



Education Quality and Accountability Office

# Business Plan 2022–2025

December 31, 2021

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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January 30, 2023



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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Dan Koenig

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## Executive Summary

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is a board-governed agency of the Ministry of Education that supports student learning and public accountability in Ontario's education system by assessing all students at key stages of their educational journey. EQAO offers independent data in relation to the learning expectations outlined in *The Ontario Curriculum*. These data are an important indicator of student learning that adds to the available knowledge about how Ontario students are doing and helps with improvement planning at the student, school, school board and provincial levels. The agency's mandate also includes the development of the Mathematics Proficiency Test (MPT) for teacher candidates before their entry to the Ontario College of Teachers.

EQAO supports parents and guardians, policy makers, other Ontarians and the education community at large in understanding, analyzing and appropriately using EQAO data for student and system improvement. Throughout its work, the agency is committed to anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion, and it continually strives to enhance its high-quality large-scale assessment program.

The agency's accountability framework for its kindergarten–Grade 12 program is centred on assessments of all students across the province in Grades 9 and 10 (mathematics and cross-curricular literacy up to the end of Grade 9 respectively) and of both mathematics and literacy in the primary and junior divisions. 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 2022–2025 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 continue to 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 continue the process of digitalizing all its large-scale assessments, and enhancing its IT operations and key business functions, including its reporting approach, as well as its privacy and security practice. With an enhanced focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, the agency will conduct an equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) audit and develop a multi-year EDI plan. The agency will also develop plans to meet or exceed all applicable recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

EQAO's vision for modernization will fulfill its mandate of contributing more effectively to education quality and accountability for all students across Ontario. This vision places Ontario K–12 students and individuals seeking accreditation from the Ontario College of Teachers at the centre of the assessment program; it leverages technology effectively and maximizes the use of data to inform decision making in order to improve learning and achievement.

## 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. With the introduction of the 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 schools<sup>1</sup>
- 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
- to report to the public and to the Minister of Education on the results of tests and generally on the quality and effectiveness

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<sup>1</sup> 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>

- 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

On October 8, 2021, EQAO received a Mandate Letter from the Minister of Education. General direction for agency operations for the coming year relate to competitiveness, sustainability and expenditure management; transparency and accountability; effective and planned risk management; optimal workforce management; data collection that is functional, transparent and useful for evidence based decision-making; digital delivery of services that respond to the customers' needs; diversity and inclusion that ensures an equitable, anti-racist and harassment-free workplace; implementation and support of initiatives that foster COVID-19 recovery.

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

- Online Adaptive Testing: Continue moving forward with digital and adaptive testing and working to maintain security for all digital assessments.
- Governance: Explore operational efficiency opportunities and pursue best practices for planning for EQAO appointments.
  - Provide the Minister with an updated skills matrix by December 31, 2021.

## 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

A board-governed 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 direction 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.

EQAO's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) is the board's connection to EQAO's operations. The CEO is accountable to the agency's board for overseeing the management and operations of the agency as well as for supervising 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 in their performance plans.

## Strategic Direction

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 direction 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"> <li>• Drive improvement in student achievement and well-being through large-scale assessment data.</li> <li>• Transform provincial assessments to embrace the contemporary classroom experience and leverage technology to provide customized and accessible assessments.</li> <li>• Support EQAO stakeholders through the digitalization and modernization of the assessments.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Goals:</i></p> <p><i>Truth and Reconciliation Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 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.</li> </ul> <p><i>Equity and Inclusion Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and implement a multi-year equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), plan for the agency.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Goals:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expand networks and partnerships to enhance EQAO's professional capacity and fiscal resources.</li> <li>• Identify and address the implications of integrating datasets to produce meaningful public reporting.</li> <li>• Engage effectively with stakeholders to continuously improve the agency's work.</li> <li>• Develop and deliver an effective communication plan for each of the strategic priorities and goals.</li> <li>• Ensure effective governance and business practices.</li> <li>• Foster a strong organizational culture.</li> </ul>

## 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. EQAO strives for continuous improvement on its journey to support positive student outcomes in a fast-changing digital world. The agency's goal is to allow everyone who takes our assessments to demonstrate their full understanding of the curriculum. From its assessment results, EQAO gathers information and data that shed light on how Ontario's public education system is performing.

EQAO's modernization enables responsiveness to the needs of the province on matters of education quality and accountability. The agency aims to provide evidence-informed insights into student learning to facilitate the improvement and success of Ontario students. Modernization at EQAO is a multi-faceted and multi-year initiative that focuses on five distinct areas:

- large-scale assessments,
- reporting of results,
- research,
- engagement with Ontarians, and
- supporting equity, diversity and inclusion in education.

