EQAO

Education Quality and Accountability Office

Business Plan
2023–2026

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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Executive Summary

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is a board-governed agency of the Government of Ontario that contributes to the quality and accountability of Ontario's publicly funded education system. EQAO develops and administers large-scale assessments that produce objective and reliable information to support student success. EQAO data are a snapshot that shows whether students are meeting *Ontario Curriculum* expectations in reading, writing and mathematics at key stages of their education. This data is an important indicator of student learning that adds to the available knowledge about how Ontario students are doing, and they help with improvement planning at the student, school, school board and provincial levels.

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, equity, diversity, 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 includes online assessments of all students across the province in Grades 9 and 10 (mathematics and cross-curricular literacy, respectively, up to the end of Grade 9) and of both mathematics and literacy in the primary and junior divisions (administered in Grades 3 and 6 respectively). 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 activities for the 2023–2026 fiscal period with a focus on 2023–2024 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 continue to modernize the agency's assessments and processes. Over the 2023-2024 fiscal year, 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.
- Ensure effective governance and engagement in the agency's operations.

Over the coming year, the agency will continue to strengthen its large-scale assessments and enhance its IT operations and key business functions, including its reporting approach, as well as its privacy and security practice.

EQAO's continued 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 at the centre of the assessment program; it leverages technology effectively and maximizes the use of data to inform decision making 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 supporting student learning.

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[1]
- 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 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.

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[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

Expectations Set Out in the Mandate Letter

The Letter of Direction received on January 23, 2023, from the Honorable Stephen Lecce, Minister of Education, outlines the direction for 2023–2024 for EQAO as follows[2]:

- "Supporting the government's commitment to modernize education through continuing the implementation of digitized and adaptive assessments for the Primary and Junior Divisions, the digital Grade 9 Math assessment and Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test in an accessible manner.
- Supporting learning recovery in Ontario by providing EQAO assessment data to inform new baselines in student performance.
- Working closely with the Ministry and the Community Services I&IT Cluster to support educators, schools, and boards by providing assessment data to support improvement planning, including the recently introduced reporting system that allows for the visualization and analysis of EQAO data by school boards."

The general direction for agency operations for the coming year relates to competitiveness, sustainability and expenditure management; transparency and accountability; effective, identified, assessed and mitigated risk management that includes the impact of COVID-19 and future emergency risks; optimal workforce management and support of the Community Jobs Initiative (CJI); diversity and inclusion that guarantees an equitable, inclusive, accessible, anti-racist and diverse workplace, as well as the inclusion of all voices in policy and decision making; data collection that improves decision making, information sharing, outcome-based reporting and service delivery; and digital delivery of services that ensures fulfillment of customer service standards as well as the use of improved tools since COVID-19.

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, guardians, 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.

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[2] Ontario Ministry of Education, (2023), EQAO Letter of Direction

- EQAO values the delivery of its programs and services with equivalent quality in both English and French.

Governance Framework

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. EQAO was established to measure the effectiveness of the publicly funded education system and deliver assessment programs that yield objective and reliable information about student achievement.

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 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 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. The Analytics, Reporting and Communications Committee identifies analytics, reporting and communications priorities and develops related policies for board approval to advance the strategic plan and guide staff in its implementation.

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 continue 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: Ensure effective governance and engagement in the agency's operations

Strategic Direction #1	Strategic Direction #2
Goals: • 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.	*Goals*: • Expand networks and partnerships to enhance EQAO's professional capacity and fiscal resources. • Identify and address the implications of integrating datasets that result in 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 priorities and goals. • Ensure effective IT operations and security measures are in place. • Ensure effective and equitable governance and business practices. • Foster a strong organizational culture founded on a sense of inclusion and belonging.

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 students who take our assessments to demonstrate their full understanding of the curriculum. From its assessment results, EQAO gathers information and data that sheds 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,
- Supporting research through the use of EQAO data
- engagement with Ontarians, and
- supporting equity, diversity and inclusion in education.

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, support 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 meant digitalizing the agency's large-scale assessment program during the 2021–2022 school year. 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.

