

Education Quality and Accountability Office

Business Plan 2026–2029



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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 and system integrity. As an evidence-based, research-informed organization, EQAO is focused on empowering educators, parents, guardians, stakeholders and the public at large with the insights and information needed to support student learning and drive improvements in Ontario's education system. EQAO provides results to each student and test-taker who writes an assessment. Its personalized reports help support individual student learning. For its K–12 assessments, the agency provides schools and school boards with detailed reports about their students' achievement, as well as contextual, attitudinal and behavioural information from questionnaires, in an interactive online reporting tool. These data are used to improve school programming and classroom instruction. EQAO also reports the [results of the provincial assessments](#) publicly.

The Mathematics Proficiency Test (MPT) is a requirement for certification with the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). The test is developed and administered by EQAO, and results are sent directly to the test-takers, and successful results are communicated to the [OCT](#). EQAO is proud to have been honoured with the Best Practitioner of the Year (Team) Award at the 2024 International e-Assessment Awards and with the Best Research award for its entry "Leveraging Distractor Analysis in Large-Scale e-Assessment to Develop Instructional Supports for Improving Student Mathematics Achievement" in 2025. This prestigious recognition acknowledges EQAO's vision, purpose, innovation and inclusiveness, and the difference the agency is making through its digital assessments and insights. EQAO is committed to maximizing the accessibility and inclusiveness of its assessments to offer the best possible student experience.

This business plan sets out the agency's activities for the 2026–2029 fiscal period. 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.

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

EQAO is a board-governed agency of the Government of Ontario dedicated to enhancing the quality and effectiveness of the province's public education system. Our award-winning large-scale assessment program and research initiatives are recognized internationally and offer accurate, relevant data and insights on student achievement and attitudes. EQAO believes that learning never ends—and so neither does its mission to contribute to improving outcomes for all students across 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

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>

Expectations Set Out in the Letter of Direction

The government's direction for agency operations for the coming year aims to protect Ontario, deliver better services and drive innovation and value for money. To protect Ontario, the agency is expected to expand domestic partnerships, to promote the development of supply chains and economic opportunities across Canada and to support economic resilience; to procure from Ontario and Canadian businesses and to provide economic relief to service receivers. To deliver better services, the agency is to focus on user-centred provision of services; identify opportunities to enhance efficiency, improve services, drive innovation and achieve cost savings and operational efficiencies. To drive innovation and value for money, the agency is to find innovative solutions to ensure delivery of services within the agency's mandate while operating within its financial allocation. The agency is to be supported by accurate financial reporting, effective internal controls and proactive fraud management practices. At the same time, EQAO is to manage its workforce to stabilize expenditures and preserve long-term financial viability within hiring control parameters. Also, EQAO provided to the Ministry of Education on October 1, 2025, the amended human resource policy that adheres to the Ontario Public Service (OPS) in-office standard of four days per week effective October 20, 2025, and five days per week effective January 5, 2026, and will work with the Ministry of Education to address any office space constraints.²

Specific to EQAO, the agency is expected to

- continue to "Support the government's commitment to strengthen student achievement and return Ontario to the highest test scores in reading, writing and math by continuing to implement provincial, national, and international student assessments and work with the government to better understand why students are not meeting provincial standards and what more can be done to strengthen achievement;
- continue with the implementation and delivery of the Mathematics Proficiency Test (MPT) and work with the ministry to continue to refine the delivery of the MPT to improve efficiency and effectiveness, reduce red tape and minimize missed tests.
- work closely with the Ministry and the Community Services I&IT Cluster to manage and address IT and system-related risks, including privacy risks;
- continue to meet revenue generation targets and explore further revenue generation opportunities.
- support the recently announced Short-term Advisory Body reviewing Ontario's approach to student achievement and assessment."

Values

² Ontario Ministry of Education. (2026–2027). EQAO Letter of Direction

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 OCT.

The agency board is accountable, through the chair, to the Minister of Education for the oversight and governance of the agency; for setting goals, objectives and strategic direction for the agency as outlined in the annual letter of direction; and for carrying out the roles and responsibilities assigned to it by the Act, the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Education and other applicable government directives and policies.

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 for the agency; reviewing the performance of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the MOU no later than four months upon appointment; ensuring compliance with Treasury Board/Management Board of Cabinet 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; ensuring operations are within the agency’s budget, as well as the promoting 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. 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 equitable, diverse and 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 Treasury Board Secretariat 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

Mandate Review

In accordance with the section 6.11.1 of the *Agencies and Appointments Directive – Operational Policy (2025)*, provincial agencies are to go through a mandate review at the beginning of each six-year cycle. EQAO's Mandate review began in January 2026.

Procurement and Expenditures

EQAO aligns its procurement to all applicable government procurement related directives and policies, including the Ontario Public Service Procurement Directive and the Procurement Restriction Policy. Key procurement work planned over the three-year horizon includes:

- External Audit Services
- Psychometric services
- Website services – hosting, security, development, and maintenance
- E-assessment services (item bank, assessment administration, scoring and data integrity)

Please note that EQAO does not yet have timelines or implementation details.