A priority of EQAO's modernization work will be grounded on anti-racism, equity and inclusion. In partnership with the Ministry of Education and school boards, EQAO will maximize the usefulness of the information supplied by large-scale assessments by analyzing data. EQAO will continue to share data, produce research based on its data and release interactive reports that are pivotal in moving the education community forward. Part of modernizing EQAO's operations and outlook means digitalizing the agency's large-scale assessment program. Digitalized large-scale assessments present several benefits over paper-based testing.

#### EQAO's digitalized assessments

- will continue to ensure students are at the centre of large-scale assessment and that the assessments are aligned with their education experience.
- increase flexibility in assessment administration throughout the school year and offer timely feedback to parents and guardians and educators on how students are doing.
- address accessibility, equity, diversity and inclusion more effectively, while continuing to be aligned with *The Ontario Curriculum*.

- incorporate digital tools, including accommodations, in their toolbar and menu to facilitate engagement for individuals taking the test.

## Provincial K–12 Assessments

The agency’s assessments began to move to a digital format in 2021 and will continue to do so into the future. The Grade 9 and Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) digital field tests were conducted in the 2020–2021 school year. The primary- and junior-division assessments, the Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics and the OSSLT moved to a digital format in the 2021–2022 school year. The current K–12 assessment program is outlined in the following table:

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

## 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 students 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)

According to O. Reg. 271/19, *Proficiency in Mathematics*, under the *Ontario College of Teachers Act*, Ontario applicants and internationally educated teachers who complete their application for a certificate of qualification and registration must successfully complete the MPT to receive the certificate of qualification and registration. O. Reg. 272/19 *Objects of the Office*, under the

*Education Quality and Accountability Office Act, 1996* 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:

- a mathematics curriculum component that assesses students' knowledge of mathematics content based on *The Ontario Curriculum* (Grades 3 to 9), which will comprise 70% of the test.
- a 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. Students must attain a minimum score of 70% on both components of the test to be successful.

At this time, the requirement to successfully complete the MPT successfully for certification with the Ontario College of Teachers is no longer in effect. All testing is paused. Please visit the Ontario College of Teachers website for updates.

## 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 2022–2025 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
<b>TIMSS</b>	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement	Grade 4 & Grade 8	<b>Mathematics, science</b>
<b>PIRLS</b>	International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement	Grade 4	<b>Reading</b>
<b>PCAP</b>	Council of Ministers of Education, Canada	Grade 8	<b>Reading, mathematics, science</b>
<b>PISA</b>	<b>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</b>	<b>15-year-olds</b>	<b>Reading, mathematics, science</b>

## Research

The fourth object of the *EQAO Act* places research and collecting information on assessing academic achievement as one of the agency’s pillars. EQAO recognizes the need for a continued focus on research to help support the academic achievement of students in order to enhance their learning outcomes at the individual, classroom, school and system levels. As EQAO looks to the future, it will continue to build on its digital assessment program in consultation with its stakeholders across the province. The agency will also continue to adapt and enhance its reporting models so that the education sector has access to timely and actionable insights based on the agency’s data.

### EQAO Statistical Standards

EQAO aligns with Statistics Canada in recognizing statistical standards as a set of rules that describe how data are collected and how statistics and results are produced and shared. EQAO’s statistical standards are used to provide data insights on specific topics and the learning experiences of groups of students. The standards also ensure consistency in data quality over time.

## EQAO's Data Quality Framework

EQAO's *Data Quality Framework* provides systematic and methodological rigour to the agency's data quality validation processes. EQAO's data quality processes use clearly defined guidelines, business rules, methodologies and protocols to ensure that data quality is maintained at all stages of the collection, processing and analyzing of educational data, and of the reporting and sharing of results.

## 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, research and EQAO's digital assessment platform. In 2022–2025, this team will continue to provide webinars to help school boards and schools to use EQAO data and resources (e.g., training for board IT staff to learn about network readiness for the e-assessment platform and for principals and consultants to learn the details of administering EQAO digitalized assessments).

## Information Technology

In collaboration with the Community Services I&IT Cluster (CSC) and Information Technology Services (ITS), the agency will continue to review and optimize its I&IT operations 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 the enhanced mining of its data 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. Through competitive processes, the agency will continue to leverage third parties 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 on Assessments

The following are summaries of digital assessment practices in some jurisdictions around the world. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on implementation plans.

