used for all students in the province. However, they are only one indicator of his or her overall achievement. Ongoing classroom assessments—which assess a child's knowledge, motivation and a variety of other factors—provide the richest and most comprehensive measure of the child's progress. Schools and school boards also use EQAO results to inform school and board improvement planning, classroom instruction and the allocation of resources to support areas of student need.

EQAO Student-Level Results

With the above caveat in mind, teachers and school administrators can show parents how the EQAO results can be used with those from school and classroom assessments to discuss the child's overall progress.

The teacher or school administrator might then discuss information from the EQAO Item Information Report: Student Roster, which shows how the child answered each test question. This information can reinforce the skills that may require additional attention that the teacher may have identified through other assessments. Any evidence of student learning can contribute to the conversation about how parents can provide additional support at home.

Questions

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

- *Item Information Reports: Student Roster* are accessible by school principals on the secure portion of the EQAO Web site.

EQAO School-Level Results

If parents ask about how the school uses EQAO results, the teacher and/or school administrator can explain that the school and the school board use the information for

- school board improvement planning,
- school improvement planning,
- designing professional development for teachers and
- monitoring student achievement.

EQAO test results are most valuable when considered over time. For this reason, EQAO's school, board and provincial reports present performance trends over a five-year period.

Effective Use of Comparative Information

If the parent asks about how the school's results compare with those of other schools, the teacher and/ or school administrator can explain that EQAO does not support comparing schools on the basis of their test results and that the results of one test administered at one point in the year do not provide a valid basis for comparisons of the overall quality of different schools in different communities with different needs.

The analogy we like to use is that EQAO results are an indicator of achievement much as blood pressure is an indicator of health. No doctor would ever offer an overall diagnosis of your health based only on your blood pressure. Blood pressure is an important indicator and a good starting point for further analysis. The same can be said about EQAO results.

The most effective use of comparisons of school results is to look at schools with similar demographics. This could provide valuable insight and opportunities for shared learning among similar schools.

Recommended Additional Resources for Parents

- EQAO Web site
- [A Parent's Guide to EQAO Tests:](#)
- [Questions and Answers for Parents:](#)
- The [Ontario Ministry of Education Web site](#)

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (Ministry of Education) has produced two resources for parents that include tips and practical activities that can be used at home and in the community to help children develop their literacy and numeracy skills.

- [Helping Your Child With Reading and Writing: A Guide for Parents: Kindergarten to Grade 6](#)
- [Helping Your Child Do Mathematics: A Guide for Parents: Kindergarten to Grade 6](#)

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

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