Digitalization and Innovation

EQAO's digital assessment program enables an effective and efficient means of evaluating the quality of the K–12 education system in Ontario. 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 Ontario Curriculum*. From the K–12 assessment results, EQAO gathers information and data that shed 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. EQAO continuously searches for better ways to provide assessment services by focusing on innovations in five specific 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 maximizes the usefulness of the information supplied through large-scale assessments. EQAO supports and conducts research based on its data, and releases insights and interactive reports that are at the heart of evidence-based policy and program development. Computer adaptive testing is an important component of EQAO's digital assessments and a useful tool to meet students where they are in their learning development journey. EQAO's data and research program is positioning the agency as an invaluable resource for other research areas, including

health and social development. The work at EQAO is internationally recognized, which shines a light on efforts to be at the forefront of large-scale assessment while solidly grounded in Ontario’s curriculum.

Beyond the K–12 assessments, but also within EQAO’s mandate, the MPT is a test for teacher certification in Ontario and is developed by EQAO in collaboration with educators from across the province and advisors from the Ontario faculties of education. It is a computer-based test that may be administered remotely or in person by an approved test centre. 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 results provide data useful for policy and program development on mathematics pedagogy and methods.

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

Starting in Grade 10, all students who are working toward the Ontario Secondary School Diploma 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).

Multi-Stage Computer Adaptive Testing for Math 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). A main advantage of adaptive tests over linear tests is that adaptive tests are more efficient (i.e., more precise, often with fewer items) in measuring student proficiency across the range of the achievement scale (e.g., Levels 1 to 4). 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. These data help paint a more holistic picture of students' achievement and learning acquisition. 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 OCT. 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 MPT is focused on two key components: **mathematics content** and **pedagogy**, drawn from concepts taught in both elementary and secondary grades:

- the mathematics content section relates to the mathematics curriculum for Grades 3 to 9 and comprises at least 70 per cent of the test.
- the pedagogy section comprises the remainder of the test.

The test is available in both English and French.

To be successful on the MPT, applicants are required to score 70% or higher on each component of the test (mathematics and pedagogy) in the same attempt. The MPT has **75 questions**. Each test contains 71 questions that count toward the applicant's score: 50 mathematics content questions (70% of the test) and 21 pedagogy questions (30% of the test). As well, there are four field-test questions that are not counted toward the applicant's final score.

National and International Assessments

EQAO coordinates the administration of four large-scale national and international assessments on behalf of the Government of Ontario every four 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 2026–2029 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 and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	Grade 4 & Grade 8	Mathematics, science
PIRLS	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	Grade 4	Reading
PCAP	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	Grade 8	Reading, mathematics, science
PISA	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	15-year-olds	Reading, mathematics, science

While the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) is the sole partner organization for PCAP, it is also a partner organization for TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA.

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 and award-winning 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](#)
- [Toronto Metropolitan University](#)

EQAO Is Internationally Recognized

For the second consecutive year, EQAO has been honoured with a prestigious recognition at the International e-Assessment (eAA) Awards in London, England. This time, EQAO has received the Best Research award for our entry "Leveraging Distractor Analysis in Large-Scale e-Assessment to Develop Instructional Supports for Improving Student Mathematics Achievement."

The eAA Awards' Best Research category recognizes best practices in research as well as the impact on the stakeholder community. This prestigious recognition acknowledges our ongoing commitment to developing a research program that is learner centred, actionable and instructionally relevant to supporting student success. Our dedication to leveraging meaningful insights from our assessment data and sharing our findings with our partners in the education community and beyond is yet another example of how we strive to support students and educators across Ontario.

School Support and Outreach

EQAO's School Support and Outreach team works collaboratively with school boards, educators, teachers in training, qualifying principals, student groups, 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 digital 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 the Infrastructure, Technology and Operations Division, 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.

Ohio (United States)

The evaluation of the education system in Ohio is under the purview of the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. The state of Ohio has three groups of tests: Ohio's State Tests (OSTs), the Alternate Assessments for Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities (AASCD) and the English Language Proficiency Tests (ELPTs). OSTs assess students in four core areas: English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.³ The AASCDs are for students with cognitive disabilities, including autism, traumatic brain injury and intellectual disability.⁴ The ELPTs are tests designed for children who speak a language other than English at home. There are two ELPTs: the Ohio English Language Proficiency Screener and the Ohio English Language Proficiency Assessment. Both tests measure a student's ability to read, write, listen and speak English. The state of Ohio administers tests at specific times during the academic year in accordance with a calendar established by the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce.⁵ The 2024–2025 Ohio state English language arts tests' outcomes showed a decline in most grades (except Grades 6 and 7) when compared to those of 2023–2024; the math tests, in contrast, showed increases across all grades compared to those of 2023–2024.

Michigan (United States)

Assessment of the education system in the state of Michigan is under the control of the Office of Educational Assessment and Accountability. The Office reports to the Michigan Department of Education and administers the Michigan Student Test of Educational Progress (M-STEP), the Preliminary Scholastic Assessment Test (PSAT) and the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT). M-STEPS are conducted in Grades 3–8 and cover English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. The tests measure proficiency based

³ Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. (2025). "Ohio State Tests – OST." retrieved from <https://education.ohio.gov/Topics/Testing/Test-Coordinator-News/March-2025/Ohio-s-State-Tests-OST>.

