



ADJUSTING THE OPTICS: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting

A Response from the Elementary
Teachers' Federation of Ontario



Published by

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

480 University Avenue, Suite 1000

Toronto, Ontario M5G 1V2

Design by KT Design & Communications

Copyright © 2001 by Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ADJUSTING THE OPTICS: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting

6 BELIEF STATEMENTS

Teachers
Students and Parents
Tests
School Leaders
EQAO
Ministry of Education

8 ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION, AND REPORTING: A DEFINITION *Key Terms*

9 THE ONTARIO PERSPECTIVE

Standardized Tests

The Ministry of Education

EARLY READING STRATEGY

Education Quality and Accountability Office

GRADES 3 AND 6 READING, WRITING AND MATHEMATICS

Performance-Based or Standardized?

Accountability vs the School Market

Contextual Accountability

Girls and Boys: A Societal Phenomenon

Overall Achievement in the Province

Individual Student Results

Validation of Results: Comparability

Validation of Results: Quality Assurance

Concluding Comments on the Issues

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

EDUCATION QUALITY INDICATORS PROGRAM

National and International Tests

SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT INDICATORS PROGRAM (SAIP)

THIRD INTERNATIONAL MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE STUDY (TIMSS)

The Provincial Report Card

Format

Reporting

Supports

The Response Form

23 FINAL COMMENTS

25 ENDNOTES

ADJUSTING THE OPTICS: ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION, AND REPORTING

“Accountability” is the buzzword in Ontario’s public educational system today. Since the Progressive Conservative government took office in 1995, it has introduced initiatives it claims will increase accountability within a publicly funded education system. At the same time, the government undertook a massive and rapid overhaul of the educational system.

The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario welcomes accountability that is fair and equitable to students and teachers within a publicly funded system. However, *true* accountability should be shared among all of the key stakeholders. The Ministry of Education, as the lead stakeholder, has the responsibility to provide:

- sufficient funding for individual class sizes, as opposed to aggregate class sizes within district school boards;
- sufficient resources and support materials for teachers to implement the Ontario Curricula and the mandated Provincial Report Card;
- sufficient funding to meet the needs of schools and classrooms with diverse and transient student populations; and
- sufficient professional development days for teachers to enhance their professionalism for the improvement of student learning.

In its quest to ensure accountability within an education system that has been centralized in provincial bureaucracy and reformed within a time frame that has forced the system into chaos, the government has lost sight of one thing – the student. The government claims that it undertakes these initiatives in the best interest of students. However, the question remains – how does the student benefit from all of these changes?

The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario believes that students have not benefited from any of these initiatives implemented by the government. By adopting a

narrow definition of “accountability” – defined by the government simply as student achievement on paper-and-pencil tests, the results of which are reported to the public – the government has lost its primary focus, which should be on students. In elementary schools, the government currently funnels



millions of dollars into provincial testing, removing every Grade 3 and 6 student from classroom instruction for five days every year in order to take achievement tests. As of June 2001, the government announced that it will be expanding provincial testing to ensure that two core subjects will be tested each year from Grades 3 to 11. Elementary testing will be implemented over two years beginning in 2002-3 and secondary testing will be implemented over three years beginning in 2004-5.

This document has been developed as the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario position regarding the initiatives undertaken by this government on student assessment, evaluation, and reporting in Ontario. Within our vision, we identify key issues that we believe will make a positive contribution to student learning and to teaching methods. The Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario believes that by *adjusting the optics* we will refocus our attention on students, *not* test results.

“Accountability” is the buzzword in Ontario’s public educational system today.

Belief Statements

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) has developed a number of belief statements regarding assessment, evaluation, and reporting in Ontario public schools. These will continue to evolve as assessment issues emerge over time.

Student learning is affected by a wide variety of factors including genetics, home environment, parental education and support, health, and motivation.

Teachers

- Teachers welcome accountability when it is fair and equitable for all students.
- Classroom teachers are in the best position to assess, evaluate, and report on real student achievements.
- Classroom teacher assessment and evaluation of students should take precedence over the results of external assessments.
- Teachers need time during the school day to assess, evaluate, and report on student learning. Additional time is needed to assess, evaluate, and plan for the progress of special needs students.
- Teachers need access to high-quality, professional development programs on assessment, evaluation, and reporting of student achievements. Teachers need at least six curriculum implementation days to provide time to learn about effective strategies to implement the many curriculum changes including the four achievement levels and the electronic report card.

Students and Parents

- The role of parents and the home environment are important factors contributing to the success of students in school.
- Student learning is affected by a wide variety of factors including genetics, home environment, parental education and support, health, and motivation. School factors include the culture of the school, teachers' expertise, and the learning environment. With such a host of variables, cause-and-effect relationships are extremely difficult to prove and predict.
- Special needs students must be appropriately supported throughout their elementary years. This is particularly crucial for demonstrating effective student development in the assessing, evaluating, and reporting process.

Tests

- All assessments should be free from cultural, racial, ethnic, gender and socio-economic bias.
- Meaningful assessment of student learning is ongoing and multi-faceted.
- "Authentic" testing must reflect the daily experiences of students in actual classrooms. Authentic tests mimic the real interactions between teachers and students. Standardized tests are not authentic assessments.
- Standardized tests are a snapshot of limited learning at one point in time. Such tests are best used as random samples over a large population to determine program effectiveness.
- Effective assessment of student achievement across a highly diverse population is a poorly understood issue and is an area needing quality, long-term research.
- ETFO does not support the comprehensive testing of all Grade 3 to 11 students. Such test

results do not provide sufficient diagnostic information to teachers, students, and parents.

- Student assessment, either individually or in small groups, should be in the form of diagnostic assessment to assist teachers in diagnosing the status of an individual student or group of students in relation to the expectations within the curriculum.
- ETFO believes that if Ontario must have regular reporting of student achievement, tests should be administered to random samples of students, to assist classroom teachers in their work to improve student learning.
- ETFO does not support expensive national and international tests, the results of which have no practical use for classroom teachers and their students.

School Leaders

- School leaders should avoid scheduling combined grades, wherever possible, to assist in the effective implementation of the Ontario Report Card and other accountability measures.
- School leaders should be knowledgeable about the complexities associated with assessing, evaluating, and reporting student achievements. Current procedures for assessment, evaluating and reporting of student achievement must be integrated into the formal leadership courses, the Supervisory Officer's Qualifications Program, and the Principal's Qualifications Program.

EQAO

- Ranking of schools based on EQAO results is inappropriate, unfair to students, and potentially destructive to the education system.
- The amount of time during the school year devoted to provincial, national and international tests should be limited to no more than three school days per grade.

Ministry of Education

- Political party interference should have no role to play in the assessment, evaluation, and reporting of student learning.
- The Ministry of Education either needs to limit its role in assessment to that of policy development or it should assume complete responsibility for implementation. Ambiguities as to EQAO's role versus that of the Ministry need to be clarified.
- The Ministry of Education must decide whether student achievement is reported by



letter and percentage grades or by levels of achievement based on a four-point scale. Using both in the elementary panel is very confusing to students and parents.

- Formal report cards should be limited to two periods, winter and spring, to allow time for students to learn the required expectations across the subject areas.
- Page three of the Provincial Report Card, the Response Form, is not functional and should be discontinued.
- Class size is an important factor in enhancing student achievement. Smaller classes are particularly important for younger students, as demonstrated by research.

Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting: *A Definition*



Key Terms

- **Assessment** is the formal and informal process of *gathering information* on student performance/achievement. Assessment instruments and strategies may include written tests, oral questioning, observation of performance, quizzes, assignments, student self-assessment, and peer assessment.
- **Formative assessment** is the on-going collection of information on student performance for the purpose of providing teachers with feedback on instructional effectiveness, student progress and individual student planning for improvement.
- **Summative assessment**, or evaluation, is the process by which teachers make *formal judgments* about student achievement for reporting purposes using a variety of assessment samples.
- **Performance assessment** involves students demonstrating specific skills and knowledge being assessed. Giving students a mathematical equation to solve with counters and instructing them to record the answer is an example of performance assessment.
- **Authentic assessment** is performance assessment involving real-life tasks and very often within a real-life context, such as research projects, speech competitions, debates. Authentic assessment is integral to normal classroom routine.
- **Diagnostic assessment** aids teachers in diagnosing the status of an individual student or group of students in relation to the expectations within the curriculum. Teachers can then use this information to plan effectively for individual and/or groups of students to improve their status.
- **Standardized testing** is a formal assessment instrument designed to assess a narrow range of a student's knowledge and understanding in a subject area. It is a snapshot in time. Such assessments are administered and scored in the same way for all students.
- **Reliability** is the extent to which an assessment produces the same results (score or grade) if the assessment were retaken or the same performance were scored by someone else.
- **Validity** refers to the ability of an assessment to make inferences about student achievement. If assessment and evaluation procedures are valid, they measure what they are intended to measure.
- **Evaluation** of student achievement in Ontario is based upon student knowledge and skills demonstrated within the "learning expectations" established by the Ontario Curriculum. The Minister of Education is responsible for setting Ontario Curriculum assessment policies.
- **Reporting** is the process by which teachers *communicate* on student achievement of knowledge, skills, and attitudes relative to the Ontario Curriculum expectations. Formally, student achievement is reported in written form through the Provincial Report Card. Informally, student achievement may be reported by such means as parent-teacher interviews, three-way conferencing (student-teacher-parents), and phone calls.

Standardized Tests

Ontario students take part in standardized tests provincially, nationally, and internationally. The increase in standardized testing within Ontario is largely due to political initiatives that view standardized tests as tools to monitor a few select variables. These variables are then used as accountability measures of teachers, schools, and district school boards. There is also a strong element of competition at the political level between jurisdictions. ETFO believes that political party interference should have no role in the assessment, evaluation and reporting of student learning.

Advocates of standardized testing contend that the consistent parameters of standardized tests in terms of content, design, administration, and scoring guarantee the comparability of student scores. However, there are a number of problems with the validity of standardized testing related to such strict parameters:

- In order for an assessment to be valid, it must measure what it is intended to measure. Standardized tests claim to measure student achievement. However, standardized assessment is one snapshot of a student's performance, testing a product of learning not the learning process. Meaghan & Casas remind us that:

*[Standardized tests] measure a student's ability to recall facts, define words, and perform routine calculations, not higher learning processes such as analyzing, synthesizing, forming hypotheses, and exploring alternative ways of solving problems.*¹

Such tests often include multiple-choice questions and written responses to be answered within a specified time frame. Most do not allow students to use resources in order to complete the test. This artificial environment limits the measurement of real student achievement. Jay McTighe, an education consultant and co-creator of the *Understanding by Design* program, notes that:

*Good assessment should be thought of as a photo album rather than a snapshot. We should use different pictures and different lenses to get at different aspects of learning over time.*²

- Standardized tests measure only a few of the

The Ontario Perspective

many intelligences students possess. This inherent bias disadvantages those students who prefer to learn using intelligences that are not tested. This limitation may explain why gender, culture, and language differences emerge as factors contributing to the spread in scores.³

- Valid assessment on the other hand is an ongoing process. It is multi-faceted, assessing the *student learning process* in a variety of ways. For example, teachers assess a student's writing ability *throughout* the writing process using different strategies. Student's progress is assessed over several drafts, through student-teacher conferences and analysis of the final writing sample. Students have access to dictionaries, thesauri, and other resources to complete the writing assignment. The appropriateness of the use of such resources is also assessed. Throughout this process teachers are assessing the student's ability to analyze, synthesize, hypothesize, and solve problems. By testing only the end product, standardized testing does not allow for a complete picture of student achievement. It does not provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate their full range of learning. This explains why teachers prefer "authentic" assessments. Authentic testing must reflect the daily experiences of students in actual classrooms. Authentic tests mimic the real interactions between teachers and students. Standardized tests are not authentic assessments.
- Standardized tests do not take into account cultural, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic differences in student populations. Biases are embedded within such tests. The broader the range of student populations, the more likely these biases will affect student scores. It is therefore not surprising that many minority students in Ontario appear to be low achievers. Bias in testing is largely responsible for this phenomenon. Ontario has one of the

Standardized assessment is one snapshot of a student's performance.

Standardized tests measure only a few of the many intelligences students possess.

most multi-cultural populations in the world. Effective assessment of student achievement across a highly diverse population, such as Ontario, is poorly understood and is an area needing quality, long-term research. ⁴

- Standardized tests, particularly in the form of multiple-choice questions, do not assess higher-order thinking skills. They are, however, easier to administer and evaluate. For this reason, efficiency in using multiple-choice tests often overrides meaningful and quality assessment that requires more time and resources. ⁵

The emphasis on standardized tests shifts “responsibility over curriculum from teachers and school authorities to the testing industry and government officials, thereby lessening rather than enhancing accountability.” ⁶ ETFO believes that classroom teachers are in the best position to assess, evaluate, and report on real student achievements and that classroom teacher assessment and evaluation of students should take precedence over the results of external assessments.

ETFO does not support the use of standardized tests as a means of comparing students, teachers, and schools. As Alfie Kohn states:

[T]he problem with tests is not limited to their content. Rather, the harm comes from paying too much attention to the results. Even the most unbiased, carefully constructed, “authentic” measure of what students know is likely to be worrisome, psychologically speaking, if too big a deal is made about how they performed, thus leading them (and their teachers) to think less about learning and more about test outcomes. ⁷

ETFO takes issue with the Ministry of Education’s decision to take millions of dollars and several weeks of student classroom time out of Ontario’s classrooms in order to support standardized tests that have limited usefulness for students and teachers.

We agree with the American Educational Research Association, which has stated:

Policy makers and the public may be misled by spurious test score increases unrelated to any fundamental educational improvement; students may be placed at increased risk of educational failure and dropping out; teachers may be blamed or punished for inequitable resources over which they have no control; and curriculum and

instruction may be severely distorted if high test scores per se, rather than learning, become the overriding goal of classroom instruction. ⁸

It is a shame that we have not been able to learn from others’ experience. As Peter Sacks puts it:

When you add up the real costs of the uniquely American model of school accountability and compare them to the minimal or nonexistent benefits, you’re left with the inescapable conclusion that the nation’s 15-year experiment with high-stakes testing has done far more harm than good. ⁹

ETFO recommends that the amount of time during the school year devoted to provincial, national, and international tests should be limited to no more than three school days per grade.

The Ministry of Education

The Minister of Education, through the Ministry, issues guidelines in the form of policy documents for curricula in Ontario; sets requirements for student diplomas and certificates; and provides funding to school boards for academic instruction and for building and maintaining schools. The Ministry also sets policy for student assessment, which is then carried out by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO).

