

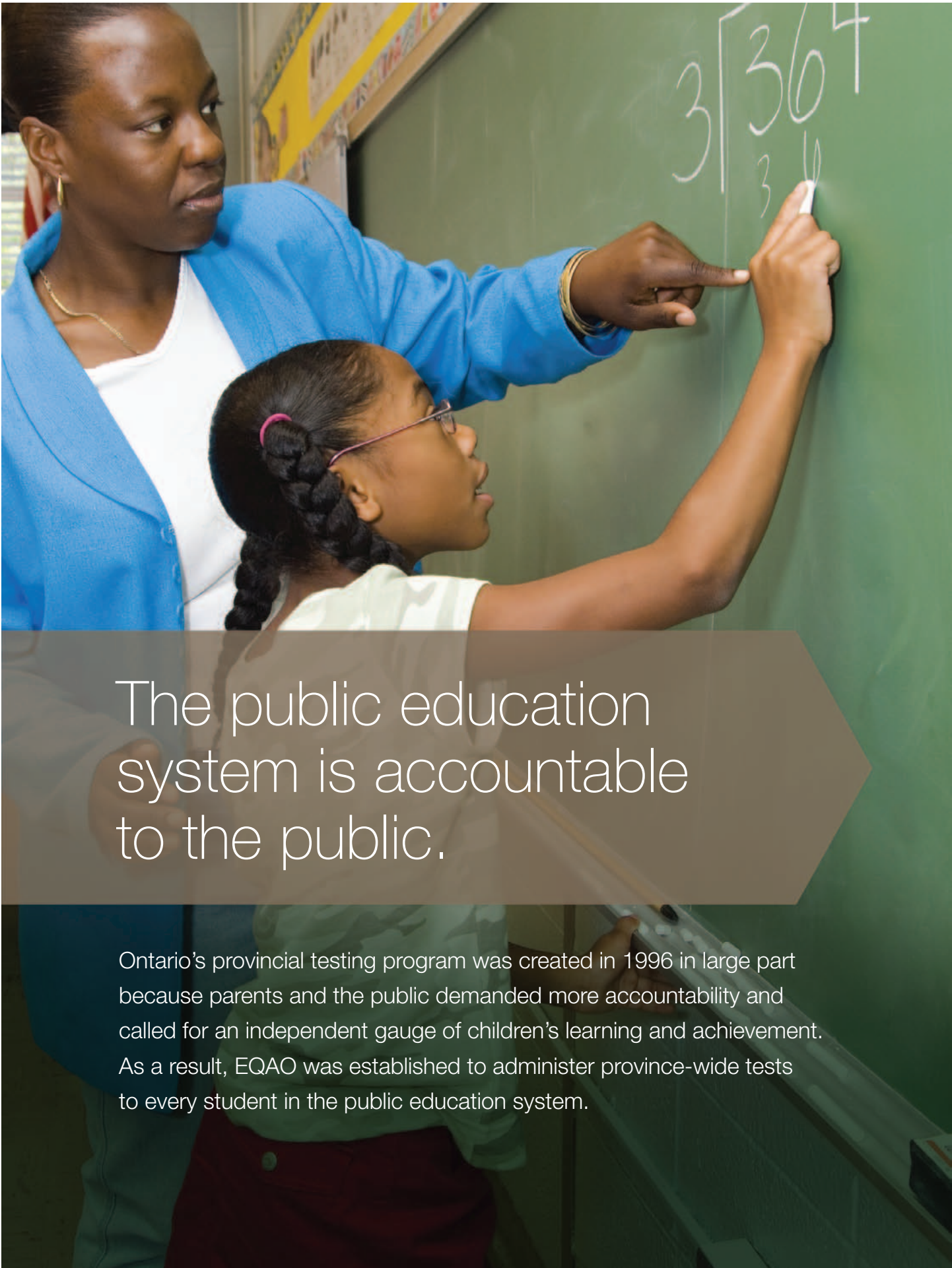
EQAO'S PROVINCE-WIDE TESTS

The Power of Good Information

Education Quality and
Accountability Office



Ontario conducts province-wide tests of students' literacy and math skills at key stages of their education to contribute to public accountability and continuous improvement.



