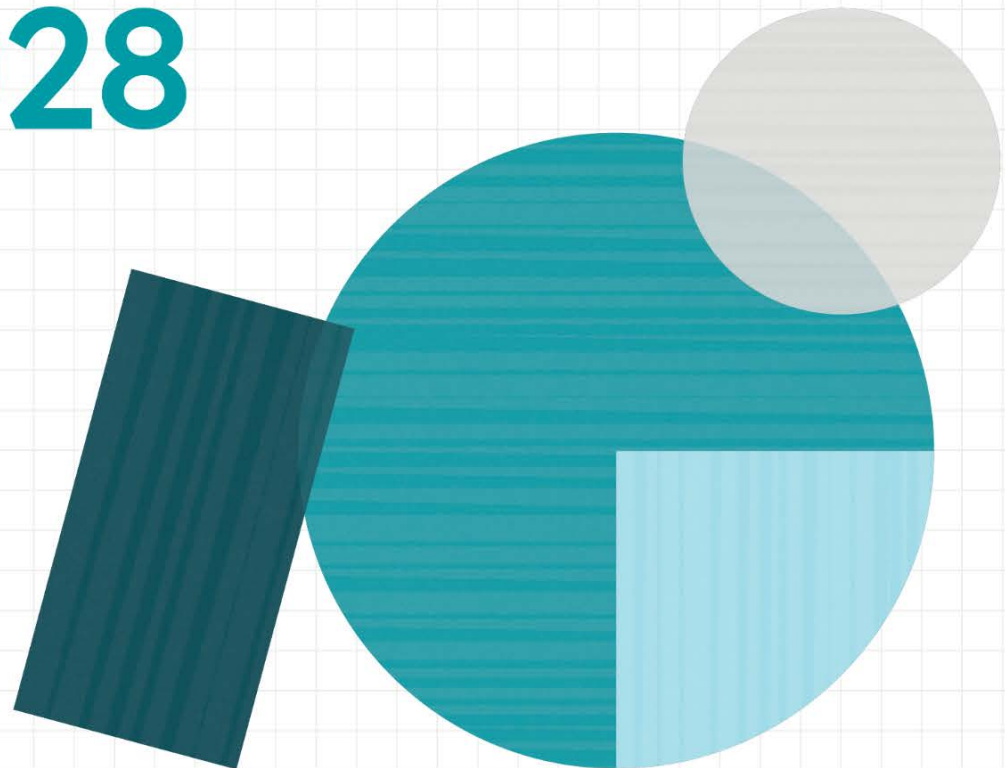


Education Quality and Accountability Office

Business Plan 2025-2028



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Executive Summary

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is a board-governed agency of the Government of Ontario that contributes to the quality and accountability of Ontario’s publicly funded education system. EQAO develops and administers large-scale assessments that produce objective and reliable information to support student success. EQAO data are a snapshot that shows whether students are meeting *Ontario Curriculum* expectations in reading, writing and mathematics at key stages of their education. This data is an important indicator of student learning that adds to the available knowledge about how Ontario students are doing, and it helps with improvement planning at the student, school, school board and provincial levels. Starting October 16, 2024, the EQAO has been administering the Mathematics Proficiency Test (MPT), which, effective February 1, 2025, is a requirement for certification with the Ontario College of Teachers.

This business plan sets out the agency’s activities for the 2025–2028 fiscal period in alignment with the strategic direction established by the 2025 Letter of Direction for EQAO. As part of its work, the agency will continue to strengthen its large-scale assessments and enhance its IT operations and key business functions, including its digital reporting offerings, as well as its privacy and security practice.

EQAO’s continued modernization will fulfill its mandate by contributing more effectively to education quality and accountability for the education system across Ontario. This vision places Ontario K–12 students and teacher candidates at the centre of the assessment program as the agency strives to inform education improvement and accountability across the province.

Introduction

Established in 1996, EQAO has distinguished itself as an organization that provides valuable services to the people of Ontario by measuring the effectiveness of the publicly funded education system and supporting student learning.

Mission

Working with the education community to support the success and well-being of all students, EQAO is dedicated to enhancing the quality and accountability of the education system in Ontario.

Mandate

According to the *EQAO Act*, the following legislated objects serve as the agency’s mandate:

- to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education

- to develop tests and require or undertake the administering and marking of tests of pupils in elementary and secondary schools¹
- to develop systems for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education
- to research and collect information on assessing academic achievement
- to evaluate the public accountability of school boards and to collect information on strategies for improving that accountability
- to report to the public and to the Minister of Education on the results of tests and generally on the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education and on the public accountability of school boards
- to make recommendations, in its reports to the public and to the Minister of Education, on any matter related to the quality or effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education or to the public accountability of boards
- to develop examinations relating to proficiency in mathematics for those seeking teacher certification in Ontario and to undertake the administering and marking of the examinations
- to conduct research and collect information in order to assess the ability and confidence of individuals writing the MPT
- to report to the Minister on the results of the MPT

Expectations Set Out in the Letter of Direction

The Letter of Direction received on October 16, 2024, from the Honorable Jill Dunlop, Minister of Education, outlines the direction for 2025–2026 for EQAO as follows:

The general direction for agency operations for the coming year relates to innovation, sustainability and accountability. To be innovative, the agency is expected to simplify interactions; expand and optimize digital services; improve satisfaction among the receivers of our services; and share procurement spending and planning data as well as contract arrangements and vendor relations with Supply Ontario when requested. To be sustainable, the agency is to strengthen public service delivery while using resources efficiently. To be accountable, the agency is to develop and report outcome-based performance measures; protect agency data; report high risks; align hybrid work policies with those of the OPS while assessing office optimization; develop and encourage equity, diversity and inclusion; and increase revenue.²

Specific to EQAO, the agency is expected to

- continue “the implementation of digitized and adaptive assessments for the Primary and Junior Divisions, the Grade 9 Math

¹ According to the *EQAO Act* (1996), “test” means “any method of assessing the academic achievement of elementary and secondary school pupils.” (“test”) 1996, c. 11, s. 1; 1997, c. 31, s. 148 (1); 2017, c. 34, Sched. 46, s. 12 (1).” Retrieved from

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/96e11#:~:text=1.,in%20elementary%20and%20secondary%20schools>

² Ontario Ministry of Education. (2024). EQAO Letter of Direction

- assessment and Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test in an accessible manner;
- continue with the implementation and delivery of the Math Proficiency Test (MPT) to ensure that the MPT certification requirement target of February 1, 2025, can be met;
- support the government’s commitment to building students’ foundational skills by providing assessment data to support improvement planning and accountability, including the reporting system that allows for the visualization and analysis of EQAO data by school boards and
- work closely with the Ministry and the Community Services I&IT Cluster to manage and address IT and system-related risks, including privacy risks.”³

Values

EQAO is guided by the OPS values of inclusion, integrity and excellence in support of its mandate.

- EQAO values giving all students the opportunity to reach their highest possible level of achievement.
- EQAO values its role as a service to educators, parents, guardians, students, government and the public in support of teaching and learning in the classroom.
- EQAO values credible evidence that informs professional practice and focuses attention on interventions that improve student success.
- EQAO values research that informs large-scale assessment and classroom practice.
- EQAO values the dedication and expertise of Ontario’s educators, their involvement in all aspects of the assessment process and the positive difference their efforts make in student outcomes.
- EQAO values the delivery of its programs and services with equivalent quality in both English and French.

Governance Framework

EQAO is governed by a board of directors appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. As outlined in the *EQAO Act (1996)*, seven to nine directors may be appointed to the board for a term specified by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. EQAO was established to measure the effectiveness of the publicly funded education system and deliver assessment programs that yield objective and reliable information about student achievement. EQAO also administers the MPT as part of the process for teacher candidates to attain certification from the Ontario College of Teachers.

