

## High Stakes Testing

### *In this issue:*

- ***The 4 ASCD Positions: High Stakes Testing (p.2)***
- ***Principal and Teacher Perspectives: High Stakes Testing (p.3)***
- ***“Assessment for Learning: An Endangered Species?” - An American Colleague’s Perspective (p.4)***
- ***Your Board of Directors (p.5)***
- ***Passage of Constitution and By-Laws (p.6)***

*The Trillium is also available on our website:*

**Ontario ASCD: [www.ascd.ca](http://www.ascd.ca)**

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### President’s Message

Last week I met with a Grade 11 student. She was in Special Education programs during elementary and passed the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test last year. While this may be exciting news to most, this student wanted to talk to me about her frustrating experience. She had two messages: there is an overwhelming pressure surrounding this test and supports to ensure students’ success need to start much sooner.

Since Grade 8, she and her classmates have felt an increasing pressure from teachers about passing the Grade 10 OSSLT. It dominated their Language Arts and English classes and became the reason to study these subjects. Life in the pressure cooker world of a pending test that had implications for their diploma/job aspirations was troubling.

I was also told about the very supportive scribe assigned to her for the OSSLT. While she appreciated this support, she is concerned that the scribe will not be there when she has her first job interview, or indeed, for the rest of her life. She wants to be able to read and write on her own. Programs to help her that start in Kindergarten and Grade 1 were preferable to later supports that have drawn her to the conclusion that, while she has completed the literacy component in order to graduate, she still feels that she is not literate.

This student spoke very positively about the change she would like to see. It is evident that educators in this province are acknowledging concerns such as these with the tremendous work being accomplished by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and early programs such as Race to Read.

The theme of this newsletter is “High Stakes Testing,” which is one of 4 adopted positions from ASCD. As we continue down the accountability road in Ontario, let us ensure that any testing is fair, balanced, and used to inform and improve instruction. And let us remember, that especially for students such as the one I’ve spoken about, decisions made from the data collected should help our students meet the challenges of the society they live in. At our recent AGM, some changes were made in our governance structure and I would like to welcome both new and returning Directors to their positions (see table on back) and wish you a productive year of growth. Anne Marie Duncan will be our Newsletter Editor; best wishes to her and her team.

We hope you enjoyed our latest edition of the “Changing Perspectives” journal. Our Board is excited to present such membership products and services and encourage you to keep your membership status active. Our upcoming Institute with Jay McTighe (Understanding by Design) will be another opportunity to benefit from your membership.

Depending on your roles, your school year is over or ending and I wish you success, happiness and professional growth during this time of reflection and rejuvenation.

Ivan Saari  
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**Ontario ASCD, a diverse learning community that promotes excellence in education, is dedicated to supporting the growth and success of all learners.**

## ASCD Adopted Positions: High Stakes Testing

Through its position adoption process ASCD continues to advocate for policies and practices that ensure all children have access to educational excellence and equity.

### The Four Positions

- [The Whole Child](#) (Trillium-Jan. 06)
- [Health and Learning](#) (Trillium-March 06)
- [High-Stakes Testing](#) (Trillium-current)
- [The Achievement Gap](#) (Trillium-Sept. 06)

### High-Stakes Testing

Decision makers in education—students, parents, educators, community members, and policymakers—all need timely access to information from many sources. Judgments about student learning and education program success need to be informed by multiple measures. Using a single achievement test to sanction students, educators, schools, districts, states/provinces, or countries is an inappropriate use of assessment. ASCD supports the use of multiple measures in assessment systems that are:

- Fair, balanced, and grounded in the art and science of learning and teaching;
- Reflective of curricular and developmental goals and representative of content that students have had an opportunity to learn;
- Used to inform and improve instruction;
- Designed to accommodate innovative speakers and special needs students; and
- Valid, reliable, and supported by professional, scientific, and ethical standards designed to fairly assess the unique and diverse abilities and knowledge base of all students.

#### **IVAN SAARI SELECTED FOR THE ASCD EMERGING LEADERS PROGRAM**

ASCD is committed to engaging a diverse community and building capacity to improve learning, teaching and leadership. In ASCD's quest to build a pool of diverse potential leaders for the association and its affiliates, ASCD has designed the Emerging Leaders Program.

