

# Winter EQAO #DataInAction Symposium

February 5, 2026

## Overview

EQAO's winter 2026 #DataInAction symposium brought together educators, school board leaders, researchers and health professionals to explore how to better support students in Ontario. It focused on two powerful sources of evidence:

- [EQAO's new mathematics cohort results from 2021–2022 to 2024–2025](#)
- [the research of the TARGet Kids! team at the Hospital for Sick Children \(SickKids\) on screen time and academic achievement](#)

## Student Cohorts: Tracking Pathways in Mathematics Achievement



EQAO staff introduced new analyses that follow the achievement of two cohorts of students over time on EQAO assessments. The students completed the mathematics components of EQAO assessments at the elementary level and the Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics and were tracked from Grade 3 in 2021–2022 to Grade 6 in 2024–2025, or from Grade 6 in 2021–2022 to Grade 9 in 2024–2025. This cohort data helps us understand the academic pathways of students and whether they maintain, rise to, drop from or never meet the [provincial standard \(Level 3 or 4\)](#).

Three key instructional messages emerged from this research:

1. **Intervene early:** Assessment results showed that meeting the provincial standard by Grade 3 increases the likelihood of meeting it in later grades. Students who did not meet the standard in Grade 3 were more likely to continue to struggle in Grade 6, and patterns of achievement from earlier cohorts suggest that these challenges can persist into secondary school if gaps are not effectively addressed.

**Takeaway:** Consistent high-quality mathematics instruction from kindergarten to Grade 3 is one of the strongest levers for long-term success.

2. **Not all “at the provincial standard” students are equally secure:** By looking at more detailed category scores within each achievement level, EQAO found that students who were at the threshold of Level 3 were

more likely to fall below the standard on the next assessment than those who were solidly within Level 3.

**Takeaway:** Some students who meet the standard may still benefit from continued support and consolidation to stay on track.

3. **Differentiate supports within Level 2:** There were important differences among students achieving Level 2. Students at the higher end of Level 2 were much more likely to move up to meet the standard than students at the lower end.

**Takeaway:** Targeted, differentiated support, especially for students just below the standard, could make a meaningful difference in whether they later meet provincial expectations.

The achievement pathways of student groups of special interest were also discussed; more information can be found in the [report](#) on EQAO’s website.





# Screen Time and Standardized Academic Achievement Tests in Elementary Schools

Researchers from [TARGet Kids! \(the Applied Research Group for Kids\)](#) presented their study on screen time among young children and these students' academic achievement in elementary school. This study is part of a larger research program by TARGet Kids! that follows thousands of children and families (with parental consent) from birth to adolescence to link health and lifestyle data about nutrition, growth, sleep and screen time, school readiness and EQAO assessment performance. The goal of this program is to optimize children's growth and development through early prevention and intervention.

Since 2012, families have consented to the linking of their children's EQAO assessment and questionnaire results in Grades 3 and 6,

resulting in datasets that include thousands of participants. Child health and development data from TARGet Kids! is securely linked with EQAO assessment and student questionnaire data, allowing researchers to explore how early health and behaviours relate to later academic outcomes.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, parent-reported data on virtual learning, report card grades and daily routines indicated that virtual learning was associated with higher screen time but also more outdoor time and physical activity, along with [later bedtimes](#). Higher overall screen use, including time spent on virtual learning, was associated with [more mental health symptoms among children and youth](#) and lower parent-reported school performance, particularly in kindergarten.



Against this backdrop, the partnership's [most recent paper](#) examined whether screen time in early childhood is associated with later performance on EQAO assessments. The study assessed relationships between total screen time, television and digital media use, video game time and achievement in reading, writing and mathematics in Grades 3 and 6 among over 3300 children enrolled between 2008 and 2023. The key finding was that, for both reading and mathematics,

- each additional hour per day of screen time was associated with about a 10% lower likelihood of achieving a higher performance level on EQAO assessments, even after accounting for demographic and family factors.
- higher early screen use was linked with lower academic achievement in elementary school, underscoring the importance of supporting families in establishing healthy screen-use routines.

The ongoing TARGet Kids! and EQAO partnership is also being used to study nutrition, movement behaviours, growth patterns and other factors that influence academic achievement and student well-being.

## Conclusion

The symposium underscored the importance of leveraging EQAO assessment and other data to support student learning and well-being. The discussions and presentations showcased the value of strong partnerships across education, health and research, and highlighted the agency's commitment to ensuring data are useful, transparent and relevant.