OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELD

Over the past year, EQAO has visited a number of secondary schools throughout Ontario to learn from their effective use of evidence and the strategies they have employed to improve student achievement in literacy. Engaging with the education community through the documentation and recognition of these successful practices allows EQAO to share insights and observations throughout the province.

To celebrate this spirit of achievement, EQAO has profiled a number of publicly funded Ontario high schools. Each has been identified in collaboration with its board of education because of its notable improvement in EQAO results and trends over time, its location in the province and its efforts to address challenging circumstances. School teams have shared how EQAO and other data have informed its school improvement planning and focused efforts to support student learning in literacy. The information that we have gathered from these conversations is consistent with research on effective schools.

Common themes emerging from these visits include the following:

• Principals and teachers are examining and using evidence from multiple sources, including classroom and EQAO assessments, to focus on specific student needs and to guide their instructional and assessment practices. The use of school-wide moderated marking establishes consistency in expectations and is useful to identify key strategies that need to be taught across the curriculum.

• Cross-panel communication and data sharing with feeder schools continue to affect student achievement positively. There has been a strong emphasis on supporting at-risk students, along with a belief that all students can succeed.

• Cross-curricular school teams have been effective in supporting literacy skill development for all students.

• Schools are ensuring that students build confidence in their test-taking skills and familiarity with the OSSLT and its expectations.

• Teachers are articulate about their instructional practices and engage in professional dialogue and collaborative inquiry to improve overall achievement. Students are taught to reflect on their learning, monitor their levels of effort, establish targets and set learning goals.

• Initiatives by schools to connect with parents have continued to foster their involvement. This has had a positive impact on student success.

These schools tell just a few of the many remarkable and inspiring stories across Ontario’s publicly funded school system. EQAO is pleased to highlight the accomplishments of these schools and celebrate their exemplary work.
Clarke High School
KAWARTHA PINE RIDGE DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
Student population: 430; Grades: 9–12; Principal: Silvia Grdovic

Clarke High School is a small rural high school where staff, students and parents refer to one another as family. The school is passionate about student success and welcomes all students into a safe, inclusive learning environment.

Clarke is located on a major highway, so all 430 students must be bused. A daily bus for students in co-op placements, board-funded late buses and supportive parents provide transportation for the many extracurricular activities offered by the committed staff. The teachers, many of whom grew up in this rural community, know the students and parents well. Students are provided with emotional and social support, life skills and leadership training. There are opportunities for everyone.

Literacy skills are taught throughout the subject areas from the moment the students enter the school. Important skills required for success on the OSSLT, such as inferring and answering multiple-choice questions, are incorporated throughout the curriculum. Working with a Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board consultant, Clarke used resources from EQAO and produced a diagnostic assessment based on the OSSLT to be used at the beginning of Grade 10. Teachers from all subjects use moderated marking to identify areas requiring improvement in the current students. As the teachers rotate through the moderated marking process using the EQAO anchors, they become more knowledgeable about expectations for student success.

“The EQAO data is important because it drives our decision-making process. The OSSLT helps our school team determine where the gaps are and in what areas we need to set priorities to improve student achievement and our instructional practices. We continually want to improve our practices as teachers and as school leaders so that we can serve our students,” states Principal Silvia Grdovic.

The location of the Pines Senior Public School on the same lot as Clarke provides easy access for transitional meetings and dialogue among the guidance, special education, student success and Grades 7 and 8 teachers. Cohort and individual data are collected from the Grades 3 and 6 EQAO results as well as assessment data from the students’ two years at the Pines.

At-risk students are identified so that strategies for success can be planned before they arrive at Clarke, and these students are paired with an adult who will identify, target and co-ordinate additional support, with accommodations as needed. Clarke students are well supported in and out of class. Students attribute their confidence and skill to their “amazing teachers.”

In September the trends identified on the Individual Item Reports for the OSSLT are cross-referenced with information about demographics and attitudes from the previous year. The resulting information is combined with the in-school achievement results from the current students to note areas needing improvement. These areas will become the focus for the new School Back row: Roberta Youngs-Ransom, Stephen Helleiner, Lyn Westlake, Jennifer Larock Front row: Marc Paxton, Silvia Grdovic (principal)

““The EQAO data is important because it drives our decision-making process. The OSSLT helps our school team determine where the gaps are and in what areas we need to set priorities to improve student achievement and our instructional practices. We continually want to improve our practices as teachers and as school leaders so that we can serve our students.””

