

Education Quality and
Accountability Office



Driving Purposeful Improvement



2009–2010 **AGENCY REPORT**

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Education Quality and Accountability Office

2 Carlton Street, Suite 1200, Toronto ON M5B 2M9

Telephone: 1-888-327-7377 | Web site: www.eqao.com

Education Quality and
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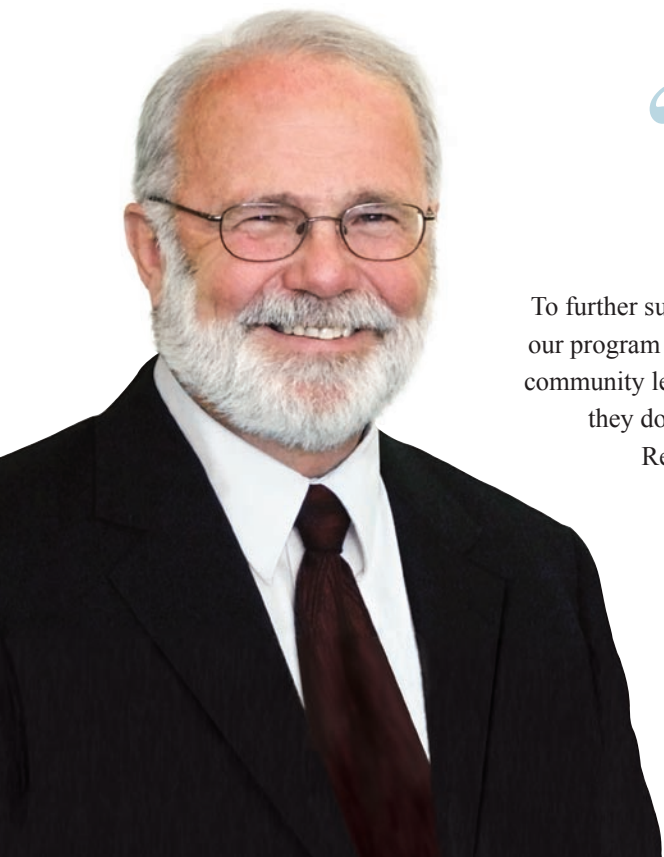
Driving Purposeful Improvement

2009–2010 AGENCY REPORT

Driving Purposeful Improvement

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was created in 1996 to meet a number of needs that remain equally vital today. The education system needs useful and appropriate measures to evaluate its performance. Educators require objective, reliable information about student achievement so that they can intervene appropriately to foster improvement. Parents want an independent gauge of how well their children and their children's schools perform in relation to established standards. The public demands accountability in Ontario's publicly funded school system. By delivering on our mandate to develop province-wide tests, to facilitate their administration, to score them and to report their results, EQAO helps meet these needs and many others, and plays a critical role in Ontario's education system.

The data produced by EQAO's world-class assessment program offer an independent gauge of how well students are meeting the reading, writing and mathematics expectations defined in *The Ontario Curriculum* at key stages in their education. The provincial tests are, in fact, the only assessments that account for every student across the province and report results in relation to one common provincial standard. These assessments provide detailed information that schools and boards are using for local reflection and focused intervention. Every year, principals and teachers report that they are incorporating EQAO data into their improvement planning with increasing frequency and sophistication. The results of this effort are evident in the significant gains that have been made and sustained in student achievement.



“EQAO's fundamental belief is that good information has the power to drive purposeful improvement.”

Dr. Brian Desbiens, Chair, EQAO Board of Directors

To further support the work of Ontario's educators, we continue to cultivate our program of workshops and symposia, helping members of the education community learn to use assessment data appropriately and celebrating them when they do. In 2009, EQAO proudly launched the Dr. Bette M. Stephenson Recognition of Achievement to acknowledge schools across Ontario whose use of EQAO data in their improvement planning has led to demonstrable improvement in their students' achievement.

EQAO has enhanced the way it tracks and reports student achievement over time. In addition to following cohorts of students as they progress from Grade 3 to Grade 6, this year we cross-referenced students' math results as the students progressed from Grade 6 to Grade 9 and reading and writing results from Grade 6 to Grade 10. This tracking has provided valuable new insights about progress in achievement and opportunities for effective intervention.

EQAO conducted a wide range of important research this year, including a study examining the literacy achievement gap between boys and girls. We also conducted a study about parents' understanding and information needs related to provincial testing. This study revealed that Ontario parents value EQAO's assessment program and the information it provides and that they want even more information about results, the purpose of testing and how they can use EQAO results to support their children's learning. Going forward, a major focus for EQAO will be our commitment to helping parents increase their understanding in these areas.

Much as our data support continuous improvement in student achievement, we are committed to continuous improvement in our assessment program and business operations. The agency is particularly proud that a comprehensive review by the Auditor General of Ontario in 2009 concluded that Ontario's province-wide tests reflect the provincial curriculum expectations fairly and accurately, are consistent in difficulty from one year to the next and are administered and marked so as to ensure that their results are valid, consistent and reliable indicators of student achievement. This value-for-money audit also praised EQAO's fiscal management and procurement processes.

EQAO's fundamental belief is that good information has the power to drive purposeful improvement. We look forward to continuing to meet the need for good information in Ontario's education system by providing objective, reliable student achievement data to support parents and the education community in their work. Collectively, we can help all students reach their full potential.



Dr. Brian L. Desbiens,
Chair



Marguerite Jackson,
CEO



Note: The quotes from teachers and principals in this report were collected between 2008 and 2010. The speakers' roles may have changed since then.

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EQAO's Strategic Priorities

This fiscal year marked the first year in EQAO's new strategic framework, building on the agency's solid foundation of providing reliable and objective evidence of student achievement that leads to purposeful improvement.

This new framework comprises five strategic priorities that will guide EQAO's work as the agency continues to support parents and the education community in improving learning and teaching while creating greater accountability in Ontario's publicly funded school system. The five strategic priorities are as follows:

"Best of Class" Assessments

EQAO is committed to ensuring that its tests provide credible evidence of student learning based on *The Ontario Curriculum*.

Supporting Student Progress

EQAO is committed to integrating a broad range of evidence to identify where interventions can be made, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to reach their highest possible level of achievement.

Building Capacity

EQAO is committed to building capacity for the use of data through service to educators, parents, government and the public.

Valuable Research Data

EQAO is committed to conducting research to develop the right instruments and best practices to keep the agency at the forefront of large-scale assessment and to ensure that EQAO data are used to improve student learning.

Effective Business Practices

EQAO is committed to ensuring the responsible management of its assessment practices and processes and of its budget and expenditures.



The next sections of this report highlight EQAO's main activities and accomplishments in 2009–2010 related to each of the strategic priorities.

