

UG schools faring better in Math than literacy - EQAO

Grade 9 mathematics students in the Upper Grand District School Board outperform many of their peers across the province, according to test results released by the province's Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO).

However, a second report dealing with literacy showed the Board's averages slightly below a provincial average success rate of 83 per cent, and the success rate at Centre Dufferin District High School at only 72 per cent.

As for Grade 9 Math, results in both the schools' Academic and Applied programs have topped provincial averages over the past five years.

In the Applied program, 59% of students in Upper Grand schools met or exceeded the provincial standard in 2014, compared with 47% provincially. The result in Upper Grand was up 7% over the previous year, and is an increase of 11% since 2010.

In the Academic program, Upper Grand students were 88% successful, compared with 85% provincially. Success rates across the province have risen slowly over the past five years, with Upper Grand students consistently 2 to 4% ahead.

In both programs boys were marginally more successful than girls. In the Academic program 89% of males met or exceeded the provincial standard, compared to 87% of females. In the Applied program 61% of males met or exceeded the provincial standard, versus 55% of females.

"The success of our students is a testament to the skill and dedication of our teachers," said Mark Bailey, Chair of the board. "It is heart-warming to see that every year an increasing number of students are able to show that they're learning the math curriculum."

"The EQAO results tell us that we're reducing the gap between students in Academic or Applied courses in math, but we can do even better. Staff will be analyzing the data for individual schools and across the board, including cohort data, and this will help to identify the instructional practices that best ignite learning."

Among the Academic program students, those tested at Orangeville District Secondary topped both the provincial and Upper Grand success rates at 91 per cent, while Centre Dufferin and Westside students were below both at 83 and 81 per cent, respectively.

Literacy results

Secondary students in Upper Grand high schools who were eligible to write the EQAO Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) this year achieved an 82% success rate – the same as it was last year, but a percentage point below the provincial average of 83%. For the past five years Upper Grand has been either the same as, or within one or two percentage points of the provincial average.

"I'm pleased with the overall results," said Mr. Bailey. "Upper Grand students are consistently on par with their peers across the province."

In Dufferin, two of the county's three high schools were close to the provincial average, Westside Secondary students having an 82% success rate and Orangeville District Secondary students next at 81 per cent. But in Shelburne the success rate at Centre Dufferin District High plunged from previous years, to only 72%.

The OSSLT assesses the reading and writing skills students are expected to learn across all subjects by the end of grade 9. All students, whether in Academic or Applied programs, take the same test. Successful completion of the OSSLT, and/or the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC), is one of the 32 requirements for an Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

"A great many of our students excel at the OSSLT," Mr. Bailey said, noting that 96% of Academic students passed, higher than the

provincial average. However, an area of concern is the lower success rate for students in Applied courses.

The success rate for students in the Applied program has been trending downward for the last five years. In 2014 it was at 53%, approaching the provincial average of 50%.

Literacy is no less important to students who may be on a pathway to a career in a trade or industry. We owe it to the students, and they owe to themselves, to see that they acquire the fundamental skills that are needed to fully participate in society.

The Upper Grand board is working on strategies to help Applied students improve their literacy levels. College Heights SS, Orangeville DSS, Centre Dufferin DHS and Wellington Heights SS are participating in a special project this year with a focus on closing the achievement gap.

Norwell DSS, Erin DHS and Guelph CVI staff are also participating in literacy-based collaborative inquiries, some of which will explore the use of technology to support student success in literacy, particularly in Applied classrooms.

Of the 2,519 students eligible to write the test for the first time (FTE), 48% were female and 52% were male. Girls outperformed boys with an 88% success rate, compared to 76% for the boys. The discrepancy between the sexes is slightly more pronounced in Upper Grand as compared to the province, where 87% of female students were successful versus 78% for males.

Students with special needs (FTE, excluding the gifted) achieved a 47% rate of success, and 74% of English Language Learners were successful.

Schools will use their Literacy Teams, develop school improvement plans with the goal of higher achievement, and will discuss strategies to help students who struggle to learn. Ongoing support for students includes mentor training for target groups, and the after-school 'Pass the Test' initiative.

D-P results above Ontario averages

Meanwhile, a release from the Dufferin-Peel Catholic board showed that in the literacy tests their students exceeded the provincial average by between four and 13 percentage points.

The release added that the percentage of Dufferin-Peel students achieving at or above the provincial standard (Levels 3 or 4) in Grade 9 mathematics continues to exceed provincial averages and highlights the ongoing success of Dufferin-Peel students in this important subject area.

Eighty-seven percent (87%) of Dufferin-Peel students who wrote the OSSLT for the first time, successfully completed the test. Dufferin-Peel students have exceeded the provincial averages on each of the Grade 9 assessments of mathematics and on the OSSLT for the last five consecutive years.

Results from the 2013-2014 Grade 9 mathematics assessments were consistent with last year's high achievement levels among students in the academic mathematics program and represented a significant 4% improvement among those taking applied mathematics. The success rate for fully participating, first-time eligible Dufferin-Peel students writing the March 2014 OSSLT was a gain of 1% over the previous year's high performance, while success rates among previously eligible students decreased slightly (-1%). This year's performance continues to support the high levels of achievement of Dufferin-Peel students over the last five years of EQAO testing.

The release did not include a breakdown of individual schools in the D-P system