

EQAO Spring #DataInAction Symposium

May 28, 2025

EQAO's #DataInAction Symposium, held on May 28, 2025, brought together school board staff from across Ontario to explore how data can reveal and address gaps in accessibility and student achievement. The event highlighted the power of research and collaboration—grounded in equity—to advance inclusive education and better support all learners.

Use of Accessibility Tools in EQAO Assessments



EQAO staff presented findings on how students use built-in accessibility tools on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT). Tools examined included split screen, flag a question, annotation, text-to-speech, zoom and others—all available to every student under a universal design approach.

EQAO's student questionnaire showed that 52–63% of students used accessibility tools during the test, with the split screen identified as both the most frequently used and the most helpful. However, for many tools, higher usage did not always correlate with higher perceived usefulness, and usage varied based on students' backgrounds. Process data provided further insight into how students engaged with these tools. Those who used the split screen feature generally performed better—especially students with strong self-directed learning skills. Students with special education needs were less likely to use the tool, and when they did, they experienced slightly less benefit.

Ultimately, the research highlighted that access alone is not enough. To ensure students benefit fully from these tools, they need clear, explicit instructions on how and when to use them. EQAO's practice tests offer an important opportunity for students to become familiar with the tools in advance of the assessments.

Supporting Students: Targeted Interventions and Inclusive Practices

EQAO worked with researchers from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education to pinpoint the school boards where students who identified with a learning disability have achieved higher-than-average results on the reading component of the EQAO junior-division Assessment of Reading, Writing and Mathematics for the past two years. EQAO conducted interviews with school board staff from six English- and three French-language boards to learn about the practices they believe contributed to these outcomes. Key themes that emerged from these interviews included the following:

1. Collaboration
2. Staff Allocations
3. Reading Interventions
4. Tiered Supports
5. Use of Assistive Technology
6. Assistive Technology Staff
7. Professional Development
8. Use of Data



Following the identification of these common themes, one of the participating boards, Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board (BHNCDSB), offered to share their local approach. The board shared how shifting from a deficit-based mindset to an asset-based approach that embeds equity, paired with early intervention, helped improve achievement for students identified with learning disabilities. By conducting an audit of modified Individual Education Plans (IEPs), the board concluded that many students would be better served with accommodations instead of modifications to allow the students to access grade-level curriculum, which allows for more opportunities in the future.

For its part, the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) shared results from a targeted mathematics intervention for Grade 3 students using a research-based early math screener.¹ This program, conducted on a small group of students and in partnership with Carleton University, significantly boosted foundational math skills and helped move students from “needs support” to “on track.” Building on those promising results, the board is now extending the intervention to Grade 1.

¹ An early math screener is a teacher-administered assessment of early numeracy designed for children in kindergarten through Grade 3.

Strategic Use of Data and Data Literacy

In 2025, the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board (HPEDSB) launched a collaborative inquiry involving board leadership, schools and classrooms, aimed at significantly boosting student success. This work highlighted the need for a structured, responsive framework to address achievement gaps. The board used a $\frac{1}{3}$ – $\frac{1}{3}$ – $\frac{1}{3}$ model.² This structured approach helped the HPEDSB align practices across the board, increase student engagement and deepen data-informed decision-making in support of equity and achievement.

Thames Valley District School Board (TVSDB) shared its comprehensive EQAO Implementation Plan, designed to build student confidence and system-wide preparedness.

Grounded in the board’s Student Achievement and Math Action Plans, the initiative focuses on five priorities: professional learning and data literacy, practice with feedback, targeted student interventions, confidence and wellness, and family engagement. The initiative allows for each school to develop its own EQAO plan, supported through monthly administrator meetings, shared best practices and centrally coordinated learning. The board embedded mental wellness strategies to normalize the test experience and reduce anxiety, and the board’s Research and Assessment team developed customized data reports that support planning and reflection, making EQAO results more accessible at both school and system levels.



² The “ $\frac{1}{3}$ – $\frac{1}{3}$ – $\frac{1}{3}$ ” teaching model suggests dividing classroom time into three roughly equal parts (Data Literacy, Knowledge Building and Commitment to Action), with each portion allocated to different types of activities or groups of students.

Use of Formative Assessments

The Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB) shared how it is using formative assessment to drive precise, high-impact instruction and improve both student and staff experiences with EQAO. Anchored in its Student Achievement Plan, the board developed a year-at-a-glance framework to integrate EQAO-style questions into regular classroom practice across Grades 3, 6 and 9. Weekly “Multiple-Choice Mondays,” “Thinking Thursdays,” along with creative initiatives—including math scavenger hunts, game shows, and resource packs—have helped students build familiarity, confidence and skills. A strong emphasis was placed on aligning practice with the curriculum, supporting educator planning and fostering collaboration across grades.

The District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) shared how a system-wide approach to improving mathematics results—grounded in data use, professional learning, targeted support, and a clear scope and sequence—led to significant gains in student achievement. Central to this work was Vault, a mid-year digital assessment aligned with both *The Ontario Curriculum* and EQAO’s format. Developed by DSBN, Vault fosters

student confidence and provides real-time data visualizations that support instructional planning. Educators use the results to identify trends, address misconceptions and inform next steps.



Conclusion

EQAO’s spring 2025 symposium offered a valuable opportunity to share large-scale assessment research and board-level methodologies and insights. The event highlighted the power of data to drive equity-focused action across the education system. As school boards continue to reflect on student experiences and outcomes, EQAO remains committed to fostering meaningful collaboration, inclusive design and the use of data that both informs and inspires.