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Winter 2009

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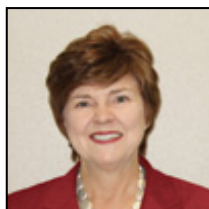
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Special Conference Issue

Welcome



**By Marguerite Jackson,
Chief Executive Officer**

This issue provides you with an overview and highlights of EQAO's third provincial conference: "Large-Scale Assessment: Supporting the Everyday Work of Schools: Balanced Assessment: Completing the Picture."

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Coffee Break



Interview with Dr. Douglas Reeves, Founder, Leadership and Learning Center

With compelling new evidence, Dr. Reeves provides his usual mix of hard-hitting facts, illuminating examples and insightful analysis to help educational leaders at every level have the maximum possible impact on student achievement.

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View from the Front of the Class



**Closing the Gender Gap
Strategies That Work**

Grade 1 teacher Kara Baranoski, from Smith Public School in Grimsby, understands the value of developing strong partnerships within her school community. Passionate in her belief that parental involvement is the key to student success,

Opportunities for Ontario Educators



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she developed a strategy to help improve boys' literacy skills.

And her influence has extended well beyond her own classroom.

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The Key to Good Assessments



Eight Big Ideas to Support Learning for All Students

At the 2008 EQAO conference, Damian Cooper, an independent education consultant, shared "Eight Big Ideas to Support Learning for All Students": Eight simple ideas that apply directly to classroom assessments and can be used easily by teachers.

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Spotlight



Celebrating the Success of an Ontario School

When the staff at Sacred Heart High School, Walkerton, examined the school's OSSLT results over time, it found that writing was the area of challenge for most students. Under the leadership of the principal, Murray Kuntz, literacy soon became a focus for the entire school, as teachers recognized the importance of developing literacy skills across the curriculum.

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How Would You Score This?



Try Your Hand at Scoring a Student Response!

Take a look at the following student response to a reading item from the junior division assessment. How would you score it?

The item, scoring rubric, annotations and correct score are provided, as are sample student responses at other score codes.

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Special Conference Issue

Welcome



Marguerite Jackson
Chief Executive Officer

On November 13 and 14, 2008, EQAO hosted its third provincial conference, "Large-Scale Assessment: Supporting the Everyday Work of Schools—Balanced Assessment: Completing the Picture."

The conference theme was addressed by leaders in Ontario's education system and experts in classroom and large-scale assessment. The sessions explored the roles played by different types of assessment in providing information that supports improved student learning.

Over 950 educators and education partners from across the province attended the conference, and an additional 900 registered to participate via live webcast, including educators from eight Canadian provinces, four territories, 29 American states and some international jurisdictions, such as Columbia, Trinidad and Tobago and Singapore.

This issue of *EQAO Connects* provides you with an overview of the conference and contains articles summarizing a number of its sessions. Also, by clicking the "video on demand" icon located on the upper left side of the *EQAO Connects* home page, you will be able to view, free and on demand, other conference sessions not presented in the webmag.

We are also pleased to continue our regular features "View from the Front of the Class" and "Spotlight," which both highlight successful school-level strategies from exceptional educators. We'd like to thank Kara Baranoski, Grade 1 teacher at Smith Public School in Grimsby, and Murray Kuntz, principal of Sacred Heart High School in Walkerton, for sharing their inspiring stories in our webmag.

I trust that this issue of *EQAO Connects*, as well as the videos on demand, will help you and your teams to enhance your understanding of balanced assessment and support your teaching strategies.

I invite you to continue offering your feedback so that *EQAO Connects* can address the assessment-related topics that will benefit you most in your role as an educational leader. ■

Marguerite Jackson

CEO, EQAO



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Special Conference Issue

Coffee Break



Interview with Dr. Douglas Reeves, Founder, Leadership and Learning Center


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

Founder of the Leadership and Learning Center, Douglas Reeves has worked with education, business, non-profit and government organizations throughout the world. The author of more than 20 books and many articles on leadership and organizational effectiveness, he has been selected twice for the Harvard University Distinguished Authors Series. Dr. Reeves contributed a chapter entitled "Level-Five Networks: Making Significant Change in Complex Organizations," to Solution Tree's 2009 publication *Change Wars*. He is the author of the 2009 ASCD book *Change Leadership in Action* and his monthly column on change leadership appears in *Educational Leadership*. Dr. Reeves has been named the Brock International Laureate for his contributions to education. He has also received the Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the Parents' Choice Award for his writing for children and parents.

