Chapter 1
Section
1.03

Ministry of Education

Follow-Up on 2020 Value-for-Money Audit:

Curriculum Development, Implimentation and Delivery

RECOMMENDATION STATUS OVERVIEW

		Status of Actions Recommended				
	# of Actions Recommended	Fully Implemented	In the Process of Being Implemented	Little or No Progress	Will Not Be Implemented	No Longer Applicable
Recommendation 1	3		2		1	
Recommendation 2	1			1		
Recommendation 3	3	1	1	1		
Recommendation 4	1	0.5		0.5		
Recommendation 5	3	3				
Recommendation 6	2	1	1			
Recommendation 7	3	1	2			
Recommendation 8	1		0.25	0.25	0.50	
Recommendation 9	1			1		
Recommendation 10	1			1		
Recommendation 11	4		1	3		
Recommendation 12	1	1				
Recommendation 13	2			2		
Recommendation 14	2	1		1		
Recommendation 15	1	1				
Total	**29**	**9.5**	**7.25**	**10.75**	**1.5**	**0**
%	**100**	**33**	**25**	**37**	**5**	**0**

Recommendations 4 and 8 were made to school boards, and all other recommendations were made to the Ministry of Education.

Overall Conclusion

We recommended 29 actions as a result of our 2020 audit of Curriculum Development, Implementation and Delivery. Of those, 27 recommended actions were directed at the Ministry of Education and two actions were recommended to the four school boards we audited. As of November 7, 2022, 33% of the actions we recommended in our *2020 Annual Report* have been fully implemented and progress has been made in implementing an additional 25% of the recommended actions.

The Ministry has fully implemented recommendations such as establishing a standard approach to communicate the availability of resources and how they can be accessed by teachers and school board staff; implementing mechanisms to solicit feedback from educators about the usefulness of resources and

to provide input into what resources are needed, and then incorporating this feedback into future resource development; making digital elementary course material available for the Grade 1-8 Math Elementary 2020 curriculum; and developing strategies to close the learning gap students experienced during remote learning required by the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the Ministry has made little or no progress on recommendations that include updating its assessment policy, Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools, 2010, to ensure that it is current and relevant; establishing a province-wide educator network to create and share assessment materials; undertaking a review of standardized assessment practices which count toward a student's final mark; and performing detailed analysis and identifying the reasons for stagnating or declining Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) scores.

The Ministry also decided not to implement our recommendation to pilot new or revised curriculum in schools prior to full implementation, indicating that there is no consistent approach in other jurisdictions to piloting of curriculum. We continue to support the implementation of this recommendation.

Results for school boards were mixed. Half of the school boards we audited implemented our recommendation for principals or vice-principals to review teachers' annual long-range plans and a sample of lesson plans to ensure all curriculum expectations are taught to an appropriate level of depth; the other half did not. Only one school board was in the process of implementing our recommendation for boards to track the utilization of textbooks in their schools and use this information to make bulk purchase orders, potentially lowering overall cost, another had taken little action to date and the remaining two would not be implementing it because there would be too much coordination involved in collecting requests for books and distributing them to schools across their region. For these boards, we continue to support the implementation of this recommendation.

The status of actions taken on each of our recommendations is described in this report.

Background

The goal of the Ministry of Education (Ministry) is that students acquire the skills and knowledge they need to reach their full potential. Accomplishing this goal requires curricula that are current, relevant, balanced, developmentally appropriate and coherent from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The Ministry is responsible for developing the curricula to be taught to students and assessment policies to be used by educators. A substantial portion of the current curricula was developed many years ago. As of April 2022, 35% of curricula subjects taught in the province were developed and put into practice at least 15 years ago, and an additional 21% were released between 10 and 14 years ago.

School boards are responsible for ensuring that their staff implement all curriculum expectations. We found that there were no formal processes in place at the Ministry, school boards or schools to provide assurance that all curricula were being taught effectively across the entire school system.

Some of our significant findings included:

- Curriculum was released without sufficient time for school boards and schools to review it and for teachers to prepare instructional materials and resources to properly implement it. We found four of the five most recently released curricula as of August 2020 were released with little time for schools to prepare for their effective implementation. For example, the Health and Physical Education Elementary 2019 curriculum was released on August 21, 2019, just 10 days before schools were required to implement it on September 3, 2019.
- Many textbooks were old and not relevant or relatable to students. Several Ontario curricula had not been revised for over a decade and many of the corresponding textbooks on the Ministry's list of approved books were just as old. Although these textbooks covered 85% of the curriculum content at the time they were last revised for the relevant subjects, they did not always reflect current social, political and environmental issues. Examples in the textbooks were also

outdated in some cases. In addition, we found examples of older textbooks being used with outdated terminology no longer considered appropriate when referring to Indigenous people.

- Province-wide student assessments tested only two subject areas and did not provide a good measure of overall learning achieved by students across the province or within school boards. Assessments by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)—a Crown agency of the Province—tested reading, writing and mathematics. This accounted for only two subject areas (language and math) of the seven mandatory subject areas offered in elementary schools and 18 subject areas offered in secondary schools. Further, assessments occurred at four intervals in the span of a student's 12- to 14-year public schooling, but no standardized testing was scheduled in the student's senior years, Grades 11 or 12. We noted that all other Canadian provinces have standardized provincial assessments in select subjects and grades. However, in many cases, the tests are conducted in a student's senior high school year, and the result of a test counted to some degree toward the student's final mark.
- Varying levels of student instruction took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the Ministry did not provide clarity on all expectations regarding instruction by teachers. It was not until May 8, 2020, almost two months after schools were initially shut down, that the Ministry provided clarification on its expectations for remote learning. However, the Ministry did not set expectations for the frequency or duration of teacher-led real-time virtual instruction. A survey conducted by the Ministry revealed that 29, or 48%, of school boards reported that only half or less than half of their teachers were offering their students live, real-time instruction online, as of May 20, 2020.