The agency board is accountable, through the chair, to the Minister of Education. The board of directors keeps the agency

³ Ibid

accountable by maintaining its arm's-length relationship with the provincial government, ensuring the agency fulfills the government's priorities and expectations as outlined in the annual letter of direction, setting priorities for attaining excellence in the delivery of Ontario's large-scale assessment programs and communicating effectively with the public and the education community.

The board chair is accountable to the minister and provides leadership to the agency by meeting with the minister at least quarterly, ensuring the agency fulfills government priorities and expectations from the annual letter of direction, working with the minister on performance measures, reviewing the performance of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the MOU no later than four months upon appointment, ensuring compliance with TB/MBC policy obligations, sending attestations to the minister, advising the minister on any skills gaps in the board through the use of the agency's skill matrix, consulting with the minister about any activity that may have an impact on government and ministry policies, establishing and implementing artificial intelligence (AI) risk management in alignment with OPS wide direction, and ensuring operations are within the agency's budget as well as the promotion of equity, diversity and inclusion.

The board meets regularly and conducts business according to the *EQAO Act*, EQAO's bylaws, the MOU and the *Public Service of Ontario Act* (PSOA). The Audit and Finance Committee supports the board in ensuring that EQAO exercises due diligence in maintaining an effective financial-control framework. The Governance and Nominating Committee is responsible for the review of governance policies over a three-year cycle, ensuring compliance with the governance policies, overseeing the professional development plans for board members and helping with the process of nominating new members to the board. The Executive Committee of the board provides a forum for advice and counsel to the chair and CEO, aids in planning the board's annual work plan and ensures the board maintains its focus on its strategic, fiduciary and generative role.

EQAO's CEO is the board's connection to EQAO's operations and serves as the ethics executive for all staff. The CEO is accountable to the agency's board; manages day-to-day operational, financial, analytical and administrative affairs; ensures that vision, innovation and tone setting for an inclusive work environment are in place; meets with the deputy minister; ensures operational implementation of government priorities and expectations from the annual letter of direction; reviews and signs a new MOU no later than four months from appointment; provides key agency information and data to the Ministry; keeps the chair and board informed of operational matters; advises the chair on the requirements of the Agencies and Appointment Directive, ensuring EQAO meets the directive's requirements; provides leadership and guidance to agency staff; ensures the agency has the oversight capacity and framework for monitoring management and operations; establishes and applies a financial management framework in alignment with applicable Minister of Finance's and TBS's controllership directives, ensuring funds are used with integrity and honesty; establishes and applies systems and risk management frameworks; and carries out the responsibilities assigned by the board in alignment with the *EQAO Act*, the MOU and the applicable agency directives set out by the Management Board of Cabinet.

Staff members of the agency are accountable to the CEO for carrying out the roles and responsibilities assigned to them by the CEO and articulated in the annual business plan and in their performance plans.

Overview of Current and Future Programs and Activities

Digitalization and Modernization

EQAO's modernized assessment program enables an effective and efficient response to the needs of the province on matters of education quality and accountability. EQAO strives for continuous improvement on its journey to support positive student outcomes in a fast-changing digital world. For its K–12 assessment program, the agency's goal is to allow students who take the assessments to demonstrate their full understanding of the curriculum. From the K–12 assessment results, EQAO gathers information and data that sheds light on how Ontario's public education system is performing.

The agency aims to provide evidence-informed insights into student learning to facilitate the improvement and success of Ontario students. Modernization at EQAO is a multi-faceted and multi-year initiative that focuses on five distinct areas:

- large-scale assessments,
- reports,
- research,
- engagement with Ontarians and
- supporting equity, diversity and inclusion in education.

In partnership with the Ministry of Education and school boards, EQAO will maximize the usefulness of the information supplied through large-scale assessments. EQAO will continue to share data, support research based on its data and release insights and interactive reports that are pivotal in moving the education community forward. Classrooms increasingly rely on digital tools for teaching and learning. To reflect these realities, EQAO digitalized Ontario's large-scale assessment program. Computer adaptive testing is an important component of EQAO's modernized assessments and a useful tool to meet students where they are in their learning development.

EQAO's modernization also pertains to proficiency in mathematics among teacher candidates in Ontario. EQAO administers the MPT in alignment with best practices in large-scale assessment. Having in-person and online options to participate in the MPT allows test takers the flexibility of administration that best suits their needs. The MPT assesses proficiency in mathematics content (covering Grades 3 to 9) and pedagogy. The MPT results provide information on mathematics performance of future primary and secondary

teachers in Ontario, which is evidence useful for policy and program development on mathematics' pedagogy and methods.

EQAO Is Internationally Recognized

In 2024, EQAO received the Best Practitioner of the Year award from the e-Assessment Association, a not-for-profit organization with an interest in e-assessment internationally. Recognizing outstanding online evaluation that makes a difference to students through the innovative use of technology for assessment around learning, this prestigious award acknowledges the vision, purpose and inclusiveness of EQAO's large-scale provincial assessments, and of the agency as a whole. EQAO is proud of this acknowledgement, which serves as an indicator of the excellence and commitment of its staff in support of education improvement across Ontario.

Provincial K–12 Assessments

The current K–12 assessment program is outlined in the following table:

Assessment	Grade	Subjects
Primary division	Grade 3	Reading, writing, mathematics
Junior division	Grade 6	Reading, writing, mathematics
Grade 9	Grade 9	Mathematics
OSSLT	Grade 10	Literacy

All students in Grades 10 and 11 who are working toward the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) must work toward the literacy graduation requirement by participating in the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) or completing the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC). As of the 2024–2025 school year, the eligibility criteria to access the OSSLC is as follows: If a student has had two opportunities to take the OSSLT and has been unsuccessful at least once, the student is eligible to enroll in the OSSLC. Principals have the discretion to allow a student to enroll in the OSSLC before they have had a second opportunity to take the OSSLT if the principal determines that it is in the best interest of the student. Further details can be found at [Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Program Requirements, 2024](#).

Multi-Stage Computer Adaptive Testing for K–12 Assessments

Multi-stage computer adaptive tests (msCATs) are a form of computer testing that adapts to a student's level of proficiency according to the student's achievement on a set of items (called a module). Such tests present many benefits to students, parents and guardians,

and educators. These include adapting to student proficiency and providing good measurement across the scale of student achievement. The administration of mSCATs takes place in a digital environment that offers flexibility in scheduling while maintaining security and providing automated reports for timely and detailed feedback. The math components of all EQAO K–12 assessments utilize the mSCATs model.

Student Questionnaire Data

EQAO student questionnaires gather valuable information on aspects of student learning and achievement. The agency will continue to collect data on attitudes toward math and literacy, as well as on student perceptions of their learning environment. This contextual data can be used to identify trends and guide decision making toward the improvement of education at the student, school, board and provincial levels.

Mathematics Proficiency Test (MPT)

EQAO develops and administers the MPT in alignment with *The Ontario Curriculum*. Successful completion of the MPT is a requirement for certification with the Ontario College of Teachers. There are two regulations governing the MPT (Regulation 271/19, *Proficiency in Mathematics*, under the *Ontario College of Teachers Act*, and Regulation 272/19, *Objects of the Office*, under the *EQAO Act*, 1996).

The regulations outline the two sections of the test:

- the mathematics curriculum section, relating to the mathematics curriculum for Grades 3 to 9, which comprises at least 70 per cent of the test.
- the pedagogy section, which comprises the remainder of the test.

The test has been designed as a computer-based assessment with single-selection questions. Test takers must attain a minimum score of 70% on both components of the test to be successful.

National and International Assessments

EQAO coordinates the administration of four large-scale national and international assessments on behalf of the Government of Ontario every three to five years: the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

During the 2025–2028 business cycle, EQAO will support Ontario’s participation in the national and international assessments as determined by the Ministry of Education.

