

Education Quality and
Accountability Office



Education Quality and Accountability Office

Business Plan, 2021–2024

December 31, 2020



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Executive Summary

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is an arm's-length government agency that supports student learning in Ontario. The agency's data, research and resources empower students, parents, guardians, educators, policymakers and others by providing information they can use to determine how best to strengthen student outcomes and trajectories across the province. EQAO's activities support both accountability in the publicly funded education system and improvements at the student, school, school board and provincial levels. As part of its mandate, EQAO also develops a digital mathematics proficiency test for individuals seeking teacher accreditation through the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT).

The agency's accountability framework for its kindergarten–Grade 12 program is centred on assessments of all students across the province in the primary division; the junior division; Grade 9 mathematics; and, through the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), cross-curricular literacy up to the end of Grade 9. The assessments are conducted in English and French in a variety of formats that accommodate students' learning and accessibility needs.

This business plan sets out the agency's focus for the 2021–2024 fiscal period in alignment with the strategic direction established by the EQAO board of directors. EQAO shares with its stakeholders, its board of directors and the Ministry of Education a desire to modernize the agency's assessments and processes. During this three-year business cycle, the agency will be guided by the following strategic direction as approved by the EQAO board of directors:

- Digitalize and modernize all EQAO assessments
- Commit to action on all applicable Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations and the development of an agency-wide equity and inclusion plan
- Ensure effective governance and engagement in the agency's operations

Over the three-year business cycle, the agency will digitalize all of its large-scale assessments, continue to enhance its IT operations and key business functions, including its reporting approach and its privacy and security practice. With a focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, the agency will develop plans to meet or exceed all applicable recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and develop an equity and inclusion plan.

EQAO’s vision for modernization fulfills its mandate of contributing more effectively to education quality and accountability for all students in Ontario. This vision places Ontario students and individuals seeking accreditation from the Ontario College of Teachers at the centre of the assessment program.

Introduction

Established in 1996, EQAO has distinguished itself as an organization that provides valuable services to the people of Ontario by measuring the effectiveness of the publicly funded education system and improving student learning. EQAO plays an important role in Ontario’s education system and is a powerful source of understanding of student learning. Recently, with the introduction of the Mathematics Proficiency Test (MPT) for individuals seeking teacher accreditation in Ontario, the agency’s mandate was expanded to include the post-secondary education sector.

Mission

Working with the education community to support the success and well-being of all students, EQAO is dedicated to enhancing the quality and accountability of the education system in Ontario.

Mandate

In accordance with the 2020 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the Ministry of Education and EQAO, the following legislated objects serve as the agency’s mandate:

- to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education.
- to develop tests and require or undertake the administering and marking of tests of pupils in elementary and secondary schools¹
- to develop systems for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education
- to research and collect information on assessing academic achievement
- to evaluate the public accountability of school boards and to collect information on strategies for improving that accountability

¹ According to the *EQAO Act (1996)*, test means “any method of assessing the academic achievement of elementary and secondary school pupils. (“test”) 1996, c. 11, s. 1; 1997, c. 31, s. 148 (1); 2017, c. 34, Sched. 46, s. 12 (1).”; retrieved from:

<https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/96e11#:~:text=1.,in%20elementary%20and%20secondary%20schools>

- to report to the public and to the Minister of Education on the results of tests and generally on the quality and effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education and on the public accountability of school boards
- to make recommendations, in its reports to the public and to the Minister of Education, on any matter related to the quality or effectiveness of elementary and secondary school education or to the public accountability of boards
- to develop examinations relating to proficiency in mathematics for the purposes of clause 18(1)(c) of the *Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996*, and to mark completed examinations
- to conduct research and collect information in order to assess the ability and confidence of individuals writing the examinations relating to proficiency in mathematics for the purposes of clause 18(1)(c) of the *Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996*

Expectations Set Out in the Mandate Letter

According to the Mandate Letter from the Minister of Education, received on October 6, 2020, as an agency of the Ontario government, EQAO is expected to operate under principles of competitiveness, sustainability and expenditure management; transparency and accountability; effective and planned risk management; optimal workforce management; data collection that is shared with the Ministry and that informs outcome-based reporting; and digital delivery that explores and implements strategies for the provision of online-based services.

EQAO is expected to respond to the following directions, specific to the agency:

- Online adaptive testing: To respond to student learning needs in a modern and technology-based way, the agency must implement online adaptive testing methodologies for its primary, junior and Grade 9 assessments and for the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test.
- Procurement to support online and adaptive testing and the IT modernization plan.
- CEO recruitment: Work closely with the office of the Minister to develop options for the Minister’s recommendations to the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Values

- EQAO values giving all students the opportunity to reach their highest possible level of achievement.
- EQAO values its role as a service to educators, parents, students, government and the public in support of teaching and learning in the classroom.
- EQAO values credible evidence that informs professional practice and focuses attention on interventions that improve student

success.

- EQAO values research that informs large-scale assessment and classroom practice.
- EQAO values the dedication and expertise of Ontario’s educators, their involvement in all aspects of the assessment process and the positive difference their efforts make in student outcomes.
- EQAO values the delivery of its programs and services with equivalent quality in both English and French.

Governance Framework

An arm’s-length agency established to measure the effectiveness of the publicly funded education system and deliver assessment programs that yield objective and reliable information about student achievement and teacher competencies in mathematics, EQAO is governed by a board of directors appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. As outlined in the *EQAO Act (1996)*, seven to nine directors may be appointed to the board for a term specified by the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

The agency board is accountable, through the chair, to the Minister of Education. It is responsible for establishing the agency’s strategic direction and setting the associated goals and objectives according to its mandate, which is defined by the *EQAO Act*, the MOU (2020) and the applicable policies and directives established by the Minister of Education and the Management Board of Cabinet.

