

EQAO scores reveal insufficient progress, Ontario education minister says as he announces new plan

Test results released Wednesday after months-long delay show slight gains in reading, writing and math among elementary and secondary students.

Updated 1 hr ago

Dec. 3, 2025

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Provincewide test results released Wednesday morning show slight gains in reading, writing and math among elementary and secondary students, but Ontario's education minister says the improvements aren't enough.

At a press conference Wednesday morning, Education Minister Paul Calandra described the results as "Yes, progress, but not enough."

"I was really taken aback by these results," he told reporters at Queen's Park, as the arm's-length Education Quality and Accountability Office released scores from the so-called EQAO tests.

Results in English-language schools show overall improvement compared with last year. In Grade 3, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding the provincial standard — equivalent to an A or B — climbed to 64 per cent in math (up three percentage points), 74 per cent in reading (also up three points), and 65 per cent in writing (up one point.)

In Grade 6, 51 per cent met the standard in math (up one point), 86 per cent in reading (up four points) and 85 per cent in writing (up five points).

On the Grade 9 math test, 58 per cent met the standard (up four points) and among first-time students taking the Grade 10 literacy test, 84 per cent met the standard.

In response to what he called insufficient progress in EQAO scores, Calandra said he plans to create an advisory panel to look at why results are "not improving at the pace we need," and if the tests match what is actually taught in classrooms.

He also wants the two advisers he appoints to determine whether teachers are properly "prepared and supported," as well as whether better resources could be made available to students.

"The latest EQAO results show that more action is needed to support our students and help them succeed," Calandra said Wednesday, also blaming governance issues and trustee dysfunction for the lack of improvement.

"In too many cases, dysfunction and infighting among trustees have distracted boards from this core responsibility. I have taken the time to closely review these results, and we are taking decisive action to get students on track for stronger achievement."

The advisers are to be appointed in the new year, and they will also be tasked at looking at how EQAO data is used in schools to improve achievement, whether students with special needs are getting the help they need, as well as ways to better prepare students for the tests.

Calandra had halted releasing the data, saying he first wanted to do a “deep dive,” fuelling speculation that scores had continued to stall or even decline.

The minister, however, said he wanted to examine the scores board by board and was having “a lot of discussions with a lot of people with respect to how the test is working” and that he wasn’t going to apologize for doing so.

“We want to do something with the data to make sure that (students) can do even better,” he said in the legislature last week as opposition critics said results from the arm’s-length Education Quality and Accountability Office should not be politicized.

“You’ve had seven and a half years (in office), and you made quite a mess,” Liberal MPP John Fraser (Ottawa South) said in the legislature last week. “That’s why you’re withholding the EQAO results.”

The tests in reading, writing and math are created and administered by the EQAO, and are typically written in the spring in grades 3 and 6.

There is also a Grade 9 math test, as well as a literacy test in Grade 10 that students have to pass to graduate.

Overall provincial results and board-by-board scores are usually made public in September or early October.

Teacher unions are no fans of the testing — with some students and educators giving it the backronym “evil questions attacking Ontario” — saying teacher assessments are better indicators of achievement.

Schools typically use the data to help in planning, though critics have questioned the usefulness given that kids have already moved on to the next grade by the time they are available.

Kathleen Woodcock, who heads the Ontario Public School Boards’ Association, has called the scores “an important planning tool, but it is only one part of a much bigger picture” along with report card data and teacher assessments.”

Calandra said the province has made changes and brought in literacy and math resources and he wants to “see how those dollars that were spent, were they working in the fashion that we wanted them to work? And if they weren’t working in some boards, why were they not working?”

Past EQAO test scores

In 2023-24, Grade 3 math scores stalled, with 61 per cent of students meeting the provincial standard — which is roughly equivalent to a B grade. In 2021-22, some 59 per cent met the standard, and in 2022-23, 60 per cent did.

In Grade 3 reading and writing, results in 2023-24 were within one or two percentage points compared to the two years prior, with 71 per cent meeting the standard in reading and 64 per cent in writing.

For Grade 6 students, just half of students met the standard in math in 2023-24, with 82 per cent making the grade in reading and 80 per cent in writing.

Math scores were up slightly and reading and writing down slightly from 2022-23.

Math scores remained stubbornly low for Grade 9 students as well, with 54 per cent meeting the standard in 2023-4, compared with 52 per cent in 2021-22 and 54 per cent in 2022-23.

Grade 10 literacy continued to produce the highest results, with 85 per cent of students passing.



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