Robert Linn, a specialist in education measurement, has outlined the appeal of standardized assessment measures to policymakers:

- [Such measures] are relatively inexpensive, compared with reforms such as reducing class size or improving professional development for teachers.
- The testing can be externally mandated without relying on substantive changes in the classroom.
- Testing changes can be rapidly implemented – “within the term of office of elected officials.”
- Results are visible, especially when reported to the media. “Poor results in the beginning are desirable for policymakers who want to show they have had an effect. Based on past experience, policymakers can reasonably expect increases in scores in the first few years of a program ... with or without real improvement in the broader achievement constructs that tests and assessments are intended to measure. The resulting overly

rosy picture that is painted by short-term gains observed in most new testing programs gives the impression of improvement right on schedule for the next election.”¹⁰

ETFO believes that the Ministry of Education is currently going beyond its role of establishing policies for the assessment and reporting of student achievement. An example of this is the Ministry’s role in the development and implementation of the provincial report cards. This action, undertaken by the Ministry’s Curriculum and Assessment Branch, goes well beyond the realm of policy development.

ETFO supports the view that assessment should be an integral part of the curriculum. Good pedagogy integrates formative and summative assessments. Hence, it is not surprising that teacher federations did not support the creation of EQAO.

Now that EQAO is an established entity in Ontario, the Ministry needs to rethink its own role in student assessment and review the emerging ambiguities around who does what in student assessment in Ontario. The Ministry of Education needs to either limit its role in assessment to that of policy development or assume complete responsibility for implementation.

Early Reading Strategy

On June 1, 2001, the government announced that it would be implementing Ontario’s Early Reading Strategy beginning in the 2001 school year. The initiative will require every school to set targets to improve reading achievement of JK to Grade 3 students, as measured by the province-wide Grade 3 test, and report annually to parents on the school’s progress. The initiative will provide funding for:

- training of elementary principals and lead teachers on how to use target-setting techniques and assessment of students’ reading skills, providing for better instruction;
- additional resources for selected schools that need extra help; and
- school improvement teams of specialists to work with these selected schools.

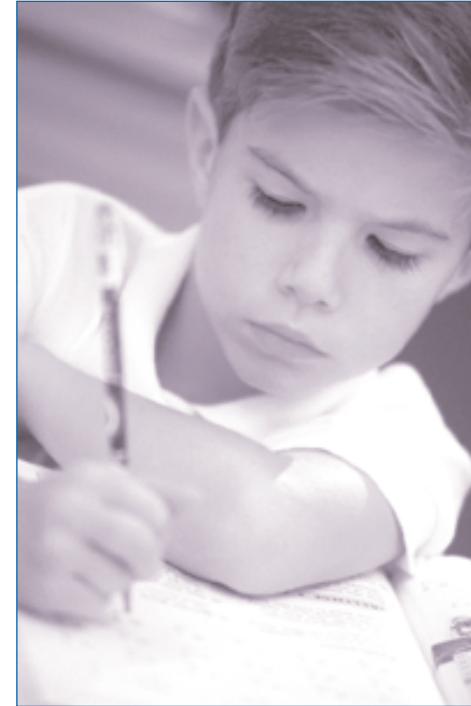
ETFO believes that the Ontario govern-

ment’s focus is misdirected. The focus of the training is on setting targets based upon EQAO data analysis and early reading assessment tools. This initiative is simply a form of teaching the students to pass the achievement tests as opposed to focusing on real student learning, which takes place every day within elementary schools in Ontario. Achievement tests are a snapshot in time and therefore have limited value.

Targeting selected schools based upon a one-time test each year does not take into account the cultural, racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity of schools. In addition, many schools have increasing numbers of special needs students. The school profile is constantly changing from year to year. This limits the usefulness of the test. Targeting schools in this way is unfair to students and the educational professionals who every day meet the challenges of diversity effectively, resulting in real student learning.

Further, the cycle of target-setting, improvement planning, and testing is flawed. Grade 3 students take the test in May. The results are reported in October, and schools are expected to set improvement targets for students’ achievement in November. Schools will actually base improvement targets for Grade 3 students upon the previous year’s test results (the results of the current Grade 4 students). Taking into account the diversity of the student population within many schools and the often transient student population of schools from year to year, one cannot generalize the achievement needs of the current Grade 3 students from the results of the previous year’s students. This simply is not good diagnostic assessment practice.

With this initiative, the government is focusing on helping teachers improve their teaching methods based upon an assumption that low test scores reflect unsuccessful teaching practices. This assumes the teacher is at fault, which smacks of a “blame the victim” mentality. ETFO believes that teachers already know what has to be done for students



within their classrooms. Unfortunately, with the massive overhaul of the educational system in recent years, the Ontario government has removed many of the supports teachers need to maximize their success in the classroom. By re-instating supports such as smaller class sizes and resources for every classroom, the government would be providing the time and assistance that would allow teachers to put into action the teaching strategies best-suited to their students.

As a result of the new funding model, and the elimination of early literacy programs, many boards have found it necessary to eliminate special support personnel and consultants whose job it has been to provide supports for younger students. Once again the government's focus is on the wrong grade. Funding should be provided to help boards focus on students who are younger (i.e., those who are in their first years of language and reading development) to ensure that teachers have the resources to meet the special needs of every child in these areas. The government should re-

focus its funding on helping school boards return special consultants and professionals who deal with oral language development.

For all of these reasons, ETFO believes that the Early Reading Strategy is just another "smoke and mirrors" strategy by the Ontario government to draw attention away from the larger problem – student learning requires appropriate funding to provide the resources, time, training, and support personnel that teachers need to get on with what they already know about student achievement and learning. All of these supports have been eroded due to the government's educational initiatives in recent years.

Education Quality and Accountability Office

In 1996, the Ontario government established through Bill 30, the Education Quality and Accountability Office in an attempt to implement greater accountability across the educa-

tion system. EQAO is responsible for providing information on the quality of education in Ontario through the reporting of student achievement. This includes:

- implementing province-wide student assessment;
- advising the Minister of Education on assessment policies;
- developing a provincial performance indicators system;
- supporting Ontario's participation in national and international assessments;
- reporting to the Minister, public, and education community on student achievements and making recommendations for change;
- supporting research and strategies for enhancing student learning.

While the Ontario government contends that EQAO is an independent, arm's-length agency, ETFO does not agree. By virtue of *Section 6(1) of Bill 30*, which gives the Minister of Education the power to issue written directives to EQAO on any related topic at any time with which EQAO must comply, the Ministry's role can and has gone beyond policy-setting. As a result, ETFO believes that EQAO cannot be free of political interference through the Minister of Education.

The following information provides an overview of the development and implementation of EQAO's current initiatives, which have an impact on the elementary panel.

Grades 3 and 6 Reading, Writing, and Mathematics

Currently, in the elementary panel, EQAO implements Grades 3 and 6 assessments of reading, writing, and mathematics for every student on an annual basis over a three-week period in early May of each year. The results are reported in the fall of each year using a four-level scale, which sets Level 3 as a provincial standard.

The Issues

Performance-Based or Standardized?