The board of directors keeps the agency accountable to the people of Ontario by maintaining its arm’s-length relationship with the provincial government, by setting strategic policy directions for achieving its mandate, by setting priorities for attaining excellence in the delivery of Ontario’s large-scale assessment program and the MPT and by communicating with the public and the education community.

The board chair is accountable to the minister and provides leadership to the agency by keeping the minister informed; by submitting, on behalf of the agency board, a business plan and an annual report; and by carrying out the roles and responsibilities assigned to the chair by the Management Board of Cabinet directives, the *EQAO Act*, the MOU and the board’s governance policies. The chair also ensures the integrity of the board’s processes, represents the board to outside parties and, in accordance with the *Public Services of Ontario Act (PSOA)*, serves as the ethics executive of the agency for all appointees.

The board meets regularly and conducts business according to the *EQAO Act*, EQAO’s bylaws, the MOU and the PSOA. The Audit and Finance Committee supports the board in ensuring that EQAO exercises due diligence in maintaining an effective financial- control framework. The Governance and Nominating Committee is responsible for the review of governance policies over a three- year

cycle, ensuring compliance with the governance policies, overseeing the professional development plans for the board members and helping with the process of nominating new members to the board. Other committees are assigned as required to reinforce the board's role.

The board's connection to EQAO operations is through the chief executive officer (CEO). The CEO is accountable to the agency's board for overseeing the management and operations of the agency and the supervision of the agency's staff, and for carrying out the roles and responsibilities assigned by the board, the *EQAO Act*, the MOU and the applicable agency directives set out by the Management Board of Cabinet. Under the PSOA, the CEO serves as the ethics executive for all staff.

Staff members of the agency are accountable to the CEO for carrying out the roles and responsibilities assigned to them by the CEO and articulated in the annual business plan and their performance plans.

Strategic Directions

EQAO shares with its stakeholders, its board of directors and the Ministry of Education a desire to modernize the agency’s assessments and processes. During the three-year business cycle covered by this plan, the agency will be guided by the following strategic directions as established by the EQAO board of directors:

- Strategic Direction 1: Digitalize and modernize all EQAO assessments.
- Strategic Direction 2: Commit to action on all applicable Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations and the development of an agency-wide equity and inclusion plan.
- Strategic Direction 3: Ensure effective governance and engagement in the agency’s operations.

Strategic Direction #1	Strategic Direction #2	Strategic Direction #3
<p><i>Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive improvement in student achievement and well-being through large-scale assessment data. • Transform provincial assessments to embrace the contemporary classroom experience and leverage technology to provide customized and accessible assessments. • Support EQAO stakeholders through the digitalization and modernization of the assessments. 	<p><i>Truth and Reconciliation Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance partnerships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis leaders to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s calls to action that apply to EQAO. <p><i>Equity and Inclusion Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and implement a multi-year equity, diversity and inclusion plan for the agency. 	<p><i>Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand networks and partnerships to enhance EQAO’s professional capacity and fiscal resources. • Identify and address the implications of integrating datasets to produce meaningful public reporting. • Engage effectively with stakeholders to continuously improve the agency’s work. • Develop and deliver an effective communication plan for each of the strategic directions and goals. • Ensure effective governance and business practices. • Foster a strong organizational culture.

Overview of Current and Future Programs and Activities

Digitalization and Modernization

EQAO's vision for digitalization and modernization enables responsiveness to the needs of the province on matters of education quality and accountability. The future of large-scale assessment in Ontario is online and adaptive, which reflects student experience in classroom and virtual settings and allows for the incorporation of digital tools to foster engagement and accessibility. Modernization must also address matters of anti-racism, equity and inclusion.

EQAO envisions a future in which

- students and teacher candidates are at the centre of large-scale assessment, and assessments are aligned with their education experience;
- parents and guardians are provided with timely independent feedback about their children's achievement;
- educators are empowered through greater flexibility and timely feedback; and
- EQAO is adaptable and responsive to the needs of the province (e.g., needs related to the navigation of COVID-19).

Provincial K–12 Assessments

The Ministry of Education is implementing a revised math curriculum in all grades, beginning in elementary. Changes to the curriculum impact EQAO assessments significantly, and the Ministry has engaged the agency in the development and roll-out process. EQAO will continue to ensure that its assessments are anchored to *The Ontario Curriculum*. The agency’s assessments are scheduled to move to a digital format during the 2021–2024 business cycle. The Grade 9 and OSSLT digital field tests were conducted in the 2020–2021 school year. The primary- and junior-division assessments and the OSSLT are expected to move to a digital format for the 2021–2022 school year, while the Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics will be paused for the 2021–2022 school year and will resume for the 2022–2023 school year upon alignment with the Ministry’s update of the secondary mathematics curriculum. The current K–12 assessment program is outlined in the following table:

Assessment	Grade	Subjects
Primary division	Grade 3	Mathematics
Junior division	Grade 6	Reading, writing, mathematics
Grade 9	Grade 9	Reading, writing, mathematics
OSSLT	Grade 10	Literacy

Student Questionnaire Data

EQAO student questionnaires gather valuable information on aspects of student learning and achievement. The agency will continue to collect data on student attitudes toward mathematics as well as the strategies they use to solve math problems. This contextual data can be used to identify trends and guide decision making toward the improvement of education at the student, school, board and provincial levels.

Mathematics Proficiency Test (MPT)

On August 20, 2019, two regulations were filed: Regulation 271/19, *Proficiency in Mathematics*, under the *Ontario College of Teachers Act*, and Regulation 272/19, *Objects of the Office*, under the *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act, 1996*.

According to O. Reg. 271, Ontario applicants and internationally educated teachers who complete their application for a certificate of qualification and registration on or after March 31, 2020, must successfully complete the MPT to receive the certificate of qualification and registration. Applicants to the OCT who hold a teaching certificate from a Canadian province or territory are exempted under the *Ontario Labour Mobility Act*. International students have two years after their initial certification to pass the test.

