

Math scores improving at York Region schools

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
Staff Writer

When it comes to math, York Region's public elementary schools have some of the brightest young minds in the province, standardized tests show.

Officials with the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) have released the results of standardized reading, writing and math assessments taken by thousands of students in grades 3 and 6.

One of the tests' main findings is local scores are slowly improving in math.

"I know, as a board, we've had significant increases at Grade 3 and 6 levels," Sharon Craigen, superintendent of curriculum for the region's public school board, said.

Nearly 75 per cent of Grade 3 students here and more than 70 per cent of their Grade 6 counterparts met or surpassed provincial standards in math. Roughly 60 per cent of Grade 3 and 6 students across boards in the rest of Ontario scored at or above those levels.

Craigen noted the math scores of Grade 3 students have risen by 11 per cent since 1998. Math scores of Grade 6 students have gone up by 8 per cent

since 1999.

As in previous years, several trends have emerged from the tests administered by the EQAO, an independent agency that reports scores to the province.

One of those trends is the combined reading, writing and math scores of schools in northern York Region are not nearly as high as those of their counterparts in the south.

Despite at least one statistician's contention it is acceptable to average scores in the three subjects, Craigen said the board frowns upon the practice.

"It's like taking an apple and orange and pear together and saying you have three pears," she said. "If you want to get an average, you have got to average three things that are the same."

Obtaining a total average doesn't really reflect the achievement of students in anything, she added.

Other areas of concern remain, such as the fact boys are lagging behind girls by about 15 per cent.

"This is just the beginning," evaluation officer Daria Lindsey said after a recent board meeting. "We have noticed that trend."

Lindsey couldn't pinpoint what accounts for the gender differences,

adding board officials will eventually investigate what sort of literature boys should be reading.

She called the results "useful" but warned against using them to rank schools, echoing comments common among board officials that they constitute only a "snapshot" of student learning.

"We need to be cautious of comparing schools on a single assessment — no matter how well it is designed," she told trustees.

Results from the assessments, which tested nearly 300,000 kids over five days last May, are to be available in every public library in the region.

Administrators at each school are to help form action plans based on the scores and director of education Bill Hogarth has promised better things in the future.

"We know that we can improve," he said. "We know that we will improve."

By March, the board is to release a plan it hopes will address trouble areas.

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Aurora, Markham schools tie in Catholic board test results

BY GIANNI COLAVECCHIA
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The students at Our Lady of Grace Catholic School in Aurora might be the last to think their test scores would be among the best in York Region.

In fact, nearly all the Grade 3 students at Our Lady of Grace met or exceeded provincial standards in mathematics, with 94 per cent reaching those levels in reading and 87 per cent in writing.

Overall, that leaves Our Lady of Grace tied with St. Patrick in Markham for first place in York Region Catholic school board rankings with a combined average of 93 per cent of students meeting or achieving provincial standards.

The York Region Catholic and public school boards released test scores for each school last week.

MacKillop credits Our Lady of Grace's students with much of the school's success.

MacKillop said knowledgeable teachers, who are very focused on student learning and parents who read to their kids, take them to libraries and put them in after-school clubs also deserve credit.

John XXIII Catholic Elementary School in Unionville was one of four schools in Ontario that had problems getting test results back from EQAO.

Despite weeks of preparing and conducting the tests, it has not received results for Grade 6 students.

EQAO officials had said they didn't receive multiple-choice booklets from the school and couldn't calculate the scores.

But the needed information turned up at the EQAO's offices Friday, EQAO spokesperson Della Rollins said.

"It (losing results) is not common. That is for sure," she said.

Results for the school will likely be available next week, she added.

"This is good news," John XXIII principal Maria Alati said, adding she's confident the results will be favourable.

Most scores from her Grade 3 and 6 students on last year's tests, she explained, were in the 70s and 80s — well above provincial standards.

This year, Grade 3 students at the school achieved test scores of 73, 73 and 64 in reading, writing and math.

The tests were conducted in May and measured the performance of 300,000 students

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