⁴ Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. (2025). "What Are Ohio's Tests?" Retrieved from <https://files.portal.cambiumast.com/ohio/Media/families-page/en/what-are-ohios-tests.pdf>

⁵ Ohio Department of Education and Workforce. (2025). "Ohio's State Tests Fall 2025." Retrieved from https://oh-ost.portal.cambiumast.com/content/contentresources/en/OST_Fa25_TAM%2009%2022%2025.pdf

on Michigan’s academic standards. The PSATs are given to Grade 10 students and serve as a practice test for the SAT, which is given to Grade 11 students. A sample of students in Grades 4, 8 and 12 participate in the National Assessment of Educational Progress. English language arts results for 2024–2025 compared to those for 2023–2024 showed declines in outcomes for Grades 3 and 4 and increases for Grades 5 to 8. The decline started in 2020, the time of COVID shutdowns. Math tests, in contrast, showed modest improvements in outcomes for Grades 4 to 7 and declines for Grades 3 and 8, mainly related to “targeted reforms, increased instructional time, and recovery efforts from pandemic-related learning loss.”

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland uses teacher-led assessments and a selective transfer test system for post-primary school admissions. Standardized testing is less centralized than in other UK regions. Teachers assess primary and secondary students during the school year. These assessments help track progress, guide instruction and inform parents about student development.⁶ Literacy and numeracy are at the heart of Northern Ireland’s curriculum. These skills and knowledge are assessed using Levels of Progression at three specific points: “for primary school pupils, at the end of Key Stage 1 (Year 4) and at the end of Key Stage 2 (Year 7); for post-primary pupils, this is at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 10).”⁷ In the three cross-curricular skills of Communication, Using Mathematics and Using Information and Communication Technology, students are expected to progress at least one level between each Key Stage. Starting in 2023, the government of Northern Ireland introduced the Transfer Tests (Grammar School Admissions). The tests are administered by the Schools’ Entrance Assessment Group, which is a not-for-profit body that operates independently and is not under the control of the Department of Education, the Education Authority or any other public body in Northern Ireland.⁸ The tests are taken by Primary Level 7 students (ages 10–11) in November; they cover English and mathematics and are used by 62 grammar schools to determine their Year 8 admissions.⁹

National Outlook

Alberta

Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) are administered annually to all Alberta students in Grades 6 and 9. Grade 6 science and French language arts PATs were not administered in 2025. Instead, schools were allowed to participate in optional field testing to help

⁶ Northern Ireland Government. (2025). “Teacher Assessment.” Retrieved from <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/assessments>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Schools Entrance Assessment Group. (2025). “FAQs.” Retrieved from <https://www.transfertestpapers.co.uk/seagtest/seag-faqs>

⁹ Ibid.

develop future assessments aligned with new curriculum.¹⁰ “In 2024/25, Grade 6 Science, French Immersion Language Arts and Literature (FILAL), and Français Langue Première et Littérature (FLPL) provincial achievement tests were not administered. Schools were given the opportunity to participate in field testing between April and June 2025.”¹¹ These optional field tests were meant to help inform the development of future PATs that align with new curriculum in these subjects. The 2024–2025 Grade 6 mathematics and Grade 6 English language arts and literature PATs were administered, as was the 2024–2025 Grade 6 social studies PAT. An additional change was that “as of 2025, Kindergarten students are required to take literacy and numeracy screening tests for the first time in Alberta. Students in Grades 1 to 3 are tested three times per year (September, January and June).”¹²

British Columbia (BC)

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is BC’s program to assess literacy and numeracy outcomes in Grades 4 and 7. FSAs were administered in BC from October 1 to November 10, 2025; the scoring and score entry deadline was December 15, 2025. The following are the graduation-related assessments in BC: the Grade 10 (G10) Numeracy Assessment (measures ability to apply math concepts in real-world contexts); the Grade 10 Literacy Assessment (evaluates reading comprehension, critical thinking and communication skills); the Grade 12 (G12) Literacy Assessment (focuses on advanced literacy skills needed for post-secondary education, work and citizenship).¹³ The November 2025 Grades 10 and 12 assessment session was cancelled due to BC General Employees’ Union (BCGEU) strike action and rescheduled to January 2026.

The 2025 Foundation Skills Assessment Provincial Marking Monitoring Report “describe[s] the degree of consistency between local or district marker-assigned scores to their students’ responses in district/school-based scoring sessions and scores assigned by provincial monitoring session participants ... and provides general comments regarding student performance based on participants’ observations during the monitoring session.”¹⁴ Key findings were that most districts showed strong alignment with provincial standards, indicating reliable and fair scoring practices; some variation was noted in subjective components like writing, where interpretation of rubrics can differ slightly. The report recommends additional training and calibration sessions for markers to further improve scoring consistency.¹⁵

¹⁰ Government of Alberta. (2025). General Information Bulletin, 2024–2025: Grades 6 and 9—Alberta Provincial Achievement Testing. Retrieved from https://www.alberta.ca/system/files/custom_downloaded_images/edc-pat-general-information-bulletin.pdf

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Government of British Columbia. (2025). Graduation Assessments. Retrieved from: <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/provincial/assessment>

¹⁴ Government of British Columbia. (2025). 2025 Foundation Skills Assessment Provincial Marking Monitoring Report. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/assessment/fsa-monitoring-provincial-report-2025.pdf>

¹⁵ Ibid.

