



Education Quality and
Accountability Office



2017-2018 ANNUAL REPORT



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EQAO'S BOARD OF DIRECTORS



Dave Cooke,
Chair
June 25, 2008–October 10, 2018



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June 2, 2011–July 25, 2020



Norah Marsh,
Chief Executive Officer
June 28, 2017–June 27, 2020



Michael Bowe
March 7, 2018–March 6, 2021



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Education Quality and Accountability Office

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Dave Cooke,
Chair



Norah Marsh,
Chief Executive Officer

On behalf of the board of directors and staff of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), we are pleased to present the report of the agency's activities during the 2017–2018 fiscal year.

This year was one of significant reflection about the agency's future that considered the importance of equity and inclusion, promising practices in large-scale assessment and the evolving needs of students, the education community and the province of Ontario. Work was also undertaken with respect to relaunching EQAO's research program, which will help provide more insights into the factors that affect student achievement.

There were important changes in the leadership team, as the agency welcomed a new chief executive officer, chief assessment officer and director of data and reporting. With a renewed leadership team, EQAO has developed its vision for modernization and emphasized its commitment to ensuring equity and inclusion throughout its policies and programs.

New leadership reaffirmed the agency's focus on providing information to support student learning—regardless of a child or youth's background or circumstance—and to contribute to the accountability of Ontario's publicly funded education system. This year, the agency successfully completed another cycle of assessments and associated reports, developed a better understanding of the diverse learning needs of Ontario students and planned future aspects of EQAO activities in preparation for its modernization initiative.

In September 2017, the Government of Ontario announced a review of assessment and reporting practices in Ontario, to be led by the Premier's education advisors. The review included classroom assessments as well as large-scale provincial assessments, and Ontario's participation in large-scale national and international assessments. EQAO encouraged active participation in the consultation process and submitted an information paper about its activities and vision for modernization.

EQAO aims to be a contributing partner in the continuous improvement of Ontario's education system, and students remain at the core of the agency's function. There is significant value in the agency's ability to generate independent reports on learning at the individual, school, school board and provincial levels. These reports not only fulfill EQAO's mandate of fostering accountability in education, but they also shine a light on student achievement and on opportunities to support vulnerable students better. One reason Ontario is viewed internationally as an authority in the area of large-scale assessments is that it provides reliable, independent evidence-based information to identify trends and inform strategies to support student success.



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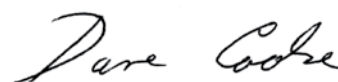
In the summer of 2017, EQAO released the provincial results of its assessments administered in the English-language school system during the 2016–2017 school year. The data showed there was a discrepancy between the achievement of students enrolled in academic and applied courses at the secondary level. While 83% of Grade 9 students enrolled in the academic course met the provincial standard in mathematics, only 44% of students enrolled in the applied course did so. Furthermore, 52% of first-time-eligible students with special education needs were successful on the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), with 36% of students enrolled in the applied course and 81% of students enrolled in the academic course meeting the provincial standard. This is consistent with the trend over the past five years. At the elementary level, data showed that student achievement in mathematics remains a challenge. While Grade 6 results stabilized, with 50% of students meeting the provincial standard for a second year in a row, there was a one-percentage-point decrease in the proportion of Grade 3 students meeting the provincial standard in math.

The data EQAO collected from the French-language school system for the 2016–2017 school year showed that a very large majority of students at the secondary level were successful at meeting the provincial standard in literacy and in academic mathematics but that achievement had decreased among students enrolled in the applied mathematics course: the majority of students did not meet the provincial standard, and there was a decrease from the previous year. Data also showed that the percentage of students with special education needs successful on the OSSLT had increased over the past years, including among students enrolled in the applied French course, which will encourage the continued implementation of targeted strategies for students needing specific support. At the elementary level, the percentages of students meeting the provincial literacy and mathematics standards remained constant, with a majority of students meeting the standards despite a slight decrease in writing.

As EQAO pursued its regular activities throughout the year, the agency also focused on the initial development of a modernization plan in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. This transformation project, conceived as a gradual initiative that will relate to every aspect of the agency, launched in October 2017 with a deliberate emphasis on research through what is best defined as a discovery phase. EQAO assessed and addressed the agency's current areas for improvement and established a work stream that focused on clearly delineating EQAO's future objectives and transformation goals. Through its stabilization discovery activities, the agency was able to review and assess key internal processes and systems for the purpose of business improvement—all in support of its future transformation from a people, process and technology perspective. Enhancements to EQAO's operations will allow the agency to fulfill its current mandate and position itself to adapt successfully to the changes that modernization will entail.

Moving forward, the agency seeks to develop innovative ways to engage students better, and to offer educators and parents comprehensive and accessible data that will serve as additional information that can guide their understanding of how students are meeting curriculum expectations.

EQAO looks forward to positive changes, and we appreciate the dedication of Ontario's education professionals as we work together to improve learning outcomes for all students.



Dave Cooke, Chair



Norah Marsh, CEO





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EQAO was established in 1996, in response to parents and taxpayers, who were seeking a more independent gauge of quality and accountability in the publicly funded education system. To fulfill our mandate and help improve student learning, EQAO administers large-scale assessments grounded in *The Ontario Curriculum*, coordinates Ontario's participation in national and international assessments, contributes to education research and assists the education community in understanding, analyzing and appropriately using EQAO data.

EQAO is currently immersed in a multi-faceted and multi-year modernization initiative that focuses on five distinct areas:

- ▶ large-scale assessments,
- ▶ reports,
- ▶ research,
- ▶ engagement with Ontarians and
- ▶ internal business processes.

EQAO is dedicated to offering a high-quality large-scale assessment program that is equitable, inclusive and reflective of Ontario's diversity so that all students can demonstrate their understanding of the provincial curriculum.

By assessing each student in relation to the learning expectations outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum*, EQAO is able to offer objective and reliable data at the individual, school,

school board and provincial levels to support the education community in professional practice. The agency provides schools and school boards with detailed reports about their students' achievement, and a personalized report to each student who writes an assessment to help support individual student learning. Additional contextual, attitudinal and behavioural information from questionnaires and other sources offers valuable insights into student learning and supports educators as they continue to meet the needs of every student.

EQAO's independent data, in addition to classroom and board information, helps the education community consider its focus for collaborative inquiries and make evidence-informed decisions when developing and monitoring targeted improvement plans that foster equitable and inclusive learning environments.

EQAO's aim in providing evidence-informed insights into student learning is to facilitate the success of all Ontario students. Through workshops and programs like the Dr. Bette M. Stephenson Recognition of Achievement, EQAO builds capacity for the appropriate use of data and provides resources that educators, parents, policy-makers and others in the education community can use to align their strategies with best practices in assessment and education nationally and globally in order to improve learning and teaching.

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Through research, EQAO investigates factors that influence student achievement, school effectiveness and best assessment practices. The agency also coordinates Ontario student participation in national and international assessments to provide data relating to how Ontario students are performing on the world stage in a number of areas, including math, science, technology, financial literacy, collaborative problem solving, reading and writing, as well as general well-being in and out of the school environment.

At EQAO, we value

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



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In accordance with direction from the Board of Directors, EQAO develops a new strategic plan every three to five years to deliver on the agency's mandate of supporting and guiding student improvement by providing credible information about the quality of the province's publicly funded elementary and secondary education system. In 2016, EQAO adopted the following strategic priorities for 2016–2019:

■ Assessment and Evaluation

EQAO will assess and evaluate important aspects of the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education.

■ Research

EQAO will conduct research into the factors affecting student achievement, equity and the quality of education.

■ Communication and Engagement

EQAO will help Ontarians better understand the role of the agency and the value of the information it provides so they can use that knowledge to improve publicly funded education.

■ Business and Governance

EQAO will operate a responsible and effective organization.

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Assessment and Evaluation

Through its large-scale provincial assessment program, EQAO currently administers full-census assessments at key stages in each student's education. This approach

evaluates progress over time at the individual, school, school board and provincial levels;

fosters discussions about improvements to learning programs in schools and boards across the province; and

allows policy-makers to better understand system-wide trends, and make student-focused and evidence-informed decisions accordingly.



EQAO assesses all Ontario students in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of the primary (Grade 3) and junior (Grade 6) divisions; in mathematics in Grade 9; and in literacy in Grade 10 through the OSSLT. Success on the OSSLT satisfies a graduation requirement. By assessing all students, EQAO is able to provide valuable data at the provincial, school board, school and individual student levels, and facilitates the tracking of student performance over time.





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EQAO's vision for modernizing its assessments is to reflect classroom experiences more closely, incorporate more digital tools, broaden the assessments' range of insights into student achievement and create a customizable and more easily accessible assessment experience for all students. Further, modernization offers an opportunity to revise reporting practices, optimize contributions to education research initiatives, engage with Ontarians more effectively and streamline business procedures. EQAO's comprehensive modernization plan includes the stabilization of business practices and a broad transformation of the agency's assessment program. In the initial discovery phase of this work, EQAO's focus has been reviewing IT infrastructure, data management, reporting, and privacy and security practices.

In the 2016–2017 school year, 568 398 students from the publicly funded English- and French-language school systems were assessed in relation to expectations outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum*: 273 140 primary- and junior-division students, 134 644 Grade 9 students and 160 614 OSSLT participants. A total of 3755 elementary schools and 956 secondary schools in Ontario's publicly funded education system participated in EQAO assessments. An additional 512 private, First Nations and international schools also participated.

Number of schools that participated in EQAO assessments*

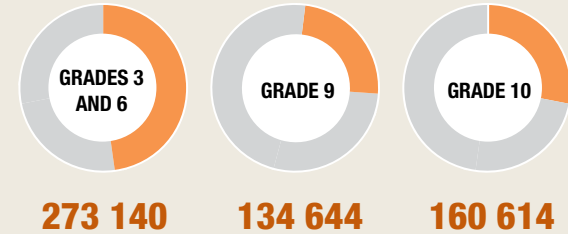
3755 Elementary schools

956 Secondary schools

512 Private, First Nations and international schools

* In the 2016–2017 school year

568 398 students from the publicly funded English- and French-language school systems were assessed in relation to expectations outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum*.