#### *Colombia*

In May 2021, according to the 276 Act (2021) for the Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education (*Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación*), the Colombian government legislated the implementation of nation-wide standardized digital testing from home.<sup>2</sup> The legislation sets out the rules and regulations for participation. Because of the school closures and distance learning necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, this type of test was instituted to supplement the in-person computer-based test administered in institutions. Colombia implemented pilot projects using Computer Adaptive Test (CAT) methods in 2018 and 2019. In May 2020, through the 268 Act, the government implemented a CAT method for the Grade 11 National tests in 2021.

#### *Mexico*

The National Plan for the Evaluation of Learning (*Plan Nacional para la Evaluación de Aprendizajes, or PLANEA*) was implemented in 2015, with assessments administered to students in the sixth year of primary school, the third year of secondary school and the last grade of upper-secondary education.<sup>3</sup> The PLANEA tests are administered by the National Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching (*Centro Nacional para la Revalorización del Magisterio*). As part of PLANEA, “the test in the last grade assesses the performance of students in the last grade of high school in two fields of training: Language & Communication and Mathematics.”<sup>4</sup> The tests are

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<sup>2</sup> Colombian Institute for the Evaluation of Education (*Instituto Colombiano para la Evaluación de la Educación –ICFES*), (2021). Mapa del Sitio. Retrieved from <https://www.icfes.gov.co/web/guest/2-normativa>

<sup>3</sup> National Plan for the Evaluation of Learning (*Plan Nacional para la Evaluación de Aprendizajes – PLANEA*), (2021). Mapa del Sitio. Retrieved From: <http://www.planea.sep.gob.mx/>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

paper-based and multiple-choice. As with tests in most countries around the world, the PLANEA tests for 2020 were suspended.

### *Singapore*

The Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board (SEAB) together with the Ministry of Education, Singapore, and Cambridge Assessment International Education are the joint examining authorities for the Singapore-Cambridge examinations. Currently the tests are mainly paper-based, administered on site and composed of oral and written (multiple-choice) components, with some developed in an e-assessment system. The tests are offered at five different levels. The onscreen marking exercises for some of the 2021 written tests allowed “hardcopy answer scripts [to be] digitized after the examinations and marked onscreen.”<sup>24</sup> This method proved to “enhance marking quality, security and efficiency.”<sup>5</sup>

In 2018, the SEAB prototyped a CAT design to support the approach best known as “assessment for learning” in Singaporean schools. Assessment for learning focuses mainly on student learning rather than on accountability or ranking. The methodology used is based on six steps “abbreviated as ‘D.E.S.I.G.N.’: 1. Define item bank blueprint based on the Learning Outcomes (LOs) stipulated in the Primary Mathematics teaching and learning syllabus; 2. Expedite item development to populate the item bank using an Automatic Item Generation approach; 3. Structure and construct the Topical Continuum by establishing and arranging the LO mastery thresholds in ascending order of demand across grade levels; 4. Integrate the Computerized Adaptive Testing engine to efficiently and accurately determine whether a student could meet each LO mastery threshold along the Continuum; 5. Generate students’ performance by profiles at the individual, class and school levels; 6. Notify and provide teachers with a report describing the LOs that each student can and cannot manage to inform” (SEAB, 2018).<sup>6</sup>

## National Outlook

### *Alberta*

In the 2021–2022 school year, Alberta’s school authorities have the flexibility to administer Student Learning Assessments (SLAs) if they choose. School authorities can also choose whether all or some of their schools or classes within a school will participate, and to what degree. The Alberta government strongly encourages its school authorities to administer SLAs to Grade 3 students.

Alberta also administers their Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) to students in Grades 6 and 9. These standardized tests reflect the essentials that all Alberta students are expected to achieve, regardless of school choice or location. “Currently, all Part A Written

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<sup>5</sup> Singapore Examinations and Assessment Board, Singapore, (2021). Seab-Link – Issue 1 – 2021. Retrieved from: [https://www.seab.gov.sg/docs/default-source/publiccommunications/seab-link-newsletter/seab-link\\_issue-1\\_2021\\_final.pdf](https://www.seab.gov.sg/docs/default-source/publiccommunications/seab-link-newsletter/seab-link_issue-1_2021_final.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

Response portions of Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) and Diploma Exams can be administered using technology. Machine scored PATs and Diplomas can also be administered for most subjects using Quest A+.”<sup>7</sup>According to Alberta Education, this arrangement is a part of a commitment to ensuring that all students have an opportunity to succeed.<sup>8</sup>