The Education Quality and Accountability Office released the first *Provincial Report on Achievement* in 1997. Since that time, EQAO



has collected three years of student achievement data for Grade 3 students and two years for Grade 6 students in Ontario on reading, writing, and mathematics. While EQAO maintains that the assessments are performance-based and therefore unlike the traditional standardized tests, ETFO disagrees. In the three years of provincial testing, EQAO has included increasing numbers of short answers and multiple-choice questions. Each year, the EQAO assessment looks more like the traditional standardized test. In addition, most people do not realize that EQAO uses the multiple-choice component of the assessment as the sole measure for the comparability of student performance from year to year.

Accountability vs. the School Market

In October 1999, EQAO released the results of the 1998-1999 Grades 3 and 6 assessment results. Within that document, EQAO stated as part of its key messages that:

*The goal of assessing and reporting is to foster a culture of improvement in every school. Assessment results should be used to improve learning and teaching, not to rank schools.*¹¹

In October 2000, one of the key messages was:

*EQAO encourages schools and school boards to be proactive in reporting results to parents and their communities.*¹²

In fact, the legislation governing EQAO mandates the reporting of results to the community.

ETFO agrees with EQAO's caution about ranking schools. However, the emerging trend within the media of ranking schools continues to be an ETFO concern. Such rankings lead to the misuse of student achievement scores. Comparing results among schools, and even among classrooms within schools does not take into account a host of complex variables. Ranking of schools based on EQAO results is inappropriate, unfair to students, and potentially destructive to the education system.

Despite EQAO's message, the tendency for parents, the community and the media is to compare data from school to school and among district school boards. The public has very little understanding of how differences

within classrooms, schools, and district school boards affect assessment results. Indeed, to corroborate ETFO's concern, in a key message in October 2000 EQAO maintains:

*The achievement data must be interpreted in relation to the contextual data from the questionnaires and other contextual data that schools and school boards have gathered.*¹³

Another key message from EQAO is that "improving student achievement is a slow, gradual process. Improvement does not occur overnight."¹⁴

ETFO agrees that improving student achievement is a slow, gradual process. This improvement will not occur without sufficient training and resources for teachers. In the first two years of implementation, elementary teachers were given six curriculum documents with hundreds of expectations to cover per grade, without any additional training and classroom resources to accompany the increased requirements. To add further burden to this unrealistic expectation, the Ontario government reduced the number of professional activity days from nine to four in recent years.

Contextual Accountability

EQAO continues to stress the message, as stated in its October 1999 report, that:

*It is important to gather information on the learning environment inside and outside the school. Student learning is affected by a wide variety of factors in the classroom, school, home and community.*¹⁵

Two key examples are the language spoken in the home and whether parents read to their children.

Class size is another important factor in enhancing student achievement. Smaller classes are particularly important for younger students, as demonstrated by research.¹⁶

In the October 1999 document, EQAO reported that 39 percent of Grade 3 classrooms had over 25 students, 49 percent of the Grade 3 classes contained only Grade 3 students; the rest (51 percent) were multi-grade classes. Furthermore, 64 percent of Grade 6 classrooms had over 25 students, 54 percent of the Grade 6 classes contained only Grade 6

Improving student achievement is a slow, gradual process.

Within the normal classroom environment, teachers assess students while at the same time providing guidance and support in the learning process.

students; the rest (46 percent) were multi-grade classes. ETFO notes that this type of contextual information was not reported in the subsequent October 2000 report.

ETFO believes that larger class sizes, more multi-grade classes, and the growing multicultural student population are significant factors in lowering student achievements. EQAO tests do not take these and other contextual factors into consideration. No matter what the rhetoric, the bottom line in the eyes of the media and the public is how well students score.

Girls and Boys: A Societal Phenomenon

ETFO notes that gender differences have been significant in both the *1998-1999* and the *1999-2000 Provincial Reports on Assessment*.¹⁷ Overall reading, writing, and mathematics results for both Grade 3 and Grade 6 indicate that girls continue to out-perform boys. While these differences are not merely an Ontario issue and can be found within national and international assessment results, parents and educators can take proactive measures to work towards eliminating the gap. Parents working with teachers can take a more active role in finding ways to encourage boys to read, write, and work on mathematical problems. Together, parents and teachers can begin to encourage boys to participate in a variety of learning experiences, thus expanding societal norms.

Overall Achievement in the Province

In the *1999-2000 Ontario Provincial Report on Assessment*, EQAO reported the following data:

Reading:

- 49 percent of Grade 3 students achieved at or above the provincial standard. This is an increase of 3 percent since the new Ontario Curriculum was introduced in 1997.
- 50 percent of Grade 6 students achieved at or above the provincial standard. This is an increase of 2 percent since the first Grade 6 assessment the previous year.

Writing:

- 52 percent of Grade 3 students achieved at or above the provincial standard.
- 48 percent of Grade 6 students achieved at or above the provincial standard. These are unchanged from the previous year.

Mathematics:

- 57 percent of Grade 3 students achieved at or above the provincial standard. This is a slight increase over the previous year.
- 51 percent of Grade 6 students achieved at or above the provincial standard. This is a 5 percent increase over the previous year.¹⁸

Clearly, student achievement, as reported within the context of the Grades 3 and 6 assessments, continues to improve gradually over time. It is important to note that this does not occur overnight, particularly in light of all of the systemic educational changes that have occurred in the past five years: for example, the amalgamation of school boards; the provincial funding formula, which eliminated the option of additional funding through local taxation and reduced the flexibility of district school boards to allocate funding to meet specific needs; an aggregate average class size within district school boards, resulting in a large number of classes over the provincial average class size of 24.5 for elementary students; implementation of the new Ontario Curriculum and the Provincial Report Card without adequate support materials and training for teachers; three weeks of assessments within the school year for Grades 3 and 6 students; and a reduction in the number of professional activity days. Improved student achievement on the Grades 3 and 6 assessments has been accomplished despite the massive and rapid changes in the Ontario educational system over a very short period of time and in spite of contextual variables that have a negative impact on achievement scores.

Individual Student Results

EQAO maintains that individual student overall scores provide important data at the school, board, and provincial levels. There are, however, limitations to the use of the overall scores at the individual student level.

Overall scores do not provide a complete picture at the individual level.

In December 1999, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario conducted a random survey of Grades 4 and 7 teachers across the province regarding the usefulness of the Grades 3 and 6 individual student results.¹⁹ While most teachers had access to individual student results of the Grades 3 and 6 tests, for a variety of reasons, only 42 percent used the individual student results.

Teachers indicated that test results became available too late to be used effectively in instruction planning. Interpretation of the results was also an issue for teachers, in that the Grades 3 and 6 teachers administered the test, while Grades 4 and 7 teachers were left to interpret results. Many respondents to an EQAO survey indicated that the category and strand levels of achievement on the tests did not reflect the overall individual student score, and that this score appeared to be skewed by the multiple-choice score on the test. (See Validation of Results: Comparability.)

In cases where individual results were more consistent, teachers did find that these individual results provided some diagnostic value in planning for individual student and class instruction, particularly for students who demonstrated weaknesses in some areas. The results also allowed teachers to identify strengths and weaknesses of individual students and classes. The results were also useful in reporting to parents to support and confirm other assessments the teacher had completed for students, and provided one more source of student achievement data for diagnostic and reporting purposes.

The results are limited, however, in terms of providing a very small snapshot of student achievement. Valid assessment is long term, on-going, multi-faceted, and without the artificial pressure of extended testing periods where teachers are unable to provide guidance and help to students. Within the normal classroom environment, teachers assess students while at the same time they provide guidance and support in the learning process. While some of the Grades 3 and 6 assessments are performance-based, set within the classroom environment, students are unable

to seek guidance and aid that teachers would normally provide throughout the day.

