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Ontario's new Grade 10 literary test, a \$21 million mistake

As a professor of education and literacy, I have anxiously been anticipating the release of the results of the new grade 10 literacy tests, along with nearly 130,000 Ontario students, their undoubtedly anxious parents, teachers, and other members who have a stake in the performance of these mostly grade 10 students' test results. EQAO the provincial testing body was created in 1996. A pilot test was field tested in 2000, which meant that the marks did not count. The reason why these results are so meaningful is that for the first time this five hour test, taken over several days, is a high stakes literacy test that all students must pass in order to graduate from high school.

Last February approximately 130,000 students wrote this test which was originally scheduled to be written in October at a cost of approximately \$14 million; however, because the test appeared on the Internet the day before it was scheduled to be written, it was postponed and another test was prepared and subsequently rescheduled for February, at a further cost of \$7 million. All this money is being spent to administer a test at a time when the government has undemocratically replaced a brave group of elected trustees who defied, as the government admits, an unworkable funding formula. They defied the government because they felt that if they followed the formula too many students would suffer. So, in one case the government appointed a supervisor at a cost of \$300,000 to the board to cut approximately \$98 million. Given the pressing need to gauge where and how our education dollars are being spent, we have every right to question the need and impact of this test.

Of the nearly 130,000 Ontario students who have written the test. and have been

test, you fail to get a high school leaving diploma without which, as we know, few if any career choices will be open to you. So, the test functions as a gatekeeper by allowing students who pass it a greater freedom in choosing future careers. Clearly, then the impact of this test is enormous. This is not a fair way of ensuring that students' career choices be limited. Furthermore, it is a paper and pencil test taken over several days by a group of nervous students, which we know contributes to poor performance. This test measures in an arbitrary way a limited set of arbitrary skills and so it does not and cannot ever predict the wealth of complexity and skills that an individual can bring to society.

As a former high school teacher and now professor at the faculty of education at Nipissing University, I meet these students who EQAO, the provincial testing body, labels as unsuccessful, and can guarantee that these students are undeserving of that label. We need to capitalize on their strengths and help them develop their many skills and talents, which may not include passing this inadequate paper and pencil test. These students can and will make important contributions in our society, given the chance. We do not need this unfair and inordinately expensive test that closes opportunities for our children and future leaders. There are better ways to spend \$21 million on our children's' education.

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