1. What are the Leadership and Learning Center's core research findings relating to improving student performance?

First, I think it's important for researchers to acknowledge the shoulders on which we stand. Therefore, before I cite any of the Center's research, I must acknowledge that our work over the years has been influenced significantly by scholars in Canada and around the globe. My work in particular is just a pebble on the mountain of research that supports the general principle that teaching and leadership have a profound influence on educational excellence and equity. While we know that innate ability and demographic characteristics are important, the research finds conclusively that these factors are not determinative, and the success of students in Canada and elsewhere makes that clear. With those acknowledgements in mind, I would say that in the past 15 years our central findings include the following:

- Practices, not programs or plans.** When we study high-performing schools, we find that the salient variables are not the program that they purchase or the elegance of their strategic plans, but rather the actual practices of teachers and school leaders. Two schools can spend the same money on the same program and experience

dramatically different results. The difference is the degree of implementation, not the brand name of the program.

- o **Implementation, not inspiration.** While I believe deeply that professional learning is imperative, the evidence is clear that many traditional models of professional learning are deeply flawed and focused on inspirational rhetoric and an evaluative system in which high praise is “a good time had by all” rather than improved student achievement. At the Leadership and Learning Center, our most effective work is associated with the “seven-to-one rule”; that is, for every one day of formal seminar or workshop training, there should be seven days of direct implementation support in the classroom and school. Professional development that is heavy on exhortation and light on implementation is worse than a waste of time; it makes teachers cynical and robs them of precious time that would better have been devoted to hands-on classroom experience.
- o **Writing, thinking and reasoning assessments, not just multiple-choice tests.** In an era of economic austerity, multiple-choice tests are appealing because they are cheap. By the same logic, we should play hockey using the cheapest possible helmet, or perhaps none at all. The evidence suggests, however, that cheap tests are a false economy, providing the worst of all worlds. They not only eviscerate the curriculum, which might have otherwise included rich and complex analysis and writing, but they validate skills that are not especially helpful in a world in which, I have not, at least so far, encountered a multiple-choice question.
- o **Leadership, not just policy or mythology.** When budgets, student demographics, board policies and union contracts are all the same, what distinguishes some schools from others? The consistent answer is leadership. The best educational leadership combines a deep understanding of instruction and learning along with a commitment to accountability and feedback that is constructive, timely and accurate. These principles suggest that effective educational leaders are not merely conducting white-gloved inspections of classrooms but are sitting on the floor with kindergarteners, walking through the hallways of a middle school among distracted students who know no rank or authority, and engaging with high school students who might teach their elders a few things about technology, relationships and student engagement. The best leaders have at least as many graphs, charts and data displays about their own performance and that of their adult colleagues as they do about student test scores. There is, in sum, not a child in Canada who will be more accountable than the adults are.
- o **Causes, not just effects.** The prevailing accountability policies around the world focus almost exclusively on test scores and thereby provide only a glimpse of the essentials of education. After all, if we were evaluating the health of students, we would want to know more than the “score” they achieve. Despite the teenage obesity crisis, we need to learn not only that students lost weight, but how the weight loss occurred. Was it the result of diet and exercise or eating disorders and drug abuse? Causes matter.



2. Why, in your view, is it so important for student performance that teachers reject the bell curve and establish

strong learning expectations?

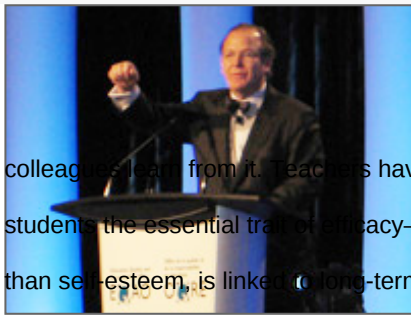
The bell curve, or normal distribution, is a useful technique to describe populations that are symmetrical—a study of the length of the horns of reindeer, for example, is well-suited to this assumption. It is, however, an inaccurate way to evaluate students. Putting aside the social and ethical implications of a system that assumes that no matter how hard they work, half of students will be failures because they are “below average,” the issue is not philosophical but mathematical. If the bell curve were true, for example, half of students would fail their driver’s test, half of aspiring physicians would become neurosurgeons and half of new immigrants would learn English. But our practical experience and wealth of data tells us that, when it comes to education, the assumption of symmetrical distribution—the very heart of the bell curve—is not true. In fact, we have skewed distributions, with a disproportionate number of students succeeding on things that matter—such as driving a car, navigating MySpace or playing Nintendo—and a disproportionate few succeeding in other areas where the salient differences are not in the characteristics of the students but the resources and support that society provides to them. Thus, my first objection to the bell curve is that it inaccurately describes student performance.

