

# PROVINCE-WIDE TESTING IN ONTARIO SCHOOLS

The Ontario Principals' Council is the professional association representing 5,000 principals and vice-principals in Ontario's public schools. As front-line school leaders, we have been in the unique position of seeing firsthand the rollout of province-wide testing over the past several years. The mandate of any testing program, be it school-based or province-wide, should be to assess the student's understanding of the material, determine areas that require further remediation and use the data collected to refine the learning plan as needed. Testing must focus on the best interest of the student as well as the accountability needs of the public.

Ontario's principals and vice-principals support testing and accountability. However, testing must provide schools with clear data that can be used to benefit students in a timely manner, taking into consideration the significant variation in learning abilities and the differences among students from diverse regions, backgrounds and cultures. Accountability should be focused on ensuring that every student is receiving quality instruction, is continuing to progress with the curriculum and is getting the help they need. It should not be about ranking schools, programs or students. The province-wide testing process must consist of more than just a collection of data; it must address the needs of students while being an appropriate use of the time and resources it demands.

Ontario's school leaders have identified two main problems in the current province-wide testing structure:

1. Schools and classroom teachers are not receiving the results in a timely manner so that remedial action, where needed, can be taken immediately and,
2. The tests, as an add-on to the regular classroom assessment process, are creating multiple challenges for schools in terms of timetabling, resource needs, disruption of school schedules, budgeting and additional work for staff.

That is not to say that the process has not resulted in some positive outcomes. The most notable successes of the EQAO have been an increase in the emphasis on data-based decision-making and program planning, and an improvement in the quality of instruction and assessment in our schools.

Where appropriate, OPC would like to see these benefits continue, while shifting the emphasis from primarily system monitoring to improved student learning. The issues of most concern to principals and vice-principals are those related to the following six areas: the high stakes nature of some EQAO testing, administration, marking, reporting, finances and equity.

Each of these issues, with impacts on student learning, is briefly discussed in the appendix.

**Our recommendation is an altered model of provincial assessment to deal with the range of problems that principals feel exist with the present approach to EQAO testing. It would entail integrating the provincial tests into ongoing classroom assessment, as opposed to them being an “add on” to the curriculum.**

This new approach is similar to that proposed for the extended core testing and would, we believe:

- Provide immediate results to classroom teachers;
- Increase the effectiveness of teachers without increasing their workload, by embedding the assessment into the curriculum;
- Enable students to get the help they need to perform better in school;
- Meet the government’s objective for large-scale provincial assessment;
- Be accountable to the public;
- Improve the assessment skills of teachers and administrators through professional development;
- Provide consistency and accountability in a more cost-effective way; and,
- Significantly reduce the onerous and time-consuming administrative burden on schools.

**OPC recommends the following model:**

**EQAO** would be responsible for:

1. Establishing consistent baseline standards of achievement,
2. Developing valid and reliable assessments,
3. Providing training and resources to schools for administering and marking the tests by classroom teachers within the instructional day,
4. Distributing the tests,
5. Auditing schools to ensure consistent administration and marking,
6. Collecting papers from a sample of students in each school to ensure reliability of marking and
7. Compiling school, board, and provincial reports.

**Schools** would be responsible for:

1. Administering the tests within a consistent provincial approach, in the context of regular classroom assessment,
2. Marking the tests (by classroom teachers) within the instructional day,
3. Using the data in a timely manner for ongoing student assessment, remediation and school improvement planning,
4. Providing reports to EQAO to ensure reliability of the data and
5. Communicating results to students and parents.

The Ontario Principals’ Council believes that this approach to provincial assessment would meet the needs of students, government, parents and taxpayers, and would result in a system of province-wide testing that leads to better student achievement and a valid mechanism for public accountability in a more cost-effective way.