Number of students who were assessed in the 2016–2017 school year

EQAO's Assessment and Reporting Process

In order to conduct modern assessments with integrity, EQAO takes measures to ensure its processes and results meet the highest standards in technical quality. EQAO follows a rigorous assessment-development process that ensures the selection of appropriate materials tied to curriculum expectations, and that items (i.e., questions on the assessments, which are tied to specific expectations outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum*) can adequately measure the knowledge and skills being assessed. Data are analyzed in depth and reports are developed to provide reliable, useful and independent insights into student achievement.

Assessments	Grade	Subjects
PRIMARY DIVISION	Grade 3 (end of primary)	Reading, writing, math
JUNIOR DIVISION	Grade 6 (end of junior)	Reading, writing, math
GRADE 9	Grade 9	Math
OSSLT/TPCL	Grade 10	Literacy

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Developing Large-Scale Provincial Assessments with Students in Mind

Each year, EQAO assessments are created by Ontario educators, who research, develop and select all EQAO assessment items. The assessments are developed in collaboration with psychometricians and experts in the education community. The psychometricians ensure EQAO stays aligned with leading practices in the field of large-scale assessment. The experts participate through an Assessment Development Committee and a Sensitivity Committee established for each assessment. In this way, educators maintain a central role throughout the assessment-development process. This involvement helps to ensure that assessments remain true to what students are learning, and that EQAO assessments are fair, equitable and inclusive, so that all students who take the assessment can fully participate and demonstrate their understanding of the curriculum expectations.

EQAO involves individual educators across the province in all aspects of EQAO assessments throughout the creation process, including the

- ▶ design and development of items and item-specific scoring rubrics;
- ▶ review of items for curriculum content and sensitivity;
- ▶ administration of the assessments in schools; and
- ▶ scoring of student responses to open-response items.



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Educators are selected to participate in EQAO activities based on the following criteria:

- ▶ cultural diversity;
- ▶ geographic location, to ensure representation from the northern, southern, eastern and western parts of the province;
- ▶ representation of rural and urban regions;
- ▶ current elementary and secondary experience (i.e., teachers, administrators, subject experts and consultants); and
- ▶ expertise in evaluation and assessment, including large-scale assessment.

The Assessment Development Committee is made up of teachers, school administrators and educational consultants who ensure that all items on each assessment are grade- and curriculum-appropriate. The Sensitivity Committee's members provide input from a specialized equity perspective and have experience in equity issues in education (e.g., matters pertaining to equity and diversity, requirements of English and French language learners, requirements of students with special education needs). The goal of this committee is to ensure that no group of students is advantaged or disadvantaged by any language or content in an assessment.

Once the questions are approved by the committees, they are field tested in schools across the province before they become part of an operational EQAO assessment. This helps to ensure that questions are appropriate and that students will be able to demonstrate their knowledge by responding to them.

Administering Assessments

EQAO is responsible for Ontario's provincial assessment program, and the agency relies on the collaboration, support and professional judgment of educators to administer the assessments. EQAO sets clear guidelines and has rigorous quality-assurance processes to ensure administration is consistent across the province. For each assessment, EQAO publishes an administration guide that includes detailed guidelines and steps for teachers and principals to follow.

During the 2016–2017 school year, EQAO was responsible for the administration of more than 275 000 primary and junior assessments, 135 000 Grade 9 assessments and 175 000 OSSLTs across the province.



Scoring Assessments

EQAO assessments are scored primarily by educators who have successfully completed specific training requirements. Educators from throughout Ontario bring their knowledge of the classroom and of the curriculum to the scoring process, and the scoring experience provides them with professional development that deepens their understanding of evaluation. Assessment questions are scored according to established criteria, which help to ensure the integrity and reliability of the data, as well as comparability of results from year to year.

Reporting Assessment Results

EQAO aims to provide user-friendly access to its data as part of its reporting of the results of its assessments each year. EQAO ensures that schools and school boards can analyze and share EQAO data and explain them to the parents and communities they serve. In accordance with its mandate, EQAO releases its assessment results and data about specific student populations yearly, to help the education community understand the different factors affecting student achievement.

Assessment scores are analyzed, and the resulting data form the basis of

- ▶ a provincial report of students' performance across Ontario;
- ▶ school and school board reports and
- ▶ individual student reports, which are distributed to every student who writes a test.

The agency uses questionnaires to keep abreast of the developing needs of educators and the education community. These student, teacher and principal questionnaires collect information on factors inside and outside the classroom that may affect student achievement, so that EQAO results can be used to make recommendations to improve student learning. EQAO is currently revising its questionnaires to better meet the requirements of the education community and be representative of current classroom practices and students' and educators' experiences.

In addition to achievement data, principals can access contextual, attitudinal and behavioural information from Student Questionnaires using EQAO's online reporting tool. When examined year over year, these data can be instrumental to the identification of trends and to operational decisions that help improve board, school, classroom and individual student achievement.

EQAO Assessment Results

Each year, EQAO reports its province-wide assessment results. The agency promotes comparisons of results over a five-year period, as opposed to a year-over-year analysis, because broader snapshots provide a more accurate picture of student achievement trends. Such comparisons facilitate the identification of strengths and areas for improvement in the education system, and they lead to valuable discussions about necessary support initiatives.



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2016–2017 Results: English-Language Education System in Ontario

Assessments of Reading, Writing and Math, Primary and Junior Divisions

According to data collected through the EQAO assessments written by Grades 3 and 6 Ontario students in the 2016–2017 school year, more than two-thirds of students met the provincial standards in elementary-school reading and writing, while fewer than two-thirds did so for math. Reading results improved in Grade 3 but remained stable in Grade 6, while writing results at the elementary level declined by one point and mathematics results showed a small decline in Grade 3.

decreased one percentage point since the previous year. In 2017, 73% of Grade 3 students met the provincial writing standard while 79% of students met it in Grade 6.

- ▶ The percentage of Grade 3 students who met the provincial standard in mathematics decreased over the last five years, and for the second year in a row only 50% of Grade 6 students met the provincial standard.

While a one-percentage-point decline in results over five years can be considered normal fluctuation, a difference of more than three percentage points is worth examining more closely.



ENGLISH-LANGUAGE STUDENTS

	GRADE 3	GRADE 6
Reading	74%	81%
Writing	73%	79%
Mathematics	62%	50%

Percentage of students who met the provincial standard in 2017

- ▶ The percentage of Grades 3 and 6 students who met the provincial reading standard (Levels 3 and 4) increased over the last five years. In 2017, 74% of Grade 3 students and 81% of Grade 6 students met the provincial reading standard, an increase of six percentage points and four percentage points respectively from the results five years previously.
- ▶ The percentage of students in Grades 3 and 6 who met the provincial writing standard



Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics

According to data collected from the EQAO mathematics assessment written by Grade 9 Ontario students for the 2016–2017 school year, the results for the academic course were stable, but the applied course showed a small decline.

- ▶ Of Grade 9 students enrolled in the academic mathematics course in 2017, 83% met the provincial mathematics standard, a one-percentage-point decrease since 2013 and the same as last year.
- ▶ Of Grade 9 students enrolled in the applied mathematics course in 2017, 44% met the provincial mathematics standard, the same percentage as in 2013.

GRADE 9 ASSESSMENT OF MATHEMATICS

Academic Course

83%

Applied Course

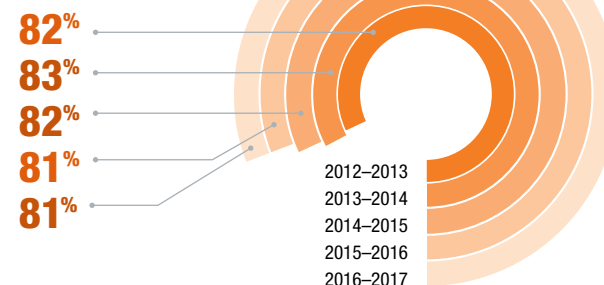
44%

Of Grade 9 students who wrote the mathematics assessment in English-language schools in 2017, 27% were enrolled in the applied course. EQAO data from the past five years show that the percentage of Grade 9 students enrolled in the academic course who met the provincial standard has remained consistently high but that fewer than half of the students enrolled in the applied course met the provincial standard. The discrepancy between the achievement results of Grade 9 students enrolled in academic mathematics and those in applied has remained substantial since 2013.

Percentage of students who met the provincial mathematics standard in 2017

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL LITERACY TEST (OSSLT)

The overall success rate on the OSSLT over the past five years



OSSLT

The results for first-time-eligible students writing the 2016–2017 OSSLT show that a majority enrolled in the academic course succeeded but that fewer than half enrolled in the applied course were successful.

- ▶ Overall, 81% percent of Ontario's Grade 10 students who wrote the assessment were successful. The overall success rate on the OSSLT has remained relatively high and stable for many years, varying between 81% and 83% over the past five years.
- ▶ Of Ontario's Grade 10 students enrolled in the academic course who wrote the assessment, 92% were successful, a decline of two percentage points over the past five years.
- ▶ Of Ontario's Grade 10 students enrolled in the applied course who wrote the assessment, 44% were successful, a decline of seven percentage points over the past five years.

Twenty percent of Grade 10 students were enrolled in the applied English course during the 2016–2017 school year, a number that has been relatively consistent over time. EQAO data reveal that particular attention needs to be paid to the experience of students who are enrolled in applied courses to improve their outcomes. The agency recommends a review of initiatives supporting these students.



