

 **PAAC on SEAC Response to Discussion Questions on Education Assessment in Ontario**
The Provincial Parent Association Advisory Committee on Special Education Advisory Committees (PAAC on SEAC) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Public Engagement on Education Assessment in Ontario. PAAC on SEAC is the only group in Ontario that brings together provincial parent associations to communicate and co-operate on matters pertaining to special education. We encourage valuable partnerships amongst trustees, educators, voluntary organizations and parents.

In consultation with our member groups, we have put together some responses to the Discussion Questions and some additional comments, based on the experiences of students with special education needs in standardized and classroom assessment.

**1. PAAC on SEAC Comments on EQAO Assessments**

Classroom assessments rather than standardized group assessments like EQAO are **most** useful for:

* Assessing prior learning
* Improving student learning, knowledge and skills
* Ensuring student equity, including the unique, diverse and specific needs of all learners
* Recognizing the culture and experiences of each student
* Minimizing undesirable negative effects of assessment practices on students’ learning and well-being
* Providing evidence to inform educators’ professional practice, including instruction and assessment
* Enabling educators to use their professional judgement to provide meaningful feedback to students
* Providing a useful, effective and manageable way to monitor the progress of students
* Providing parents/caregivers with meaningful information on their child’s achievements and progress (Information from ongoing individual classroom assessment is more meaningful to parents/caregivers than scores from large group standardized tests).

EQAO assessments **may** be useful for:

* Providing evidence to inform policies and priority actions by schools, school boards and the government to support improvements for all students and for students requiring additional supports,
* Providing evidence to indicate areas where teachers may benefit from additional training
* Providing independent scrutiny and accountability to report to the public on the performance and quality of schools, school boards and the overall Ontario publicly-funded education system

Standardized testing of a **random set of students or a representative sample of students** across the province could meet the above two goals of informing policy and providing accountability, without the disadvantages in the current system, outlined below.

Disadvantages of EQAO tests:

* The large amount of time teachers spend on preparing students for EQAO tests would be better spent on ongoing assessment *for*, *as* and *of* learning of **each** student.
* Students who do not participate in EQAO tests, as well as students who do participate, lose out on time for monitoring of their individual progress.
* School based EQAO scores have been misused by the public and some organizations to rate schools and even influence real estate sales.
* The questions on the EQAO only measure of certain academic content, and are not inclusive of other important measures of student success (i.e. equity, excellence, well-being).
* Standardized tests often suffer from cultural and language bias, EQAO is no exception.
* Students with Special Education needs should have input to whether or not their EQAO math score form part of their math grade or not. This decision should not be left entirely to the teacher.
* The language surrounding EQAO results should be written using more student-friendly and parent-friendly language.
* EQAO results may cause schools or boards to overreact to scores. More nuanced interpretations of results will result in STUDENT focused, not SCORE focused solutions.
* Testing is stressful for many students, including those with special education needs and many do not perform well. For many students continuous assessment strategies work better than time limited assessment strategies.

For students with special education needs who **do** participate in large group standardized assessments, it is imperative that they receive accommodations that they are comfortable using, based on their Individual Education Plans.

**2. PAAC on SEAC Comments on Classroom Assessments**

[Special Education in Ontario, Kindergarten to Grade 12: Policy and Resource Guide (2017)](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/policy/os/onschools_2017e.pdf)

**Part C, Early Identification, Assessment, and Transition** **Planning** provides useful guidelines on classroom assessment, summarized below:

Classroom assessment should be planned concurrently with instruction and integrated seamlessly into the learning cycle to inform instruction, guide next steps, and help teachers and students monitor each student’s progress towards achieving their learning goals.

For students with special education needs, the various types of assessments contribute to a decision about the development of a program and supports for that student. Ongoing assessment and monitoring are necessary to confirm the appropriateness of these programs and supports. As new information is gathered, based on the student’s response to instructional strategies, the teacher notes progress or the lack of it, considers any adjustments in planning that could be beneficial, and may decide on providing more intensive instructional supports and interventions.

PAAC on SEAC Comments:

* For students with special education needs, this individualized and ongoing approach to assessment is critical. It is also critical that the step of providing more intensive instructional supports and interventions follows when lack of progress is indicated by ongoing assessment. Equally, when prior learning is assessed and students are functioning at or beyond the material, accelerating the material to the level of the student provides opportunities for students to reach their learning potential and ensures that ongoing assessment reflects learning.
* Students should continue to have a variety of assessments modalities available to them in order to allow them to reflect their learning (presentations, creative projects, tests, papers, etc.). Rather than focusing solely on outcomes or products, assessing progress and process is equally important in ensuring students learning is assessed (i.e. how they are learning, not just what they are producing).
* Classroom assessments should be student (not curriculum or content) focused, and whenever possible include the student in developing, understanding, and reflecting on their assessment. Too often, the only feedback students receive from assessments are grades, and too many assessments are treated as evaluations. Students should be encouraged and supported in how to undertake self-assessment, peer-to-peer assessment, group assessment and teacher-student assessment. Assessment should be a learning tool so that students can understand how better to learn.
* For students with an IEP, the accommodations related to assessment, as well as identified assessment methods, should be used when assessing student progress.

**3. PAAC on SEAC Comments on National and International Assessments**From a nation’s perspective, it is useful to understand where Canada places overall in international rankings. However, as with all comparative rankings, we need to evaluate carefully what these assessments are measuring, and how important these criteria really are to what we actually consider the success of our students. Provided the results of comparative international standardized tests are understood in context and not given undue importance (i.e. they should not be used as primary drivers for provincial policy or funding), the information therein can be a valuable point of reference. From our perspective, the most critical assessment is at the student level, helping students to understand and learn.

**4. PAAC on SEAC Comments on the Future of Assessments in Ontario**

Information and knowledge are no longer the purview of education. Information is everywhere: online, on TV, on social media, on YouTube, etc. It is available everywhere, any time and no longer confined by the boundaries of our own city, province or even country. Already today, learning reaches far beyond the four walls of the classroom. Today’s students can already carry the world of information in the ‘palm of their hand’. Therefore, the Future of Assessments in Ontario must consider assessing how well we are preparing students for this new world, considering a holistic picture of the students’ learning environment (i.e. the world at their fingertips AND in the classroom).

How will Ontario assess student learning, taking this new learning environment into account? How will assessment show WHAT knowledge students have and, perhaps more importantly, HOW they use it? Can they find the information, evaluate it, understand it, identify and evaluate the source of it, understand the weight and value of it, recognize when it is misinformation, understand how to separate fact from fiction, determine if additional information is required?

Classroom assessment of the future will have to recognize this shift. Technology may provide new and varied ways that students with special education needs can participate in the expanded learning environment, and a crucial component of assessment will be to understand how well the technology meets the needs of all students.

Access to technology use is important for universal design for learning and assessment.Currently there are many students with special education needs who are not even able to access the Ontario curriculum because they have been denied access to technology.

Assessment will need to be able to capture how students are interacting with and integrating information, so that they can be prepared to process and understand and take part in the world around them.

Respectfully submitted,

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