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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:

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

The literacy graduation requirement has been restored beginning with students graduating in the 2022–2023 school year. Students graduating in 2022–2023 are required to meet the literacy graduation requirement. All students in Grades 10 and 11 as well as non-graduating students, including those who are learning remotely, must also work toward the literacy graduation requirement by participating in the OSSLT or completing the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC). To provide maximum flexibility for students to satisfy the literacy graduation requirement, particularly students enrolled in remote learning, in 2022–2023, students can be enrolled in the OSSLC without having attempted the OSSLT.

Student Questionnaire Data

EQAO student questionnaires gather valuable information on aspects of student learning and achievement. The agency will continue to collect data on attitudes toward math and literacy, as well as on student perceptions of their learning environment. 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)

The requirement to successfully complete the MPT for certification with the Ontario College of Teachers is no longer in effect. According to the decision of the Ontario Superior Court of Justice—Divisional Court File Number 20-2584, the MPT is no longer a certification requirement.

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 2023–2026 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	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development	15-year-olds	Reading, mathematics, science

Research

The fourth object of the *EQAO Act (1996)* 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 assessments in order to enhance their learning outcomes at the individual, classroom, school and system levels. At EQAO, we believe discussions about education quality need to be evidence-informed and grounded in research. 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 actionable insights based on the agency's data in a timely manner.

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 on 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, including the collection, processing and analyzing of educational data, and the reporting and sharing of results.

Supporting Research Through EQAO Data

EQAO understands the importance of partnering to fulfill our research mandate. Currently, EQAO's research partners include The Offord Centre for Child Studies at MacMaster University, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), Unity Health Toronto and the Hospital for Sick Children. Our common research projects include an examination of the learning continuum of Ontario students to "understand trajectories of student learning and well-being—from early childhood to adolescence"[3] and a study of the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on student outcomes.

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[3] The Offord Centre for Child Studies at McMaster University, (2022) – Offord Centre and EQAO collaborating to understand student trajectories. Retrieved from https://edi.offordcentre.com/?s=EQAO

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's data, research, and digital assessment platform. Over the next year, this team will continue to provide webinars to help school boards and schools use EQAO data and resources (e.g., training for board IT staff about network readiness for the e-assessment platform and for principals and consultants about administering EQAO's 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 agency plans to undertake an organizational assessment to ensure the agency's human resources and skill sets allow for successful accomplishments of its modernization goals. The agency will continue to leverage third parties, as required, 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 an impact on implementation plans.

Australia

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), established in 2008 as an independent body, is tasked with providing advice on, and delivery of, national curriculum, assessment, and reporting country wide.[4] ACARA develops Australia's curriculum and sets out direction for the National Assessment Program (NAP). As part of NAP, the National Assessment Program—Numeracy and Literacy (NAPLAN) yearly assesses students in third, fifth, seventh and ninth grades numeracy and literacy (reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation). Results are provided at the national, state and regional levels. NAPLAN tests are online and adaptive.[5] The 2022 NAPLAN results showed mostly stable outcomes with declines in Grade 5 numeracy and Grade 9 spelling. Decreased "student participation rates as a result of the pandemic, flu and floods" were reported.

England

England's education system has four key stages (KS): in primary school, KS1, Grades 1 and 2, and KS2, Grades 3 to 6; in secondary, which encompasses junior school, KS3, Grades 7 to 9; and in senior, KS4, Grades 10 to 11. Year 9 marks the students' transition from junior to senior school. The education system also includes the Standards & Testing Agency, in charge of developing and delivering the Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) for children at the end of Key Stages 1 and 2 (Grade 2 and Grade 6).[6] SATs assess primary students' progress and attainment in English, science and math. Next, the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) takes place at Key Stage 4. Under the supervision of the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation in England, several examination boards, including Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) and the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations (OCR), deliver the tests. Assessment subjects incorporate between 9 and 12 fields, some of them compulsory (English, math, two or three sciences, history and geography, a modern language, etc.) and some chosen by each student according to skills and preferences. At the end of the two-year GCSE program, following the examinations, students receive their GCSE. Note that students with special needs are assessed on a different scale.

