

York board wants alternate diploma after seeing literacy test results

BY MITCHELL BROWN
Staff Writer

The York Region District School Board is among 20 provincial school boards calling for an alternate high-school diploma, following the latest test results from the Education Quality and Accountability Office.

Although 75 per cent of the Grade 10 students who completed the two-day Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test last February passed the test, 32,000 students did not, raising fears many of them will not receive a high-school diploma.

"We know that students who leave secondary school before graduating work less and for less than those who graduate," said Gerri Gershon, chairperson of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association.

"These students are a vital component of the labour force and deserve the opportunity to show an employer an alternate diploma, which reflects a program of studies designed to prepare them to go to work."

On Monday, the EQAO released results of its OSSLT, a two-day test completed by more than 129,000 Grade 10 students last February.

About 97,000, or 75 per cent, of Ontario students passed the reading and writing components of the test; a requirement for graduation. The other 25 per cent failed either the reading portion (five per cent), the writing portion (nine per cent), or both (10 per cent, or nearly 13,000 students).

Here in York Region, the numbers look a little brighter.

In the public system, 82 per cent of the 6,708 students who took the test passed both the reading and writing components of the test, while 77 per cent of almost 3,000 students in the Catholic system achieved the same results. However,

those numbers look slightly different when broken down by stream.

For example, if only the students in the public board's academic stream are considered — that is, those students planning to go on to university — the percentage of those who passed goes up to 89 per cent.

On the other hand, students in the applied stream, meaning those who want a diploma but do not plan to attend university, scored only a 46 per cent passing rate.

The numbers are similar among Catholic students, with 87 per cent of academic students passing the test, compared to only 32 per cent of applied students.

While those are slightly lower than the public board's figures, board spokesperson Chris Cable said their numbers reflect the fact the York Catholic board had the highest participation rate in the province, with 97 per cent of eligible students writing the test compared to 92 per cent provincially.

"The cold reality is, those students must still pass this test," Ms. Cable said, adding those students who failed will receive in-school remedial help.

Education Minister Elizabeth Witmer has said she would consider proposals for an alternate diploma, but would not go into details about what would be required to obtain one.

The mere fact it is being considered is encouraging, said public board spokesperson Ross Virgo, who said the call for an alternate diploma has been ongoing for some time now.

"We feel there ought to be alternative ways for students to feel successful because all children can achieve levels of success when it comes to reading and writing," he said.

Students who failed the test will get another chance to pass it Oct. 23 and 24,

when this year's Grade 10 students will write it for the first time.



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