■ “Best of Class” Assessments

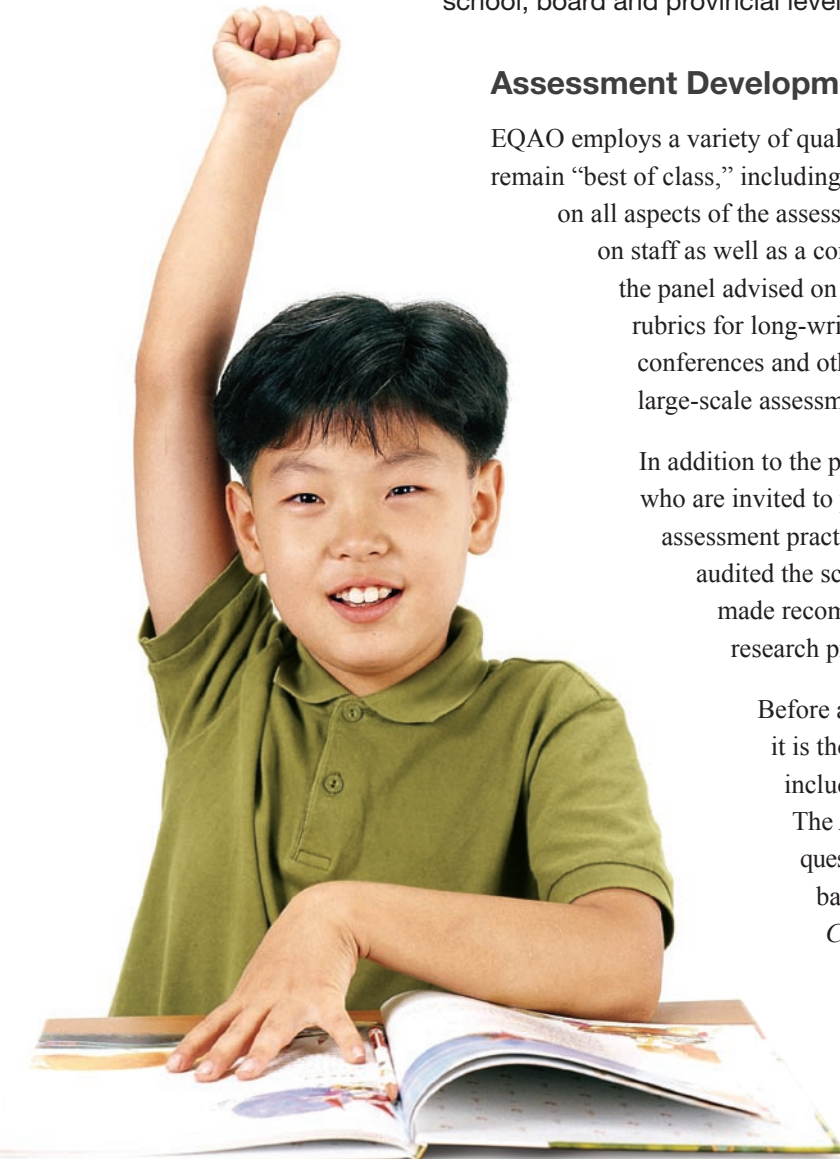
For a school system that is determined to provide high-quality education, there is extraordinary power in assessing all students relative to established learning expectations at key stages of their education. Before the establishment of EQAO, provincial tests were conducted using random samples of students. But this approach did not provide local schools or boards enough information about their own students to inform planning for improvement. Many boards began to call for all students to participate in assessments, so that more useful data could be obtained for local reflection and focused intervention. The establishment of EQAO answered this call. Since 1996, when EQAO began providing province-wide full-census assessments, the education system, parents, guardians and the public have had access to detailed information on student achievement at the student, school, board and provincial levels.

Assessment Development

EQAO employs a variety of quality assurance measures to ensure its assessments remain “best of class,” including working with national and international experts on all aspects of the assessment cycle. EQAO has a team of psychometricians on staff as well as a consultative Psychometric Expert Panel. This year, the panel advised on issues such as form construction and scoring rubrics for long-writing questions. The agency also participates in conferences and other forums to keep pace with best practices in large-scale assessment.

In addition to the panel, EQAO works with scholars-in-residence, who are invited to provide objective feedback about the agency’s assessment practices. This year, the agency’s scholars-in-residence audited the scoring procedures for all EQAO assessments and made recommendations, and provided counsel on three major research projects.

Before any question is included in an EQAO assessment, it is thoroughly analyzed and tested. This analysis includes reviews by two important EQAO committees. The Assessment Development Committee ensures all questions are age and grade appropriate and directly based on the learning expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum*. A separate Sensitivity Committee then ensures the questions are free of any bias that may favour or hinder particular groups of students, while ensuring the questions are culturally fair to the broadest range of students.



“The EQAO employs a number of quality assurance measures to provide credibility to its processes and procedures. These measures help to ensure that the questions presented to students are appropriate for their grade level and represent fairly the Ministry’s curriculum expectations, and that the tests are consistent in their level of difficulty from one year to the next.”

2009 Annual Report, Office of the Auditor General of Ontario

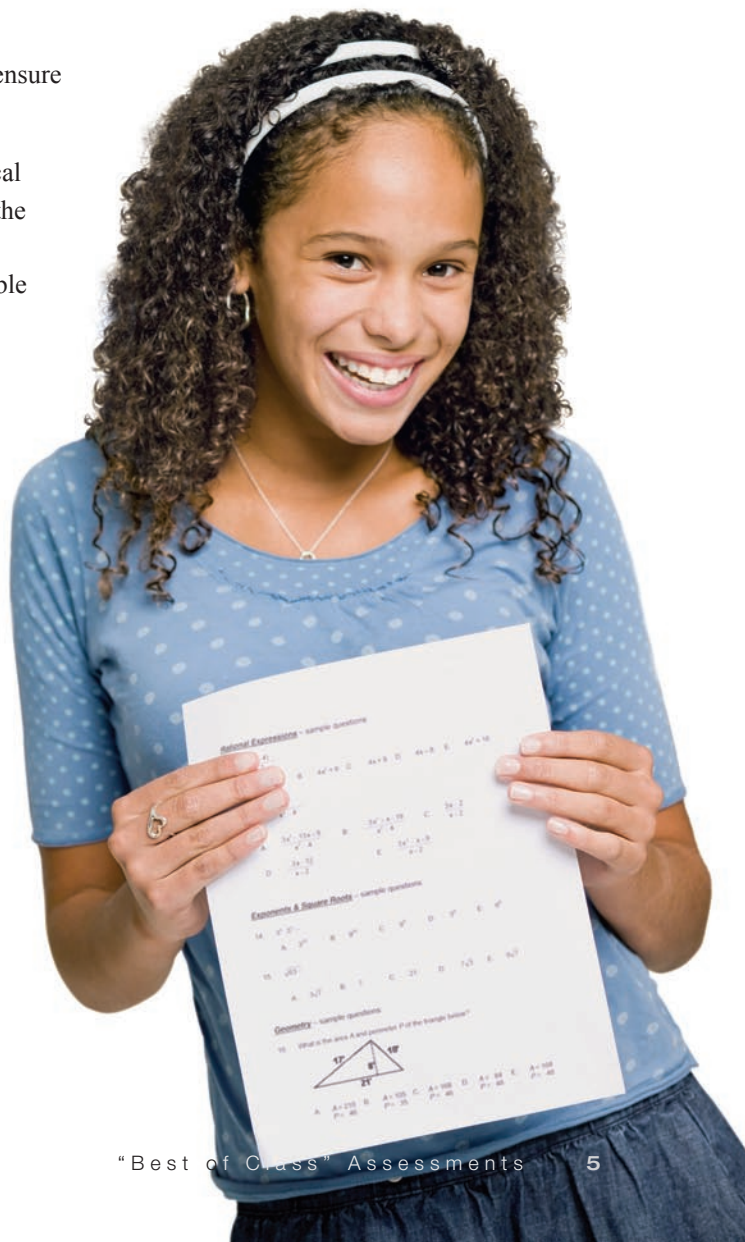
All assessment questions are then thoroughly field tested to ensure they are of the highest quality.

