

TEST #	1247a	DATE	05/01/2011
--------	-------	------	------------

# ACCOUNTABILITY ON STEROIDS

COURSE	Testing, continuous improvement and privatization		
NAME	Gordon Bambrick	STUDENT #	0023567849

## QUESTION 1:

Is the statement  
below true or false?

Despite pretensions of  
helping the kids, it is  
increasingly evident that  
the real goal of testing  
is to put a spotlight  
on the supposed  
underperformance of  
public education.

Teachers know that results on high-stakes testing are not a fair indicator of school success. Schools don't teach just numeracy and literacy. And, by any estimate, these subject areas don't represent more than a fraction of the curriculum.

Although no teacher would be foolish enough to claim that exams in two subject areas represent the sum of a child's learning in all subjects over three years, this is what is sold to the public by both the government and the media. The government boasts about improved Education and Quality Accountability Office (EQAO) results; oversimplified headlines and sound bites do the rest.

Despite pretensions of helping the kids, it is increasingly evident that the real goal of testing is to put a spotlight on the supposed underperformance of public education. This is exactly how high-stakes testing gets used by dozens of pro-privatization think tanks, many of which, like Canada's Fraser Institute, publish their school rankings in the media. These organizations know that all tests mathematically guarantee lots of "below average" schools and unhappy customers. This ratchets up parental paranoia, which then can be used to drive parents into the net of school choice—non-public alternatives that include vouchers, charter schools and home schooling. By perpetuating the EQAO tests and publishing results it knows will be used for school rankings, the government feeds into this narrowing of public perception.

It's no secret that Mike Harris's education reforms, such as EQAO testing, were aligned with the dreams of the Fraser Institute (where Harris is now a Senior Fellow). However, the same testing and accountability agenda continues with the current government. EQAO results are now publicized on the Ministry's School Information Finder website. A *Toronto Star* article, "Premier defends school shopping with ministry data" (April 8, 2009), explains that the Ministry site, in its original design, included a "controversial online school comparison feature known as the 'shopping bag,'" which McGuinty claimed "helps parents pick the best education for their kids and spurs principals to do better." Fortunately, pressure from educators and parents groups led to that feature being deleted.



Other measures to heighten accountability for “results” include the threat of “intervention” from the Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership (OFIP). According to the Ministry’s OFIP website, “In 2008, 1,100 schools were receiving interventions.” The degree of Ministry intervention in schools is based strictly on test performances, with the cut-off for

Results Team,” “stretch targets” for achievement and graduation rates, “finely tuned intervention strategies,” “new data management and assessment tools,” strategies to “increase pressure for accountability, including transparency about results” and “negotiation of targets.”

Another Ministry web page is entitled “The K–12 School Effectiveness Frame-

ship training, benchmark assessment, data warehousing, test preparation and information technology.

Invariably, private sector providers advertise based on claims of offering “solutions” to new forms of accountability, sometimes introduced by their own research, philanthropy and lobbying influences. They promise improvement of “outcomes,” “re-

OSSTF/FEESO created the “Credit Integrity Workgroup” to look into defining “real” versus “artificial” student success. Its final report continues to inform Federation positions and input to current Ministry initiatives related to student success and achievement.

satisfactory performance set around the number of students scoring Level 3 (i.e. 70 per cent) or better. Such an approach is arguably more focused on justifying putting more schools under intervention than on helping failing students. Even schools with above-average grade averages will receive intervention if they do not show continuous improvement.

Another indication of the government’s attempt to raise the stakes was the “Provincial Interest Regulation” attached to Bill 177, the *Student Achievement and School Board Governance Act, 2009*. The “Provincial Interest Regulation Consultation Paper” indicated that test scores and graduation rates would be used as “triggers” for “intervention” and Ministry “takeover.” One proposed trigger was that a board had “40 per cent or more of its schools in the bottom 20 per cent of schools in the province based on EQAO Grades 3 and 6 scores.” Although the triggers were eventually removed as a result of objections from various stakeholders, they reveal the obsession with making the drive for constant improvement of results into the new purpose of education.

The Ministry’s own websites indicate just how focused on results it has become. “Case Study—System on the Move: Executive Summary” reveals that Ontario’s strategy includes an “Education

work: A support for school improvement and student success.” Among other things, the “framework” asks schools to ask themselves, “What actions will we take to ensure continuous improvement?”

One symptom of increased pressure for accountability is the rise of concerns about teachers and administrators improperly administering EQAO tests or inflating pass rates. Last September it was revealed that 10 schools in the province were being investigated for bending the rules in their administration of the tests.

A *Toronto Star* exposé, “Failure is not an option” (June 9, 2007), revealed new pressures on teachers to pass more students and evidence of students being undeservedly passed. In response to such concerns, OSSTF/FEESO created the “Credit Integrity Workgroup” to look into defining “real” versus “artificial” student success. Its final report, published on February 14, 2008, continues to inform Federation positions and input to current Ministry initiatives related to student success and achievement.