Silvia Grdovic, Principal
Clarke High School: Newcastle

**OSSSLT STUDENT POPULATION**
(eligible to write the test for the 1st time)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61%</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41%</td>
<td>Applied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57%</td>
<td>Academic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Locally developed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26%</td>
<td>Special education needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1%</td>
<td>English language learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3%</td>
<td>Speak primarily a language other than English at home*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on responses to Student Questionnaire

Improvement Plan. Through a process of collaboration and discussion the staff develops a variety of strategies, and teachers choose those useful in their subject areas. For example, this year the data from EQAO indicated a need to focus on news reports, so teachers of every subject area had students practice organizing their writing in this form. After the strategies are implemented, there is a follow-up assessment.

The administration uses creative timetabling combinations to provide a variety of courses to serve the individual strengths, needs and interests of the students. Some courses are cycled and offered every other year. Grade 10 courses without prerequisites are open to Grade 9 students. Some classes are large enough to allow for smaller classes elsewhere, and many students are involved in the co-op program run through the collegial network of the school board and local businesses.

Reading is highly valued at Clarke, and the rate of participation in the White Pine Forest of Reading Program at the school is one of the highest in the area. Many of the staff read the novels and join in the student discussions. With the aim of encouraging reading among students taking applied English in Grade 10, the board consultant helped design a collaborative student literacy club based on linked adventure novels by seven Canadian authors. The students were engaged and improved their questioning and active listening skills through discussion groups that "opened their minds" to the opinions of others. This unit, which culminated in visits by two of the authors, was highly successful, with many students choosing to read more novels.

Parents are informed about the OSSLT. The school created information packages that outline how the school provides supports and accommodations and how parents can help their child at home.

“Our OSSLT results have been maintained and sustained through the dedication and work of the teachers. I can set direction and provide leadership, but it is the teachers in the classroom and what happens in the classroom that directly affects the students and their progress. Teachers take on that leadership and I thank them for that. This staff has bent over backwards in terms of helping students with special needs and making them feel ready for the OSSLT. It is their work that ensures our success," states Principal Grdovic.

At Clarke, nobody slips through the cracks. Students are welcomed and provided with a safe, healthy, inclusive environment, where they are treated as respected and valued partners in learning. The teachers know the students well and use evidence from a variety of sources to focus on areas for remediation when necessary. Students are offered many opportunities to improve their academic and life skills. The positive and close relationships at Clarke result in sustained success on the OSSLT and extremely high graduation rates.
Holy Trinity Catholic High School
OTTAWA CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
Student population: 1400; Grades: 7–12; Principal: Jennifer Oake

Holy Trinity Catholic High School is located in Kanata and has a population of 1400 students in Grades 7–12. Although the demographics of the school have remained constant and homogeneous over the past five years, there has been an increase in the French-speaking student population. There are also a large number of students with special education needs. The school has a tradition of excellence, and student success is the focus of all conversations and initiatives.

Under the leadership of the administration, staff members examine and analyze EQAO literacy results, student work, report card data and teacher observations to identify trends and make informed decisions about areas for development and improvement. Data are used extensively to influence and shape classroom instruction in order to provide meaningful learning experiences for all students. There is a strong focus on literacy skills for all students from the time they enter the school. Board-generated data that include results from the primary and junior EQAO assessments allow staff to identify at-risk students and begin timely and specific intervention as early as Grade 7. While staff members are conscious of preparing students for the OSSLT, they are also aware of the need to integrate skills and content authentically so that students see their real-world applicability in different fields. Students have the opportunity to acquire skills over time, practise the skills, receive timely feedback and apply that feedback to future tasks.

Many initiatives at Holy Trinity have contributed to its success. The school literacy committee plays an integral part in planning and facilitating the implementation of many effective teaching strategies in collaboration with teachers from both panels and all subject areas. Using triangulated evidence of student achievement from a variety of sources, teachers make decisions about programming and plan lessons. The literacy committee is also cognizant that teachers in all areas need support and appropriate materials. Grades 7–12 English teachers who were involved in a cross-panel grammar initiative received a package of grade-level resources containing lesson plans, assignments targeting specific skills and assessment instruments.