### *British Columbia*

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA), which has an evidence centred design, is an annual province-wide curriculum-based assessment of the literacy and mathematics skills of all B.C. students in Grades 4 and 7. Teams of educators from across the province work together to develop the FSA, which is built on the recommendations of the Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment. The literacy tests have two types of questions: selected-response questions and constructed-response questions. FSA has four components: a collaboration component, a student booklet component, an online component and a student reflection component. The FSA 2021–2022 live online administration will run October 4–November 12, 2021.<sup>9</sup>

### *Quebec*

Every year, the Quebec Ministry of Education publishes an official timetable of examination sessions. For elementary school, Quebec’s standardized testing system requires students in Grades 4 and 5 to receive the Mandatory Tests for French, English and mathematics. For secondary school, the Ministry requires the Unique Test in mathematics (Grade 9, or the fourth year of secondary in Quebec); the Unique Test in English and French according to the language of learning (Grade 10); the Mandatory Test of written French (Grade 7) and the optional History of Québec and Canada Uniform Examination (Grade 9, starting in 2023).<sup>10</sup> French sessions were scheduled from January 2021 to January 2022.<sup>11</sup> English sessions are scheduled for 2022.<sup>12</sup> Quebec is in the process of implementing a digital version of its provincial assessment program.

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<sup>7</sup> Government of Alberta, (2021). Quest A+: Using Technology to Administer Provincial Assessments. Retrieved from: <https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/ed-using-technology-to-administer-pats-diploma-exams.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Government of British Columbia, (2021). Foundations Skills Assessments. Retrieved from: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/program-management/assessment/foundation-skills-assessment>

<sup>10</sup> Government of Quebec, (2021). Exams and Ministerial Examinations. Retrieved from <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/parents-and-guardians/exams/>

<sup>11</sup> Government of Quebec, (2021). Horaire de la session d’examen et de la reprise d’épreuves | Ministère de l’Éducation et Ministère de l’Enseignement supérieur. Retrieved from : <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/parents-et-tuteurs/examens-et-epreuves/horaire-de-la-session-dexamen-et-de-la-reprise-depreuves/>

<sup>12</sup> Government of Quebec, (2021). Schedule for the Examination Session and Retake of Examinations. Retrieved from : <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/parents-and-guardians/exams/schedule-for-the-examination-session-and-retake-of-examinations/>

## *Ontario Outlook*

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ontario government continues to set in place measures to facilitate continuity in learning while ensuring the safety of students, teachers and staff across Ontario schools and school boards during the 2021–2022 school year.<sup>13</sup> Remote learning will continue to be an essential component, as it will remain an “option for parents even as school boards are planning for students to return to in-person learning. School boards will be required to provide students learning remotely with 300 minutes of learning opportunities” daily.<sup>14</sup>

In 2021, the Ontario government issued a new de-streamed Grade 9 math curriculum based in mathematical processes, mathematical modelling and coding to help students make sense of math through real-life situations contextualized within the students’ cultural realities. The province of Ontario will continue to provide a variety of learning approaches for the near-term. The decision between in-person school attendance and virtual learning will continue to be made by students, their families and the school board.

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

### Anti-racism, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

As part of the Ontario Public Service, EQAO is committed to upholding anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion throughout its internal and external activities and policies. One of EQAO’s board-approved strategic priorities identified for the 2021–2024 period is to “Commit to action on all applicable Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommendations and the development of an agency-wide equity, diversity and inclusion plan.” Clear and robust tracking of EQAO’s equity, diversity and inclusion efforts and outcomes is essential to the well-being of agency staff and those we serve. The agency will be developing an equity, diversity and inclusion audit and a multiyear plan in 2022. The outcomes of the audit will help the agency progress on matters of equity, diversity and inclusion by identifying and managing prejudices, bias, blind spots, attitudes and habits that promote homogeneity and superiority, and which may be unperceived. Thinking patterns and behaviours that may be to the detriment of people (especially minorities, equity-seeking groups and Indigenous people) inside and outside the agency may continue unchecked if not addressed. Having information on the experiences of diverse communities, and their respective intersectionality, allows for the implementation of evidence-informed programs and policies aiming to eliminate any kind of discrimination in agency processes, policies and delivery

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<sup>13</sup> Government of Ontario, (2021). COVID-19: Health, safety, and operational guidance for schools (2021-2022), retrieved from: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/covid-19-health-safety-and-operational-guidance-schools-2021-2022/introduction>

<sup>14</sup> Ibid

of programs and services. Between 2022 and 2024, EQAO will also be developing other activities focusing specifically on the calls to action of the TRC and on access barriers experienced by equity-seeking and special needs groups.

