For immediate release
Date: February 11, 2016

Accountability explored

Large scale assessment, one of the measures of school accountability, was explored recently by Lizzie Yan, an M.Ed. student at UPEI; her survey, of more than 500 people across Prince Edward Island, was designed to explore the public’s knowledge and perceptions of PISA, PCAP and Provincial large scale tests. Based on the survey of over 500 islanders, Ms. Yan reported that Islanders

- knew that students scored at or near the bottom on the most recent international assessment (PISA)
- were not aware that students made significant improvements on the most recent national assessment (PCAP) where they moved from the bottom to the middle ranking of Canadian jurisdictions
- believed that large-scale assessments were an indicator of the quality of our schools
- did not believe that large-scale assessments were an indicator of economic prosperity

Ms. Yan also noted that there was an inconsistency in the manner in which provincial large-scale assessment data was reported in PEI and that students’ provincial assessment scores cannot be easily accessed by the public. Further, she noted that unlike international and national large-scale assessments, PEI does not describe the standards of achievement for each assessment. For example, when a student in grade 9 mathematics ‘meets the standard,’ it is unknown what the student can actually do in mathematics. While Ms. Yan acknowledged that over the past ten years, the provincial assessment program has grown considerably, she concluded recommending more transparency in PEI’s large-scale assessment program is needed.

Following the presentation, Dr. Tess Miller, her research supervisor, lead a lively discussion on both research methodology and findings, in particular, the need to educate the public about the relationship between students’ large-scale assessment achievement and economic prosperity in the province.

Large scale assessments are used by Departments of Education as a measure of accountability. Assessments provide a snapshot in time of student achievement and are most useful when results can be compared with similar snapshots taken in earlier years; difficulties in making comparisons occur, however, if ground rules change in between assessment periods.

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