We made 15 recommendations, consisting of 29 action items, to address our audit findings.

We received commitment from the Ministry of Education, the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, the District School Board Ontario North East, the Near North District School Board and the Toronto District School Board, that they would take action to address our recommendations.

Status of Actions Taken on Recommendations

We conducted assurance work between April 2022 and September 2022. We obtained written representation from the Ministry of Education, the Toronto District School Board, the Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario, the District School Board Ontario North East, and the Near North District School Board, that effective November 7, 2022, they have provided us with a complete update of the status of the recommendations we made in the original audit two years ago.

Curriculum Review Process

Recommendation 1

In order to improve the process of developing and implementing curriculum, we recommend that the Ministry of Education:

- *develop a formal risk-based approach for selecting curriculum to revise;*
  Status: In the process of being implemented by the end of December 2023.

Details

During our 2020 audit, we compared Ontario's curriculum review process to other provinces and found that some provinces (namely, Manitoba, New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador) utilized risk-based frameworks with established criteria to determine the need for reviewing and updating curriculum. Factors they considered included demand from industry, age of the curriculum, scope of revisions under consideration, stakeholder recommendations, societal demands, demographics, research engagement and achievement

data. The Ministry provided us with a timeline for curricula it was planning to update between 2019/20 and 2022/23; however, there was no documented justification provided for why these curricula were selected over others.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had begun development of a Curriculum Review Guide to inform the curriculum review process, which will include a risk-assessment framework for curriculum review and a curriculum review cycle. At the time of our follow-up, the guide was in the process of being drafted. Factors being considered as to when a curriculum should be revised included: age of the curriculum; the currency of the curriculum (such as new skills/knowledge related to the subject/discipline; pedagogical approaches; innovations in technology; realities of the day); advancements in research related to the subject matter; and changes in best practices across leading jurisdictions.

To inform the development of the Curriculum Review Guide, between June and October 2021 the Ministry conducted a jurisdictional scan on curriculum review processes to build on the information contained in our *2020 Annual Report*. The scan included all Canadian provinces and select international jurisdictions, including the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

The Ministry also stated it conducted engagements with various stakeholders to, among other things, help in the development of a regular curriculum review cycle. We were told that these engagements occurred from December 2021 to April 2022; however, minutes or summary notes of the engagements were not available for our review.

The Ministry reported-back to Cabinet in February 2022 on recommendations for a standard risk-assessment framework for curriculum revision and a regular curriculum review cycle as components of the Curriculum Review Guide. The Ministry expects its Curriculum Review Guide to be publicly released in winter 2023.

- *set a defined amount of time between when it releases curriculum and the implementation date;*
  Status: In the process of being implemented by the end of December 2023.

Details

In our 2020 audit, we found that Ontario left little preparation time for teachers prior to releasing a curriculum. The amount of lead-time provided to Ontario teachers in the five most recently released new or revised curricula we reviewed at the time of our audit ranged from 10 days to five months. In comparison, we noted that other provinces had a defined timeline to release curriculum revisions to schools prior to the date teachers were expected to implement the revised curriculum. For example, in British Columbia the curriculum was released one year before mandatory implementation in schools and in Nova Scotia, depending on the curriculum, it was released one to two years ahead of mandatory implementation.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had not yet set defined time frames for the release of new or revised curricula prior to implementation. The Ministry informed us that it is considering policy options related to defined timelines for curriculum release, which will be included in the Curriculum Review Guide the Ministry expects to implement by the end of December 2023.

Since the time of our original audit in 2020, the Ministry has released three curricula with the time between release and implementation ranging from three to six months. Specifically, the English and French curriculum for Grade 9 Math was released June 9, 2020, three months prior to September 2020 implementation; American Sign Language as a Second Language and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) langue seconde were released March 11, 2021, six months prior to implementation in September 2021; and the English and French curriculum for Grade 1-8 Science and Technology was released on March 8, 2022, also allowing six months prior to implementation in September 2022.

- *pilot new or revised curriculum in schools prior to full implementation.*
  Status: Will not be implemented. The Office of the Auditor General of Ontario continues to support the implementation of this recommendation.

Details

We found in our 2020 audit that the Ministry did not have a system for piloting curriculum before it was released. In contrast, eight other provinces we reviewed piloted draft curriculum in schools and incorporated feedback from the pilot process into the final curriculum document.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had decided it would not be piloting new or revised curriculum prior to implementation. The Ministry stated it came to this conclusion following the completion of a jurisdictional scan of Canadian provinces, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, through which the Ministry determined there was not an approach to piloting of curriculum which it wanted to pursue. As mentioned in the second action item of **Recommendation 1**, in lieu of piloting curriculum the Ministry stated that it has committed to set defined time frames for the release of new or revised curricula prior to implementation in order to provide boards with enough lead-time to implement a new or revised curriculum.

As noted in our *2020 Annual Report*, piloting of new or revised curriculum would be a beneficial process for teachers and students prior to full implementation, and therefore, we continue to support the implementation this recommendation.

Recommendation 2

To allow for development of curricula that is research-based, evidenced-informed and reflective of stakeholder views, we recommend that the Ministry of Education establish procedures that ensure that each step in its own process for curriculum development is completed on a timely basis and that fulsome research and relevant stakeholder feedback are obtained.

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

In our 2020 audit, we found that the Ministry did not always adhere to its stated curriculum review process. For example, we found that the Ministry had not obtained comprehensive stakeholder input or provided sufficient time to allow for proper fact-checking while revising the 2019 Health and Physical Education Elementary curriculum. As well, the Ministry had not updated all necessary stakeholder input while developing the 2019 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Studies Secondary curriculum.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry was in the process of drafting and developing a Curriculum Review Guide, which is to outline the procedures to be taken in each stage of the curriculum review process (research; info-gathering; writing; editing and fact-checking; approvals; issuance; implementation). The Ministry informed us that the Curriculum Review Guide is to act as a standard procedures guideline to be used throughout the curriculum revision process to support the consistency of each stage, including how research and relevant stakeholder feedback are incorporated into each stage.