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[4] Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority – ACARA, (2022), Our Purpose, retrieved from https://www.acara.edu.au/about-us

[5] National Assessment Program -NAP (2022), Understanding online assessment, retrieved form: https://www.nap.edu.au/naplan/understanding-online-assessment.

[6] United Kingdom's Standards and Testing Agency, (2022), What we do, retrieved from: https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/standards-and-testing-agency Standards and Testing Agency - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Due to the pandemic, in the 2019–2020 or 2020–2021 academic years, no national curriculum assessments in primary education, including SATs, were conducted; these testing activities were resumed in the 2021–2022 academic year.[7]

Massachusetts (United States)

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education creates and administers the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS).[8] All students using the Massachusetts public education system are mandated by federal and state law to participate in state-wide standardized testing. In 2017, Massachusetts introduced the Next-Generation Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, a computer-based test program for Grades 3–8, and Grade 10 in English language arts and math; and Grade 5 and Grade 8 in science and technology. Students not passing or missing an MCAS test, or transferring without having passed an MCAS test, must take an English language arts or mathematics retest, conducted in late fall and early spring. The legacy retests in English language arts and mathematics were phased out with the last administration, in November 2021. For the first time "in 2022–23, all of the retests are next-generation, computer-based tests, with a paper-based accommodation available."[9]

National Outlook

Alberta

The Alberta government is setting "a phased approach to implementing mandatory literacy and numeracy screening tools for students in grades 1 to 3. Beginning in September 2022, school authorities will be required to administer literacy and numeracy screening assessments, selected from an approved list. These mandatory screening assessments will be phased in at schools across the province for grades 2 and 3 students, followed by grade 1 students in January 2023."[10] Other assessment tools will continue to be used as well to address learning loss over the pandemic. The assessment window for the 2022–2023 Student Learning Assessment that evaluates literacy and numeracy in the student's language of instruction at the beginning of Grade 3 was set between mid-August and the end of October 2022.[11]

Alberta also administers the Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) to students in Grades 6 and 9. Exemptions from the Grade 6 PATs

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[7] Government of the U.K. (2022), SATs or National Curriculum Assessment., retrieved from: https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7980/#:~:text=SATs%2C%20or%20national%20curriculum%20assessments%2C%20are%20assessments%20of%20primary%20pupils,of%20primary%2F%20junior%20phase).

[8] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2022), Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, retrieved from: https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/default.html

[9] Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2022), Initial Release of the 2022–23 MCAS and ACCESS for ELLs Testing Schedule, Retrieved from: https://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/2023schedule.html

[10] Alberta Government, (2022), Early Years Assessments, retrieved from: https://www.alberta.ca/early-years-assessments.aspx#jumplinks-1

[11] Alberta Government, (2022), Student Learning Assessments – Important Dates, retrieved from: https://www.alberta.ca/student-learning-assessments.aspx

for the 2022–2023 school year will apply to schools that choose to implement new Grade 6 math or English language arts and literature curricula, or pilot the updated Grade 6 science, French first language and literature, or French Immersion language arts and literature curriculum. Teachers provide input when piloting and implementing Grade 6 PATs.[12] Finally, diploma exams have also been temporarily modified. For the 2022–2023 school year, they "will comprise 20 per cent of a student's overall mark in the course. The weighting will return to 30 per cent in the 2023-24 school year."[13]

British Columbia

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA), an annual province-wide assessment of literacy and numeracy for all B.C. students in Grades 4 and 7, involves teams of educators from across the province who work together to develop the tests. 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 assessments were redesigned in the 2021–2022 school year by combining the previous categories reading and writing into literacy. The FSA was live online from October 3 to November 11, 2022.[14] B.C.'s graduation assessments comprise literacy and numeracy testing in Grade 10, and literacy testing in Grade 12.