The most worrisome result of such pressure, however, is the opening up of new markets for private sector providers. Such school-improvement businesses include for-profit products and services such as consulting, professional development, tutoring, teacher testing, leader-

ships,” “performance,” “achievement,” “success” and “closing gaps.”

One large and growing area of this market is that of education consultancies, which are hired by school districts to raise scores. Angus McBeath, former Superintendent of Edmonton’s schools, recounts how he hired Focus on Results, an American turnaround consultancy. In the company’s winter 2006 newsletter, McBeath explains:

“With [Focus on Results]’ assistance, we asked each of our schools to implement an improvement framework.... Monthly training...was quickly established. Instructional walk-throughs, where staff learned how to observe best teaching practices and give quality feedback, became part of the norm. Thirdly, we strengthened the way we collect, use and display student achievement results in order to help our schools better use data to make good instructional decisions.”

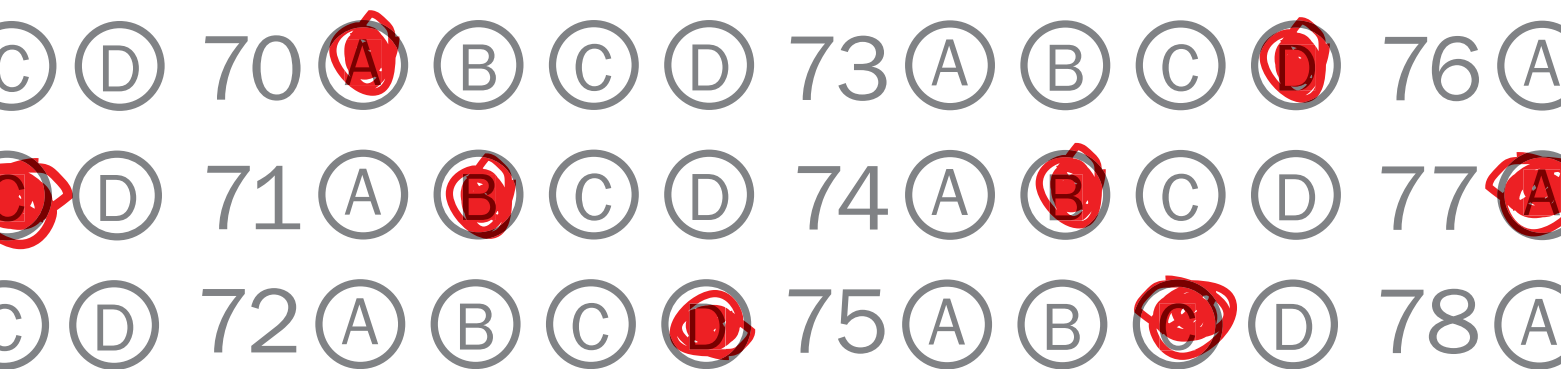
Certainly this agenda differs little from Ontario’s. In his address “Before the PEI Task Force on Student Achievement” in July 2005, McBeath, who upon retirement was hired by both Focus on Results and the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies business think-tank, mentions that he even brought in Ontario’s Special Advisor, Michael Fullan, who taught him that “if [schools] persistently don’t improve, then

I have to bring in another measure called ‘pressure import.’” It is worth noting how well this agenda aligns with Ontario’s: “And when are we going to have to stop this work of measuring, setting standards, setting targets?” asks McBeath rhetorically, to which (not surprisingly) he replies, “It will not stop. It cannot stop.” There is no true goal to continuous improvement,

Improvement Process’ and Staff Development to improve student outcomes.”

Meanwhile, the Public Consulting Group offers “Skovision™ School Improvement Planning,” which “Improves the execution of strategies leading to greater results” and is endorsed on its website by Waterloo’s “Superintendent of Learning: School Effectiveness.”

continuously assessing student progress.” Solution Tree also offers training in the implementation of professional learning communities, which “promote higher levels of learning for all students.” One such Solution Tree expert is the TDSB’s Director, Chris Spence, who “has worked to... promote causes that benefit students and achieve measurable results.”



but the true result will always be to generate an insatiable demand for private sector products and services.

The commercial expansion of professional development is predicated largely on needs created by accountability for continuous improvement. Edu-quest International Inc., another improvement consultancy, promotes founder Avis Glaze on its website as “Ontario’s first Chief Student Achievement Officer and founding CEO of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat [who] played a pivotal role in improving student achievement in Ontario schools.” Edu-quest specializes in such topics as “maximizing student achievement,” “school and system effectiveness,” “district improvement planning,” “school improvement planning,” “assessing school effectiveness,” “self-assessment and accountability,” and “strategies for monitoring improvement.”

