

Growing Success: Consultation Response

November 4, 2024

Growing Success is intended to outline policies and practices to ensure accessible, meaningful and responsive assessment practices that improve student learning.

OPSBA appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Ministry of Education's request for feedback on the Growing Success document. This is an important and comprehensive policy that guides reporting, assessment and evaluation in this province. It has not been updated since 2010 and we are pleased to provide several suggestions to ensure that teachers, students, and parents are supported in the successful implementation of this important guiding document. OPSBA is committed to ensuring student success, equity and the well-being and we support the creation of quality professional development and resources to facilitate consistency and respect for diversity across the province. We believe that parents and caregivers are partners in the learning and advocate for clear communication to enhance this essential partnership with the goal of improving student learning and well being.

We have not responded to all questions in the consultation, but provided answers in areas we feel are relevant to our knowledge and expertise as the advocate for Ontario's 31 English public school boards and 10 school authorities.

1. What are the three to five strengths of the present Growing Success policy?

- It is grounded in the belief that students can continuously improve and is asset focused.
- It is holistic and provides a comprehensive approach that looks at students' abilities and skills and considers competencies beyond knowledge alone.
- It is an attempt to create consistency across the province and speaks to many topics such as levels of achievement, modifications, reporting, credit recovery, ELD and ESL learners, etc., with definitions in the glossary, and therefore, is an overarching guide.
- The document respects the diversity of learners and allows for multiple entry points and ways to demonstrate understanding.
- Facilitates numerous opportunities for feedback and avoids heavily weighted single assignments and tests by being prescriptive in weightings etc.
- Attempts to promote clear communication with students and parents – learning goals and success criteria are identified.
- Criteria vs. norm referenced is at the heart of the document and is inclusive. Research is cited to support assessment for, as, and of, learning.
- The document acknowledges the importance of learning skills and work habits alongside academic achievement, helping students develop essential skills for lifelong learning. It is valuable for students who face learning difficulties.

- Encourages the use of descriptive feedback and provides students with detailed, actionable insights into their strengths and areas for improvement, promoting deeper and more independent learning, which is a goal.
- The policy supports the integration of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), which fosters inclusive classrooms and helps meet the diverse needs of all students, although it should be explicitly named. Educators need specific supports in this area.

2. What are three to five areas of focus for revision of the present document? Please provide rationale where possible.

- Inconsistency of implementation and the subsequent lack of consistent practice among teachers has posed problems.
- Tension between professional judgement and professionalism should be considered.
- The approach has made implementation challenging due to differing resources available to teachers regarding professional development.
- Mark book programs used are often counter to the notion of most recent and most consistent level of achievement.
- While learning skills are noted and commented upon, they are not seen to be linked to marks and are often overlooked and as unimportant by parents and students. Teachers find these difficult to evaluate. The learning skills need to be linked to critical thinking skills and broken down for students and parents so they can transfer these at home, e.g. questioning.
- Learning skills should be highlighted as they are key to developing autonomous learners.
- The four categories of Knowledge and Understanding, Thinking, Communication, and Application are not easily pulled apart and understood for feedback purposes.
- Consider learnings from the *Right to Read* report and culturally relevant curriculum references.
- Diversity in pedagogical knowledge needs to be revisited and included, more diversity of approaches needs to be considered.
- Consider how Artificial Intelligence (AI) will impact the strategies and how cutting-edge professional technology can support effective instruction.
- It should be better written for a parental audience, as there is a lot of educational jargon. Accessibility for parents is essential and parents should understand the learning and what they should see in their child's classroom.
- How are new technologies considered? With the rise of emerging technologies like AI, the document could benefit from clearer guidelines on how these emerging and future tools should be used in assessments to enhance, not replace, meaningful teacher-student interactions. Further, the document needs to consider how these emerging technologies and the use of them are linked to

critical thinking skills. Even at the earliest of ages, children need to be able to separate fact from fiction and to discern reliable sources of information.

- While the document outlines percentage-based evaluations in the older grades, there can be inconsistencies in how these percentages are applied across schools. More concrete guidelines on how to standardize assessments across the province would improve consistency in grading. A deeper focus on learning goals and success criteria would be beneficial.
- There should be more specific examples and clearer guidelines on assessing learning skills and work habits linked to critical thinking skills. The current criteria can be interpreted differently by teachers, leading to inconsistencies in practice and assessment.
- *Growing Success* should be revised to include mandatory evidence-based literacy assessments throughout elementary school that would ensure early identification and intervention as suggested in the *Right To Read* report.
- The present focus on assessment can be labour intensive for teachers.

3. Are there any other areas of *Growing Success* you would like to comment on as the ministry explores possible revisions to the document?

- Consider thoughtful implementation based on what is really happening in the field – gap analysis. What is the best way to support teacher/administrator capacity? What is the accountability mechanism for implementation?
- Communication with families must be a top priority and should be articulated in the document.
- Consider equity and cultural sensitivity, mental health situations even with assessment and evaluation, exams on holidays, consideration of cultural issues, weighting of assignments and flexibility based on context.
- UDL and DEI inclusions – reporting for special needs should have meaning. Level the reporting disconnect for those who have modified programs and visually share that. Alternative programs are not really reported on as accommodations are about good teaching practices – do not separate them.
- Critical thinking skills need to be focused on in the document – what are they and what is the age-appropriate progression?
- Address how systemic barriers to success (e.g., racism, socio-economic challenges) are being addressed in the evaluation process. A clear framework for culturally responsive and anti-bias assessment could be added to ensure all students, particularly marginalized groups, are treated equitably by incorporating

principles from the *Right to Read Report* and Ontario Human Rights Commission findings.

- Put greater emphasis on communication strategies between home and school. There should be guidelines for schools to ensure all families, regardless of language or access to technology, can easily understand and engage with assessment and evaluation reports. A stakeholder terminology friendly document needs to accompany the one for educators.
- Promoting formative assessment practices through detailed feedback is key for student learning and growth. Research shows that ongoing feedback improves learning outcomes, particularly for students with reading challenges, by providing them with actionable steps for improvement. It helps to develop skills like perseverance and self-regulation.

Additional Optional Questions:

Please respond to any of the following additional optional focus questions related to your area of expertise/interest:

4. Please describe any emerging considerations related to the assessment, evaluation and reporting, of:

a) Learning skills and work habits

- The increasing need to develop 21st-century skills such as collaboration, adaptability, and digital literacy, as well as critical thinking skills, should be reflected more clearly in the assessment of learning skills and work habits.

b) Transferable skills

- In evolving workplaces and environments, more focus is needed on assessing students' ability to apply critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving across various subjects and contexts.

8. In what way could Growing Success ensure that the diversity of student needs is accounted for to support [open text box for each topic listed below]:

a) English language learners/French language learners English- and French-Language

- There should be more flexibility in assessments for new language learners, with greater emphasis on content understanding over language proficiency, especially in subject areas where language is not the primary focus.
- As Grade 9 is now de-streamed, there must be specific guidance on how to adapt assessment practices to better serve students of varying abilities and learning paces in a de-streamed environment.

11. What support is needed from school boards and the ministry to ensure consistent implementation, provide resources and examples to assist and inform educators?

Educators need ongoing training and resources to understand and implement Growing Success consistently, especially in areas like response to students with special needs, culturally responsive pedagogy and integrating technology.