## Internal Factors

EQAO is in a time of transition and change that impacts the work that the agency does and how it is carried out. 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.

On September 1, 2021, EQAO welcomed its new CEO, Dan Koenig. With more than three decades of public service in education and having been a key member of the Toronto Catholic District School Board's senior leadership team for several years, Mr. Koenig is a highly respected and passionate educator and leader.

At EQAO, a top priority for Mr. Koenig will be to lead the continuing digitalization and modernization of the agency's assessment program to ensure that EQAO can continue to fulfill its mandate and generate reliable data about Ontario's public education system to support student learning in the digital age.

### 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 for the scoring of the open-response questions on its digital assessments.

The shift to digital assessments and the new strategic directions bring about 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 activities that honour the constitutional status of Indigenous peoples, which is distinct from those of equity-seeking groups. Respecting this status will require enhanced stakeholder engagement skills and effort and a well-prepared strategy. Some of these activities to address these needs may come from reallocating responsibilities and goals for current staff and as well as engaging outside expertise.

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

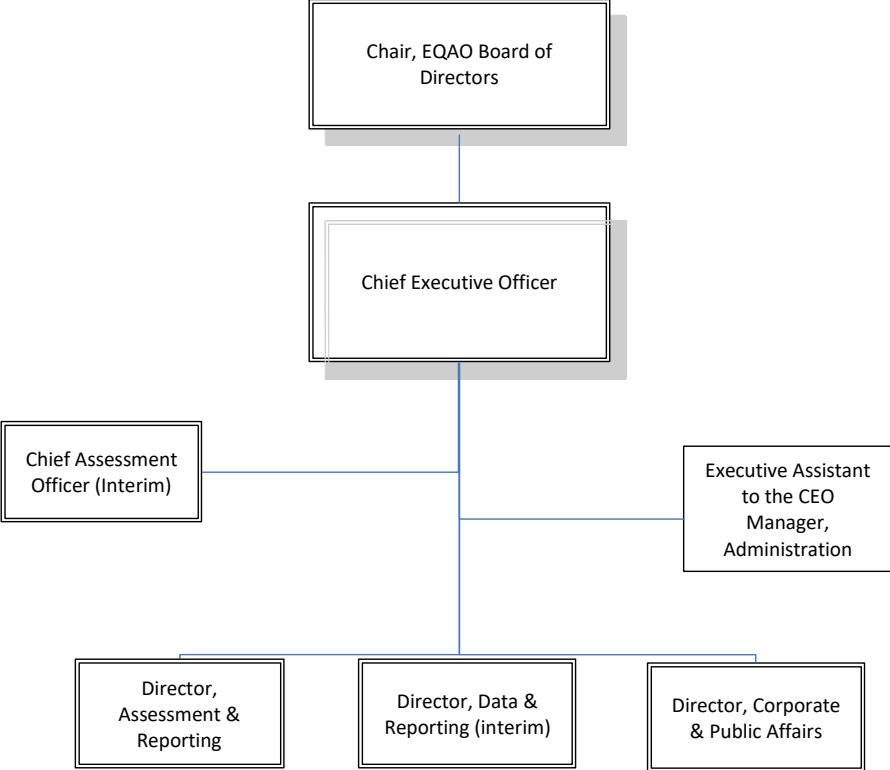
capability gaps that prohibit the evolution of best practice. Any decisions about human resource changes that emerge from this review will need to be discussed and planned for appropriately within government policy and the provisions of labour agreements.

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 cyber security and enterprise architecture.

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

Education Quality and Accountability Office

as of November 2021,



## 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"> <li>✓ Provide credible data to the education community to inform school board and student improvement.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 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.</li> </ul>
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"> <li>✓ Leverage new digital assessment models to provide a more relevant and engaging assessment experience.</li> <li>✓ Ensure all digital assessments follow best practice for data quality and psychometric analysis.</li> <li>✓ Enhance the reporting model to increase the usability of the assessment results.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 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"> <li>• Ensure that the new assessment model aligns with the provincial curriculum as well as government direction, legislation and policy.</li> <li>• Ensure this model aligns with contemporary classroom practices and current technology.</li> <li>• Provide assessment windows that are flexible and better integrated into classroom instruction.</li> <li>• Ensure more timely and detailed reporting to support student achievement.</li> <li>• Develop customizable assessment</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