Preparation for the OSSLT includes a series of initiatives developed to ensure that students feel comfortable about the test and to provide the necessary supports so that each student can produce his or her best possible work. All Grade 10 students participate in a mock test early in the school year to ensure that there is ample time to collect the data, score the test using EQAO rubrics, provide feedback and put appropriate supports in place. The test is marked using a cross-panel and cross-curricular approach facilitated through the teacher moderation strategy, where teachers share and learn from one another using the EQAO rubrics. It is worth noting that teachers volunteer to participate in the scoring process, demonstrating a high level of commitment and dedication to student achievement. From the mock test, a list of students who are experiencing difficulty and need targeted intervention is generated, and those students are invited to attend an after-school program. Letters are sent home to keep parents informed. The achievement data collected from various sources are often shared with students and parents to stress the importance of attending the after-school program.

Students are prepared to demonstrate their learning when they write the OSSLT. A Grade 11 student interviewed indicated that students have the opportunity to practise many reading and writing strategies and that they use graphic organizers in many subjects. She also explained that teachers provide a lot of feedback and are always willing to give extra help. She found the mock literacy test very useful in lowering her anxiety, and the feedback she received after the test was very helpful. She stated: “I just did not feel as worried when I wrote the real test. I felt prepared.” Student voice is very important, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OSSLT STUDENT POPULATION (eligible to write the test for the 1st time)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Applied</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Locally developed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special education needs</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>English language learners</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Speak primarily a language other than English at home</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on responses to Student Questionnaire*
Grade 10 students are surveyed after the administration of the OSSLT to determine whether the current initiatives are effective in helping them or whether changes need to be made.

Students also have the opportunity to participate in the Caring Adult Program. Each participating student is matched with an adult whose responsibility is to connect with the student and provide support, putting into action the consistent message “we care about you and want you to be as successful as you can be.” Students quickly realize that at Holy Trinity there is an entire community of caring adults who believe in them and are willing to invest time and effort in their success.

Parent-teacher interviews are held early in the school year so that parents and teachers can work together to provide the interventions and support required to ensure success. There is ongoing dialogue with parents regarding the OSSLT, and parents are also provided with information on the school Web site. Prior to the test, they receive a message with helpful tips to help their child prepare. Students are provided with a booklet that they can work through with their parents. This regular communication with parents and the sharing of resources such as a literacy preparation package, an essay guide and the EQAO Web site have resulted in a high level of engagement and support.

At Holy Trinity, data clearly play an important role in determining the focus for student achievement. Everyone is challenged to think critically about literacy strategies and how to best meet student learning needs. Embedding literacy in all subject areas has become a priority. The collaborative approach includes visionary leadership, a strong belief in professional development, teachers who hold themselves responsible for their own learning and a genuine desire to provide each and every student with the opportunity to succeed. There is also a strong belief that the work of providing a learning environment that embraces all students is never done. Principal Jennifer Oake states: “We use data to bring our school improvement plan to life. Data sets the tone for all our meetings and helps us to roll out our action plan. We use data to help target students so they can be more successful. It has become the credibility piece for staff and shows us where we need to go. Every single year there is a team of caring people helping our students be successful. We cannot take our results for granted.”

Jennifer Oake, Principal

“We use data to bring our school improvement plan to life. Data sets the tone for all our meetings and helps us to roll out our action plan. We use data to help target students so they can be more successful. It has become the credibility piece for staff and shows us where we need to go. Every single year there is a team of caring people helping our students be successful. We cannot take our results for granted.”
OSSLT: School Stories—On the Journey of Learning

Michipicoten High School

Michipicoten High School, in scenic Wawa, has a stabilizing influence in a community stressed by economic challenges. The tone at Michipicoten is that of an extended family, and the caring staff members have a history of producing positive attitudinal, attendance and behavioural changes in students. Teachers track students’ progress and achievement and use the resulting information when planning for curriculum implementation, thus ensuring that no child slips through the cracks.

Staff members review the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) results, Item Information Reports and student responses to EQAO questionnaires along with their classroom assessment data when creating the school improvement plan. Before the transition to high school, staff review the junior-division EQAO assessment cohort results from feeder schools. With students entering from three different school boards, these data are essential for appropriate student placement. Assessment meetings are held each fall, and students are tracked through a school-wide organization system that includes colour-coded assignment sheets, success criteria and achievement charts. With this careful monitoring, teachers ensure that students do not fall behind or miss an assignment.