Wayne Hulley, president of the Canadian affiliate of the U.S.-based Effective Schools, was presented as a keynote speaker at a Toronto District School Board (TDSB) rally for 20,000 teachers at the beginning of the current school year. Hulley’s firm advertises on its site that it specializes in “Workshops, presentations and multi-day training of school improvement teams using the ‘Correlate of Effective Schools,’ the ‘Effective Schools

Some of Ontario’s new mandates for accountability and professional development are aligned to specific services offered by American PD firms with focuses on such areas as differentiated instruction, assessment *for* learning, professional learning communities and “closing the gap” for underperforming races, ethnicities or genders. PD is marketed not only as a solution to new accountability but also as an amplification of those demands. School Improvement Network, for instance, echoes the accountability battle cry of “No Excuses! How to Increase Minority Student Achievement DVD Program.”

The Ontario Ministry’s promotion of “assessment *for* learning” through “Growing Success” opens the door for the Education Testing Service, a giant of the measurement industry, to promote its “Assessment For Learning” line of products that purports “to improve student achievement by integrating student-involved classroom assessment with day-to-day instruction.” Pearson, a globally dominant education corporation, offers similar services from its Canadian branch, the Assessment Training Institute.

U.S.-based Solution Tree, which advertises in Ontario, offers its own Assessment Institute in which “Educators create high-performance schools by skilfully and

It is questionable whether consulting PD firms or the broader improvement industry should be so focused on wringing ever-higher results from students. Societal goals of educating the whole child with the whole curriculum may be replaced with the narrower concerns of demonstrating measurable improvement between elections and contracts. Teachers may find themselves accountable for using the latest performance-enhancing pedagogies in the face of up-to-the-minute data correlations between “investments” and student outputs. In Louisiana, even teachers’ colleges are being held accountable for K-12 results: “It’s accountability on steroids,” as one university president enthuses, in a *Washington Post* article. “Louisiana serves as model in teacher assessment” (December 13, 2009).

More importantly, a side-effect of commercial expansion is the erosion of public control. School improvement puts much control over funding, defining and purchasing improvement in the hands of competitors who may not care to keep things public. The lofty ideals of continuous improvement may well have more to do with justifying expansion and bottom lines than helping kids. Unlike the more explicit privatization threat of charter schools, the new privatization is entirely hidden from those outside its networks.



## Barbara Coloroso's 2011 Summer Institute Teaching with Wit & Wisdom

A 3-day institute for K-12 educators,  
administrators, and trustees

Day 1

**Teaching with  
Wit and Wisdom**

Day 2

**The Bully, the Bullied,  
and the Bystander**

Day 3

**Just Because It's Not Wrong,  
Doesn't Make It Right**

### Register Today!

By phone: 800-729-1588

Online: [www.kidsareworthit.com](http://www.kidsareworthit.com)

By Email: [info@kidsareworthit.com](mailto:info@kidsareworthit.com)

By Fax: 303-972-1204

Cost: \$475 US funds

Dates: July 6, 7, 8, 2011

Location: Ryerson University

Toronto, Ontario CANADA



kids are worth it! inc.

PO BOX 621108

Littleton, CO 80162

Two recent books, *Hidden Privatization in Public Education* and *Hidden Markets: The New Education Privatization*, highlight both the invisibility of privatization and its rapid expansion.

In the U.K., Tony Blair's focus on testing and accountability has come to fruition with virtually every aspect of its system now open for business, as revealed in Stephen Ball's recent study, *Education plc: Understanding Private Sector Participation in Public Sector Education*. The lag between the U.K. system and our own may be only a few years, due to the commonly acknowledged architect of Ontario's reform Michael Fullan, whom McGuinty hired in 2003 as Special Advisor on Blair's recommendation (*The Globe and Mail*, May 1, 2004). Not only was Fullan Blair's guru but he was also a key advisor brought in to New Orleans to help with reform after Hurricane Katrina wiped out public schools and they were replaced with charter schools. According to "A Fresh Start For New Orleans' Children: Improving Education After Katrina," New Orleans schools brought in Fullan to "develop and implement a five-year plan for system-wide capacity building."

While teachers in Ontario have been spared the direct assaults underway in more advanced stages of reform, the rise of the new privatization inside our borders is a strong hint of what's to come. Such problems as we may soon be facing in an increasingly borderless economy are well documented in Mary Compton's *The Global Assault on Teaching, Teachers and Their Unions* (2008). Through its analysis of globalization's impact on education, the book demonstrates that, in the quest for profit, international reforms are threatening both public education and teaching conditions everywhere. Fortunately there is still time for us to build awareness among ourselves and the public about the implications of privatizing society's most precious institution. ☺

**Gord Bambrick** is a teacher at Eastview Secondary School and recently served as Communications Officer for OSSTF/FEESO District 17, Simcoe.

**21st Century**  
TRAVEL INSURANCE LIMITED

Your  
**Edvantage**

Save **10%** off our regular premiums on

- Medicare International Travel Insurance
- Visitor to Canada Insurance
- Trip Cancellation, Baggage Insurance, etc.

**Call us at 1-800-567-0021**

