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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Section 3.05, 2003 Annual Report of the Provincial Auditor)

1st Session, 38th Parliament
53 Elizabeth II

The Honourable Alvin Curling, MPP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Sir,

Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts has the honour to present its Report and commends it to the House.

Norman Sterling, MPP
Chair of the Committee

Queen's Park
November 2004

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
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1st Session, 38th Parliament

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PREAMBLE

The Provincial Auditor (the Auditor) reported on Curriculum Development and Implementation in Section 3.05 of his *2003 Annual Report*. The Standing Committee on Public Accounts held hearings on this audit report on February 18, 2004, with representation from the Ministry of Education.

The Committee endorses the Auditor's 2003 report on Curriculum Development and Implementation and recommends the implementation of his recommendations by the Ministry of Education. The Committee has prepared supplementary recommendations based on its findings during the hearings. This report is a record of those findings and the Committee's recommendations.

The Committee extends its appreciation to the officials from the Ministry for their attendance at the hearings. The Committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings of the Office of the Provincial Auditor, the Clerk of the Committee and staff of the Legislative Library's Research and Information Services.

1. OVERVIEW

The *Education Act* gives the Minister of Education broad authority over the courses of study taught to the province's 1.4 million elementary and 700,000 secondary students in its 4,000 elementary and 800 secondary schools.

Prior to 1996, school boards (boards) had considerable latitude regarding the curriculum that they taught. In 1996, for the first time, the Ministry of Education undertook the development of a province-wide curriculum. This decision was preceded by the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Learning,[*] recommendations contained in the Auditor's *1993 Annual Report* and public concerns about the quality of education.

Elementary curriculum policy documents were introduced for all grades in September 1997 and 1998. Secondary curriculum reform, which included the introduction of the Ontario secondary schools grades 9 to 12 policy and the four-year secondary curriculum policy documents for all disciplines, was introduced one grade at a time, starting with the grade 9 curriculum in September 1999 and ending with the grade 12 curriculum in September 2002.

The Ministry estimated that the costs of developing and implementing the new curriculum between 1996 and January 31, 2003 were about $488 million.[1]

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[*] The Royal Commission on Learning was appointed in May 1993. Its report, *For the Love of Learning*, was released in December 1994.

2. AUDIT OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE

The audit's objectives were to assess the adequacy of the Ministry's procedures for:

- ensuring that its curriculum meets the province's objectives for the education of students and that it is implemented cost effectively; and

- measuring and reporting on the effectiveness of both curriculum content and implementation and, where necessary, ensuring that appropriate corrective action is taken.

The audit was carried out from September 2002 to June 2003.[2]

3. OVERALL AUDIT CONCLUSIONS

The process by which the Ministry developed the new curriculum was appropriate. According to most of the educators interviewed, it resulted in a good-quality product that was an improvement over what had been in place.

However, the educators interviewed expressed concerns regarding implementation. Their major concern was that the Ministry rushed the implementation, with the result that a new curriculum and changes in student assessment practices were introduced before appropriate training, textbooks, and other materials were readily available. This made the initial years of implementation extremely difficult for students and teachers.

Educators also expressed concerns about the suitability of the new curriculum for weaker students. Recent studies and test results indicated that many students are still not succeeding under the new curriculum and that many students are entering secondary school without the educational foundation required to graduate.

The audit also concluded that the Ministry and the school boards visited did not have sufficient and reliable information to, for example:

- measure and report on the extent to which students have learned the new curriculum in grades and subjects other than those that have been tested province-wide;

- measure the extent to which consistency in student assessment has been achieved among the province's schools; and

- identify and prioritize the problems underlying poor student achievement; develop viable improvement plans; and track and report results.[3]

4. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Structure of the New Curriculum

At the time of the audit, there were 41 curriculum policy documents in English and French: 10 for elementary and 31 for secondary (now ending at grade 12). The policy documents are organized into strands, that is, broad areas of study for

each grade (elementary) and course (secondary). Each document contains an achievement chart for each (elementary) subject and (secondary) discipline. Charts provide the framework used for assessment and evaluation. They describe four levels of achievement, level 3 being the provincial standard. At the secondary level, students are expected to select courses according to their ultimate destination (i.e., college, university, work).[4] Secondary course designations appear in the chart below.

Structure of Secondary Curriculum

Grade 12	University Preparation Courses	University/College Preparation Courses	College Preparation Courses	Workplace Preparation Courses	Open Courses
Grade 11	University Preparation Courses	University/College Preparation Courses	College Preparation Courses	Workplace Preparation Courses	Open Courses
Grade 10		Academic Courses	Applied Courses		Open Courses
Grade 9		Academic Courses	Applied Courses		

Source: Ontario, Office of the Provincial Auditor, *2003 Annual Report* (Toronto: The Office, 2003), p. 125. Based on data from Ministry of Education.

4.2 Views on Curriculum Content

Almost all of the teachers interviewed by the Auditor's staff considered the new curriculum to be an improvement over what had preceded it. They did express concern that the needs of weaker students might not be met. All of the principals said the new curriculum was as good or better for most students. However, they had mixed views about its suitability for weaker elementary students and those who enter the workforce directly from secondary school. Several thought the work habits of work-bound students had deteriorated.[5]

4.3 Conclusion on Curriculum Development Process

The process by which the Ministry developed the new elementary and secondary school curricula was appropriate.[6]

Committee Hearings

Curriculum Review

A five-year cycle of curriculum review (the sustaining quality curriculum initiative) was initiated in February 2003. The first full year of the review began the following September. According to Ministry staff, the process will ensure currency and relevancy. The review will result in a system that will monitor how the curriculum is working, what revisions need to be made and how to implement changes in a timely fashion.