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2016–2017 Results: French-Language Education System in Ontario

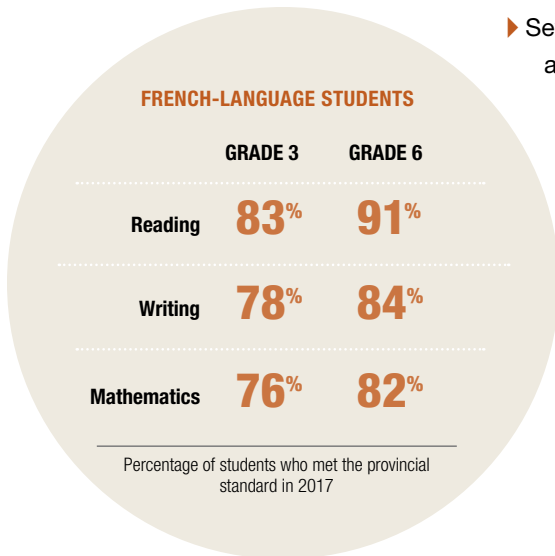
Assessments of Reading, Writing and Math, Primary and Junior Divisions

According to the data collected through the EQAO assessments written by Grades 3 and 6 students in Ontario's French-language education system, elementary school results remained consistently high, increasing over the last five years in reading, and declining slightly in writing and mathematics.

▶ Eighty-three percent of Grade 3 students and 91% of Grade 6 students met the provincial reading standard, an increase of five percentage points and two percentage points respectively over the past five years.

▶ Seventy-eight percent of Grade 3 students and 84% of Grade 6 students met the provincial writing standard, a decrease of five percentage points and two percentage points respectively since 2013.

▶ Seventy-six percent of Grade 3 students and 82% of Grade 6 students met the provincial mathematics standard, a decrease of one percentage point and three percentage points respectively from the previous year.



GRADE 9 ASSESSMENT OF MATHEMATICS



FRENCH-LANGUAGE STUDENTS

Percentage of students who met the provincial mathematics standard in 2017

Academic Course

85%

Applied Course

44%

Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics

The Grade 9 EQAO assessment tests students according to the curricula for the academic and applied mathematics courses offered in Ontario French-language secondary schools. EQAO data from this assessment reveal that secondary school mathematics results are strong in the academic course but there has been a decline in achievement among students enrolled in the applied course, where fewer than half met the provincial standard.

- ▶ Of Grade 9 students enrolled in the academic mathematics course, 85% met the provincial mathematics standard, a four-percentage-point increase since 2013.
- ▶ Of Grade 9 students enrolled in the applied mathematics course, 44% met the provincial mathematics standard, a seven-percentage-point decrease since 2013.

EQAO data show that the discrepancy between the achievement results of Grade 9 students enrolled in the academic mathematics course and those enrolled in applied remains substantial and has increased since 2013. The data reveal that particular attention needs to be paid to the experience of Grade 9 students who are enrolled in applied courses to help them improve their outcomes.

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Test provincial de compétences linguistiques (TPCL)

The results for first-time-eligible students writing the 2016–2017 EQAO TPCL showed that the overall success rate for the literacy test has remained high and stable for several years.

- ▶ Ninety-two percent of Ontario's Grade 10 students taking the test for the first time were successful, an increase of four percentage points from 88% in 2013.
- ▶ Of Ontario's Grade 10 students enrolled in the academic course who wrote the assessment, 97% were successful, and of students enrolled in the applied course who wrote the assessment, 73% were successful.
- ▶ Of the students writing the test for the first time and identifying as having special needs, 77% were successful, an increase of six percentage points over the past five years.

The long-term increase in achievement among students with special education needs suggests that, in many cases, intervention strategies have had a positive impact on student achievement, and it encourages schools to continue to strengthen their initiatives that support these students.

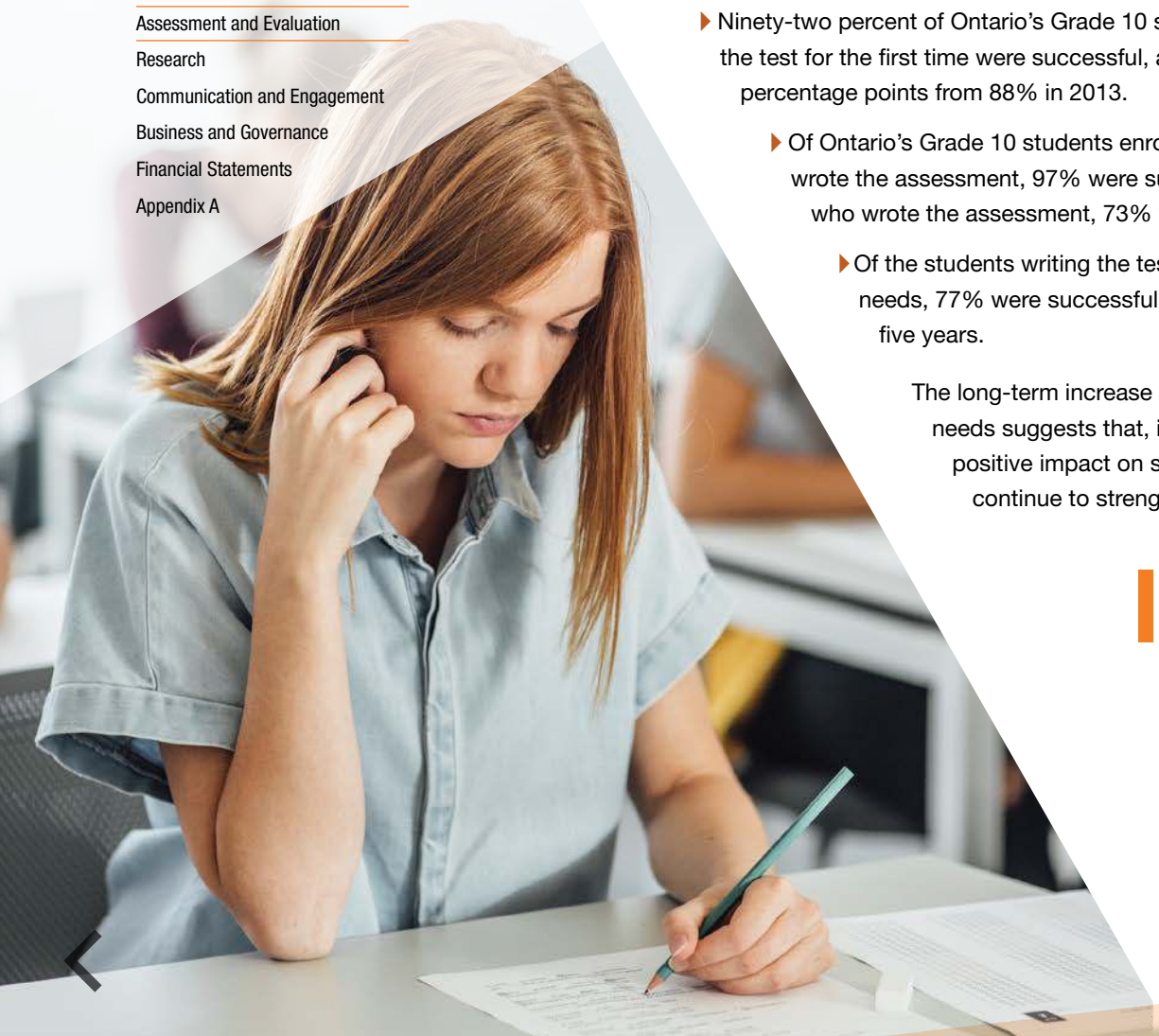
At school, I learn to be resourceful, autonomous and independent.

Student from Timmins



TEST PROVINCIAL DE COMPÉTENCES LINGUISTIQUES (TPCL)

92% of Ontario's Grade 10 students taking the test for the first time in 2017 were successful





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National and International Assessments

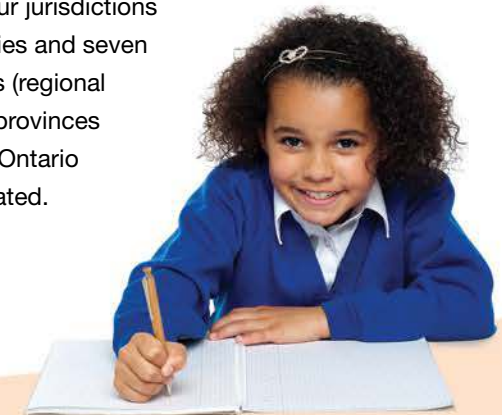
Another part of EQAO's activities is to coordinate Ontario's participation in national and international assessments. These assessments provide a general sense of how Ontario students are doing relative to those in other jurisdictions or education systems, and they contribute to the larger picture of student achievement in Ontario. Both the public and education policy-makers benefit from these high-level indications of how students in Ontario are positioned in relation to their peers across the country and around the world in specific subjects. The results from these assessments are a good complement to the information gained through the full-census provincial assessments.

EQAO does not develop the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test or the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) assessments; however, the agency does oversee their Ontario administration. Though these assessments do not take place every year, the findings from national and international assessments and studies supplement and help establish a context for provincial assessment data. This information assists in the setting of educational priorities and is valuable for improvement planning. It also serves to measure Ontario students' achievement against national and international benchmarks.

During the 2016–2017 fiscal year, the detailed Canadian results from two assessments EQAO coordinated and administered previously were made public: The TIMSS Canadian results report and the PISA Canadian results on financial literacy offer useful insights on Ontario students' overall achievement in specific subjects and skills.

TIMSS

The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) is an international assessment conducted under the auspices of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) that assesses the mathematics and science knowledge of students in Grades 4 and 8. TIMSS was first administered in 1995 and has been conducted every four years since, the last time in 2015. Sixty-four jurisdictions comprising 57 countries and seven benchmarking entities (regional jurisdictions such as provinces and states, including Ontario and Quebec) participated.



In Ontario, over 4500 Grade 4 students from 151 English and French schools participated in the assessment and in Grade 8, more than 4500 students from 138 English and French schools took part. The Canadian TIMSS results were published in 2017 and were broken down for each grade by province.