Secondly, the bell curve is based on a morally offensive assumption that student achievement is predetermined, as if by the gods, and is not subject to the influences of teaching, feedback, curriculum, nutrition, medical care and a host of other influences. No matter how excellent my instruction, I won’t change the distribution of reindeer horns. But my instruction can have a profound and measureable impact on the shape of the distribution of student achievement. Student achievement in Canada, both as measured domestically and in international comparisons over the past 12 years, makes this case in a clear and convincing manner. If the deterministic bell curve were true, the changes we’ve witnessed would not have occurred.

Thirdly, the bell curve reinforces pernicious assumptions that underlie ineffective teaching, leadership and policy-making. If our job as educators is to separate the sheep from the goats, merely awarding judgments and determining who the next ruling class will be, we hardly need to spend a lot of energy in the classroom, provide opportunities for disadvantaged student or seek to find the spark that engages student interests. Though that perspective still prevails in a few schools, it is the product of the same school of thought that, a century ago, showed with mathematical precision the inferiority of women, Africans, the Irish and Italians, all based on purported cranial measurements (see Stephen J. Gould’s classic work *The Mismeasure of Man*). The defenders of the bell curve in educational circles have the same air of mathematical certainty about them, and they are as wrong as their philosophical ancestors.

3. Could you tell us why it is important that teachers see themselves as “agents of change,” and how this can be related to increased student success?

I’m always curious that change is such a controversial subject, as if the absence of change were a possible choice. Change, growth and deterioration happen whether we want them to or not, so the only question is whether change will be constructive



or destructive. I value deeply a sense of history, along with the teachings of Socrates and other ancients, such as my brother. Therefore my commitment to change is not a rejection of the past, but rather an attempt to help my students and colleagues learn from it. Teachers have a particular obligation to embrace change because they are modelling for their students the essential trait of efficacy—a sense that we are empowered to make a difference in our lives. Efficacy, far more than self-esteem, is linked to long-term gains not in only student achievement but in lifetime satisfaction and achievement. Stanford psychologist Carol Dweck's recent writing on this subject provides persuasive and long-term evidence precisely on this point.

4. You've spoken about the relationship between the academic and behavioural performance of students and their involvement in extracurricular activities. Could you tell us a little more about this?

We're rather good in educational research about providing statistical confirmation of the obvious. But if the relationship between extracurricular activities and student performance were so obvious, then why are our policies and budgets so blatantly contrary to the evidence? My recent writing in *Educational Leadership* on this point is just one piece of a vast pile of evidence that establishes that when students participate in extracurricular activities, they are more engaged in school and have better attendance, better academic performance and fewer behavioural problems. In particular, the greatest advantage occurs when students increase from zero activities to three or four activities. There is little or no gain when the increase is from four to seven or eight activities. Despite these findings, extracurricular activities are routinely on the chopping block when budgets are tight. One of the worst policies in the U.S. is the prevalence of "activity fees," in which families must pay public schools as much as \$500 to \$900 per child in order for them to participate in extracurricular activities. Therefore, the students who might most benefit from improved engagement, attendance, academic performance and behaviour are systematically excluded from those opportunities.

5. Given the significant role that teachers play in the lives of their students, what's the one message you wish every teacher would impart to his or her students?

In the words of my friend Dr. Jeff Howard, founder of the Efficacy Institute, "Smart is not something you are; smart is something you get." Teachers have the incredible opportunity to instill in students a sense of empowerment, of control over their destiny and, most of all right now, a sense of resilience. Every student in our schools either is affected directly or knows someone affected by the global recession.



The fear, hopelessness and despair is magnified by a relentless media barrage of bad news. The classroom is a safe harbour in this storm, a place where hard work, creativity, empathy and friendship all matter, even if the international economy seems to relegate all of these characteristics to the scrap heap. I wish that every teacher could also hear words of thanks for their efforts, but my experience tells me that teachers typically hear those words years, perhaps decades, after their

efforts. Therefore, we must encourage one another. One of the most important obligations of educational leadership is the deliberate, frequent and specific acknowledgement of the efforts of teachers.

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?