Overall, many respondents indicated that the results did not accurately reflect individual student achievement based on their daily assessments. Why then are we spending millions of classroom dollars on tests that have such limited use? ETFO believes that reporting to the public on program effectiveness is important. However, this could be done with far fewer dollars using a random sample approach. Census testing is expensive. Individual student achievement for the purpose of assessing strengths and weaknesses is best left to the classroom teacher.

Validation of Results: Comparability

ETFO is deeply concerned about the alteration of individual students' overall level of achievement. The performance-based component of the test comprises 80 percent of the overall student level of achievement. The multiple choice comprises only 20 percent. In the 1998-1999 reporting process, EQAO reported that overall student scores were recalibrated based on how they did on the multiple-choice component of the test and only that part. How useful is that?

For example, if a student received a 28/29 score on the multiple-choice assessment, this resulted in an overall level of achievement in reading of 4, despite actual student achievement at level 3 in all four knowledge/skills categories. Thus, the multiple-choice component had greater weight in the recalibration of the overall scores. Teachers then were faced with inconsistent overall scores in relation to performance results within strands and categories. Teachers were not able to explain this inconsistency in the reporting process to parents. Often, overall scores did not reflect actual student achievement scores and other assessments that teachers used for evaluation and reporting.

Despite recommendations that the multiple-choice scores be given less influence on a students' overall level of achievement results



ETFO takes issue with an expansion of a standardized testing program before a careful assessment of the current impact and implications of the Grade 3 and 6 testing regime has been considered.

by integrating the multiple-choice results within each relevant strand of the performance-based assessment, EQAO continued to report the results as a separate item in the 1999-2000 report. Unfortunately, not only did EQAO report the results separately, it converted the raw score into a level 1, 2, 3, or 4. EQAO determined each level based upon a top percentage score of students for a level 4, another lower percentage for a level 3, and so on, for all four levels of achievement. In essence, the effect is to bell-curve the scores in order to make the conversion.

Furthermore, pedagogically, the practice of converting a raw score into a level is unreliable. In fact, rather than directing teachers to convert raw scores to levels, district school boards have worked relentlessly to provide teachers with professional development on the assessment of students by levels, as set out in the Ontario Curriculum and on the Grades 3 and 6 performance-based assessments. By translating a raw score into a level, EQAO endorses a pedagogically invalid assessment practice, thereby providing teachers with very mixed messages.

Finally, a continued concern remains regarding alterations to marking protocols for the Grade 3 and 6 assessments and the negative impact these have on the comparability of results from year to year. *The Ontario Provincial Report on Achievement 1999-2000* compared the results of student achievement for Grade 3 based upon two previous years' results and for Grade 6 on the previous year's results. The basis for comparability of student achievement from year to year is greatly affected by EQAO's continued practice of altering the marking protocol. In truth, results cannot and should not be compared from year to year. To do that, EQAO needs to standardize the marking protocol. Why has this not been done? ETFO believes it is because student achievement would be too high. EQAO's marking model is just like the old "bell curve," whereby results are forced to fit into a bell curve mould.

Validation of Results: Quality Assurance

In the *1999-2000 Provincial Report on Assessment*²⁰, EQAO reports some significant results from the EQAO Quality Assurance survey conducted on samples of 400 Grades 3 and 6 teachers. First, the surveys indicated that there is considerable turnover. Approximately 34 percent, of teachers in Grades 3 and 6 indicated that they were administering the EQAO assessments for the first time.

Second, 42 percent of the respondents reported that they had received no training to prepare for the administration of the assessment.

Third, the training teachers did receive did not prepare them effectively to make decisions about exemptions or accommodations for their students. In fact, only 35 percent of respondents indicated that they felt very well prepared to make these decisions.

Given all three of these factors and those previously identified, the validity of these assessments must be questioned. ETFO also questions the millions of dollars being wasted on a testing program that lacks a solid methodological foundation. No wonder secrecy surrounds EQAO's assessment process.

Concluding Comments on the Issues

EQAO is a hybrid organization that is not working well for students, teachers, parents, or the public. Through this organization, a great deal of time and money has been allocated to assess student achievement in Ontario. Unfortunately, in June 2001 the government announced that it will be expanding the student testing program to ensure that every student from Grades 3 to 11 be tested in two core subjects each year. EQAO will develop and administer these tests. Results from the new tests will count for 20 percent of a student's mark each term. The entire testing will be phased in over five years, with the elementary testing being implemented over two years beginning in 2002-3 and secondary testing being implemented over three years beginning in 2004-5. The following is the implementation schedule as set out by the Ministry of Education:

Ministry of Education Testing Schedule

	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006	2006-2007
Grade 3	EQAO Reading, Writing, Mathematics	EQAO Reading, Writing, Mathematics	EQAO Reading, Writing, Mathematics	EQAO Reading, Writing, Mathematics	EQAO Reading, Writing, Mathematics
Grade 4	*Science and Technology	Science and Technology, *Language	Science and Technology, Language	Science and Technology, Language	Science and Technology, Language
Grade 5	*Social Studies,	Social Studies, *Mathematics	Social Studies, Mathematics	Social Studies, Mathematics	Social Studies, Mathematics
Grade 6	EQAO Reading, Writing, Mathematics	EQAO Reading, Writing, Mathematics	EQAO Reading, Writing, Mathematics	EQAO Reading, Writing, Mathematics	EQAO Reading, Writing, Mathematics
Grade 7	*Science and Technology	Science and Technology, *Language	Science and Technology, Language	Science and Technology, Language	Science and Technology, Language
Grade 8	Social Studies,	Social Studies, *Mathematics	Social Studies, Mathematics	Social Studies, Mathematics	Social Studies, Mathematics
Grade 9	EQAO Math	EQAO Math	EQAO Math, *Science	EQAO Math, Science	EQAO Math, Science
Grade 10	EQAO Literacy	EQAO Literacy	EQAO Literacy	EQAO Literacy, *History	EQAO Literacy, *History
Grade 11					*English, *Mathematics
*First year of implementation					

The government asserts that the estimated cost for the expanded testing, once fully implemented, is \$16 million annually. Currently the annual cost to conduct the Grade 3 and 6 student tests is over \$9 million per grade. The Grade 10 literacy test cost \$14 million to administer. The cost of the Grade 9 mathematics test administered in the spring of 2001 has yet to be determined. Based upon these current annual costs, ETFO believes that the annual cost of the expanded program will be well above this estimate.

ETFO takes issue with an expansion of a standardized testing program before a careful assessment of the current impact and implications of the Grade 3 and 6 testing regime has been considered.

In Ontario, there is no need to test every student from Grades 3 to 11 every year in two core subjects. Random sampling would meet

the need for public accountability and would be much more cost-effective. Funding should be redirected to more useful initiatives in the form of: classroom support materials developed by and for teachers; timely training for teachers and school administrators within the school day; consultants to aid teachers in the implementation of the new curriculum, assessment, evaluation, and reporting procedures; and time provided for curriculum implementation days within the school year.

ETFO believes that the EQAO regular reporting on student achievement, based on what we believe to be standardized tests within the guise of performance assessments, does not provide significant diagnostic information to teachers, students, and parents. The role of regular reporting for the purpose of public accountability to demonstrate that curriculum expectations are being met should

be in the form of testing random samples of students, as is done nationally and internationally.