This leadership program equips leaders to advance ASCD positions; to strengthen ASCD's voice for influencing policy and practice; to become involved in ASCD governance and to explore multiple pathways towards ASCD leadership.

14 individuals were selected from a worldwide pool of applicants. Ontario ASCD congratulates Ivan on his selection!

## High Stakes Testing: The Elementary Principal's Perspective

By Judy Atkins and Sheila Piggott, Elementary Principals  
Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington  
Catholic District School Board

As Elementary School Principals academic testing is a part of life. Test scores are shared with the public for Reading, Writing and Mathematics in grades three and six. PM Benchmark, DRA and exemplar scores are assessed and shared with both the school board and parents a number of times each school year. The focus on testing in elementary schools today can be viewed both positively and negatively.

In a positive light, data should drive instruction. The focused attention on assessment has reinvigorated action research in the classroom. As professional learning communities we grow and develop our skills through meaningful dialogue about, balanced, focused, and objective assessment. We are accountable for the achievement of our students. This empowers educators to stay focused on the mandate to facilitate the development of life long learners and successful contributing members of an ever-changing society.

Decisions about instruction are objective when the assessment tool is based on many children the same age completing the same normative task. We obtain objective data when assessment tools such as exemplars, PM Benchmark and DRA are used appropriately.

When looking at the negative impact that High Stakes Testing can have on educators, one can look at the published accounts of EQAO results for grades three and six in the media.

At times we can lose perspective that EQAO assessments are a snapshot of how a child is achieving at a particular time. When the newspapers publish the information, it is based on all children in the grade, not just the students completing the assessments. Publishing EQAO scores, groups all of the students together and encourages the public to compare groups of grade three and six students against the previous year's grade three and six students. The tests change each year and thus we are comparing apples to oranges. Not to mention the fact that in small schools, the samples can be quite skewed because each student can be worth 5% or more when looking at the data.

What we need to be focusing on is what growth has occurred from one cohort of students from grade three testing on through to grade six. Even though the tests are different and change each year, at least in many schools the students are consistent. This data should be used along with other assessments, report cards, anecdotal comments by the teacher, exemplar and reading scores to provide a fuller more complete idea about how a child is achieving.

When looking at the aggregate scores for the school board, EQAO helps to guide professional development, build teacher capacity and thus increase student achievement.

As educational leaders we need to stay focused on improving student achievement. EQAO assessments are a piece of information that can be used to improve communication amongst all stakeholders. Staying focused on how to use data to continue to improve student achievement, the development of resources and improvement of instruction within the classroom will ensure that we are graduating students that will be successful in a global community. Also to keep in the fore front as Catholic educational leaders is the message clearly stated in the Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association publication, The Special Vocation of Teachers in Catholic Schools which states, "Teachers in a Catholic school strive to realize a Catholic educational vision of Assessment that determines growth and achievement while respecting the sacred mystery of each learner."

## High Stakes Testing: The Teacher's Perspective

By Margaret Talbot  
Toronto Catholic District School Board

My school memories are as an average student who experienced academic successes and failures. I built on these mountains and valleys to continue on to my next goal. I progressed because I generally had an evaluation that was pointing the way. There were times, however, when the testing seemed a waste of my educational time. I suspect less successful students also felt this way about the testing tools. These were usually the students who were disciplined for unacceptable behavior. I can't help but wonder if this was partly a reaction to the school system due to frustration, stress and an inability to see their own goals and successes. Imagine the frustration those teachers were feeling having to respond to their students in this way.

Looking at schools in general, I wonder if the same thing is happening today. Why do teachers feel the behavior and respect of students is declining? There are many reasons for this but I can't help feeling that today's students are also reacting to the system in the same manner. I know for sure that today's teachers are disheartened with the way they must deal with our student behavior.

Simply count the number of tests required of our students! Kindergarten through to High School have board and Ministry mandated testing. Some of these tests, such as EQAO, require days, weeks and months of preparation time. The list of classroom interferences seem endless. Teachers question when they can deliver curriculum without interruption and concern about the next testing period. These anxieties do not even begin to address the monetary costs that standardized tests require.