Nunavut

Nunavut's Student Assessment and Evaluation division is responsible for researching, developing, implementing and evaluating student assessment policies, approaches and tools in Nunavut.¹⁶ "Ilitaunnikuliriniq" refers to the overall process of student assessment, evaluation and reporting that is specific to Nunavut schools. The principles of Ilitaunnikuliriniq work together with the two foundation documents for schooling in Nunavut: the *Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit Education Framework for Nunavut Curriculum* and *Inuglugijaittuq: Foundation for Inclusive Education in Nunavut Schools*. Ilitaunnikuliriniq reflects Inuit values and is supported by research and theory.¹⁷ Seven key principles of Ilitaunnikuliriniq guide assessments in Nunavut schools: supporting continuous learning; showing respect for all learners; recognizing each student's unique talents and skills; emphasizing the interdependence, growth and success of the group; ensuring assessment is outcome based; having different purposes for assessment; and ensuring assessment is authentic, meaningful and builds on student strengths.¹⁸ Currently, Nunavut students are required to write the Alberta Diploma Examinations in selected Grade 12 courses (English Language Arts 30-1 and 30-2, Math 30-1 and 30-2, French Language Arts 30-1, Français 30-1, Biology 30, Chemistry 30, Physics 30 and Science 30). The diploma examinations are administered by Alberta's Department of Education. The results are worth 50% of the final course, and the remaining 50% is made up of class or term work.¹⁹

The Dynamic Assessment is a newer approach being pilot tested across the territory. It emphasizes learning potential and student growth over static performance and involves interactive tasks where teachers provide support during the assessment to determine how students respond to guidance."²⁰

Ontario Outlook

In November 2025, the Ontario government passed the *Supporting Children and Students Act*, which "strengthen[s] government oversight, accountability and transparency in public school boards, postsecondary education and children's aid societies. The changes

¹⁶ Government of Nunavut. (2025). "Ilitaunnikuliriniq: Student Assessment and Success." Retrieved from <https://www.gov.nu.ca/en/education-and-schools/ilitaunnikuliriniq-student-assessment-and-success>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Government of Nunavut. (2024). "Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting Policy (2024) and the Dynamic Assessment Framework." Retrieved from <https://www.gov.nu.ca/en/education-and-schools/ilitaunnikuliriniq-student-assessment-and-success>

also increase the safety, well-being and academic and personal achievement of children and youth.”²¹ The enhanced measures increase government’s oversight of school board finances, governance and program performance. Additional proposed changes aimed at improving student outcomes and child and youth safety include

- “incentivizing student volunteerism by introducing a new Minister’s Certificate of Recognition for Community Involvement for students who earn 50 or more community involvement hours
- requiring school boards to implement School Resource Officer (SRO) programs where they are offered by local police services starting in the next school year
- expanding the Ombudsman’s investigative authority to include 18- to 22-year-olds who are eligible for, or are in the Ready, Set, Go program and requiring children’s aid societies to notify these youth about the Ombudsman’s services regularly
- consulting on requiring children’s aid societies and out-of-home care licensees to physically post age-appropriate information about children and youth rights and internal complaints processes in areas of a residence that are accessible to them.”²²

The *Strengthening Cyber Security and Building Trust in the Public Sector Act, 2024* officially took effect on 2025, as confirmed by Order in Council 361/2025. The bill provides means to the government of Ontario to respond to cyberattacks on critical services, systems and government operations. The bill also includes provisions to protect the data collected by government bodies with a particular focus on safeguarding children.²³

Addressing Systemic Barriers

In line with the OPS Anti-Racism Policy, 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 is 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 carrying out 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.

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

²¹ Ontario Government. (2025). “News Release - Ontario to Introduce Legislation to Strengthen School Board Oversight.” Retrieved from <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1005972/ontario-to-introduce-legislation-to-strengthen-school-board-oversight>

²² Ibid.

²³ Ontario Government. (2025). “Strengthening cyber security and building trust in the public sector.” Retrieved from <https://www.ontario.ca/page/strengthening-cyber-security-and-building-trust-public-sector>

EQAO recognizes that it operates on land shared with many Indigenous communities. EQAO honours the Dish with One Spoon wampum, which teaches people to care for the water, plants and animals that sustain them, to preserve the earth for future generations and to leave some resources as a sign of respect and care. EQAO's office is located in Toronto, which is covered by Treaty 13, also known as the Toronto Purchase. For further details of EQAO's Land Acknowledgment, please see "[EQAO Land Acknowledgement for the office at 2 Carlton Street, Toronto.](#)"

Internal Factors

EQAO continues to innovate in its agency processes and operations, always with the goal of making service delivery more effective and efficient, and ensuring that students receive tools that help them succeed in their learning process. Organizational assessment and change management as they apply to people, processes and technology are integral to the success of the agency's innovation efforts. Part of these efforts is the use of groundbreaking technologies, including AI. EQAO is currently exploring the use of AI in service delivery (details outlined in the Use of Artificial Intelligence section further below).