The terms of the review include examining the level and number of course expectations. Particular attention will be paid to the grades 7, 8, 9, and 10 sequence. General expectations will be made clearer during the first year of the review. An examination of policy implications will follow.

Revisions to the grades 1 to 8 social studies-history-geography curriculum were expected to be completed by the spring of 2004. A review was underway for the English-language and French-language curriculum in mathematics for all grades, career and guidance education for grades 9 to 12, and business studies for grades 9 to 12. Implementation of the review for grades 9 to 12 Canadian and world studies was planned for September 2005.[7]

Locally Developed Courses

Boards can offer locally developed courses "to serve local needs or interests, or the needs of special education students." These courses are in addition to those listed in the chart on page 3 of this report.[8] There are two types: compulsory credit and optional credit. The following requirements and conditions apply to both types: 1) their content, teaching strategies, assessment and evaluation procedures must "accord" with current Ministry policy; 2) they must not duplicate the provincial curriculum; 3) they must lead to courses outlined in the secondary curriculum policy documents and/or be part of a specialized program that provides a focus to assist students in meeting diploma requirements and making the transition to a postsecondary destination; and 4) Ministry approval is valid for three years.[9]

Compulsory credit courses are intended for students who need flexibility and support to meet compulsory credit requirements in English, mathematics and science for the Ontario Secondary School Diploma or the Ontario Secondary School Certificate. A board can create three compulsory credit courses, one in each of the previously named subjects. (Most boards offer the compulsory credit courses in grade 9.[10]) Optional credit courses can be developed in any grade and discipline, and must have a specific course type designation (e.g., Applied, Academic).[11]

Ministry staff told the Committee that locally developed compulsory credit courses recognize that students entering grade 9 might not be able to meet the grade level expectations in the Applied or Academic curriculum. The courses allow them to consolidate basic knowledge and skills, and then move into the Applied stream in grades 9 or 10 and on to grade 11, or into grade 10 and locally developed optional credit courses ('stepping stone' courses) to prepare for destination-related courses in grades 11 and 12.[12]

Committee members and Ministry staff referred to the work of the Double Cohort Study (the Study). (Dr. Alan King from Queen's University was the principal investigator for the Study, which focussed on the "impact of the restructured secondary school program on student applications to universities and colleges in 2003."[13]) A revised version of the *Double Cohort Study Phase 3 Report* was released in January 2004. One of its findings dealt with grade 10 essential skills (locally developed optional) courses that do not qualify as compulsory credit courses.[14]

In their comments on the Double Cohort Study, Ministry staff addressed its conclusion that unless locally developed courses come with compulsory credit, too few students will take them. The Study also found that students taking locally developed compulsory credit courses in grade 9 are the most seriously at risk of not being able to complete other course requirements. This suggested these students were under-prepared on entering secondary school. (Grade 9 locally developed courses are based on elementary expectations.)[15]

Students select locally developed courses with their parents, in grade 8. As a result, parents and students need sufficient information to understand the value and purpose of the courses.[16] Without the construction of credible pathways through the secondary system, Ministry staff felt that students would continue to deselect themselves from these courses and schools would not offer what were called "building blocks."[17] If only a small number of students in a school want locally developed courses, it could be difficult to assemble a viable class. At the same time, students may not want to leave their own school to go to another to become part of a viable class.[18] (In 1999/00, the first year of the grade 9 cohort, about 1% of students took locally developed courses; in the second year - 5% to 6%.[19])

The final report of the At-Risk Working Group, *"A Successful Pathway for All Students,"* recommended that the number of locally developed compulsory credit courses be increased from three to five. The fourth course would be grade 10 English/French and would be included as a prerequisite for grade 11 Workplace English. The fifth course would be chosen at the discretion of the local board.[20] The *Double Cohort Study Phase 3 Report* recommended that compulsory credit value be assigned to grade 10 essential skills (locally developed optional) courses in English, mathematics and science. Such a move would facilitate the "transition of students who take these courses to Workplace course sequences in Grades 11 and 12."[21]

Committee members were told that the matter was a concern in the education sector and that it was being discussed with the Minister of Education.[22]

Committee Recommendations

The Committee recommends that:

> **1. The Ministry of Education report on the actions it has taken to create more effective pathways for at-risk students, including increasing the number of locally developed courses that qualify for compulsory credit.**
>
> **2. The Ministry of Education ensure that students and their parents are provided with comprehensive information about the content and purposes of locally developed courses.**
>
> **The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with responses to these recommendations within 120 days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.**

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CURRICULUM

5.1 Implementation Problems

The primary concern with implementation was that it had been rushed. This resulted in teacher training that was not conducted early enough or at all. During the early years of implementation, the appropriate textbooks and classroom materials were often not available when classes started. Suitable texts now exist for most core subjects, but availability remains an issue for others.[23]

5.2 Focus of Teacher Training

The two most common suggestions made by teachers for training improvements were: more opportunities to discuss grade-specific implementation issues with a wider variety of colleagues, and courses oriented to actual implementation strategies and techniques.[24]

5.3 Use of Teacher Supports

Two of the supports introduced to assist teachers in the delivery of the new curriculum were (secondary level) course profiles and the (elementary and secondary levels) curriculum unit planner.[*] The profiles were rated as adequate by one-third of the secondary teachers interviewed. About 60% of the elementary and secondary teachers rated the unit planner as useful.[25]