Assessment	Partner Organization	Approximate Age/Grade	Subjects
TIMSS	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement	Grade 4 & Grade 8	Mathematics, science
PIRLS	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement	Grade 4	Reading
PCAP	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	Grade 8	Reading, mathematics, science
PISA	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	15-year-olds	Reading, mathematics, science

EQAO’s Research Program

As part of EQAO’s commitment to providing objective, reliable and useful data about student achievement, the agency has an active research program that undertakes a number of original projects. The fourth object of the *EQAO Act* (1996) places research and collecting information on assessing academic achievement as one of the agency’s pillars. EQAO recognizes the need for a continued focus on research to help support learning outcomes at the individual, school and system levels. Also, in accordance with the *EQAO Act*, and in following the Ministry of Education’s Letter of Direction, the agency will continue to analyze data from the K–12 assessment programs and will initiate research to assess the ability and confidence of teacher candidates writing the MPT.

Research Framework

At EQAO, we believe discussions about education quality need to be evidence-informed and grounded in research. EQAO recognizes the need for a continued focus on research to examine effective high-quality educational experiences that support student achievement. For this purpose, EQAO has established the [#DataInAction Research Framework](#), which is aimed at ensuring EQAO data

are used for improving student learning. Under this lens, EQAO accepts research proposals that leverage our data or seek to collaborate with the agency to further student achievement (see [#DataInAction 2.0: Research Priorities and Approaches](#)).

EQAO's Statistical Standards

EQAO aligns with Statistics Canada in recognizing statistical standards as a set of rules that describe how data are collected and how statistics and results are produced and shared. EQAO's [statistical standards](#) are used to provide data insights on specific topics and on the learning experiences of groups of students. The standards also ensure consistency in data quality over time.

EQAO's Data Quality Framework

[EQAO's Data Quality Framework](#) provides systematic and methodological rigour to the agency's data quality validation processes. EQAO's data quality processes use clearly defined guidelines, business rules, methodologies and protocols to ensure that data quality is maintained at all stages of its program, including the collection, processing and analyzing of educational data, and the reporting and sharing of results.

Research Partners

EQAO is pleased to partner with the following organizations:

- [Ontario Institute for Studies in Education](#)
- [The Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University](#)
- [SickKids, The Hospital for Sick Children](#)
- [Unity Health Toronto](#)

School Support and Outreach

EQAO's School Support and Outreach team works collaboratively with school boards, educators, teachers in training, qualifying principals, student groups and parents and guardians to develop professional learning programs that incorporate EQAO's latest research and data. These programs are designed to assist educators and administrators in leveraging EQAO data and navigating the agency's modernized assessments to support student success. The innovative, successful practices of schools and boards are also collected and shared with the education community to further support student success.

Information Technology

In collaboration with the Community Services, I&IT Cluster (CSC) and Information Technology Services (ITS), the agency will continue

to review and optimize its I&IT operations at the Guelph Data Centre.

Resources Needed to Meet Goals and Objectives

Financial Resources

Continued optimization of the EQAO assessments, strengthening of its I&IT ecosystem, engaging with Ontarians and enhanced mining of the agency's data are some of the goals that have been planned consistently with the current level of funding received from the government.

Human Resources

EQAO's digital assessments and the demands of a rapidly changing world put pressure on developing and acquiring the skill sets required to meet the agency's obligations. In fulfilling the agency's obligations, EQAO commits to ensure effective recruitment and onboarding while building capacity and promoting a positive and healthy workplace.

Environmental Scan

From a large-scale assessment perspective, jurisdictions have increasingly moved into digital modes of assessing students mixed with methods of evaluation that ensure the individual learning experience of the student is also reflected.

External Factors

International Outlook on Assessments

The following are summaries of education systems and of digital assessment practices in some jurisdictions around the world.

California (United States)

The California Department of Education carries out evaluation functions (testing and accountability) for primary and secondary education in the state of California. Established on January 1, 2014, the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) is the system in place to assist teachers, administrators, students and parents in student learning through a series of different assessments, including the [Smarter Balanced Assessment System](#), [California Science Test](#), [California Alternate Assessments \(CAAs\) for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics](#), [CAA for Science](#), [California Spanish Assessment](#) (optional) and [Grade Two Diagnostic Assessments](#) (optional). The Smarter Balanced Assessment System designs, develops and administers assessments in ELA (English Language Arts) and mathematics, and “utilizes computer-based tests and performance tasks that allow students to show what they know and are able to do in English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics.”⁴ The other states and territories in the consortium are Connecticut, Hawaii, Montana, Oregon, U.S. Virgin Islands, Indiana, Delaware, Idaho, Nevada, Michigan, South Dakota and Washington. General results for California assessments show generally low levels (less than 50% of students meet the standard in English Language Arts and Math).

Connecticut (United States)

Connecticut’s assessment system “supports student learning of the [Connecticut Core Standards](#) and the [Next Generation Science Standards](#).” Assessments in Connecticut for students in Grades 3 to 8 and high school for mathematics and English language arts (ELA)/literacy are developed through the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments.⁵ The Connecticut SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test) School Day, administered for students in Grade 11, gathers evidence on student skills in reading/writing and mathematics. General results for Connecticut assessments show “overall improvement in mathematics and science for the second consecutive year, with the most noticeable improvements across the majority of student groups in mathematics. ELA performance was at or above 2022–2023 levels in Grades 3 through 7. Grades 8 and 11 showed small declines.”⁶

⁴ California Department of Education. (2024). Smarter Balanced Assessment System. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/>

⁵ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2024). Student assessment. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/sde/services/k-12-education/accountability-assessment-data/student-assessment>

⁶ Connecticut State Department of Education. Press release 08/27/2024. Connecticut students show a second year of improved attendance and mathematics and science scores. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/sde/press-room/press-releases/2024/improved-attendance-and-mathematics-and-science-scores>

Wales (Great Britain)

In Wales, Personalised Assessments are mandatory for public school students in Grades 2 to 9 to evaluate numeracy (procedural and reasoning) and reading (English and Welsh). Numeracy (procedural) focuses on numerical facts and procedures—the numerical “tools” that are needed to apply numeracy within a range of contexts.⁷ Numeracy (reasoning) focuses on how well children can use and apply what they know to solve numerical problems. Reading personalized assessments provides information on a student’s understanding of a text and whether they can make judgments about what they are reading.⁸ Available throughout the year, the tests evaluate the students’ “strengths and areas for further development so that their teachers can help them grow their skills.”⁹ Schools choose the timing and methods to use the results in reading and numeracy. Personalized assessments are online and adaptive. Instead of having “windows” for the assessments, the schools decide the timing. Schools also choose whether assessments are taken in small or large groups in accordance with each school’s needs.¹⁰ Qualifications Wales is the independent organization regulating general and vocational qualifications. Qualifications Wales is in charge of the General Certificates of Secondary Education (GCSEs), which are “the main general qualifications taken by 16-year-old learners [in grade 11] in Wales and Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced (A) levels are the main general qualifications at Level 3 and are usually taken at age 16-19. They are used as a basis for admissions to higher education, further training or entry into employment.”¹¹

⁷Education Wales. (2024). Online personalized assessments in reading and numeracy: Information for parents and carers of children in Years 2 to 9 in maintained schools in Wales. Retrieved from <https://hwb.gov.wales/api/storage/dcc633f6-5ac9-4167-b022-391cefb7918f/online-personalised-assessments-in-reading-and-numeracy-years-2-to-9-in-maintained-schools.pdf>

⁸Ibid

⁹ Education Wales – HWB. (2024). Personalised assessments: Information for parents and carers. Retrieved from <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/reading-and-numeracy-assessments/personalised-assessments-information-for-parents-and-carers>

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹Qualifications Wales. (2024). GCSEs, AS and A levels. Retrieved from <https://qualifications.wales/information-support/qualifications-available-in-wales/gcse-as-a-levels/#:~:text=GCSEs%20%2D%20General%20Certificates%20of%20Secondary,year%2Dold%20learners%20in%20Wales>