Each year, EQAO publishes a report that outlines the technical features and professional expertise that were used to ensure the accuracy, validity and psychometric integrity of each EQAO assessment. Full reports and executive summaries are available publicly at www.eqao.com.

Constant monitoring is also critical to EQAO. The agency uses quality assurance monitors to observe the administration of its assessments and closely tracks assessment scoring to ensure the validity and reliability of the results.

Important Confirmation of Assessment Rigour

After a comprehensive review of the agency, the Auditor General of Ontario confirmed in 2009 that EQAO assessments reflect the provincial curriculum expectations fairly and accurately, are consistent in difficulty from one year to the next and are administered and marked so as to ensure that their results are valid, consistent and reliable indicators of student achievement. EQAO is proud that the Auditor General’s audit attests to the rigour of its assessment practices and processes.



OVERVIEW OF EQAO'S ASSESSMENTS

A brief description of each of EQAO's assessments appears here, accompanied by sample questions that demonstrate the link to *The Ontario Curriculum*. All EQAO assessments include both multiple-choice and open-response questions. Samples of all EQAO assessments can be viewed at www.eqao.com. Results are discussed in the next section.

Assessment of Reading, Writing and Mathematics, Primary Division (Grades 1–3)

This assessment measures the reading, writing and mathematics skills students are expected to have learned by the end of Grade 3.

This sample question tests skills included in “Developing and Organizing Content” in the writing section of *The Ontario Curriculum*.

Choose the best opening sentence for this paragraph.

_____ It makes lights glow. It runs the computer, television, washing machine, refrigerator and other appliances. It makes flowers bloom, trees grow and water flow. The world is full of energy.

- a We need to save energy.
- b Children are full of energy.
- c Energy makes things happen.
- d We use lots of energy in the gym.

Correct answer: c

“EQAO has been a catalyst. It has made teachers more aware of the curriculum. Now all teachers share. This is not just about students doing well on the testing, but about students doing well in education. We are teaching children how to be better learners.”

Lois Dale, Grade 6 Teacher, St. Louis Separate School,
Kenora Catholic District School Board

Assessment of Reading, Writing and Mathematics, Junior Division (Grades 4–6)

This assessment measures the reading, writing and mathematics skills students are expected to have learned by the end of Grade 6.

This sample question tests skills taught in the Geometry strand of *The Ontario Curriculum*.

Look at the ladybug below.



The ladybug is rotated three times in the following order.

- 90° counter-clockwise
- 180° clockwise
- 180° clockwise

Which of the following best illustrates the ladybug's position after the three rotations?

a



b



c



d



Correct answer: b

Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics

This assessment measures the mathematics skills students are expected to have learned by the end of Grade 9. Separate versions of the assessment are administered to students in the academic and the applied courses.

This sample question tests skills taught in the Measurement and Geometry strand of *The Ontario Curriculum*.

A gift shop sells water-filled spherical globes that sit on bases. There are two sizes to choose from.

- A small globe has a radius of 6 cm.
- A large globe has a radius of 18 cm.

Mary thinks that the volume of water contained by the large globe is about three times the volume of water in the small globe.

Is she correct? Circle one: Yes No

Justify your answer.

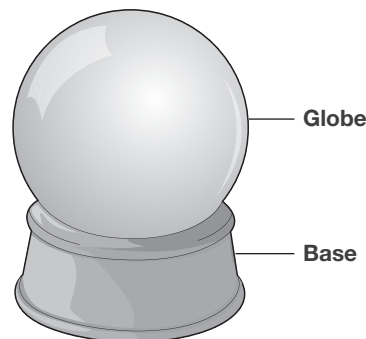
$$\begin{aligned} V &= \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3 \\ &= (1.3)\pi(6)^3 \\ &= (1.3)\pi(216) \\ &= (4.08)(216) \\ &= 882.15 \end{aligned}$$

Small globe holds
882.15 ml of
water

$$\begin{aligned} V &= \frac{4}{3}\pi r^3 \\ &= (1.3)\pi(18)^3 \\ &= (1.3)\pi(5832) \\ &= (4.08)(5832) \\ &= 23818.30 \end{aligned}$$

∴ Large globe holds
23818.30 ml of
water.

$$23818.30 \div 3 = 7939.33$$



This response earned a code 40, the maximum score on a scale scoring rubric.

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test

This test measures whether students meet the minimum standard for literacy across all subjects in the provincial curriculum up to the end of Grade 9.

This sample question assesses the cross-curricular communication skill of developing a main idea with sufficient supporting details and organizing the information and ideas in a coherent manner, as outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum*.

What is an effective way advertisers persuade teenagers to buy a product? Explain why this method is effective.

Advertisers persuade teenagers to buy a product by showing them someone they can relate to or a popular celebrity using the product. For example if you see Arnold Schwarzenegger using a certain protein shake as his diet teens will think of how Arnold was big in the past and present. This can certainly persuade teens to buy the protein shake.

This response earned a code 30 for topic development, the maximum score on a scale scoring rubric.

Supporting Student Progress

The information acquired through the tracking of students' progress at key points in their education strongly contributes to improving student achievement. When combined with information from classroom and other assessments, EQAO's results provide students, parents, teachers and administrators with a clear picture of student achievement and a basis for improvement planning and evaluation.