The Auditor recommended that the Ministry ensure that teachers receive appropriate training prior to the implementation of future curriculum revisions and that educational publishers have sufficient lead time to develop appropriate textbooks and classroom materials. To help improve the implementation of the current curriculum, the Ministry should work with boards to ensure that teachers receive more specific implementation training, including training on the use of tools such as the course profiles and unit planner.[26]

Committee Hearings

Responsibility for implementing curriculum policy and programs is shared by boards, principals and teachers. To support the implementation of system-wide changes, the Ministry allocated approximately $472 million to textbooks, resources, support materials, and teacher training.[27]

Implementation Feedback

The Ministry continues to meet with the Curriculum Implementation Partnership, an ad hoc committee comprised of key education stakeholders, to help determine appropriate areas to support effective curriculum implementation. The Partnership's members have told the Ministry that classroom teachers felt the elementary implementation was rushed. There was a time lag between actual implementation and receipt of some of the support documents that teachers

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[*] Course profiles are a series of second-generation documents with detailed examples of learning activities and assessment strategies. The curriculum unit planner is an electronic tool that helps elementary teachers create individual lesson plans and units of study. They can develop their own units or download and modify those developed by the Ministry or their board. See Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, p. P-168.

required. The Ministry looked at methodologies which would provide at least interim supports and resources. [28]

Availability of Resources

The Ministry has spent over $300 million on textbooks and learning resources in both English and French to support the new curriculum from kindergarten to grade 12. It is working with publishers and other interested stakeholders to ensure they have the necessary lead time to develop appropriate resources to support curricular revision. Representatives of publisher organizations attend the Trillium List[*] advisory committee's biannual meetings, as well as stakeholder information sessions on specific curriculum initiatives.[29]

As a result of ongoing textbook development, the Ministry was able to make an increasing number of grades 11 and 12 textbooks available for French-language core and non-core courses for the 2003/04 school year. More recently the Ministry had decided to provide $2.6 million to French-language boards for the purchase of textbooks and other learning resources for all grades by March 2004.[30] By September 2004, the Ministry expected to have a complete selection of textbooks for the basic diploma requirements. At the time of the hearings, it was working with Quebec publishers to begin producing textbooks for Ontario.[31]

Teacher Training and Supports

Orientation sessions for each of the new curriculum policy documents and subject-specific train-the-trainer workshops were offered prior to the implementation of the curriculum for grades 9 to 12 over a four-year period.[32]

A range of targeted implementation supports, or *TIPS*, are now available to teachers. They provide much more detailed guidance on instructional strategies and lesson plans than what was previously available. For example, grades 7 to 9 Applied mathematics was released in December 2003. As well, $2.45 million was provided to support follow-up training in boards for grades 7 to 9 mathematics. A booklet called *Think Literacy* has been prepared to assist secondary school teachers in integrating the teaching of literacy across all curricular subjects.[33]

Additional support materials, funded by the Ministry and targeting the curriculum policy documents and its achievement charts, include elementary curriculum units and 'exemplars' for grades 1 to 12. (Exemplars are samples of student work demonstrating the four levels of achievement and are used for assessment purposes.) A survey conducted by the Council of Directors of Education in June 2002 indicated province-wide teachers' approval of curriculum units and exemplars, as well as the course profiles and the curriculum unit planner.[34]

Implementation supports for French-language schools include approximately $3.5 million to develop resources and offer training to boards, such as teaching modules in mathematics for grades 1 to 8 to be completed by 2005, and learning materials for grade 9 Applied mathematics sent to boards in 2003.[35]

Superintendents interviewed for the audit thought "insufficient computer literacy was an impediment to greater use of these [the course profiles and curriculum

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[*] The Trillium List contains textbooks approved by the Ministry for use in the province's schools.

unit planner] and other software tools." Access to computers was considered an issue because the boards visited did not provide teachers with PCs. [36] (Survey data reported by Ministry staff indicated that about 15% of teachers have a desktop computer or a laptop.[37])

Approximately $7.7 million will be transferred to French and English-language boards to allow them to continue training teachers in the use of the curriculum unit planner, student assessment and other ongoing priorities.[38]

On the issue of teacher information and communication technology (ICT) training, Ministry staff reported that university faculties of education are beginning to provide such training. Two faculties currently require laptops - Nipissing and the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. Windsor is cosidering becoming a laptop faculty. Other faculties are being helped to build ICT into their teacher training. All faculties are looking at ICT competencies for their new professors.[39]

Committee Recommendation

The Committee is of the opinion that ICT (information and communication technology) skills are vital for today's teaching profession.

The Committee therefore recommends that:

> **3. The Ministry of Education provide information on its progress in providing more ICT (information and communication technology) equipment and training for classroom teachers.**
>
> **The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a response to this recommendation within 120 days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.**

6. ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

According to educators, the elementary and secondary curricula now cover more material and are more challenging. Educators expressed concerns about weaker students who are at-risk of becoming part of the 25% of students the 2002 *Double Cohort Study Phase 2 Report* said leave school without a secondary school diploma.[40]

6.1 Promotion without Remediation

The teachers interviewed felt that students need to perform at least at level 2 (60-69%) in a subject to have sufficient understanding of key learning expectations to succeed in subsequent grades. The Ministry has set the pass rate at level 1 (50-59%).

Audit staff were told by elementary principals that students who perform below level 1 are normally promoted to the next grade in a practice referred to as "social promotion." In its 2001/02 business plan, the Ministry stated its intention to require that only those students who achieved an acceptable level be promoted. No such action has been taken.