National Outlook

Alberta

Literacy and numeracy assessments for students in Grades 1 to 3 were made compulsory in the 2022–2023 school year. Starting in the 2024–25 school year, changes in literacy and numeracy in these grades will include the following: “Mandatory screening assessments in September and January, with a follow-up assessment in June for those students requiring additional supports after completing the January assessment. Mandatory screening assessments in January for all students in kindergarten, beginning in January 2025.”¹² It is also compulsory for school authorities to include in their [Annual Education Results Report](#) the students’ literacy and numeracy results and to engage with their educational partners “to set priorities and build their education plan.”¹³ This approach allows all educational partners in Alberta, including school authorities and schools, to “track successes and continuously improve the quality of education for students. It also supports a transparent, accountable and responsive education system.”¹⁴ Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) are administered annually to all Alberta students in Grades 6 and 9. Alberta Education is transitioning to a new digital platform for provincial student assessments, meaning that eventually students will write diploma exams and provincial achievement tests in a digital environment rather than with pencil and paper. In 2023–24, Grade 6 English language arts and literature and mathematics provincial achievement tests were not administered. Schools were encouraged instead to participate in field tests between April and June 2024.¹⁵

British Columbia

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is British Columbia’s program to assess literacy and numeracy outcomes in Grades 4 and 7. In 2024–2025, FSAs were administered between October 1 and November 8, 2024, with the final deadline for scoring activities on December 6, 2024, and identification of score entry errors and students no longer enrolled on December 6, 2024.¹⁶ The British Columbia government includes in its website resources readily available on Indigenous knowledge. The [Indigenous Education Resource Inventory](#), developed by the Ministry of Education in collaboration with the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, the First Nations Steering Committee and Métis Nation British Columbia, provides a rich selection of resources intended to help

¹² Government of Alberta. (2024). Early years assessments – Updates. Retrieved from [Early years assessments | Alberta.ca](#)

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Government of Alberta. (2024). General Information Bulletin 2023-2024 – Grades 6 to 9 – Alberta Provincial Achievement Testing. Retrieved from https://www.alberta.ca/system/files/custom_downloaded_images/edc-pat-general-information-bulletin.pdf#search=PATs%20results

¹⁶ Government of British Columbia. (2023). Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA). Retrieved from <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/program-management/assessment/foundation-skills-assessment>

incorporate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into British Columbia’s classrooms. The compilation includes “guides, books, e-books, articles, websites, videos and other materials to support personal and professional Indigenous learning.”¹⁷

Saskatchewan

The provincial government offers guidelines and tools for assessments and expectations that schools are required to follow. Saskatchewan’s Early Years Evaluation (EYE) assesses the skills of children aged three to six years as they prepare for and make the transition to school. In 2024, these exams took place on October 19, 2024, and November 29, 2024. The *Help Me Tell My Story* oral language assessment measures language development in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students and is available to all Saskatchewan schools. The provincial examinations are administered by the Ministry of Education for Grade 12 students who are instructed by non-accredited teachers or teachers choosing not to practise their accreditation. These examinations are written in November, December, January, March, April, May, June and August of each year.¹⁸ Resources to support teachers in classroom assessment include the *Supporting Student Assessment in Saskatchewan (2022)*. Based on the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education’s [Student First](#) approach, it “provides research-based effective practices for classroom assessment.”¹⁹ This work is also in alignment with the [Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework](#). Developed in dialogue with representatives of Métis and First Nations organizations, Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers, provincial pre-kindergarten to Grade 12 (PreK–12) education stakeholders and post-secondary institutions, the framework guides “the development of First Nations and Métis education plans at the provincial, school division and school levels, and [ensures] that Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing continue to shape the learning experience for all students.”²⁰

Ontario Outlook

In January 2024, the Ontario government announced the *Back-to-Basics Kindergarten Curriculum*. The curriculum is to emphasize “clear and direct instruction in reading, writing and math for kindergarten students.”²¹ It merges hands-on and play-based learning to ensure students entering Grade 1 acquire “foundational skills in literacy and math and intellectual growth.”²² In February 2024, to

¹⁷ Government of British Columbia. (2024). Indigenous Education Resource Inventory. Retrieved from

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/indigenous/indigenous-resources-inventory.pdf>

¹⁸ Government of Saskatchewan. (2024). Student assessment. Retrieved from [Student Assessment | PreK-12 Education, Early Learning and Schools | Government of Saskatchewan](#)

¹⁹ Government of Saskatchewan. (2022). Supporting assessment in Saskatchewan. Retrieved from [Spring Stndnt Assmt \(Feb 16 2023\).pdf](#)

²⁰ Government of Saskatchewan. (2018). Inspiring success—First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework. Retrieved from [107115-Inspiring Success Policy Framework.pdf](#)

²¹ Ontario Government. (2024). Ministry of Education News. Retrieved from <https://news.ontario.ca/search/en>

²² Ibid

mark Black History Month, the Ontario government introduced mandatory history learning in Grades 7, 8 and 10 on the “contributions and history of Black Canadians who helped build Canada.”²³ Starting in September 2025, “Grades 7, 8 and 10 history classes will include mandatory learning with an emphasis on elevating Black history as Canadian history, by highlighting the various Black communities that emerged, developed and contributed to the development of Canada, including pre- and post-Confederation.”²⁴ With a focus on going back-to-basics, the Ontario government is providing supports to schools and school boards including school math facilitators, school board math leads tasked with improving math skills among students and specialized educators to provide reading support, support for school boards’ ability to conduct professional assessments to hire more staff to help reduce wait times for speech and language supports, and increase funding for mental health initiatives. In addition, the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD) requirements were upgraded in 2024 for the first time in 25 years.²⁵ Additional reforms included

- a new financial literacy graduation requirement,
- consulting on important life skills and the return of home economics education,
- reinstating the Math Proficiency Test to ensure new teachers hold basic competency in math,
- a wholesale revitalization of guidance and career education to support students’ understanding of local labour market needs and
- return of the student exit survey to benchmark success and garner feedback on the impact of reforms.

Finally, the Ontario government introduced the [Ontario Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Program Requirements, 2024,](#) which is a comprehensive umbrella policy that gathers the many policies and programs that provide direction on all aspects of the educational experience of Ontario students in publicly funded elementary and secondary schools.

Addressing Systemic Barriers

As part of the Ontario Public Service, EQAO lives its values of inclusivity, integrity and public service excellence and is committed to upholding anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion throughout its internal and external activities and policies. The agency started implementing a multi-year plan through which it will aim to identify, manage and rectify inequities and systemic barriers that may affect both agency staff and the students it serves. The agency is also developing and implementing initiatives focused specifically on the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and on the assessment-related needs of Indigenous and equity-deserving communities.

²³ Ibid

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Ibid

EQAO believes that these measures will help foster an organizational culture where everyone feels a sense of inclusion and belonging and that this culture will continue to be reflected in the agency's work to support students and the education system in Ontario.

EQAO acknowledges the enduring presence of Indigenous peoples on the lands on which we gather and work across Ontario, and we thank the past, present and future caretakers of this land. These lands are gathering points where age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal took place. EQAO is grateful to have the opportunity to work and learn on these lands in a community of sharing.

Internal Factors

EQAO continues its modernization journey, which is impacting the work that the agency does and how it is completed. Organizational assessment and change management as they apply to people, processes and technology are integral to the success of the agency's modernization efforts. The agency recognizes the updates to the Agencies and Appointments Directive and will continue to align operations accordingly.

Staffing, Human Resources and Compensation Strategy

EQAO benefits from staff with a high level of commitment to their work. The agency staff are part of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) and the Association of Management, Administrative and Professional Crown Employees of Ontario (AMAPCEO) bargaining units. EQAO follows the OPS process for classification, recruitment and other HR functions in alignment with the *OPS Employment Policy*. Compensation is based on OPS salary ranges for the respective bargaining units. Each year, educators are seconded from school boards to assist in the development of content and scoring of the assessments. EQAO will continue to rely on educators across the province for their expertise for the development of content and the scoring of the open-response questions on its digital assessments.

