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*From the President*

**The Cassandra Complex**

**By Malkin Dare**

In Greek mythology, Cassandra was the daughter of King Priam of Troy. When Cassandra captured the eye of Apollo, he granted her the gift of prophecy, but when she spurned his affections, Apollo placed a curse on her so that her predictions would not be believed. And so, when Cassandra warned the Trojans not to bring the wooden horse into the city and foretold the destruction of Troy, she was ignored — and the rest is history.

While I haven't noticed any wooden horses lately and although I am not predicting the fall of Ontario, I do think Cassandra's story has some relevance. Take Ontario's grade 10 literacy test, for example.

When Ontario's Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) recently released this year's results of the province's high-stakes literacy test, EQAO officials proudly proclaimed an 84% pass rate. As our report on page 12 shows, the EQAO was definitely putting the best possible face on the results. Nevertheless, the report was accepted uncritically by everyone concerned — educators, politicians, and journalists.

It is not surprising that educators and politicians preferred not to look this gift horse in the mouth. By and large, there are few Ontario educators who would welcome warts-and-all reporting: good news makes them look good and feel good, and it keeps the critics at bay. Politicians love to be able to tell their constituents they are doing a good job and should be re-elected (and maybe even get a pay raise).

The tough question is why journalists accepted the report at face value, given the many indications that there is a serious problem with illiteracy in the province (complaints from post-secondary institutions and employers, high illiteracy rates on other tests, declining newspaper readership, and so on).

I think there are a number of explanations for this phenomenon. For one thing, it wouldn't occur to many people that the EQAO has an incentive to report good results. For another, most Generation X-ers themselves received a diminished education and thus have no idea how badly students are being cheated. (To find out what students are capable of, talk to grandparents or recent immigrants from other countries.) Then there's the myth that there are lots of people who just can't learn to be good readers and writers.

Most people think it's a waste of time to try to fight city hall and so they just think happy thoughts. However, until the public tells politicians they're mad as hell and not going to take it any more, nothing is likely to change. And so, like Cassandra, we at the Society for Quality Education will continue to publish unpopular editorials.