None of the boards visited by the Auditor's staff tracked and monitored the participation of low-performance students in remedial programs or the impact those programs had on subsequent performance. Other jurisdictions were said to be experimenting with more stringent promotion policies (e.g., mandatory summer school in the Chicago Public Schools system), but the Ontario Ministry of Education had not introduced any related policy directive.

The Auditor noted that the results of the 2002 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) and the grade 9 mathematics test confirmed that many students had not acquired sufficient skills in either area of study and that many of those taking Applied courses were at-risk students. (The November 2003 grade 9 math test results were no better.) Some of the secondary school teachers interviewed noted that students in Applied mathematics responded better to a non-traditional teaching approach. Reference was made to a study, which observed that many teachers, particularly new ones, did not have the instructional strategies to deal with Applied students.[41]

6.2 Ministry Initiatives Regarding At-Risk Students

A series of initiatives regarding at-risk students were introduced between 2001 and the time of the audit:

- 2001 - Early Reading Strategy for grades 1 to 3, to be followed by Early Math Strategy for grades 1 to 3 and expansion of Early Reading Strategy to grade 6 beginning in 2003/04;

- November 2002 – At-Risk Working Group; report released January 2003;

- March 2003 - $50 million program to address At-Risk Working Group's recommendations; and

- February 2003 – beginning of systematic review and update of all curriculum policy documents, grades 1 to 12.[42]

The Auditor recommended that the Ministry develop policy guidance governing the promotion of at-risk students, including ways to increase participation in remedial programs (e.g., summer school) to help ensure all students acquire the knowledge, skills and work habits required to succeed in subsequent grades and ultimately to obtain an Ontario Secondary School Diploma. Boards should be required to track the participation of at-risk students in remedial programs and to assess the effectiveness of the programs in improving student performance.[43]

Committee Hearings

The debate about creating a system that expects high standards of all and that is at the same time responsive to the needs of students who are struggling and/or leave early, has been ongoing. It seems more acute today because there are fewer opportunities for students who leave school without a diploma, and because at-risk students can now be identified and monitored in the education system.

Based on 1993 data, the Royal Commission on Learning indicated that approximately 30% of students left the system without a diploma; 58% of grade 9 students taking the old general level courses and 65% of students taking the basic level courses did not obtain their diploma.[44] The Royal Commission

believed that students saw general and basic level courses as dead-ends. Students saw no reason to stay in those courses because they, along with their teachers and parents, felt general and basic level courses would not get them where they needed to go.

The Double Cohort Study speaks of a 25% potential dropout rate, about 24,000 students, a figure based on an examination of students who started the new grade 9 in 1999/2000.[45] About a third return to school before the age of 21 to get a diploma of some kind. The Ministry also knows that there are about 6,000 16 and 17 year olds in the welfare system.[46]

Definition of At-Risk Student

For the purposes of the government's initiatives, the definition of at-risk student has focused on the secondary system, although there are related initiatives for grades 7 and 8. Such students are considered to be those who, through credit accumulation information and their performance on the OSSLT, are at-risk of not obtaining their diploma. An at-risk student would include a child who was struggling for a number of reasons, including a learning disability or being exceptional.[47]

Updates on Initiatives Regarding At-Risk Students

In December 2003, the government announced funding of $112 million to boards for students with extra challenges: $95 million to help students from low-income and single-parent families, as well as recent immigrants; and $17 million for services to students whose second language is English or French.

Principals' associations received approximately $1.4 million through the Ministry's professional learning fund to develop professional learning courses, including courses on effective practices to support at-risk students.[48]

Work Plans to Address Needs of At-Risk Students

Boards have been allocated $50 million to implement the recommendations of the reports of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk and the Program Pathways on Students at Risk Work Group.[*] The money flowed as part of board operating grants for 2003/04.

Some of the funding, $10 million, has enabled every board to hire at-risk leaders to help develop school and board-based work plans for addressing the needs of students at risk of leaving the system. Leaders received training in the spring and fall of 2003. An additional session was to be held in February 2004. Work plans have been received and commented on by Ministry staff.

The remaining $40 million was to be used to implement the work plans that focus on literacy skills and initiatives such as school-to-work, co-op and apprenticeship programs. Committee members were told that at the end of the 2003/04 school year, boards would be expected to prepare a report on how their work plans were

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[*] The Program Pathways on Students at Risk Work Group was created as a result of the final report of the At-Risk Working Group.

implemented and what they achieved. Such reports will become an annual requirement.[49]

The work plans include a commitment to provide specific professional opportunities related to literacy for the 2003/04 school year and further commitments for professional development opportunities for literacy and numeracy in the 2004/05 school year.[50]

A number of Ministry branches have together established accountability measures relating to the funding for and effectiveness of work plans. They were initiated in 2003/04 and will be refined in 2004/05.[51]

Early Reading and Early Math Strategies

The Early Reading and Early Math strategies grew out of the reports of the Early Reading and Early Math Expert panels. The reports emphasized the importance of reading, writing and mathematical skills to improving students' learning and achievement. To support the strategies, a training program for principals and teachers in kindergarten to grade 3 was being implemented. It was to run until the end of the 2003/04 school year. That same year, $30 million was available to expand the strategies to grade 6.[52]

By the end of 2004, there will be lead mathematics, reading and writing teachers in every elementary school in the province. They will work with other teachers to discuss the reports of the Expert panels and the needs of their particular schools. Each lead teacher will work within a community-of-learning approach that has been used in other jurisdictions and is endorsed by the two expert panels. An evaluation will ascertain how the approach can be improved and whether it has had any significant impact on teaching strategies.