The agency will continue to review its staffing and ensure the appropriate levels and structures are in place to achieve its goals. Any decisions about major human resource changes will be discussed and planned appropriately to ensure they remain within government policy and the provisions of labour agreements.

A key priority for the agency is to ensure it has the skill sets and succession plans to meet its mandated obligations. EQAO also has contracts with vendors to support staff in carrying out the agency's work. The vendors are contracted using a transparent tendering and evaluation process that aligns with Ontario Public Service directives and is carefully overseen by EQAO management and staff, who are accountable to the CEO. As outlined in its MOU, the agency also coordinates with Ministry divisions for specific support in areas such as cybersecurity and legal services.

The agency has a full-time equivalent count of 100 [95 + 5 MPT (2024)], broken down as follows:

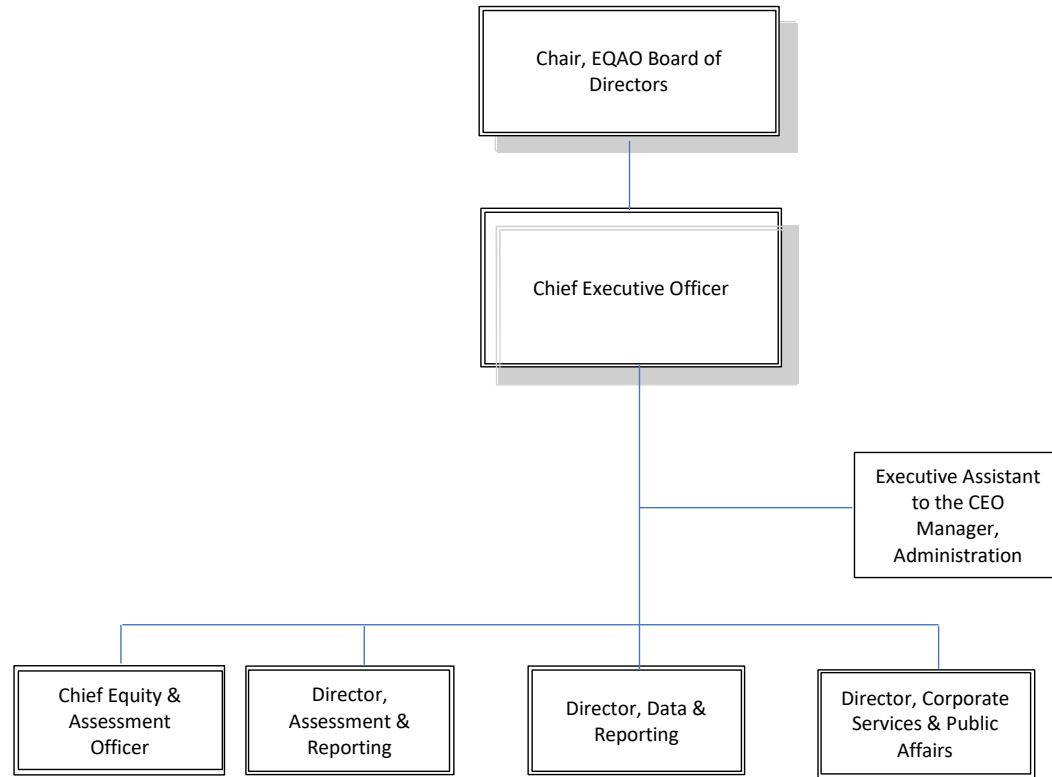
- Unionized positions: 82 (OPSEU and AMAPCEO)
- Non-unionized position: 1
- Management positions: 13
- Senior management/executive positions: 3
- Order in Council appointment: 1
- Part-time positions: 0

The agency regularly recruits and hires temporary staff, with usage potentially reaching up to 20 staff over a fiscal period. Due to the presence of singular positions without backups, temporary staff are essential to fill urgent gaps and assist with one-time projects.

The agency's high-level organizational chart is as follows:

Education Quality and Accountability Office

as of November 2024,



Outcome- and Output-Based 2025–2026 Government Priorities

The performance measures below are focused on the 2025–2026 fiscal year and are in accordance with the expectations that set direction for the agency’s next business cycle.

EQAO PRIORITIES

Expectation 1: Innovative

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
A. Simplify client/customer interactions.	✓ Ensure that the assessments are conducted efficiently and effectively to maximize student engagement and benefit by developing high-quality assessments that accurately measure student performance in alignment with large-scale assessment standards.	✓ Report annually on feedback received from stakeholders and on improvements in the assessment lifecycle.
B. Expand and optimize digital service offerings.	✓ Continue to implement digitalized and adaptive assessments for the Primary and Junior Divisions, the Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics and Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) in an accessible manner.	✓ Develop, deliver, score, analyze and report annually on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the percentage of student participation in EQAO assessments (number of students participating versus number of students registered to participate) for the following assessments: Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics, the OSSLT/TPCL and the Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics, Primary and Junior Divisions. ○ the exemption rates for each school and school board and the province.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Continue to implement and deliver the MPT. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensuring fulfillment of any applicable legislation, develop, administer and report annually to the Ministry of Education on the MPT in accordance with the following measure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ overall success rate of candidates taking the assessment.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Continue to develop reporting and data visualization capabilities to support the use of EQAO data. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Report annually on the enhancements to the agency’s reporting platforms and channels based on feedback from education partners. ✓ By end of Q2 of each year (between 2025 and 2028), produce cohort reports as part of the agency’s annual reporting cycle.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure EQAO works closely with the Ministry and the Community Services I&IT Cluster to manage and address IT and system-related risks, including privacy risks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strengthen the agency’s I&IT infrastructure, policies and related privacy and security posture in collaboration with CSC and ITS. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By Q4 of fiscal 2026–2027, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ with CSC and ITS, implement and adhere to the federated model. ▪ conduct a privacy impact assessment on the e-assessment platform for all assessments. ○ By Q4 of fiscal 2027–2028, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ conduct a threat and risk assessment of the e-assessment platform for all assessments. ✓ Optimize the agency’s operations at the Guelph Data Centre by moving to common services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Onboard to the ITS Common Services platform, with 80% of the services transitioned by Q4 of fiscal 2025–2026

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Complete remaining 20% of services transition by Q3 of fiscal 2026–2027.
<p>C. Improve client/customer satisfaction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Incorporate students’ voices into the design, implementation and reporting of assessments to ensure relevant and effective assessments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Conduct at least two EQAO Student Engagement Committee meetings each year and report on the results and feedback.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Analyze best practices in large-scale assessments nationally and internationally to improve student achievement by embedding evidence of national and international best practices in assessment development, analysis and reporting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Each year, undertake at least five research projects into the evolution of best practices in large-scale assessment (design, administration, reporting and analysis) and implement recommendations as appropriate.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Strengthen the understanding around the appropriate use of EQAO data for improvement by conducting outreach activities for the education community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Communicate with partners in education and provide data-informed resources, including learning modules, research reports, webinars, videos and other appropriate materials to promote the richness of EQAO data and its role in improving student learning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Each year, undertake at least four webinars dedicated to the appropriate use of EQAO data for the improvement of the education system. ○ Report on the feedback from all outreach sessions, with a target of 90% positive responses.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
<p>D. Share data with Supply Ontario, when requested, regarding procurement spending and planning, contract arrangements and vendor relations to support data-driven decision making.</p>	<p>✓ Share data with Supply Ontario, when requested, regarding procurement spending and planning, contract arrangements and vendor relations to support data-driven decision making.</p>	<p>✓ Report annually on data provided to Supply Ontario as requested.</p>