The public education system is accountable to the public.

Ontario's provincial testing program was created in 1996 in large part because parents and the public demanded more accountability and called for an independent gauge of children's learning and achievement. As a result, EQAO was established to administer province-wide tests to every student in the public education system.

“ It seems obvious to us that the public school system is responsible to the public, and owes it to the public to demonstrate how well it’s doing with our children. ”

Ontario’s Royal Commission on Learning, 1994



There is “broad-based and long-standing public and parental support for [province-wide] testing as a mechanism of system accountability.”

OISE Study: Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario, 2009

According to the 2009 OISE study,

- 65% of the public supports province-wide testing at the elementary level.
- 69% of the public supports province-wide testing of all students at the secondary level.
- 71% of parents support province-wide testing at each of the elementary and secondary levels.

Parents value the provincial testing program and believe it contributes to higher quality and accountability in the public education system.

EQAO commissioned survey of Ontario parents, 2009

According to the EQAO survey,

- 88% of parents consider the provincial testing program important; 62% believe it is *very* important.
- 74% believe EQAO results are used to improve education quality.
- 69% believe provincial testing makes the education system accountable to parents and taxpayers.



Continuous improvement
is fuelled by constant
transparency and
reliable data.

“ The process starts with EQAO. That’s the baseline. Without that, I wouldn’t know where to start. ”

Marilyn Dawson, Grade 3 teacher, Holy Rosary Catholic School,
Waterloo Catholic District School Board

All partners in the education system rely on the information provided by EQAO test results to help improve student learning and achievement.

“[The EQAO test] helped me a lot because I got a lot of practice. It helped me improve my reading and my writing a lot . . . It makes me want to learn more and more because I know I’m doing well in school and so do they [teachers and parents].”

Grade 6 student

“I think [the purpose of the provincial testing program is] to make all children better for the future. It gives them more support and dedication. We can help the children more with this program. It’s good for everybody.”

Parent from EQAO’s 2009 survey

Students

- Each student who writes the provincial tests receives a report that describes his or her achievement on the test, which helps teachers and parents support his or her learning.

Parents

Of a representative sample of Ontario parents surveyed in 2009,

- 69% value having an objective indication of their child’s achievement relative to the provincial standard.

“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

“I’m a big believer in data. It can be very helpful, especially when looking at data over time. Unless you’re talking about data, you’re just talking. It’s a great direction setter.”

Jim Rielly, principal, Crestwood Secondary School, Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board

Teachers

Of the more than 7200 Grade 6 teachers EQAO surveyed during the 2010 assessment administration,

- 81% use EQAO data to identify how well students are meeting curriculum expectations and
- 83% use EQAO data to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in elementary programs.

Principals

Of the more than 3400 elementary school principals EQAO surveyed in 2010,

- 97% use EQAO data to guide school improvement initiatives;
- 97% use EQAO data to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement in elementary programs;
- 90% use EQAO data to support change in teaching practices and
- 83% use EQAO data to communicate with parents and guardians about student achievement.

“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

School Boards

- The *Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act, 2009* requires every school board in Ontario to develop, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies to deliver education programs, promote student achievement and ensure effective stewardship of resources. EQAO data are one important source of information for trustees to include in the school-board plans mandated under this Act.
- Directors of Education are required to produce annual school-board reports for their school communities. EQAO data are a central source of information for these reports.
- Before the establishment of EQAO, provincial reviews were conducted using random samples of students. This approach was found to be lacking because it did not provide school boards with their own students' results and, therefore, provided no opportunity for local reflection and focused intervention for improvement. Many boards began to request that all their students participate in assessments so that more useful data could be obtained.

“EQAO’s provincial tests provide our schools with information they need to deliver effective teaching strategies and support each one of their students. Planning for improvement without reliable data would be like aiming for a target with your eyes closed.”