Implementation of Curriculum Expectations

Recommendation 3

In order to understand and address barriers and challenges to the effective implementation of new or major curriculum revisions, we recommend that the Ministry of Education:

- *collect data and information through surveys of educators and other means to evaluate the level of implementation following major curriculum revisions;*

  Status: Little or no progress.

Details

Our 2020 audit found that school boards and the schools we engaged with did not have a formal and sustained process to make sure that the curriculum was being implemented effectively across all schools. We found that, although school administrators and curriculum leads take several informal actions to make sure that the curriculum is being implemented, there were no consistent systematic processes at the school level to make sure that the curriculum was being implemented and that the students were learning all of the required curriculum.

In our follow-up, we found that, although the Ministry did collect feedback from teachers and other educators regarding the usefulness of resources and webinars made available to support implementation of curriculum (as further discussed in the second action item of **Recommendation 5**) and additional training and supports required, it has not yet begun to collect data through survey or other means to evaluate the level of implementation following the release of curriculum.

- *provide specific and focused training and supports in areas identified by surveys to be impeding effective implementation;*
  Status: Fully implemented.

Details

In our 2020 audit, we surveyed teachers on whether certain factors had an impact on their ability to effectively deliver curricula. Most respondents indicated that the following factors had a major impact on their ability to effectively deliver curricula—the number of students with special needs (76%), class size (70%), availability of student resources (54%), and availability of teacher resources and exemplars (49%).

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had designed a series of webinars and resources to support the release of recent curriculum revisions, and in June 2020 launched the Curriculum and Resources website to house all Ministry-developed curricula and curriculum resources in one place. The website is accessible to educators, parents/guardians, students, and the public. At the time of our follow-up, the site included the seven most recently revised or developed English and French-language curriculum in digital format and the associated resources with links on the curriculum pages they apply to.

For each new curriculum released since the time of our original audit, for example, American Sign Language as a Second Language, Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) langue seconde, Grade 9 Mathematics (de-streamed), and Grade 1-8 Science and Technology, the Ministry hosted webinars in both English and French to provide an understanding of curriculum changes and pedagogy. For each of the webinars held, the Ministry obtained written feedback from educators which, among other things, ask what additional opportunities and/or resources are needed to support effective implementation of the curriculum.

Based on the feedback received, the Ministry has provided supports in areas identified as impeding effective implementation. For example, in feedback received from math topic webinars held in March 2021, many teachers indicated that they are looking for sample course templates for particular strands such as financial literacy and coding. We noted that the Ministry has posted sample long-range plans and course plans for Grade 9 Mathematics on its Curriculum and Resources website. The Ministry also summarized feedback obtained from webinars held in 2020/21 and used this to inform and develop the 2022 professional learning calendar.

- *collect and examine data related to students' performance in the first year of post-secondary pursuits to gain an understanding of any knowledge or skills gaps of Ontario students and address the gaps.*
  Status: In the process of being implemented by December 2023.

Details

Our 2020 audit found that the Ministry had only collected data and conducted analysis on the number of students who entered publicly funded post-secondary education in Ontario, but had not collected information related to first-year success in post-secondary school (drop-out rate or unsuccessful completion of courses) to gain an understanding of any knowledge or skills gaps.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had begun to collect the data necessary to complete analysis on first-year postsecondary student success and to identify where knowledge gaps may exist. In fall 2021, the Ministry began development of the Transitions to Postsecondary Education tool, which allows for data analysis and visualizations describing the transition from secondary to post-secondary education, including college, university and apprenticeship programs. Analysis is possible at the school, board, region and provincial levels. The Ministry will be analyzing the

performance of students who entered post-secondary education from 2013/14 to 2019/20. The underlying data for the analytic tool is obtained from the ministries of Education, Colleges and Universities, and Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development. The Ministry expects the tool to be finalized and implemented by the end of 2022, and analysis will begin in the following year.

Recommendation 4

We recommend that school boards ensure principals or vice-principals consistently complete a review of teachers' annual long-range plans and a sample of lesson plans to ensure all curriculum expectations are planned to be taught to an appropriate level of depth.

Status:

District School Board Ontario North East and Toronto District School Board – Fully implemented.

Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario and Near North District School Board – Little or no progress.

Details

In our 2020 audit, we reported that only 71% of elementary school teachers we surveyed, told us that their long-range plans for curriculum delivery were reviewed by their principal or vice- principal. Even fewer elementary school teachers reported that their principal or vice-principals reviewed their unit plans (15%) or lesson plans (14%) to oversee if the curricula were being consistently implemented. At the secondary level, about half of teachers we surveyed told us that their long-range plans (i.e., course outlines) were reviewed by either their principal, vice-principal or school curriculum lead. In addition, even fewer secondary school teachers reported that their principal, vice-principal, or curriculum lead reviewed their lesson plans (22%) and tests and major assignments (30%).

In our follow-up, we found that:

- **Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario:** The school board has not developed or implemented processes to address this recommendation. The school board informed us that principals are required to complete teacher performance appraisals, during which they will review long-range plans, a sample of lesson plans, and observe teachers in the classroom. However, as we reported in our *2020 Annual Report*, a performance appraisal occurs only once every five years for experienced teachers (unless performance issues have been identified) and twice within the first 12 months of employment for new teachers.
- **District School Board Ontario North East:** The school board has included in its 2021/22 school year a principal's checklist, which includes all items that must be completed and due dates throughout the year, and the requirement that principals and vice-principals collect and keep on file long-range plans of all teachers. The school board formed a committee of elementary and secondary principals which first met in April 2022 to discuss options, roles and responsibilities, and a strategy for implementation of principal or vice-principal review of long-range plans, and a sample of lesson plans. The committee developed procedures including checklists for review to this end, which were communicated to principals, vice-principals, and teachers in June 2022 for implementation beginning in September 2022.
- **Near North District School Board:** The school board has not yet developed a specific process to ensure long-range plans and a sample of lesson plans are consistently reviewed. The school board told us that in March 2022, it administered a survey of all elementary school principals related to long-range planning, in which 76% said they completed a review of teachers' long-range plans to ensure all curriculum expectations are planned to be taught in appropriate depth; however, the school board did not provide us with a copy of the survey and the responses for our review.
- **Toronto District School Board:** In May 2022, the school board added a requirement to both the elementary and secondary school administrator checklists for teachers to submit

long-range plans and for principals or vice-principals to check that teachers have a binder of lesson plans ready in case an occasional teacher is needed. Further to this, the checklist requires that school principals review long-range plans and take samples of lesson plans to ensure they meet Ministry expectations and assessment guidelines (Growing Success).

Recommendation 5

In order to provide teachers and other educators with useful resources and materials needed to support teaching the curricula, we recommend that the Ministry of Education, in conjunction with the school boards:

- *communicate the availability of new resources to teachers and school board staff upon the release of the resources, including where and how they can be accessed;*

  Status: Fully implemented.

Details

In our 2020 audit, we reported that 26% of teachers we surveyed, who were responsible for teaching any of the eight new or revised curricula released between 2017 and 2020, had not been provided any resources related to the curricula for which they were responsible. In addition, a 2014 consultant's report on the usefulness of math resources for teachers of all grades, found that teachers were aware that there are numerous resources available, but they were not always well informed on how to access the resources or even where to start their research for resources.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had established an approach to communicate the availability of resources and how they can be accessed. As noted in the details of the second action item of **Recommendation 3,** in June 2020 the Ministry launched the Curriculum and Resources website to house all Ontario curricula and associated resources, and now uses this as the exclusive place where all new Ministry developed material related to curriculum can be found, increasing the ease of accessibility.

Since our audit in 2020, the Ministry has also taken standard approaches to communicate revisions to curricula and the availability of new resources as they are available, including publishing on the Curriculum and Resources website a document outlining and comparing the key changes to updated curricula, producing a parent's guide for curricula, which provides information about the learning expectations of the curricula and how they can support their child's learning, and links to access Ministry webinars which accompany and discuss the curricula.

In addition to making the existence and content of the Curriculum and Resources website known to educators, in March 2022, coinciding with the release of the revised elementary science and technology curriculum, the Ministry began to provide communication and announcements to school boards at the same time the curriculum is released, on where to access new resources and register for webinars. Since our audit, the Ministry has also been utilizing social media platforms to communicate the availability of new curriculum and accompanying resources. For example, with the 2021 release of the new curricula for American Sign Language and Langue des signes québécoise (LSQ) langue seconde, the Ministry posted announcements and links to the curricula and resources on several social media platforms.

- *collect feedback and input from teachers on the usefulness of the resources and on suggestions for improvement, through surveys or other means, within two years of releasing the resources;*

  Status: Fully implemented.

Details

In our 2020 audit, we reported that 87% of teachers that responded to our survey said they would find it valuable to provide input and feedback to the Ministry during the development of resources. However, only 3% of teachers indicated that the Ministry had ever solicited their feedback when developing resources.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had implemented mechanisms to solicit feedback from educators about the usefulness of resources and to provide input in what resources are needed. As described in the second action item of **Recommendation 3,** the Ministry has begun to solicit and receive feedback through

a standard survey asked of participants of all Ministry webinars. This survey asks participants to describe additional opportunities and/or resources which would support future learning needs to effectively implement new or revised curricula.

Beginning in the 2020/21 fiscal year, the Ministry has also included a requirement in transfer payment agreements with third-party resource developers/providers, that they collect educator feedback on the effectiveness of resources and include the results in a report to the Ministry.

For the Grade 9 Math curriculum, in June 2021, the Ministry also obtained feedback through the annual report each school board is to submit to the Ministry. The feedback solicited an answer to the question, "What additional ministry resources and/or training would your board find useful to better support the continued implementation of the math strategy?" This feedback informed the development of math resources for teachers, as further discussed in action item three of **Recommendation 5**.

- *use and incorporate feedback received into future resource development.*
  Status: Fully implemented.

Details

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had incorporated feedback received from educators in the development of training and resources. As noted in the detail of the second action item of **Recommendation 3**, the Ministry has developed supports regarding needed resources based on response to feedback it solicited through webinars accompanying the release of curricula. We reviewed feedback received following the June 2021 webinars accompanying the release of the de-streamed Grade 9 Math curriculum, and noted that teachers most frequently requested examples of lessons and lesson plans. In response, as of May 2022, the Ministry outsourced the development of over 210 sample lesson and assessment plans to vendors.

We also reviewed educator feedback received regarding the Ministry's math strategy in June 2021, as well as, the number and types of resources developed for both the elementary and secondary math curricula. We noted that the resources developed aligned to the feedback received. For example, many of the responses from educators requested additional training and resources related to coding and mathematical modelling. The Ministry outsourced the development of lesson plans related to coding and led or funded over 70 webinars between November 2020 and October 2021, across all grade levels on this subject.

Recommendation 6

To allow teachers to understand new or revised curriculum in adequate depth and to have the knowledge of instructional strategies and practices they should be using to be able to deliver it effectively, we recommend the Ministry of Education:

- *provide a sufficient amount of lead-time prior to the curriculum implementation date, ranging from six months to one year, depending on the scope of revision;*
  Status: In the process of being implemented by December 2023.

