

District EQAO results fall short of provincial averages

By Sarah Sobanski

School board EQAO test results reveal local junior students keep up with province for reading, but fall short in all other elementary school testing.

When it came to primary testing, an average of 56 per cent of primary students passed in reading (59), writing (61) and math (50). In junior testing, the average was nearly the same due to a 34 per cent passing rate in math, but 72 per cent passed in reading and 64 per cent passed in writing.

While these results may not seem very high, superintendent of education for the board Cathy Portt said this year's results were better than last years.

“Our board results have been growing over a 10 year trend and we have had growth in both primary and junior reading and writing. We're very pleased with our results,” said Portt. “Across the province there is a trend of some decrease for primary and junior students, so that is a focus for our math strategy and a priority area for us in terms of our learning in [the board district].”

For HPEDSB, primary reading averages have increased nine per cent and writing has risen 12 per cent over the past decade. Junior averages have increased 16 per cent in both reading and writing. Math average percentages over the decade were not provided to the *Bancroft This Week* when the board provided its reading and writing trends, but were noted to have declined.

When comparing however, local averages didn't meet the provincial bar according to EQAO.

Between 2011-'12 and 2015-'16, average primary results in reading have risen six per cent from 66 to 72 per cent. Writing, while up in 2012-'13 and 2013-'14 school years to an average 77 and 78 per cent of primary students passing, fell to 74 per cent in this years results. Average math results have seen a steady decline from 68 per cent in the 2012-'13 school year to 63 per cent in the 2015-'16 year.

A similar trend can be seen for at the junior level. In the 2012-'13 junior students tested across the province passed at an average of 75 per cent in reading and 74 per cent in writing. By the 2015-'16 year these rates had risen to 81 and 80 per cent. In math however, the average fell from 58 per cent to 50 per cent of students passing.

Prince Edward-Hastings MPP Todd Smith said the provincial school curriculum is to blame for low test scores, especially in math. “Since they brought in the new curriculum students are having a difficult time and parents are having trouble because it's not what they were taught,” said Smith. “Right now it is a math problem, but soon it will be a job problem. Countries with the lowest unemployment rates have high math stats.”

He added, “Can't take anything away from reading and writing but you have to pay attention to the other R which is arithmetic. It might be more important.”

Smith said many Ontario students are graduating without the skills they need as adults.

“I don't know how kids can fail now cause they're all getting pushed through,” said Smith. “We need to be equipping kids to get jobs [and math is important for] opening small businesses, [being] entrepreneurs, [even] if the computer goes down at [a] fast food [restaurant].”

In Grade 9 mathematics, 80 per cent of academic students and 51 per cent of applied students passed at or above the provincial standard within HPEDSB. In Grade 10 literacy, 92 per cent of academic English students and 43 per cent of applied English students passed.

The board's deferral rates have decreased from 15 per cent in the 2011-'12 school year to three per cent in the 2015-'16 school year. The board reported this meant more students were given the opportunity to write the test in their Grade 10 year.

“One of the areas we're really pleased with is that in Grade 9 applied and academic math we are trending with the province and above the province in that area. While mathematics is a focus, we are seeing that our students are being quite successful in Grade 9 math programs,” said Portt.

Looking ahead, Portt suggested the board was working to establish a math strategy with the province.

“We're not born with or without a math brain, but with instruction and practice all students can be successful in mathematics. That's a message we're really supporting our students with.”

“Not everyone is going to be a chemist or a scientist, but everyone is going to have a bank account,” said Smith. He suggested teaching practical math such as that used when banking might make students more receptive to math studies.