

Independent Review of Assessment and Reporting Ontario: A Learning Province – Summary

April 2018

Message from the Minister

Ontario's publicly funded education system is among the best in the world. Our students are graduating at the highest rates in our history and are outperforming other jurisdictions in international assessments. Together with our partners, we strive to equip our students with the ability to face new challenges with confidence, knowledge and compassion.

Our aim is to focus our education system on the development of the vital skills students need to succeed in the classroom and in the world. Literacy, numeracy and transferable skills are at the core of our work in schools. But how can we be sure that our system is working well to support our students and our communities? How can we know where the gaps are and what needs to be strengthened? To give students and parents better information about a child's progress and to modernize our curriculum and assessment tools, our government announced a multi-year plan that includes new provincial report cards. Jurisdictions across Canada and around the world are wrestling with the challenge of how best to support students, parents and educators through assessment and reporting. To inform this work, our government commissioned an independent review of Ontario's student assessment and reporting, led by Dr. Carol Campbell and five advisors.

The review's recommendations suggest that the status quo is no longer working. Instead, they set out a vision for truly transformational change in our assessment approach. They call for a greater emphasis on and support for classroom assessments conducted by the teachers who work with students every day. They also recognize that large-scale Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments provide important public information about the performance of Ontario's education system and inform improvements that benefit students.

We intend to move forward with our partners on the recommendations for strengthening classroom assessment and reporting, while calling for further consultations this fall with parents, educators and stakeholders on the recommendations related to EQAO to develop next steps.

I would like to thank Dr. Carol Campbell and the advisors for their comprehensive and thoughtful report. I would also like to thank all of the students, parents, educators and community members from across the province who provided their valuable input through the public consultation process.

Our schools are the foundation for a caring and competitive Ontario. This report will help us improve our publicly funded education system so that every student in Ontario is able to reach their full potential.

Indira Naidoo-Harris
Minister of Education
Minister Responsible for Early Years and Child Care

The Review

The review was conducted from September 2017 to March 2018. Input and feedback was collected through:

IN-PERSON AND ONLINE ENGAGEMENT SESSIONS	ONLINE SURVEY	REPRESENTATIVES FROM STAKEHOLDER ORGANIZATIONS	WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS
886 PEOPLE	4,100 RESPONSES	100+ ORGANIZATIONS	44 SUBMITTED

The review was also informed by:

- Experts in assessment design and research, equitable practices and Indigenous ways of learning
- Commissioned research, including consideration of assessment practices in Canada and internationally
- An Educator Panel with representation from across Ontario, including elementary and secondary school levels, Public, Catholic, English and French systems, an early childhood educator and an Indigenous teacher.

Although the original intent was to consult with First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners, educators and community members in a parallel process, the limited timeframe did not allow for meaningful engagement that would be respectful of established processes and consistent with broader government commitments. A longer process of engagement and consultation will be developed, starting with the creation of dedicated working groups, with membership to be identified in collaboration between the Ministry and existing Indigenous leadership tables.

Assessment in Ontario

Classroom assessment supports students' learning, engagement and growth. How students are assessed, and what is measured, make a real difference in the trajectory of their progress in school. Ontario students are routinely assessed in the classroom, by their teachers, using a variety of tools and methods to provide individual feedback and improve learning. Likewise, large-scale assessments provide important information to parents/guardians and the public about the performance of our public education system, and they inform future work to make our schools even better.

In May 1993, the Province of Ontario established the Royal Commission on Learning “to ensure that Ontario’s youth are well-prepared for the challenges of the twenty-first century.” The commission’s report, *For the Love of Learning*, recommended large-scale provincial assessments of literacy and numeracy in Grade 3 and of literacy in Grade 11, to be administered by an independent body that would provide reports to the Minister of Education and to the public.

Today, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) designs and administers large-scale, province-wide census testing annually of students’ knowledge of the curriculum:

- reading, writing and mathematics in Grades 3 and 6,
- academic and applied mathematics in Grade 9, and
- literacy in Grade 10.

Types of assessment

Classroom: developed by teachers to help individual students take the next steps in learning and to determine and inform students and parents/guardians of the student’s achievement (e.g., tests, assignments, teacher observations, etc.).

Large-scale: one-time measures, administered at a provincial, national, or international level and designed primarily to provide snapshots of the strengths and weaknesses of education systems.

Other large-scale assessments currently in use in Ontario include:

- The Early Development Instrument (EDI) administered to all Kindergarten students by their teachers to collect census data on children’s developmental readiness.
- A range of national and international assessments in which a random sample of Ontario students are tested to enable comparisons across jurisdictions. For example, the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), measures a sample of 15-year old student performance in mathematics, science and reading across more than 70 countries.

Report Findings and Recommendations

The report outlines 18 recommendations for assessment processes that give students and educators timely and relevant feedback on their progress, stimulate growth in relation to their past performance and future goals, and communicate real-time information to parents/guardians and professionals who can help students in their quest for fulfillment and success.

Strengthen classroom assessment and reporting

The Advisors found that: There is a need to prioritize, value and improve classroom assessments and feedback. Growing Success, the ministry’s policy for assessment, evaluation and reporting, is a well-respected foundation on which further development can be based. Developing assessment knowledge, skills and practices requires a long-term strategy and investment in new supports.