Expectation 2: Sustainable

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
<p>E. Strengthen public service delivery</p>	<p>✓ Continue to improve the assessments and reports to reflect the identities of Ontario’s students by ensuring that assessment design and the evaluation of students’ learning align with their needs and individualities.</p>	<p>✓ As directed by the Ontario Human Rights Commission in <i>Dreams Delayed: Addressing Systemic Anti-Black Racism and Discrimination in Ontario’s Public Education System (2025)</i>, by Q3 of fiscal 2027–2028, define with the Ministry of Education a pathway for EQAO to provide identity-based reports.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ By Q3 of fiscal 2026–2027, in accordance with the Truth and Reconciliation Committee calls to action, report on the agency’s aim to add one First Nation, Metis or Inuit passage to each language assessment.
	<p>✓ Support interested parties in analyzing and integrating EQAO data with other data that focuses on interventions that enhance student learning and well-being, by establishing an accessible and responsive data framework.</p>	<p>✓ Report annually on analyses and publications with or by partners on the use of EQAO data to improve student well-being and learning experience.</p> <p>✓ Establish an accessible and responsive data framework to foster collaboration with external partners.</p>
	<p>✓ Inform the public about the purpose and use of EQAO data by school districts and schools/educators to foster improvement.</p>	<p>✓ Report annually on outreach webinars conducted and communications products developed (minimum of five social media posts per week and designated sections on the EQAO website for each assessment).</p>
<p>F. Use public resources efficiently and operate within the agency’s financial</p>	<p>✓ Align resource allocation to maximize the impact of the agency’s modernization, ensuring</p>	<p>✓ Maintain agency operations in alignment with EQAO’s governance, policy framework, established processes and government</p>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
allocations.	effective, efficient and equitable governance, project management and business practices.	directives (for example, the Agencies and Appointments Directive; the OPS Procurement Directive; the Travel, Meal and Hospitality Expenses Directive)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure financial and acquisition accountability in alignment with OPS-wide standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Maintain accurate and timely financial reports in accordance with Public Sector Accounting Board guidelines and have them validated by an external audit process. ✓ Monitor and report expenditures every month and conduct an analysis of variances every quarter at a minimum. ✓ Align acquisitions with the OPS Procurement Directive.
<p>G. Use public resources efficiently and prudently manage workforce size. Where the agency requires a material increase in workforce size, EQAO must provide the Minister with an HR plan for approval that provides the rationale based on government priorities and/or agency mandate.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Manage workforce size. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Track the change (annual percentage increase or decrease) in workforce size and document the rationale. ✓ By December of 2026, create and/or update job descriptions, as required, to better reflect the work that is part of the modernization mandate.

Expectation 3: Accountable

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
<p>H. Develop and report on outcome-focused performance measures to effectively monitor and measure performance.</p>	<p>✓ Ensure measures are outcome based.</p>	<p>✓ Ensure outcome-based performance measures are incorporated into the agency’s annual business plan.</p>
<p>I. Protect individual, business or organization data by actively managing data and cybersecurity and reporting Artificial Intelligence (AI) use.</p>	<p>✓ Ensure the agency plans, responds (proactively and reactively) to cybersecurity matters and reports on AI use.</p>	<p>✓ Report annually to EDU on cybersecurity-related activities and agency use of AI, ensuring fulfilment of the <i>Strengthening Cyber Security and Building Trust in the Public Sector Act, 2024</i>; the <i>Agency Guidance for Responsible Use of AI, 2024</i>; and other applicable government AI policies.</p> <p>✓ Ensure the agency reports to the Treasury Board Secretariate at least twice a year on the nine domains identified in the most recent cybersecurity audit.</p> <p>✓ By Q4 2025–2026, in alignment with GO-ITS standards, deliver on the fiscal 2026–2027 commitments resulting from cybersecurity audit recommendations.</p>
<p>J. Report all high risks, including effective mitigation plans.</p>	<p>✓ Ensure the agency tracks and timely mitigates high risks.</p>	<p>✓ Report the agency’s high risks to EDU quarterly.</p> <p>✓ Track the number of days taken to mitigate any high risks reported.</p>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
<p>K. Align hybrid work policies with the OPS and identify and assess office optimization opportunities to reduce office realty footprint and find cost reductions.</p>	<p>✓ Align with OPS return-to-work policy.</p>	<p>✓ Align with OPS policy requiring staff to attend the workplace a minimum of three days a week.</p>
	<p>✓ Assess office optimization opportunities to reduce office realty footprint based on government directives and/or policies.</p>	<p>✓ Track space and cost reductions as a result of alignment with the MBC Realty Directive requirements, OPS Modern Office Space (OMOS) and optimization initiatives.</p> <p>✓ Calculate ratio of head count to office space to optimize office real estate.</p>
		<p>✓ Report quarterly on efforts to maintain facilities as necessary to ensure a safe and healthy workplace environment for all staff and contribute to promoting overall employee wellness.</p>
<p>L. Develop and encourage diversity and inclusion initiatives by promoting an equitable, inclusive, accessible, anti-racist and diverse workplace.</p>	<p>✓ Continue to nurture an inclusive organizational culture through authentic and ongoing professional learning and employee engagement by fostering a strong organizational culture founded on a sense of inclusion and belonging.</p>	<p>✓ Each year, develop and offer a minimum of four activities and events that further promote a strong organizational culture, employee engagement, belonging and excellence.</p> <p>✓ Each year, provide a minimum of two agency-wide training and professional development sessions to up-skill EQAO's employees.</p>
	<p>✓ Implement and report on internal components of the multi-year equity, diversity and inclusion plan.</p>	<p>✓ Report annually on progress on the internal components of the multi-year equity, diversity and inclusion plan.</p>
<p>M. Increase non-government, non-fare, non-fee revenue.</p>	<p>✓ Develop initiatives that ensure growth on non-government, non-fare, non-fee revenue.</p>	<p>✓ Continue to collect and report on income generated through the provision of assessment services to private inspected schools (primary, junior and Grade 9 only), private non-inspected</p>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<p>schools and overseas schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Continue to generate revenue of 1% of government funding through participation fees. ✓ Explore further revenue generation opportunities throughout the 2025–2028 business cycle.

Financial Budget (\$M)

Program Area	2024–2025 Actual	2025–2026 Projected	2026–2027 Projected	2027–2028 Projected
Grades 3 & 6 (Reading, Writing & Mathematics)	9.86	9.71	9.85	9.85
Grade 9	6.27	6.45	6.59	6.59
Ontario Secondary School Literary Test	8.80	8.55	8.69	8.69
Mathematics Proficiency Test	1.93	2.71	2.71	2.71
Transformation	-	1.00	-	-
Operating	4.09	4.27	3.92	3.92
Total EQAO Program Operating Expenses	30.95	32.69	31.76	31.76
National/International Program (funded separately by Ministry)	0.35	0.84	0.45	0.45
Total Expenses Including National/International	31.30	33.53	32.21	32.21
Ministry Allocation for EQAO Operating Expenses	30.61	31.39	31.39	31.39
Total Funding Excluding National/International & Other Funding for External Partner (FEP) Projects	30.61	31.39	31.39	31.39
National/International Program Funded Separately	0.35	0.84	0.45	0.45
Total Funding including National/International & Other FEP Projects	30.96	32.23	31.84	31.84
Capital Assets	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25

NOTES/ASSUMPTIONS:

- The payroll projections are based on 100 full-time-equivalent positions and ratified collective agreements.
- MPT funding from fiscal 2025–2026 onwards is currently pending approval.
- National/international costs are dependent on Ministry decisions regarding Ontario’s participation in assessments and are funded separately by the Ministry on a cost-recovery basis for the agency.
- Additional funding changes may arise as a result of operational direction provided to the agency by the Ministry of Education.

Realty

As per the *EQAQO Act* (1996), the agency may not acquire, hold or dispose of an interest in real property, other than a leasehold interest, without first obtaining the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. EQAO falls under the Centralization of Broader Real Estate (CBREA) and must comply with the Management Board of Cabinet Realty Directive when acquiring space for accommodation and program purposes. The EQAO office is leased at 2 Carlton Street, Suite 1200, Toronto, Ontario.