I've had many, including my parents and many friends. But two teachers in particular, Mrs. Ernestine Gunzelman in fifth grade and Professor Richard Hilliard in the first year of college, were demanding, confident and inspirational. Both awarded what were, to me, shockingly low grades, and both knew how to transform that shock and disappointment into resilience, hard work and deep satisfaction. They both inspire me to this day, and the songs of Mrs. Gunzelman and the poetry of Professor Hilliard ring in my mind on a regular basis. ■

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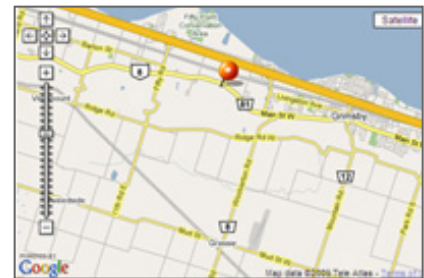


Closing the Gender Gap *Strategies that Work*

Kara Baranoski, Grade 1 Teacher

Smith Public School (Grimsby)

District School Board of Niagara



A highly accomplished professional with a rich background of teaching experience from junior kindergarten to Grade 6, Kara Baranoski understands the value of developing strong partnerships within her school community. Passionate in her belief that parental involvement is the key to student success, she communicates clearly and regularly with parents and empowers them through invitations to participate in the academic development of their children. Since her arrival at Smith Public School six years ago, Ms. Baranoski's influence has extended beyond her own classroom to her strong collaborative relationships throughout the school.



Smith Public School, in Grimsby, serves approximately 250 students from junior kindergarten to Grade 8. Most classrooms have combined grades. The absence of formal special education and English language learner classes reflects the homogeneity of the school population. For children who do require special assistance, support staff is available. All children are bused to school.

Even before 2005, when EQAO data showed a gender gap in favour of girls on the literacy component of the Grade 3 EQAO assessment, Ms. Baranoski noticed an imbalance in the levels of literacy of the boys and girls entering her kindergarten classes. Curious about the causes, she attended an Ontario Ministry of Education conference to discuss *Me Read? No Way!* Her attendance led her to submit a proposal to the Ministry for an approach to closing the gender gap board-wide, as well as to a three-year study grant aimed at improving boys' literacy skills in her own school.

Already asking questions and discussing this topic, Kara Baranoski soon translated the EQAO gender data into action in her junior

and senior kindergarten classroom. She recognized and acted upon the need to examine her own instructional practices and to increase communication with parents prior to their children's entry into kindergarten. To this end, Ms. Baranoski provided parents with several workshops teaching them how to prepare their children for kindergarten, familiarizing them with the different reading stages that children progress through and informing them of kindergarten curriculum expectations. In addition, she arranged for a speech pathologist to speak to parents about the speech and language milestones. Particular emphasis was placed on helping boys to enter kindergarten with the same skills that girls of the same age tend to possess.



For the next three years, Ms. Baranoski worked with the same core group of children, from junior kindergarten to Grade 1, for continuity and to track their academic progress. In the meantime, her leadership role in the school grew as a consequence of her involvement in the board-sponsored literacy study. Determined to use the grant money to the greatest effect, she equipped not only her classroom but collaboratively spread resources throughout the primary division and the learning resource centre. The reading materials purchased covered all areas of the curriculum and catered to a wide variety of interests. The major focus was on giving students, especially boys, the best possible start by building a rich and diverse collection of literature to capture their interest and make reading pleasurable and enlightening.

Ms. Baranoski's cross-curricular approach to literacy has contributed significantly to the tremendous success boys at this school are now experiencing and has influenced changes school wide.

"My teaching day," she explains, "is not a language block of 100 minutes and then on to the following subjects. I really look at my teaching day as 300 minutes of language. I really think that has changed how much the children have received enriched literature because I constantly try to find picture books that will tie in to all the subjects. I use them as an introduction in most lessons, whether they are for math or for science or social studies or music. That has enveloped the children in a literacy-rich environment."

By 2008, Ms. Baranoski's and her colleagues' efforts to improve instruction and planning in the primary division were so successful that the gender gap virtually disappeared: the boys and girls at Smith Public School scored equally well on the literacy component of the Grade 3 EQAO assessment.

Using EQAO Data for Student Achievement



Having reached her goal, Ms. Baranoski joined the primary staff in examining the EQAO data more deeply to pinpoint specific gaps in skill development. Ms. Baranoski credits the way in which EQAO presents its results with helping to promote consistency and continuity throughout the school. Recently, for example, when the staff met as a team, it discovered that all grades were struggling with the skills of making inferences and connections. From there, the staff decided to use SMART goals and concentrate on specific skills.

Techniques from EQAO's [Summary of Results and Strategies for Teachers](#) and from the mentor texts are proving useful. Again in the interest of ensuring the use of best teaching practices and uniformity in presentation, teachers at Smith Public School are introducing EQAO terminology into all classrooms in all subject areas. Their decision to employ common language and the same resources throughout the grades has contributed not only to improved student results but also to staff cohesion.