Details

In our 2020 audit, we found that in four of the five recently revised curricula we reviewed, the curriculum was released without sufficient time for school boards and schools to review the curriculum and prepare teachers and instructional materials and resources to properly implement the curriculum. For example, the Health and Physical Education Elementary 2019 curriculum was released just 10 days before the start of the school year and the Mathematics Elementary 2020 curriculum was released at the end of June for implementation in September 2020. In each of these cases, the curriculum was released during or immediately prior to the period when teachers are not typically working. The school boards we spoke with told us they would like to receive a new or revised curriculum three to 12 months in advance to allow the board and school staff to understand the changes and determine the professional learning required for teachers. School boards also noted that the longer timeline before implementation of a new or revised curriculum would give the board and its schools enough time to make sure they

are able to provide teachers with proper resources, and would also give publishing companies enough time to create new textbooks and other resources that are aligned with the new curriculum.

Since our 2020 audit, and as noted in the second action item of **Recommendation 1**, the Ministry has released three curricula with the time between release and implementation ranging from three to six months. Also, as previously noted, at the time of our follow-up the Ministry was in the process of developing a Curriculum Review Guide, which is to include standard time frames to be adhered to between the issuance and implementation of new or revised curriculum. The Ministry expects its Curriculum Review Guide to be publicly released in winter 2023.

- *deliver the necessary training, tools and resources to teachers several months before the curriculum is to be taught.*
  Status: Fully implemented.

Details

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had standardized its approach to curriculum release to include an implementation plan for each release. The implementation plan, which is developed several months before implementation, contains a standard set of initial resources released with the curriculum, including an outline of the key changes to the curriculum, a parent's guide to the curriculum, and information on how to access webinars presenting the new curriculum. This process formally began with the release of the Grade 1-8 Science and Technology curriculum in both English and French in March 2022, and will be captured in the draft Curriculum Review Guide under development by the Ministry.

The implementation plan also outlines initial resources to be provided prior to the curriculum being taught. In the case of the Grade 1-8 Science and Technology curriculum, this includes introductory videos and webinars focused on key areas in the revised curriculum outlining methodological and pedagogical practices to understand the changes in the revised curriculum, and classroom-ready resources such as lesson plans and assessment examples.

As part of the standard curriculum implementation process, a draft curriculum is shared with education publishers ahead of its public release date. We noted that the Ministry notified and provided publishers with the Grade 1-8 Science and Technology draft curriculum in August 2021.

Recommendation 7

To provide students with textbooks for their studies that are relevant and relatable, we recommend the Ministry of Education:

- *review the listing of textbooks on the Trillium List and gain assurance that they are current and relevant to student learning for each subject;*
- *discontinue the ability to purchase textbooks that are no longer considered relevant;*
  Status: In the process of being implemented by August 2023.

Details

The Ministry has a list—one for the English-language curriculum and one for the French-language curriculum—of approved textbooks for most subjects and courses, known as the Trillium List/Liste Trillium. Although school boards and schools are not required to use textbooks from the list in their classrooms, if a school or teacher wants to purchase a class set of textbooks, it must be from the list. Our 2020 audit found that there was no limit on the number of years an approved textbook could remain on the Trillium List and be used in schools. Textbooks were not periodically re-evaluated or regularly reviewed to assess the currency and relevance of the information and whether they were still an appropriate and suitable resource for students. Only when the curriculum was revised would textbooks be re-evaluated to determine if they still met the Ministry's eligibility criteria or if an entirely new textbook needed to be created. Although 43% of teachers who responded to our survey indicated that they were not provided with textbooks for the classes they teach, 61% who were provided with textbooks said the textbooks were not current and relevant to the curriculum.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had continued with the same process used at the time of the audit in 2020, in which English-language and French-language textbooks that have become outdated with the release of new and revised curriculum, or at the publisher's request, are removed. This process, most recently completed in August 2021, resulted in 26 English-language textbooks being removed from the Trillium List in the areas of elementary Mathematics and Social Studies/History and Geography, and secondary Mathematics and Canadian and World Studies. An additional 120 French-language textbooks were removed, leaving only seven approved French-language textbooks on the list.

The Ministry expects that it will complete its review of all subjects by August 2023, and plans to conduct a periodic review going forward from that date.

- *ensure textbooks are made available for the Math Elementary 2020 curriculum.*
  Status: Fully implemented.

Details

In our 2020 audit, we found that the Ministry was not aware when publishers would be developing new textbooks or updating existing textbooks to align with the revised Math Elementary curriculum released in June 2020.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had approved eight new digital English-language textbooks for grades 1-8 to support the Elementary Math curriculum released in 2020. The textbooks were produced independently by a third-party publisher and were approved by the Ministry between August 2020 and February 2021, and placed on the Trillium List (list of approved textbooks).

There are fewer and smaller third-party publishers of French-language textbooks in Ontario, and as such, none have begun to develop a textbook specific to the 2020 Elementary Math curriculum. In lieu of this, the Ministry provided funding, in the amount of $1.5 million to Le Centre franco-ontarien deressources pédagogiques (CFORP) for the development of resources to support Grades 1-8 elementary math teaching and learning. These resources became available in June 2022 and are housed in a dedicated website.

Recommendation 8

In order to determine which textbooks, if any, are most widely used and preferred by teachers, we recommend school boards track the utilization of textbooks in their schools and use this information to make bulk purchase orders, potentially lowering overall cost.

Status:

Near North District School Board – In the process of being implemented by December 2023.

Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario – Little or no progress.

District School Board Ontario North East; Toronto District School Board – Will not be implemented. The Office of the Auditor General of Ontario continues to support the implementation of this recommendation.

Details

We found in our 2020 audit that school boards did not track the utilization of textbooks or other teaching resources purchased by their schools; therefore, school boards were unable to determine which textbooks, if any, were most widely used and preferred by teachers. Such information could help schools acquire textbooks at a lower price through bulk purchasing.

