

EQAO's Online Assessment Platform: Student Comfort, Achievement and Perceptions

Research Brief

MARCH 2024

How comfortable do students feel about EQAO assessments and the online assessment platform? Is there a connection between student comfort and student achievement? EQAO investigated these questions using the 2022–2023 EQAO assessment and student questionnaire data.

Every year, Ontario students in Grades 3, 6, 9 and 10 complete an EQAO assessment. These assessments, which focus on reading, writing and mathematics learning, provide evidence about how well students are meeting curriculum expectations across the province. After the assessment, students are invited to complete a voluntary questionnaire that asks about their learning environment, attitudes toward learning and experience of the assessment, among other questions. Data from this questionnaire is used to help inform continuous improvement in the provincial education system.

To answer the questions above about student comfort, EQAO looked at 2022–2023 trends in self-reported comfort before and after the assessments, and how comfort was related to student achievement on the assessments. We also looked at how much students agreed with the following statements from the student questionnaires:

- The sample test helped prepare me for this assessment.¹
- I liked the design of the online assessment.²
- I could go from question to question easily.³
- The different kinds of questions (drop-down, drag and drop, checklist) were easy to use.⁴

Student Comfort and Student Achievement⁵

Before writing the Grades 3 and 6 assessments, a large majority (80%) of students felt relatively comfortable about them. Of all Grades 3 and 6 students, 29% felt comfortable, 51% “just OK” and only 21% uncomfortable.⁶ A similar pattern is seen for secondary students. Of all Grade 9 students, 69% felt “very comfortable,” “somewhat comfortable” or “neither comfortable nor uncomfortable” before the assessment. Of all students writing the OSSLT/TPCL, 69% felt the same way (see Figure 1).

¹ The OSSLT wording for this statement was “The practice test helped prepare me for this test.”

² The OSSLT wording for this statement was “I liked the design of the online test.”

³ The Grade 9 and OSSLT wording for this statement was “It was easy to navigate between questions.”

⁴ The Grade 9 wording for this statement was “The different kinds of questions (for example, drop-down, drag and drop) were easy to use.”

⁵ Analysis findings were the same for students in English- and French-language boards, so both groups are reported together in this research brief.

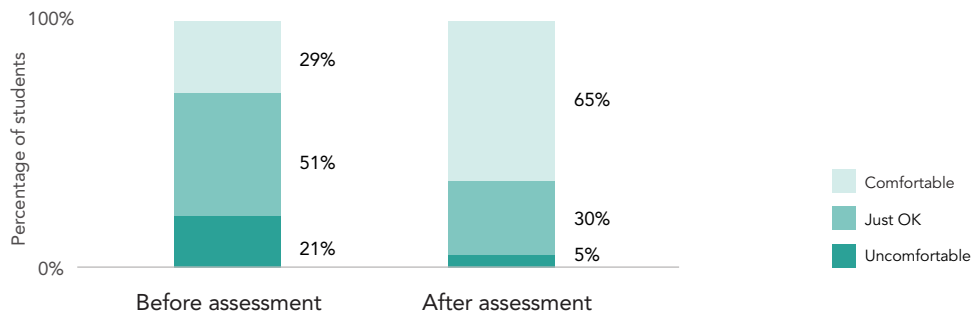
⁶ Percentages in this report may not add exactly to 100%, due to rounding.

Across all grades, students felt more comfortable *after* the assessment than they did before the assessment. For example, students in Grades 3 and 6 saw an increase in comfort of 36 percentage points, from 29% of students comfortable before the assessment to 65% of them afterward. Students who wrote the OSSLT/TPCL saw an increase of 24 percentage points, from 43% of students very or somewhat comfortable before the assessment to 67% afterward. Students in Grade 9 saw an increase of 21 percentage points, from 38% of students very or somewhat comfortable before the assessment to 59% afterward (see Figure 1).