At the Grade 4 level in math, more than 90% of Canadian students reached at least the basic level of achievement. Sixty-nine percent reached at least the intermediate level, compared to 75% internationally. Within Canada, this proportion ranged from 55% in Alberta to 82% in Quebec, while 70% of students met the intermediate level in Ontario.

At the Grade 4 level in science, over 90% of Canadian students reached at least the basic level of achievement and 77% reached at least the intermediate level, a proportion that was the same as that achieved internationally. Among Canadian provinces, Ontario had the most students (79%) reaching the intermediate level while Alberta (73%) had the fewest.

At the Grade 8 level, the international assessment found that more than 90% of Canadian students achieved at least the basic level in each of science and math. Additionally in math,

TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE STUDY (TIMSS)

BASIC LEVEL

Mathematics and Science

90%

GRADES 4 AND 8

of Canadian students reached at least the basic level of achievement in each of math and science.

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL

Mathematics

GRADE 4

69%

International median: 75%
Ontario: 70%

GRADE 8

78%

International median: 62%
Ontario: 75%

Science

77%

International median: 77%
Ontario: 79%

78%

International median: 64%
Ontario: 77%

The TIMSS Canadian results were published in 2017.

78% of Canadian students reached at least the intermediate benchmark, a figure that is well above the international median of 62%. The figures for Ontario were 75%. In science, 78% of Canadian students reached at least the intermediate level, once again surpassing the international median, which was 64%. The figures for Ontario were 77%.



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PISA

PISA is an international program initiated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and undertaken every three years to assess the achievement of 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics and science. In 2015, the OECD added financial literacy and collaborative problem solving as measurable 21st-century skills. Financial literacy data from the assessment were released in 2017.

In 2012, an optional financial literacy component of the PISA assessment was introduced, and in 2015, Canada participated for the first time. Students in all provinces scored above the OECD average in financial literacy. Of Canadian students, 87% performed at or above Level 2, which the OECD considers

a baseline level of proficiency. Overall, Canadian students achieved a mean score of 533, which is well above the OECD average of 489.

The next PISA administration will take place in 2018 with reading as the major focus. In addition, PISA 2018 will introduce a new construct, global competence. The results of the 2018 assessment will be published in December 2019.

PROGRAMME FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT (PISA)

21ST-CENTURY SKILLS | FINANCIAL LITERACY

533 Mean score of Canadian students

OECD average mean score: 489

87% of Canadian students performed at or above level 2 in financial literacy.

Financial literacy data resulting from the assessment were released in 2017.



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Research

EQAO conducts research into the factors affecting student achievement and the quality of education by commissioning meaningful research studies and collaborating with stakeholders from other sectors on broader research studies. The agency's research program is designed to achieve two main purposes: position EQAO at the forefront of large-scale assessment and ensure EQAO data are used for their primary purpose (i.e., improving student learning).

EQAO's research interests centre on effective, high-quality educational experiences that support student achievement at the individual, classroom, school and system levels. In Ontario, such research requires consideration of diversity, inclusion and equity to include its several student populations, such as Indigenous students, English and French language learners and students with special education needs, and to account for various educational contexts.





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Focusing on a New Research Framework

In December 2017, the EQAO Board of Directors approved a new research framework to support a revitalized program to increase the agency's understanding of the specific factors affecting student achievement. EQAO is undertaking or collaborating on a number of research projects that will help the agency better understand students' learning experiences in Ontario. Research topics include

- ▶ the extent to which commonly used accommodations affect achievement on provincial assessments;
- ▶ the performance of new Canadians, including refugees;
- ▶ the opportunities presented by text-to-speech programs for math;
- ▶ student learning from early childhood to adolescence and
- ▶ links between health and achievement.

Leading Research Initiatives

EQAO conducts its own research to ensure continuous improvement of its methods and activities. In the past year, the agency has explored the relationship between certain student accommodations and the students' demonstration of learning.

During the 2017–2018 fiscal year, EQAO renewed its commitment to research and examined the achievement of students with special education needs—students who typically score lower on EQAO assessments than students without identified exceptionalities. The results demonstrate that accommodations level the field for students; however, the results are closely associated with past achievement as well as with student attitudes and learning strategies.

Through questionnaires administered to students, teachers and principals, EQAO is able to provide insights into the circumstances of students' learning environments and into how students view themselves as learners. Contextual, behavioural and attitudinal data at the individual, school, school board and provincial levels can offer important information as we collectively seek to support student achievement. EQAO is in the process of reviewing and optimizing its questionnaires to provide even more insights and to continue to meet the needs of all those interested in leveraging questionnaire data (e.g., teachers, principals, other members of the education community, policy-makers, researchers).

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Collaborating with Partners in Research

Because EQAO monitors every child's and youth's progress through their elementary- and secondary-school career in Ontario, the agency is recognized as a trustworthy source of education achievement data. EQAO is regularly approached by organizations interested in researching factors that influence students' performance and to contribute to research projects in the areas of student achievement, school effectiveness and best assessment practices. EQAO data also serve as the basis for academic inquiry in graduate and post-graduate programs, for in-school learning groups and at education industry conferences. EQAO is currently leading research to improve understanding of the learning journey of students with special education needs and students who enrol in applied courses.

The more schools provide opportunities, the more that learning would improve—not just in me, but in other students.

Student from Kingston



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Most of EQAO's research is conducted collaboratively with school boards, academic institutions and other stakeholders throughout the province. During the 2017–2018 fiscal year, EQAO was involved in exploring the achievement impact of text-to-speech applications (e.g., Read&Write for Google Chrome) in Grade 9 mathematics in collaboration with boards; collaborated with the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University on its new program of research seeking to understand student learning from early childhood through to adolescence; delivered EQAO data to the Hospital for Sick Children for a study pertaining to the academic performance of school-aged children with cleft or craniofacial conditions; and started field testing creativity questions on the agency's Student Questionnaire according to an agreement with People for Education.

To see what I've studied in class apply to real life, to the world—that I find exciting.

Student from Ottawa

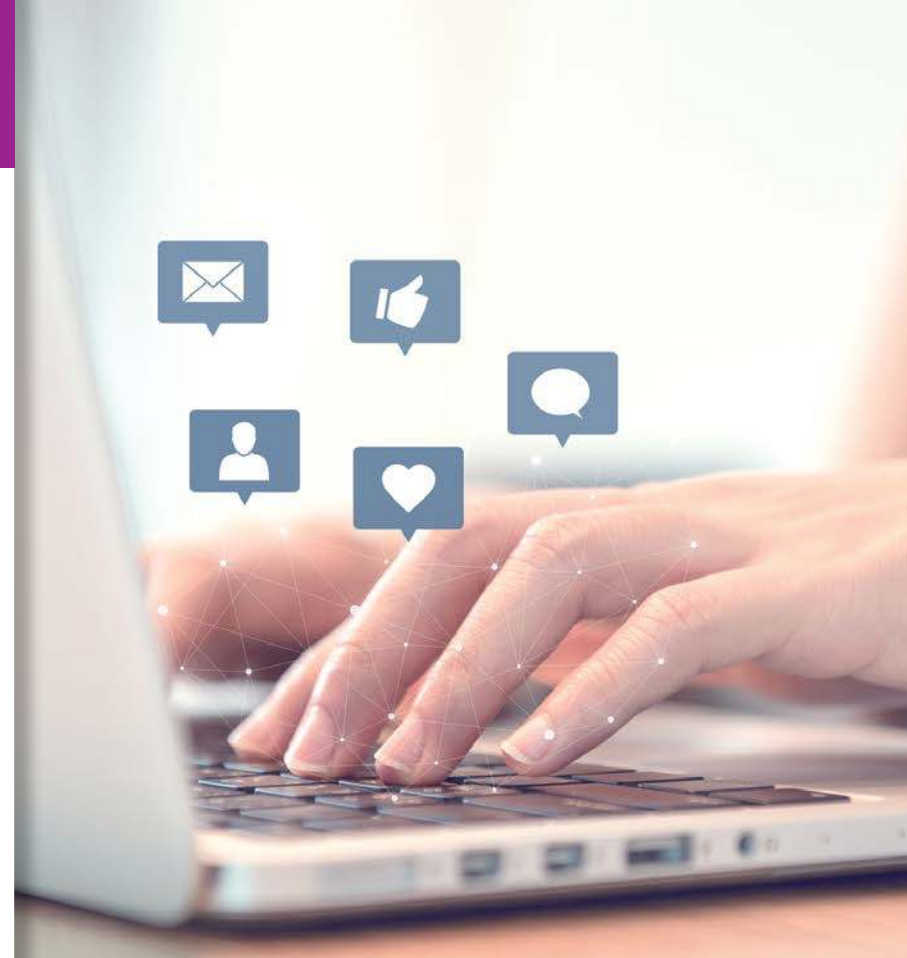


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Communication and Engagement

Since EQAO is a publicly funded organization with a mandate to provide information to benefit education in Ontario, it is important that the agency effectively provide information to all its key audiences and engage in genuine dialogue and constructive exchanges of ideas.

EQAO's approach to integrated communications leverages multiple channels and helps Ontarians understand the role of the agency and the value of the information it provides. This approach also facilitates close collaboration with schools and school boards during the administration of assessments, and during the analysis and use of EQAO data. EQAO regularly receives queries from the public, the media, the research community and others on a wide array of issues, and the agency strives to provide answers and guidance in a timely manner.





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There are multiple channels through which EQAO communicates and builds relationships with audiences, including the agency's

- ▶ Web site;
- ▶ social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube);
- ▶ media relations efforts;
- ▶ information centre;
- ▶ engagement with partners and stakeholders;
- ▶ presentations to school boards, schools, parents and other groups;
- ▶ events (e.g., EQAO Forum); and
- ▶ Dr. Bette M. Stephenson Recognition of Achievement program.

By increasing public awareness of the role and purpose of EQAO, the agency can help others to use EQAO information, data and research effectively. An important goal of the agency's communication efforts remains getting valuable, clear and compelling information about student learning and achievement into the public domain, and stimulating meaningful conversations about equity, quality and accountability in education. The purpose is for reflection and discussion to prompt action to help improve student learning and achievement.

