

Issues related to Provincial
Achievement

TESTS



What parents need to know.



The Alberta Teachers' Association

Facts



about Provincial Achievement Tests

- All students in **Grade 3** write Provincial Achievement Tests in language arts and mathematics.
- All students in **Grades 6 and 9** write Provincial Achievement Tests in language arts, mathematics, science and social studies.
- The tests rely heavily on **multiple choice** questions and measure a very **limited range** of student learning.
- Test **results are reported** by individual students, schools, school jurisdictions and the province.
- Students write the tests in **June**; the results are not reported to schools until **October** of the following school year.
- The budget of the **Learner Assessment Branch** that administers Provincial Achievement Tests has tripled from \$4 million to \$12 million since the mid 1980s. Over the same period the budget of the **Curriculum Branch**, which designs and implements the entire Alberta K–12 curriculum, has remained static at \$4 million.
- Alberta leads all other Canadian provinces in the **frequency and intensity** of government testing programs.



Testing and assessment in Alberta

As parents you have a responsibility to be informed about all aspects of your child's schooling.

Assessment and testing are critical pieces of this process. The Alberta Teachers' Association believes the primary role of assessment and testing is to improve learning. All students in Grades 3, 6 and 9 are required to write Provincial Achievement Tests.

The ATA believes that these tests do not improve teaching and learning and may have a negative impact on students and schools.



achievement \ ə-'chev-mənt \
a student's demonstration of knowledge, skills and attitudes relative to grade level curriculum standards.

as-sess-ment \ ə-'ses-mənt \
process of collecting information on student achievement and performance. A balanced assessment includes a variety of assessment tasks. Ongoing diagnostic assessment provides information to inform instruction and improve student performance.

eval-u-a-tion \ i-val-yə-'wā-shən \
judgment of how well a student has done based on a number of assessment indicators; the overall quality, value, or worth of a response, product or performance based on curriculum standards



- ✔ *observations*
- ✔ *questions and notes*
- ✔ *classroom discussions*
- ✔ *portfolios of student work collected over time*
- ✔ *checklists and inventories*
- ✔ *tests with open-ended questions*
- ✔ *student demonstrations, essays*
- ✔ *experiments*
- ✔ *individual and group projects*



Teachers believe in testing

- The most important reason to test children is to give teachers, students and parents information they need to plan for further learning. Tests are not an end in themselves.
- Teachers believe tests should be used to help make important decisions about student learning.
- Paper and pencil tests cannot begin to capture the richness and excitement of a child's total learning experiences.
- Teachers continually assess student performance. They use a wide variety of methods to assess individual student learning.
- Assessments should help students know how well they are doing and how to improve.
- Teachers routinely review the results of tests with students and parents.





Problems

with Provincial Achievement Tests

- The tests **measure only a small portion** of what teachers are required to teach and what students are expected to learn.
- There is **no evidence** that external testing, such as student achievement tests, actually improves student learning.
- Some students in English-as-a-second-language modified programs and special education are required to write the tests although they **may not have received instruction** in the material.
- Students experience **unnecessary stress** writing these tests.
- Not all children are able to **perform** well on tests, even though they know the material.
- Too much classroom time is spent preparing for and writing Provincial Achievement Tests, **taking time away from real learning**.
- Teachers are **pressured** to teach to the tests and the tests are being used to **unfairly label** students, schools and teachers.
- High stakes tests, such as the Provincial Achievement Tests, serve to **sort and rank** students rather than support student learning.
- The use of test results to rank schools leads to **invalid judgments** about the quality of education in schools.
- The millions of dollars used to develop, mark and report the tests is money that would be **better spent on student learning** in classrooms.



A better alternative

Rely on the teacher's overall assessment of the student as the best source of information about learning.

Discontinue the provincial achievement testing program because the tests are not an accurate or fair measure of student achievement.

Implement a diagnostic assessment program initially for Grade 3 students. Diagnostic tests identify a student's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers use diagnostic assessment results to help students make improvements during the school year.

Modify the current provincial program to test only a sample of students in Grades 6 and 9. This will provide school jurisdictions and the province with the information needed to determine if students are learning what they are expected to learn. It is not necessary or cost effective to test all students.

What parents can do

- Understand that test results do not measure the whole range of student knowledge, performance and ability.
- Talk to the teacher about the student's learning needs and progress.
- Take time to read and appreciate work the student brings home from school.
- Attend parent-teacher conferences prepared to talk about the student's achievement.
- Ask how the Provincial Achievement Tests are being used in the school and the jurisdiction.
- Recognize that ranking of students and schools is unfair and harmful.
- Advocate for alternatives to the Provincial Achievement Tests that focus on student learning.
- Ask the School Council to organize a workshop on student testing and assessment.
- Ask your MLA why Alberta Learning spends so much money on testing that could be better spent in the classroom.



per-for-mance as-sess-ment

\ pə(r)-'fɔr-mən(t)s ə-'ses-ment \
an assessment activity that
requires students to construct a
response, create a product or
demonstrate something they have
learned or created

port-fo-lio \ pɔrt-'fɔl-ē-,ō \

a collection of work that provides
a concrete representation of a
student's learning and progress

grade \ 'grād \
level of
achievement; a summary
statement of student achievement
based on demonstrated
performance of curriculum
standards

grades \ 'grāds \
a term widely
used to refer to judgments of
student performance in relation
to the curriculum

grad-ing \ 'grād-ij \
a process to
determine a student's level of
achievement within a subject
area or course



For more information

For information about your child's achievement, contact his/her teacher.

For more general information about student achievement, contact

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