OTTAWA-CARLETON DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Learning Well-being Social Responsibility

**COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE (PUBLIC)** **4 February 2025**
**Report No. 25-003**

# Student Learning Update: Core Academic Skills

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## PURPOSE:

1. This report is the first of three *Student Learning Updates* and will focus on core learning areas. It will provide an update on student achievement planning and reporting in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) in literacy and math, and will share the Board Priority Learning Plan for 2024-2025.

## STRATEGIC LINKS:

2. Student achievement planning and prioritization is guided by the 2023-2027 Strategic Plan priorities: Learning, Well-Being, and Social Responsibility. This report focuses on the Learning pillar goals of improving literacy and math achievement, the priorities outlined in the OCDSB's Priority Learning Plan (PLP), and the Ministry of Education (MOE) directives of the Math Achievement Action Plan (MAAP). The report highlights key progress indicators and initiatives implemented and shows efforts to meet the needs of all learners, including Indigenous and underserved students.

## CONTEXT:

3. In 2023, the MOE introduced the Student Achievement Plan (SAP; Appendix A) to guide school boards in prioritizing student success. This comprehensive plan focuses on three key areas: improving core academic skills, preparing students for future endeavors, and fostering student engagement and well-being.

   This report is focused on the achievement of learning outcomes in core academic skills. Subsequent reports this spring will address the remaining SAP priorities: preparing students for future success, and, promoting student engagement and well-being.

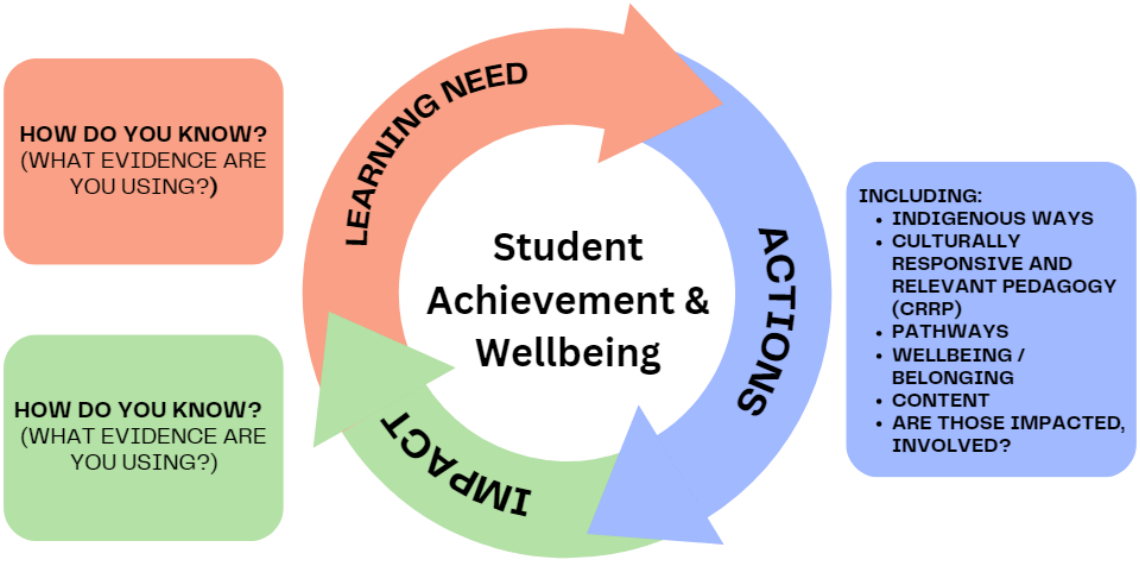
Aligned with the MOE's focus on student achievement in mathematics, the District has also implemented a Math Achievement Action Plan (MAAP) (Appendix B). This plan utilizes evidence-based strategies and performance indicators to enhance mathematics instruction. Key priorities of the MAAP include ensuring fidelity of curriculum implementation, promoting ongoing professional learning in mathematics content knowledge, and fostering a deep understanding of the mathematics learner to ensure that all tasks, interventions, and supports are relevant and responsive.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

4. **Program Services Framework**

Programming to support student learning needs is driven by data and other sources of evidence across the District. The following framework is used by Program Services to guide actions and initiatives, ensuring an ongoing cycle of actions that are informed by student learning needs. These actions are intentionally monitored for impact, which then informs the next need and actions.

