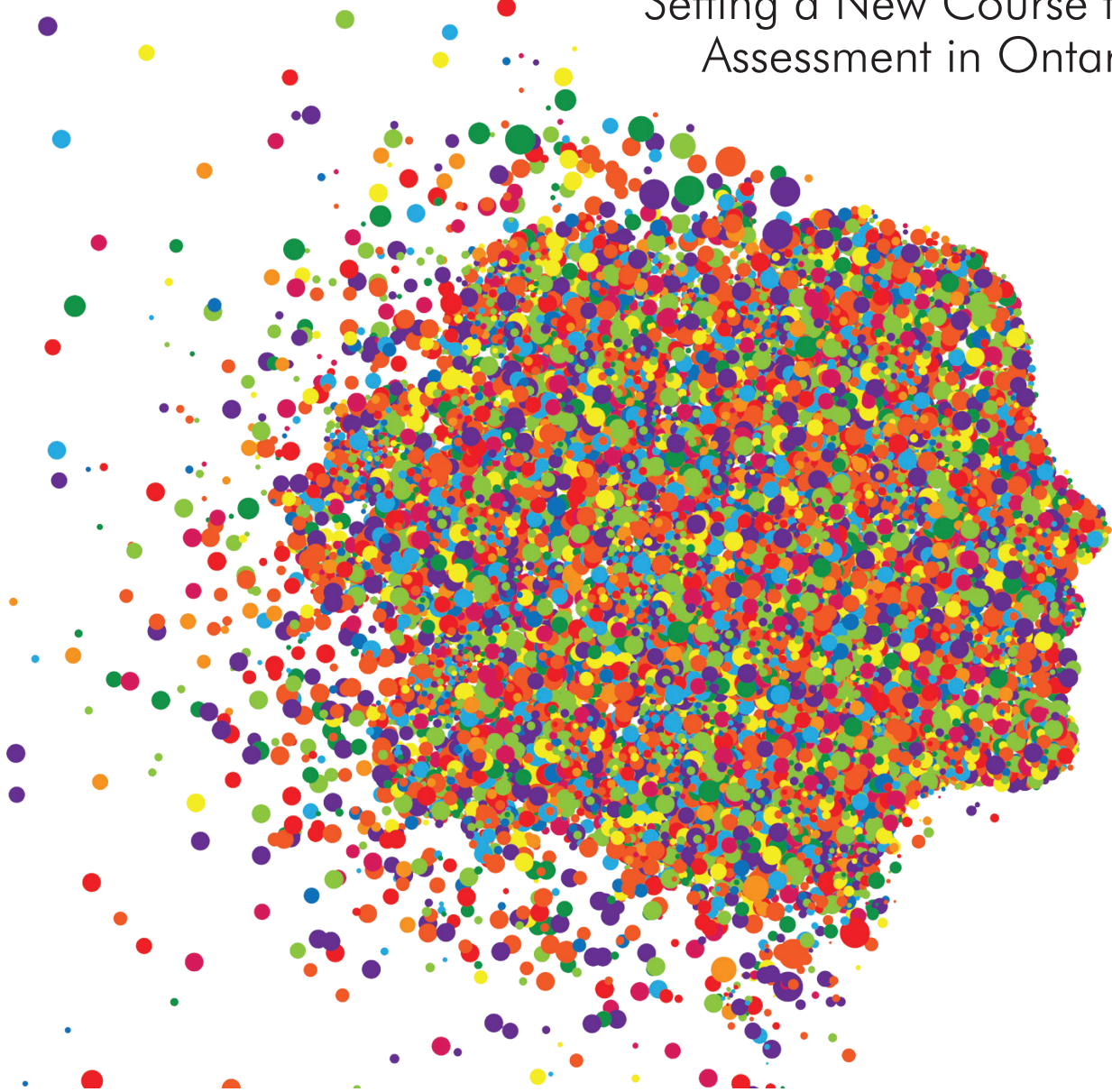


# More than Dots on a Chart

Setting a New Course for  
Assessment in Ontario



A position paper of the  
**Ontario Teachers' Federation**

December 2017

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## Setting a New Course for Assessment in Ontario

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**The primary purpose  
of assessment and  
evaluation is  
to improve  
student learning.**

(Ontario Ministry of  
Education, 2010, p. 6)

**Teachers'  
professional  
judgements are  
at the heart of  
effective assessment,  
evaluation, and  
reporting of student  
achievement.**

(Ontario Ministry of  
Education, 2010, p. 8)



### INTRODUCTION

Ontario is recognized as a renowned, global leader in education. Our teachers, educators and stakeholders share a commitment to continually improve the education system.

Our collective understanding of assessment and evaluation has evolved since the publication of *A New Vision for Large-Scale Testing in Ontario* (2011). OTF and its Affiliates continue to believe in evidence-based research tempered and informed by the experience of classroom teachers.

OTF believes it is time to set a new course for assessment in Ontario's public education system.



### OTF POSITIONS ON ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

1. Assessment and evaluation of student achievement is the domain of the teaching profession.
2. Teacher professional judgement is the cornerstone of assessment and evaluation.
3. Authentic assessment and evaluation of growth and learning cannot be standardized.