New Brunswick

New Brunswick's Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) is in charge of the development and administration of provincial assessments, the results of which are used for policy and program development at the provincial, district and school levels.[15] Assessments in Grades 4 to 8 are part of New Brunswick's Provincial Assessment Program. They assess English reading and scientific literacy in Grade 4; mathematics (all students) and French Immersion reading (French Immersion students only) in Grade 5; English reading and scientific literacy in Grade 6; mathematics (all students) and French reading (French Immersion or Post-Intensive French) in Grade 7; scientific literacy, numeracy (starting 2023) and French in Grade 8. The English Language Proficiency Assessment assesses reading comprehension skills for secondary school students. Also, part of New Brunswick's Provincial Assessment Program, the Grade 10 assessment assesses French second language reading. Note that "a new formative assessment tool is being piloted in New Brunswick K–2 classrooms during the 2022–23 school year. The Early Grades Literacy Assessment (EGLA) supports teachers in evaluating and tracking the acquisition of the five foundational skills of reading:

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[12] Alberta Government, (2022), 2022-2023 Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) update, retrieved from: https://www.alberta.ca/provincial-achievement-tests.aspx

[13] Calgary Board of Education, (2022), Provincial Assessments and Reports, retrieved from: https://cbe.ab.ca/about-us/provincial-tests-and-reports/Pages/default.aspx

[14] Government of British Columbia, (2022). Foundations Skills Assessments. Retrieved from: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/program-management/assessment/foundation-skills-assessment

[15] New Brunswick Government, (2022), Provincial Assessment Information, retrieved from: https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/ed/pdf/K12/eval/AssessmentBrochure.pdf

phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension." [16] EGLA's structure and content align with the province's curriculum. In 2021–2022, the administration methodology for all assessments shifted from sample-based to administration to the whole population.[17]

Ontario Outlook

The Ontario government launched *Ontario's Plan to Catch Up[18]* which includes the following five key components:

1. Return to education in classrooms in September 2022 with full school experience
2. Expanded student supports: Tutoring, literacy, and special education to address learning gaps;
3. Enhance skills development in accordance with labour market demands;
4. Increased funds to improve education facilities;
5. Access to mental health support

Ontario's *Plan to Catch Up,* announced in October 2022, includes steps that "respond to EQAO assessment results and prepare students for future success. New supports include:

- **new digital resources**, including TVO's elementary math course packs and TFO's Missions d'Élo on Idéllo, and access to the Grade 9 online math course for additional review and practice. Ontario is also providing an additional $15 million for school boards to offer a digital tool aligned with *The Ontario Curriculum* to support students, parents and educators.
- **Math Action Teams** deployed to underperforming school boards to promote high-impact math teaching practices in Ontario classrooms. These expert teams will identify and recommend short- and long-term targeted responses, with a focus on early interventions.
- **early reading enhancements** that further our response to the Ontario Human Rights Commission's (OHRC) *Right to Read Report*, which includes a $25 million investment in evidence-based reading intervention programs and professional assessments, and helps educators reach young students sooner. Beginning in the 2023–2024 school year, students in year 2 of kindergarten to Grade 2 will be screened for reading using evidence-based tools. The government will also work with school boards and labour partners this school year to establish a consistent set of recommended screening tools.

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[16] Government of New Brunswick – Education and Early Childhood Development, (2022), Reports on Achievement 2021-2022, retrieved from https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/k12/content/anglophone_sector/reports_on_achievement.html

[17] Ibid

[18] Ontario Government, (2022), Plan to Catch Up, retrieved from: https://files.ontario.ca/edu-plan-to-catch-up-en-2022-07-25.pdf

- **extending the $175 million tutoring support program,** previously set to expire on December 31, 2022. The government is extending the investment in this publicly funded tutoring program to ensure students can continue to access supports they need to catch up.
- **continued modernization of curriculum,** including a focus on math, science, computer studies, business studies and technological education to ensure students are prepared with the skills they need for the jobs of tomorrow. This will include a regular curriculum review cycle that ensures curriculum is up to date and relevant to important job and life skills, including pathways to the skilled trades, supported by a Curriculum Review Guide for greater transparency to students and families.
- **attendance supports for struggling students**, by working with school boards to create provincial expectations for how school boards help students with attendance difficulties and enable more students to benefit from consistent classroom learning." [19]