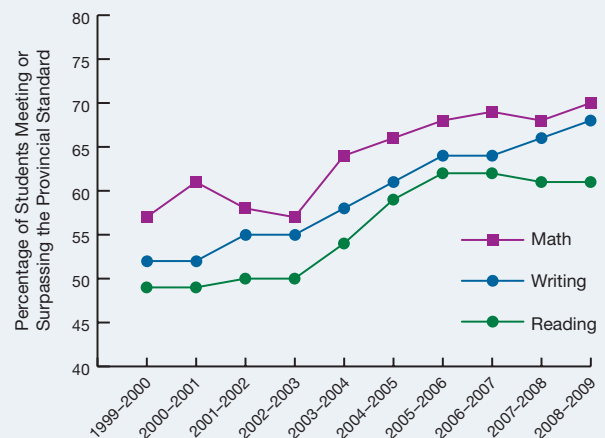
Focused intervention based on reliable data has helped to improve and sustain achievement. Literacy and numeracy skills across the province have steadily improved since EQAO began its testing. This year's results reveal improved or sustained achievement in all areas assessed.

Unless otherwise noted, the results contained in this section apply to students and schools in Ontario's English-language system. Results for Ontario's French-language system can be found in the French version of this report.

Primary-Division Assessment

This past year, the percentage of Grade 3 students meeting or surpassing the provincial standard in mathematics and writing increased by two points since last year, from 68% to 70% and 66% to 68%, respectively. The percentage for reading remained at 61%. Looking back over time, the magnitude of improvement on this and all of EQAO's assessments becomes clear. Since the first year this test was administered (1996–1997), the percentage of students meeting or surpassing the provincial standard has increased by 11 points in reading, 29 points in writing and 37 points in mathematics.

ACHIEVEMENT OVER TIME



“ I was thrilled to see where EQAO has gone in giving us feedback to use in department meetings. Having access to the data changes you. It focuses you in your planning and your teaching. You look at the data and say ‘maybe I should be adjusting my teaching.’ ”

Bill Broten, Head of Mathematics, Beaver Brae Secondary School,
Keewatin-Patricia District School Board

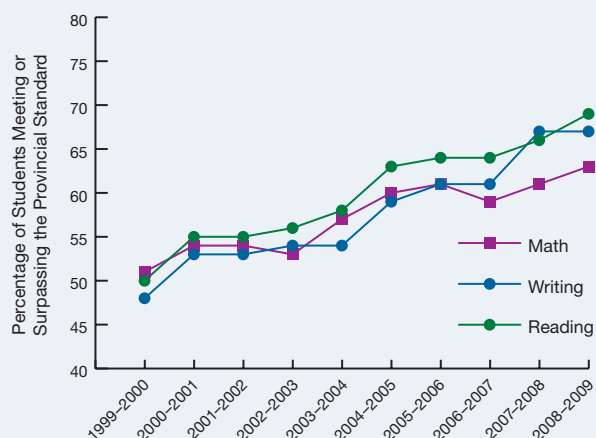
“ We take EQAO data very seriously. We look at it as a means to gauge how we’re doing, how our students are learning, where we can improve our teaching practice and how we will inform our practice. It’s something we focus on throughout the year. ”

Gary O'Donnell, Principal, St. Marguerite d'Youville Catholic School,
London District Catholic School Board

Junior-Division Assessment

The percentage of Grade 6 students meeting or surpassing the provincial standard increased by three points in reading, from 66% to 69%, and by two points in mathematics, from 61% to 63%, since last year. The corresponding percentage in writing remained at 67%. Since the first administration of this test, in 1998–1999, the percentage of students meeting or surpassing the standard has increased by 21 points in reading, 19 points in writing and 17 points in mathematics.

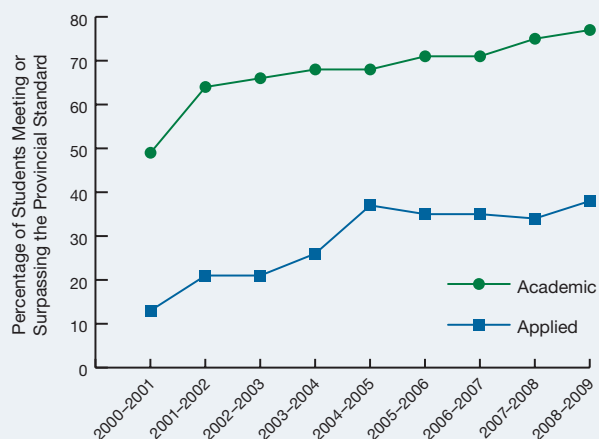
ACHIEVEMENT OVER TIME



Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics

This past year, the percentage of students in the academic course who performed at or above the provincial standard increased by two points, from 75% to 77%; and the corresponding percentage of students in the applied course increased by four points, from 34% to 38%. Since the first administration of this assessment, in 2000–2001, the improvement has been notable: there has been an increase of 28 points in the percentage of students in the academic course meeting or surpassing the standard, and an increase of 25 points in the corresponding percentage in the applied course.

ACHIEVEMENT OVER TIME

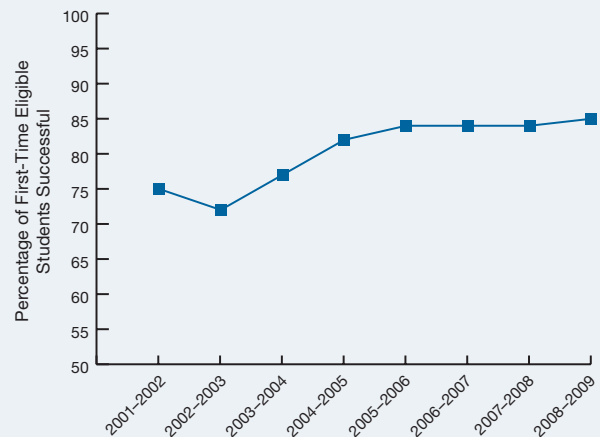


Note: In 2005–2006, revisions were made to *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9 and 10: Mathematics*.

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test

This past year, 85% of fully participating first-time eligible students were successful on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), an increase of one percentage point since last year and three points over the past five years. Since the first administration of the OSSLT, in 2001–2002, there has been an increase of 10 points in the percentage of students who were successful.

ACHIEVEMENT OVER TIME



Enhanced Tracking for Enhanced Improvement

This year, EQAO enhanced the way it tracks student achievement over time. In addition to following cohorts of students as they progress from Grade 3 to Grade 6, EQAO now also cross-references the same students' Grade 6 and Grade 9 math results and their Grade 6 reading and writing results with their OSSLT outcome. Cohort tracking provides valuable insights about progress in student achievement and helps focus attention on effective programs and interventions.