Releasing EQAO Results

With each annual release of its assessment results, EQAO undertakes multi-faceted and province-wide bilingual public communications campaigns focusing mainly on media engagement, digital communications and stakeholder relations.

In August and September 2017, EQAO conducted an extensive media campaign that

- ▶ reached 66.7 million people through approximately 573 English and French news stories in traditional media, such as print, radio and television, and involving local and national outlets.
- ▶ increased engagement on the agency's English and French social media channels and their communities, which grew overall by almost 30% or 255 followers (the increase was 20% on Twitter, 32% on Facebook and 37% on LinkedIn).
- ▶ disseminated valuable information about student success and brought attention to current issues in student learning in different subjects and student populations. Examples are mathematics at elementary and secondary levels; achievement in the academic and applied course types and the performance of programs designed for students requiring special education needs.

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Optimizing Digital Communications

The importance of social media in the current information landscape means EQAO's social media channels have quickly become a means of engaging promptly and directly with audiences. The agency uses these channels to build and grow engaged and informed communities, and to provide insights about the organization and ways to use its information, data and research effectively. Social media is used to support assessment administration and the public release of results and school success stories as well as other significant agency endeavours. EQAO also contributes to online conversations and answers queries received through social media, and it aims to produce visually compelling posts to convey key messages more effectively.

Online platforms such as EQAO's Web site and social media channels allow the agency to contribute to education-related discussions among the general public. By using its considerable experience with large-scale assessments, the agency can help inform the conversation with evidence-based facts and data acquired through years of research and analysis. Modern communications technology can facilitate the immediate release of information pertaining to the agency's activities, the correction of misinformation when need be and the promotion of the agency's goals and values.

EQAO understands that audiences' communication preferences evolve, especially with respect to online platforms. For this reason, the agency regularly reviews its approach to communications, and considers whether platforms can be optimized and whether new channels need to be established.

Providing Direct Support to Schools and School Boards

EQAO works with schools and school boards daily. The agency—and indeed the province—relies on partners to ensure the effective administration of large-scale provincial assessments in accordance with stated policies and procedures. EQAO's information centre serves as a primary contact point for the education community and is dedicated to responding to queries received by phone and e-mail in a timely manner. In collaboration with the Ministry of Government and Consumer Services, EQAO introduced a new application, IceBar, in August 2017 to optimize the information centre's capabilities for call intake and tracking. The system also provides more up-front messaging options so that callers can obtain information faster. Additionally, the system enables a larger number of calls to be taken in queue. The information centre regularly responds to queries from schools and school boards, parents and guardians, students, EQAO assessment scorers and the general public. It received more than 30 000 calls this past year.



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A unique feature of EQAO is its School Support and Outreach team, which is dedicated to helping schools and school boards understand and analyze their students' achievement results and trends. This truly is a unique program in that no other organization tasked with administering large-scale assessments appears to have one. EQAO remains committed to supporting student learning; the initiatives of the School Support and Outreach team demonstrate EQAO's proactive efforts to engage with and help the education community in this regard. As the face of EQAO for many education-community members, the team offers capacity-building sessions and data-literacy workshops to classroom teachers, administrators, superintendents, board curriculum and program leads along with researchers, secondary school department heads and parents. During the 2017–2018 school year, the team worked directly with 46 English- and French-language school boards across the province.

I would like more hands-on work 'cause usually the way you best learn something is to do it yourself. Like you can listen to somebody tell you this a million times, but you're never going to get any better at it unless you do it yourself.

Student from Cobourg



Providing New Resources to Support Student Learning

In early 2018, after gathering feedback from teachers across the province, EQAO introduced a new resource, *Mathematics Resource: Released Assessment Questions by Strand, 2012–2016*, to better support teachers and educators by facilitating the analysis of assessment results. The resource contains multiple-choice and open-response questions from the primary- and junior-division assessments, sorted by strand, along with an indication of the category of knowledge and skills and overall expectation each question is mapped to, as well as sample student responses to the open-response questions. This well-received resource was developed to support teachers and simplify their work helping individual students meet curriculum expectations. The English tweet announcing this resource was the subject of more than 630 interactions and was viewed almost 46 000 times.

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Highlighting the Value of EQAO Data

Each year, EQAO hosts a forum to provide a unique opportunity for education stakeholders from across the province to connect and engage through workshops on different topics, to hear about the diverse experience of experts in the field and to recognize communities who have played a successful part in supporting student achievement using data from EQAO assessments. The 2017–2018 fiscal year was exceptional in that the agency hosted two forums, the first (“Building Data Literacy in Ontario’s Education Community”) in May 2017 and the second (“Equity, Data and a Culture of Hope”) in February 2018.

In recognition of the children and youth EQAO supports, the agency asked students from every region of Ontario to share by video their learning experiences. The resulting short film featuring many of these students’ reflections was introduced at EQAO’s 2018 forum and made available for public viewing on the agency’s Web site shortly after. EQAO is honoured to feature student voices and is thankful to all participating students for sharing their goals, hopes and dreams with the education community and the rest of Ontario.



Dr. Bette M. Stephenson,
Director Emeritus

Recognizing Strategies that Effectively Support Student Learning

EQAO’s Dr. Bette M. Stephenson Recognition of Achievement program recognizes Ontario schools for their effective use of data to support the progress of their students. Through this recognition, EQAO aims to assist other schools by sharing the promising practices of the schools it profiles. The media coverage resulting from this recognition disseminates the positive outcome for students that the agency’s data help promote.

Seventeen schools were recognized this year for supporting growth in outcomes for students with special education needs. In each of these schools, educators used EQAO data and other information to develop strategies that strengthened student achievement.

Even if I mess up today, I know there is another chance tomorrow. It is very inclusive.

Student from Oakville



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The following schools were honoured at the Dr. Bette M. Stephenson Recognition of Achievement luncheon that took place at the February 2018 EQAO forum:

D. Roy Kennedy Public School
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

South Carleton High School
Ottawa-Carleton District School Board

McKellar Park Central School
Lakehead District School Board

Pius XII Catholic Elementary School
Sudbury Catholic District School Board

St. Martin Elementary School
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board

Superior Collegiate and Vocational Institute
Lakehead District School Board

Beverly Heights Middle School
Toronto District School Board

Danforth Collegiate and Technical Institute
Toronto District School Board

St. Bernadette Catholic School
Durham Catholic District School Board

Sir William Gage Middle School
Peel District School Board

Holy Names Catholic High School
Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board

St. Dominic Savio Catholic School
Waterloo Catholic District School Board

École élémentaire catholique Laurier-Carrière
Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est

École secondaire publique Gisèle-Lalonde
Conseil des écoles publiques de l'Est de l'Ontario

École publique Héritage
Conseil scolaire public du Nord-Est de l'Ontario

École secondaire catholique de Hearst
Conseil scolaire catholique de district des Grandes Rivières

École secondaire du Sacré-Cœur
Conseil scolaire catholique du Nouvel-Ontario

Exchanging Knowledge About Large-Scale Assessments with Other Jurisdictions

EQAO is highly respected nationally and internationally for its first-class large-scale assessment program, its unique approach to outreach and its useful research initiatives. The agency regularly hosts delegations from other jurisdictions to share its historical perspective, mandate and principles of equity and inclusion, along with information about the context in which its data support school boards in improving student achievement. Sharing the knowledge accumulated and the lessons learned over the past 20 years is part of interacting with professionals from other provinces and countries, and this has proven fundamental to maintaining an open dialogue and a direct exchange of research-based practices with other jurisdictions. During the 2017–2018 fiscal year, EQAO made 12 presentations for international delegations from Australia, China, Korea, Norway, Russia and Wales.

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Business and Governance

EQAO provides reports that contribute to continuous improvement and accountability in Ontario's publicly funded education system. The agency is also committed to transparency and operates in accordance with best practices in governance.



EQAO recognizes the importance of remaining accountable to Ontario taxpayers and, as an agency of the Government of Ontario, abides by the *Agencies and Appointments Directive* to set its strategic direction every three to five years. This annual report describes the second year of activities in EQAO's current three-year strategic cycle; additional corporate and financial information can be found in EQAO's *Business Plan, 2016–2019*.



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Providing effective governance in accordance with its mandate means the agency monitors and remains aligned with provincial legislation and government directives, and that it updates its guidelines and protocols within established general timelines. The past fiscal year has seen EQAO move forward on its multi-faceted modernization project that touches on all its strategic priorities. Additionally, the agency's modernization initiative will be updated as required to ensure alignment with the Ministry of Education's curriculum refresh, and its review of assessment and reporting.

Leading the Organization to Prepare for the Future

EQAO is governed by a board of directors appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. During the 2017–2018 fiscal year, EQAO's board of directors held six regularly scheduled meetings to set the goals, objectives and strategic direction for the agency within its mandate as defined by the *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act, 1996*; to review and approve EQAO's business plan, financial statements, annual report and risk assessments; and to review business cases for large expenditures.

Relying on Committed and Professional Staff

Throughout the year and amid fluctuations in personnel, EQAO remained dedicated to enhancing the equity, quality and

accountability of the Ontario education system and to working in close collaboration with the education community. A team of 97 full-time employees was joined by contingent workers hired on an as-needed basis to deliver the agency's core mandate and by contracted vendors to support staff in carrying out the agency's activities. EQAO's modernization initiative involved the creation of a new team of permanent and temporary workers that is still evolving. All vendors under contract with EQAO are hired using a transparent procurement and recruitment process that is overseen by EQAO management and staff in accordance with Government of Ontario guidelines and regulations.

EQAO's accomplishments are made possible through the continued dedication and support of its employees. The agency recognizes the value and expertise of every member of its team and acknowledges its staff's strong commitment. EQAO thanks its entire staff for their valuable contribution and hard work, which has allowed the agency to become the respected leader in large-scale assessment programs it is today. The agency looks forward to continuing to benefit from its employees' expertise as it seeks to strengthen its assessment program and adapt its activities for the advancement of Ontario's public education system and the benefit of every student.