Always eager to maximize resources, Kara Baranoski draws from a wide variety of data to complement the information from the EQAO assessments. For example, recent results from the Stanford Early School Achievement Test (SESAT), designed specifically to evaluate language and math skills in Grade 1, indicate that the boys in her class have not only closed the literacy gender gap but have actually surpassed their female counterparts. Other sources of information include report card data, anecdotal reporting and PM benchmarks. Convinced of the importance of the frequent and detailed tracking of student achievement, Ms. Baranoski administers PM benchmarks four times a year, cross-references their results with SESAT scores and posts them on a data wall. In their professional learning communities, teachers at this school have recently set up divisional data walls to target individual or small group needs and follow student growth. These walls allow the literacy research teacher to identify small groups of children struggling with the same concepts from any classroom in the division.

Describing this process, Ms. Baranoski says:

"It is very individualized, complete differentiated instruction. We really look at the students' work and these results for different effects. We look at their daily work, and the conferencing that we did with them, to really understand how they are learning, why they are learning the way they are and then we tailor our instruction to support them, pulling from a variety of sources."

Teaching Strategies



The teaching strategies that Kara Baranoski employs in her Grade 1 classroom so successfully are supported by sophisticated and detailed organization and planning. Many of these strategies, including the board-designed [Star Strategy](#), are now being used throughout the primary division and upper grades. Star

Strategy is used board wide and is designed to promote a wide range of good reading practices, from simple decoding to making connections and inferences. Star Strategy works well in conjunction with the Anchor Charts, which Ms. Baranoski's students use to acquire and practise specific skills. These direct-teaching tools, with their visual prompts and cuing systems, lend themselves well to addressing specific higher-level reading skills by allowing children to use and reuse the materials until they understand the concepts completely.



Another important method is [Questions, Answer, Evidence and Opinion](#) (QAEQ), which prepares students for open-ended questioning techniques by teaching the four elements of a good response: restate the question, answer the question, provide evidence for your answer and express your opinion on the topic. Students internalize the QAEQ strategy and use it effectively in their work.

The final and most far-reaching of Ms. Baranoski's initiatives centres on the focused training opportunities that she offers parents to keep them up to date on concepts and materials used in her classroom. The heightened levels of parental commitment to volunteerism, which includes participation in the weekly Dad's Reading program, increases the value many boys place on reading. This involvement, along with the school's solid EQAO scores, demonstrates the success of her endeavours. ■



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Eight Big Ideas to Support Learning for All Students

Damian Cooper

Independent Education Consultant



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At the 2008 EQAO conference, Damian Cooper, an independent education consultant, shared "Eight Big Ideas to Support Learning for All Students": Eight simple ideas that apply directly to

classroom assessments and can be used easily by teachers. Cooper encouraged his audience to challenge their perceptions and acknowledged that we, as educators, are wrestling with a major shift in teaching. We are moving from a pass/fail paradigm to one in which failure is not an option and is ultimately unnecessary, now that classroom assessment supports learning rather than just grading.

According to Cooper, until recently, our standards of achievement were neither too hard, nor too soft, but just right—like Goldilocks's porridge. The use of the bell curve and the assignment of grades throughout the curve reflected this approach—a win-lose proposition, supporting some students and profoundly discouraging others. But this approach is no longer appropriate. When we know better we must do better, and we know that students learn in different ways and at different rates and respond to stress, such as that created by classroom tests, very differently. Our instruction and assessment must take these variables into account.



Cooper suggests that schools have to be about everyone achieving excellence, and that in order for that to happen, we must adapt. Classrooms continue to become more diverse in all respects: language, culture, background and the skills with which students arrive. In order to support all students, we must differentiate instruction, which means we must work together with our students.

Another assumption Cooper asks us to reconsider is that, in the classroom, time is fixed and achievement is variable. You pass or fail on test day and that's your only shot at success. But consider this: When you take your driver's test, the level of achievement is fixed and time is variable. That is to say, you can take the test several times, each

time learning something more as you go, but the standard that you must achieve is fixed. What if we applied this idea to teaching, learning and classroom assessment? This brings us to Cooper's first big idea.

Big Idea 1

Classroom assessment serves different purposes at different times.

Classroom assessment may be used to find out what students already know and can do, it may be used to help students improve their learning, or it may be used to let students and their parents know how much they have learned within a specified period of time.

Classroom assessment is not always synonymous with evaluation. Classroom assessment is a tool to help teachers figure out how to instruct a student, not only how to grade him or her. Classroom assessment is designed to promote learning: it's practice time, or, to use a sports analogy, it is like a tryout and teachers are the coaches. After plenty of practice comes game day, the tests that are used for evaluation and that result in a score. As teachers, we don't need to score the practice. It's a work in progress and it's meant to help kids take positive risks and engage them in their learning.