The appropriate role for comprehensive student testing, either individually or in small groups, should be in the form of diagnostic assessment to assist teachers in diagnosing the status of an individual student or group of students in relation to the expectations within the curriculum. Teachers conduct this type of diagnostic testing throughout the school year.

Finally, school leaders should be knowledgeable about the complexities associated with assessing, evaluating and reporting student achievements. Current procedures for the assessment, evaluation, and reporting of student achievement must be integrated into the formal leadership courses, the Supervisory Officers' Qualifications Program, and the Principals' Qualifications Program.

School Improvement Planning

At the same time that it released its *1999-2000 Ontario Provincial Report on Achievement*, EQAO also released the *Ontario Report and Guide on School Improvement Planning*²¹, which contains school board action plans submitted by all 72 district school boards in the province. The report outlines the characteristics of successful improvement planning, evaluates system planning for improved achievement in Ontario, and makes recommendations for grounding improvement planning in system development and quality assurance processes. The report focuses on involving parents in the action plan and emphasizes the use of local and EQAO data for school and board action plans.

The Issues

ETFO believes that district school boards should develop comprehensive improvement planning processes. However, based on the information in the report, ETFO has these concerns:

- Only a few boards submitted procedures for monitoring the action plans. School board action plans are not useful if boards do not review and monitor them during implementation.
- Yearly school board improvement plans do not encourage long-term planning. School board action plans should be part of a long-term planning process.
- District school boards should also ensure that school administrators and Supervisory Officers have expertise in assessment and improvement planning, and that professional development opportunities are provided for teachers.
- Based upon the existing funding formula, insufficient funds exist to support the needed resources and personnel within district school boards to implement the action plans.

Education Quality Indicators Program

EQAO has been developing the *Education Quality Indicators Program (EQUIP)* since 1998.²² The first full application of EQUIP began in January 2001. EQAO maintains that while assessment results provide one important source of information about a school, the EQUIP will provide information on a wide variety of factors that influence student achievement and school quality.

EQUIP will provide information under nine themes, consisting of a total of 32 indicators within these themes:

- 1) Community, Student, and Family Demographics
- 2) Education Financing
- 3) Preparedness to Learn and Early Learning Support
- 4) Leadership
- 5) School Climate
- 6) Community-School Relationships
- 7) Teaching and Learning Environment
- 8) Perception and Satisfaction of Parents, Students, and Teachers
- 9) Student Achievement

The data collected on these indicators will be reported as indicator profiles at the school, the district school board, and/or the provincial level(s). In addition to school-level reports, schools will be given information about their statistical neighbours (i.e. schools with similar data profiles) to facilitate the sharing of best practices. A general report with highlights and observations will be available to all education stakeholders and the public.

The application of the indicators program covers a two-to three-year period. The first formal application of the indicator program is set for spring 2001.

The Issues

EQAO maintains that the indicator program will result in recommendations for improvement to schools, district school boards, the Ministry of Education, and other organizations in the education community. More specifically, the indicators will produce profiles of schools, district school boards, and Ontario's entire education system by collecting and analyzing qualitative and quantitative data on the learning environment inside each school. EQAO maintains that this will provide parents and educators with a better understanding of the range of factors that determine the effectiveness of school programs and students' learning.

ETFO is deeply concerned about the basic assumptions within the indicators program. Specifically, we challenge the premise that the selected indicators equate to quality education. The current Minister of Education has not yet developed a definition of quality education. Quality education within Ontario should be directly connected to and defined by Ontario educational goals, which in turn should be reflected in the Ontario Curriculum. No such educational goals have been set. Instead, the Ontario Curriculum and the EQUIP program have been developed in isolation and with no overarching set of beliefs. ETFO is concerned that the EQUIP program may ultimately define quality of education in Ontario.

A key problem concerns the use of data from different years, due to the fact that these

data will be collected from existing sources within the EQAO, Ministry of Education, and Statistics Canada. Statistics Canada data will reflect the previous census year. Data from schools or boards will reflect the current year. In addition, data will be changing even in the short term. For example, principals change from school to school, structures change (e.g., the twinning of schools), and student turnover can be greater than 100 percent within a given year. How is such data to be interpreted? How will it be useful? Is the exercise worth the cost?

ETFO believes that the EQUIP program will be yet another tool used to compare schools and district school boards. ETFO does not believe that the selected indicators will capture the quality of learning environments. To raise the quality of education, the government should stop wasting funds on superficial tracking systems and focus instead on the essence of high-quality education – highly educated, committed educators and support personnel working collaboratively in resource-rich, learning environments implementing a forward-looking curriculum.

National and International Tests

EQAO is responsible for ensuring the involvement of Ontario students in national and international tests. Currently, Ontario students participate in a national testing initiative, the *School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP)* and in an international testing initiative, the *Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)*.

School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP)

The School Achievement Indicators Program was developed by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) to assess performance of 13- and 16-year-old students in mathematics, science, and reading and writing.²³ These assessments are administered in a three-year cycle, generally one subject per year, to a sample of students across Canada. Tests have been administered in April and

ETFO believes that the EQUIP program will be yet another tool used to compare schools and district school boards.

May of each year according to the following schedule:

School Achievement Indicators Program Testing Schedule

Mathematics	Reading and Writing	Science
1993	1994	1996
1997	1998	1999
2001		

THE ISSUES

...these tests are not sensitive to differences in curricula for particular ages and grades in different countries (nor can they be made so).

The results of national tests, such as SAIP, are not as useful as one might think. Evaluation of student achievement in Ontario is based upon student knowledge and skills demonstrated within the criteria established in the Ontario Curriculum.

Canada does not have a national curriculum, therefore the curriculum match varies from province to province. Meaghan & Casa note:

*Although advocated as a means to carry out international comparisons of student learning and performance, these tests are not sensitive to differences in curricula for particular ages and grades in different countries (nor can they be made so).*²⁴

SAIP tests only from 56-58 percent of what Ontario students are taught. The SAIP test has not been updated since 1994. Within this context, comparing student achievement on national tests between provinces is like comparing apples and oranges.

The diversity of a student population also affects the results of student achievement. Each student's ability to learn is affected by such factors as poverty, mental, physical and emotional health, ethnic and cultural origin, and parents' educational background, to name a few. For example, Ontario has the highest number of English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) students in Canada and is the most culturally diverse province. Research has shown that removing the results of English-as-a-Second Language students from the test data raises the overall achievement levels of Ontario students to the top ranks.

Given these factors, the contention that SAIP should be supported by hundreds of

thousands of dollars from each province so that data can be collected that will lead to better teaching and learning in Canadian schools must be questioned. ETFO believes there are better uses of those funds.

Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)

The *Third International Mathematics and Science Study* project is conducted under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA).²⁵ Ontario students initially began participation in TIMSS in 1995, involving Grades 3/4, 7/8, and 12/OAC students. Ontario is one of 38 countries participating in the *TIMSS-Repeat* project. This test was administered to randomly selected students in Grade 8 in May and June of 1999. Its purpose is to compare mathematics and science results of these Grade 8 students in relation to their cohorts' results who took the Grade 4 test four years earlier in 1995. Results of the assessment were released in December 2000.

Ontario was the only province to show substantial gains in student achievement over 1995 in both math and science.