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

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 that apply to EQAO.</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 September 30, 2022, establish an EQAO team to lead the agency’s work to address all applicable calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.</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"> <li>• meeting sessions with Indigenous communities.</li> <li>• participation in Indigenous events.</li> <li>• sessions at town halls and other EQAO-organized events.</li> <li>• Establish equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives as mandatory elements of individual performance plans for all staff.</li> </ul>
	<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, 2023, establish a working group with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• gather feedback on what education data are useful to them and how EQAO can assist with supporting their</li> </ul>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<p>needs in education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• direct research and the application of EQAO data as required and appropriate in service to Indigenous communities.</li> </ul> <p>✓ By September 30, 2023, 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, 2023, 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 2023, make annual public reports and communicate with education stakeholders about agency activities related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s calls to action. These activities may include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eliminating fees or streamlining the funding process for EQAO assessments in schools on reserve, to benefit Indigenous students.</li> <li>• establishing accommodations for EQAO assessments (e.g., timing for the Grade 9 assessment) according to Indigenous student needs.</li> <li>• outlining EQAO’s responsibilities related to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to</li> </ul>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<p>action.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• developing assessments without barriers for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students.</li> </ul> <p>✓ By September 30, 2024, 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"> <li>• refresh EQAO assessment design and reporting to better reflect the identities, circumstances and learning needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis students.</li> <li>• ensure that EQAO has built relationships and engagement with Indigenous communities to inform its assessment, reporting and research work.</li> </ul>
<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 September 30, 2022, establish an EQAO team to lead the agency’s work concerning equity, diversity and inclusion.</p> <p>✓ By July 31, 2022, conduct an equity, diversity and inclusion audit of the agency.</p>
	<p>✓ Create a multi-year equity, diversity and inclusion plan.</p>	<p>✓ By September 30, 2022, launch a multi-year equity, diversity and inclusion plan that strengthens the agency’s commitment to anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion both internally</p>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		(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
<p>A. Expand networks and partnerships to enhance EQAO's professional capacity and fiscal resources.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Refresh EQAO's stakeholder engagement strategy to address the goals and objectives in this business plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ By April 1, 2022, refresh the agency's stakeholder engagement strategy in alignment with its operational goals.</li> <li>✓ Always maintain collaborative relationships with Ministry counterparts in alignment with the agency's MOU.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Identify future revenue generation opportunities for the agency.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ By March 31, 2022, identify potential opportunities for revenue generation.</li> </ul>
<p>B. Identify and address the implications of integrating datasets to produce meaningful public reporting.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ EQAO will establish a sector standard on the requirements and implications when integrating datasets for public reporting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ By March 31, 2023, EQAO will establish a policy and procedure that sets out the authority and requirements for legislative compliance in the integration of data sets.</li> </ul>
<p>C. Engage effectively with stakeholders to continuously improve the agency's work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Leverage the refreshed EQAO stakeholder engagement strategy to direct engagement with the agency's stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<p>By June 30, 2022, EQAO will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ review and update its current stakeholder engagement strategy to identify strategic stakeholders, objectives and timelines.</li> <li>✓ engage all key stakeholders in alignment with agency goals and the objectives of the stakeholder engagement plan.</li> <li>✓ develop clear and compelling communication products for all</li> </ul>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<p>channels to engage stakeholders and inform them of the agency's work and findings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ ensure use of stakeholder input and feedback for the agency's continuous improvement.</li> </ul>
<p>D. Develop and deliver an effective communication plan for each of the strategic priorities and goals.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Produce a communication plan for each of the strategic directions and goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Develop communication plans that outline activities for all the strategic directions and goals.</li> <li>✓ In alignment with project timelines, include reporting on the metrics of communication products related to the strategic priorities and goals promoted publicly and among agency stakeholders across all communication channels.</li> </ul>
<p>E. Ensure effective governance and business practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensure that the internal governance and operational policy frameworks support the agency's operation in accordance with provincial legislation and government directives.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Maintain agency operations in alignment with EQAO's governance and policy framework by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reviewing all EQAO policies, procedures and guidelines to verify their alignment with provincial directives and legislation.</li> <li>• communicating and implementing measures outlined by the Secretary of the Cabinet.</li> <li>• integrating the enterprise risk-management program into agency operations.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• updating the agency's records management program.</li> <li>• ensuring business operations comply with provincial legislation, directives and policies.</li> <li>• engaging with Infrastructure Ontario on future workplace planning.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensure financial and acquisition accountability and exceptional service delivery.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Maintain accurate and timely financial reports based on Public Sector Accounting Board guidelines and have them validated by an external audit process.</li> <li>✓ Monitor and report expenditures every month and</li> <li>✓ Conduct an analysis of variances every quarter at a minimum.</li> <li>✓ Improve efficiency of service delivery by implementing a new collection-of-fees system (credit card) for fee-based assessment participants.</li> </ul>



GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ensure IT infrastructure and privacy and security posture are in alignment with applicable government standards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Maintain an updated business architecture and ensure technological and process updates are captured in order to support program and process improvement.</li> <li>✓ Strengthen the agency's I&amp;IT infrastructure and related privacy and security posture by optimizing operations at the Guelph Data Centre in collaboration with CSC and ITS.</li> </ul>
<p>F. Foster a strong organizational culture.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Lead and encourage employee engagement, collaboration and inclusion throughout the agency.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Monitor and maintain facilities as necessary to ensure a safe and healthy workplace environment for all staff and contribute to promoting overall employee wellness.</li> <li>✓ Promote cross-agency collaboration and alignment of work to the agency's strategic priorities.</li> <li>✓ Increase staff knowledge of all departmental functions through all-staff meetings, lunch-and-learn sessions, internal resources and reference documents and feedback surveys.</li> <li>✓ Improve engagement for new staff in accordance with EQAO's mandate by modernizing the employee orientation program</li> </ul>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<p>and showcasing the work undertaken across all departments of the agency.</p> <p>✓ Do the following to ensure employees are engaged in the agency's mandate and feel their needs are being met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and act upon the EQAO and OPS Employee Engagement Survey results. Reconcile any gaps in areas identified.</li> <li>• Encourage participation in agency committees.</li> <li>• Develop motivational presentations for all-staff events.</li> <li>• Develop activities that engage all staff in agency-wide endeavours (e.g., all-staff day).</li> <li>• Encourage participation in EQAO and OPS events and professional learning initiatives in accordance with expenditure restrictions.</li> <li>• Improve communication to all staff with respect to agency developments and future activities through monthly CEO updates, executive team office hours, interdepartmental meetings,</li> </ul>

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		<p>operational meeting summary notes, etc.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ 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.</li> <li>✓ 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.</li> </ul>

## Financial Budget (\$M)

Program Area	2022–2023 Projected	2023–2024 Projected	2024–2025 Projected
<b>Grades 3 &amp; 6 (Reading, Writing &amp; Mathematics)</b>	7.33	7.33	7.33
<b>Grade 9</b>	4.89	4.89	4.89
<b>Ontario Secondary School Literary Test</b>	6.75	6.75	6.75
<b>Mathematics Proficiency Test</b>	1.41	1.41	1.41
<b>Transformation</b>	3.61	3.61	3.61
<b>Operating</b>	4.48	4.48	4.48
<b>Total EQAO Program Operating Expenses</b>	<b>28.47</b>	<b>28.47</b>	<b>28.47</b>
<b>National/International Program (funded separately by Ministry)</b>	0.78	0.78	0.78
<b>Total Expenses, Including National/International</b>	<b>29.25</b>	<b>29.25</b>	<b>29.25</b>
<b>Ministry Allocation for EQAO Operating Expenses</b>	28.29	28.33	28.33
<b>Total Funding, Excluding National/International &amp; Other PPF</b>	<b>28.29</b>	<b>28.33</b>	<b>28.33</b>
<b>National/International Program Funded Separately</b>	0.60	0.30	0.30
<b>Other PPF Projects Funded Separately</b>	0.18	0.48	0.48
<b>Total Funding, Including National/International &amp; Other PPF Projects</b>	<b>29.07</b>	<b>29.11</b>	<b>29.11</b>
<b>Capital Assets</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.30</b>	<b>0.30</b>

### NOTES/ASSUMPTIONS:

- Payroll projections are based on current positions 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 operational direction provided to the agency by the Ministry of Education.

### Realty

According to the *EQAO Act*, 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. A key example is 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, Diversity and Inclusion 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 in its work. 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 2022–2025 business cycle will be on modernizing its key programs and operations in the following ways:

### Digital Assessments

The agency will continue to enhance and implement digital models for all of the EQAO assessments with a focus on Computer Adaptive Testing methodologies of evaluation.

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 are highlights of additional modernization activities expected to be completed by the end of the business cycle:

1. Continue to implement assessment and reporting changes in support of students and educators.
2. Enhance data reporting models through the use of Microsoft Power BI.
3. 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.
4. Optimize IT operations at the Guelph Data Centre.
5. Develop and update business architecture to support program and process improvements and future change initiatives.