In our follow-up, we found the following:

- **Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario:** The board did not have a full inventory of textbooks and other resources used in each of its schools. All purchasing of textbooks is co-ordinated at the board central purchasing department in which school purchases are consolidated.
- **District School Board Ontario North East:** To assess the utilization of textbooks across its schools, in February 2022 the school board conducted a survey of all teachers to indicate if they use textbooks for the subjects that they teach. For textbooks used, they were asked to provide the textbooks' title, publisher, edition number

and publication date for each textbook. Based on the survey data, the board found that 26% of teachers used textbooks (44% secondary, 15% elementary), and no current purchasing of class sets was necessary. The school board told us that there would not likely be a cost savings to purchase textbooks centrally as the quantity would not be high enough to warrant significant publisher discounts and the geographic size of the board (600 kilometres) was prohibitive to ordering centrally and redistributing across the board due to high shipping costs.

- **Near North District School Board:** In December 2020, the school board launched the Surplus Learning Resources Portal, which allows schools to make surplus learning resources (including textbooks) available to the system. Educators are able to order surplus items of other schools to be delivered to their schools to aid in optimizing the board's investment in textbooks and supplementary resources. In November 2021, the school board issued a draft Textbook Management Guideline and began the process of cataloguing textbooks. This was completed in March 2022, providing data to allow the school board to track the utilization of textbooks in schools and use this information to make bulk purchase orders, potentially lowering overall cost. By December 2023, Near North District School Board plans to conduct a similar review of textbook utilization, review opportunities to purchase digital e-textbooks at the system level, and on an ongoing basis to monitor curriculum revisions/releases and consider appropriate system investments, enabling bulk purchase orders.
- **Toronto District School Board:** In late 2020, the school board contacted the primary vendors of textbooks to determine if discounts would apply to bulk board-wide purchases, based on past order history. Five of nine vendors contacted indicated that discounts for bulk purchases were possible; however, the amount of the discount would depend on the publisher, title, and quantity ordered. However, the board decided that it would not be feasible because bulk textbook purchasing requires a great deal of coordination across all schools and grade levels, and potentially among teachers within grade levels if personal preference is considered. It also stated that an additional challenge would be the timing to gather all order information from all schools in time to place bulk orders by publisher and receive the books centrally, break down shipments and repack for individual classrooms and schools in time for the start of school. The school board has not determined which textbooks are most widely used and preferred.

Classroom Assessment of Student Learning

Recommendation 9

We recommend that the Ministry of Education update its assessment policy, Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools, 2010, to provide teachers with further guidance and tools regarding assessment, including definitions of the various levels of achievement, formal criteria in each learning category and examples of student work at the various levels, as well as guidance on assessment during remote learning for all grade levels.

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

Our 2020 audit found that the Ministry's key policy document on student assessment, evaluation and reporting, allowed inconsistency in student assessment. Although the policy outlined the areas in which students are to be assessed, and lists four levels of achievement, the different levels of achievement were not clearly defined and were subject to interpretation. Moreover, the policy required that students demonstrate overall expectations, but not all specific expectations. Teachers decided how much relative importance to place on each specific expectation, and which specific expectations in the curriculum to include in the evaluation of overall expectations

toward a student grade. Research commissioned by the Ministry noted that teachers had a desire for more clarity and guidance on assessment to introduce more consistency to the process.

At the time of our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had plans to solicit quotes in 2023 for research to be conducted, including a jurisdictional scan and literature review to inform revision of the assessment policy. The Ministry anticipates receiving the final report from the researchers in late 2023 and will then begin to collaborate with experts on the process to revise and finalize the assessment policy. The Ministry expects to release a revised assessment policy in 2024.

Recommendation 10

We recommend that the Ministry of Education update its assessment policy, Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting in Ontario Schools, 2010, to reflect the most current knowledge about assessment, equity, inclusion, special educational needs, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and the use of technology for remote learning.

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

Our 2020 audit found that the Ministry's key policy document on student assessment, evaluation and reporting, was also outdated, as it reflected the state of knowledge about the learning experience at the time it was published 10 years earlier. For example, it did not provide guidance regarding e-learning and online/virtual assessment of students. Further, the report of the Ministry's independent review, Ontario: A Learning Province (2018), indicated that the assessment policy document did not include policy or guidance concerning culturally relevant assessments. It also noted that focused revisions and updates of the assessment policy were required to take into account changing knowledge about assessment and new commitments to early childhood learning, equity, inclusion, special educational needs, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and the use of technology.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry expects revisions to its assessment policy will be made in line with the recommendation, as part of the revision process it is planning to undertake, as described in **Recommendation 9**. The Ministry stated that as part of the policy review, and through consultation with procured experts and researchers, consideration and revisions will reflect current knowledge about assessment, equity, inclusion, special educational needs, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, linguistic needs, and the use of technology for remote learning.

Recommendation 11

To gain assurance that consistency in student assessment is being achieved across the province and in each particular board, we recommend the Ministry of Education:

- *require school boards to analyze student performance data (that is, the consistency between EQAO scores and classroom grades);*

  Status: In the process of being implemented by December 2023.

Details

In our 2020 audit, we found that neither the Ministry nor the school boards we spoke with were doing any work to systemically ensure that student assessment was occurring consistently across schools and boards. We also found inconsistencies between the level achieved in Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments and classroom marks assigned by teachers, which again suggested inconsistencies in classroom assessment and the standardized evaluation occurring across the province. Neither the Ministry nor school boards could provide us with a reason for the differences between EQAO results and classroom marks.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry was developing a tool to analyze and assess the consistency between EQAO scores and classroom grades. As an extension of the Ministry's current database of board information, which includes EQAO and report card data, the Ministry has begun to develop an analytical tool which will allow for comparison of EQAO scores and classroom grades at the student level. Student report card marks will be cross-referenced with their

EQAO achievement in order to identify the alignment of student EQAO and report card marks.

The Ministry is working to incorporate this new cross-referenced data into a dashboard tool for board use, and expects to have this implemented by December 2022. However, since EQAO testing was suspended since the start of COVID-19, this recommendation will not be implemented until the following year.

- *compile and analyze data provided by school boards;*
- *follow up and address issues where consistent assessment does not appear to be the case;*

  Status: Little or no progress.