The Issues

Similar concerns to those raised within the context of national tests are raised and magnified in relation to the validity of international tests. The usefulness of international tests depends upon the extent to which assessment and evaluation procedures measures what they are intended to measure.

As with national tests, international tests involve different jurisdictions. Countries involved in the testing use different curricula. Some have national curricula, while others have locally developed programs.²⁶ When the numbers are adjusted to obtain a good curriculum match, Ontario students perform in the top ranks.

Furthermore, different populations of students write the test. For example, we know in some countries, where scores are particularly high, only the highest-achieving students write the test, and they are given time to prepare.²⁷ In Ontario, every student in the randomly selected classroom writes the test, regardless of ability.

The Provincial Report Card

The Ministry of Education established guidelines for reporting in the elementary panel in the *Guide to the Provincial Report Card, Grades 1-8*²⁸, which mandated full implementation beginning September 1998. Formal written reports to parents occur three times each year. The first report is sent home in the fall, the second in the spring, and the final report at the end of the year. There are two main versions of the elementary Provincial Report Card: one for Grades 1-6 and one for Grades 7/8. The key differences between these versions are that letter grades are used to show achievement in Grades 1-6 while percentage marks are used in Grades 7/8. In addition, the Grade 7/8 version also shows the grade average.

Both versions are designed to show a student's achievement three times throughout the school year. The first report reflects student achievement of the curriculum expectations introduced during the first reporting period. The second and third reports reflect student achievement of curriculum expectations introduced or further developed during the second and third reporting periods.

Page 3 of the report card provides parents/guardians and the student with an opportunity to comment on student achievement, goals, and home support, as well as an opportunity to request a meeting to discuss the report card.

The Issues

In December 1999, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario conducted a random survey of teachers across the province regarding the reporting process within the Provincial Report Card Guideline and on the use and value to teachers of the EQAO Grades 3 and 6 individual student reports.²⁹ From this survey, ETFO was able to identify what elementary teachers value within the current Provincial Report Card.

What Elementary Teachers Value:

- The reporting process is tied to the Ontario Curriculum expectations.

- The assignment of a grade for each term within each subject area is effective in reporting student development along a continuum.
- The reporting of mathematics achievement by strands allows teachers to identify student strengths and weaknesses by strand.
- The achievement of learning skills is a useful tool for reporting student effort, motivation, independence, and interaction with others.
- The strengths, weaknesses, and next steps sections provide a concise format for developing an action plan for individual student planning.
- The provision of a grade average section on the Grade 7/8 Provincial Report Card allows teachers to report a student's achievement in relation to the student population within that grade.

Within that survey, teachers also identified areas that are problematic relating to the format and implementation of the Provincial Report Card. In response to these concerns, ETFO has made the following recommendations to the Ministry of Education on the formatting and implementation of the Provincial Report Card:

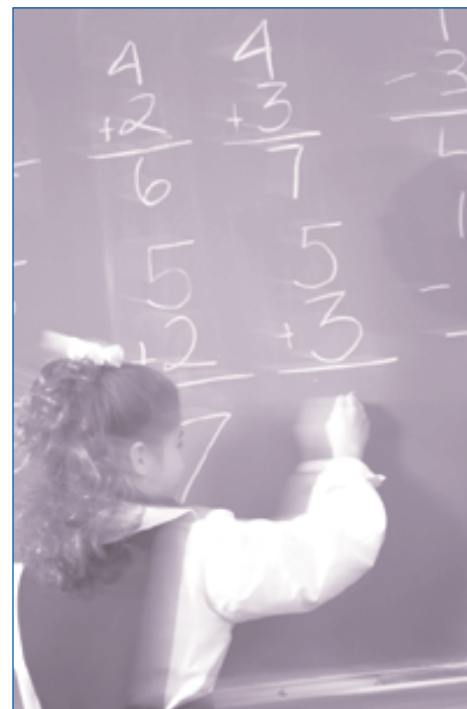
Recommendations for Change:

Format

- Create a consistent scale by which student achievement is reported. It should be consistent across all grades and with the curriculum expectations.
- Simplify the language within the Provincial Report Card for parents and students.
- Specify student effort as part of the Learning Skills section of the report card.
- Provide more space for comments within the strengths/weaknesses and next steps sections.

Reporting

- Reduce the three formal reporting periods to one informal conference in the fall and two formal written report cards, one in the winter and the other in spring.



- Teachers must report in each of the three reporting periods on all strands in mathematics, language, second language, and the arts. Mathematics has the most strands (five), which is extremely challenging. On September 5, 2000, the Ministry of Education changed its policy on the reporting of mathematics marks, requiring that “a grade/mark must be filled in for each strand for at least two reporting periods, and [that] each reporting period must show a grade/mark for at least two strands.”³⁰
- Clarify the terms “R” (remediation) and “IEP” (individual education plan); provide definitions to assist in the reporting process.
- Specify within the guideline that the completion of the strengths/weaknesses and next steps sections is left to the teacher’s discretion in order to address individual student needs.

Supports

- Provide teachers with user-friendly computer software to prepare the Provincial Report Card.
- Develop report card software for teachers of multiple and combined grades.
- Provide teachers with adequate and equitably distributed computer hardware, including printers, to complete the Provincial Report Card.
- Provide teachers with adequate training to help them use the Provincial Report Card software effectively and efficiently.
- Provide teachers with preparation time within the instructional day to prepare report cards.
- Encourage school leaders to avoid scheduling combined-grades, wherever possible, to assist in the effective implementation of the Ontario Report Card and other accountability measures.

The Response Form

ETFO has serious concerns with Page 3 of the Provincial Report Card. Page 3, the Response Form, is designed to allow parents, guardians, and students to make “comments on student achievement, goals, and home support”. A

government requirement is that the Provincial Report Card, including Page 3, the Response Form, be placed in each student’s Ontario Student Record file.

ETFO has identified a number of specific concerns with the Response Form from the teacher survey. Elementary teachers have also contacted the ETFO provincial office, Professional Relations Services staff, on a regular basis on this issue. From both of these sources of input, teachers are saying the following:

- Not all parents/guardians/students return the Response Form.
- Schools have difficulty ensuring the return of the Response Form by parents/ guardians/students;
- Parents/guardians/students sometimes make inappropriate comments regarding a teacher’s professional performance and abilities on the Response Form. Such comments then become part of a student’s permanent record and moves with the student from grade to grade.

ETFO has recommended to the Ministry of Education that the parent/guardian/student Response Form should be omitted from the Provincial Report Card. Until that happens, ETFO believes that school boards and principals should embark on the following practices:

- Communicate clearly to parents/guardians/students the expectations that written comments must be consistent with the intended purpose of the Response Form, that is, only comments that will enhance student learning should be included.
- Ensure that parents withdraw or reword their comments in order to be consistent with the intent.
- Remove negative comments regarding teacher performance from the OSR. If parents/guardians/students refuse to withdraw or reword negative comments, the principal should delete the information that is not conducive to improving student instruction. (OSR Guidelines already give principals this authority.)

Final Comments

Student learning and success is affected by a wide variety of factors including genetics, home environment, parental education and support, health, and motivation. School factors include the culture of the school, teachers' expertise, and the learning environment. These school factors have been profoundly impacted by the provincial government's educational initiatives.