This past year, cohort tracking revealed that 69% of students who met the provincial mathematics standard in Grade 6 also met the Grade 9 academic standard, and 9% of students who did not meet the standard in Grade 6 did meet it in Grade 9. Meanwhile, cohort tracking for reading skills revealed that of the students who met or surpassed the provincial standard in Grade 6, 97% were successful on the OSSLT, and of the students who did not meet the standard in Grade 6, 66% were successful on the OSSLT.

These results clearly show that students who acquire the skills to reach the provincial standard in Grade 6 are well positioned for success as they progress through high school. The results also show that focused intervention to support students not meeting the provincial standard in Grade 6 leads to positive results for many of them. Moreover, the results underscore the importance of monitoring achievement throughout students' schooling to provide the help that's needed.

EQAO reports its data in a variety of ways, from Individual Student Reports to detailed reports at the school, school board and provincial levels. EQAO data are also regularly reported by partners across the education community. For example, almost half of the progress indicators in the Ministry's School Board Progress Reports are related to EQAO assessment results. In addition, directors of education report EQAO results in their annual school-board reports, and schools and boards often create their own parent and community reports of EQAO data. Moving forward, EQAO data are sure to be one source of information for the school-board plans mandated by the *Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act*, 2009 (Bill 177).

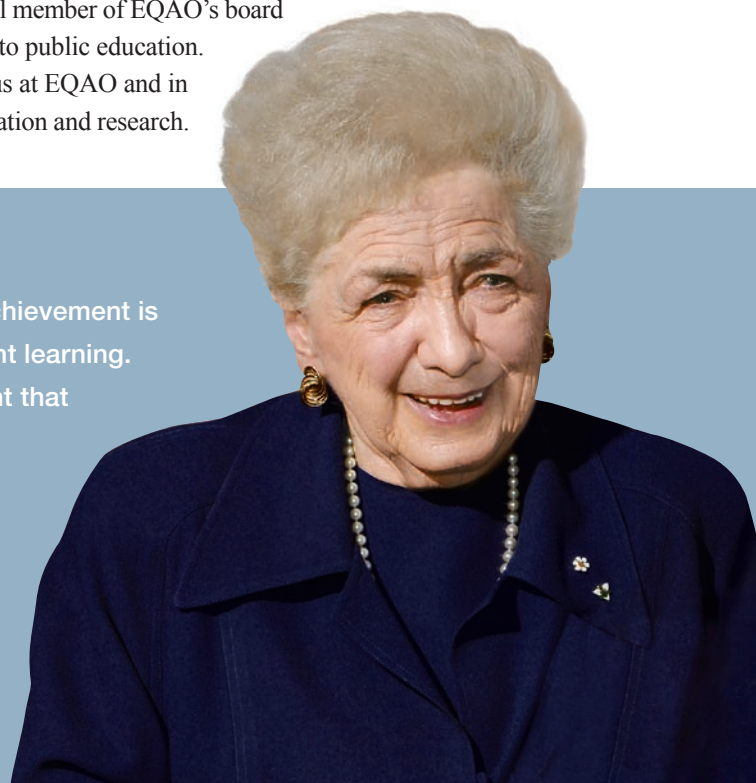
Putting Data to Use: New Recognition Program

In 2009, EQAO proudly launched the Dr. Bette M. Stephenson Recognition of Achievement program to acknowledge exceptional school communities throughout Ontario whose use of EQAO data in their improvement planning has led to demonstrable improvement in their students' achievement. This year, 37 schools were presented with the recognition. Each school is at a different point in its journey of continuous improvement and has developed a unique action plan. All are notable for their leadership, proactive initiatives and sincere effort to help every student succeed. Case studies for all recipients are available in EQAO's provincial reports for the 2008–2009 assessments at www.eqao.com.

This recognition program was established in honour of Dr. Stephenson's lifelong commitment to public service and Ontario's publicly funded education system. As minister of both Education and Colleges and Universities from 1978 to 1985 and as an original member of EQAO's board of directors, Dr. Stephenson made an enormous contribution to public education. She continues to play an inspirational role as director emeritus at EQAO and in leadership positions at several organizations involved in education and research.

“Solid and reliable information on student achievement is crucial to helping educators improve student learning. I'm really proud of the culture of assessment that EQAO has, since its inception, been able to establish in Ontario. I'm also really, really pleased that so many schools have used assessment information and have demonstrated positive student results.”

Dr. Bette M. Stephenson, Director Emeritus,
EQAO Board of Directors



Complementary National and International Assessments

In addition to its provincial assessment program, EQAO coordinates Ontario's participation in a number of national and international assessments. These studies, in which a random sample of students participate, provide yet another window on the achievement of Ontario students.

This past year, EQAO coordinated the administration of the Programme for International Student Assessment, which assesses 15-year-olds' skills in reading, mathematics and science. The results will be released in early December 2010. EQAO also began planning for the 2010 administration of the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program and field tested some related mathematics and science materials. ■

Building Capacity

When put to good use, EQAO data are a proven catalyst for improvement in student achievement. Knowing this, EQAO does more than simply report the results of its assessments. The agency proactively helps its stakeholders learn how to interpret and use its assessment data appropriately to support improvement planning. EQAO has always been committed to building capacity for the appropriate use of data among education professionals, parents and the public.

Building Educators' Capacity

Over the past year, EQAO has continued to cultivate its range of resources for the education community. Feedback on our focused outreach and resources clearly shows the success of these activities in building capacity for the use of data.

The agency's School Support and Outreach team provided workshops and presentations and made school visits across the province, involving more than 2000 practising teachers, pre-service teachers, vice-principals and principals. These sessions helped the educators learn to use data as a foundation to support the vital work they do in their classrooms and schools every day.

EQAO also hosted two learning symposia this year. November's *School Teams Making a Difference Through Knowledge, Support and Action* drew more than 700 participants from elementary-school teams, including parents, and February's *Schools Making a Difference Through Knowledge, Support and Action* drew more than 400 participants from secondary-school teams. In addition, key sessions from the two symposia attracted more than 900 registrants to their live webcasts. The webcasts were subsequently made available "on-demand" on EQAO's Web site to an even greater number of educators. These webcasts were viewed approximately 1000 times last year. The symposia helped broaden educators' appreciation for how a balanced assessment program contributes to improved student learning.

EQAO also hosted a seminar this year, called *Supporting the Everyday Work of Schools*, which drew more than 400 participants from elementary-school teams. It provided a framework for organizing the interpretation of school data to inform planning, teaching and student learning.

"This was a great opportunity for the exchange of ideas and strategies to support student learning."

