

A Learning Province

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ON
EDUCATION ASSESSMENT
IN ONTARIO

What is the best way to support student learning? Parents/caregivers, educators, and students—in Ontario and around the world—have debated this for decades. Learning is complex and evolving. We know that student assessment is an important part of the process. But how do we improve assessment and the reporting of it so that it has the most positive impact on student learning at individual, school, school board and system-wide levels? This is a provincial priority and the question we'd like to discuss with you today.

Our goal is to develop young people who become confident, capable, and caring citizens respectful of the diversity of Ontarians. People who appreciate, respect, value, and honour cultures, knowledge, and communities whether Indigenous or global in context, and who will thrive in their personal well-being. We will develop students' knowledge, skills, and work habits so they become employable and economically self-sufficient.

- Education of young people is a singularly important goal.
- We will do what it takes to prepare young people for the challenges and opportunities that they face now and into the future.

How we got to now

In 1993 the Government of Ontario appointed the Royal Commission on Learning to study the direction of the province's education system comprehensively. Its report provided extensive recommendations to improve the education system – and it emphasized the importance of classroom assessment in supporting students' learning.

We are now looking ahead to imagine the future of assessments in Ontario. Reviewing how we approach assessment is necessary to realize the Ontario Ministry of Education's commitment fully to meet the educational needs of Ontario's young people.

On September 6, 2017, the Premier of Ontario, Kathleen Wynne, and Ontario's Minister of Education, Mitzie Hunter, announced the establishment of an Independent Review of Assessment and Reporting to make sure educational assessments are culturally relevant, able to measure a wider range of learning, and better reflect equity and student well-being. They have asked a team of independent, expert advisors to review the current model of assessment and reporting practices.

Their study will engage as many viewpoints as possible in a province-wide conversation so the advisors can hear the hopes for, and concerns about, student assessment. This is essential if they are to make recommendations for improvement that will positively impact student experiences and outcomes.

Student assessment in Ontario

Ontario's system of assessment and reporting works in multiple ways. For example, it supports student learning and it monitors and reports on student, school, school board, and provincial education performance. Also, there is a range of approaches to assessment: who participates, what is assessed, when assessments take place, how assessments are administered and how results are reported and to whom.

There is also a difference between classroom assessments and large-scale assessments; both are important and useful and, taken together, paint a comprehensive picture of the learning and achievement of students.

Classroom assessments are developed by teachers to help individual students take their next steps in learning, and to inform students and their parents of the student's achievement. This can take many forms, including teacher observations, student-teacher conversations, student in-class work, or homework that demonstrates their learning.

Large-scale assessments are one-time measures developed to provide snapshots of the strengths and weaknesses of education systems.

Familiar examples of large-scale assessments include:

- **Early Development Instrument (EDI)** is an observational tool completed by teachers that assesses the skills and behaviours of children between 3.5 and 6.5 years of age by measuring five areas: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communications skills and general knowledge.
- **The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)** examines the provincial curriculum and involves all students in publicly funded schools.

Students in grade 3, then grade 6, are assessed for their knowledge of reading, writing, and mathematics. The results are not recorded on students' report cards. Grade 9 students are assessed for mathematics, and the EQAO test mark may be integrated into the student's final grade. Finally, Grade 10 students complete the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) which is one of thirty-two requirements to receive the Ontario Secondary School Diploma.

Examples of National and International large-scale assessments include:

- **The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP)** is a national test administered every three years to assess Grade 8 students' reading, mathematics, and science knowledge.
- **The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)** reports every three years on the reading, math, and science literacy of Grade 10 students. Schools and students are selected randomly for participation.
- **Trends in Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)** takes place every four years and measures the effectiveness of teaching and learning of mathematics and science for students in Grades 4 and 8. A sample of schools is selected at random to participate, and within each of those sampled schools, at least one student in each of Grade 4 and/or Grade 8 is selected to participate.
- **Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)** is conducted every five years to measure learning in reading for Grade 4 students.

Both classroom and large-scale assessments need to be reviewed and discussed. We believe that students' experiences must be at the centre of those discussions and decisions about the future design and use of assessment.

Meeting the needs of all learners

Nurturing students as competent, capable, curious, and rich in potential throughout their schooling, from Kindergarten to grade 12, requires us to ensure assessment supports the learning of all children so each of Ontario's young people may develop to their fullest potential.

However, there are systematic barriers within society that result in differential treatment, something that affects many students. These barriers must be addressed.

Accommodating different cultures, different ways of knowing, differing teaching practices, and differing opportunities required to demonstrate learning must be built into the design of new forms of assessment and reporting.

What this means is that the assessment materials and practices we recommend must be culturally relevant, respectful, and appropriate to the diversity of Ontario's communities and students, including Indigenous knowledge, languages, and cultures, Francophone identity and culture, special education needs, English/French language learners, and the experiences of racialized and minoritized groups.

Join the conversation

Please join us in this province-wide conversation and help us to provide recommendations for the best possible assessment system to support all Ontario students and their learning. We hope to hear from as many people as possible in order to get a wide range of views, experiences, and suggestions. The feedback you give us will inform a report, to be submitted to the Minister and Premier in the spring of 2018, advising how student assessments can be improved.

There are multiple ways to share your input:

- 1. Online:** Visit *OntarioALearningProvince.ca* to participate in an online engagement and answer discussion questions
- 2. Social media:** Share your comments on Twitter at *#OntEdAssessment* (English); or at *#OntEvaluationEdu* (French)
- 3. In writing:** Submit your written comments/papers to *educationassessment@Ontario.ca*
- 4. In person:** Participate in local engagement sessions in late November and early December across Ontario. We want to hear directly from parents, students, educators, officials and the broader community and work with you to develop ideas on how to improve assessment practices.
- 5. In the community:** Organize a conversation and submit your report to *educationassessment@Ontario.ca*

In order for it to be considered for the report, please submit your feedback and input by Friday, December 15, 2017.

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