*Figure 1: Program Services Framework*




5. **Evidence-Informed Decision-Making**

Data informs planning at multiple levels: for the system, for schools, and for students. This report includes District-level achievement data which is used to monitor progress and inform our work. An important use of this data is the disaggregation of achievement results by student identity data. Although generally in line with provincial achievement rates, staff recognize that ongoing support is needed to increase student achievement, especially for those underserved, including Indigenous and multilingual learners, students with special education needs, and students from low-income neighbourhoods.

6. **Provincial Achievement Data from 2023-2024 School Year**

The MOE indicators for the priority area *Core Academic Skills* focus on provincial assessments of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (i.e., the percentage of students who meet or exceed the provincial standard on Grade 3 and 6 reading, writing, and mathematics assessments, as well as Grade 9 math and the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT)). High level observations from these indicators are outlined below, with a fulsome summary, disaggregated by identity, attached as Appendix C:

- Participation rates remain high, signalling active engagement, particularly in the earlier grades;
- Compared to the province, OCDSB students were more likely to meet the provincial standard in mathematics (grades 3, 6, and 9). Although elementary reading and writing scores were either on par or slightly less than the province, OSSLT results were higher;
- The data demonstrates relatively stable performance over time, with some slight increases and decreases;
- Math has remained particularly consistent, with a 1% increase in grade 3; and,
- There were small decreases in reading and writing, particularly in grade 6 writing.

| Assessments | % Meeting Provincial Standard | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2021-2022 | | 2022-2023 | | 2023-2024 | |
| | OCDSB | Prov. | OCDSB | Prov. | OCDSB | Prov. |
| **Grade 3** | | | | | | |
| Reading | **74%** | 73% | **72%** | 73% | **71%** | 71% |
| Writing | **66%** | 65% | **64%** | 66% | **62%** | 64% |
| Mathematics | **61%** | 59% | **61%** | 60% | **62%** | 61% |
| **Grade 6** | | | | | | |
| Reading | **85%** | 85% | **84%** | 84% | **81%** | 82% |
| Writing | **84%** | 84% | **83%** | 84% | **79%** | 80% |
| Mathematics | **52%** | 47% | **52%** | 50% | **52%** | 50% |
| **Grade 9** | | | | | | |
| Mathematics | **57%** | 52% | **55%** | 54% | **55%** | 54% |
| **OSSLT** | | | | | | |
| First-time eligible | **87%** | 82% | **89%** | 85% | **87%** | 85% |

7. **Perceptual Data**

EQAO assessments also include student questionnaires, for the collection of data based on student perceptions. Based on our student responses, we see that:

- Reading tends to be the subject in which students report the most interest and confidence in both elementary and secondary;
- In elementary, younger students are more likely to report enjoyment and confidence in reading, writing, and math than their older peers. Some

interest in writing, and confidence in reading and math may be regained as higher rates are seen in secondary (compared to grade 6); and
- A growth mindset shows more stability across the grades, with only small decreases (2-3%) of those in agreement with the statements '*a person can always get better at math*' and *'almost everyone can understand math if they work at it*.'

8. **Observations from Identity-Based Data**

One of the important ways the OCDSB uses achievement data is to monitor the progress of identified groups and inform efforts to reduce disproportionalities. Student identity data is based on information available from our student information system and from the Valuing Voices Survey. When disaggregating EQAO data, it is important to consider participation rates and how low counts can contribute to fluctuations in the data. Additionally, it is important to consider how a group is identified; for example, through self-identification, formal assessment, or records from Statistics Canada. Note that students with special education needs includes those with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and/or those who have been identified through the Identification and Placement Review Committee (IPRC), and excludes students identified as gifted.

Overall, EQAO results show that there continue to be lower rates of success on provincial assessments for multilingual learners, students with special education needs (excluding gifted), students who identify as Indigenous, and students residing in low-income neighbourhoods. Additionally, results show differences in achievement based on race and religion, with students who identify as Black, Middle Eastern, and Muslim meeting the provincial standard at a lower rate than their peers. Disproportionality indices, change over time, and comparisons to provincial data (where applicable) are presented in Appendix C.