O. Reg. 272 added to the objects of the office in the *Education Quality and Accountability Office Act, 1996*. They now include the provision of examinations relating to proficiency in mathematics and the conducting of related research.

O. Reg. 271 and 272 made EQAO responsible for

- developing the test in both English and French;
- providing instructions for the Ontario faculties of education on administering the test;
- collecting and marking the tests (within 10 days of receiving the submissions);
- identifying successful candidates to the OCT;
- conducting research on the results of the test; and
- collecting information in order to assess the ability and confidence of individuals writing the test.

The regulation outlines the two main components of the test:

- the mathematics curriculum component assesses test-takers' knowledge of mathematics content based on *The Ontario Curriculum (Grades 3 to 9)*, which will comprise 70% of the test.
- the pedagogy component that measures pedagogical elements reflected in Ministry of Education policies (e.g., *Growing Success*), which will make up the remaining 30% of the test.

The test has been designed as a computer-based assessment with multiple-choice type questions. Test takers must attain a minimum score of 70% on both components of the test to be successful. Future administrations of the MPT will be responsive to

changes in the education sector and determined in partnership with the Ministry of Education, with advisement from the OCT and faculties of education.

National and International Assessments

EQAO coordinates the administration of four large-scale national and international assessments on behalf of the Government of Ontario every three to five years: the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

During the 2021–2024 business cycle, EQAO will support Ontario’s participation in the national and international assessments as determined by the Ministry of Education.

Assessment	Partner Organization	Approximate Age/Grade	Subjects
TIMSS	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement	Grade 4 & Grade 8	Mathematics, science
PIRLS	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement	Grade 4	Reading
PCAP	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	Grade 8	Reading, mathematics, science
PISA	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development	15-year-olds	Reading, mathematics, science

Research

EQAO reaffirms its commitment to research through participation in conferences, publications and other research events. Between 2021 and 2024, the agency will continue to add value to the assessment program in Ontario through applied research that fulfills its mandate for accountability and supports the growth and sharing of knowledge in education, health, community planning, economics and policy development. By fostering research partnerships, making data available for a range of stakeholders and including EQAO findings in presentations and communications materials, EQAO will conduct and disseminate relevant research that contributes to improvements in student learning and the quality of public education in Ontario.

For example, in 2020, an EQAO research paper, “Fundamental Math Skills and Elementary Students,” was published in the peer-reviewed journal *Ontario Mathematics Gazette*, a publication of the Ontario Association of Mathematics Educators. Additionally, EQAO published a paper on student engagement, titled “Student Voices: What Engages Students, in Their Own Words,” which drove the agency’s back-to-school social media campaign. This research has also been accepted for the 2021 AERA virtual conference, which focuses on educational responsibility for equity and social justice.

During 2021–2022, EQAO research will focus on the digitalization of its assessments and reporting through a monitoring and evaluation plan. The purpose of this monitoring and evaluation plan is to track changes associated with the agency’s move to online assessments and the impact of these changes on the measurement of student learning and on user experience. This plan draws on insights from rapid-cycle evaluation, a process that quickly and rigorously tests changes to improve and adapt services in an iterative manner.

EQAO’s responsibility for the MPT also extends to the research domain. Between 2021 and 2024, EQAO will gain further understanding of OCT applicants’ knowledge of math content and pedagogy using information gleaned through the MPT.

School Support and Outreach

EQAO’s School Support and Outreach team works collaboratively with school boards, educators, teachers in training, qualifying principals, student groups and parents and guardians to support the use of EQAO data and research. In 2021–2024, this team will be instrumental to professional learning activities centred on digitalization and modernization.

Information Technology

In collaboration with the Community Services I&IT Cluster (CSC) and Information Technology Services (ITS), the agency will conduct assessment and review activities to improve and optimize I&IT services at the Guelph Data Centre.

Resources Needed to Meet Goals and Objectives

Financial Resources

EQAO is in a period of major change in the way it conducts key elements of its programs. Digitalization of its assessments, strengthening of its I&IT ecosystem, a renewed focus on equity and inclusion and enhancements to its research program have all been planned consistently with the current level of funding received from the government.

Human Resources

The change in EQAO's operating model is expected to have some impact on the skill sets required to meet the agency's obligations under the new strategic directions. The EQAO board of directors has undertaken an organizational assessment to ensure the agency's human resources and skill sets allow for successful accomplishments of its goals. The agency will leverage third parties, through competitive processes, to support its initiatives.

Environmental Scan

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on education around the globe. While many jurisdictions have already begun moving toward digital education and assessments, the pandemic has accelerated some of these efforts.

External Factors

International Outlook

The following are summaries of digital assessment practices in some jurisdictions around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic will surely have an impact on implementation plans over the near future.

California

The Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments are comprehensive end-of-year assessments for English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards for ELA and mathematics and that measure progress toward college and career readiness. The tests capitalize on the strengths of computer adaptive testing—efficient and precise

measurement across the full range of achievement and the timely turnaround of results.² The assessments are administered online yet allow for paper-and-pencil testing under special circumstances. The ELA and mathematics assessments have a multi-stage adaptive test portion (starting at a medium level and recalibrating to the student’s level) and a performance task; the performance task is randomly assigned.

Australia

Students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are tested on fundamental literacy and numeracy skills that every child needs to succeed in school and beyond. The National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is a consistent national measurement that determines whether students are meeting important educational outcomes.³ Currently NAPLAN is a hybrid assessment, but a full transition to an online model is expected for 2022. Results are shared in public reports along with an analysis of national findings, which include results for urban and rural groups and Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups.