Most teachers appreciate standardized reports and testing when used appropriately. In March 2004 the ASCD adopted a position on high stakes testing. Two of the most salient points were that testing must be "fair, balanced, and grounded in the art and science of learning and teaching" and must be "used to inform and improve instruction." The risk is that we are now becoming number crunchers. We speak of students as levels and fitting a particular rubric. We set class and school goals to move the numbers up to the next level. We seem to forget that we teach people not robots.

I have also observed that frequently students answer well or poorly on a test yet react opposite in the regular classroom environment. Our students are not transferring their knowledge to real situations in either of these cases. Have we only taught skills to ensure that we have prepared for the test? Is this practice helping our students to become life long learners? When are children allowed to be children today? I fear we are taking the pleasure and spontaneity out of learning and teaching. Are we sure that they know their personal goals and achievements and are on their own road to success and not a road of frustration?

All of these questions make me wonder if the stakes are too high.

## Assessment for Learning: An Endangered Species?

by W. James Popham, Emeritus Professor, UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies

Classroom assessment for learning is a marvelous, cost-effective way of enhancing student learning. Solid research evidence confirms that it works, assessment experts endorse it, and teachers adore it. Nevertheless, I fear for its survival. To explain, let me wind back the clock. In October, 1998, two British researchers, Paul Black and Dylan William, reported on the work of their colleagues in the United Kingdom's Assessment Reform Group. (1) Black and William described a powerful distinction between two approaches to classroom testing. They characterized the traditional approach to assessment, in which a teacher tests students chiefly to determine what those students know, as assessment *of* learning. In contrast, they referred to a more instructionally oriented approach, in which testing plays a pivotal role in helping students learn, as assessment *for* learning (see the November 2005 issue of *Educational Leadership* on "Assessment to Promote Learning" for a variety of viewpoints on the topic).

By adroitly juggling a pair of prepositions, the Assessment Reform Group succinctly highlighted the difference between these two approaches to assessment. In their 1998 article, Black and William drove home the significance of this assessment distinction by presenting a meta-analysis of previously reported empirical research regarding the effects of classroom assessment for learning. Their analysis indicated striking test-score improvements for students, not only on classroom assessments but on external examinations as well. Subsequent meta-analyses by other researchers have confirmed the idea that classroom assessment for learning can be a wonderful way of boosting students' scores on external achievement tests.

Assessment *for* learning involves the frequent, continual use of both formal and informal classroom assessments. It can be as simple as requiring students to respond to a lesson-embedded, one-item quiz as a way of gauging student understanding of what's being taught. Ideally, this innovative approach to classroom assessment is based on a careful analysis of the enabling knowledge and subskills that students must first acquire to master a higher curricular aim.

Unlike assessment *of* learning, which attempts to get a fix on what students know for the purposes of giving grades or evaluating schools, the array of test-like events in assessment *for* learning is always linked to the question "What's next instructionally?" Students are key players in this endeavor because one aim of this assessment approach is to empower students to monitor their own progress toward clearly understood curricular goals. Moreover, prominent assessment specialists, such as Rick Stiggins and Lorrie Shepard, have given ringing endorsements to this classroom-testing strategy. There's lots to love and little to hate about classroom assessment for learning.

Why, then, am I fearful for the long-term survival of classroom assessment for learning? In the United States, there is currently one big, federally installed school-evaluation scoreboard in the sky, and it reports whether a school's students have made adequate yearly progress (AYP) on the standardized achievement tests that each state uses to implement No Child Left Behind (NCLB). This highly visible NCLB scoreboard officially indicates whether a school should be regarded as successful or unsuccessful.

Although these key state standardized tests vary substantially, the vast majority of them are *instructionally insensitive* — that is, they're unable to detect even striking instructional improvements when such improvements occur. This significant shortcoming arises because these tests are so strongly linked to students' socioeconomic status that they need to measure what students bring to school rather than what they are taught there. Adding to this regrettable reality are the levels of AYP test-score improvement that NCLB requires. According to University of Colorado professor Robert Linn, one of the world's leading measurement experts, current AYP expectations are altogether unrealistic.

Given insensitive standardized tests and unrealistic AYP targets, more and more teachers are apt to abandon sound instructional strategies like classroom assessment for learning. You see, even this powerful classroom assessment strategy won't be able to increase students' scores *enough* so that most schools can avoid AYP assassination.