Through the analysis of student responses on EQAO’s Item Information Reports, staff members noted that many students were close to achieving a higher score code and being successful on the OSSLT. Accordingly, the staff members chose to focus on the students’ ability to complete the short-writing questions competently. Using modelling, graphic organizers, anchor charts and direct instruction, the teachers introduced a consistent formula for paragraph writing across the curriculum. Realizing that some students needed basic literacy skills, they developed a similar process for teaching a standardized approach to the sentence: CCCAPS (Capitalization, Complete, Comma, Avoidance of run-on, Punctuation and Spelling).

Teachers used EQAO resources by modelling and integrating sample questions and anchors from previous years’ assessments during English classes. The students participated in the moderated marking of sample anchors and quickly grasped the expectations required to bring their work up to the next code on the scoring rubric for each of the components of the OSSLT. This strategy resulted in a noticeable improvement in student writing.

The writing assignments were then expanded so that students were prepared for long-writing questions. Course exams were created using the OSSLT’s format and included test questions from sample OSSLTs. The students are now confident in their abilities and are excited about writing the OSSLT.

Principal Petar Kusic states: “We pride ourselves here at Michipicoten for having developed a caring, challenging and safe environment in which students can excel. Through our ‘Team Viking’ approach, we have used EQAO data to help improve our literacy skills. All the staff focuses on literacy content and improvement.”

There is time built into all classes to promote reading, and encouraging reading for pleasure is a priority at Michipicoten. A reading corner in the library is stocked with graphic novels, sports

Petar Kusic, Principal

ALGOMA DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Student population: 130; Grades: 9–12; Principal: Petar Kusic
magazines and hot beverages. This area has become such a success that the English program now makes use of graphic novels in class.

Grade 9 students are given a diagnostic assessment based on the skills measured by the OSSLT. A similar test is given to students at the beginning of Grade 10. Staff members take part in moderated marking and then group the students by area of need. Students at risk are helped by the student support teacher and, if required, scheduled for the literacy course the following year. All students are taught how to use the technology necessary for accommodation.

The Algoma District School Board provides release time, secondary team support and professional training. Staff members are very supportive of literacy initiatives and embed them in their courses. Technology has been used to bridge long distances so that representatives can attend board workshops. The entire school staff takes part in after-school workshops held online.

Parents have great respect for the school and credit it with preparing students for the OSSLT and for academic success. Parents see the school as open and welcoming, and the teachers as supportive, not only to students, but to the community as a whole. Parents also feel that their children are comfortable reaching out when help is needed.

Students at Michipicoten commend their teachers for their commitment. Teachers are always available to give help and descriptive feedback on assignments. They are proactive at finding students at risk and moving them forward. They understand that home and social situations can be difficult and are therefore flexible about assignments, since some students spend over two hours a day on buses and many have part-time jobs. Extra help with specific literacy skills, organization and study habits help prepare students for post-secondary endeavours. A nutritious breakfast and snack program run by the co-op program helps keep everyone energized throughout the day.

According to a Grade 12 student, “Teachers are always there for us and find time to help us. Early and late buses are available for students who want to be involved in extracurricular activities. Teachers do everything they possibly can to make sure we succeed.”

Through consistent organization and language, and the use of effective teaching techniques, the staff members at Michipicoten maximize class time. Diagnostic tests based on the OSSLT and moderated marking allow students to be grouped by area of need for further direct instruction. The positive, caring attitude of the staff creates an environment in which students are engaged in learning, comfortable asking for help and confident about their ability to succeed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>OSSLT STUDENT POPULATION</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(eligible to write the test for the 1st time)</strong></td>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applied</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Locally developed</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special education needs</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language learners</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speak primarily a language other than English at home*</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on responses to Student Questionnaire
Sir Frederick Banting Secondary School

THAMES VALLEY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Student population: 1250; Grades: 9–12; Principal: Joan Cooper

Sir Frederick Banting Secondary School is a part of the Thames Valley District School Board and is located in London, Ontario. The student population has remained stable at 1250 for several years, but there have been some changes in the demographics, with an increase in the number of at-risk Grade 9 students (30–35%) and a significant number of out-of-boundary admissions. Sir Frederick Banting is one of two high schools in London that offer a French Immersion program. While its demographics are challenging, this school exceeds board and provincial results on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test.