New Zealand

New Zealand’s Progressive Achievement Tests comprise adaptive and non-adaptive testing from Grades 3 to 10, listening comprehension from Grades 3 to 10, punctuation and grammar from Grades 4 to 10 and reading comprehension and vocabulary from Grades 4 to 10. The assessments follow a hybrid model.

Teachers use the assessments summatively but generally administer them at the beginning of the school year. Teachers may also administer the assessments again later in the school year to compare results. For the adaptive mathematics test, teachers can have students start the assessment for the second time from where they stopped the first time.

National Outlook

Alberta

Student Learning Assessments (SLAs) are digital tests administered at the beginning of the school year in Grade 3. They assess outcomes related to literacy and numeracy in language arts and mathematics in Alberta’s current Grade 2 provincial programs of

² Government of California, (2020), Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments, retrieved from: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/sbacsummative.asp>

³ Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, (2020), The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), Retrieved from (<https://www.acara.edu.au/assessment/naplan#pastpaper>)

study.⁴ The SLAs are digital assessments with a performance task, which is done using paper and pencil. While the SLAs are hybrid assessments, digital reporting is available with filters to show specific data.

British Columbia

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is an annual province-wide assessment of all B.C. students' academic skills in Grades 4 and 7. British Columbia uses a hybrid model of assessment. Student response booklets contain a choice of reading themes, three written-response reading comprehension questions, one writing topic, three written-response numeracy questions and a self-reflection question. Online are 30 reading comprehension, 30 numeracy and two self-reflection questions.

Raw scores are available immediately, giving schools data early in the school year, but rich data are not available until the end of January. The latter allow opportunities to consider Indigenous students and English language learners.

The FSA 2020 to 2021 live online administration will be available from January 18 to February 26, 2021, rather than during the usual late fall administration window, due to the unique circumstances facing schools.

Newfoundland

The province of Newfoundland launched a redesigned Provincial Reading and Mathematics Assessment for Grades 3, 6 and 9 students in May 2020. While the assessment is currently administered on paper, the province is conducting research on moving the reading component online.

Ontario Outlook

The COVID-19 pandemic has imposed challenges to the equitable provision of public education for the near future and perhaps for the next few years. Students across Ontario have had very different learning experiences through 2020 because of the interruption of in-school learning caused by COVID-19.

The administration of assessments in widely different contexts across the province in 2020 and the reporting of outcomes locally and provincially will be affected by the COVID interruption. The digital assessments in the 2021–2022 school year will have to be reimagined in light of the gaps in learning and the challenges to student mental health created by the pandemic.

⁴ Government of Alberta, (2020), Student Learning Assessments, Retrieved from: <https://www.alberta.ca/student-learning-assessments.aspx>

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the province of Ontario has approved a variety of learning approaches for the 2020–2021 school year. The decision between in-person school attendance and virtual learning is made by students, their families and the school board. Some students continue to study in person in cohorts, with social distancing measures in place.

As the province works to combat the spread of COVID-19, EQAO remains in close contact with the Ministry of Education and other key stakeholders regarding its role in support of the education system.

Anti-Racism, Equity and Inclusion

Recent events have brought a focus to meeting the needs of students who have been underserved or treated in racist and oppressive ways by the policies of the education system. The 2021–2024 business cycle will reinforce EQAO’s commitment to working with the Equity Secretariat to understand the barriers for equity-seeking groups related to accessing and completing EQAO assessments.

The agency is committed to working with the Anti-Racism Directorate and developing its programs in alignment with the *OPS Public Service Anti-Racism Policy* and the *OPS Inclusion and Diversity Blueprint*.

Internal Factors

EQAO is in a time of transition and change that impacts the work that the agency does and how it is completed. Organizational assessment and change management as they apply to people, processes and technology are integral to the success of the agency’s digitalization and modernization efforts.

Staffing, Human Resources and Compensation Strategy

EQAO benefits from staff with a high level of commitment to their work. The agency staff are part of the OPSEU and AMAPCEO bargaining units. EQAO follows the OPS process for classification, recruitment and other HR functions in alignment with the *OPS Employment Policy*. Compensation is based on OPS salary ranges for the respective bargaining units. Each year, educators are seconded from school boards to assist in developing and scoring the assessments. EQAO will continue to rely on educators from across the province for their expertise in scoring the open-response questions on its digital assessments.

The shift to digital assessments and the new strategic directions highlight exciting opportunities to maximize the agency’s human resources and its partnerships. The shift away from paper-based assessments opens the potential to apply staff knowledge and expertise in new ways to achieve the mission of the agency.

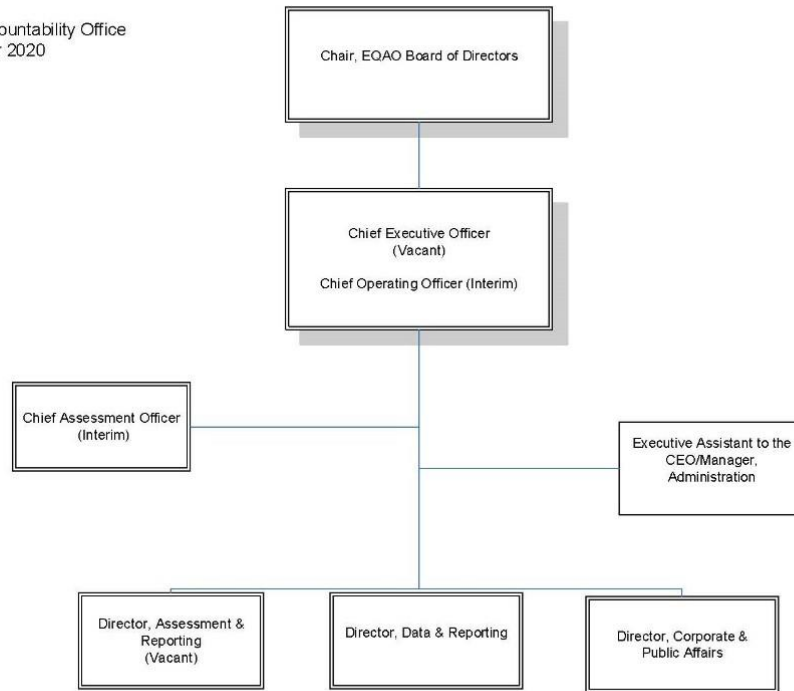
The engagement with Indigenous communities will require particular strategies and activities due to the constitutional status of Indigenous peoples, which is distinct from those of equity-deserving groups. Respecting this will require enhanced stakeholder engagement skills and effort and a well-prepared strategy.