Ongoing work in this area involves a more nuanced understanding of the data, often at the student level. Some examples of this work include analysis of achievement results for multilingual learners based on their English proficiency (Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) level) and exploration of report card results for students with special education needs in the context of modified curriculum expectations when applied. This work will help identify more precise areas of need and inform intentional shifts in practice to address systemic barriers as guided by the OCDSB's Indigenous, Equity, and Human Rights Roadmap.

9. **Board and School Priority Learning Plans**

The OCDSB Board Priority Learning Plan (PLP; Appendix D) reflects the priorities within the strategic plan while remaining in alignment with the MOE Student Achievement Plan (SAP). It is refined using EQAO data as one benchmark to monitor trends in learning needs. Given EQAO results, this plan reflects our commitment to achieving equitable outcomes for all students, with a particular focus on Indigenous students and those historically underserved by the education system. The goals outlined in the PLP are realized through School

Priority Learning Plans (SPLP; Appendix E) to address specific needs in literacy, mathematics, pathways, and well-being. These plans prioritize underserved students in greatest need, using quantitative, qualitative, and perceptual data to monitor progress and inform instruction. This data-driven approach ensures accountability and facilitates continuous improvement.

To build capacity and support school teams in using their data effectively to develop and monitor their SPLs, the Research, Evaluation, and Analytics Division (READ) has implemented a Data Support Model. Specifically, Data Support Leads from READ are partnered with each Superintendent of Education (SOE) to support the group of schools within their superintendency. The goal of this approach is to equip school administrators with the knowledge and tools needed to better understand their school data, to inform decisions and practices.

10. **Professional Learning and Support**

The District employs a multifaceted approach to literacy and math development, supporting educators at the District, school, and classroom levels to improve student achievement and well-being.

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| **District - level** | ● Creating district-wide professional learning.<br>● Facilitating principal and vice-principal learning.<br>● Coordinating learning networks of principals and educators.<br>● Consolidating resources and tools in online platforms.<br>● Facilitating system-wide learning regarding the use of tools and resources.<br>● Providing 1:1 support for principals and vice-principals. |
| **School - level** | ● Principal and instructional coach facilitation of district-wide professional learning.<br>● Provision and refresh of resources.<br>● Provision and facilitation of training on specific content tools.<br>● School-based math and literacy learning sessions.<br>● School learning teams. |
| **Classroom - level** | ● Literacy and math screener and diagnostic support.<br>● In-class instructional coach and specialist teacher support.<br>● Support in applying learning from learning networks.<br>● Support in making data-informed decisions. |

This multi-tiered support system includes an increased focus on progress monitoring (enabling more timely interventions) and expanding central support from the provision of learning and resources to facilitation of deeper understanding and application of effective learning practices. This collaborative

approach aims to strengthen educator capacity and ensure that all students have the necessary support to develop strong literacy and math skills.

11. **Core Learning: Literacy**

Literacy continues to be a priority learning area for the District. This table provides a summary of some of the work (and the impact of that work) that the district has engaged in this school year to support improved literacy achievement:

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| **Student Learning Need Identified through:** | **Elementary**<br>● Lower achievement in EQAO reading and writing, specifically the achievement gap for Multilingual Learners.<br>● Early Reading Screening results.<br><br>**Secondary**<br>● Lower achievement in EQAO reading and writing, specifically the achievement gap for Multilingual Learners.<br>● Results from literacy assessment tool used in grade 9. |
| **Actions include:** | **Elementary**<br>● District-wide professional learning on structured literacy.<br>● Learning support for evidence-based literacy resources.<br>● Implementing *Early Reading Screening* from K-8 and a specific progress monitoring tool for K-2.<br>● Creating 15 minute *literacy moments* for Principals to include at each staff meeting.<br><br>**Secondary**<br>● Targeted professional learning on structured literacy for educators in English Language Learning programs.<br>● Support using English as a Second Language (ESL)/ English Language Development (ELD) STEP continuums to facilitate differentiated programming and monitor progress in English proficiency.<br>● Ongoing multilingual instructional coach and teacher collaboration to build teacher capacity with structured literacy, utilizing ESL-specific strategies designed to accelerate student learning.<br>● Collaboration with Indigenous Education team to embed Indigenous pedagogies into literacy instruction and classroom practices (such as using talking circles to build community and teach syntax). |
| **Evidence of Impact includes:** | **Elementary**<br>● Students who did not meet benchmark and who received support from a Reading Intervention Teacher (RIT) made |