Pressured teachers, then, will most likely succumb in desperation to any sort of quick-fix score-raising techniques that offer the promise of AYP success — even though some of those techniques, such as relentless test-prep drilling using practice items practically cloned from the state's standardized exams, are educationally unsound.

As this pressure continues to mount, I fear that the big tests will drive out the little tests that can demonstrably help students learn. States' NCLB assessments *of* learning will swamp teachers' classroom assessments *for* learning.

We can take assessment for learning off the endangered species list only when states employ instructionally sensitive accountability tests capable of detecting the impact of first-rate teaching. The key attributes of such instructionally sensitive tests are that they

- Measure students' mastery of only a modest number of curricular aims or of exceptionally important ones — so teachers aren't overwhelmed by too many instructional targets.
- Provide teacher-palatable descriptions of the skills or bodies of knowledge being assessed — so teachers can direct their instruction toward those assessment targets rather than toward particular test items.
- Contain a sufficient number of items measuring each curricular aim — so the tests effectively report on each student's achievement in terms of each assessed aim.

U.S. educators need to lobby for the installation of the instructionally sensitive accountability tests. They can do so by first learning more about such tests, and then using whatever energy and influence they have — individually or in league with colleagues from their professional associations — to urge key policymakers to install more defensible accountability tests. The survival of instructional interventions like classroom assessment *for* learning will depend on it.

- (1) Black, P., & William, D. (1998). Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80(2), 139-148.

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## Meet the new Ontario ASCD Directors:

### JoAnn MacGregor

I am a Principal with London District Catholic School Board, currently working as the Staff Development Officer. I am, first and foremost, an educator and interested in helping all students be as successful as they can. As an administrator at a school level I was able to facilitate staff development for all staff that benefited the students in our building. In my present position as Staff Development Officer I am able to facilitate personal and professional growth of all staff members of London District Catholic School Board, which directly impacts the students in our system.

I am a lifelong learner, always seeking ways to continue to improve my own knowledge and skills. I feel that being part of the Ontario ASCD Board of Directors will help me in this endeavour.

### Renée Meloche

For most of my 20 year career, I have been a French Immersion classroom teacher, with students in The Halton District School Board. I have also been consultant with our board and with the private sector, assisting teachers and district personnel in customizing FSL programs to suit individual and local settings.

Because I am committed to promoting the enhancement of education and, to working in the best interests of all learners, I have been involved in many segments of the education system, intent upon building a positive learning community. As member of ETFO, I have contributed to many aspects of the organization, by writing articles for our journal, acting as Professional Development leader, and participating on provincial committees. I have also worked with the OME, as facilitator of the provincial and Golden Horseshoe train the trainers workshop for the FSL – Core French, Grade 4-8 curriculum document. In addition, as a member of the OCT accreditation committee, I have participated in the review of the pre-service program at The Ontario Institute of Child Studies/University of Toronto.

As a front line worker in education, I have witnessed many changes and challenges to our system. Yet we continue to strive to graduate successful youth who are knowledgeable, emotionally and physically healthy, motivated, engaged in the arts, prepared for work and economic self-sufficiency and ready to become meaningfully engaged citizens in a democratic society. After all, we are in the business of creating what Neil Postman calls "a public imbued with confidence, a sense of purpose, a respect for learning and tolerance". Through efforts such as provided by OASCD, we can make a difference in the educational community of the province.

### Anne Marie Duncan

Hello! My name is Anne Marie Duncan, and I am very excited to be a new member of the Ontario ASCD Board of Directors! Currently, I am a Vice-Principal at St. Andrew Elementary School in the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board. I bring to the position experience as both an elementary and secondary teacher; a department head; a curriculum consultant, K-12; a secondary vice-principal, and now an elementary vice-principal. I am entering my last year of my PhD in Holistic and Aesthetic Education at OISE/UT. I am fortunate to have a wonderfully supportive husband, Ted, and two beautiful children.

Educators are key nurturers of students. We, then, need to be nurtured so that we can continue to provide the ultimate care to our charges. Ontario ASCD, and the professional development which it is committed to providing through its adopted positions on The Whole Child, Health and Learning, High-Stakes Testing, and The Achievement Gap, is a perfect vehicle to promote this growth. I am looking forward to contributing to this dedicated, hard-working organization. Please feel free to contact me with your feedback and ideas!