"I took away ideas that I have already used in my classroom and shared with other educators."

"I appreciated the fact that we had time within our school family to share and plan for the future."

Comments from Educators Who Participated in EQAO's Symposium
School Teams Making a Difference Through Knowledge, Support and Action

“EQAO’s approach has always been rooted in building understanding and confidence in the appropriate use of assessment information to improve student learning. EQAO data are an indispensable tool for helping all students to reach their full potential.”

Marguerite Jackson, CEO, EQAO

EQAO continues to publish *EQAO Connects*, its Web magazine written for teachers and other education professionals. The magazine is distributed to more than 18 400 subscribers. The agency also profiled a broad range of schools in this year’s provincial reports and its Web magazine to share examples of school communities that have been successful in improving student outcomes through their use of data and evidence-based actions.

Every year, educators across Ontario report they are incorporating EQAO data into their improvement planning with increasing frequency and sophistication. For example, of the more than 3400 elementary-school principals who responded to EQAO’s 2009 survey, 95% said they used the previous year’s EQAO data to guide their school improvement initiatives and 76% used the data to pinpoint where resources were needed. Of the more than 7000 Grade 3 and Grade 6 teachers who responded, 78% and 74%, respectively, used student and school EQAO data to identify areas of program strength and areas for improvement.

“It is very beneficial to have the data because it forces people to take a long hard look at what they’ve been doing and to see if what they have been doing has had the desired effect. The data is driving the instruction.”

Tom Durran, Principal, St. Timothy Catholic School,
Halton Catholic District School Board

Thanks in part to the thoughtful analysis of EQAO results, schools, boards and the government have developed initiatives that have led to better outcomes for tens of thousands students across the province. Data collected from assessments have enabled the Ministry of Education to establish initiatives such as Learning to 18, the Turnaround School Program and the Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership. EQAO assessment data have also helped schools implement such effective instructional practices as creating blocks of instructional time for literacy and math; using anchor charts, rubrics and sample questions as teaching guides to demonstrate expectations and model expected performance; and incorporating higher-level questioning techniques, involving analysis, synthesis and evaluation, into daily teaching.



Building Parents' Capacity

EQAO is also committed to helping parents learn how to use its data and resources to support their children's learning. To this end, the agency continued to offer a variety of print and online resources especially for parents, including responses to frequently asked questions in 20 languages, posted on EQAO's Web site, and *A Parent's Guide to EQAO Testing*, sent to elementary schools at the start of the school year for distribution to parents.

For each student who writes a test, EQAO provides an Individual Student Report (ISR). ISRs indicate the student's level of achievement on the assessment relative to the provincial standard. For the first time this year, ISRs for students who wrote the Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics included their results on the mathematics component of the junior-division assessment in 2006. Likewise, ISRs for students who wrote the junior-division assessment this past year included their results from the primary-division assessment in 2006, when they were in Grade 3. This comparative tracking information is particularly valuable in helping parents monitor their children's achievement over time and in facilitating discussions with teachers about individual performance and support strategies.



“I now know that the assessments are more about curriculum and teaching and improving learning.”

“I have a better understanding of EQAO and the tests.”

“Now I understand why the assessment is done and what results are used for.”

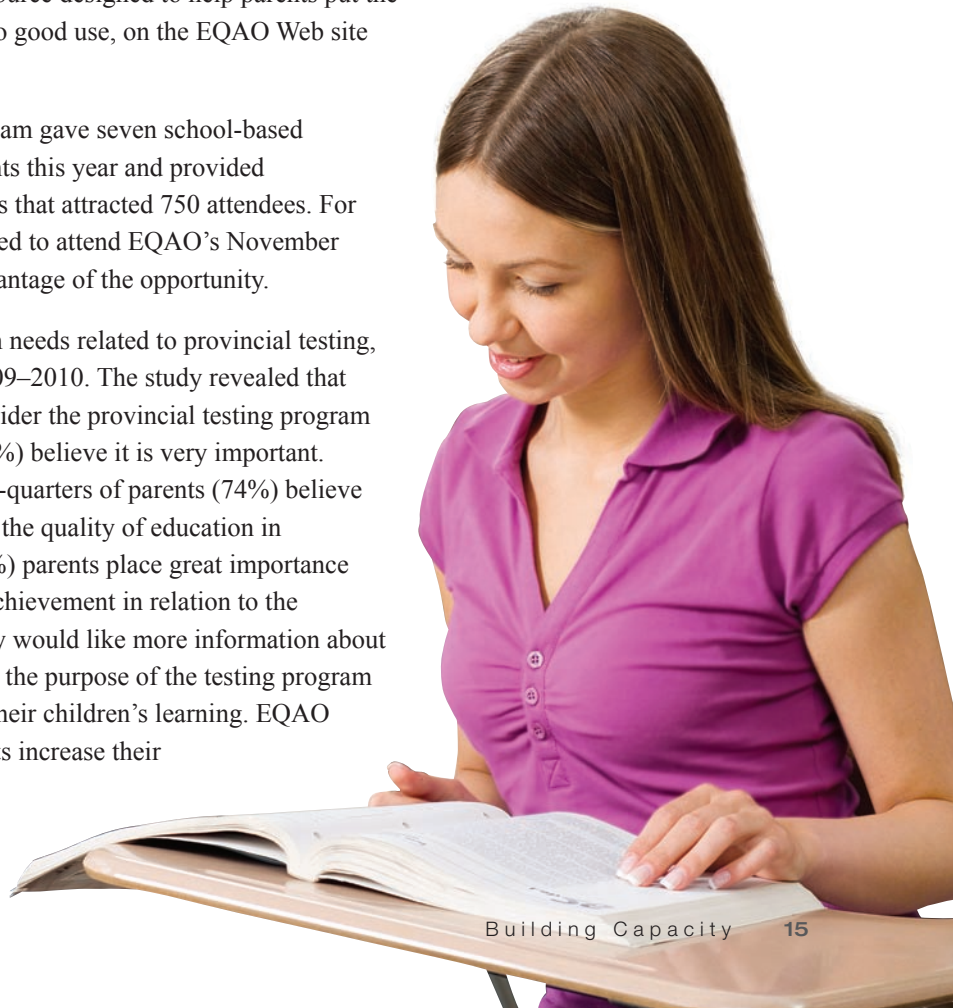
“I see EQAO tests as a good way to track achievement and to see if the school has improved.”