Additionally, the Ontario government announced actions to address antisemitism, including implementing its first mandatory learning requirement in elementary school for Holocaust education in the Grade 6 curriculum and working with the Ontario College of Teachers to develop Holocaust-related professional learning for teachers.[20]

Addressing Systemic Barriers

As part of the Ontario Public Service, EQAO lives its values of inclusivity, integrity and public service excellence and is committed to upholding anti-racism, equity, diversity and inclusion throughout its internal and external activities and policies. The agency is developing its multi-year plan through which the agency will aim to identify, manage and rectify inequities and systemic barriers that may affect both agency staff and the students we serve. The agency will also develop initiatives focused specifically on the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and on the assessment-related needs of equity-deserving communities.

EQAO believes that these measures will help foster an organizational culture where everyone feels a sense of inclusion and belonging and will continue to be reflected in its work to support students and the education system in Ontario.

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[19] Ontario Government, (2022), Province Takes Action to Ensure Students Catch up, retrieved from https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002410/province-takes-action-to-ensure-students-catch-up

[20] Ontario Government, (2022), Ontario Strengthening Holocaust Education to Counter Rising Antisemitism, retrieved from: https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002465/ontario-strengthening-holocaust-education-to-counter-rising-antisemitism

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.

In 2023, EQAO will continue to provide its assessments on a digital platform while ensuring quality and clear assessment windows for assessment administration and results. Following the release of EQAO's provincial data from its assessments administered during the 2021–2022 school year, EQAO made available in November 2022 the first school and school board assessment results since before the pandemic. More than 600 000 students at the elementary and secondary levels in the English- and French-language school systems across the province completed EQAO assessments during the 2021–2022 school year. For the first time, EQAO is reporting on the achievement results of its new digitalized assessments at the school and school-board levels. EQAO's large-scale modernized assessments introduced a new online model of assessment delivery that differs from that of the prior paper-based assessments. EQAO's new platform leverages interactive and user-friendly dashboards for educators, parents, guardians and the public to access assessment and questionnaire data at the provincial and local levels.

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 the development and scoring the assessments. EQAO will continue to rely on educators 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 brings 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-deserving groups. Respecting this status will require enhanced stakeholder engagement skills and effort and a well-prepared strategy. Some of these activities 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 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 to ensure they remain 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 with 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 2022,