### 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 and maximizing the insights and usefulness of its assessment data.

## Communications Plan

### Context

EQAO is a board-governed government agency that contributes to the quality and accountability of Ontario's publicly funded education system. 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 and contribute to public accountability in education. EQAO's strategy is based on the concept of integrated communications (i.e., leveraging multiple channels to convey information to key audiences).

### Communications Channels

In keeping with the MOU, EQAO acknowledges its responsibility to engage in collaboration 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 the 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 better support students and the public education system in Ontario.

## Risk Identification, Assessment and Mitigation Strategies

EQAO undertakes a risk-review process and reports risks to the Ministry of Education each year. As a part of the agency's Enterprise Risk Management framework, EQAO reviews its risks on a quarterly basis. The following section summarizes the agency's most relevant risks.

### Technical Disruption During or After a Testing Session

The risk of an IT failure impacting students or teacher applicants before or during a testing session (at a testing site or school, or with the agency's digital testing vendor) is a danger to EQAO's operations. To address this risk, the agency has identified the following mitigation strategies:

- Privacy and security assessments of vendor system have been undertaken in conjunction with ITS and the CSC I&IT Cluster. All "high" and "critical" recommendations have been implemented. Security assessments will continue annually and privacy assessments every two years or with any substantial change to the data collected.
- The agency has established technical support and virtual situation room processes to identify, escalate and resolve issues quickly.
- The assessments employ a cloud environment, which mitigates capacity and cyber security risk better than an on-premises model.
- EQAO ensures the development and maintenance of the agency's business architecture (e.g., business function model, business process model, users and roles, data flows and user journeys)
- The agency has conducted technical readiness activities with school boards and testing centres. These will be repeated annually as required.
- The agency will continue to provide flexible administration windows to ease the technical load on the solution, administration and infrastructure.
- A technical committee comprising EQAO, CSC and Vretta Inc. was established in Q2 2020.

As this is the first year of the digital assessment administration, technical issues with schools and school boards are expected, and a support model has been established with the vendor.

## Accuracy of Reporting

Aligning with standards for fair, valid and reliable large-scale assessment is important to the quality and soundness of the agency's tests and reports. To mitigate the risks of operating in a new model with a digital testing vendor, the agency has developed the following mitigation strategies:

- Leverage the expertise of EQAO's psychometric advisory committee.
- Establish internal quality assurance processes to oversee vendor data quality.
- Implement a phased approach to bring the agency back to a stabilized operational cycle, with consideration of new curriculum, de-streamed programs and setting of new measurement standards.
- Work closely with the Ministry on the reporting for the 2021–2022 assessments.
- Provide multiple assessment accommodations, including a paper-based option, for students who require them to complete the assessment.

## Board Appointments

The terms of six current members of the board of directors will expire by September 2022, which will leave the board with limited historical context. EQAO's board of directors suggests the following strategies to mitigate the associated risks:

- that the board of directors and its Governance and Nominating Committee undertake thorough recruitment activities to ensure competency and diversity in the board's composition
- that the board employ an EQAO board member matrix to help inform the process to reflect the skills, expertise and experience required for an effective EQAO board (resuming three-year terms will assist with continuity and effective board governance)
- that the board's membership reflects diversity, equity and inclusion, which are key pillars of the board's new strategic directions
- that board appointments be two years or longer to ensure members can maximize their contributions to agency governance

## Meeting Public or Stakeholder Expectations

Lack of understanding of the role of the agency and the value of the data it collects in support of student achievement has the potential to impact the agency's operations negatively, especially due to the pandemic-related suspension of assessments. The initiatives below will help EQAO to provide clarity on its mandate vis-à-vis the perceptions of EQAO's stakeholders:

- Clearly communicate the purpose of EQAO assessments, and support parents, the general public and the education community in leveraging the agency's information for student and system improvement.
- Maintain an updated communications plan that includes strategies to address negative media reporting.
- Monitor media daily and respond to significant issues as appropriate.
- Build the capacity of stakeholders through outreach and agency initiatives focused on the benefits and appropriate use of EQAO data for improvement planning.
- Maintain a collaborative relationship with the Ministry to address knowledge, policy and practice related to student learning in the province.
- Clearly outline the purpose and plans for modernization, including requirements of schools at each step, to key stakeholders. Include information relating to quality assurance and timelines. Use the EQAO website for information related to the online assessments.



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