Staffing, Human Resources and Compensation Strategy

EQAO benefits from long-tenured staff with a high level of commitment to their work who are part of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) and the Association of Management, Administrative and Professional Crown Employees of Ontario (AMAPCEO).

EQAO follows the OPS process for classification, recruitment and HR programs in alignment with the OPS HR policies, and compensation is based on OPS salary ranges for the respective bargaining units.

EQAO has a full-time equivalent count of 95. The current breakdown is as follows:

- Unionized positions: 77 (OPSEU and AMAPCEO)
- Non-unionized position: 1
- Management positions: 13
- Senior management/executive positions: 3
- Order in Council appointment: 1

Each year, educators are seconded from school boards (not included in full-time equivalent count) to assist in the development of assessment items and the scoring of the open-response questions. Seconded staff also support EQAO's outreach to schools and school

boards by delivering professional development sessions to ensure the schools and boards are leveraging EQAO's data, research and resources to support student achievement.

To maintain continuity and manage one-time needs, EQAO regularly recruits and hires temporary staff, with usage potentially reaching up to 20 staff over a fiscal period. As some organizational roles are singular (with no backups), temporary staff are essential to fill urgent gaps and support one-time projects. Temporary staff hired from external agencies are not included in EQAO's full-time equivalent count of 95.

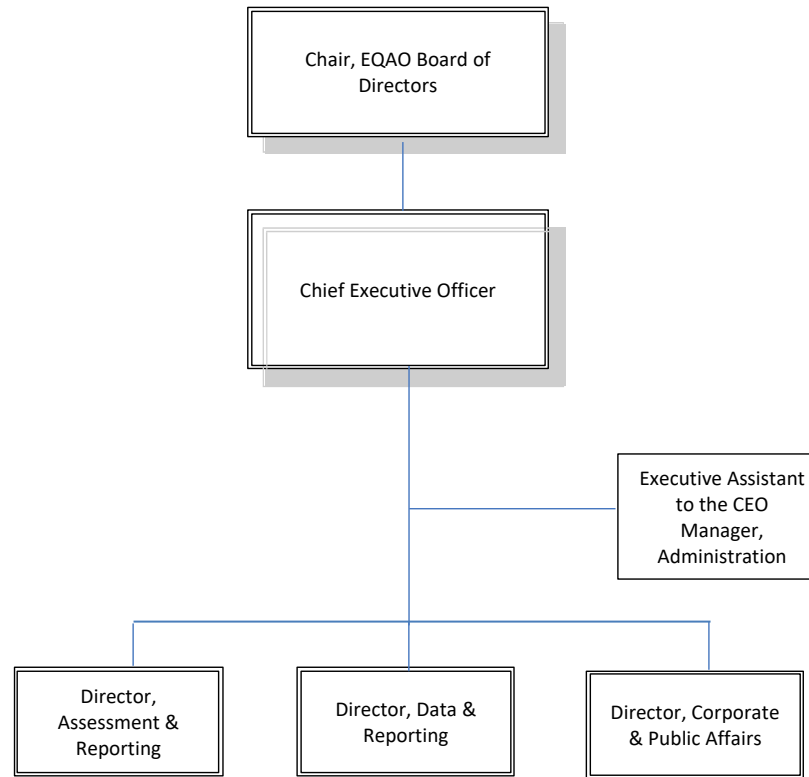
Positions that become vacant due to resignation, retirement or other attrition will be filled expeditiously to maintain operational continuity and the agency's ability to meet its responsibilities. EQAO engages vendors through a transparent tendering and evaluation process that aligns with OPS directives 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 will continue to review its staffing and ensure fulfillment of its objectives as outlined in the Ministry of Education's 2026 Letter of Direction. Any significant human resource changes will be discussed and planned according to government direction and within the provisions of labour agreements.

At this time, the projected workforce profile for the next three years remains unchanged, with no significant full-time equivalent variances anticipated. Any adjustments would depend on changes to EQAO's mandate, legislative requirements, or program direction. A decrease to our full-time equivalent allocation would jeopardize the agency's ability to fulfill its objectives and mandate. EQAO will strengthen workforce capacity by proactively managing and filling all 95 full-time equivalent positions through workforce planning and recruitment processes. To support retention and role clarity, the agency will continue reviewing and updating job descriptions to keep them current and responsive to organizational needs. Enhancing employee experience remains a priority; actions will be guided by recent employee survey results, the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Multi-Year Plan, and expanded recognition initiatives to foster a positive, inclusive and engaged workplace culture consistent with public service values and EQAO's commitment to continuous improvement. Our HR priorities reflect our commitment to sustaining a high-performing, accountable public sector workforce that supports EQAO's mandate.

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

Education Quality and Accountability Office (as of November 2025)



Outcome- and Output-Based 2026–2027 Government Priorities

The performance measures below are focused on the 2026–2027 fiscal year and are in accordance with the expectations that set direction for the agency’s next business cycle.