Try circling the errors on a practice test in pencil (don't score), and providing classroom time during which students can work out the answers for themselves, either individually, in groups or as a class.

Big Idea 2

Classroom assessment must be planned and purposeful.

If our goal is excellence, let's define learning in terms of proficiency. Identify targeted understandings, determine appropriate assessment for those learning and plan learning experiences and instruction that make such understanding possible. As teachers, we must engage in backward planning. Let's start by asking the right questions in the right order.



Practice Backward Design by asking "What is critical for kids to know at the end of this unit?"—and this implies taking a close look at the curriculum to see what is important—then "What is the set of exercises that will give me evidence that they are learning what they need to learn" then "What lessons/activities/field trips do we need to do to teach these lessons?"

Big Idea 3

Classroom assessment must be balanced.

Classroom assessment must evaluate oral, written and performance responses and it must be flexible in order to improve learning for all students. Going back to the driver's license analogy, imagine if we issued licences based on the written test only. No road tests. There would be thousands of drivers with no evaluation or record of performance. Students need to demonstrate knowledge and skill in different ways.



Create opportunities for students to demonstrate skill and discuss their understanding, in addition to completing written work.

Big Idea 4

Classroom assessment and instruction are inseparable because effective assessment informs learning.

Students want engaging work, which in kidspeak means “fun and relevant.” Use your lesson plan as a blueprint, but be prepared to adapt and differentiate when you need to do so. Ask yourself: “What do my students know and what can they currently do? Where do I want them to get to? How big is the gap? How do I ensure the gap is just right to challenge students in a way that maximizes learning?”



Lessons on the fly: Adjust a lesson plan to call for a book review instead of a book report, focusing on the “real life” aspect of a book review. Have students research book reviews and present their findings in class, thus establishing the criteria for success for themselves.

Big Idea 5

Feedback delivered in words is helpful to students.

It is the prescriptive, anecdotal feedback that helps students improve learning. Students must be informed, in words, **about** what they have done well or poorly and what they need to do to improve. A classroom culture focused on grades and rankings forces students to look for ways to get the best marks, rather than improve their learning.



Revive the student portfolio as a way to facilitate discussion as you share classroom assessment information with students and their parents. It can also be useful in discussions between students and teachers and students and parents.

Big Idea 6

Classroom assessment is a collaborative process that is most effective when it involves self-, peer- and teacher-assessment.

Self- and peer-assessment enables students to develop an understanding of what quality work looks like. Students are then able to monitor their own progress and develop critical thinking skills, as well as communication and interpersonal skills. Self- and peer-assessment engages metacognition, which is what allows assessment to facilitate learning. In addition, self- and peer-assessment help teachers identify students requiring individual attention, as well as create the time in class for such attention.



Engage your class in a self-assessment “moment” during lessons by asking for a “thumbs up” or “thumbs down” to indicate understanding. Be sure to check in with the “thumbs up” students to ensure their assessment is accurate.

Big Idea 7

Performance standards are an essential component of effective classroom assessment.

When using rubrics in the classroom and assessing for learning, provide feedback to students focusing on the indicators of success and not on the overall level. When you are conducting an assessment of learning, use the rubric holistically by asking “What set of indicators best describes this student’s overall performance at this time?”



Use the four-level rubric response to create a checklist for students. They will know if they have satisfied the criteria or not.

Big Idea 8

Grading and reporting is a caring process that requires teachers’ professional judgement.

Grading is important but different from teaching and learning—it results in a grade or numerical score that summarizes a large amount of data and represents a recent trend in the student’s achievement. We need to be able to stand behind the grades by keeping impeccable records of a child’s work. Grades must confirm and affirm what everyone already knows. There should be no surprises on a report card.



Take off your teacher hat and put on your parent hat when you are writing in the comments section of a report card. Avoid labelling students, and talk about performance.