In examining the factors that contribute to Banting’s success, one must begin with the sense of community and inclusiveness that is fostered in this school. As Principal Joan Cooper states, “We don’t just tolerate diversity; we celebrate it.” This spirit of belonging is typified in an annual event called “Wild Card.” Prior to the end of each school year, the Grade 8 graduates from all the feeder schools are invited to a sleepover at Banting. Parents drop their children off on Friday evening and pick them up on Saturday morning. In the interim, administration, staff and senior students orchestrate a series of activities that are designed to allay fears, have students interact, and replace apprehension with anticipation. When parents come to pick up their children, they watch a video that shows all students participating and enjoying the friendships they have formed over the weekend. This gentle transition to high school diminishes fears and provides an introduction to older students so that each child can have contacts to navigate this secondary school more easily. Parents are pleased that anxiety has lessened, their children are motivated and possible negatives such as bullying or hazing are minimized.

With an emphasis on serving individual needs, solid educational information is a valued commodity. It is essential to develop an accurate student profile so that no student needs are missed. Principal Joan Cooper recognizes the value of good data and how they can provide the information necessary to select appropriate targeted interventions, when possible. She cautions that with so much available data, care must be taken so that they can inform and transform teaching and learning experiences. “What’s behind the data is what’s important to us.” Accordingly, previous EQAO reports provide demographic information, achievement scores, item analysis data and student attitudinal information. The school also administers Degrees of Reading Power to all Grade 9 students to determine who is struggling and refers to report card results, teacher recommendations, Grade 9 English results, Individual Education Plans, transitional profiles from Grade 8 and Grade 6 EQAO data. These are only some of the information sources that allow for an appropriate academic picture that will drive the decision making process and improve the success rate on the OSSLT for all students.

The school response to the information gleaned from the accumulated data profile is a blend of supports for at-risk students, initiatives that address any gaps that might exist, and best practices that will enhance the quality of literacy instruction for all students. At Sir Frederick Banting, all teachers from all disciplines are involved. There is a member from each department on the Literacy Team, and all teachers can and do develop literacy skills within their respective disciplines. Skills such as formatting, test writing and reading graphic texts are part of this cross-curricular initiative. For those students who have been flagged and have Individual Education Plans, there is ongoing assistance from the resource teacher. Individual interviews with previously eligible students occur, with a review of results and discussion of specific next-step strategies. Mock tests or practice assignments are all scored and discussed with literacy coaches. There is assistance available for all students, in all subject areas, during lunch. A Student Success and Right Track Program, peer support,
Think Literacy strategies embedded in daily teaching, a welcoming student success resource area and EQAO resource materials are all available.

Preparation for the OSSLT is not a task that is taken lightly at Sir Frederick Banting Secondary School. A detailed and specific plan is produced that informs and prepares all students. Highlights of this plan include a Grade 10 assembly (in February), which reviews the format and scoring of the OSSLT and is usually presented by a staff member who has scored the test. The presenter speaks specifically about writing strategies that can be used. Mock tests are administered and scored and then returned to students. Prior to the actual test, remedial practice and extra-help sessions are also provided.

Parents also receive complete information on the progress of their children, and they are given information regarding available EQAO resources and a complete list of all significant preparatory events prior to the test. This communication has gained parental support for interventions and remedial programs at the school.

Sir Frederick Banting Secondary School has achieved excellent results on the OSSLT due to a great deal of hard work. The school’s formula for success is not to view the OSSLT as an addendum but to include it in school planning throughout the year. This school believes strongly in providing an atmosphere that welcomes every single student who is registered and offering the supports and accommodations needed for each student to move forward. All teachers are on board, and there is a culture of acceptance and success here. This is a literacy-rich school that strives for success for all. It has demystified the OSSLT for students and parents and is constantly working to refine its programming. Sir Frederick Banting Secondary School has struck an excellent balance between culture and academics.
Enhanced by an International Baccalaureate program, the culture of academic excellence that characterizes St. Robert Catholic High School is such that most students entering Grade 9 aim to attend university on graduation. To facilitate the achievement of these expectations, St. Robert personalizes its approach to reflect individual needs, and evaluates and programs extensively to teach literacy skills to its substantial number of English language learners. A board-wide orientation day in August, which involves some literacy and math screening procedures, provides an essential inclusionary vehicle for welcoming incoming students and allowing staff to anticipate special needs.

