

**PROFESSIONAL  
JUDGEMENT  
MATTERS**

**PROFESSIONAL  
JUDGEMENT  
GUIDELINES FOR  
DIAGNOSTIC  
ASSESSMENT**





Ongoing diagnostic assessment of student learning is a vital aspect of a teacher's daily work. The understanding that teachers are expected to use diagnostic assessment based on their professional judgement to inform teaching and learning in their classroom is inherent in both the Teacher/Occasional Teacher Collective Agreement and Ministry of Education [Policy/Program Memorandum 155 \(PPM 155\)](#). Issued in January 2013, PPM 155 provides direction on the role of teachers' professional judgement in the selection, use, and timing of diagnostic assessments.

Since 2015, professional judgement has been defined in Section C2.5 of the Teacher/Occasional Teacher Central Agreement as:

Judgement that is informed by professional knowledge of curriculum expectations, context, evidence of learning, methods of instruction and assessment, and the criteria and standards that indicate success in student learning. In professional practice, judgement involves a purposeful and systematic thinking process that evolves in terms of accuracy and insight with ongoing reflection and self-correction.

Language specific to teacher professional judgement and diagnostic assessment is enshrined in Section C9.00 of the 2022-26 Teacher/Occasional Teacher Central Agreement as follows:

Teacher professional judgement is further informed by diagnostic assessment to identify a student's needs and abilities and the student's readiness to acquire the knowledge and skills outlined in the curriculum expectations.

The key takeaways from the language in the central agreement are that:



boards are required to provide a list of pre-approved assessment tools consistent with their board improvement plan for student achievement and PPM 155



teachers are to use their professional judgement to determine which assessment and/or evaluation tools from the list of those pre-approved by the board are applicable, for which student(s), and the frequency and timing of the tools' use



teachers must utilize diagnostic assessment during the school year



the results of student diagnostic assessments cannot be used to evaluate teachers, or to justify discipline or discharge of a teacher



## Exercising Your PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT

As ETFO teacher and occasional teacher members, you are expected to use your professional judgement to determine:



the assessment tools you will use from the board's approved list



the students who require a particular assessment tool



the timing and frequency of assessments

Teachers can administer a diagnostic tool with an individual student, a small group of students, or any number of students, including an entire class. However, as a result of the language in the central agreement, teachers cannot be requested or directed to administer a specific assessment with all students or to submit assessment data by a certain date with the exception of exclusions outlined on page 5.

As previously outlined in [PRS Matters Bulletin #71](#), if the board list of approved assessments includes only literacy and numeracy tools, non-homeroom teachers should use their own informal diagnostic assessments for their subject area and be prepared to provide evidence if requested by an administrator. Documentation of diagnostic assessments can take a variety of forms, including pre-tests, observations, rubrics, checklists, or student self-reflection tools.

Administering diagnostic assessments to at-risk students may be part of some literacy and numeracy coaches/teachers' roles. If this is considered a core job responsibility, you should continue to administer the assessments.

Teachers (including ESL/ELD, itinerant, resource, initial teacher assessor, or classroom) may also be required to complete diagnostic assessments for initial student placement or to determine the level of ESL/ELD program support required. Continue to administer assessments for ongoing programming and student support.

Classroom teachers of English language learners (ELLs) should use professional judgement to determine what assessments and assessment resources (e.g., the Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) framework) to use to support individuals or groups of ELLs in the classroom.

## EXCLUSIONS

Teachers of grades 3 and 6 are required by legislation to administer the Primary and Junior EQAO assessments. Continue to administer provincially mandated assessments.

Special education resource teachers administer various assessments that are used to identify students with special needs. This practice should continue.

At times, a classroom teacher might be asked to administer a special education screening test with their entire class, such as a test to determine placements for gifted students (e.g., the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test). You should administer these types of tests as long as you are only asked to proctor the assessment and hand in the tests and are not required to mark the student work.

As of September 2024, classroom teachers have a professional responsibility to administer the fall early reading screener to students in year two of Kindergarten and in grades 1 and 2. Specialist teachers will provide literacy and language instruction to classes that do not have a designated early childhood educator (DECE) while the early reading screeners are

being administered. A classroom teacher in a year-two Kindergarten class that has a DECE can request the support of a specialist teacher.

Students who do not meet the benchmark after the first screening will receive reading support from the specialist teacher, who will administer the second screening in the spring. Students who meet the benchmark of the first early reading screener are not required to do the second screening.

The early reading screener is part of a larger platform that includes a variety of functional tools and additional assessments. These “value-added” features are where you can exercise your professional judgement. In combination with teacher classroom-based assessments, these additional tools can play a valuable role in early identification in order to maximize student success. Under the guise of progress monitoring, you may be asked to complete some of these assessments with your entire class. However, it is up to you to decide whether to administer select assessments to specific students individually, in groups, as a class, or not at all, based on your professional judgement.

## Defending Your PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT

With the exception of the exclusions above, administrators cannot direct you to perform diagnostic assessment in a manner that is contrary to your professional judgement. You cannot be directed to use a specific tool to administer assessments to specific students, or to complete an assessment by a specific date, regardless of how the principal or board labels the assessment.

If you are directed to complete an assessment from the board list as a formative or summative assessment and to submit the results to the school administrator, inform your school steward immediately. The steward should then contact your ETFO local president, as this directive would contravene the language in the Teacher/Occasional Teacher Central Agreement and could result in a grievance being filed.

## Related Resources about PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT

More information and resources about professional judgement are available in the [Professional Judgement Matters series](#) on the [ETFO members' website](#).

## QUESTIONS?

If you have any questions or concerns about diagnostic assessment and teacher professional judgement, reach out to your school steward or ETFO local president. Staff in Professional Relations Services (PRS) at the provincial office are also available to help. We can be reached at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836.