Information Technology and Electronic Service Delivery Plan

EQAO relies on technology to carry out its core business practices and services, including the delivery of assessments and the collection, processing and storage of its data. There has been a focus on establishing resilient IT infrastructure and systems, and the agency is actively working to optimize its GDC operations by moving to common services. EQAO provides Ontario school board and school employees with secure digital access to their students' achievement results and questionnaire data, as well as resources designed to support student learning. As in previous years, in 2025 EQAO will continue to provide quality data and results through means that are reliable, secure and easy to access.

With an emphasis on cybersecurity, the agency is in the process of developing and updating policies and procedures to continually enhance its cybersecurity posture. EQAO is also improving internal processes to ensure the protection of the information under the agency's custody. EQAO has also obtained a cyber-insurance policy that provides coverage in various situations, including ransomware, phishing, data breaches, wire fraud and social engineering. Services covered include breach response services, breach response costs, crisis management, public relations and ransomware extortion.

Initiatives Involving Third Parties

EQAO actively works with its educational partners to ensure its assessment data are used to enhance educational instruction, support improved student achievement and increase the quality and effectiveness of Ontario's public education system.

To ensure the successful delivery of its programs, the agency is reliant on third parties for some functions of its operations. Key examples are the delivery of digital assessments once EQAO has developed the content, and the reporting of some of its data to parents and guardians, educators, students and MPT test takers.

When using third parties, the agency undertakes the appropriate independent privacy and security assessments and consults key ministry units such as Cyber Security and the CSC for their expertise. These actions help the agency ensure secure and reliable service delivery in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*, the *OPS Procurement Directive* and the applicable sections of the Government of Ontario's Information Technology Standards (GO-ITS). EQAO's updated policies and procedures include the involvement of third parties in agency operations.

As EQAO modernizes, it recognizes the need for thinking that engages expertise both internal and external to the agency. For this

reason, EQAO has a Modernization in Measurement Advisory Panel (MMAP) that shares knowledge and expertise to support the agency in meeting its digitalization and modernization objectives while ensuring strong methodologies, analytics and knowledge-sharing approaches. The MMAP is composed of interdisciplinary experts, including practitioners, researchers and scholars in fields related to large-scale assessment.

EQAO engages Ontario educators in every step of the assessment cycle, from development to administration to the scoring of open-response items. Throughout its work, EQAO collaborates with French- and English-language educators from across the province in various activities.

EQAO's Advisory Committee provides advice and recommendations on assessment activities to the agency. Committee members represent directors of education, parents and guardians, principals, trustees, supervisory officers, teachers' federations, Chiefs of Ontario and education research organizations. Ad hoc committees will be established for short-term consultation on specific activities.

EQAO's Student Engagement Committee is a group of elementary and secondary students that provides a space to listen to students' voices offering feedback, advice and lived experience to the agency. Committee members represent a diverse range of schools and communities across Ontario. Their input helps ensure EQAO's digitalization and modernization reflects the needs of students. Students are the focus of EQAO's work, and the agency values learners' perspectives.

The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion/Content Development Committee reviews materials for all EQAO assessments. Its members have knowledge and expertise in the areas of diversity, culture, language acquisition and special education, and they independently review and discuss all new assessment items, reading passages and other content to ensure equity, cultural relevance, accessibility, and grade and curriculum appropriateness to all students.

On behalf of Ontario, EQAO also partners with the following national and international organizations:

- the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—to administer the Programme for International Student Assessment
- the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada—to administer the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program
- the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement—to administer the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

EQAO is also committed to implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action related to education. In response, the agency has established the following: the First Nations Collaborative Council, the Métis Network and the Inuit Network. These three groups serve as collaborative and advisory bodies to ensure assessments and reporting are enhanced in their authenticity, cultural relevance and responsiveness to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

Implementation Plan

The expectations outlined in the Ministry of Education’s Letter of Direction inform the agency’s operations and provide guidance on the sequencing and dependencies that need to be considered in its work. The agency’s focus during the 2025–2026 fiscal year will be on optimizing its processes of modernization of key programs and operations as well as enhancing assessment development with an accessibility lens, in the following ways:

Digital Assessment Administration

The agency will continue to enhance its digital assessment program and ensure adherence to large-scale assessment best practices. The agency will also continue to listen to all voices across Ontario, including those of Indigenous communities and of other historically marginalized communities.

The agency will continue to review and improve its user guides to provide clear direction and information to school administrators, teachers and IT professionals.

The agency is motivated to continue leveraging technology to enhance its digital assessment program that is focused on the present and future needs of students in Ontario. The following activities highlight additional modernization activities expected to be carried out by the end of the business cycle:

1. Continue to improve assessment administration and content development in support of students, educators and MPT test takers.
2. Continue to enhance data reporting models through the use of data visualization tools.
3. Continue to share data with schools and school boards through a secure and reliable system aligning with OPS-wide standards for user authentication and identity management.
4. Continue to share MPT results with the Ontario College of Teachers.
5. Continue to strengthen the agency’s I&IT privacy and security program by undertaking and acting on recommendations from privacy impact and threat and risk assessments.
6. Update business architecture to support program and process improvements and future change initiatives.

7. Reinforce mechanisms for participation of different voices across Ontario, including those of Indigenous communities.

Communications Plan

Context

EQAO is a board-governed agency that contributes to the quality and accountability of Ontario's publicly funded education system. As an evidence-based research-informed organization, EQAO is focused on empowering various partners, including educators, parents and guardians, policy makers and the public at large, with the insights and information needed to support student learning and improve student outcomes.

Strategy

Through its refreshed communications materials, EQAO seeks to increase awareness and understanding of the agency and the information it provides, to share the results of its evaluations broadly and to engage meaningfully with its audiences concerning the appropriate and optimal use of its information to support growth in student achievement and contribute to public accountability in education. EQAO's strategy is based on the concept of integrated communications (i.e., leveraging multiple channels to convey information to key audiences).

Communications Channels

In keeping with the MOU, EQAO acknowledges its responsibility to engage in collaboration with the Ministry of Education on public matters affecting the work of the agency and/or the Ministry.

EQAO uses its website as a central disseminator of information to all audiences. EQAO's website is periodically reviewed to ensure it meets applicable policy guidelines and regulations, including the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* and the Open Government initiative. The website provides comprehensive information about the agency and its services. It also contains interactive dashboards to allow users to view assessment results easily, electronic versions of assessment result reports, sample assessments, assessment administration guides and other resources. As the agency modernizes its programs, it will continue to share information, resources and insights through its website. The agency also has an information centre dedicated to responding to inquiries through a toll-free telephone number and e-mail.

EQAO also leverages social media as a way of sharing information and engaging directly with audiences.

The increased visibility of EQAO data and information will allow the agency to engage effectively with its audience and to better support students and the public education system in Ontario.

Risk Identification, Assessment and Mitigation Strategies

EQAO has an enterprise risk management program (ERM) and reports risks to the Ministry of Education annually. As part of the agency's ERM framework, EQAO reviews its risks on a quarterly basis and reports any identified high risks to EDU. The following section summarizes the agency's most relevant risks.

Disruption Before, During or After Administration

The risk of an IT failure (at a school, or with the agency's digital testing platform) impacting students before, during or after administration is a risk to EQAO's operations. This risk includes the reliance on a single vendor to provide mission-critical e-assessment services. Digital assessment also presents cyber threats that must be actively managed. To address this risk, the agency has identified the following mitigation strategies:

- Privacy and security assessments of the vendor system have been undertaken in conjunction with ITS and the CSC. All "high" and "critical" recommendations have been implemented. Security assessments will continue annually, and privacy assessments will continue every two years or with any substantial change to the data collected.
- The agency has established technical support and virtual situation room processes to identify, escalate and resolve issues quickly. EQAO engages regularly with school board I&IT leads to promote the sharing of information.
- The assessments employ a cloud environment, which mitigates capacity and cybersecurity risk better than an on-premises model.
- EQAO ensures the development and maintenance of the agency's business architecture (e.g., business function model, business process model, users and roles, data flows and user journeys).
- The agency has conducted technical readiness activities with school boards. These are repeated annually as required.
- The agency will continue to provide flexible administration windows to ease the technical load on the solution, administration and infrastructure.