Details

In our follow-up we found that the Ministry had not yet received and compiled an analysis from school boards outlining the alignment between report card and EQAO assessment results and thereby, had not yet taken steps to follow up and address issues where inconsistency exists. The Ministry expects to act on these steps following the completion of the analytical tool being developed and then made available to school boards, at the end of 2023.

- *establish a province-wide educator network to create and share assessment materials, strategies and practices.*

  Status: Little or no progress.

Details

In our 2020 audit we noted that according to a 2018 report, by the education advisors to the Premier and Minister of Education, it is necessary to find the appropriate balance between consistency in assessment and being able to address local needs through teachers' professional judgment. According to the report, among the potential solutions were collaborative learning to develop shared understanding and practices, and professional collaboration within and across schools, with district teams, and educator networks across the province.

In our follow-up, we found that beginning with the de-streamed Grade 9 Math curriculum in June 2021, the Ministry adopted a standard approach to sharing assessment material as part of the Ministry's standard implementation plan it creates for each curriculum release (as discussed in the second action item of **Recommendation 6**). This includes a webinar on assessment and evaluation of the particular curriculum being released.

In June 2021, the Ministry launched a new assessment, evaluation, and reporting section on its Virtual Learning Environment (a website which includes items such as assignments, rubrics, lessons linked to curriculum expectations, and quizzes). At the time of our follow-up, this site included a brief summary of some aspects of the current assessment, evaluation, and reporting policy (Growing Success, 2010). The Ministry told us that it plans to create additional content on this page as a means of sharing materials, strategies and practices related to student assessment and evaluation, although at the time of our follow-up, this had not been done. The Ministry also told us that it plans to include information regarding an educator network in its planned revised version of the assessment, evaluation, and reporting policy (as discussed in **Recommendation 9**), but no supporting documentation of this was available for our review.

Province-Wide Assessments

Recommendation 12

We recommend that the Ministry of Education include, as part of its curriculum revision, a process to investigate the causes where Ontario's performance in national and international assessments shows a decline or lack of improvement over time, and develop strategies to address gaps and shortcomings in student learning.

Status: Fully implemented.

Details

We found in our 2020 audit that, while both Ontario elementary and secondary students performed well on national and international assessments, Ontario had not been able to increase the proportion of students meeting baseline levels of achievement in these assessments. For example, in national assessments through the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) which

tests Grade 8 students in science, reading and math, Ontario performed well compared to other Canadian jurisdictions from 2010 to 2016, but performance in all three subjects tested had declined or stagnated, while the Canadian average continued to climb and surpassed Ontario in the 2016 math assessment.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had completed analysis of national and international assessments to identify specific areas where the performance of Ontario students has declined or stagnated, and areas where performance is below that of other provinces and/or countries. For example, in relation to the Grade 1-8 Science and Technology (March 2022) curriculum, the Ministry's analysis showed that performance in the area of Earth Science was the least favourable among the science topics assessed. As a result, Earth Science learning was enhanced in the new elementary curriculum to include new learning on geological processes and climate change.

The Ministry's analysis of reading performance showed that although Ontario is consistently a top performer in reading within Canada and internationally, there was no change in Ontario's average reading score from 2010 to 2019, and the Ontario French-language school system's average reading performance was lower in 2019 than in 2010. The analysis also revealed that an improved reading performance in other jurisdictions has contributed to a lower international standing for Ontario in the most recent test results.

Both the elementary and secondary language curricula are in development and expected to be released in September 2023, and as a result of the analysis of the national and international assessments, the Ministry has planned changes to the curricula. For example, rather than teaching reading skills using a cueing system (teachers prompt students to draw on multiple sources of information to identify words), the revised curricula will include specific expectations for teaching foundational reading and writing skills (e.g., phonics) throughout all sections of the curricula. Whereas the existing curricula has a standalone oral communication section, oral communication will now be explicitly required throughout the curricula to provide constant reinforcement.

Recommendation 13

To provide better assurance that Ontario students have acquired a consistent minimum level of knowledge in core subject areas, we recommend the Ministry of Education:

- *assess practices in other jurisdictions that have standardized provincial testing in various subjects and grades at the secondary level which are worth some component of the final course grade, and adjust its standardized testing, as appropriate, based on the review; and*
- *conduct cyclical assessment of priority subjects.*

Status: Little or no progress.

Details

Our 2020 audit found that Ontario students were not subject to standardized testing in their senior years, Grades 11 or 12, unlike students in other provinces. We noted that seven other provinces had standardized provincial testing in various subjects and grades at the secondary level which were worth some component of the final course grade, ranging from 10% to 50%, and in some cases a test had to be passed in order for the student to graduate.

In our 2020 audit, we also reported that an independent review of student assessment and reporting commissioned by the Ministry recommended, among other things, that the Ministry consider the potential for one-off cyclical (three-to-five years) research or assessment of priority subjects and/or competencies for a broader understanding of the performance of Ontario's education system.

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had not undertaken a review of standardized assessment practices which count toward a student's final mark, nor conducted cyclical assessments. The Ministry has stated that as part of the procurement of research, including a jurisdictional scan and literature review to inform revision of the assessment policy (as discussed in **Recommendation 9**), it plans to obtain a jurisdictional analysis to inform the implementation of this recommendation. No evidence was available to support that work had begun in this respect.

Recommendation 14

In utilizing testing information as a tool to improve curricula and student education, we recommend that the Ministry of Education:

- *perform detailed analysis and identify reasons for stagnating or declining EQAO scores;*
  Status: Little or no progress.
- *have school boards put in place supports to directly impact those groups of students who may be struggling.*
  Status: Fully implemented.