At the time of the hearings, it was expected that teachers would soon be able to obtain assistance on effective teaching strategies and problem resolution via a web site, and a reading and mathematics guide would be made available to parents.[53]

Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course

Over 36,000 students failed the OSSLT at its second administration. Although 85% of the students enrolled in Academic courses passed both the reading and writing sections, only 38% of those enrolled in Applied courses and 14% of those in locally developed courses passed both.

In response to concerns about these results, the former government introduced the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course (OSSLC). It was first offered in September 2003 at the grade 12 level as an alternative assessment method for those students who failed the OSSLT. Its implementation is being monitored.

Boards have developed plans to ensure secondary school principals and all teachers of the OSSLC receive training during the 2003/04 school year. At the time of the hearings, it was expected that a web site offering OSSLC implementation support to teachers would go live in the near future.[54]

Social Promotion vs. Remediation

Under the *Education Act*, pupil promotion is a principal's decision, although typically the principal will consult with parents and teachers when in doubt. As a follow-up on the Auditor's report, the Ministry plans to conduct more quantitative research on the extent of social promotion.

The Ministry expects to have its research on social promotion completed within the 2004 calendar year. Jurisdictions like Chicago that have mandated remediation will be examined. Additional remediation was considered one of a number of ways to improve student achievement. Ministry staff stated their commitment to a better understanding of what they referred to as a systemic concern.[55]

Funding is currently provided for summer or after-school remediation programs. In 2000, an additional $25 million was provided for this purpose around literacy and mathematics for grades 7 to 10. Boards decide when and how to offer programs. Since then, changes had been made to the funding to make it more flexible and extend it to grade 12.

As part of its at-risk strategy, the Ministry has been gathering information about effective practices, including boards running summer learning camps rather than summer remediation classes. The former were found to be getting what were referred to as "great results".

Processes to identify, track and monitor at-risk students in remedial programs are underway. Boards are tracking students who have been unsuccessful on the OSSLT and who must complete it in order to graduate. The Ministry has fairly good secondary school data but poorer elementary data. Moving to the Ontario Educational Number (OEN) will lead to better tracking.[56]

E-Learning as Remediation Tool

There is research that indicates e-learning is a way to promote and engage students, particularly disaffected male adolescents. The Ministry's Ontario Knowledge Network for Learning project is funding a series of demonstration or pathfinder schools across the province. The Ministry is evaluating and researching the results.

Consortia of boards have put together virtual high schools in which students can register and take some or all of their courses. In the francophone education system the use of e-learning is vital. Some jurisdictions, particularly small northern high schools, do not have the number of students or teachers able to teach some of the more specialized subject areas. They are often taught through a virtual classroom or with e-learning tools.[57]

Teacher Training and Student Results

Ontario does not have data that would demonstrate a correlation between the level of teacher training and student results. However, research from other jurisdictions speaks to the investment in instructional strategies that work with particular kinds of students and curricula.

At-risk leaders have been asked to collect data to help identify, monitor and track struggling students as they implement recommendations on strategies to address the range of students at-risk of not graduating. The Ministry is also conferring with them about the use of the data to assess the effectiveness of interventions, including teacher training.

The Early Reading and Early Math strategies will include an evaluation of the investment in teacher training to see if it has led to any change in instruction.[58]

Incomplete Assignments

The Auditor reported educators' observations on the poor 2002 OSSLT and grade 9 math test results. They attributed the lack of success by students taking Applied courses to a variety of factors: a curriculum that was too hard; poor work habits and low motivation; and ineffectual teaching techniques. The main concern regarding poor work habits was the failure to complete assignments.[59]

When asked if they had data on the relationship between a reported increase in the rate of incomplete assignments and the current student assessment model, Ministry staff said that the assessment policy was based on the idea that students and parents should not be given a mark that rolls in variables other than student achievement. (The current assessment model does not allow teachers to penalize students for late or incomplete assignments.) The policy's goal was to make sure that a mark was not being confused with a student's learning behaviours. (Learning behaviours are reported on separately.) In the past, teachers may have included marks for a number of things, including a late penalty, that did not reflect whether the student understood the curriculum.[60]

Ministry staff said that they tried to provide supports to new teachers and those who are working with a grade for the first time, such as activities that more experienced teachers have said are highly effective in engaging students.

As part of the ongoing cycle of curriculum review, the Ministry is interested in the observations of practitioners about whether there is anything in the curriculum itself that could be more relevant and more engaging for the students.[61]

Committee Recommendation

The Committee recommends that:

4. The Ministry of Education provide information on the impact of its programs for at-risk students. Any response should include reference to the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course and the most recent data available from the Double Cohort Study.

5. The Ministry of Education report on the results of its research regarding social promotion and remediation, including differences in practices, eligibility criteria and availability among boards, and the need for additional Ministry guidance.

6. The Ministry of Education should review its student assessment policy regarding the impact of learning behaviours, such as completing assignments on time, on student marks.

The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with responses to these recommendations within 120 days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.