The agency is currently engaged in the recruitment of a Chief Executive Officer. The selected individual will be responsible for leading the change initiatives outlined in this business plan. The CEO will support and encourage further development in the digitalization and modernization of all EQAO assessments. The agency is currently undertaking an organizational review to determine the appropriate staffing and structures to achieve its strategic goals. Assessing the organizational structure involves addressing audit concerns related to single points of failure and capability gaps that prohibit the evolution of best practice. Any decisions about human resource changes that emerge from this review will need to be discussed and planned appropriately within government policy and the provisions of labour agreements.

The key priority for the agency at this time of change is to ensure that the organization has the skill sets and succession plans to meet its mandated obligations. EQAO also has contracts with vendors to support staff in carrying out the agency's work. The vendors are contracted using a transparent tendering and evaluation process that aligns to the Ontario Public Service directives and is carefully overseen by EQAO management and staff, who are accountable to the CEO. As outlined in its MOU, the agency also coordinates with Ministry divisions for specific support in areas such as cybersecurity and enterprise architecture.

. The agency's high-level organizational chart is as follows:

Education Quality and Accountability Office
as of November 2020



Outcome- and Output-Based Performance Measures and Targets

With innovation as a driver, EQAO has established the following strategic priorities and related goals, objectives and performance measures to guide its activities and resources for the current three-year business cycle.

Strategic Priority 1: Digitalize and modernize all EQAO assessments

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
A. Drive improvement in student achievement and well-being through large-scale assessment data.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide credible data to the education community to inform school board and student improvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Create, administer, score and report annually on the Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics, the OSSLT and the assessments of literacy and mathematics for primary and junior students.
B. Transform provincial assessments to embrace the contemporary classroom experience and leverage technology to provide customized and accessible assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Leverage new digital assessment models to provide a more relevant and engaging assessment experience. ✓ Ensure all digital assessments follow best practice for data quality and psychometric analysis. ✓ Enhance the reporting model to increase the usability of the assessment results. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Transform the EQAO assessments so that they respond to each student’s learning needs through Computer Adaptive Test technology and a testlet-based linear-on-the-fly (tLOFT) assessment model. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Successfully procure a digital assessment vendor by September 2021. • Ensure that the new assessment model aligns with the provincial curriculum as well as government direction, legislation and policy. • Ensure this model aligns with contemporary classroom practices and current technology. • Provide assessment windows that are flexible and better integrated into

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<p>classroom instruction.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure more timely and detailed reporting to support student achievement. • Develop customizable assessment tools that reflect the contemporary classroom experience and satisfy accessibility needs. • Improve timelines for the reporting of results to stakeholders. <p>✓ Provide multiple assessment accommodations, including a paper-based option, for students who require them to complete the assessment.</p> <p>✓ Establish a psychometric review team to work alongside EQAO staff to ensure data quality and sound psychometric practices for the digital assessments.</p> <p>✓ By December 2022, implement Power BI as the reporting platform for schools and school boards.</p> <p>✓ Create, score and report on the MPT for new applicants to the Ontario Colleges of Teachers in alignment with legislation and government direction.</p>
<p>C. Support EQAO stakeholders through the digitalization and modernization of its assessments.</p>	<p>✓ EQAO will establish resources and support materials for school boards, schools, parents and guardians and students to assist with the transition to the digital assessment platform.</p>	<p>✓ Provide resources that include learning modules, webinars, videos and other appropriate materials to support school boards and schools with the digital assessment administration.</p> <p>✓ Provide digital sample and practice tests on the public EQAO website.</p>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Provide resources for parents and guardians on the EQAO website. ✓ Support schools and school boards with data visualization tools through Power BI.

Strategic Priority 2: Commit to action on all applicable Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations and the development of an agency-wide equity, diversity and inclusion plan.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
<p>A. Enhance partnerships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis leaders to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s calls to action.</p>	<p>✓ Learn about and understand First Nations, Inuit and Métis needs in relation to education and large-scale assessments in Ontario.</p>	<p>✓ By March 31, 2023, ensure there are Indigenous representation and voices on all EQAO committees as well as on governing and advisory bodies.</p> <p>✓ By March 31, 2023, ensure EQAO team members are trained in anti-racism and aware of educational needs among Indigenous communities in Ontario. Learning will take place through</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meeting sessions with Indigenous communities. • participation in Indigenous events.
	<p>✓ Establish partnerships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis leaders to co-create strategies within the scope of the agency’s mandate to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s calls to action.</p>	<p>✓ By March 31 2022, establish a working group with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • gather feedback on what education data are useful to them and how EQAO can assist with supporting their needs in education. • direct research and the application of EQAO data as required and appropriate in service to Indigenous communities. <p>✓ By September 30, 2022, identify the assessment-related needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners and the implications of EQAO reporting and its use for these partners.</p> <p>✓ By December 31, 2022, in collaboration with Indigenous communities, develop the agency’s action plan to respond to the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including the necessary assessment enhancements.</p> <p>✓ Starting December 2022, make annual public reports and communicate with education stakeholders about agency activities related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action. These</p>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<p>activities may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eliminating fees or streamlining the funding process for EQAO assessments in schools on reserve, to benefit Indigenous students. • establishing accommodations for EQAO assessments (e.g., timing for the Grade 9 assessment) according to Indigenous student needs. • outlining EQAO’s responsibilities related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action. • developing assessments without barriers for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students. <p>✓ By September 30, 2023, identify and develop research using EQAO and other relevant data to unpack and address areas of interest identified by Indigenous communities.</p> <p>✓ By March 31, 2024, make enhancements to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • refresh EQAO assessment design and reporting to better reflect the identities, circumstances and learning needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis students. • ensure that EQAO has built relationships and engagement with Indigenous communities to inform its assessment, reporting and research work.
<p>B. Develop and implement a multi-year equity, diversity and inclusion plan for the agency.</p>	<p>✓ Conduct an equity, diversity and inclusion audit of the agency’s work, including the agency’s relationships with the field and EQAO’s assessments, products and recommendations.</p>	<p>✓ By October 31, 2021, conduct an equity, diversity and inclusion audit.</p>
	<p>✓ Create a multi-year equity,</p>	<p>✓ By March 31, 2022, launch a multi-year equity,</p>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
	diversity and inclusion plan.	diversity and inclusion plan that strengthens the agency's commitment to anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion both internally (with staff and management) and externally (with all stakeholders and the public).
	✓ Implement the multi-year equity, diversity and inclusion plan.	✓ Starting March 31, 2023, report annually on progress on the multi-year equity, diversity and inclusion plan.