Since the Harris government came into power in 1995, the Ontario educational system has experienced a massive, rapid overhaul. Within this systemic educational change, the government has amalgamated district school boards, creating mega-boards in terms of geography and student population, while at the same time reducing the number of trustees and senior school board administrators. It has implemented a provincial funding formula that eliminated the option of additional funding for district school boards through local taxation and reduced the flexibility of district school boards to allocate funding to meet specific board and, therefore, student needs. By mandating an aggregate class size within district school boards, a large number of classrooms exist with class sizes well over the provincial elementary class size average of 24.5. The implementation of the new Ontario Curriculum and the Provincial Report Card, without any accompanying funds for support materials and training for teachers, has been problematic. Through the establishment of EQAO, the government has taken away five days of student learning time within the school year for students participating in the Grade 3 and 6 student assessment. It now plans to take away more instructional time from students with its expanded testing program commencing in 2002. Lastly, the Harris government has reduced the number of professional development days for teachers within the school year from nine to four. All of these changes affect student learning and success.

From the outset, the Harris government has preferred to place blame on the educational system, insisting that the system become more accountable for its actions. Teachers welcome accountability when it is fair and equitable for all students. However, the government has targeted district school boards,

trustees, senior administrators, school administrators, and teachers as facilitators of a "broken" educational system, rather than providing appropriate and timely support for the numerous changes it has mandated in such a



short period of time. In fact, Ontario has historically provided, and continues to provide, one of the best educational systems in the world, despite the challenges of a diverse student population.

ETFO believes that the money and time allocated for provincial, national, and international tests could be spent more effectively. ETFO therefore makes the following recommendations for funding in that regard:

- Provide funding to reduce class size and to eliminate, wherever possible, combined grades.
- Limit funding for provincial, national, and international tests to no more than three days per grade.
- If regular provincial reporting based on standardized tests is deemed to be absolutely necessary, then provide funds for testing of samples of students, as is done nationally and internationally. This would free up millions of dollars for other areas of support for student

assessment, evaluation, and reporting.

- Provide funding to support the needed resources and personnel within district school boards to implement school board action plans.
- Provide teachers with time during the school day to assess, evaluate and report on student learning.

- Provide teachers with additional time to assess, evaluate, and plan for the progress of special needs students.
- Provide appropriate support for special needs students throughout their elementary years. This is particularly crucial for demonstrating effective student development in the assessing, evaluating, and reporting process.
- Provide teachers and school administrators with access to high-quality, professional development programs on assessment, evaluation, and reporting of student achievements within the school year.
- Provide funding for consultants within boards to aid teachers in the

implementation of the new curriculum, assessment, evaluation, and reporting.

- Provide teachers with at least six curriculum implementation days within the school year to provide time to learn about effective strategies to implement the many curriculum changes including the four achievement levels and the electronic report card.
- Provide teachers with classroom support materials developed by and for teachers.
- Provide funding for the development of user-friendly software to prepare the Provincial Report Card.

- Provide funding for the development of the Provincial Report Card software for teachers of multiple and combined grades.
- Provide funding for boards to ensure adequate and equitable distribution of computer hardware, including printers, to complete the Provincial Report Card.

ETFO believes that the role of students, parents, teachers, school administrators and district school boards should be to work together to enhance student learning. Howard Gardner, author of *Multiple Intelligences*, states that “psychologists spend too much time ranking people and not enough time helping them.”³¹ Enhancing student achievement can only be achieved through the Ontario government’s commitment to provide the necessary supports for educational change. These include:

- adequate funding for such change;
- equal funding for elementary students at the same level as funding for secondary students in order to ensure appropriate learning opportunities;
- a phasing-in of such changes to ensure quality, pedagogical development, implementation, monitoring, opportunities for feedback and revisions; and
- *genuine* consultation with the stakeholders at the front-end of educational change.

Educational change must begin at the grass roots, with teachers, supported by parents, district school boards, and the Ontario government. Only by adjusting the optics, can we move forward, focussing on a vision which emphasizes what’s best for students.



Endnotes

- ¹ D.E. Meaghan & F. R. Casas, "On the Testing of Standards and Standardized Achievement Testing: Panacea, Placebo, or Pandora's Box?", *Interchange*, 26(1) (1995).
- ² Jay McTighe, as quoted by John Franklin, "Trying Too Hard? How Accountability and Testing Are Affecting Constructivist Teaching", *Education Update: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development*, Volume 43, Number 3 (May 2001).
- ³ Bernie Froese-Germain, *Standardized Testing: Undermining Equity in Education* (Ottawa: Canadian Teachers' Federation, 1999).
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Ibid.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Alfie Kohn, *The Schools Our Children Deserve: Moving Beyond Traditional Classrooms and Tougher Standards* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), p.124.
- ⁸ American Educational Research Association (AERA), *Position Statement Concerning High-Stakes Testing in Pre K-12 Education* (July 2000). www.aera.net/about/policy/stakes.htm
- ⁹ Peter Sacks, "Predictable Losers in Testing Schemes," *The School Administrator*, December 2000). www.aasa.org/publications/sa/2000_12/sacks.htm
- ¹⁰ Robert L. Linn, "Assessments and Accountability," *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (March 2000), pp. 4-16.
- ¹¹ "Key Messages", 1998-1999 *Ontario Provincial Report on Achievement*, (Education Quality and Accountability Office, October 1999). www.eqao.com
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Charles M. Achilles, *Let's Put Kids First, Finally. Getting Class Size Right*. (Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, 1999).
- ¹⁷ 1999-2000 *Ontario Provincial Report on Achievement*, (Education Quality and Accountability Office, October 2000). www.eqao.com
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ *Survey of Grade 4 and 7 Teachers on the Individual Student Results of the EQAO Grade 3 and 6 Assessment of Reading, Writing and Mathematics*, (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, December 1999).
- ²⁰ 1999-2000 *Ontario Provincial Report on Achievement*, (Education Quality and Accountability Office, October 2000). www.eqao.com
- ²¹ *Ontario Report and Guide on School Improvement Planning*, (Education Quality and Accountability Office, October 2000). www.eqao.com
- ²² *Educator Quality Indicators Program*, Education Quality and Accountability Office. www.eqao.com
- ²³ *School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP)*, (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)). www.cmec.ca/saip/indexe.stm
- ²⁴ D.E. Meaghan & F. R. Casas, "On the Testing of Standards and Standardized Achievement Testing: Panacea, Placebo, or Pandora's Box?", *Interchange*, 26(1) (1995).
- ²⁵ *Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)*. <http://nces.ed.gov/timss>
- ²⁶ D.E. Meaghan & F. R. Casas, "On the Testing of Standards and Standardized Achievement Testing: Panacea, Placebo, or Pandora's Box?", *Interchange*, 26(1) (1995).
- ²⁷ Gerald W. Bracey, "TIMSS, Rhymes with 'Dims,' As in 'Witted'", Kappan, May, 1998.
- ²⁸ *Guide to the Provincial Report Card*, Grades 1-8, (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998). www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/forms/report/1998/report_98/html
- ²⁹ *Survey Questions: The Provincial Report Card*, (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, December 1999).
- ³⁰ Suzanne Herbert, Deputy Minister of Education, "Changes in Reporting the Strands of Mathematics on the Elementary Report Card," Ministry of Education Memorandum (Ontario Ministry of Education, September 5, 2000).
- ³¹ "Alternatives to Standardized Testing: A Conversation with Howard Gardner", *HEL Focus Series*, No. 2 (1996).

Notes

Notes

Notes