7. MONITORING CURRICULUM QUALITY AND IMPLEMENTATION

The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was established as a Crown Agency in 1996. Its board reports to the Minister of Education and operates in accordance with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Minister. Its legislated mandate includes developing systems for evaluating the quality and effectiveness of education, and researching and collecting information on assessing academic achievement. The EQAO develops, administers and marks the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), the grades 3 and 6 reading, writing and math tests, and the grade 9 math test. It is also responsible for managing and reporting on Ontario's participation in national and international tests. Activities to date have not encompassed the EQAO's full mandate.[62]

7.1 Validating the EQAO's Testing Practices

The audit reported that independent experts in the field of psychometrics had not examined the EQAO's procedures for designing and reporting results on its tests. However, such experts had been engaged by the EQAO in early 2003 to review those processes. The review was expected to be completed by March 2004.[63]

7.2 Achieving Consistency in Student Assessment

The Ministry implemented policies governing student assessment practices with the introduction of the new curriculum. (Before these policies were introduced, boards exercised flexibility in their assessment practices.) To help meet the goals of these new policies (e.g., improved learning, greater consistency in assessment and evaluations), the Ministry developed standard report cards and achievement charts, as well as course/subject exemplars, and an assessment and evaluation resource guide for secondary teachers. The boards visited by audit staff had introduced some of their own measures regarding assessment. Neither they nor the Ministry, though, had implemented measures for monitoring and reporting on the extent to which consistency had been achieved.

The Auditor suggested that one method for measuring consistency in assessment would be to compare report card marks with performance on the grades 3, 6 and 9 EQAO tests. Superintendents interviewed for the purposes of the audit indicated that they would do this when the EQAO began reporting marks using the Ontario Education Number (OEN), which the Ministry planned to introduce in September 2003. Additional benchmark information could be obtained with the implementation of more EQAO tests or province-wide exams.[64]

7.3 Gaps in Student Achievement Information

According to the audit report, there continues to be insufficient information about student achievement levels, particularly in secondary schools. It cites the 2001 report of the Task Force on Effective Schools, which said that, the grade 9 math

and the grade 10 literacy (OSSLT) tests say more about students' elementary education than about their achievement at the secondary level.[65]

7.4 Strengthening Implementation Process

The audit reported that the Ministry and school boards did not yet have sufficient assurance that adequate procedures were in place to ensure that schools were teaching the new curriculum; students were being properly and consistently assessed; best practices had been implemented; and that appropriate accountability frameworks were in place. It suggested conducting accreditation reviews as recommended by the Task Force on Effective Schools. The Task Force recommended that an arm's length agency design and implement an accreditation process for boards and schools.

It was noted that having more comprehensive and comparable student performance results would provide valuable information for identifying problems and best practices, and might lead the Ministry to reconsider the need for large-scale testing.[66]

7.5 Measuring Outcomes

Neither the Ministry nor the EQAO has developed outcome-oriented measures of effectiveness. Possible measures put forward in the audit report included the percentage of students entering secondary school who graduate and the percentage of graduates who obtain degrees and diplomas from colleges and universities.[67]

The Auditor recommended that the Ministry implement procedures to monitor and report on consistency in teachers' student assessment practices throughout the province; assess the benefits of developing common province-wide exams; establish a process for strengthening school board implementation processes, the scope of which includes evaluating the adequacy of key curriculum delivery, student assessment, improvement planning, and results reporting procedures of school boards; and develop and report on outcome-oriented measures of effectiveness for elementary and secondary education.[68]

Committee Hearings

The Ministry has a role to play in ensuring greater consistency in student assessment and evaluation, and enhancing board accountability. For instance, as part of the sustaining quality curriculum process, achievement charts are under revision. These will be finalized later in 2004 to create greater consistency across subjects and grades.

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education was contracted to help develop implementation support for the secondary assessment policy. Boards have received funding to offer training on this initiative. Work had begun on a similar elementary resource document that will be released and ready for training in 2004/05.

The new Ontario School Information System (ONSIS), which is targeted for implementation over the next two years, will help support the development of accountability measures for schools, boards and the Ministry. Closely tied to the

ONSIS project is implementation of the Ontario Education Number (OEN) which will become the key identifier on student records throughout a child's school career and provide the Ministry with meaningful comparable data. At the time of the hearings, over two million OENs had been assigned.[69]

Ministry staff spoke of their commitment to addressing the lack of outcome measures and to identifying what the most important outcome measures should be. The standardized tests in grades 3, 6, 9, and 10 were deemed the primary outcome measures at this point in time. As part of that testing process, schools and boards are asked to prepare annual improvement plans which identify strategies schools and boards think they need to put in place. Plans are posted on the EQAO's and/or the Ministry's web site.

The Double Cohort Study was described as the start of the Ministry's longer-term commitment to finding better measures. Its work was said to have informed the recommendations of the At-Risk Working Group and the Expert panels. The education sector was using the same source to advise on recommended action for at-risk students.[70]

Committee Recommendation

The Committee recommends that:

> **7. The Ministry of Education report on the review of the Education Quality and Accountability Office's procedures for designing, administering and reporting results on its tests.**
>
> **The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with a response to this recommendation within 120 days of the tabling of this report in the Legislature.**

8. STRENGTHENING IMPROVEMENT PLANNING AND RESEARCH

EQAO test results represent the only comprehensive data available on the performance of students across the province. In response to those results, schools, boards, and the Ministry have taken steps to improve student performance. Some have provided a one-time increase in performance, such as designing classroom problems in a format that is similar to that of EQAO tests. Others are intended to contribute to long-term improvement. These include boards providing additional resources to their lowest-performing schools and the Ministry using EQAO results to identify schools eligible for its Support for Schools That Need Extra Help (the Turnaround School) Program.