While the initial response to EQAO data lies with the school Literacy Committee, which identifies school-wide trends and highlights specific areas of strength and need, each department takes this information, devises its own curricular plan and incorporates its findings into the larger school improvement plan. Using EQAO as the starting point, teachers at St. Robert concentrate over time on areas of concern by integrating successful teaching strategies into the curriculum. For example, by aligning different genres of reading with the curriculum, giving descriptive feedback and matching assessment data with expectations, every staff member takes responsibility for teaching literacy.

Recently for instance, when school data indicated a difficulty with vocabulary development, staff immediately focused on that need. Then, zooming in on inferencing, they explicitly taught students how to read for meaning, articulate what they have learned and make connections to real-life experiences. Similarly, for writing they “married EQAO data with the curriculum” and designed a course outline to ensure that all students receive the same information through targeted lessons about personal opinion pieces, news reports and sight-passage analysis. Likewise, acting on data showing strong student performances on knowledge-based questions and corresponding weaknesses on critical-thinking tasks, teachers refined their questioning practices and explicitly taught critical-thinking skills.

To accommodate evolving English-language skills, the school provides all Grade 10 students with workbooks covering essential reading and writing skills from the curriculum. Deeply invested in the academic success of their children, parents can go directly to these resources to familiarize themselves with EQAO literacy requirements. For subject teachers, they serve as diagnostic assessment devices or as lead-ins to teaching curriculum expectations. An online program called Reading Aloud is another valuable resource available to Grade 10 applied classes. Again, literacy skills outlined in the curriculum are embedded in the program. With contemporary stories and a chat area for discussing questions, it functions as a highly motivating teaching tool.

Reaching out to non-identified students, the Literacy Mentor program provides increasingly inclusive data and support. Recently transferred at-risk students who scored below 60% in Grades 9 and 10 English or weren’t successful on the OSSLT meet in small groups with staff mentors twice weekly to identify individual learning gaps, determine why these gaps exist and receive appropriate interventions. The staff mentors record progress and ultimately share improvement data with the multi-disciplinary school success team. “Trusting and sharing your data are two of the most important things teachers can do,” says Principal Sarna.

Using a continuous feedback cycle of data, St. Robert also traces trends over time. Current EQAO data, school results from the primary and junior assessments along with classroom data and data from other sources (such as credit recovery and attendance records) are used organically by small

successful departmental learning teams. These teams venture beyond the numbers to gather perceptual and attitudinal data, which they layer over school board statistics, ensuring student success.

Principal Sarna states: “There is a constant questioning around how we can make those incremental improvements. The challenge is continually seeking out the deeper corners of the curriculum.”

With professional development predominantly occurring on site, staff can tailor board initiatives to local needs. Recently for example, working with a board initiative, staff from various departments used EQAO data to create targeted lessons for Grades 9 and 10 students in the applied program. As part of the project, teachers worked in pairs, observing each other and discussing their insights. A comparison of data from before and after showed that these strategies improved students’ literacy skills significantly. As Principal Sarna states, “Data helps by providing a focus to align our vision along a path that is going to produce results.”

Staff at St. Robert collaborate successfully in small teams, not only within the school but also with staff from other schools, and acknowledge their commitment to meeting student needs. This was demonstrated recently by the school’s success securing a grant to address the discrepancy between the academic and applied programs’ OSSLT success rates by reviewing data, linking them to the curriculum and designing Grade 9 lessons plans with other schools.

Assistive and other technology provides another link to success by allowing students with learning disabilities to function well in the academic stream and all students with special education needs to demonstrate their learning more clearly on assessments. EQAO resources familiarize students with the language and expectations of the curriculum. Committed to improving technology school-wide, St. Robert is now purchasing iPads to improve students’ oral and written communication skills.

Ever respectful of student wishes, staff encourage student input into the schools’ many extracurricular activities, which significantly contribute to the development of language and social skills among the diverse student population. With full parental support, the teachers have collaboratively created a friendly, welcoming and safe learning community within which students thrive both socially and academically.