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| | progress with almost all of them (97%) meeting or exceeding benchmark.<br>● Students independently identifying their literacy challenge and referencing the appropriate resource to resolve this challenge.<br><br>**Secondary**<br>● Analysis of STEP data demonstrates significant improvement within 1-2 semesters with students progressing from STEP level 1 to STEP level 3 or 4.<br>● Increased demonstration of students using their literacy skills to work through literacy challenges independently and with peers.<br>● Preliminary analysis of literacy achievement for Multilingual Learners in Grade 9 English demonstrated gaps at STEP 1, 2 and 3, however, as students progressed (achieving STEP level 4, 5, and 6), those gaps closed. |
| **Next Steps:** | ● Supporting an expanded use of progress monitoring tools.<br>● Continuing to build educator capacity in linking progress monitoring data to appropriate learning resources.<br>● Strengthening the application of differentiated instruction, Universal Design for Learning, and Indigenous and Culturally Responsive Pedagogies. |

One of the most significant changes in literacy support in the 2024-2025 school year is the increased intentional focus on and use of progress monitoring tools. The development and use of these resources and tools has increased educators' ability to identify specific areas of student strength and needs and more intentionally focus specific learning strategies, supports, and resources with students to meet their specific needs. Using these resources has served to increase educator capacity to connect specific learning needs with specific literacy learning approaches and tools.

12. **Core Learning: Mathematics**

The Math Achievement Action Plan (MAAP) focuses on providing equitable access to high-quality math education across the district. It prioritizes addressing disparities for Indigenous, multilingual, and underserved students while supporting the success of all learners. For 2024-2025, MAAP goals are to:

- Decrease the number of students performing below Level 2 in grades 3, 6, and 9;
- Enhance foundational skills in number sense in elementary grades and algebraic thinking in secondary grades; and

- Promote and integrate inclusive practices such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP).

The detailed update (Appendix F), covering the period from September 2024 to January 2025, highlights actions taken to improve student achievement in mathematics, the impact of these efforts, and ongoing strategies to enhance math instruction in the OCDSB. The table below highlights just a few of the efforts and their resulting impact on math achievement so far this year.

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| **Student Learning Need Identified through:** | • Lower achievement in Mathematics on the EQAO Assessment at grades 3, 6, and 9.<br>• Challenges in foundational number sense skills in elementary.<br>• Challenges in algebraic thinking at secondary. |
| **Actions include:** | • Professional learning focused on strengthening math knowledge and skills through CRRP and UDL principles, fostering collaboration and sharing best practices.<br>• Three initiatives to support staff working with Indigenous students, Multilingual Learners, and students with special education needs, in collaboration with Indigenous, ESL and LSS teams.<br>• School-based coaching support for educators in implementing effective practices and using tools like the OCDSB Numeracy Assessment Tool (ONAT) and other student data to inform instruction and assessment.<br>• Development of monitoring tools to support leader training on data analysis, progress monitoring, and effective implementation of high-impact math practices across schools. |
| **Evidence of Impact includes:** | • Teachers shifting to student-centered, collaborative approaches (e.g., math conversations, hands-on learning, small groups) that boost student confidence, engagement, and achievement. These approaches align with Indigenous ways of knowing, and support multilingual learners by emphasizing relationships, experiential learning, and the whole student.<br>• Students developing stronger reasoning, problem-solving skills, and number sense, effectively using tools to understand math. Mid-year OCDSB Numeracy Assessment Tool (ONAT) data shows overall growth, especially in classrooms with regular tool use.<br>• Teachers reporting increased confidence in using manipulatives, analyzing student data to adjust instruction, and applying high-impact strategies. |

