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Results prompt testing dialogue

Teachers may hear from parents who want to understand more about the recent test results from Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). EQAO is encouraging parents and guardians to examine the results and become “active and informed partners in their (children’s) education and achievement.” EQAO reports on assessments can be found at EQAO’s website, www.eqao.com. EQAO suggests that parents and guardians learn about their school’s improvement plan for reading, writing and math.

While the nature of EQAO’s suggested questions are better directed to administration, teachers may be approached by parents and should respond if they feel comfortable doing so and are well-informed. OECTA’s positions on standardized testing are summarized in two documents that can be found on the OECTA website: [A Culture of Testing www.oecta.on.ca/pdfs/sefindex/cultureoftesting.pdf](http://www.oecta.on.ca/pdfs/sefindex/cultureoftesting.pdf) and [Standardized Testing www.speakforchildren.ca/pdfs/standardizedtesting.pdf](http://www.speakforchildren.ca/pdfs/standardizedtesting.pdf)

Like all Canadian teachers, OECTA members have grave reservations about standardized testing. Joel Westheimer of the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa observes that because it is so difficult to measure the things we care about, such as character development or a propensity to participate meaningfully in one’s community, we begin to care about the things we can measure, such as test scores in math and literacy.

Standardized tests measure technical skills – not the ability to debate, critique, reason and understand.

They create high levels of stress for students, measure achievement according to narrow standards and limit discussion to just a few of the

accomplishments of each individual student. The needs of the whole student are ignored.

Non-instructional factors (such as the number of parents living at home, income level, parents’ educational background, type of community) can account for most of the variations in test scores among schools.

Standardized testing cannot measure the benefits of spontaneous, creative learning.

When schools and teachers focus their time and energies on improving test scores, innovative instruction, intellectual inquiry and enthusiasm for learning is drained away.

Teacher responsibility is lost to testing accountability. Time and energy devoted to test preparation by both the teacher and the students takes away from learning itself and limits opportunities for teachers to work with students who are having trouble with the curriculum, especially those who need learning accommodations. The effort to raise standardized test scores typically comes at the expense of more meaningful forms of learning.

In Finland, where there is no standardized testing, students delivered the top results in the world in the Program in the International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2007, while the USA, which places heavy emphasis on standardized testing, ranked 23 in the same year.

If testing must be done, OECTA believes that the information needed to make informed policy and program decisions could be gathered through sample testing of a representative number of students instead of every student, at lower cost and less disruption.