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## Focus on math after tests

A strong focus on mathematics will continue at the Halton District School Board, says the superintendent monitoring Grade 3 test results.

Halton students recorded above average scores in the provincial testing, which covered math, reading and writing.

"The students have achieved very well," said superintendent Kit Rankin. "These results tell us we're on the right track."

She had earlier noted the board's Grade 3 students did well in math testing. But she agreed they could improve in some aspects of that subject such as communication and problem solving.

"Problem solving cuts across all aspects of the subject," Ms Rankin said in an interview. "And some kids can't explain their reasoning. That's what communicating involves."

Of those completing tests, 60 per cent of Halton students made the provincial standard (levels 3 and 4) in reading and writing, while about 55 per cent met the standard in math.

Results were somewhat lower in the math categories of problem solving and communication.

Ms Rankin said the Halton students' lower scores in math are part of a province-wide trend.

She said a longer-term focus on early literacy in Halton may account for better results in reading and writing.

But Ms Rankin cautioned the provincial assessments only represent a brief look at how students are doing.

"I hope no one is making judgments about a program or school on the basis of this snapshot .... it's much more complex than that," she said.

"With my own children, I'm much more concerned

about how they do over time," added Ms Rankin. "How do they perform over a two to three month period and what are their work habits like?"

The superintendent noted the provincial tests are valuable as an independent evaluation.

"But I know principals, staff and parents are the greatest experts ... my job is to work with them," said Ms Rankin.

She does feel provincial Grade 3 testing is on the right track. Last May's evaluations were based on new language and math curriculums. They were done over five half days, instead of 10 full days required in 1997.

"I strongly support the design of the tests, which provide opportunities to show understanding and learning," said Ms Rankin. "I was very worried it would be multiple choice or fill-in-the-blank testing, which involves a much narrower range of knowledge."

The superintendent would not directly compare results between individual schools or areas. But Ms Rankin noted many factors can influence results, such as demographics, a child's health and wellbeing, parental participation and the size of the class.

For example, Percy Merry School of Milton, which had the lowest percentage of Grade 3 students meeting the provincial standard, was also the region's smallest class with 14 students.

As for other factors, affluence doesn't necessarily help children, but parental involvement does, said Ms Rankin.

"Parents reading with kids at home is one of the things that enrich children's learning," she said. "But parents spend time with children in different ways at different times and I would not say just one or two ways are the best."

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