At the time of the audit, none of the boards visited had established effective improvement planning processes. It was felt this was due to the absence of certain key requirements such as sufficient, accurate and comparable student performance and contextual data, appropriate training, and procedures to assess the quality of the improvement planning process.[71]

8.1 Research to Support Decision-making

According to the audit report, the lack of sufficient, comparable student performance data and suitable computer support systems limit the ability of the Ministry and boards to conduct research that will address critical issues in curriculum delivery and provide the basis for informed decision-making. Issues that research could help address include socio-economic status and performance, class size and its relationship with student performance, the use of subject specialists versus generalists, and the impact of teaching quality on student achievement.[72]

The Auditor recommended that the Ministry establish standards regarding the capability of student information systems used by boards and the information recorded on them; co-ordinate and support training for school and board personnel in implementing effective improvement planning processes; implement, either through the EQAO or otherwise, a review function for board and school improvement planning processes that includes on-site examination; and co-ordinate and support research on key curriculum delivery issues.[73]

In its initial response to the audit, the Ministry said it was developing standards to guide boards in their data management. The Ministry and the EQAO would work with the Council of Ontario Directors of Education to determine cost-effective ways to improve school improvement planning processes. It would continue working with the education sector to ensure that decisions regarding curriculum delivery are based upon sufficient and reliable information. In addition, the Ministry would commit to continuing support for research, dependent on the availability of appropriate resources.[74]

Committee Hearings

The ONSIS will become the foundation for generating more accurate, reliable and complete statistics, providing a better basis for assessing needs and developing policies to meet them. Board teams have been trained on how to use assessment data to inform improvement planning. The Ministry has also sponsored three regional symposia on data-driven decision-making for school improvement.

An RFP for research to investigate effective strategies to improve boys' reading and writing skills was in development and was expected to be posted in June 2004. Research will commence in the 2004/05 school year and continue for three years.[75]

Ministry staff were asked about the status of their IT systems. The Ministry uses what was described as an old and inadequate Legacy system. The previous government had provided funding to install a new data warehouse that would improve the Ministry's system and those of boards so that the latter would be able to report data to the Ministry. A link would also be made to the EQAO database. This project is about three years old. The Ministry hopes to have it operating within the next two years. That hope is to some degree dependent on the availability of future resources. Current project funding is about $6 million to $8 million.

The backbone of the system, the OEN, is in place. The Ministry's biggest priority is matching the OEN with the EQAO results and credit accumulation data. This

will allow for progress to be tracked by board and by school. The Ministry hoped to have this completed in 2005.[76]

Assistance for Underperforming Schools

Through the Turnaround School Program, Ministry staff are working with teams in 43 schools to improve the reading achievement of JK to grade 3 students and the schools' improvement planning techniques. Schools were chosen because they had poor EQAO test results and reflected certain socio-economic characteristics. At the time of the hearings, the Program was in its third year and the first cohort of schools was being evaluated. Best practices from the initiative were to be shared across the system by December 2004.[77]

Ministry staff also told Committee members that they were looking into a program that twins high-performing schools with low-performing schools. Similar initiatives in the United States and Great Britain had met with some success. Research conducted by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) indicates that related opportunities exist in this province.[78]

9. EVALUATING THE ANNUAL EDUCATION PLAN/TEACHER ADVISER PROGRAM

A for-credit career education course is included in the curriculum. School boards are required to offer co-operative education/work experience opportunities. They are also required to provide the Teacher Adviser Program (TAP) and the Annual Education Plan (AEP). Both were introduced in 1999 and start in grade 7.

Elementary teachers and principals felt the initiatives were beneficial as they encouraged students to think about school's impact on their futures. Secondary teachers and principals were in general agreement, but felt the programs were not as effective as they could be. Secondary teachers felt they were not knowledgeable enough to provide advice about career choices and did not know students well enough to be effective advisers. Both principals and teachers felt students had no immediate incentive to take the process seriously. A majority of secondary educators said that the money would be better spent in other areas, for example, guidance teachers.

The Auditor found that the Ministry had not established measurable objectives for the AEP/TAP and that the AEPs examined were of poor quality.[79] In order to help ensure that appropriate benefits are realized from the AEP/TAP, he recommended that the Ministry, in conjunction with boards and principals, formally assess the success of the program in meeting the needs of the students. If the assessment is positive, measurable objectives should be established.[80]

Committee Hearings

Ministry policy requires principals to conduct a survey of students, parents, teachers, and community members every three years to determine the effectiveness of their school's guidance and career education program. To assist in the implementation of this requirement, the Ministry has sponsored teacher and administrator training, and developed and distributed support resources, including model program effectiveness surveys.

The Ministry will undertake a review of the implementation of the AEP and the TAP. Options on the review methodology have been developed. The review and recommendations will be completed by the end of the 2004/05 school year.[81]

10. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee request that the Ministry of Education provide the Committee Clerk with a written response to the following recommendations within 120 calendar days of the tabling of this report.

1. The Ministry of Education report on the actions it has taken to create more effective pathways for at-risk students, including increasing the number of locally developed courses that qualify for compulsory credit.

2. The Ministry of Education ensure that students and their parents are provided with comprehensive information about the content and purposes of locally developed courses.

3. The Ministry of Education provide information on its progress in providing more ICT (information and communication technology) equipment and training for classroom teachers.

4. The Ministry of Education provide information on the impact of its programs for at-risk students. Any response should include reference to the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course and the most recent data available from the Double Cohort Study.

5. The Ministry of Education report on the results of its research regarding social promotion and remediation, including differences in practices, eligibility criteria and availability among boards, and the need for additional Ministry guidance.

