St. Marguerite D'Youville Catholic School

LONDON DISTRICT CATHOLIC SCHOOL BOARD

Student population: 450; Grades: JK–8; Principal: Gary O'Donnell

London's St. Marguerite D'Youville is a school in transition. Declining enrolment and an expanding English language learner population are transforming the area's English-speaking, middle-income population. Committed to providing a welcoming and supportive environment with equal access to the curriculum for all students, the staff is working as a team to analyze EQAO data and examine current teaching strategies to accommodate individual needs in their changing school community.

St. Marguerite D'Youville Catholic School

Built 15 years ago, this faith-based community school serves 450 students from junior kindergarten to Grade 8, and offers on-site daycare. Slightly more than 10% of the school population has been identified as having special education needs. In the primary division assessment, on recent administrations, girls have performed slightly better in all three test areas. However, by Grade 6, this gender gap has virtually disappeared. In fact, although the scores are statistically comparable, boys' performances are slightly better in writing and math.

As a school where student needs are complex, St. Marguerite respects the immense power of data and appreciates the availability of EQAO results for planning sessions in early September. Convening as a team to explore their educational implications has long been a priority for staff. Individual Item Report data assist in identifying student strengths and needs while establishing patterns in student performance. Together with curriculum expectations and board documents, these findings guide school curriculum initiatives and teaching practice, with the ultimate goal of improving student learning.

In addition to EQAO data, St. Marguerite employs results from CASI, PM Benchmarks and Prime Math, as well as its own data, for supportive and comparative measures of student learning. Principal O'Donnell appreciates the importance of providing time for teachers to meet during the school day, get their hands on data and discuss them, to focus on relevant documents and to get excited about where the data take them. Teachers use the board's template, assemble the data and create SMART goals as part of the school improvement plan. Meeting in divisions allows teachers to tailor goals to the needs of their students and encourages common teaching practices. Considerable informal mentoring and teacher moderation also occur. The board facilitates these endeavours through in-school professional development days, with time set aside for developing school improvement plans.

"Dialogue has turned out to be teaching practice. The data is informing how we teach."

—Gary O'Donnell, principal

Two highly successful data-driven initiatives at this school target deficiencies in junior division math and promote literacy and numeracy development in the primary grades. Three years ago, the staff began ensuring that all aspects of

"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

Gary O'Donnell, principal

the math curriculum were fulfilled by adhering strictly to the Nelson program. Changes in primary scheduling created large, uninterrupted literacy and numeracy blocks in the morning. St. Marguerite teachers have acquired a wealth of high-yield strategies, featuring open-response questions, that they use to support a school-wide focus on literacy. Next year, the school plans to use EQAO data to choose its Teaching-Learning Critical Pathways.

Several factors contribute to the outstanding student successes at St. Marguerite. With a strong focus on data, dialogue, teamwork and the need to support each child, the committed staff has created a positive atmosphere that visitors sense when they enter the school. A broad spectrum of extracurricular activities and a daily physical exercise program add health and vitality to the mix. Prior to the EQAO administrations, staff make every effort to ensure that teachers and students understand the process, that all allowable accommodations are available to students, and, to reduce stress, that students remain in familiar surroundings.

"Don't be intimidated by the data. If you sit down together, the data will lead. You're not just collecting data; you are using it. It's going to mean something in your schools."

—Gary O'Donnell

The staff has worked hard to forge strong connections with Mother Theresa Secondary School, whose co-op students and community service volunteers are a tremendous source of support in St. Marguerite classrooms. Dialogue and information sharing between the two schools has been instrumental in easing the transition for students entering Grade 9. Grade 6 EQAO data are an integral part of the process. Intermediate teachers use this information to address areas of concern while preparing their students for high school.

An active parent community supports school initiatives in two ways: through the Catholic School Council's interest in curriculum, board policies and school processes, and the Parent Community Network's fundraising. The division of these groups ensures that monthly council meetings are not sidetracked by discussions about money. Parent volunteers are highly valued; they organize weekly hot lunches and assist teachers with everything from class outings and activities to reading and writing clubs. This year's School Effectiveness Review, conducted by the Ministry, offered valuable insights concerning both strengths and places to improve. Clearly, in a school such as St. Marguerite, the strengths are many.

"We have fantastic teachers, a good mix of teachers, who know the school, the system and, most importantly, the culture of the school. They're doing a wonderful job of sharing with the new teachers."

—Gary O'Donnell

GRADES 3 AND 6 STUDENT POPULATION

	GRADE 3	GRADE 6
Female	42%	58%
Male	58%	42%
English language learners	0%	0%
Special education needs	18%	16%
Born outside Canada	9%	13%
First language learned at home other than English	6%	13%