EQAO PRIORITIES

Expectation 1: Protect Ontario

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
A. Expand domestic partnerships to promote the development of supply chains and economic opportunities across Canada and support economic resilience, particularly in light of ongoing U.S. tariff threats and economic uncertainty.	✓ Ensure that any partnerships (Including research partnerships) involve primarily Canadian entities.	✓ Annually report on the percentage of partnerships developed with Canadian entities (out of total partnerships).
B. Procure from Ontario and Canadian businesses whenever feasible.	✓ Ensure agency procurement focuses on Ontario business first.	✓ Following the Building Ontario Businesses Initiative (BOBI) and all government direction on keeping business within Canada and following due process for any U.S. procurements, annually report on percentage of procurement processes involving Ontario-based businesses (out of total procurement processes).
C. Provide economic relief for Ontario families, consumers and businesses by freezing	✓ Review all current policies with regards to fees and implement appropriate changes to support	✓ Freeze fees for participation in EQAO tests for the 2026–2027 school year for equity deserving communities (e.g., Indigenous communities on

government fees and fares, unless approved by the oversight minister.	economic relief in Ontario.	reserves).
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Expectation 2: Deliver Better Services

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
D. Focus on a user-centred client/customer experience by simplifying interactions, improving satisfaction and expanding and optimizing digital service offerings.	✓ 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.	✓ Annually report on feedback received from stakeholders and on improvements in the assessment and reporting lifecycle.
	✓ Incorporate students' voices into the design, implementation and reporting of assessments to ensure relevant and effective assessments.	✓ Conduct at least two EQAO Student Engagement Committee meetings each year, and report on the results and feedback.
	✓ Analyze best practices in large-scale assessment nationally and internationally and improve student achievement by embedding these best practices in assessment development, analysis and reporting.	✓ 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.
	✓ Strengthen the understanding of the appropriate use of EQAO data for improvement by conducting	✓ Communicate with partners in education and provide data-informed resources, including learning modules, research reports, webinars,

	outreach activities for the education community.	videos and other appropriate materials, to promote the richness of EQAO data and its role in improving student learning. ○ 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.
E. Identify opportunities to enhance efficiency, improve services, drive innovation and achieve cost savings for the people of Ontario, including through the use of AI and other advanced technologies.	✓ Support the government's commitment to strengthen student achievement and return Ontario to the highest test scores in reading, writing and math by continuing to implement provincial, national and international student assessments and work with the government to better understand why students are not meeting provincial standards and what more can be done to strengthen achievement.	✓ Develop, deliver, score, analyze and report annually on ○ the percentage of student participation in the following EQAO assessments (number of students participating versus number of students registered to participate): Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics, the OSSLT/TPCL and the Assessments of Reading, Writing and Mathematics, Primary and Junior Divisions. ○ EQAO's coordination of National/International assessments. ○ the exemption rates for each school and school board and the province. ○ innovations produced throughout the data lifecycle linked to AI or any other technologies. ✓ In collaboration with the Ministry of Education, establish a set of actions EQAO can take to better understand why students are not

		meeting provincial standards and what more can be done to strengthen achievement.
	✓ Continue with the implementation and the delivery of the Math Proficiency Test and work with the ministry to continue to refine the delivery of the MPT to improve efficiency and effectiveness, reduce red tape and minimize missed tests.	✓ Ensuring fulfillment of any applicable legislation, and develop, administer and report annually to the Ministry of Education on the MPT in accordance with the following measures: ○ overall success rate of candidates taking the assessment; ○ initiatives to improve MPT efficiency and effectiveness; ○ initiatives to reduce MPT-related red tape; ○ Initiatives to minimize missed tests.
	✓ Support the recently announced Short-term Advisory Body reviewing Ontario's approach to student achievement and assessment.	✓ Report to the Ministry on EQAO's work with the Advisory Body reviewing Ontario's approach to student achievement and assessment.
	✓ Continue to develop reporting and data visualization capabilities to support the use of EQAO data.	✓ Annually report 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 2026 and 2028), produce cohort reports as part of the agency's annual reporting cycle.
	✓ Ensure the agency plans for and responds (proactively and reactively) to cybersecurity matters and reports on AI use.	✓ Report annually to the Ministry 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. ✓ 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. ✓ By Q4 2025–2026, in alignment with GO-ITS standards, deliver on the fiscal 2026–2027 commitments resulting from cybersecurity audit recommendations.
F. Eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and red tape by applying lean methodologies or other modalities to achieve operational efficiency.	✓ Identify opportunities to make assessment delivery more efficient.	✓ Annually report on improvements to assessment delivery efficiency.

Expectation 3: Drive Innovation & Value for Money

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
G. Find innovative solutions to use public resources efficiently and to effectively deliver on the agency's mandate while operating within the agency's financial allocation, supported by accurate financial reporting, effective internal controls and proactive fraud management practices.	✓ Strengthen the understanding of the appropriate use of EQAO data for improvement by conducting outreach activities for the education community.	✓ 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. ○ 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.
	✓ Ensure EQAO works closely with	✓ Strengthen the agency's I&IT infrastructure,