Strategic Priority 3: Ensure effective governance and engagement in the agency’s operations

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
A. Expand networks and partnerships to enhance EQAO’s professional capacity and fiscal resources.	✓ Refresh EQAO’s stakeholder engagement strategy to address the goals and objectives in this business plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ By April 1, 2022, refresh the agency’s stakeholder engagement strategy in alignment with its operational goals and MOU. ✓ Always maintain collaborative relationships with Ministry counterparts in alignment with the agency’s MOU.
	✓ Identify future revenue generation opportunities for the agency.	✓ By March 31, 2022, identify potential opportunities for revenue generation.
B. Identify and address the implications of integrating datasets to produce meaningful public reporting.	✓ EQAO will establish a sector standard on the requirements and implications when integrating datasets for public reporting.	✓ By March 31, 2022, EQAO will establish a policy and procedure that sets out the authority and requirements for legislative compliance in the integration of datasets.
C. Engage effectively with stakeholders to continuously improve the agency’s work.	✓ Leverage the refreshed EQAO stakeholder engagement strategy to direct engagement with the agency’s stakeholders.	<p>By December 31, 2021, EQAO will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ review and update its current stakeholder engagement strategy to identify strategic stakeholders, objectives, and timelines. ✓ engage all key stakeholders in alignment with agency goals and the objectives of the stakeholder engagement plan. ✓ develop clear and compelling communication products for all channels to engage stakeholders and inform them of the agency’s work and findings. ✓ ensure use of stakeholder input and feedback for the agency’s continuous improvement.
D. Develop and deliver an effective communication plan for each of the strategic	✓ Produce a communication plan for each of the strategic directions and goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Develop communication plans that outline activities for all the strategic directions and goals. ✓ In alignment with project timelines, include

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
priorities and goals.		reporting on the metrics of communication products related to the strategic priorities and goals promoted publicly and among agency stakeholders across all communication channels.
E. Ensure effective governance and business practices.	<p>✓ Ensure that the internal governance and operational policy frameworks support the agency's operation in accordance with provincial legislation and government directives.</p>	<p>✓ Maintain agency operations in alignment with EQAO's governance and policy framework by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviewing all EQAO policies, procedures and guidelines to verify their alignment with provincial directives and legislation. • communicating and implementing measures outlined by the Secretary of the Cabinet. • integrating the enterprise risk-management program into agency operations. • updating the agency's records management program. • ensuring business operations comply with provincial legislation, directives and policies. • engaging with Infrastructure Ontario on future workplace planning. • establishing a process between EQAO and the Ministry of Education to bring visibility to how EQAO data and research are used annually by the government for improvement in education.
	<p>✓ Ensure financial and acquisition accountability and exceptional service delivery.</p>	<p>✓ Maintain accurate and timely financial reports based on Public Sector Accounting Board guidelines and have them validated by an external audit process.</p> <p>✓ Monitor and report expenditures every month and conduct an analysis of variances every quarter at a minimum.</p> <p>✓ Improve efficiency of service delivery by implementing a new collection-of-fees system</p>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Ensure IT infrastructure and privacy and security posture are in alignment with applicable government standards. 	<p>(credit card) for fee-based assessment participants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Maintain an updated business architecture and ensure technological and process updates are captured in order to support program and process improvement. ✓ Strengthen the agency's I&IT infrastructure and related privacy and security posture by optimizing operations at the Guelph Data Centre in collaboration with CSC and ITS.
<p>F. Foster a strong organizational culture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Lead and encourage employee engagement, collaboration and inclusion throughout the agency. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Monitor and maintain facilities as necessary to ensure a safe and healthy workplace environment for all staff and contribute to promoting overall employee wellness. ✓ Promote collaboration and increase staff knowledge of all departmental functions through all-staff meetings, lunch-and-learn sessions, internal resources and reference documents and feedback surveys. ✓ Improve engagement for new staff in accordance with EQAO's mandate by modernizing the employee orientation program and showcasing the work undertaken across all departments of the agency. ✓ Develop activities to ensure employees are engaged in the agency's mandate and feel their needs are being met by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reviewing and acting upon the EQAO and OPS Employee Engagement Survey results. Reconcile any gaps in areas identified. • encouraging participation in EQAO and OPS events and professional learning initiatives in accordance with expenditure restrictions.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop motivational presentations for all-staff events. ● Develop activities that engage all staff in agency-wide endeavours (e.g., all-staff day). ● Encourage participation in EQAO and OPS events and professional learning initiatives in accordance with expenditure restrictions. ● Improve communication to all staff with respect to agency developments and future activities through monthly CEO updates, executive team office hours, interdepartmental meetings, operational meeting summary notes, etc. ✓ Develop at least one activity a year that enhances one aspect of anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion in the day-to-day work of the agency. ✓ Ensure that working groups and committees (e.g., Accessibility Committee; Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee; Research Committee) report regularly to managers and teams on their work.