Details

Our 2020 audit found that EQAO assessment results had declined, particularly in math, but the reasons remained unknown to the Ministry. Specifically, students in Ontario have performed below the Ministry's goal of having 75% of all students in the province achieve the provincial standard in Grades 3, 6 and 9 math EQAO assessments since at least 2011/12. Although the Ministry analyzed the impact of additional funding that it began to provide in 2016 to select school boards with low student achievement in EQAO math results, the additional funding did not appear to make any significant difference in increasing student performance in math at the elementary level, but had a modest impact on student performance in Grade 9 applied math.

In our follow-up, we noted that the Ministry has not performed detailed analysis to identify reasons for stagnating and declining assessment scores.

However, we noted that the Ministry has made efforts to gain input from EQAO on revisions to the curriculum and obtained from EQAO information on areas of difficulty for students. The Ministry told us that since our audit it met with EQAO to discuss results and trends in assessment scores, and review where students struggled to inform implementation resources, and to share with EQAO a draft of the revised de-streamed Grade 9 Math curriculum for comment. The Ministry also told us that it has continued to meet with EQAO regarding upcoming revisions to the Grades 1-8 Language curriculum and the Secondary English curriculum. The Ministry told us that it will further analyze EQAO results in relation to upcoming revisions in curriculum, which it expects to complete by August 2023.

Details

In our follow-up, we found that the Ministry had provided funding and put in place tools to assist school boards in targeting supports for those groups of students who may be struggling in achieving the provincial standard on EQAO scores.

In September 2021, the Ministry released to school boards, an initial version of the Board Improvement and Equity Plan (BIEP), a tool designed to capture data about the experiences and outcomes of Indigenous students, Black and other racialized groups of students, students with disabilities and/or special education needs (non-gifted), 2SLGBTQ+ students, and students from low-income neighbourhoods. The BIEP is intended to provide a standardized tool for school boards to identify local actions that will lead to improved achievement. The tool includes performance indicators to measure and track success of the supports provided. For example, the percentage of students who received targeted early reading and math supports; the percentage of educators who received professional learning related to supporting students in early reading and math, and the percentage of students who meet or exceed the provincial standard in math report card assessments in Grades 3, 6 and 9. At the time of our follow-up, the results of the performance indicators were not available.

In November 2021, the Ministry communicated to school boards that, as of September 2022, all Grade 9 subjects will be offered in one stream. The Ministry believes this should help address systemic discrimination and break down barriers for Indigenous, Black, and racialized students, students from low-income households, 2SLGBTQ+ students, and students with disabilities and/or special education needs. The Ministry provided schools boards with professional development, and plans and initiatives to support students who are facing barriers to success in transitioning from Grade 8 to de-streamed Grade 9 courses.

The Effects of COVID-19 on Curriculum Delivery and Student Assessment

Recommendation 15

In order to have students achieve the level of learning they should be at in their current grade level, as indicated by assessment of all areas of the curriculum, we recommend the Ministry of Education develop strategies throughout the 2020/21 school year to provide to school boards to close the learning gap students experienced during remote learning required by COVID-19.

Status: Fully implemented.

Details

In our 2020 audit, we reported that school boards we spoke with anticipated there would be gaps in student learning beginning in the 2020/21 school year. In early April 2020, the Ministry announced student grades and marks were not to go down from what they were at the start of the closure period on March 13, 2020. As a result, some students did not feel incentivized to continue to be fully engaged in their studies. In addition, the Ministry did not clarify its expectations for remote learning, in regard to teacher instruction, e.g., whether learning was to be live, the duration and frequency. At the time of our fieldwork in August 2020, three of the four school boards that we spoke with had not developed any specific new strategies to help students catch up academically in the 2020/21 school year.

In our follow-up, we found that as the shutdowns and disruptions continued throughout the 2020/21 school year, in May 2021, the Ministry identified key themes emerging, including the need to focus on student mental health and well-being, supports for early reading and math and the re-engagement of students. The Ministry announced plans to support learning recovery and renewal through an allocation of an additional $85.5 million in funding to school boards to provide supports to students through strategies including summer school programming; upgrading courses; support for students from First Nation Schools; targeted math and literacy support; STEM summer programming; targeted programs for under-served students; and for supporting students with special education needs and mental health needs.

In June 2021, the Ministry asked school boards to develop re-engagement plans for supporting student disengagement that occurred throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and required that boards provide their re-engagement plan by September 30, 2021. In December 2021, the Ministry met with school boards to discuss the plans.

In September 2021, the Ministry provided school boards with the $85.5 million in funding, that it had announced previously, including $20 million for re-engaging students and reading assessment supports to address the impacts of learning disruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of this funding school boards were to reach out to students, and their families, who had not attended school, have had inconsistent attendance or have disengaged from their learning; and connect students to supports in the school community to respond to their individual interests, needs, and pathways; and to keep students engaged in learning, connected to their school, and motivated to achieve their learning goals. Funding was also directed to support re-engagement activities that have a strong focus on supporting students who have been historically disadvantaged and disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, including Indigenous, Black, and racialized students, Children and Youth in Care, students from low-income households, students with special education needs, students with mental health needs, and English/French Language Learners.

In February 2022, the Ministry introduced the Learning and Recovery Action Plan, including a proposed approach to initiatives and associated funding to address the effects of learning disruptions from the pandemic, in the following areas:

- Measure and assess the extent of learning gaps, including in specific regions and on specific populations and engage to establish targets for learning recovery.
- Strengthen numeracy and literacy skills, by introducing new or expanding existing learning focused programs and tools.

- Student resilience and mental well-being, by stabilizing and increasing historic mental health funding and consulting to develop an approach to support school-based children's resilience and mental well-being.
- Deliver tutoring supports through school boards, including in partnership with local community organizations, and the expansion of online tutoring. In March 2022, the Ministry established transfer payment agreements with school boards to offer tutoring support programs that supported learning recovery in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Modernize education to better prepare students for the world of work, including aligning new and/or revised curriculum and programs with the skills students need for the jobs of tomorrow, and a requirement for school boards to provide remote learning for the 2022/23 school year.