	the Ministry and the Community Services I&IT Cluster to manage and address IT and system-related risks, including privacy risks.	policies and related privacy and security posture in collaboration with CSC and ITS. ○ By Q4 of fiscal 2026–2027, ▪ 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, ▪ 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. ○ Onboard to the ITS Common Services platform, with 80% of the services transitioned by Q2 of fiscal 2026–2027. ✓ Complete the remaining 20% of service transition by Q4 of fiscal 2026–2027.
	✓ 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.	✓ As recommended by the Ontario Human Rights Commission in <i>Dreams Delayed: Addressing Systemic Anti-Black Racism and Discrimination in Ontario’s Public Education System</i> (2025), by Q3 of fiscal 2027–2028, define with the Ministry of Education a pathway for EQAO to provide identity-based reports.
	✓ Support interested parties in analyzing and integrating EQAO data with other data that focuses on interventions that enhance	✓ Report annually on analyses and publications with or by partners on the use of EQAO data to improve student well-being and learning

	student learning and well-being, by establishing an accessible and responsive data framework.	experience. ✓ Establish an accessible and responsive data framework to foster collaboration with external partners.
	✓ Inform the public about the purpose and use of EQAO data by school districts, schools and educators to foster improvement.	✓ 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).
	✓ Align resource allocation to maximize the impact of the agency's modernization, ensuring effective, efficient and equitable governance, project management and business practices.	✓ Maintain agency operations in alignment with EQAO's governance, policy framework, established processes and government directives (for example, the Agencies and Appointments Directive; the OPS Procurement Directive; the Travel, Meal and Hospitality Expenses Directive)
	✓ Ensure financial and acquisition accountability in alignment with OPS-wide standards.	✓ 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.
	✓ Continue to meet revenue generation targets and explore further revenue generation opportunities.	✓ Continue to generate revenue through fee-based assessment participation. ✓ Explore additional sources of revenue generation.
H. Manage agency workforce	✓ Manage the agency's workforce	✓ Track quarterly compliance with the directive

with careful responsibility to stabilize expenditures and preserve long-term financial viability by strictly adhering to hiring control parameters, including ceasing hiring for non-business critical and non-public-facing positions, including the use of consultants.	responsibly to keep costs under control and ensure long-term financial stability by following hiring rules and eliminating the use of consultants.	that all new hires meet the “business critical and public facing” criteria.
	✓ 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.	✓ Each year, develop and offer a minimum of four activities and events that further promote a strong organizational culture, employee engagement, belonging and excellence. ✓ Each year, provide a minimum of two training and professional development sessions to up-skill EQAO’s employees.
	✓ Implement and report on internal components of the multi-year equity, diversity and inclusion plan.	✓ Report annually on progress on the internal components of the multi-year equity, diversity and inclusion plan.
I. Operate within a defined maximum workforce size (including consultants).	✓ Ensure the agency’s workforce size responds to Ministry of Education direction.	✓ Track the change (annual percentage increase or decrease) in workforce size and document the rationale. ✓ By December of 2027, create and/or update job descriptions, as required, to better reflect the work that is part of the modernization mandate.
J. Enhance productivity and efficiency by using technology wherever possible.	✓ Document uses of technology that enhance productivity	✓ Annually report on improvements to productivity linked to changes in technology.

K. Work with the oversight ministry to address any office space constraints.	✓ Assess office optimization opportunities to reduce office realty footprint according to government directives and/or policies.	✓ Calculate ratio of head count to office space to optimize office real estate based on staff attending the workplace five days per week.
		✓ 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.

Financial Budget (\$M)

Program Area	2025–2026 Projected	2026–2027 Projected	2027–2028 Projected	2028–2029 Projected
Grades 3 & 6 (Reading, Writing & Mathematics)	9.83	9.97	9.97	9.97
Grade 9	6.57	6.71	6.71	6.71
Ontario Secondary School Literary Test	8.66	8.80	8.80	8.80
Mathematics Proficiency Test	2.71	2.71	2.71	2.71
Transformation	1.00	0.57	0.57	0.57
Operating	4.26	4.26	4.26	4.27
Total EQAO Program Operating Expenses	33.03	33.02	33.02	33.03
National/International Program (funded separately by Ministry)	1.24	1.24	1.24	1.24
Total Expenses Including National/International	34.27	34.26	34.26	34.27
Ministry Allocation for EQAO Operating Expenses	32.39	32.39	32.39	32.39
Total Funding Excluding National/International & Other FEP Projects	32.39	32.39	32.39	32.39
National/International Program Funded Separately (from FEP)	1.24	1.24	1.24	1.24
Total Funding Including National/International & Other FEP Projects	33.63	33.63	33.63	33.63
Capital Assets	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25

NOTES/ASSUMPTIONS: Payroll projections are based on EQAO's 95 full-time-equivalent positions and ratified collective agreements. National/International costs are dependent on Ministry decisions regarding Ontario's participation in these 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. EQAO does not currently issue any transfer payments to third-party entities.

Realty

According to the *EQAO 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 must comply with the Management Board of Cabinet Realty Directive when acquiring space for accommodation and programs.