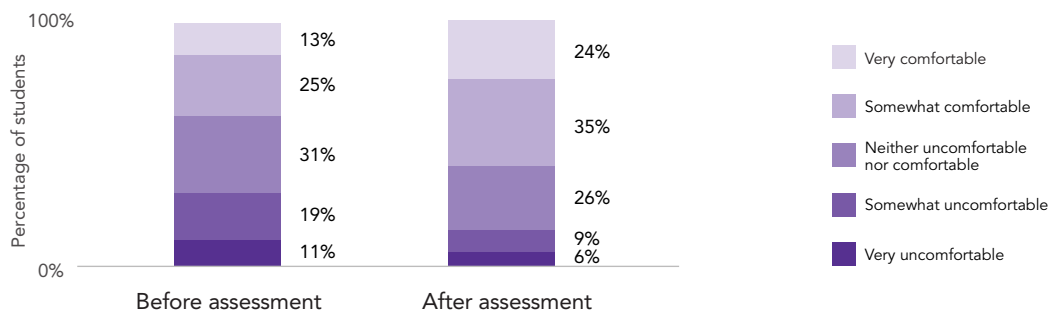
An explanation for these large increases is that the assessments were a positive (or at least not a negative) experience: they were less challenging and/or easier to navigate and complete than expected.

Figure 1. Student comfort pre- and post-EQAO assessment: Grades 3 and 6, Grade 9, OSSLT/TPCL, 2022–2023

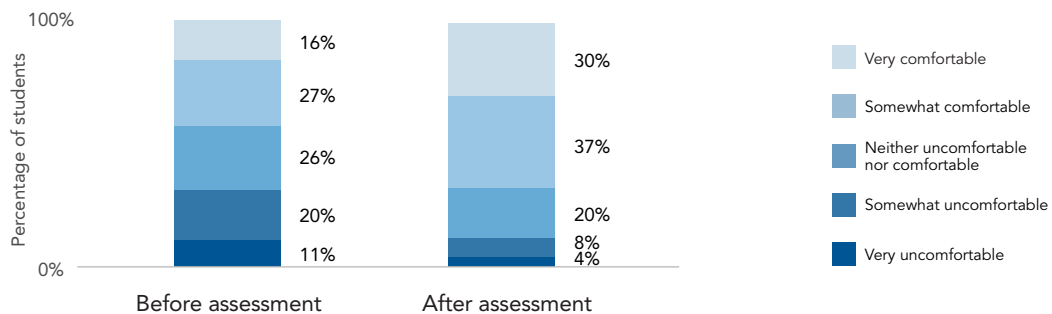
Grade 3 and Grade 6



Grade 9



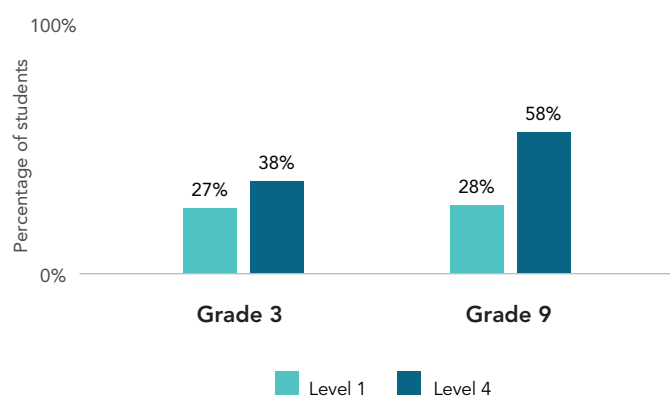
OSSLT/TPCL



Comfort and Achievement: Before the Assessments

We also found that achievement level and students' comfort before the assessment were linked. Students who achieved higher levels on the assessment tended to feel more comfortable *before* completing it. This relationship between achievement and pre-assessment comfort is stronger among older students. For example, while Grade 3 students across the different achievement levels in mathematics showed similar frequencies of pre-assessment comfort (around 27–38%), Grade 9 students showed larger differences in pre-assessment comfort. For example, 28% of Grade 9 students who achieved Level 1 in mathematics were comfortable before the assessment; in comparison, among Grade 9 students who achieved Level 4, this number was 58% (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Percentage of students who felt comfortable before their EQAO assessment by achievement level (1 or 4) and grade (3 and 9), 2022–2023