Financial Budget (\$M)

NOTES/ASSUMPTIONS

Program Area	2021–2022 Projected	2022–2023 Projected	2023–2024 Projected
Grades 3 & 6 (Reading, Writing & Mathematics)	7.33	7.33	7.33
Grade 9	4.89	4.89	4.89
Ontario Secondary School Literary Test	6.75	6.75	6.75
Mathematics Proficiency Test	1.41	1.41	1.41
Transformation	3.61	3.61	3.61
Operating	4.48	4.48	4.48
Total EQAO Program Operating Expenses	28.47	28.47	28.47
National/International Program (funded separately by Ministry)	0.50	0.78	0.78
Total Expenses, Including National/International	28.97	29.25	29.25
Ministry Allocation for EQAO Operating Expenses	28.26	28.47	28.81
Ministry Allocation Student Survey	0.28		
Total Funding, Excluding National/International	28.54	28.47	28.81
National/International Program Funded Separately	0.50	0.60	0.30
Total Funding, Including National/International	29.04	29.07	29.11
Capital Assets	0.30	0.60	0.30

NOTES/ASSUMPTIONS:

- Payroll projections are based on current employees and ratified collective agreements.
- National/International costs are dependent on Ministry decisions regarding Ontario's participation in these assessments and are funded separately by the Ministry on a cost-recovery basis for the agency.
- Additional funding changes may arise as a result of direction provided to the agency by the Ministry of Education

Realty

According to the *EQAO Act (1996)*, the agency may not acquire, hold or dispose of an interest in real property, other than a leasehold interest, without first obtaining the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. EQAO must comply with the MBC Realty Directive and the Ministry of Government Services' Realty Policy when acquiring space for accommodation and program purposes. The EQAO office is leased at 2 Carlton Street, Suite 1200, Toronto, Ontario.

Information Technology and Electronic Service Delivery Plan

EQAO is increasingly relying on technology to carry out its core business practices and services, including the delivery of assessments and the collection, processing and storage of its data. There has been a focus on establishing resilient IT infrastructure and systems, such as the I&IT controls and privacy and security safeguards that EQAO has added to its operating model. EQAO's effort in the area of IT resiliency includes the migration to and continued optimization of the agency's operations at the Guelph Data Centre and the undertaking of privacy impact assessments, threat and risk assessments and penetration testing as EQAO moves to implement key systems such as digital testing and Power BI.

As the agency moves forward through the next business cycles, it will continue to leverage Ministry expertise in the areas of enterprise architecture and cyber security to ensure its programs adhere to the government's technical standards (GO-ITS).

Initiatives Involving Third Parties

EQAO is dedicated to continuing to work with its stakeholders to ensure its assessment data are used to enhance educational instruction, support improved student achievement and play a role in increasing the quality and effectiveness of Ontario's public education system.

To ensure the successful delivery of its programs, the agency is reliant on third parties for some functions of its operations. Key examples are the delivery of digital assessments once EQAO has developed the content and the reporting of some of its data to parents and guardians, educators and students.

When using third parties, the agency undertakes the appropriate independent privacy and security assessments and consults key Ministry units such as Cyber Security and the Community Services I&IT Cluster for their expertise. These actions help the agency ensure secure and reliable service delivery in accordance with the Freedom of Information and Protection and Privacy Act, the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, the OPS Procurement Directive and the applicable sections of the government of Ontario's Information Technology Standards (GO-ITS).

As EQAO modernizes, it recognizes the need for thinking that engages expertise both internal and external to the agency. For this reason, EQAO has a Modernization in Measurement Advisory Panel (MMAP) that shares knowledge and expertise to support EQAO in meeting its digitalization and modernization objectives while ensuring strong methodologies, analytics and knowledge-sharing approaches. The MMAP is composed of interdisciplinary experts, including practitioners, researchers and scholars in fields related to large-scale assessment.

EQAO engages Ontario educators in every step of the assessment cycle, from development to administration to the scoring of open-response items. Throughout its work, EQAO collaborates with French- and English-language educators from across the province in various activities. It is open to provincial, national and international partnerships that are mutually beneficial.

EQAO's Advisory Committee provides advice and recommendations on assessment activities to the agency. Committee members represent the Ministry of Education, directors of education, parents and guardians, principals, trustees, supervisory officers, teachers' federations and education research organizations. Ad hoc committees will be established for short-term consultation on specific activities.

EQAO's Student Advisory Committee is a group of elementary and secondary students who offer feedback, advice and lived experience to the agency. Committee members represent a diverse range of schools and communities across Ontario. Their input helps ensure EQAO's digitalization and modernization reflects the needs of students. Students are the focus of EQAO's work, and the agency values learners' perspectives.

The Equity Committee reviews materials for all EQAO assessments. Its members have knowledge and expertise in the areas of diversity, culture, second-language acquisition and special education, and they independently examine and then discuss all new assessment items, reading passages and other content to ensure equity, cultural relevance and accessibility to all students.

On behalf of Ontario, EQAO also partners with the following national and international organizations:

- the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—to administer the Programme for International Student Assessment.
- the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada—to administer the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program.
- the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement—to administer the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

Implementation Plan

The strategic directions, goals and objectives, along with the Ministry of Education's mandate letter, direct the agency's implementation plan and provide guidance on the sequencing and dependencies that need to be considered. The timing of the implementation will depend on recovery from the pandemic and the resulting availability of stakeholders to engage in the complex work described in this business plan.