Renewing Our Focus on Equity and Inclusion

For EQAO to measure the effectiveness of Ontario's publicly funded education system, students write large-scale assessments at key stages of their academic development. This allows for continuity in monitoring student achievement by cohort and individually, and in identifying areas that require further intervention and support. EQAO is committed to collaborating with Ontario's education community to ensure that students are given the opportunity to write EQAO assessments whenever possible.

EQAO strives to meet the needs of all students and has consistently permitted access to certain accommodations that are consistent with regular classroom assessment for students with special education needs. Additionally, certain provisions are permitted for those whose first language is not the language of instruction.

One important focus of EQAO's modernization initiative is large-scale assessments. With constant technological advances, classrooms are relying more on digital tools for teaching, and there is a wider array of means available to assess academic and other transferable skills. EQAO seeks to continue to collaborate with students, parents, educators and other Ontarians to modernize its assessments in order to

- ▶ reflect today's classroom more closely;
- ▶ measure skills that EQAO does not currently measure; and
- ▶ facilitate some online customization to accommodate students' unique learning needs.

During the 2017–2018 school year, changes to accommodations were implemented to better serve students and educators. Students no longer required Individual Education Plans (IEPs) to receive extra-time accommodations or to request preferential seating in the assessment room during the administration of the Grade 9 mathematics assessment or the OSSLT/TPCL. The purpose of this change was to reflect regular classroom practices and offer flexibility for students who regularly receive additional time to complete assessments. Furthermore, for all EQAO assessments, the agency indicated that students would no longer require an IEP if they needed a quiet, individual or small group setting, or prompts if they had severe attention problems and were at risk of being off-task for significant periods of time.





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As an example of EQAO's commitment to updating its accommodation policies, in 2016 the agency was pleased to collaborate with school boards on the introduction of Read&Write for Google Chrome as an assistive-technology option. The agency continues to offer several versions of its assessments in response to requests from educators and administrators across the province. Assessments are produced in a number of different formats, including Braille, audio and large-text versions, Kurzweil 1000 and 3000, Word Q, Premier, Read&Write Gold, accessible Word and accessible PDF.

EQAO has been reviewing its equity and inclusion strategies to reflect Ontario's diversity further and to align itself with the Ministry of Education's initiatives to ensure equity for all

I know it's quite difficult coming into high school off the reserve so just having people there to help, to motivate you to stay in school in hopes that they help you reach your goals, I feel the teachers do a good job with that, and even your peers help too.

Student from Brantford

students. With the help of educators, independent experts and agency staff, the agency deliberately started by analyzing best accommodation practices for students with special education needs across the province. This ongoing review also considers the experiences of schools with new Canadians who have not experienced Ontario's education system and curriculum for long, as well as the responsibilities of school districts as part of the Ministry's *Ontario Education Equity Action Plan*. Opportunities will be created for the education community to provide feedback on EQAO's direction in the near future, and the agency aims to have new accommodation policies developed by fall 2018.

Additionally, EQAO established an internal Accessibility Committee to ensure the agency will be ready to meet the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* requirements by 2021 by preventing and removing barriers to accessibility. In order to ensure compliance by the required deadlines, the committee reviews the agency's protocols, procedures and procurement practices with the accessibility of all its products and services (e.g., Web site, assessments and customer service channels) in mind.



Listening to Advisory Committees

Part of EQAO's governance structure are several advisory committees that help to guide the agency's activities and inform thinking on different aspects of the agency's work:

EQAO's Advisory Committee: Formerly the Assessment Advisory Committee, which was made up of stakeholders who provided advice to the CEO on assessment practices, this committee currently offers advice on all of the agency's activities. In addition, committee members are asked for input on key EQAO policies and programs, and the committee works to find feasible solutions to problems raised by members.

Equity Council: This council's external experts provide advice concerning equity at each stage of EQAO's modernization. Their input helps to identify and mitigate any discriminatory biases and systemic barriers to ensure equity of opportunity for all students regardless of their background or circumstances.

Modernization in Measurement Advisory Panel: This panel was established in fall 2017 to support EQAO in meeting its modernization objectives, specifically those related to the agency's assessment and reporting activities. The panel's members offer insights on measurement methodologies, analytics practices and knowledge-sharing approaches. The panel is composed of experts who examine facets of large-scale assessment programs such as the experiences of assessment users, authenticity and equity, psychometrics and technology, and knowledge mobilization.

In spring 2018, EQAO will add a fourth committee to its advisory model. The EQAO Student Advisory Committee will be a new group that helps foster a two-way conversation between Ontario's students and EQAO. Students are the focus of EQAO's work, and the agency values learners' perspectives on all aspects of its programs. As EQAO continuously seeks to improve, it is striving to ensure that students' voices are informing its thinking. The EQAO Student Advisory Committee will be a unique forum for students from diverse backgrounds to share ideas and experiences.



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Modernizing to Better Support Student Learning

While some questions remain with respect to EQAO's future activities, the agency has moved forward where possible with its modernization project, with the strong support of the Ministry of Education. EQAO has continued to collaborate fully with the Ministry on modernization activities to better meet the needs of students, the education community and the rest of the province of Ontario.

While awaiting government direction and a renewed mandate to inform its modernization initiative, EQAO has undertaken discovery activities as part of a stabilization program. This program aims to build a renewed foundation for the agency's operations that is efficient, stable, secure, reliable, accessible and scalable. This discovery work will inform the business case

for the program, and is focused on the infrastructure renewal (e.g., IT network and software management) and business continuity needs of the agency (e.g., privacy and security enhancements), to better position it for its upcoming modernization.

Throughout this process and in consultation with the Ministry of Education, EQAO has remained committed to incorporating feedback while basing decision making on its research and on promising practices. This approach enables the agency to

support its modernization initiative and better meet the needs of students, the education community and the rest of the province of Ontario.

To prepare for this transformation and seamlessly adapt the agency's activities, EQAO has also conducted an in-depth risk evaluation that will result in a revised risk-management strategy.

Managing Public Resources Responsibly

EQAO is dedicated to effective business practices, and the agency monitors and evaluates business processes to promote continuous improvement in its activities and functions. Despite a reduction in its operating budget by more than 20% over the past 15 years and a further reduction in 2012, the agency continues to ensure financial and procurement accountability along with strong service delivery through all of its operations.

Ontario's mandated large-scale assessment program measures how well students across the province are meeting the numeracy and literacy expectations defined in *The Ontario Curriculum* at key stages of their academic development. During the 2017–2018 fiscal year, the cost of operating EQAO, which reports on the quality of publicly funded education and helps to foster accountability, was approximately \$31 million. This amounts to a cost of \$15.69 of the \$12 000 spent annually per student enrolled in an Ontario public school. In addition, EQAO's budget represents approximately 0.13% of the Government's overall education expenditures in Ontario.

This independent evaluation of the public education system is delivered at a cost that works out to

\$15⁶⁹ per student enrolled in an Ontario public school.*

* In the 2017–2018 fiscal year

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Leveraging Financial and Non-Financial Resources to Meet Objectives

The agency effectively leverages human, financial and material resources to meet the needs of its current scope of activities. Depending on the direction of the Government of Ontario with respect to the agency's future, it is conceivable that different resources will be necessary.

Mitigating Risk Across the Agency

Risk-mitigation strategies are currently in place across the agency and are reported to EQAO's board of directors and the Ministry of Education. As part of its modernization initiative, EQAO is undertaking an extensive risk analysis of all of its programs and teams. A full risk-assessment report will be finalized in spring 2018 and, depending on the report's findings, further mitigation strategies may be implemented.

EQAO ensures there are processes in place at all times to control quality and mitigate errors that could affect the integrity of its assessment results and its data, as the latter are key to fulfilling the mandate of the agency. In January 2018, following a printing error, the agency enhanced its quality-control measures to ensure this issue does not repeat itself. This was the first time such an event had occurred, and the agency's ability to provide accurate and useful data on student achievement was not affected.



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Year Ended March 31, 2018

EQAO's audited financial results for operations ending March 31, 2018, which were funded through Ministry of Education allocations.



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INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT

To the Board of Directors of the
Education Quality and Accountability Office

We have audited the accompanying financial statements of the Education Quality and Accountability Office, which comprise the statement of financial position as at March 31, 2018, the statements of operations and accumulated surplus, changes in net financial assets and cash flows for the year then ended, and notes, comprising a summary of significant accounting policies and other explanatory information.

Management's Responsibility for the Financial Statements

Management is responsible for the preparation and fair presentation of these financial statements in accordance with Canadian public sector accounting standards, and for such internal control as management determines is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

Auditors' Responsibility

Our responsibility is to express an opinion on these financial statements based on our audit. We conducted our audit in accordance with Canadian generally accepted auditing standards. Those standards require that we comply with ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements are free from material misstatement.

An audit involves performing procedures to obtain audit evidence about the amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. The procedures selected depend on our judgment, including the assessment of the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error. In making those risk assessments, we consider internal control relevant to the entity's preparation and fair presentation of the financial statements in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the entity's internal control. An audit also includes evaluating the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates made by management, as well as evaluating the overall presentation of the financial statements.

We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our audit opinion.

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Opinion

In our opinion, the financial statements present fairly, in all material respects, the financial position of the Education Quality and Accountability Office as at March 31, 2018, and its results of operations and its cash flows for the year then ended in accordance with Canadian public sector accounting standards.