Highlights of recommendations:

- Respect teachers’ professional judgement and equip them to provide quality, descriptive feedback to students and partners using a range of tools.
- Update and re-launch Growing Success to support greater emphasis on recognizing the culture and experiences of each student and ensuring equity.
- Provide professional learning and development opportunities to educators to improve assessment capacity across the system, including co-development of tools and practices.

What will these changes mean...for teachers?

Martha has been a Grade 7 teacher in the French Catholic elementary school board for ten years. She recently moved to Sudbury and her new class of students is much more diverse.

Martha didn’t receive much training on assessment when she was studying to be a teacher. She has difficulty finding quality classroom assessment examples. The few she uses are in English and include terminology that is not culturally relevant.

In the future, Martha will be able to access a range of assessment examples that are evidence-based and culturally relevant so they are suitable for the dynamic range of student learning and backgrounds that make up Martha’s class.

Martha could participate in regular professional development opportunities and be part of a provincewide network that co-develops new classroom assessment resources for Ontario teachers.

Modernize large-scale assessment and reporting

The Advisors found that: There was a strong consensus about the need for changes in EQAO assessments. There is a high level of concern about the current nature and impact of EQAO assessments given commitments to student equity and minimizing undesirable indirect effects of assessments, on students’ learning and well-being. In particular, there were concerns about whether Grade 3 is an appropriate age for large-scale assessments in light of concerns about children’s development, well-being and anxiety; whether Grade 9 is an appropriate time as students were transitioning into the first year of secondary school; and finally, whether the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) is outdated and should continue to be a one-day assessment linked to a graduation requirement. EQAO test results provide useful information to support school, school board and education system improvements but too often the data is also used to measure individual student performance or rank schools, which causes confusion and can be damaging.

Highlights of recommendations:

- Use EQAO’s large-scale assessments as a point-in-time “snapshot” of student learning outcomes, achievement and equity:
 - Continue to use a census method in order to obtain a complete picture of progress on addressing issues of inequity through analysis of sub-groups.

- Reduce the number of large-scale assessments and limit their use to measuring students’ knowledge of the curriculum not linked to graduation at two key stages in school: Grades 6 and 10.
- Strengthen the use of the Early Development Instrument to help schools and communities understand the needs of their youngest learners.
- Modernize EQAO’s assessment and reporting to make better use of technology, address issues of cultural relevance and assess a broader range of skills and competencies that students will need to succeed after secondary school.
- Be more inclusive in EQAO assessment design and administration to remove barriers, recognizing the uniqueness and increasing diversity of Ontario’s students and incorporating their choices and voices, including providing appropriate and effective accommodations, modifications and exemptions for students with special needs and English/French language learners.
- Revise the *EQAO Act* to focus the future purpose and role of the EQAO on provincial large-scale assessment.
- Transform approaches to reporting provincial large-scale assessments to be consistent with their purpose and to minimize and mitigate inappropriate uses, including: using large-scale provincial assessments for student diagnostic purposes, to infer evaluation of educators, and for ranking schools and school boards.

What will these changes mean...for students?

Aadil is in Grade 6. It’s taken some time for him to adjust to his new middle school, make friends and get used to learning at a different speed. He will take the EQAO test in the spring.

Since the first day of school, Aadil has been hearing about the EQAO test and the importance of the whole class doing well. The teacher regularly gives practice tests. On test day, Aadil is surprised to find all the charts and tip sheets have been taken off the walls. The whole class seems stressed and Aadil is unable to concentrate.

In the future, Aadil’s math teacher could give students a range of in-class assessments to help them make progress on their learning and become more comfortable with different types of assessments. The teacher could explain that the EQAO test is just a snapshot, not about individual student performance and give the students information about the purpose of the test for them to give to their parents. As a result, Aadil could feel more confident that he is ready to demonstrate what he has learned in math this year.

Engage partners to increase understanding and plan and implement change

The Advisors found that: Over the past twenty years, there has been an evolution of expectations and perceptions of how and why assessment happens in Ontario schools. Ontario’s education system is stronger when professionals – at all levels of the education system – work together, sharing knowledge, skills and experience to improve student achievement and the well-being of all students and staff. With regular input and feedback from students, parents/guardians and communities, changes will be well-informed and further help strengthen the system so it supports all students to achieve their potential.

Highlights of recommendations:

- Provide better information to students, parents/guardians, educators, school system leaders and the public to establish a shared understanding of the purpose, application and value of different types of assessment to support improvement efforts.
- Use collaborative and broadly representative forums to develop improvement initiatives in a thoughtful, coherent way that is integrated as the curriculum is refreshed and involve First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Franco-phone, special needs and racialized students and communities to ensure any changes improve equity.
- Establish a process of continuous review and independent evaluation of student assessment and EQAO.

For more information

- Read the Advisors’ final report
www.edu.gov.on.ca/CurriculumRefresh/learning-province-en.pdf
- Learn about the curriculum refresh and work of the Transformation Steering Committee
www.curriculumrefresh.ca