Damian Cooper’s “Eight Big Ideas to Support Learning for All Students” tackles learning, teaching and assessment in the information age, where the three Rs Reading, ‘Riting and ‘Rithmetic are giving way to Reasoning, Responsibility and Resilience. As educators, says Cooper, we must be able to respond to this shift, and “we must believe in the potential of all kids to learn. We must believe in the potential of all kids to achieve when their work is relevant and engaging.” ■

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Grade this article

Comments

- A** This article is excellent. Do more of these!
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- C** This article is OK. It is somewhat interesting, but I already knew a lot of what it has to say.
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Special Conference Issue

Spotlight



Left to right: Christian Hambrock,
Laurie Fischer, Murray Kuntz

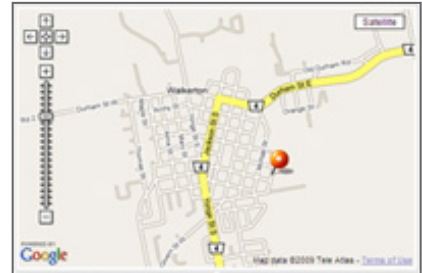
Celebrating the Success of an Ontario School

Sacred Heart High School
Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board

School population: 750

Grades: 9 through 12

Principal: Murray Kuntz



Situated in the rural community of Walkerton, Sacred Heart High School serves 750 students in

Grades 9 through 12. Over the past five years, the student population has been stable. The

majority of students who enter the school in Grade 9 graduate from Sacred Heart. The community is mainly agricultural, but many families work for Bruce Power, the largest industry in the area. Eighty-five percent of the students are bused and travel approximately an hour each way, with some students travelling 40 to 50 kilometres.



The female-to-male ratio over the past five years has remained consistent, with a larger female population. Students with special needs make up 14% of the student population. Approximately 34% of the students take courses at the applied level.

Literacy: A Cross-Curricular Focus

When the school team examined the OSSLT results over time, it found that writing was the area of challenge for most students. The students could articulate their opinions orally but could not effectively write them. The English department set a target to improve student writing skills by focusing on opinion pieces. Teachers began with the Grade 10 students but expanded the effort into Grade 9. The results were positive. The principal set a goal for the rest of the teaching staff to examine the OSSLT question types and model them in their classroom practices.

The staff did not perceive using the OSSLT sample tests to inform their classroom planning as an extra, [but as] a different

way of doing things to assist the students to achieve success. The teachers recognize the importance of literacy across the curriculum and are committed to continuous literacy skill development.

Murray Kuntz, Principal

Tutoring for Success

Staff at Sacred Heart implemented two additional initiatives that they believe contribute to student confidence in demonstrating literacy skills on both classroom assessments and the OSSLT.

- 1 Tutoring sessions are offered in which students work with the OSSLT sample tests. Two English teachers oversee the sessions, and five to 15 students participate in each one. Students are invited to continue to work with the two teachers after the sessions if they feel they need it. The sessions are open to all students, but previously eligible students in particular are encouraged to attend. Principal Kuntz says: "The students seek out this help. They value it. They embrace the encouraging, non-judgmental and positive environment these teachers create for them to work in."
- 2 In 2007–2008, the staff expanded the use of EQAO sample tests as resource materials by having all Period 1 Grade 10 classes work on *Booklet 1* and all Period 2 classes work on *Booklet 2*. This activity familiarized the students with the format of the OSSLT and gave them the opportunity to become more comfortable with its terminology.

The classroom teacher is important to the students at Sacred Heart. Students believe that the teachers care about them, and this motivates them to engage in their learning. The teachers know the students, and most of the staff members live in the community. In fact, 35% of the teachers are graduates of Sacred Heart, which brings history and tradition to the school.

A Strong Culture of Caring

There is an expectation among parents and the Sacred Heart school community that all students will graduate. The parents are supportive of the school and engage significantly in finding ways to help students achieve success. "The school staff, parents and community believe if students are appropriately placed and receive support, they will be successful. In this culture of caring, students are set up for success. The students want to pass and work hard to ensure that they do. Attendance is very high. Rarely do we hear a student say, 'I am not going to graduate,' [and this includes] our at-risk students," says principal Kuntz.

The staff believes that a key contributor to student success is the notion of "credit saving" rather than "credit recovery." The Student Success Team works closely with the teachers to monitor, track and mentor students. Credit accumulation at the end of Grade 10 is very high, with 90% of students, including those at risk, acquiring all 16 credits.

The Student Success Team's ability to shift the mindset from credit recovery to credit saving has had a significant impact on student success and confidence building. It gives students the opportunity to save the course rather than fail it and have to take it again. It also is encouraging for teachers, as they see more of their students meeting with success in the initial course.

Laurie Fisher, Vice-principal

Christian Hambrock, a student success teacher, applauds the active involvement of the administration in nurturing students: "They know who is struggling and provide intervention where necessary. Collaboration between Guidance, the administration, Resource and Student Success has lead to the continued success of the students at Sacred Heart." ■



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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 Junior Division Assessment and then check out the correct code.