- EQAO has standard procedures for testing the e-assessment system prior to the start of administration windows.
- Pre-approved messaging is developed to speed up responsiveness to unforeseen events.
- With cybersecurity in mind, EQAO is in the process of updating policies and procedures as well as enhancing its capacity to respond to cases of cyber threats and cybersecurity-related emergencies.
- EQAO’s third-party vendor providing e-assessment services (Vretta) has established several standard operating procedures aimed at preventing disruptions to the digital testing platform, including but not limited to system monitoring, escalation procedures, incident response, cybersecurity incident response protocols, disaster recovery planning, daily system checks, periodic distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) testing, annual penetration testing, pre-assessment load testing and continuous alignment with industry standards to ensure platform stability and security.²⁶

AI-Powered Tool Used to Circumvent EQAO Assessment Safeguards

AI is increasingly present in all human endeavours. AI-powered tools used inappropriately are a threat. The agency may encounter AI-powered tools that have been created and used to help students/test takers respond to EQAO assessments, including the MPT.

In response, the agency will do the following:

- Develop research to find ways to identify AI-powered responses to EQAO tests.
- Develop data integrity policies specific to the MPT that outline directions to follow when suspected AI-powered tools are used to respond to EQAO assessments.
- Reinforce Professional Responsibilities and Administration Guidelines through the MPT and EQAO websites, as well as through webinars and in-person sessions for all assessments and the MPT. Reinforce the use of lockdown browsers.
- Leverage AI detection tools to identify the potential use of AI in assessment responses.
- AI-based policies or programs developed at EQAO will be based on any applicable direction including Ontario’s Trustworthy Artificial Intelligence (AI) Framework; the Ontario Government’s Responsible Use of AI Directive; and the Agencies and Appointments Directive (AAD).
- Report on use cases when AI is used (no AI cases to be reported in this cycle).

²⁶ According to the Federal Government of Canada, a distributed denial-of-service is “a type of cyber-attack in which threat actors aim to disrupt and prevent legitimate users from accessing a networked system, service, website, or application. One example of a traditional DDoS attack involves threat actors flooding a targeted financial institution’s website with fake traffic to disrupt its clients’ online banking activity” (Government of Canada, 2025, retrieved from: <https://www.cyber.gc.ca/en/guidance/distributed-denial-service-attacks-prevention-and-preparation-itsap80110>).

Meeting Public's or Partners' Expectations

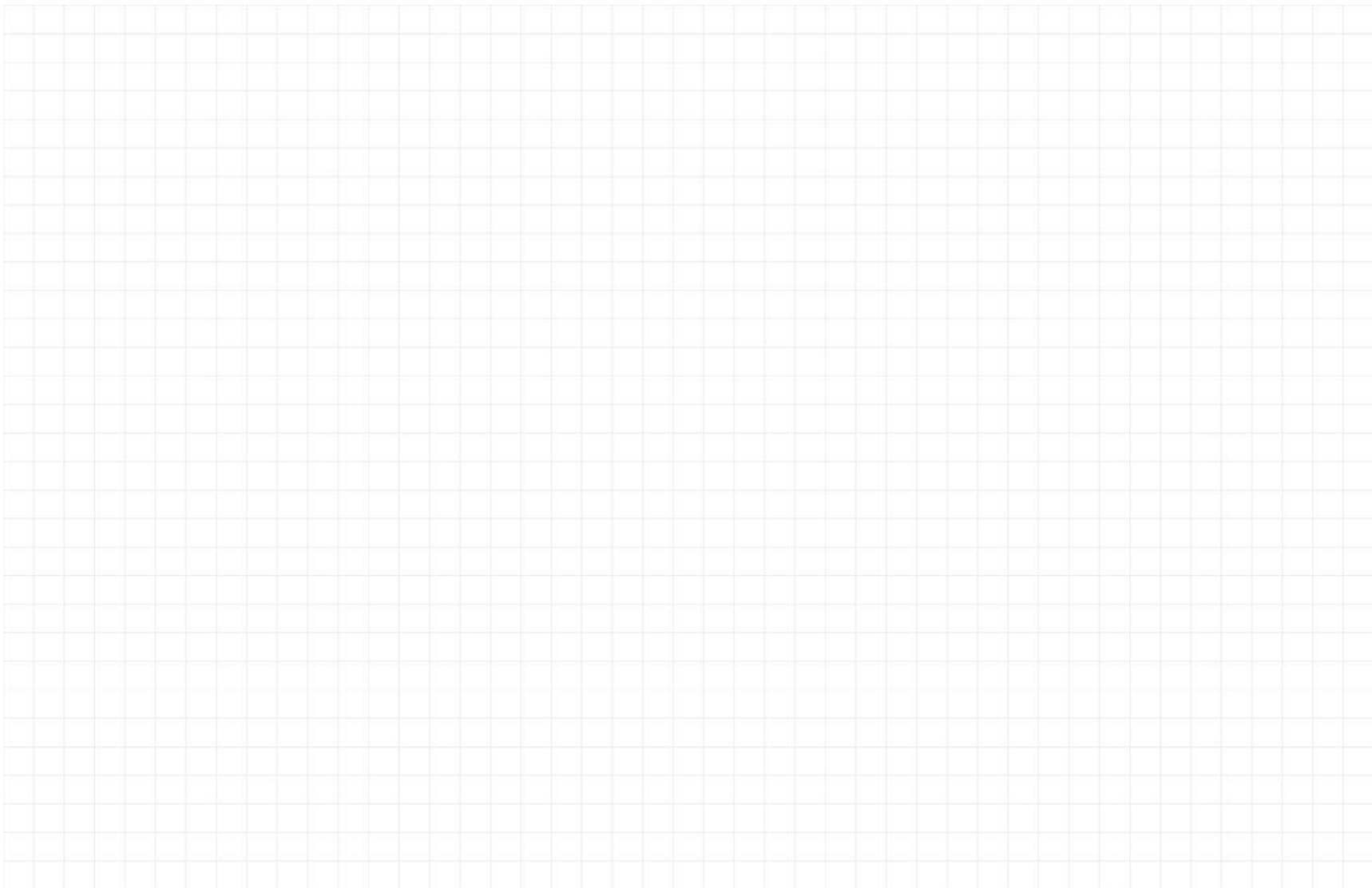
Lack of understanding of the role of the agency and the value of the data it collects in support of student achievement has the potential to impact the agency's operations negatively. The initiatives below will help EQAO increase understanding among its education partners and support schools and school boards:

- Clearly communicate the purpose of EQAO assessments, and support parents and guardians, the general public and the education community in leveraging the agency's information for student and system improvement.
- Maintain an updated communications plan that includes strategies to address negative media reporting.
- Monitor media daily and respond to significant issues as appropriate.
- Build the capacity of the education community through outreach and agency initiatives focused on the benefits and appropriate use of EQAO data for improvement planning.
- Maintain a collaborative relationship with the Ministry to address knowledge, policy and practice related to student learning in the province.
- Work with the Ministry to provide timely information to the education community to support its work toward student achievement and keep its members apprised of EQAO activities.

I&IT Infrastructure and Support Services

The agency continues to work with the CSC I&IT Cluster and ITS to optimize its footprint at the Guelph Data Centre. The next phase of the project is to move to managed services in an effort to further strengthen the agency's security posture and responsiveness to I&T issues. Based on the recent cybersecurity audit commissioned by the Ministry, there are many mitigations dependent on the move to common services at GDC. Risk mitigation measures include

- holding regular meetings with CSC and ITS to establish the governance and operating model for the project
- reviewing and signing off on a project charter related to the move to common services at GDC
- ensuring EQAO is aware of the impact to its current operating model so that day-to-day activities can continue without interruption during after the move to common services
- ensuring that there is a robust testing, training and knowledge transfer plan as part of the migration to common services



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