Information Technology and Electronic Service Delivery Plan

EQAO relies on technology to carry out its core business practices and services, including assessment delivery as well as data collection, processing and storage. There has been a focus on establishing resilient IT infrastructure and systems, and the agency is actively working to optimize its Guelph Data Centre 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 2026 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. EQAO's Cybersecurity and Privacy Program is dependent on the move to OPS common services at the Guelph Data Centre. This project is active and being undertaken in collaboration with Infrastructure Technology Operations Division and Community Services Cluster, both part of the Ministry of Public and Business Service Delivery and Procurement. EQAO's actions related to the 2023 Cybersecurity Audit of the education sector have resulted in the agency being recognized for showing positive progress toward meeting the auditor's recommendations at each progress checkpoint.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Based on the *Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence Directive* (2024), EQAO's *AI Roadmap* provides the agency with a strategic way forward to explore the use of AI in agency programing and service delivery. EQAO's *AI Roadmap* is designed to enable the

agency to incrementally integrate AI for further innovation, efficiency and enhanced service delivery, in alignment with the following Strategic Directions:

- Ensure assessments contribute to enhancing student achievement and improving Ontario’s education system.
- Support partners in using EQAO data to improve student learning.
- Continue to modernize the agency within budget.

Incremental AI integration in areas of test development, scoring, analytics and stakeholder communications enables the cultivation and harvesting of benefits of the upcoming transformation linked to generative AI. EQAO is committed to embracing these opportunities for innovation responsibly not only to improve service delivery but also to remain technologically relevant in a rapidly changing world. EQAO is also aware that these technological changes require careful ethical and human-centred design, administration and monitoring to ensure the principles outlined in the aforementioned directive are at the heart of any AI-related agency endeavour. Also based on the directive, EQAO developed its AI Policy and Procedure to provide clear direction and the steps for developing AI-related projects.

The following is EQAO’s AI Inventory:

Use Case Title	AI-Assisted Item Drafting
Description	Using OPS-approved Microsoft Copilot Chat, some initial EQAO assessment item drafts are created with the assistance of an AI language model. This approach addresses the labour-intensive nature of early-stage item drafting and contributes to the efficiency, consistency and scalability of item-development processes. EQAO can make available to our educational partners and the public specific steps in the item-drafting process that involve AI.
Business Branch	Assessment and Reporting
Benefits for Ontario	This use case benefits Ontario by offering efficiencies in assessment item-drafting processes, while

	maintaining item quality, fairness and validity. EQAO educational experts remain responsible for the full development and creation of EQAO assessment items. All assessment items are thoroughly reviewed, edited and refined by staff. They are further reviewed by the equity and assessment development committees and collaborative councils for equity-deserving communities. As part of ongoing monitoring and risk mitigation, all items then proceed through a rigorous field-testing process for full evaluation of quality and performance prior to counting toward students' outcomes.
Datasets Used	No personal information is used in this use case. Data are limited to EQAO assessment item templates, public item exemplars and publicly available information on curriculum expectations. Data are stored in environments with enterprise data protections that safeguard organizational data through privacy security, and compliance controls, ensuring AI use remains transparent, accountable and risk-managed within approved governance frameworks.

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.

Third-party participation in EQAO program design, delivery and monitoring is tightly linked to compliance in following OPS-wide direction applicable to EQAO, including risk management, procurement, cybersecurity and AI management. EQAO policies and procedures directly align with all applicable direction on the matter.

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.

In addition to the third-party research partnerships outlined in the Research section of this plan, the agency engages other educational partners at different stages of the assessment development cycle. As EQAO innovates, 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 (MMAAP) that shares knowledge and expertise to support the agency in meeting its digitalization and innovation objectives while ensuring strong methodologies, analytics and knowledge-sharing approaches. The MMAAP 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 and CMEC—to administer PISA
- the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada—to administer the PCAP
- the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement and CMEC—to administer PIRLS and TIMSS

While CMEC is the sole partner organization for PCAP, it is also a partner organization for TIMSS, PIRLS and PISA.

As directed by the amendments to the *EQAO Act*, the agency is to work with the OCT in administering the MPT. Ontario applicants for a general Certificate of Qualification and Registration, with the exception of applicants who satisfy the requirements to become teachers of an Indigenous language (native languages), must successfully complete the MPT.

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 First Nations Data Stewardship Advisory Committee. These three groups serve as collaborative and advisory bodies to ensure assessments, data and reporting are enhanced in their authenticity, and cultural relevance and responsiveness to Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

EQAO’s Black Communities Collaborative Council is composed of members representing Black communities across the province, the majority of whom are educators. The council aligns with Ontario’s Anti-Black Racism Strategy, as well as the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s report “Dreams Delayed: Addressing Systemic Anti-Black Racism and Discrimination in Ontario’s Public Education System” in providing a space for targeted engagement with Black communities where open dialogue informs the work of EQAO and its assessments.

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 2026–2027 fiscal year will be on optimizing 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 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 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 OCT.
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 the Ministry. 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.²⁴

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 the Test Administrator Guides and the Professional Responsibilities and Administration Guidelines through the MPT and EQAO websites respectively, as well as through webinars and in-person sessions for the MPT and the K–12 assessments. 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 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.
- Report on use cases when AI is used (no AI cases to be reported in this cycle).

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

²⁴ 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>).

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. 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 the Guelph Data Centre.
- 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.



Education Quality
and Accountability Office

Information Centre: 1-888-327-7377 (Ontario)
416-916-0708 (outside Ontario)

info@eqao.com
eqao.com

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