Sample Question and Answer

The Green Detective

Autumn was coming. It was the middle of September, and the days were getting shorter. Sam noticed that he needed a sweater at night and that some of the leaves were starting to turn red and brown. Summer already seemed far away.

"I know a way to keep summer with us all winter," Mrs. Quincy told Sam's class. Sam imagined having a beach in the school gym.

"It'll be a great science project, too," Mrs. Quincy winked.

The class groaned.

[View or print entire passage](#)

Explain Sam's reaction when he realizes the encyclopedia is no longer in the library. Use specific details and examples from the text to support your answer.

He was sad, scared, angry, worried, and thoughtless they ran and ran till they got to the class he was speechless and then relaxed

Use the annotations 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.

Junior Division Rubric

Code	Description
10	Response attempts to explain Sam's reaction when he realizes the encyclopedia is no longer in the library. The response either • answers an aspect of the question OR • does not refer to the reading selection OR • provides inaccurate support. View sample student response Sample Student Response Explain Sam's reaction when he realizes the encyclopedia is no longer in the library. Use specific details and examples from the text to support your answer. He was upset be- cause he wanted to check more leaves
	Response identifies a reaction and indicates a partial understanding by explaining Sam's reaction when he realizes the encyclopedia is no longer in the library. The response provides: • irrelevant support from the reading selection OR • vague support from the reading selection OR • limited support The response usually requires the reader to connect the support to what it is

20

intended to prove.

[View sample student response](#)**Sample Student Response**

Explain Sam's reaction when he realizes the encyclopedia is no longer in the library. Use specific details and examples from the text to support your answer.

That he was sad that he couldn't find
 the leaves in the encyclopedia but with
 the help from Erin he found the leaves.

30

Response identifies a reaction and indicates an understanding by explaining

Sam's reaction when he realizes the encyclopedia is no longer in the library.

The response includes:

- some accurate and relevant support and
- some vague or underdeveloped support.

The response requires the reader to make some connections between the support and what it is intended to prove.

[View sample student response](#)**Sample Student Response**

Explain Sam's reaction when he realizes the encyclopedia is no longer in the library. Use specific details and examples from the text to support your answer.

Sam's reaction when he realizes the encyclopedia is
 not in the library is that he is surprised because the
 encyclopedia almost never gets taken out of the library.
 He is also worried because he can't find his
 leaves!

Response identifies a reaction and indicates an understanding by explaining Sam's reaction when he realizes the encyclopedia is no longer in the library and provides specific and relevant support from the reading selection to explain fully why he reacts that way.

[View sample student response](#)

40

Sample Student Response

Explain Sam's reaction when he realizes the encyclopedia is no longer in the library. Use specific details and examples from the text to support your answer.

When Sam realizes the encyclopedia is gone he panics because he is scared that the leaves will either be ruined or lost. One of the sentences that demonstrate this is: "What does it matter? What am I going to do!" Sam is panicking because his leaves could be gone.

[View Score](#)

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Yes

No, I'm not
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Winter 2009

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.

You've asked us!

Q "I've heard that mature students will no longer have to attempt the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test before being allowed to enrol in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course? Is this true?"

A Yes, that's right. On Thursday, December 4, 2008, in her keynote address at the Ontario Association of Adult and Continuing Education School Board Administrators conference, Minister Wynne announced that a change will be made to Policy/Program Memorandum No. 127, which sets out policy with respect to the secondary school literacy graduation requirement. This change will allow mature students* to enrol directly in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC) in order to meet the graduation literacy requirement, without first attempting the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT).

The change will address the obstacles that mature students may face in meeting the secondary school literacy graduation requirement:

- Many mature students are able to complete all other diploma requirements in a semester but are required to wait for the next administration of the OSSLT.
- Mature students may have job or family responsibilities that prevent them from being present on the provincially scheduled test day. In these cases, the only option is to wait another year.
- Requiring mature students to fail the OSSLT at least once before accessing the OSSLC is a further barrier to students trying to graduate as quickly as possible and is demoralizing to students who may have had difficulty in regular day school.
- Many instructors of adult and continuing education consider the content of the OSSLT age-inappropriate for mature students.

This revision will be effective for the 2008–2009 school year. The Ministry of education will be issuing the revised Program and Policy Memorandum and a covering memo in Spring 2009.

**A mature student is a student who is at least 18 years of age on or before December 31 of the school year in which he or she returns to school, who was not enrolled in a day school program for a period of at least one year and who is enrolled in a secondary school program*

for the purpose of obtaining an OSSD.

Ask your Questions

Your question will be received anonymously.

EQAO will not be able to respond individually to questions submitted through this box.

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