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                      ┌─────────────────────┐
                      │  Chair, EQAO Board of│
                      │      Directors       │
                      └──────────┬──────────┘
                                 │
                      ┌─────────────────────┐
                      │                      │
                      │ Chief Executive Officer│
                      │                      │
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                                 │
                                 │        ┌──────────────────┐
                                 │        │ Executive Assistant│
                                 ├────────│    to the CEO      │
                                 │        │    Manager,        │
                                 │        │   Administration   │
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│ Chief Equity &│ │  Director,   │ │Director, Data &│ │Director, Corporate│
│  Assessment   │ │ Assessment & │ │  Reporting    │ │Services & Public │
│   Officer     │ │  Reporting   │ │               │ │     Affairs      │
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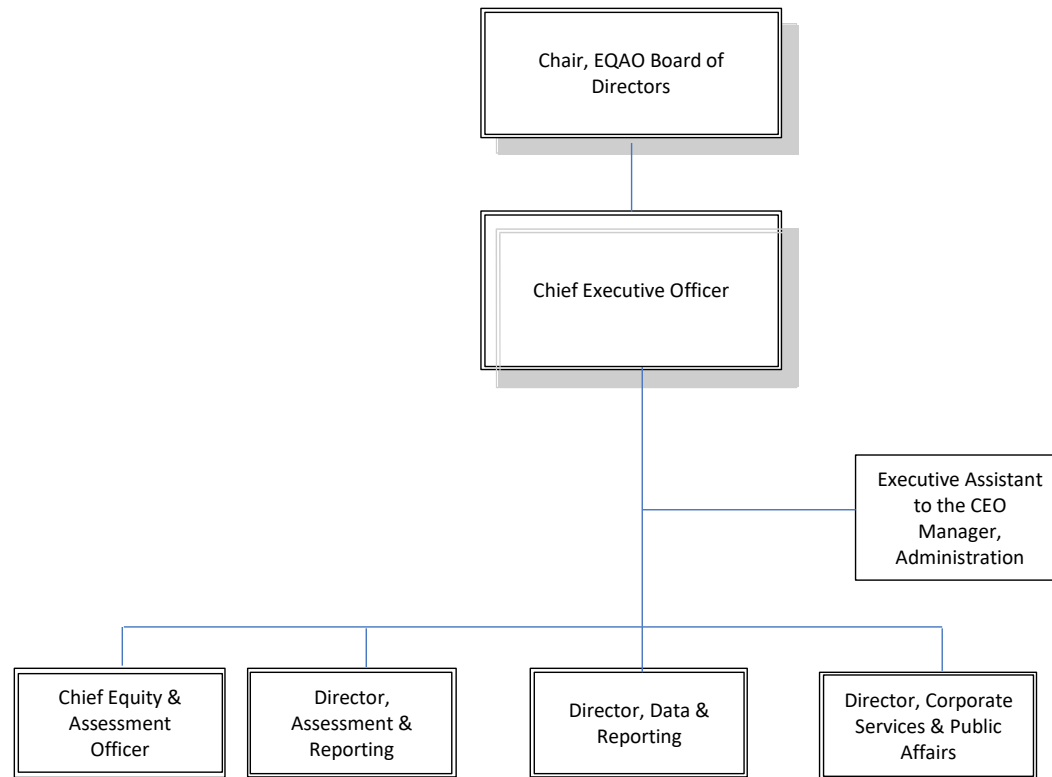
Outcome- and Output-Based Performance Measures and Targets

The performance measures below are focused on the 2023–2024 fiscal year, as the board will undertake strategic planning activities that will set direction for the agency's next 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.	✓ Provide credible data to the education community to inform school board and student improvement.	✓ 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.	✓ 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 enhance the usability of the assessment results.	✓ Transform the EQAO assessments so that they respond to each student's learning needs through the use of Computer Adaptive Test (CAT) technology and a testlet-based linear on-the-fly (tLOFT) assessment model. • Ensure that the new assessment model aligns with the provincial curriculum, and 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 classroom instruction. • 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.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		✓ Provide multiple assessment accommodations, including a paper-based option, for students that require them to complete the assessment. ✓ Engage the psychometric review team to work alongside EQAO staff to ensure data quality and sound psychometric practices for the digital assessments.
C. Support EQAO stakeholders through the digitalization and modernization of its assessments.	✓ 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.	✓ Provide resources that include learning modules, webinars, videos and other appropriate materials to support school boards and schools with the digital assessment administration. ✓ Provide digital sample and practice tests on the public EQAO website. ✓ 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: 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.	✓ By April 30, 2023, 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.
B. Identify and address the implications of integrating datasets in the interest of meaningful public reporting.	✓ EQAO will establish a sector standard on the requirements and implications when integrating datasets for public reporting.	✓ By March 31, 2024, EQAO will establish a policy that sets out the authority and requirements for legislative compliance in the integration of data sets.
C. Engage effectively with stakeholders to continuously improve the agency's work.	✓ 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 by • Learning about and understanding First Nations, Inuit and Métis needs in relation to education and large-scale assessments in Ontario.	✓ By June 30, 2023, establish an EQAO team to lead the agency's work to address all applicable calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. ✓ By December 31, 2023, ensure there are Indigenous representatives and voices on all EQAO committees. ✓ By March 31, 2024, ensure that EQAO team members receive training in anti-racism and that they are aware of educational needs among Indigenous communities in Ontario. Learning will take place through. • meeting sessions with Indigenous communities • participation in Indigenous events • sessions at town halls and other EQAO-organized events, and

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		• equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) initiatives as mandatory elements of individual performance plans for all staff.

