

# Girls did much better than boys in tests

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN  
Staff Writer

Gender-based results of the provincial literacy test, released late Thursday by the province, reveal a disturbing gap between boys and girls which has both York Region school boards concerned.

Grade 10 girls fared better than boys by more than 10 per cent.

Only 63 per cent of Catholic school boys passed both the reading and writing components, compared to 76 per cent of girls. In the public schools 66 per cent of boys passed both reading and writing, compared with 78 per cent of girls.

The gender gap becomes even more apparent when looking at students who failed both reading and writing. Of the total Catholic students who failed, 15 per cent were boys, compared to eight per cent of girls, numbers which, when averaged out, equal the 12 per cent of total students who failed.

In the public board, nine per cent of boys failed both, compared to five per cent of girls, equaling that board's seven per cent failure rate.

"Our major concern is that we are again seeing the difference between boys and girls," said Barbara Bodkin, the York Catholic District School Board superintendent of curriculum and assessment.

Bodkin noted several other surprising results, gleaned from survey questions included in the test.

More than 95 per cent of York Region students have a home computer. More than 83 per cent write outside of school by sending e-mails or chatting on the Internet and more than 70 per cent of students read Internet material outside school.

"It's obvious technology has a part to play, an enhanced role in our classrooms," Bodkin said. "We want to encourage a balance, but above and beyond, that is what appeals to young people."

Overall, according to numbers released last week, the public board performed slightly above its Catholic counterpart, with 70 per cent of total students passing. That percentage includes those students who were absent and those whose test was deferred, for example, a recent immigrant still studying English as a second language.

Sixty-nine per cent of students in the York Catholic District School

Board passed the test, which measured reading and writing skills based on language expectations common to all subjects.

Province-wide, 61 per cent of students passed.

Ross Virgo, spokesperson at the York Region District School Board said staff are still crunching the gender-related numbers.

"Having just received the data, there hasn't been an opportunity for proper analysis as to why the numbers are the way they are," he said. "There has been anecdotal and test evidence, but never a uniform literacy test and never one which has shown a discrepancy of this magnitude."

## System underfunded, survey shows

Catholic teachers union poll suggests it's the top concern of parents in Ontario

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN  
Staff Writer

A recent survey of Ontario parents shows that more than half think the province's education system is underfunded.

Fifty-nine per cent said the province is not adequately funding public and Catholic schools, while 32 per cent said they believe the system is sufficiently funded. Eight per cent didn't know.

Commissioned by the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), Vector Research and Development asked 502 adults to rank nine items in order of importance to their children's education.

"The results were quite astonishing," said OECTA president Jim Smith. "When you boil it all down, parents are focusing on specific issues about the quality of education they don't feel are being met right now by the government."

The expectations parents rank highest include textbooks for every child (97 per cent), qualified teachers (93 per cent), resources for special needs students (89 per cent), amount of time teachers spend with each student (86 per cent) and time between or after classes to provide extra help to students (84 per cent).

Parents also want to see class

sizes that do not exceed 25 students in primary grades and 22 in high school, enough computers in the classroom for each child and no split grades.

Smith said the provincial government practice of issuing letters of permission to people allowing them to teach without a certificate is undermining the entire system.

"It's laughable," he said. "The government is talking about standardized testing for teachers while it allows individuals with no teacher training in our classrooms."

Elizabeth Crowe, chair of the York Catholic District School Board, agreed the board has hired people under special letters of permission from the province as it struggles to find qualified teachers in technical and computer science areas, as well as filling supply teacher demands.

"There is an issue around finding qualified teachers — they're just not there. There are only so many graduating every year and we are in competition with other boards to

hire those teachers," she said, adding her board has a "limited amount" of people teaching under letters of permission.

In fact, the Catholic board has 17 such individuals of its 3,000 teachers, three-quarters of which teach French as a second language in grades 1-3, which is a subject not available to those grades in public schools.

Of the public board's 5,000 teachers, six people are instructing under letters of permission.

"These are instructors in technical areas, what we used to call shop, and in special language courses,"

explained spokesperson Ross Virgo. Crowe said in general, the survey results aren't a revelation.

The board has routinely strived to provide textbooks for every child, but with the new curriculum, many texts aren't available before teachers begin the course, she said.

Crowe also pointed out parents may think the 25/22 students per class is a maximum, when in fact it's an average.

"For every class that's over,



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

The blue Together We're Better Dancers prepare to trash the red ones in a take on racism by these students at Parkview Public School in Unionville on Friday morning. The assembly drama was part of the school's participation in the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination

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Crowe also pointed out parents may think the 25/22 students per class is a maximum, when in fact it's an average.

"For every class that's over,

there's a class that is under," she said. Sometimes there's a larger class to avoid a split grade and sometimes there's not enough funding to avoid a split grade.

Stouffville Catholic parent Anne Salvagna said her biggest concern is the lack of support in the classroom, for both teachers and students, especially in larger classes.

"We need more support in the classroom. We need helpers to give the kids one-on-one attention when they need it and to take a load off the teachers."

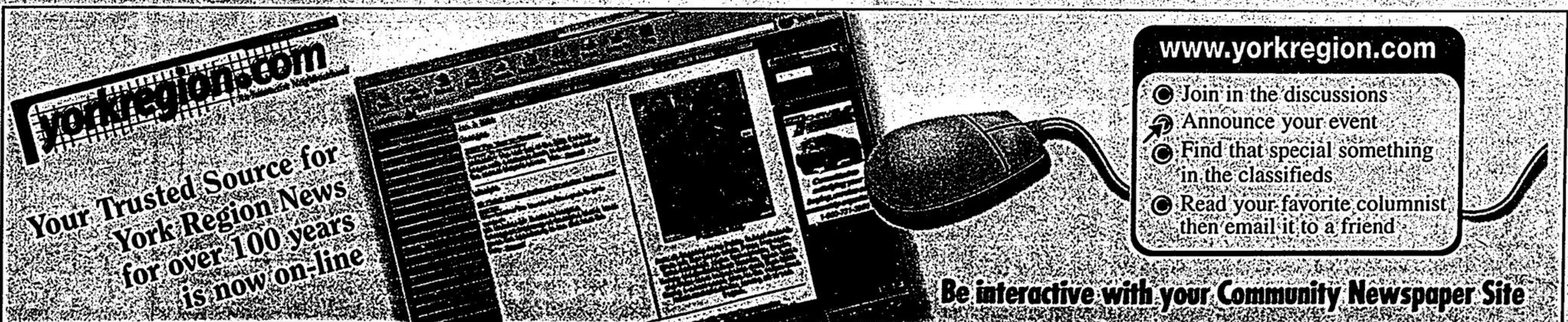
"Daycares don't allow those high ratios, so why do the schools?"

Meanwhile, public board spokesman Virgo said while his board hasn't commissioned such a survey itself, the issues parents are concerned about are parallel.

"General feedback from principals, trustees and parents indicates a number of York Region parents share the same concerns," he said.

"But we would suggest the survey data needs to be interpreted carefully." For example, he said, students sharing textbooks may be an appropriate and efficient solution in some cases.

"But any core subject text, like math or English, we would agree the need is one textbook per student and that is certainly the case in our board."



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