**Successful Passage of the Constitution & Bylaws of Ontario ASCD**

In October 2000, the ASCD membership approved constitutional changes designed to create a stronger overall governance structure that better supported key dialogue and decision-making. The Governance Transition Advisory Committee (GTAC) was appointed in 2000 by President Lee Hay to develop transition plans for ASCD and its affiliates. The new governance structure was fully implemented in 2003. GTAC noted areas for further change and evolution.

In 2003, President Raymond McNulty appointed the Constitution Review Committee. President McNulty also appointed the Nominations-Elections Panel to help the organization reinvigorate the nominations process. Finally, President McNulty created the Leadership Council Futures Ad-Hoc Advisory Panel. Both of these panels informed the work of the Constitution Review Committee. In July 2004, the Board of Directors reviewed and discussed the suggestions for enhancement and refinements to the ASCD governance structure received from the Constitution Review Committee. ASCD’s Board of Directors voted unanimously to send the membership a ballot on a series of proposed constitutional changes to enable the new governance structure. The membership approved these changes in February 2005.

In 2001, Ontario ASCD initiated a major re-drafting of its constitution, fully implementing many changes in March 2003, including a 1:2:1 term for officers and establishing two Leadership Council representatives of three year terms outside of the affiliate hierarchy. The governance changes of Ontario ASCD were described by the former Executive Officer for ASCD Constituent Relations “as 5 to 10 years ahead of most affiliates”.

The present Ontario ASCD Constitution Review Committee worked entirely on-line since its formation in September 2005, using an asynchronous, threaded discussion service. Two steps were envisioned: (a) the section on Leadership Council representation was aligned to include overlapping terms and submitted by the deadline to ASCD for legal review and (b) a comprehensive review of the 2003 Constitution was conducted with proposals being brought forward for consideration as a revised “Constitution & Bylaws”.

The proposed amendments to the Constitution & Bylaws of Ontario ASCD were circulated electronically 30 days in advance to all members and also made available on the provincial website at [www.ascd.ca](http://www.ascd.ca). A number of questions were fielded from members during this period. At the Annual General Membership Meeting of 08 April 2006, full approval was received from the members in attendance.

The newly-approved Constitution & Bylaws of Ontario ASCD introduces the defined positions and terms of Secretary and Treasurer, distinguishes between committee and working group tasks and duration, establishes a means of replacing vacancies in office, and aligns the terms of Leadership Council delegates.

This final document is available for viewing at [www.ascd.ca](http://www.ascd.ca). The Committee is very appreciative of the member support received.

**Ontario ASCD Regionals**

There are currently two regionals associated with the Ontario affiliate. Contact people are:

**Peel:** [Rosemary.Sutton@ascd.ca](mailto:Rosemary.Sutton@ascd.ca)

**Ottawa:** [Colleen.Beanish@ascd.ca](mailto:Colleen.Beanish@ascd.ca)

**Contacting Ontario ASCD**

**Membership Coordinator:**

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**Newsletter Editor:** If you have a comment or a story to share please e-mail it to:

[AnneMarie.Duncan@ascd.ca](mailto:AnneMarie.Duncan@ascd.ca)

**Notice:**

To ensure that we can continue to offer high quality programs, services, and events, the Board of Directors voted at the last meeting to adopt a budget that included an increase in membership dues from \$30 to \$40. Ontario ASCD dues have not been keeping up with inflation and at the same time, we have continued to provide professional programs and services to meet the needs of our members. We continue to offer a tremendous value for the money, when compared to other professional associations. In general, members are supported through representation, networking, and professional development, including the following benefits: the Changing Perspectives Journal, Trillium Newsletter, Member Benefits Online, HireED.net, and discounts on ASCD books, videos, online services, regional events and the ASCD Annual Conference & Exhibit Show. If you have any questions, please contact any of the Directors listed on the back of this newsletter at [firstname.lastname@ascd.ca](mailto:firstname.lastname@ascd.ca).

**Ontario ASCD Membership - new or renewal**

Please send this form and your membership fee (\$40) to the Membership Coordinator at the address above.

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