	• Establishing 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.	√ By June 30, 2023, establish a Collaborative Council with First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners to
		  • gather feedback on what education data are useful and relevant to Indigenous communities and how EQAO can collaborate authentically, and
		  • support the application of EQAO data as required and appropriate in service to Indigenous communities.
		√ 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.
		√ By March 31, 2024, identify the assessment-related needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis partners and the implications of EQAO reporting and its use for these partners.
		√ By March 31, 2024, make enhancements to
		  • better reflect the identities, circumstances and learning needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis students, and
		  • ensure that EQAO has built

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		relationships and engagement with Indigenous communities to inform its assessment, reporting and research work. ✓ By September 30, 2024, support research using EQAO and other relevant data to unpack and address areas of interest identified by Indigenous communities.
	✓ Leverage the refreshed EQAO stakeholder engagement strategy to direct engagement with the agency's stakeholders.	EQAO will ✓ 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 priorities and goals.	✓ Produce a communication plan for each of the strategic directions and goals.	✓ Develop communication plans that outline activities for the agency's strategic directions and goals. ✓ In alignment with project timelines, report on the metrics of communication products promoted publicly and among agency stakeholders across all communication channels.
E. Ensure effective and equitable governance and business practices.	✓ Ensure that the internal governance and operational policy frameworks support	✓ Maintain agency operations in alignment with EQAO's governance and policy framework by

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
	the agency's operation in accordance with provincial legislation and government directives.	• 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.
	✓ Ensure financial and acquisition accountability and exceptional service delivery.	✓ Maintain accurate and timely financial reports based on Public Sector Accounting Board guidelines and have them validated by an external audit process. ✓ Monitor and report expenditures every month and conduct an analysis of variances every quarter at a minimum. ✓ Improve efficiency of service delivery by implementing a new collection-of-fees

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		system (credit card) for fee-based assessment participants.
	✓ Ensure IT infrastructure and privacy and security posture are in alignment with applicable government standards.	✓ 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.
F. Ensure effective IT operations and security measures are in place.	✓ Continue to implement security measures to mitigate cyber threats and protect EQAO data holdings. ✓ Review the renewed EQAO data lifecycle and implement measures for greater efficiency.	✓ Optimize EQAO's IT processes as they relate to security, software development, governance, operations, capacity management and disaster recovery planning. ✓ Ensure incident management procedures and protections are in place for cyber events. ✓ Conduct an internal and external review of current data lifecycle processes. ✓ Implement measures to improve data lifecycle efficiency both internally and with external vendors and partners.
G. Foster a strong organizational culture founded on a sense of inclusion and belonging.	✓ Lead and encourage employee engagement, collaboration and inclusion throughout the agency.	✓ 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.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		✓ 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
		• 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.
		• improving 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.
		✓ By April 30, 2023, establish an EQAO team to lead the agency's work concerning how to address system inequities and barriers.
		✓ By May 30, 2023, develop a multi-year plan that addresses systemic barriers.
		✓ Develop at least one activity a year that enhances one aspect of anti-racism and addressing inequity and system barriers. in the day-to-day work of the agency.

GOALS	OBJECTIVES	PERFORMANCE MEASURES
		✓ Ensure that working groups and committees (e.g., Accessibility Committee; Anti-Racism Committee; and Research Committee) report regularly to managers and teams on their work.

