

Math results dismal in Greater Toronto school boards

Just half of Grade 6 students are meeting provincial standards in math in latest round of Ontario-wide testing.

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Up to half of Grade 6 students in the GTA are not meeting provincial standards in math, part of an alarming trend that has seen Ontario-wide scores drop to their lowest level in at least 15 years.

While reading and writing results stabilized or improved in Toronto and the 905, math results continued to slide, according to individual board results released Wednesday by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO).

Across Ontario, only 50 per cent of Grade 6 students were at or above the provincial standard in math — down from 58 per cent in 2012 and the worst results since 2001.

Sixty-three per cent of Grade 3 students met the standard, the bleakest outcome since 2002-2003.

“Results have never been this bad,” said Mary Reid, a professor of math at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. “It’s very sad. I didn’t predict 50 per cent.”

Even the province’s education minister, who popped into a Grade 3 classroom at Toronto’s J.R. Wilcox Community School on Wednesday to play a math game, told reporters “this is very urgent.”

Improving math scores is a priority the province is addressing the same way it boosted literacy over the past decade by

adding supports for teachers and parents, she said.

“We’ve seen the benefits of that,” she said. “And today we are shifting that to math.”

Reid noted a worrisome decline in elementary school, with one of five children who met the standard in Grade 3 falling below it three years later.

“What happened in Grades 4 and 5?” she said. “Why are they slipping behind?”

As the dismal board results were released, Hunter reaffirmed the province’s commitment to its \$60-million math strategy first announced last spring, which mandates 60 minutes of math a day for elementary students, and at least one teacher with math expertise in every school.

Reid called the strategy “long overdue” and is hopeful it can replicate the huge improvement in literacy results.

Wilcox is among schools that have already benefitted from intensive support from the Toronto District School Board. While its results are still weak, they improved dramatically: Grade 3 math scores matched the board average of 67 per cent, up from 32 per cent two years ago and Grade 6 results jumped from only 4 per cent meeting the standard two years ago to 20 per cent today.

“If you try to make the math come alive it makes a huge difference,” said Wilcox Grade 3 teacher Sandra Quintal, after her students immersed themselves in a game of “Race to

100” that involved rolling dice, accumulating blocks of 10, and adding aloud with great enthusiasm.

Quintal, who was instrumental in improved scores at Wilcox, says there are creative ways to incorporate math throughout the school day, whether by comparing country populations in geography or collecting money for Terry Fox runs.

“The more you collaborate with experts in the field, and other teachers, the more ideas you get.”

Overall, some 55 per cent of Grade 6 students in the Toronto board met or exceeded the standard.

Half of Grade 6 students in the Peel District School Board didn’t meet the standard, mirroring the provincial average, while Grade 3 students fell slightly below at 61 per cent versus 63 per cent provincially.

Peel board director Tony Pontes said the board will be exploring reasons that students may be struggling.

However, he also noted Peel scores appear lower because results include students who

were absent or didn’t take the test — often newcomers who are struggling to learn the language.

Peel is asking that the EQAO report numbers that exclude students who don’t participate “as this is a more accurate reflection of student performance at a school.”

The current method is unfair and can be demoralizing to students by negatively impacting overall scores of their schools, he added.

One superintendent cited a disconnect between the test and current teaching practices.

Peel’s Poleen Grewal also noted there’s been a generational shift in how math is taught, which can make it difficult both for teachers and students.

“We were taught the rote way of learning — here’s the rule, follow the rule,” she said. “Now, it’s about thinking and making connections between concepts ... We didn’t understand math from that deep level and now we are expecting kids to.

EQAO – Greater Toronto board’s results (2015-2016)

SCHOOL BOARD	GRADE 3 READING	GRADE 3 WRITING	GRADE 3 MATHEMATICS	GRADE 6 READING	GRADE 6 WRITING	GRADE 6 MATHEMATICS
Durham Public	75%	77%	68%	82%	81%	52%
Durham Catholic	75%	77%	62%	83%	83%	50%
Halton Public	79%	78%	70%	85%	85%	56%
Halton Catholic	84%	86%	78%	88%	88%	64%
Peel Public	73%	76%	61%	81%	82%	50%
Dufferin-Peel Catholic	77%	79%	65%	83%	83%	52%
Toronto Public	74%	77%	67%	80%	81%	55%
Toronto Catholic	No results due to labour disruption.					
York Public	79%	83%	76%	87%	88%	65%
York Catholic	79%	86%	71%	87%	89%	57%

Source: Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)

ANSON PARK PUBLIC SCHOOL RESULTS

