

# Halton schools rated average, according to Fraser Institute

*But education directors dispute ranking system*

By **KIM ARNOTT**

Special to *The Champion*

Halton's schools are neither awesome nor awful, according to a province-wide ranking of elementary schools released by the Fraser Institute.

The right-wing think-tank ranked 2,887 schools in Ontario based on their results on the standardized EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office) tests administered in grades 3 and 6.

While no Halton schools appeared in the top 100 schools on the report card, neither did any appear in the lower 200.

The region's schools — both public and Catholic — were ranked between 133 and 2,682 in the province.

The top 10 ranked schools in Halton consist of seven Catholic and three public schools. Six of the schools are in Burlington, three are in Oakville and the remaining one is in Georgetown.

Peter Cowley, director of school performance studies at the Fraser Institute, said the ranking is useful for people involved with the educational system.

"Today, more and more parents choose from among several

schools for their children," he said. "They use the report card's academic indicators to compare schools and make better decisions."

However, the director of education for the Halton District School Board said he was skeptical of the usefulness of ranking schools based on those standardized tests.

"If the best way they have to rank school is EQAO scores, then they're missing a whole lot of other variables," said Dusty Papke.

While he said the test scores are helpful to the school system for a number of reasons, Mr. Papke suggested it's meaningless to compare the results from school to school.

Test results will vary from school to school depending on a number of factors, including turnover of staff and students, socio-economic status of the school population, number of students without English as a first language and the placement of special programs, he said.

For example, the highest ranking Halton public school in the Fraser Institute study was Burlington's John T. Tuck School, which landed at 148th best in the province.

But Mr. Papke noted that Tuck is also the school where the board clusters its gifted students.

Mr. Papke's skepticism about the report card was echoed by Lou Piovesan, director of education for the Halton Catholic District School

Board. Mr. Piovesan said his board supports the standardized tests, as well as the publication of the results, but sees little value in ranking schools based on test results.

Like Mr. Papke, he noted that ranking doesn't account for a number of important differences that exist between schools.

The elementary school report card was also rejected by the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) and the Council of Directors of Education (CODE).

"Boards have always used EQAO results to help our teachers and schools to develop strategies to improve student learning and achievement," said OPSBA president Gerri Gershon. "Today's published ranking, however, undermines valid evaluation and testing measures; discourages and demoralizes teachers; and belittles the efforts of our students."

Mr. Papke added that he usually pays little attention to any information published by the conservative Fraser Institute, suggesting the group uses faulty research methods and has an anti-public school agenda.

"Whatever (the Fraser Institute) produces will be in support of that agenda," he said.

The complete report card is available on-line at [www.fraserinstitute.ca](http://www.fraserinstitute.ca).

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