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| | ● Principals reporting growth in using data to support staff and drive effective teaching and learning. |
| **Next Steps:** | ● Expanding professional learning focused on enhancing math knowledge, high-impact strategies, and Culturally Relevant Responsive Pedagogy (CRRP) application. While implementation of CCRP practices and high impact strategies are increasing, we still have much work to do in this area.<br>● Increasing educators' capacity to use diagnostic tools and math continuums to monitor the achievement of students with curriculum modifications, evaluate their progress, and inform targeted strategies.<br>● Supporting principal capacity to use progress monitoring tools like the ONAT, digital dashboards, and CRRP/Universal Design for Learning (UDL) with specific pieces of evidence being sought. |

These actions, and the additional actions and initiatives outlined in the detailed report (Appendix F), have positively impacted students and educators, leading to more student-centered practices, increased engagement and confidence in math, improved reasoning and problem-solving, and enhanced educator collaboration. Staff will continue to strengthen curriculum implementation, use data-driven instruction, and refine progress monitoring to ensure ongoing success for all learners.

13. **Summer Program and Support Offerings**

In addition to the programming and support offered during the traditional school year, the OCDSB Continuing Education department, in collaboration with several key District departments, offers summer programs for students at the elementary, secondary, and adult learner levels. These programs are highly valued by students and families, creating space for students to accelerate their learning and have additional opportunities to develop foundational learning skills.

During the summer of 2024, a total of over 10,000 students were served and supported in a variety of ways. Some examples of programs and supports offered are as follows:

- **Elementary (Grade 6-8) Literacy and Numeracy Summer School Program:** A non-credit program available for OCDSB students currently enrolled in Grades 6-8. These programs are designed to assist students as they prepare for the transition to higher grade levels. Programs offered are focused on literacy and/or numeracy;
- **SAIL (Students Accelerating in Literacy):** This is a non-credit opportunity for OCDSB high school students in ELD and ESL to improve their competency and language level in English. Eligible students had the opportunity to enrich their education by developing oral proficiency,

reading proficiency, and basic numeracy skills. This was delivered through experiential education and an authentic, contextualized learning format; and

- **Secondary Student Supports:** At the secondary level, eLearning, in-person and virtual summer schools, credit recovery, and cooperative education programming provided students with opportunities to explore areas of interest, improve academic performance and participate in experiential learning.

An overview of all the programs and supports organized and offered by the Continuing Education department can be found in Appendix G.

## RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

14. All expenses for this work are funded through existing district funds and MOE grants.

## COMMUNICATION/CONSULTATION ISSUES:

15. The PLP outlines the OCDSB's learning priorities and goals for the 2024-2025 school year. It was developed through collaboration with various stakeholders including district committees and departments. These priorities were shaped through community consultations during the development of the OCDSB's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan. They have been revised for 2024-2025 based on District data identifying key areas of need prioritizing underserved students. Additional input was gathered through discussions between Program Services, Learning Support Services, the Mental Health Lead, Student Achievement Through Equity (SATE), READ, and Equity and Indigenous teams.

    The learning priorities and goals for 2024-2025 were shared with school principals in November 2024, focusing on school improvement efforts for the current school year and a reflection and review of school-level data to support planning and monitoring.

## GUIDING QUESTIONS:

16. The following questions are provided to support the discussion of this item by the Committee:

What observations can be made from our student achievement data to inform our next steps?

- How can the OCDSB's PLP articulate learning priorities for underserved students?
- How will the work described realize increased student achievement in literacy and mathematics?

- How will the proposed elementary program structure support continued growth in literacy and math?

## FOR DISCUSSION

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| Brett Reynolds<br>Associate Director, Academic | Pino Buffone<br>Director of Education and<br>Secretary of the Board |

**APPENDICES**

Appendix A Student Achievement Plan (SAP)
Appendix B Math Achievement Action Plan (MAAP)
Appendix C Student Learning Update: Learning Outcomes in Core Academic Skills
Appendix D OCDSB's Priority Learning Plan (PLP)
Appendix E OCDSB's School Priority Learning Plan (SPLP)
Appendix F Update on the Math Achievement Action Plan
Appendix G 2024 OCDSB Summer Program and Support Offerings Summary