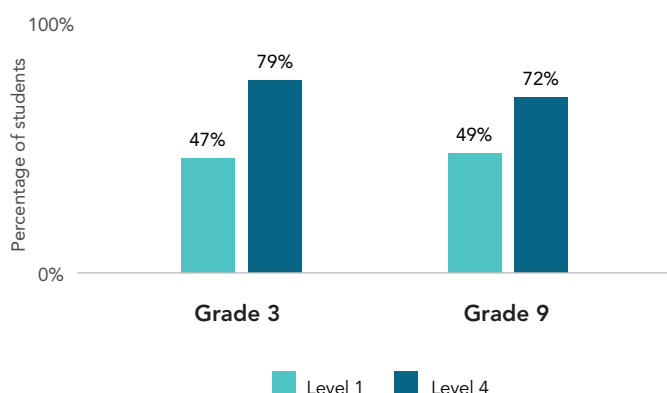
This suggests that as students grow older, they may develop a better understanding of their own academic achievement and preparedness for assessments. In particular, older students who are meeting curriculum expectations are likely to feel more comfortable than younger students who are also meeting expectations, because they understand their situation better.

In addition, students taking the Grade 9 assessment and the OSSLT/TPCL know that their performance contributes to their mathematics grade (for many although not all Grade 9 students) or that a successful outcome is required to graduate (for students taking the OSSLT/TPCL). Therefore, students who are currently meeting expectations may feel particularly comfortable, because they understand their achievement will contribute to these objectives.

Comfort and Achievement: After the Assessments

Comfort after the assessment was also related to achievement level. Like pre-assessment comfort, higher post-assessment comfort was linked to higher achievement. However, unlike pre-assessment comfort, Grade 3 post-assessment comfort levels were *not* similar across achievement levels. For example, 47% of Grade 3 students who achieved Level 1 on the mathematics component felt comfortable after completing the Grade 3 assessment, but 79% of those who achieved Level 4 on the mathematics component felt comfortable (see Figure 3). This suggests that after the assessments, students have an accurate idea of their performance, a pattern that holds across grades.

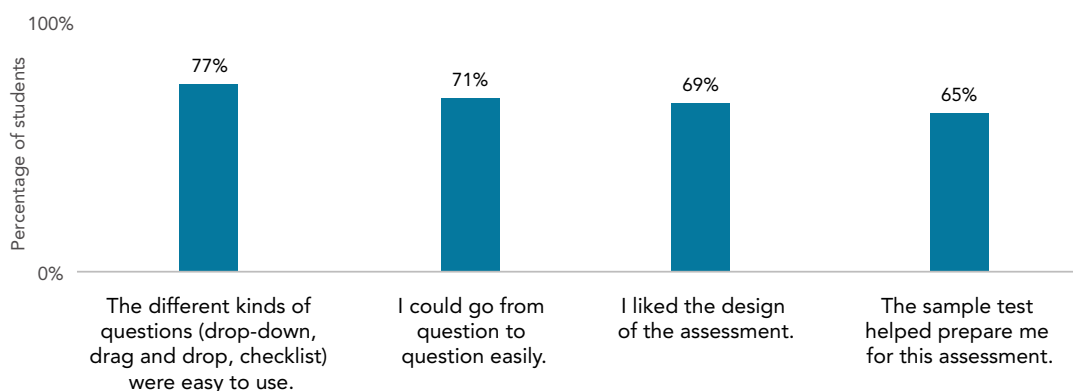
Figure 3. Student comfort post-EQAO assessment by achievement level (1 or 4) and grade (3 and 9), 2022–2023



Student Comfort and the Assessment System

Regarding EQAO's online assessment platform, in general we found that students feel comfortable using it (see Figure 4). For example, 77% of students found that the different question types, such as drop-down and checklist, were easy to use.