*Comments from Parents Who Participated in EQAO's Symposium
School Teams Making a Difference Through Knowledge, Support and Action*

EQAO continues to post samples of its tests, highlights of provincial results and school and school board results at www.eqao.com. These and other EQAO resources help parents and the public understand the standards that are expected in our schools and provide a valuable snapshot of how Ontario students are doing. This year, EQAO enhanced the school-search feature on the main page of its Web site to give parents and the public even easier access to board and school reports and profiles. EQAO also continued to provide “Six Questions to Ask When Looking at Your School’s Results,” a resource designed to help parents put the information in the school-board reports to good use, on the EQAO Web site in 20 languages.

EQAO’s School Support and Outreach team gave seven school-based presentations to approximately 400 parents this year and provided information at two parent-led conferences that attracted 750 attendees. For the first time this year, parents were invited to attend EQAO’s November symposium, and more than 230 took advantage of the opportunity.

To better understand parents’ information needs related to provincial testing, EQAO conducted a research study in 2009–2010. The study revealed that almost nine out of 10 parents (88%) consider the provincial testing program important and that almost two-thirds (62%) believe it is very important. The study also revealed that almost three-quarters of parents (74%) believe EQAO results are being used to improve the quality of education in Ontario, and almost seven out of 10 (69%) parents place great importance on having an indication of their child’s achievement in relation to the provincial standard. Parents reported they would like more information about their children’s and their schools’ results, the purpose of the testing program and how they can use results to support their children’s learning. EQAO is committed to continuing to help parents increase their understanding in these areas. ■



Valuable Research Data

EQAO's commitment to providing objective, reliable and useful data about student achievement concerns far more than its assessment results. The agency also has an active research program that undertakes a number of original projects each year. EQAO conducts two main types of research: research to ensure the agency remains at the leading edge of large-scale assessments and research to ensure EQAO data are used for their primary purpose—improving student learning. In this way, EQAO delves into the statistical and psychometric processes and the instruments that result in high-quality assessment data, as well as the many factors that influence education quality and student achievement. This year, EQAO made important research advances in both of these areas.

Research Related to the Quality of Psychometric Processes

Research conducted under this mandate ensures that the most recent knowledge in the field of large-scale assessment is incorporated into EQAO's assessment program and that the data analysis procedures used by the agency are appropriate. Such research is critical to delivering reliable results that are a valid representation of what students know and can do in relation to curriculum expectations. It helps ensure that EQAO results can always be used to make valid year-to-year comparisons so that changes in student achievement at the school, board and provincial levels can be monitored effectively. For example, one study released this year, *Maintaining Comparability: The Move to a Single Literacy Score for the OSSLT*, confirmed that the comparability of results was maintained when, in 2006, in response to recommendations from an external review of its assessment program, EQAO shortened the OSSLT and began to report the results as a single literacy score rather than as separate reading and writing scores.

Research Related to Improving Student Learning

Research conducted under this mandate focuses on improving student learning by investigating the broad-ranging factors that affect it. The insights from these research projects help guide decision making by educators, parents and the government.

One study released this year, for example, examined the literacy achievement gap observed between boys and girls in English-language elementary schools. This study, *Towards an Understanding of Gender Differences in Literacy Achievement*, investigated various student factors, teacher beliefs and teaching practices at a sample of schools that have shown either large or small achievement gaps between girls and boys. A parallel study was conducted in French-language schools. The research concluded that creating a climate that focuses on learning for all students is critical to enabling each student to experience success. The results will inform new resources for educators with suggestions for narrowing the gender achievement gap.



“As teachers, we know our students best, but the data help us to know our students better. The data support us.”

Roslyn Bowness, Principal, E.T. Carmichael Public School,
Near North District School Board

EQAO's Research Portal

Use of EQAO's research portal also continued to increase this year. Through the portal, qualified researchers can quickly and easily access selected EQAO data files (with student identifiers removed) for their research. The portal encourages and facilitates the transformation of EQAO data into information that can influence decision making and action to improve student learning.

“My graduate students and I have requested data through EQAO's research portal for research on how immigrating to Canada, moving schools, speaking English at home, and proficiency in Grade 3 relate to students' proficiency in reading, writing and mathematics in Grade 6, and several other studies. Because Ontario students have such a wide range of experiences and backgrounds, EQAO data make it possible to investigate research questions that haven't been studied anywhere else in the world.”

Dr. Ruth Childs, Associate Professor, Department of Human Development and Applied Psychology,
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, and member of EQAO's Psychometric Expert Panel

EQAO RESEARCH PROJECTS PUBLISHED IN 2009–2010

Research Related to the Quality of Psychometric Processes

- Assessing Different Equating Methods Using Complex Test Formats
- Maintaining Comparability: The Move to a Single Literacy Score for the OSSLT

Research Related to Parents' Understanding of the Provincial Assessment Program

- Parents' Perspectives: The Importance of Provincial Testing and the Information It Provides About Children's Learning

Research Related to Improving Student Learning

- Towards an Understanding of Gender Differences in Literacy Achievement
- Étude des différences entre les garçons et les filles dans le développement de la littératie au sein des écoles françaises de l'Ontario (a study on gender and literacy development in Ontario French-language schools)
- Keeping an Eye on Literacy: Tracking the Progress of Students Who Were Unsuccessful on or Did Not Participate in the 2006 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test

Full results of these EQAO research projects are available at www.eqao.com.

Effective Business Practices

Accountability in Ontario's publicly funded education system was one of the central reasons for EQAO's creation in 1996. As an agency, EQAO therefore has a particular and deep-rooted commitment to ensuring its own accountability by demonstrating the responsible management of its assessment practices and processes, budget and expenditures. EQAO achieves this accountability through the development of effective and efficient operations, frequent review and enhancement of its policies, procedures and controls, and its reporting on these measures.