Chartered Professional Accountants, Licensed Public Accountants

June 6, 2018
Vaughan, Canada



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EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Statement of Financial Position

March 31, 2018, with comparative information for 2017

	2018	2017
Financial Assets		
Cash	\$ 1,590,434	\$ 1,057,123
Cash - board restricted fund (note 2(b))	6,969,154	6,602,318
Accounts receivable (note 3)	1,974,320	645,151
Tangible capital assets held for resale (note 5)	250,000	—
	<u>10,783,908</u>	<u>8,304,592</u>
Financial Liabilities		
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	3,241,441	2,160,863
Net financial assets	7,542,467	6,143,729
Non-Financial Assets		
Prepaid expenses (note 4)	613,190	1,010,291
Tangible capital assets (note 5)	884,460	671,878
	<u>1,497,650</u>	<u>1,682,169</u>
Commitments (note 6)		
Accumulated surplus (note 2)	\$ 9,040,117	\$ 7,825,898

See accompanying notes to financial statements.

On behalf of the Board:

_____ Chairman

_____ Chief Executive Officer

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Statement of Operations and Accumulated Surplus

Year ended March 31, 2018, with comparative information for 2017

	2018 Budget (note 10)	2018 Actual	2017 Actual
Revenue:			
Ministry of Education:			
Base allocation payments	\$ 31,719,961	\$ 32,431,323	\$ 31,443,684
Other	–	423,234	593,090
	<u>31,719,961</u>	<u>32,854,557</u>	<u>32,036,774</u>
Expenses:			
Service and rental	16,059,395	16,225,420	18,638,971
Salaries and wages	12,581,469	12,387,720	11,998,134
Transportation and communication	2,377,493	2,335,037	1,830,026
Supplies and equipment	701,604	692,161	2,565,081
	<u>31,719,961</u>	<u>31,640,338</u>	<u>35,032,212</u>
Annual surplus (deficit)	–	1,214,219	(2,995,438)
Accumulated surplus, beginning of year	7,825,898	7,825,898	10,821,336
Accumulated surplus, end of year	<u>\$ 7,825,898</u>	<u>\$ 9,040,117</u>	<u>\$ 7,825,898</u>
Accumulated surplus comprises:			
Externally restricted		\$ 2,070,963	\$ 1,223,580
Internally restricted (note 2(b))		6,969,154	6,602,318
		<u>\$ 9,040,117</u>	<u>\$ 7,825,898</u>

See accompanying notes to financial statements.

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Statement of Changes in Net Financial Assets

Year ended March 31, 2018, with comparative information for 2017

	2018 Budget (note 10)	2018 Actual	2017 Actual
Annual surplus (deficit)	\$ -	\$ 1,214,219	\$ (2,995,438)
Acquisition of tangible capital assets	-	(530,957)	(192,668)
Amortization and impairment of tangible capital assets (note 5)	363,268	318,375	2,209,235
	363,268	(212,582)	2,016,567
Acquisition of prepaid expenses	-	(613,190)	(1,010,291)
Use of prepaid expenses	-	1,010,291	1,299,480
	-	397,101	289,189
Increase (decrease) in net financial assets	363,268	1,398,738	(689,682)
Net financial assets, beginning of year	6,143,729	6,143,729	6,833,411
Net financial assets, end of year	\$ 6,506,997	\$ 7,542,467	\$ 6,143,729

See accompanying notes to financial statements.

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Statement of Cash Flows

Year ended March 31, 2018, with comparative information for 2017

	2018	2017
Cash provided by (used in):		
Operating activities:		
Annual surplus (deficit)	\$ 1,214,219	\$ (2,995,438)
Items not involving cash:		
Amortization and impairment of tangible capital assets (note 5)	318,375	2,209,235
	1,532,594	(786,203)
Change in non-cash operating working capital:		
Accounts receivable	(1,329,169)	13,294
Tangible capital assets held for resale	(250,000)	-
Accounts payable and accrued liabilities	1,080,578	(259,832)
Prepaid expenses	397,101	289,189
	1,431,104	(743,552)
Capital activities:		
Acquisition of tangible capital assets	(530,957)	(192,668)
Investing activities:		
Change to board restricted fund	(366,836)	(540,046)
Increase (decrease) in cash	533,311	(1,476,266)
Cash, beginning of year	1,057,123	2,533,389
Cash, end of year	\$ 1,590,434	\$ 1,057,123

See accompanying notes to financial statements.

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Notes to Financial Statements

Year ended March 31, 2018

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (the "Agency") was established by the Province of Ontario by the EQAO Act, June 1996. The Agency was created to assure greater accountability and to contribute to the enhancement of the quality of education in Ontario. This is done through assessments and reviews based on objective, reliable and relevant information, and the timely public release of that information along with recommendations for system improvement.

1. Significant accounting policies:

These financial statements, which have been prepared in accordance with Canadian public sector accounting standards, as established by the Public Sector Accounting Board of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada ("CPA Canada") and, where applicable, the recommendations of the Accounting Standards Board of CPA Canada, reflect the accounting policies set out below:

(a) Revenue recognition:

The Agency is funded by the Ministry of Education in accordance with established budget arrangements. The Agency receives base allocation payments in accordance with the fiscal year's approved budget. These transfer payments are recognized in the financial statements in the year in which the transfer is authorized and all eligibility criteria have been met, except when a transfer gives rise to a liability.

Other revenue is recognized at the time the service is rendered.

(b) Tangible capital assets:

Tangible capital assets are stated at cost less accumulated amortization. Tangible capital assets are amortized on a straight-line basis over their estimated useful lives as follows:

Computer equipment	3 to 10 years
Furniture and fixtures	5 years

For assets acquired or brought into use during the year, amortization is calculated from the month following that in which additions come into operation.

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Notes to Financial Statements (continued)

Year ended March 31, 2018

1. Significant accounting policies (continued):

The Agency considers the carrying value of tangible capital assets when events or changes in circumstances indicate that the carrying value of an asset may not be recoverable or when a tangible capital asset no longer contributes to the Agency's ability to provide goods and services. If the Agency expects an asset to generate cash flows less than the asset's carrying value, at the lowest level of identifiable cash flows, the Agency recognizes a loss for the difference between the asset's carrying value and its fair value.

(c) Measurement uncertainty:

The preparation of financial statements requires management to make estimates and assumptions that affect the reported amounts of assets and liabilities, disclosure of contingent assets and liabilities at the date of the financial statements and the reported amounts of revenue and expenses during the year. Such estimates include providing for amortization and impairment of tangible capital assets. Actual results could differ from those estimates.

(d) Newly adopted accounting standards:

- (i) The Agency adopted Public Sector ("PS") 3210, Assets effective April 1, 2017. This standard provides a definition of assets and further expands that definition as it relates to control and includes some disclosure requirements related to economic resources that are not recorded as assets to provide the user with better information about the types of resources available to the public sector entity. The adoption of this standard as at April 1, 2017 did not have a material impact on the Agency's fiscal year 2018 financial statements.
- (ii) The Agency adopted PS 3320, Contingent Assets effective April 1, 2017. This standard provides a definition of contingent assets and has two basis characteristics. It includes specific disclosure requirements for contingent assets when the occurrence of the confirming event is likely. The adoption of this standard as at April 1, 2017 did not have a material impact on the Agency's fiscal year 2018 financial statements.

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Notes to Financial Statements (continued)

Year ended March 31, 2018

1. Significant accounting policies (continued):

(iii) The Agency adopted PS 3380, Contractual Rights effective April 1, 2017. This standard provides contractual rights to future assets and revenue. Information about a public sector entity's contractual rights should be disclosed in notes or schedules to the financial statements and should include descriptions about their nature and extent and the timing. The adoption of this standard as at April 1, 2017 did not have a material impact on the Agency's fiscal year 2018 financial statements.

(iv) The Agency adopted PS 2200, Related Party Disclosures effective April 1, 2017. This standard provides related party disclosures and defines related parties. Related parties could be either an entity or an individual. Related parties exist when one party has the ability to control or has shared control over another party. Individuals that are key management personnel or close family members may also be related parties. The adoption of this standard as at April 1, 2017 did not have a material impact on the Agency's fiscal year 2018 financial statements.

(v) The Agency adopted PS 3420, Inter-entity Transactions effective April 1, 2017. This standard provides measurement of related party transactions and includes a decision tree to support the standard. Transactions are recorded at carrying amounts with some exceptions. The adoption of this standard as at April 1, 2017 did not have a material impact on the Agency's fiscal year 2018 financial statements.

2. Accumulated surplus:

(a) Externally restricted accumulated surplus:

The Agency receives base allocation payments in accordance with the year's approved budget. Actual expenses incurred in the year could differ from the budgeted amounts. The difference between base allocation payments received and actual expenses incurred are tracked separately as externally restricted accumulated surplus.

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Notes to Financial Statements (continued)

Year ended March 31, 2018

2. Accumulated surplus (continued):

(b) Internally restricted accumulated surplus:

A board restricted fund was established by a Board of Directors' ("Board") resolution for the purpose of examining assessment processes and researching emerging methodologies in large scale assessment in order to maintain Ontario's high quality assessment programs as best of class. The fund is currently invested in a Royal Bank of Canada current account. The Agency has the authority to retain any revenue that is not provincial funding according to the EQAO Act, June 1996, the Agencies and Appointment Directive and the Financial Administration Act.

	2018	2017
Balance, beginning of year	\$ 6,602,318	\$ 6,062,272
Appropriation of other income	309,850	507,323
Interest income earned on funds	113,384	84,106
Cost associated with fee-based administration (note 8)	(56,398)	(51,383)
Balance, end of year	\$ 6,969,154	\$ 6,602,318

In a prior year, the Board approved a motion to fully restrict the internally restricted accumulated surplus for the Board-approved IT strategy.

3. Accounts receivable:

Included in accounts receivable is a transfer payment in the amount of \$1,891,740 (2017 - \$297,446) due from the Ministry of Education.