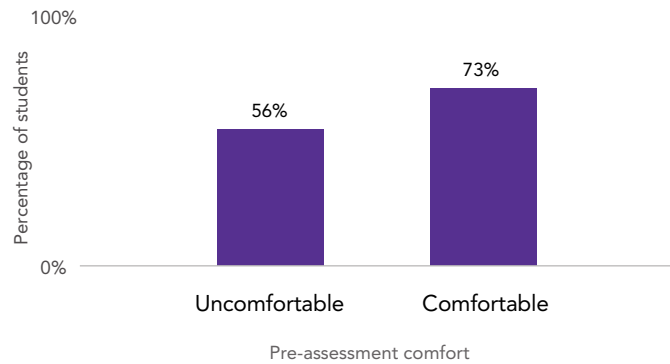
Figure 4. Percentage of students who agree with statements about EQAO's online assessment system: Grades 3, 6 and 9 and OSSLT/TPCL, 2022–2023⁷



⁷ The statements shown in Figure 4 are the Grade 3 and Grade 6 versions of the statements. The data comes from all grades. Students could also say they disagreed, or neither agreed nor disagreed.

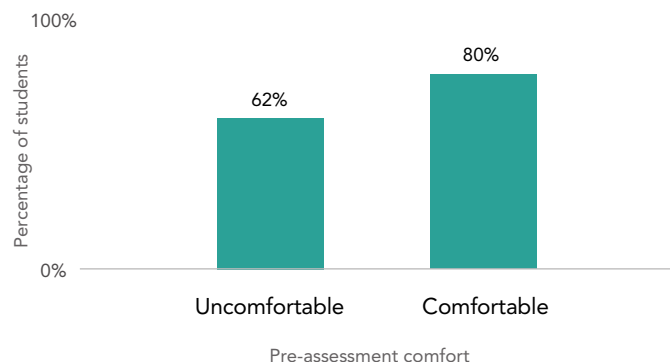
Regarding the connection between pre- and post-assessment comfort and experiences using the platform, we found that comfort before *and* after the assessment was related to positive experiences of the platform. For example, among Grade 9 students who were comfortable *before* the assessment, 73% found the sample test helpful, while among Grade 9 students who were *uncomfortable* before the assessment, this number was 56% (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Percentage of Grade 9 students who agree the sample test was helpful by pre-assessment comfort, 2022–2023



Students who were more comfortable before the assessment were also more likely to have a positive view of the assessment in general. For example, 80% of Grade 3 students who were comfortable before the assessment indicated that they liked the assessment design (see Figure 6). This contrasts with the 62% of students who were uncomfortable before the assessment who also liked the assessment design. This suggests that comfort before the assessment may influence students’ perception of the assessment’s user-friendliness, or that user-friendliness may contribute to comfort. Alternatively, comfort before the assessment may be related to another factor that helps students navigate the platform successfully.

Figure 6. Percentage of Grade 3 students who liked the EQAO assessment design by pre-assessment comfort, 2022–2023



Implications

The purpose of this analysis was to explore whether there is a connection between student comfort and student achievement, and to find out how comfortable students feel about EQAO's online assessment platform. We found that in general, students feel comfortable using the platform, although students who feel comfortable *before* the assessment are more likely to report positive experiences.

In addition, it appears that students' sense of comfort with the assessments is somewhat linked with their prior experiences of success in the assessed curriculum areas, and fairly strongly linked with their sense of success on the assessment itself.

- After the assessments, students in all grades have a fairly accurate sense of their achievement and feel more comfortable when they did well.
- Prior to the assessments, older students already have a sense of their current achievement and feel comfortable if they anticipate success.
- However, younger students have a generally positive yet not highly developed sense of self-efficacy and, therefore, their sense of pre-assessment comfort is fairly consistent regardless of current achievement.

These findings show the importance of ensuring students are meeting curriculum expectations, as they will then experience feelings of success when they attempt an EQAO assessment. In addition, pre-assessment preparation should focus on reducing pre-assessment nerves, as most students will go on to have a positive assessment experience. For example, positive messaging from adults such as parents, teachers and principals can contribute to student comfort and reduce pre-assessment nervousness. Furthermore, familiarizing oneself with the assessment format and question types can reduce pre-assessment stress. Students should be encouraged to take the sample test any time between the opening of the provincial assessment window and their assigned assessment date, so they know what to expect.⁸

Student well-being is of the utmost importance to EQAO. We hope that these findings can provide educators, parents, guardians and other stakeholders in education with a solid foundation upon which to continue supporting student learning.

⁸ Sample tests are available for familiarizing students with the Grade 3, Grade 6 or Grade 9 assessments. A practice test is available for students preparing for the OSSLT/TPCL.