The agency's focus during the 2021–2024 business cycle will be on modernizing its key programs and operations in the following ways:

Digital Assessments

Implement digital K–12 assessments according to direction from the Ministry of Education and the EQAO board of directors:

2021–2022: Grade 9 and OSSLT

2022–2023: primary, junior and OSSLT

Equity and Inclusion

EQAO data will identify barriers in the assessments for Indigenous, Black and other students of Colour, students with special education needs and student members of other equity-seeking groups.

Research

The agency’s strategic directions highlight research and stakeholder engagement as key priorities. This business plan will focus EQAO research on monitoring and evaluating digitalization and modernization initiatives.

Other Priorities

The agency is motivated to leverage technology to build a sophisticated assessment program that is focused on the present and future needs of students in Ontario. The following activities highlight additional modernization activities expected to be completed by the end of the business cycle:

1. Strengthen the agency’s privacy and security program by implementing recommendations from the privacy impact and threat and risk assessments that will be conducted across the enterprise.
2. Optimize IT operations at the Guelph Data Centre.
3. Catalogue and consolidate data assets and develop enhanced data management and reporting plans, including for the use of Power BI.
4. Develop and update business architecture to support program and process improvements and future change initiatives.
5. Continue to implement assessment and reporting changes in support of students and educators.

Communications Plan

Context

EQAO is an arm's-length government agency that contributes to the quality and accountability of Ontario's publicly funded education system for K–12 and post-secondary institutions. As an evidence-based research-informed organization, EQAO is focused on empowering educators, parents and guardians, stakeholders, policy-makers and the public at large with the insights and information needed to support student learning and improve student outcomes.

Strategy

Through its communications materials, EQAO seeks to increase awareness and understanding of the agency and the information it provides, to share the results of its evaluations broadly and to engage meaningfully with its stakeholders concerning the appropriate and optimal use of its information to support growth in student achievement. EQAO's strategy is based on the concept of integrated communications (i.e., leveraging multiple channels to convey information to key audiences).

Communications Plan

In keeping with the MOU, EQAO acknowledges its responsibility to collaborate with the Ministry of Education on public matters affecting the work of the agency.

EQAO uses its website as a central disseminator of information to all audiences. EQAO's website is periodically reviewed to ensure it meets applicable policy guidelines and regulations, including AODA and the Open Government initiative. The website provides comprehensive information about the agency and its services. It also contains electronic versions of assessment result reports, sample assessments, assessment administration guides and other resources. EQAO dedicates a section of its website to showcasing examples of the positive use of its data and will soon highlight student questionnaire data to help audiences understand how students view themselves as learners. As the agency modernizes its programs, it will continue to share information, data and insights through its website. The agency also has an information centre dedicated to responding to inquiries through a toll-free telephone number and e-mail.

EQAO also leverages social media as a way of engaging directly with audiences. As the agency digitalizes and modernizes, social media are important to providing information to key audiences.

The increased visibility of EQAO data and information will allow the agency to engage effectively with its audience and to support students and the public education system in Ontario better.

Risk Identification, Assessment and Mitigation Strategies

EQAO undertakes a risk-review process and reports risks to the Ministry of Education each year. In preparation for digitalization and modernization and in response to privacy and security recommendations, EQAO has reviewed risks across the entire enterprise. The following section summarizes the agency's risk posture.

Digitalization/Modernization

EQAO has a vision for modernization that will enable it to fulfill its mandate of contributing more effectively to education quality and accountability on behalf of all students in Ontario. As the agency moves forward with digital assessments, it has identified a number of key risks to ensuring that the new assessment model

- aligns with *The Ontario Curriculum*.
- is appropriate and engaging for students.
- maintains the integrity, privacy and security of data.
- is communicated about effectively with the education community to support technical and user readiness.

EQAO has made efforts to mitigate these risks by

- providing multiple assessment accommodations, including a paper-based option, for students who require them to complete the assessment.
- communicating with the Ministry of Education on its plans for curriculum change.
- strengthening the security of the assessment and ensuring multiple versions of the assessments are created by having an adaptive test design and large content pool.
- consulting with stakeholders, including students from across Ontario.
- undertaking independent privacy and security assessments of key vendor systems and data quality processes.
- establishing internal data validation processes and quality assurance checks to authenticate the data's integrity.
- communicating with schools and school boards before, during and after launch.
- deploying monitoring and continuous improvement mechanisms.
- engaging in technical readiness activities with school boards.
- providing practice modules to the public, educators and students before the launch.

IT Security Posture

EQAO is increasingly relying on technology to carry out its core business practices and services, including the delivery of assessments and the collection, processing and storage of its data. There has been a focus on establishing resilient IT infrastructure and systems, such as the I&IT controls and privacy and security safeguards that EQAO has added to its operating model. The agency values the security and privacy of its data, but as technology continues to change, there are always risks to be identified and monitored, including

- the potential for a security breach and/or loss of the agency's data and information.
- the chance that test content will be compromised

Some actions that EQAO has taken to address these risks are

- moving its IT infrastructure to the government-owned Guelph Data Centre.
- modernizing its application holdings so that 100% will be AODA compliant by January 2021.
- developing an IT roadmap for the next year in collaboration with agency partners at the CSC and ITS.
- upgrading its anti-virus software, which anticipates threats and identifies processing patterns.
- contracting a third-party security vendor to monitor its environment as well as its certificate and encryption management control.
- creating formal scorer contracts with a component to address confidentiality, privacy and security as well as the professional obligations of certified Ontario teachers and principals.
- requiring the security clearance of vendor staff.
- establishing a formal breach protocol with its online testing vendor.

Education Quality and
Accountability Office



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