Financial Budget ($M)

Program Area	2023–2024 Projected	2024–2025 Projected	2025–2026 Projected
Grades 3 & 6 (Reading, Writing & Mathematics)	9.90	9.90	9.90
Grade 9	6.42	6.42	6.42
Ontario Secondary School Literary Test	7.96	7.96	7.96
Mathematics Proficiency Test	0.00	0.00	0.00
Transformation	0.17	0.17	0.17
Operating	4.05	4.05	4.05
Total EQAO Program Operating Expenses	**28.51**	**28.51**	**28.51**
National/International Program (Funded Separately by Ministry)	0.60	0.60	0.60
Total Expenses Including National/International	**29.11**	**29.11**	**29.11**
Ministry Allocation for EQAO Operating Expenses	28.33	28.33	28.33
Total Funding Excluding National/International & Other PPF	**28.33**	**28.33**	**28.33**
National/International Program Funded Separately	0.60	0.60	0.60
Total Funding Including National/International & Other PPF	**28.93**	**28.93**	**28.93**
Capital Assets	**0.25**	**0.25**	**0.25**

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 (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 relies 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 provides eligible Ontario school board and school employees with secure access to their students' achievements results and questionnaire data, as well as resources designed to support student learning. The new business-to-business (B2B) system to access EQAO data and Power BI reports allows school board staff to access EQAO reporting through a single sign-on for authorized users in schools and school boards. EQAO worked jointly with ministry partners and school board IT staff to implement the Azure Business to Business Identity and Access Management solution in summer 2022. In 2023, EQAO will continue to explore ways to provide quality data and results through means that are reliable and easy to access.

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 actively works with its stakeholders to ensure its assessment data are used to enhance educational instruction, support improved student achievement and increase 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 in a manner that is 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 Engagement 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 review 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 be dependent 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 2023-2024 fiscal year will be on optimizing its processes of modernization of key programs and operations as well as enhancing assessment development with an accessibility lens in the following ways:

Digital Assessment Administration
The agency will continue to enhance and implement digital assessments with a focus on Computer Adaptive   Testing (CAT) methodologies of evaluation. The agency will also continue to listen to all voices across Ontario, especially those of Indigenous communities and of other historically marginalized communities.

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. Continue to implement assessment and reporting changes in support of students and educators.
2. Continue to enhance data reporting models through the use of Microsoft Power BI.
3. Continue to share data with schools and school boards through a secure and reliable system aligning with OPS-wide standards for user authentication and identity management.
4. Strengthen the agency's privacy and security program by implementing recommendations from the privacy impact and threat and risk assessments that are conducted across the enterprise.
5. Develop and update business architecture to support program and process improvements and future change initiatives.
6. Reinforce mechanisms for participation of different voices across Ontario including indigenous communities.

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 and/or the Ministry.

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 *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* 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. As the agency modernizes its programs, it will continue to share information, resources 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 sharing information and engaging directly with audiences. As the agency digitalizes and modernizes, social media are important to providing resources and insights 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 Administration

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

- Privacy and security assessments of the 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 will continue 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. EQAO engages regularly with school board I&IT leads to promote the sharing of information.
- The assessments employ a cloud environment, which mitigates capacity and cybersecurity 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. These are repeated annually as required.
- The agency will continue to provide flexible administration windows to ease the technical load on the solution, administration and infrastructure.
- EQAO has standard procedures for testing the e-assessment system prior to the start of administration windows.

Data Quality and Integrity

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 risk of data anomalies, 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.
- Document, automate and adhere to technical and quality assurance processes in EQAO's Data Quality Framework.
- Transfer data in alignment with GO-ITS standards for security and privacy.

Delays in Public Reporting

There is a risk of a delay in reporting results to the Ministry and the public should delays be experienced during administration, scoring and/or data validation. EQAO has implemented the following controls to minimize delays:

- rigorous testing and quality assurance of all new processes
- monitoring activities against reporting schedules and addressing issues appropriately
- continuously reviewing and implementing process improvements to minimize reoccurrence of issues and streamline reporting
- communicating any delay with Ministry and all stakeholders

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. The initiatives below will help EQAO increase understanding among its stakeholders and support schools and school boards:

- Clearly communicate the purpose of EQAO assessments, and support parents and guardians, 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.

- Work with the Ministry to provide timely information to the education community to support its work toward student achievement and keep its members apprised of EQAO activities.

Human Resources

With the shift in the agency's operations, HR identifies recruitment requirements and provides directors and managers with staffing strategies and support to fill vacancies expeditiously and maintain business operations and service levels.

EQAO

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