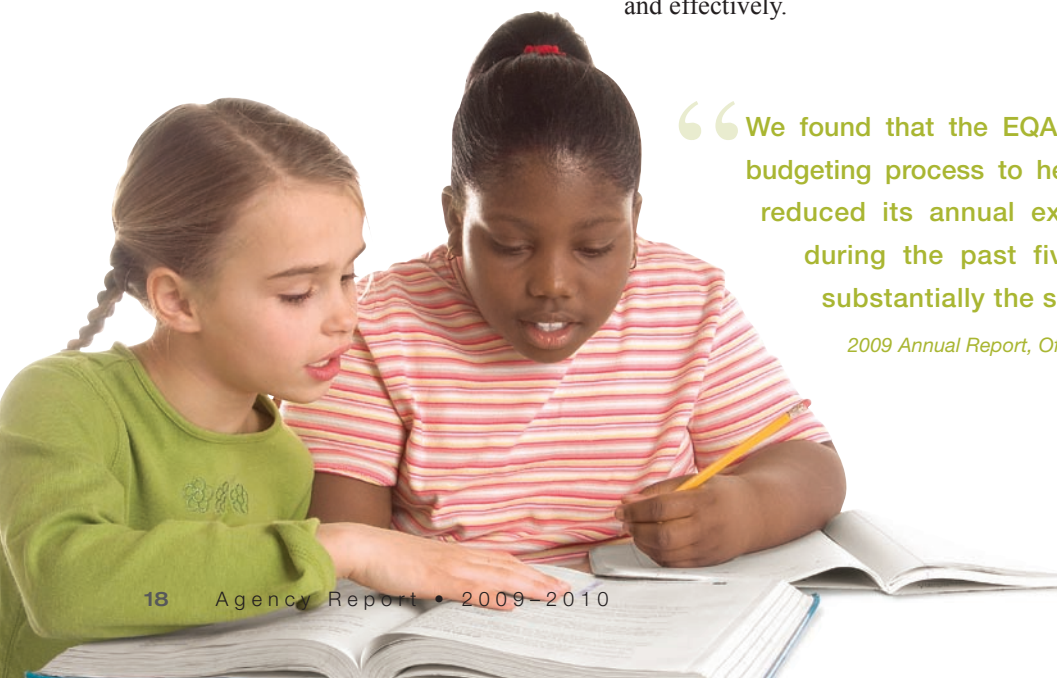
EQAO's assessment process is a large and complex undertaking. Consider this: each year, EQAO develops four different assessments in both French and English and then produces versions of them in a wide range of formats, including print, Braille, descriptive audio and assistive technology, to meet all students' needs. The agency then delivers the assessments, oversees their execution, collects and scores them, and reports their results. In total, almost 600 000 tests were written last year at more than 5000 schools across the province. Each step of the assessment process, from developing items (or questions) to distributing materials to releasing reports, requires a number of procedures and controls to ensure that the results are valid, consistent and reliable indicators of student achievement.

Value for money was one of the areas the Auditor General assessed as part of an extensive review of EQAO in 2009. One of the three main objectives of the review was to ensure that the agency delivered its programs and acquired its goods and services in an economical and efficient manner.

The Auditor General's report confirmed that EQAO has developed a good budgeting process to help control costs and has reduced its annual expenditures by over 20% during the past five years while delivering substantially the same service. In addition, the audit confirmed that EQAO complies appropriately with the procurement, travel and expense procedures that are required of government agencies to ensure that public funds are used efficiently and effectively.

“We found that the EQAO had developed a good budgeting process to help control costs and had reduced its annual expenditures by over 20% during the past five years while delivering substantially the same service.”

2009 Annual Report, Office of the Auditor General of Ontario



As an agency that exists to improve accountability, demonstrating accountability in all that it does is of paramount importance to EQAO. The agency is proud that the Auditor General's report confirms both the rigour of its assessment processes and the solidity of its financial practices. The Auditor General also made a number of valuable recommendations about EQAO's assessment processes, which the agency will factor into its ongoing improvement planning process.

Each year, the government spends \$20 billion on the operation of school boards in Ontario. With almost two million students in the publicly funded school system, that's more than \$10 000 a student.

For only \$17 a student (about \$33 million in 2009–2010), EQAO operates the provincial assessment program to determine how well students across the province are satisfying the reading, writing and mathematics expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum* at key stages in their education. The testing results provide powerful information that contributes to accountability in the publicly funded school system and generates data that educators use to improve programs for all students. The cost is minimal; the value is considerable. ■

ANNUAL COST PER STUDENT

Ministry of Education *	\$10 221
EQAO †	\$17

* Based on total 2009–2010 school-board funding (excluding unallocated, school authority and capital funding) of \$19 431 669 812 and total enrolment of 1 901 236 full-time students, as of March 2010, according to the Ministry of Education.

† Based on total 2009–2010 spending of \$33 044 155 and the same enrolment as above.

Acknowledging EQAO's Educator Partners

EQAO involves educators from across the province in all aspects of its assessment program, from question development to test administration to scoring. Involving front-line educators helps ensure that EQAO's assessments are directly linked to curriculum expectations, reflect the work being done every day in classrooms across Ontario and produce information that is useful for improvement planning at the individual, school, school-board and provincial levels.

“ Involving educators in all stages of the assessment cycle is critical to ensuring EQAO's assessments have relevant, curriculum-based content, are scored validly and produce objective, reliable results. Working closely with educators also helps ensure that the information the assessments produce is what educators need for their improvement planning strategies, interventions and target setting.”

Marie Parsons, Chief Assessment Officer, EQAO



EQAO would like to thank all the educators and the many other members of the education community who participated in the agency's scoring activities and committees over the past year.

This year, more than 2500 English- and French-language educators participated in the agency's scoring and committee activities. These educators represented all 72 school boards in Ontario and more than 4000 schools, a broader range than ever before.

Educators who participate in EQAO's committees and scoring activities say consistently that the experience is important professional development that informs the way they teach and helps them influence student achievement positively.

“ Using the EQAO data and other classroom results, we were able to identify students who were struggling and provide the necessary interventions. In addition, our teachers enhanced their classroom teaching practices to accommodate the various learning styles of our students.”

Gordon McCabe, Principal,
Fort Frances High School,
Rainy River District School Board



About EQAO

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is an independent provincial agency funded by the Government of Ontario. EQAO's mandate is to conduct province-wide tests at key points in every student's primary, junior and secondary education and report the results to educators, parents and the public.

EQAO acts as a catalyst for increasing the success of Ontario students by measuring their achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in relation to *Ontario Curriculum* expectations. The resulting data provide a gauge of quality and accountability in Ontario's publicly funded education system.

The objective and reliable assessment results are evidence that adds to the current knowledge about student learning and serves as an important tool for improvement at the individual, school, school board and provincial levels. EQAO helps build capacity for the appropriate use of data by providing resources that educators, parents, policy-makers and others in the education community can use to improve learning and teaching.

EQAO distributes an individual report to each student who writes the tests and posts school, school-board and provincial results on its Web site (www.eqao.com). Schools and school boards also create their own reports of EQAO data for distribution to parents and others in their communities.

VALUES

EQAO values giving all students the opportunity to reach their highest possible level of achievement.

EQAO values its role as a service to educators, parents, students, government and the public in support of teaching and learning in the classroom.

EQAO values credible evidence that informs professional practice and focuses attention on interventions that improve student success.

EQAO values research that informs large-scale assessment and classroom practice.

EQAO values the dedication and expertise of Ontario's educators and their involvement in all aspects of the assessment process and the positive difference their efforts make in student outcomes.

EQAO values the delivery of its programs and services with equivalent quality in both English and French.

**Education Quality and
Accountability Office**



2 Carlton Street, Suite 1200, Toronto ON M5B 2M9
Telephone: 1-888-327-7377 Web site: www.eqao.com

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