

Standardized testing should remain

For families with school-age children, the day after Labour Day marks the beginning of a new year every bit as much as January 1 does—perhaps even more so.

School's back next week. It's a good time to think about the importance of public education.

Ontario's education system has considerable strengths, most notably our motivated students and caring teachers.

But we can never ever rest on our laurels. If Ontario seeks to be a leader once again, which surely should be our common objective, we need a culture of continuous improvement in our schools.

Canada's new Governor-General Designate David Johnston, always a passionate supporter of public education in his capacity as President of the University of Waterloo, recently urged greater efforts to improve test scores. He's absolutely right.

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was created by a Progressive Conservative government in 1996 to administer standardized testing and measure and report on students' progress and knowledge of the Ontario curriculum. Testing also helps to identify areas of weakness and then help students, teachers and parents work together to achieve success.

Often criticized in principle and practice by the Ontario Liberals while they were in Opposition, the EQAO survived the change of government in 2003. Today, the EQAO provides for testing in reading, writing and math for Grades 3 and 6, Grade 9 math, and a test of literacy which students

Ted Arnott



must pass to graduate high school.

It's true that EQAO testing is costly at \$32 million a year, has its limitations, and should never be used to criticize teachers.

But standardized testing measures progress and success, and helps to encourage students and teachers alike to reach for the top.

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Elizabeth Witmer, the opposition critic to the Minister of Education, last year, highlighted the need to take action against bullying in our schools.

She raised awareness by outlining the nature and scope of the problem, and offered constructive suggestions to help solve it. In response, the Legislature passed a resolution declaring the third week of November as "Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week."

As the new school year begins, the Ministry of Education and our school boards need to make plans to implement her recommendations.

—Ted Arnott is the MPP for Wellington-Halton Hills

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