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Students downplay testing

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— 5 per cent passed writing but failed reading.

"We were not satisfied with the results at all; we had a very high failure rate," said Bob Glass, interim chief executive officer for the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO).

"A significant number failed the writing portion — doing summaries, expressing opinions," he noted. "Whether they didn't read it, didn't understand it or simply didn't do it, we don't know."

As for the gender gaps, Glass said it was time to review the types of materials teachers are putting in front of boys.

York District Public School Board chair Crothers insisted the results are not realistic. "I don't think the results mean anything," he said. "If the results are accurate, one would be disappointed, but I don't think they reflect the capabilities of this year's Grade 10 students."

Crothers said schools in his board will show results all over the map because this year's test was a trial run and neither teachers nor students knew what to expect.

And since this first test would not keep failing students from graduating, Crothers believes students may not have taken it seriously.

That seems to be confirmed in the attitude of some students.

Several MDHS students said the test was a waste of time, not only because it was a trial run but didn't replace exams.

"It's just a mark on a piece of paper," agreed student Neil Caron, Grade 11. "We have to write exams anyway."

Of all the students interviewed, the answer to one question was the same. Did you study hard? "Of course not."

Their English teacher, Steve Murray, agreed there was no motivation for the

students to do well this year and worse, that a failing grade next year may prompt students to become discouraged and drop out because it does mean so much.

Students can write the test three times before Grade 12.

"The results show one of two things — the government's right and there is something very wrong with the nature of education, or something is very wrong with the test itself," he said. "Everyone has to see their responsibility in this — the danger is not the results themselves, but how they're used."

At Stouffville District Secondary School, students are claiming the literacy test causes stress, should be given to older students and could be imposing too high of standards on the students.

"The literacy test is a dumb idea," said Mike Thornhill, 16. "They should move the test to the later stages of high school."

SDSS students noticed that females scored better than the males. And, they know why. Girls have more interest in seeking professional careers, said Daniel Crawford, 15. "I think more males fail the test than females because they don't care as much about getting into college," said the Grade 9 student.

York Catholic District School Board chair Elizabeth Crowe said whether or not this year's results count, they can still be used to improve literacy skills in the students who wrote the test and the ones coming up after them.

"We have to get strategies in place to address these issues," Crowe said. "I do know and am happy to say our board did better than the provincial average, but it's still not good enough."

Board results are out today and individual schools can release their results April 9. If schools choose not to, the EQAO will release those results April 27.

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