4. Prepaid expenses:

Prepaid expenses are paid in cash and recorded as assets before they are used or consumed. As at year end, the balance is made up of the following amounts:

	2018	2017
Prepaid expenses	\$ 266,246	\$ 351,841
Prepaid secondees	346,944	658,450
	\$ 613,190	\$ 1,010,291

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Notes to Financial Statements (continued)

Year ended March 31, 2018

5. Tangible capital assets:

			2018	2017
	Cost	Accumulated amortization	Net book value	Net book value
Computer equipment	\$ 3,163,171	\$ 2,383,279	\$ 779,892	\$ 584,054
Furniture and fixtures	433,759	329,191	104,568	87,824
	\$ 3,596,930	\$ 2,712,470	\$ 884,460	\$ 671,878

Amortization and impairment of tangible capital assets recorded in the current year amounts to \$318,375 (2017 - \$2,209,235).

As at March 31, 2018, the Agency approved plans to sell certain tangible capital assets (TCA); accordingly, the TCA of \$250,000 (2017 - nil) has been reported as a financial asset in the statement of financial position.

6. Lease commitments:

The Agency leases premises under certain operating lease arrangements with expiry dates up to December 31, 2022. Under the terms of the leases, the Agency is required to pay an annual base rent, which is predetermined based on square footage rates plus operating and maintenance charges. Future minimum annual scheduled payments are as follows:

2019	\$ 1,420,608
2020	1,228,190
2021	898,850
2022	898,850
2023	674,137
	\$ 5,120,635

EDUCATION QUALITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

Notes to Financial Statements (continued)

Year ended March 31, 2018

7. Financial instruments:

The Agency's financial instruments consist of cash, board restricted fund, accounts receivable and accounts payable and accrued liabilities. Financial instruments are recorded at fair value on initial recognition. The fair values of these financial instruments approximate their carrying values due to their short-term nature.

It is management's opinion that the Agency is not exposed to significant interest, currency or credit risk arising from these financial instruments.

8. Allocation of expenses:

Incremental administration expenses are allocated to fee-based administration revenue. Expenses are allocated proportionately based on the number of individual student assessments administered.

9. Liquidity risk:

Liquidity risk is the risk that the Agency will be unable to fulfill its obligations on a timely basis or at a reasonable cost. The Agency manages its liquidity risk by monitoring its operating requirements. The Agency prepares budget and cash forecasts to ensure it has sufficient funds to fulfill its obligations.

There have been no significant changes to the liquidity risk exposure from 2017.

10. Budget:

The budget information has been derived from the budget approved by the Board on August 24, 2017.

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Performance Targets,
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Assessment and Evaluation

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PERFORMANCE TARGETS



GOALS

Conduct modern assessments with quality and integrity, and leverage technology to create, administer and score assessments.

OBJECTIVES

Ensure EQAO assessments, processes and results have the highest technical quality and meet national and international standards.

Evaluate the public accountability of school boards, particularly how they share their EQAO results with the communities they serve.

Ensure school boards use and share EQAO data, information and research with parents and community.



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PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Administer and report on the assessments for the 2016–2017 school year.

Begin planning and initial assembly of a dedicated Transformation team focused on business improvements and the future assessment program.

Visit schools across the province to inform the agency on current student experiences in classrooms, and conduct an updated jurisdictional review of assessment programs by March 2018.

Research alternative assessment models, equating plans and reporting plans by March 2019.

Explore Ministry of Education initiatives that may affect the future of large-scale assessment, including the Education Equity Action Plan, the broadband initiative and the use of digital mathematics tools and resources.

Develop an item bank system to be integrated into EQAO's test development activities.

Coordinate Ontario's participation in national and international assessments (PCAP, TIMSS, ICILS, TALIS and PISA) and provide support for analyzing and reporting the results as they are released.

Annually monitor completion of teacher and principal questionnaires by school boards.

Annually monitor boards' direct and indirect sharing of EQAO results with the communities they serve.



PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

EQAO completed the administration and scoring of the assessments for the 2016–2017 school year. All assessment results were reported on schedule.

EQAO assembled a new Transformation team to support the development of its modernization initiative.

EQAO completed the report on the jurisdictional review of large-scale assessment programs by the end of the fiscal year. Additionally, the agency developed and published an information paper in support of the Independent Review of Assessment and Reporting.

EQAO's jurisdictional scan of reporting practices for large-scale assessment programs identified key themes across North America, Australia and Wales that were related to Ontario's context. A review of additional jurisdictions will occur in 2018–2019.

EQAO met regularly with Ministry partners to update its business plan and launched an Equity and Inclusion Committee to help manage agency activities in this area.

EQAO developed a prototype and continues to explore item bank options.

EQAO coordinated the logistics of the administration of PCAP, PISA and TIMSS with schools and boards.

EQAO successfully compiled the research concerning its teacher and principal questionnaires, and is currently updating these to serve the education community better.

EQAO continued to collaborate with school boards to facilitate the sharing of data and information.



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PERFORMANCE TARGETS



GOALS

Conduct and commission meaningful research studies.



OBJECTIVES

Facilitate the linking of EQAO assessment data to data from other sources in the broader education sector.



PERFORMANCE MEASURES

By June 2018, expand research on full-day kindergarten to explore the relationships between EDI domains and achievement in elementary schools.

By June 2018, undertake a practitioner-based research project exploring the relationship between socio-demographic factors and student achievement outcomes.



PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

EQAO collaborated with the Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University on its new program of research that seeks to understand student learning from early childhood through to adolescence.

EQAO presented a research framework to its board of directors by end of year.



Communication and Engagement

PERFORMANCE TARGETS



GOALS

Report the results of EQAO's assessments, evaluations and research.



OBJECTIVES

Provide user-friendly, interactive, technically supported access to EQAO results.



PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Deliver public media campaigns that report on EQAO's provincial assessment results, reaching at least 20 million people while earning a campaign quality score for achieving established campaign success criteria across education stakeholder groups of 85% or greater.

Introduce a board-level interactive electronic reporting application to the public to increase understanding of EQAO data by September 2018.

Begin transition of all EQAO's aggregate reports from paper to digital in September 2018.



PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

EQAO successfully executed a campaign from August to October 2017, reaching 66.7 million people through 573 news stories in traditional media, and increasing social media engagement by almost 30%.

As EQAO is still awaiting direction from the government about the agency's future activities, these projects are currently on hold.

EQAO undertook a reporting review and developed recommendations for future implementation.

Engage with Ontarians in using EQAO information, data and research effectively.

Increase public awareness of the role and purpose of EQAO.

Provide responsive information to specific stakeholder groups to increase their knowledge and effective use of information from EQAO's large-scale assessments.

EQAO undertook several initiatives (e.g., EQAO forums, meetings in schools and school boards) to increase stakeholders' knowledge and effective use of data. Through its information centre, the agency also continues to respond to phone and e-mail queries in a timely manner.

Use social media to build and grow engaged and informed communities.

EQAO continued to develop and update an effective social media strategy to inform the public and stakeholders and to respond to queries about its activities and other large-scale-assessment-related matters.

Engage stakeholders in the appropriate use of EQAO data and research to support accountability and evidence-informed decision making.

Modernize operational communications with schools and boards to make assessment administration more efficient.

EQAO upgraded the application it uses to receive calls through the Information Centre and continues to refine channels for two-way communications, including memoranda.

Increase access to EQAO information, data and research.

Provide Ontarians with accessible systems and resources to obtain EQAO information, data and research.

Produce accessible materials to comply with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

EQAO continued to adhere to accessibility guidelines and to review its Web content regularly to ensure it remains compliant.

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PERFORMANCE TARGETS



GOALS

Provide effective governance for the agency.

Ensure effective business practices.

Foster a strong organizational culture.

OBJECTIVES

Ensure that the internal governance and operational policy frameworks support the agency's operation.

Ensure that the agency remains aligned to provincial legislation, directives and submission requirements.

Ensure financial and acquisition accountability and exceptional service delivery.

Monitor and evaluate business processes to promote continuous improvement.

Promote a motivated and engaged team environment that recognizes the unique contributions of all employees.



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PERFORMANCE MEASURES

Ensure all administrative policies, protocols and procedures that apply to the board of directors, staff and stakeholder committees consistently align with provincial directives and legislation and are updated within established timelines.

Continuously monitor provincial legislation and directives and ensure all relevant agency submissions are provided to the Ontario Public Service within established timelines.

Ensure annual financial accountability for the agency through quarterly reporting and budgetary controls in alignment with Public Sector Accounting Board guidelines.

Efficiently manage procurement processes by adhering to applicable current directives and operational policies.

Monitor and annually modify the assessment cycle to improve efficiency, privacy and security.

Conduct agency-wide privacy impact assessment and threat and risk assessment by March 2018.

Document current-state business architecture and identify improvement initiatives in the areas of internal business operations, IT infrastructure and external-user experience.

Refine and create initiatives that support a positive work environment by March 2019.

Develop tactics for internal information and knowledge sharing throughout all levels of the agency by March 2019.

By March 2018, expand existing types of employee recognition activities and explore new ones to formalize EQAO's recognition program.

Develop a student practicum placement program in collaboration with various colleges and universities by February 2018.

By March 2018, initiate an internal EQAO Equity and Inclusivity Committee with representation throughout the agency.



PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS

EQAO monitored and updated its policies, protocols, procedures and internal documents as needed, and communicated them to appropriate parties as applicable.

EQAO continued to align itself with the Ministry's directives and the Ontario Public Service's guidelines and protocols.

EQAO followed all regulations pertaining to financial and procurement accountability, and auditors reviewed accounting files as part of regular practice.

EQAO monitored its compliance with new and existing policies, including the procurement directive.

EQAO ensured independent reviews of operations were conducted.

EQAO concluded these assessments by year end.

EQAO documented current-state business processes across the agency and identified areas for improvement.

EQAO continued to strengthen its internal-communication strategy to ensure that agency staff received pertinent information through appropriate channels in a timely manner. The strategy also seeks to foster an open and inclusive workplace culture that welcomes feedback and encourages idea sharing.

The internal communications strategy is in place and initiatives were rolled out regularly throughout the year.

EQAO implemented this initiative.

EQAO continues to explore the feasibility of this program.

EQAO launched the Equity and Inclusion Committee in fall 2017.



Education Quality and
Accountability Office



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