**Warren Kennedy, Director of
Education, Greater Essex County
District School Board**

“The annual assessments administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office are important markers of how students, and our education system as a whole, are doing . . . Parents told us that they wanted an independent body to assess the achievements of their children. These results allow us to drive resources into our classrooms. They let us know that students are learning, improving and mastering the basic skills necessary to succeed in the classroom, and beyond the classroom.”

**The Honourable Leona Dombrowsky,
M.P.P., Minister of Education**

Government of Ontario

- Ontario’s Ministry of Education uses EQAO results to help create and direct its supports, develop policies and programs and manage the system at the provincial level.
- 50% of the progress indicators in the ministry’s School Board Progress Reports are related to EQAO results.
- EQAO data have enabled the ministry to establish initiatives such as Learning to 18, the Turnaround School Program and the Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership.

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a pencil, poised to write on an open notebook. The background is softly blurred, showing a green plant. A semi-transparent brown arrow-shaped box points to the left, containing white text.

Province-wide tests
measure core skills
at key stages.



The provincial tests measure core reading, writing and math skills based on the expectations in *The Ontario Curriculum*, which are the foundation for success in all other areas of learning and in life beyond school.

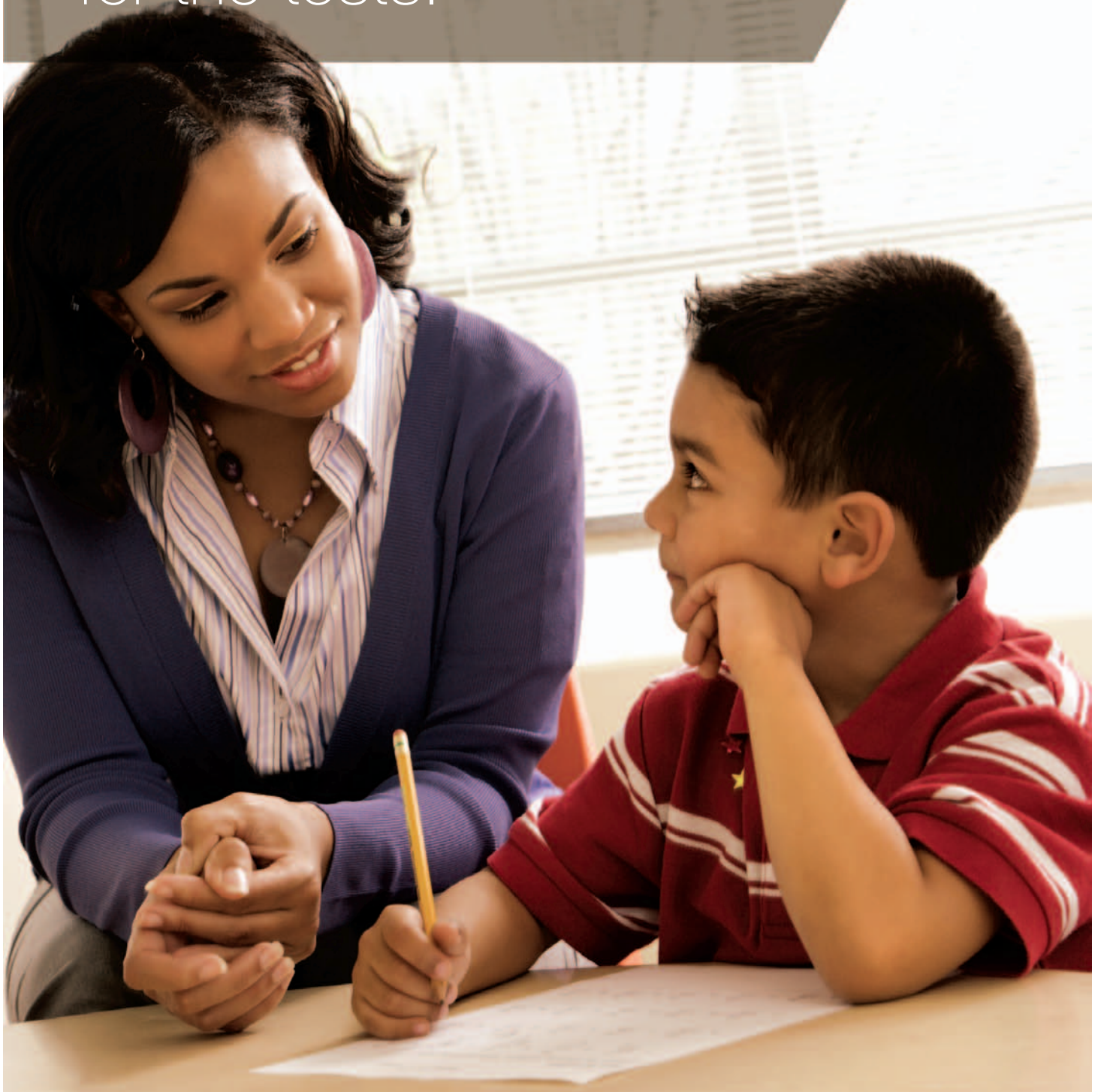
Ontario's province-wide tests assess cumulative knowledge and skills at four key stages:

