

September, 2013

In August, while many teachers were returning to school to prepare for the new school year, the government chose to release the results of the EQAO 2013 Grades 3, 6 and 9 standardized testing. The government's critical commentary regarding the test results dampened the spirit of many teachers who were looking forward to the new school year.

The good news was that the reading and writing scores in Grades 3 and 6 continued to improve. However, EQAO reported a decline in the mathematic scores in Grades 3 and 6 over the past five years. In addition, the Grade 6 cohort showed a decline in their scores compared to their results in Grade 3.

The Minister of Education indicated that these poor scores result from the lack of teacher expertise in the areas of math and science. She suggested that teachers do not have the same comfort level teaching mathematics as they do reading and writing.

At the same time that the Minister may be calling for more expertise at the elementary level, there have been changes in recent years which loosen the requirements for secondary teachers to hold specializations in some areas of the curriculum at the secondary level.

The perception that elementary teachers are not comfortable with mathematics or that they have a math phobia is misleading. Elementary teachers are generalists and do their best with the tools they are given.

Over the past few years, teachers have been aware that elementary students have been struggling with mathematics. They have shared these concerns with those with decision-making powers including principals, school boards and the Ministry.

Perhaps, there is a correlation between the highly literacy-based math program introduced over five years ago and the declining mathematics results. In addition, the Ministry focus for the past six years has been reading and writing. Therefore, school boards concentrated on language arts in order to improve those EQAO results. Teachers cautioned against this practice, concerned that the end result would be improved reading and writing at the expense of other subject areas, namely mathematics.

A future announcement of Ministry initiatives in mathematics, as a result, will come as no surprise. However, the government needs to consult with classroom teachers to determine the strategies and programs which best meet the needs of students.

Colleagues, in this profession, we understand the importance of life-long learning. We adapt to changes in curriculum and program for the benefit of the students we teach, not test scores. For that, we are to be commended.

Wishing you a successful school year,
Julie Pauletig
OTF President