6. The Ministry of Education should review its student assessment policy regarding the impact of learning behaviours, such as completing assignments on time, on student marks.

7. The Ministry of Education report on the review of the Education Quality and Accountability Office's procedures for designing, administering and reporting results on its tests.

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NOTES

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Official Report of Debates (Hansard), 38th Parliament, 1st Session (18 February 2004):
P-167.

[2] Office of the Provincial Auditor, *2003 Annual Report*, p. 122.

[3] Ibid., pp. 122-123.

[4] Ibid., pp. 124-125.

[5] Ibid., pp. 125-126.

[6] Ibid., p. 126.

[7] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, pp. P-168,
P-186 and P-187.

[8] Office of the Provincial Auditor, *Annual Report 2003*, p. 125.

[9] Ontario, Ministry of Education, *Guide to Locally Developed Courses, Grades 9 to 12: Development Approval Procedures* (Toronto: The Ministry, 2004), pp. 4-5. Internet site at
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/secondary/localdev/locdeve.pdf accessed on
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[10] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, p. P-194.

[11] Ministry of Education, *Guide to Locally Developed Courses, Grades 9 to 12*, pp. 5-6.

[12] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, p. P-173.

[13] Queen's University, Social Program Evaluation Group (Dr. Alan J.C. King, Principal Investigator), *Double Cohort Study Phase 2: Report* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, October 2002), p. i. Internet site at
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/cohortph2.pdf accessed on 28 October 2004.

[14] Queen's University, Social Program Evaluation Group (Dr. Alan J.C. King, Principal Investigator), *Double Cohort Study Phase 3: Report*, rev. (Toronto: Ministry of Education, January 2004), p. ii. Internet site at
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/phase3/report3.pdf accessed on 28 October 2004.

[15] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, pp. P-173 – P-174.

[16] Ibid., p. P-174.

[17] Ibid., p. P-187.

[18] Ibid., p. P-174.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid., p. P-194; and Ontario, At-Risk Working Group (Barry O'Connor, Chair), *"A Successful Pathway for All Students": Final Report of the At-Risk Working Group* (Toronto: Ministry of Education, January 2003), p. 22. Internet site at
http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/atrisk/atrisk.pdf accessed on 28 October 2004.

[21] Social Program Evaluation Group, *Double Cohort Study Phase 3: Report*, p. iii.

[22] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates (Hansard)*, pp. P-187 and P-194.

[23] Office of the Provincial Auditor, *2003 Annual Report*, pp. 126-127.

[24] Ibid., p. 127.

[25] Ibid., pp. 127-128.

[26] Ibid., p. 128.

[27] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates*, p. P-167.

[28] Ibid., pp. P-168 and P-175.
[29] Ibid., pp. P-168 and P-169.
[30] Ibid., p. P-168.
[31] Ibid., p. P-192.
[32] Ibid., pp. P-167 – P-168.
[33] Ibid., pp. P-169, P-182 and P-190.
[34] Ibid., p. P-168.
[35] Ibid., p. P-169.
[36] Office of the Provincial Auditor, *2003 Annual Report*, p. 128.
[37] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates*, p. P-191.
[38] Ibid., p. P-169.
[39] Ibid., p. P-191.
[40] Office of the Provincial Auditor, *2003 Annual Report*, p. 129.
[41] Ibid., pp. 129-131.
[42] Ibid., pp. 131-132.
[43] Ibid., p. 132.
[44] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates*, p. P-169.
[45] Ibid., p. P-171.
[46] Ibid., pp. P-183 – P-184.
[47] Ibid., pp. P-172 – P-173.
[48] Ibid., pp. P-169.
[49] Ibid., pp. P-169, P-172, P-178, and P-189.
[50] Ibid., pp. P-168 – P-169.
[51] Ibid., p. P-170.
[52] Ibid., pp. P-169 and P-188.
[53] Ibid., pp. P-176 – P-177.
[54] Ibid., pp. P-169 and P-190.
[55] Ibid., pp. P-172, P-181 and P-182.
[56] Ibid., pp. P-170 and P-185; and Ontario, Ministry of Education, "New Funding Focuses on Literacy and Math Skills," *News Release* (28 March 2000).
[57] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates*, p. P-183.
[58] Ibid., pp. P-172 – P-173.
[59] Office of the Provincial Auditor, *2003 Annual Report*, p. 131.
[60] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates*, p. P-185.
[61] Ibid., p. P-184.
[62] Office of the Provincial Auditor, *2003 Annual Report*, pp. 133-134.
[63] Ibid., p. 134.
[64] Ibid., p. 134-135.
[65] Ibid., p. 136.
[66] Ibid., pp. 136-137.
[67] Ibid., p. 137.
[68] Ibid., p. 137.
[69] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates*, pp. P-170 and P-190.
[70] Ibid., p. P-195.
[71] Office of the Provincial Auditor, *2003 Annual Report*, pp. 138-140.
[72] Ibid., pp. 140-141.
[73] Ibid., pp. 141-142.
[74] Ibid., p. 142.
[75] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates*, p. P-170.
[76] Ibid., pp. P-196 – P-197.
[77] Ibid., pp. P-169 and P-177 – P-178.
[78] Ibid., p. P-195.
[79] Office of the Provincial Auditor, *2003 Annual Report*, pp. 142-143.
[80] Ibid., pp. 143-144.
[81] Standing Committee on Public Accounts, *Official Report of Debates*, p. P-170.