- Grade 3 (literacy and math tested at the end of the primary division);
- Grade 6 (literacy and math tested at the end of the junior division);
- Grade 9 (math tested in the first year of secondary school) and
- Grade 10 (literacy tested as a graduation requirement).

All other Canadian provinces and territories conduct large-scale testing and the practice is common in many other countries as well. Ontario has a minimal level of testing compared to other jurisdictions.

As with regular classroom assessments, all students who are able to do so are expected to complete Ontario's provincial tests. For students with special education needs, some accommodations that are consistent with regular classroom assessment practices are permitted. Special provisions may also be permitted for English language learners.

Teaching the curriculum
is preparing students
for the tests.



“

[EQAO] is an independent audit of the Ontario curriculum, and, if you are teaching curriculum in the proper order, at the proper rate, at the proper depth – your students will do well.

”

Jim Costello, Director of Education,
Lambton Kent District School Board



Each question on every EQAO test is based on learning expectations set out in *The Ontario Curriculum*, which is what teachers are responsible for teaching in classrooms every day.

Preparing students for the tests means teaching them

- to understand what they read;
- to clearly communicate their thoughts in writing and
- to use appropriate math skills to solve problems.

These skills can and should be reinforced in all subjects.

EQAO tests should not require special preparation. Students are simply asked to demonstrate the curriculum-based skills they have developed through their regular classroom work.

EQAO tests are developed, administered and scored by Ontario teachers.



Ontario educators from across the province participate in all aspects of the provincial assessment program, from question development to test administration to scoring.

Involving 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 relevant information that is useful for improvement planning at the individual, school, school-board and provincial levels.

“

Participating in EQAO activities, as an educator, really gives you an insight into the skills and the competencies that the Ministry is looking for students to demonstrate, so it has put more of a focus on the key skills that are involved in literacy and making sure those are the skills we develop in our students.

”

Jennifer Seeley, resource teacher,
Westgate Collegiate and Vocational Institute,
Lakehead District School Board

Testing every student is essential for accountability and system improvement.



Using the available data to monitor each student's progress and plan for their continued success is like the rubber meeting the road. We have the data but we need to use it effectively to ensure the continued success of our students.



Kendall Olsen, principal, Sturgeon Creek Public School, Rainy River District School Board

EQAO was established to gather information from—and account for—every student in the public education system.

Only tests that gather information from every student can

- provide students and parents with information about individual student achievement in relation to the provincial standard and
- provide reliable achievement information at the school and board levels, and by sub-population (e.g., gender), to inform improvement planning and resource allocation.

Random-sample testing cannot provide the level of information needed for school, board and student improvement planning or for local accountability.

In December 2010, following a review and public hearings, the Ontario government's Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommended that EQAO "continue its policy of every-child testing." The Standing Committee is an all-party legislative committee that reviews and reports to the House its observations and recommendations on the annual reports of Ontario's Auditor General.



EQAO tests
provide value
for money.

