

NEWS release

June 11, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

► **85% of first-time test-takers in Peel board pass literacy test** *98% of students successful by end of grade 12*

Of grade 10 students in the Peel District School Board who took the provincial literacy test for the first time, 85 per cent passed, compared to 84 per cent provincially. Fifty per cent of previously eligible students who rewrote the test were successful.

"It's clear that we've seen significant improvement over the past five years—10 per cent more students are passing the test the first time they take it, compared to five years ago," says Jim Grieve, director of education. "It's also important to look at students' progress over their entire time in high school. By the end of grade 12, about 98 per cent of students in Peel schools pass the test or the literacy course that's an alternative to the test—and so they're able to graduate."

Highlights of Peel board results for first-time test-takers include the following.

- 9,981 students were eligible to write the test for the first time in March 2008. Of those, 9,421 or 94 per cent wrote the test—the other students were deferred or absent.
- 88 per cent of girls passed the test, compared to 81 per cent of boys. The pass rate for boys is stable over the past three years.
- 44 per cent of English language learners who wrote the test passed, compared to 59 per cent provincially. This is a 10 per cent drop from last year.
- 57 per cent of special education students passed, compared to 52 per cent provincially. This is an eight per cent increase over last year. Fourteen per cent of eligible students are identified with special needs.
- 94 per cent of students in academic courses passed the test, compared to 58 per cent in applied courses, and 15 per cent in locally developed courses.

"What's most important about these results is how we use them to help improve student learning," says Chuck Waterman, superintendent of curriculum and instruction. "For the past two years, we have been focusing on transformational practices designed to help students in grades 7 to 12 strengthen their literacy and numeracy skills. First, we gathered proven strategies from our schools that were making the biggest difference in boosting student achievement. Next, these transformational practices were packaged in a way that all schools could easily implement."

During the last two years, teams from schools with grades 7 to 12 have participated in training about how to use the strategies. All schools have a plan to implement two of the transformational practices:

- preparing for EQAO assessments
- consistent and planned administration of EQAO assessments

As a family of schools, the teams have also chosen one additional transformational practice on which to focus, based on the greatest area of need for students in their area. The other practices are:

- using data to make informed decisions
- explicit teaching and reinforcement of vocabulary
- literacy skills across the curriculum
- three-part lesson design to support mathematical thinking
- purposeful talk about mathematics
- using thinking tools

"It's important for parents and the public to understand that the literacy test is not a standardized test, and it's not a test of basic literacy skills. The test is based on the Ontario curriculum. Unlike a standardized test, a student's performance on the test is not compared to that of other students. Rather, students pass or fail the test based on a standard set by EQAO, which designs and marks the test. The requirement to pass this test is clearly much higher than the normal pass mark in school," Waterman explains.

The OSSLT is a one-day test that focuses on key skills in reading and writing. It is based on the reading and writing skills expected in the Ontario curriculum across all subject areas up to the end of grade 9. The test includes reading selections, multiple choice and short answer questions, as well as a variety of types of writing tasks.

For a copy of the Peel board report or for school-by-school results, visit the Peel board website at www.peelschools.org and look for the icon "grade 10 literacy test" on the home page, or go to the EQAO site at www.eqao.com.

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