



News Release

Attention: News editors, education reporters

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EQAO Confirms Cause of Technical Issues During Online OSSLT Trial

Agency continuing investigation and looking at how to prevent future incidents

TORONTO, October 24, 2016“ The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) confirms that the cause of the technical issues that resulted in the cancellation of the October 20 province-wide trial of the online Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) was an intentional, malicious and sustained Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack“ a type of cyberattack.

EQAO shares the disappointment experienced by thousands of students, families and educators across the province. The agency recognizes the considerable time and energy spent, by all stakeholders, preparing for the trial assessment, and it sincerely apologizes for the considerable inconvenience that resulted.

An extremely large volume of traffic from a vast set of IP addresses around the globe was targeted at the network hosting the assessment application. The impact of this DDoS, initiated by an unknown entity or entities, was to block legitimate users—(i.e., school boards; schools—and students—) access to the EQAO test application.

An in-depth and ongoing investigation will lead to recommendations on how to prevent similar incidents in the future.

EQAO undertook several successful field and load tests to gauge the system’s readiness in the lead-up to the October 20 trial. This final trial was meant to test the system’s readiness on a larger scale and, notwithstanding the DDoS attack, EQAO remains confident that assessments can be administered online successfully. EQAO’s shift to online assessments mirrors classroom trends that see a greater emphasis on the use of digital technology.

EQAO is committed to openness and transparency, and we will continue to provide updates on this matter.

Quick Facts

- The October 20 online OSSLT was a voluntary trial to test the system’s readiness before the regularly scheduled administration of the OSSLT in March 2017.
- Discussions about the feasibility of scoring completed online OSSLT assessments are ongoing and an announcement on this will be made shortly.
- EQAO will deliver the March 2017 OSSLT, which students will be able to take either online or on paper.

- An independent third-party forensic firm is involved in an investigation into the October 20 incident on behalf of EQAO.
- Data indicates that the DDoS attack began shortly before 8:00 a.m. EDT.
- At the height of the DDoS attack, 99% of the traffic in the system was not coming from schools or school boards. This effectively blocked legitimate user access to the system.
- No personal or private student information was compromised during the administration of the assessment.

Quote

"EQAO shares the frustration that students, parents, teachers, schools and school board educators and administrators feel about the outcome of the assessment. We were shocked to learn that someone would deliberately interfere with the administration of the online OSSLT. There will be discussions over the next few weeks to determine how to strengthen the system, and we will continue to work with Ontario's education community to understand how best to use online assessments to benefit our province's students."

—Richard Jones, Director, Assessment

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For further information, please contact:
Natalia Williams, Senior Communications Officer
416-325-9902
natalia.williams@eqao.com