Annual Cost per Student

\$10,000

Ministry of Education
School-Board
Funding

\$17

Provincial Testing
Program



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 per student.

For only \$17 per student (about \$33 million in 2009–2010), EQAO operates the provincial testing program to determine how well students across the province are developing critical reading, writing and math skills and to inform the policies and instructional programs that will help improve learning for all students.

The Auditor General of Ontario's 2009 value-for-money audit of EQAO confirmed that EQAO 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.

The audit praised EQAO's budgeting and procurement processes and acknowledged that the agency had reduced its annual expenditures by over 20% in five years while delivering substantially the same service.

What gets measured gets attention. What gets attention improves.

“ We are all in this together. The bottom line is that we are morally obligated to improve student achievement. EQAO data helps us do this. ”

**Bernadette Gillis, vice-principal, St. Barbara
Catholic Elementary School, Dufferin-Peel
Catholic District School Board**

Ontario students have made notable progress over the years in meeting the provincial standard in reading, writing and mathematics.

In Grade 6, for example,

- more than 28 000 additional students met the provincial standard in reading and writing in 2010 than in 2000.
- more than 12 000 additional students met the provincial standard in math in 2010 than in 2000.

There is still work to be done, however, to ensure that all Ontario students develop the basic literacy and math skills they need for success in school and in life.

In Grade 6 in 2010, for example,

- more than 37 000 students did not meet the provincial standard in reading.
- more than 40 000 students did not meet the provincial standard in writing.
- more than 52 000 students did not meet the provincial standard in math.

Internationally, Ontario students are among the best in reading, according to the results of the 2009 administration of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). A full 92% of Ontario students met or exceeded PISA's key achievement benchmark, and, of the 75 participating jurisdictions, including all 10 Canadian provinces, only Shanghai, China, had reading results that were statistically higher than Ontario's.



The recent PISA results also challenge us to look more closely at other areas of student learning. These latest results show that, while Ontario students are performing well and holding their own in relation to other countries and provinces in math and science, they are not among the top global achievers in these two areas.

“Ontario has managed to balance administrative and professional accountability in an admirable fashion. [The government] has consistently communicated the message to the field and the public that results matter, as defined by performance on the provincial assessments. However, its response to weak performance has consistently been intervention and support, not blame and punishment.”

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education: Lessons from PISA for the United States* (2010)

Early achievement —
or identification of
struggles — is related
to future success.



It is important to track children’s progress consistently throughout their schooling.

Research on the results of province-wide tests has shown that there is a clear relationship between early achievement and achievement in secondary school. This means that students who meet the provincial standard in early grades are more likely to carry that success into later grades. Those who do not meet the provincial standard in early grades are at a greater risk of not having the literacy and numeracy skills they will need in secondary school and beyond.

For example, cohort tracking results for the 2010 Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics (Applied) show that

- of the 5603 students who had met the standard in both Grades 3 and 6, 75% (4198) met it again in Grade 9.
- of the 14 716 students who did not meet the standard in either Grade 3 or Grade 6, 71% (10 480) still did not meet it in Grade 9.


The data also show that identifying struggling students early and providing support at school and at home can make all the difference.

For example,

- of the 3303 students who had not met the standard in math in Grade 3 but improved to meet it in Grade 6, 59% (1961) carried that success forward and met the standard again in Grade 9 in applied mathematics.
- of the 62% of students who did not meet the provincial standard in reading in Grade 6, and of the 67% of the students who did not meet the standard in writing in Grade 6, all were successful on the OSSLT on their first try in 2010.

“EQAO’s assessments have proved to be tremendous tools for refining teaching practice. One of the great accomplishments of the assessments is that they allow us to test what we are teaching and gain a greater understanding of where students need support. Assessment for learning has become our mantra.”

Val Drury, former principal, St. Patrick School, Northeastern Catholic District School Board

A photograph of a classroom with students raising their hands. The foreground shows the back of a student's head and shoulders, wearing a green and white striped shirt. In the background, other students are visible, some with their hands raised, in a classroom with blue walls and a green chalkboard.

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Accountability Office**



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