

Professional Judgement Matters

ETFO Professional Judgement Guidelines for Diagnostic Assessment

Professional judgement is an important concept for educators. It is now defined in our central agreement. Section C2.5 of the Teacher/Occasional Teacher Central Agreement reads as follows:

“Professional Judgement” shall be defined 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 indicated 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.

Prior to the language in the Central Agreement (2015), the Ministry of Education had issued Policy and Program Memorandum 155 (PPM 155) *Diagnostic Assessment In Support of Student Learning* (January 2013). At that time, PPM 155 provided direction on the role of teachers’ professional judgement in the selection, use and timing of diagnostic assessments in their classrooms. Following the release of PPM 155 in 2013, ETFO issued PRS Matters Volume #71 – *Policy and Program Memorandum 155 Diagnostic Assessment in Support of Student Learning Advice for Members* to outline the implications for members.

Section C10.00 Diagnostic Assessment of the 2015 Central Agreement enshrines teacher professional judgement language specific to diagnostic assessment in the collective agreement.

There is acknowledgement that “teachers’ professional judgement is 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” (Central Agreement 2015).

The key components of the language in the Central Agreement are:

- Boards shall provide a list of pre-approved assessment tools consistent with their Board improvement plan for student achievement and PPM 155;
- Teachers shall use their professional judgement to determine which assessment and/or evaluation tool(s) from the Board list of pre-approved assessment tools is applicable, for which student(s) as well as the frequency and timing of the tool;
- Teachers must utilize diagnostic assessment during the school year; and
- The results of diagnostic assessments shall not be used in any way in evaluating teachers. No teacher shall suffer discipline or discharge as a consequence of any diagnostic assessment results.

As an educator exercising your professional judgement, you should be prepared to provide rationale for the decisions you make.



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Implications for Members

Inherent in the 2015 Central Agreement and PPM 155 is the understanding that teachers are expected to use diagnostic assessment based on their professional judgement to inform teaching and learning in their classrooms.

ETFO teacher and occasional teacher members will use their professional judgment to determine:

- The assessment tools from the board list which they will utilize;
- The students requiring a particular assessment tool; and
- The timing of the assessment.

Members should be prepared to provide evidence/documentation of their use of diagnostic assessment. Members may administer the diagnostic tool with an individual student, a small group of students or any number of students but do not need to include an entire class. As a result of the language in the 2015 Central Agreement, teachers cannot be requested or directed to administer a specific assessment with all students. Nor can administrators ask that teachers submit to them assessment data by a certain date.

As previously outlined in PRS Matters #71, if the board list of approved assessments includes only literacy and numeracy assessments, non-homeroom teachers should use their own informal diagnostic assessments for their subject area and be prepared to provide evidence if requested by their administrator. Documentation of diagnostic assessments may take a variety of forms including and not limited to: pre-tests, observations, rubrics, checklists, student self-reflection tools (e.g., exit cards) or running records.

Some literacy and numeracy coaches/teachers may have the administration of diagnostic assessments to at-risk students as part of their role. If it is considered a core job responsibility, they should continue to administer the assessments to the at-risk students.

English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers may also be required to complete diagnostic assessments for the purpose of student placement or support levels. They should continue to administer assessments that are required for program placement and to determine support levels. Classroom teachers of English Language Learner (ELL) students should use their professional judgement to determine what assessments (e.g., Steps to English Proficiency – STEP) to use to support individual or groups of ELL students in their classroom.

Using Your Professional Judgement

Administrators cannot direct members to perform diagnostic assessment in a manner that is contrary to the member's professional judgement. Members 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 requested to submit the results to the school administrator, the school steward should contact the local ETFO president immediately as this would contravene the language in the 2015 Central Agreement and could result in a grievance being filed.

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Exclusions

Teachers of grades 3 and 6 are required by legislation to administer the Primary and Junior EQAO assessments and as such they will continue to administer provincially mandated assessments.

Special education resource teachers administer various assessments which are used to identify students with special needs and will continue to administer these types of assessments. At times a classroom teacher may be asked to administer a special education screening test such as a test to determine placements for gifted students (e.g., the Canadian Cognitive Abilities Test – CCAT) with their entire class. Classroom teachers should administer these types of assessments as long as all they are required only to proctor the assessment and hand them in and they are not required to mark the student work.

Under the guise of special education assessments you may be asked to complete assessments such as whole class early learning screening tools. A teacher's professional judgement should apply in such a scenario, with the teacher making the decision to administer select assessments to specific students based on their professional judgement. Teachers may choose to administer early screening assessments with individual students, small groups of students or with the entire class. Early years screening assessments can play a valuable role in early identification in order to maximize student success from the beginning of a student's educational experience and support levels for educators in their classrooms.

For Further Information if You Have Concerns

Should a member be directed by an administrator to conduct an assessment that is contrary to the member's professional judgement they should contact their school steward and the ETFO local president immediately.

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

Related Resources about Professional Judgement

For further information and resources about professional judgement, check the ETFO website in the Advice for Members and the Professional Judgement sections.