#### **Assessment and evaluation of student achievement is the domain of the teaching profession**

Assessment for learning is continuous. It is used to monitor student performance, provide timely feedback and generally enhance the teaching and learning experience. It occurs during daily instruction to support the next stages of learning.

Classroom-based, qualitative and quantitative data are the best sources to inform effective educational policy decisions and avoid the pitfall of initiative fatigue. Data obtained from

large-scale, at-a-glimpse assessments distort the perception of student achievement and the quality of student learning. Teachers' ongoing classroom interactions with students best inform their practice and cannot be replicated.

Ongoing assessment and the reporting process serve as important sources of evidence:

- Teachers' instructional practices are informed by their knowledge of what students know and are able to do at various stages in the learning process.
- Students' learning processes are informed by an understanding of their strengths, areas for improvement and next steps.
- Families receive meaningful communication about the achievement and progress of their children.

### Teacher professional judgement is the cornerstone of assessment and evaluation

The Ministry of Education's *Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting in Ontario's Schools* (2010) policy document defines teachers' professional judgement as "judgement that is informed by professional knowledge of curriculum expectations, context, evidence of learning, methods

of instruction and assessment and the criteria and standards that indicate success in student learning. In professional practice, judgement involves a purposeful and systematic thinking process that evolves in terms of accuracy and insight with ongoing reflection and self-correction" (p. 152).

A teacher's ability to select when and how frequently to use appropriate assessment tool(s) allows him/her to gather evidence that is relevant, sufficient, and valid in order to make sound judgements about student learning.

When teachers make such judgements, they take a holistic approach that recognizes the importance of students' choice and voice, something absent from standardized testing platforms.

### Authentic assessment and evaluation of growth and learning cannot be standardized

OTF has observed an increasingly heavy dependence on high-stakes, large-scale assessments as sole drivers of policymaking at both the system and school levels. In their quest for sound decision-making, policymakers should be using the authentic, daily assessments of classroom teachers which provide valuable sources of evidence that both matter *and* count.



Want a complete picture of how your children are doing in school? Ask their teacher, not their EQAO results.

**EQAO** Education Quality and Accountability Office

4 85 105

(Education Quality and Accountability Office, June 14, 2017)



**[A]ssessment is not simply an instrument or an event, but a collection of practices with a common feature: *They all lead to some action that improves learning.***

(Chappuis, 2015, p. 2)

**It is worth noting, right from the start, that assessment is a human process, conducted by and with human beings .... However crisp and objective we might try to make it, and however neatly quantifiable may be our 'results', assessment is closer to an art than a science. It is, after all, an exercise in human communication.**

(Sutton quoted in Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 29)







**A teacher's professional judgement is the cornerstone of assessment and evaluation.**

(Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 1)

**It is time for us to embrace the value that the road to excellence is paved with high-quality assessments designed and used [by] those who collaborate day to day in the classroom: students and their teachers.**

(Stiggins, 2017, p. 96)



Third party, large-scale assessments fail to respond to the needs of the school community, which is comprised of students, families, teachers, and administrators. These types of assessments do not account for the myriad factors that affect students' success.

Large-scale assessments are an intrusive measure of a very narrow span of a student's potential that overlook the full breadth of the growth and learning of a student, something more richly reflected by the differentiated approach of his/her own teachers.

## **CONCLUSION**

If Ontario is to continue to help all students be successful learners and reach their full potential, the province should refocus on what the research and experience of teaching professionals reveal about how best to support student learning. Ontario's teachers and educators want what is best for students in their publicly funded schools.

OTF's positions on assessment and evaluation are clear:

- Assessment and evaluation of student achievement is the domain of the teaching profession.
- Teacher professional judgement is the cornerstone of assessment and evaluation.
- Authentic assessment and evaluation of growth and learning cannot be standardized.

This paper frames a new course in assessment and evaluation that is timely for this province. In the spirit of collaborative professionalism, we look forward to constructive opportunities to work together with all stakeholders to realize this vision.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

In partnership with the Affiliates, OTF recommends that the Ministry of Education

- emphasize the value of teachers' professional judgement in all its work by leveraging teachers' ongoing assessments to inform policymaking decisions;
- eliminate the reliance on high stakes, large-scale, census-based testing as a policy driver, starting with the immediate elimination of EQAO testing in Grade 3; and
- reallocate funding, currently used to design and administer large-scale tests, to a model of sustained professional learning opportunities, which are offered during the instructional day and which support the effective implementation of classroom-based assessment practices.



I'm not going to school today, Mom, or any of the next three days because what's the point anyway ... I don't get any marks for [Grade 6 EQAO tests] ... it's not even made by my teacher ... four days to be a dot on a chart, no thanks, I'll practice for my piano exam instead ....

(Max, 12-year-old Ontario Grade 6 student)

**Standardized testing returns us to the limiting and narrow style of teaching that assumes that a 'standardized student' exists. It puts school practices in direct opposition to all relevant, current and respected pedagogy.**

(Kempf, 2016, p. 84)

**Fear of being left behind in [the global education race] haunts policy-makers .... The risk is that school systems may find themselves running in the wrong direction in pursuit of reforms that will not get them where they need to go.**

(Sellar, Thompson & Rutkowski, 2017, p. 3)



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