

General Information Bulletin

Introduction to the Achievement Testing Program

Purpose of this Bulletin

This bulletin outlines the key features of the Achievement Testing Program and lists the specific directives issued under the authority of the *Student Evaluation Regulation, Alberta Regulation 177/2003*. The information provided is intended primarily to assist school authorities and school administrators and classroom teachers in implementing the program in their authorities and schools.

Purpose of the Achievement Testing Program

The purpose of the Achievement Testing Program is to

- determine if students are learning what they are expected to learn
- report to Albertans how well students have achieved provincial standards at given points in their schooling
- assist schools, authorities, and the province in monitoring and improving student learning

Description of the Achievement Testing Program

Provincial achievement tests are administered annually in English and Français/French language arts and mathematics in Grade 3, and in English and Français/French language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies in grades 6 and 9. Grade 9 achievement tests based on the Knowledge and Employability programs of study in English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies are also administered. French translations of all mathematics, science, and social studies achievement tests are available for students in Francophone and French immersion programs.

Writing accommodations are available for students with learning disabilities or physical disabilities to allow them to do their best when writing an achievement test.

Every effort is made to ensure that the achievement tests show respect for cultural diversity.

In scheduling the achievement tests, some flexibility is provided to allow students who are absent on the day of administration to write before they leave, or if they return prior to the dates scheduled for the return of the testing materials.

Our goal is to provide a provincial overview of how well students in grades 3, 6, and 9 are achieving in relation to provincial standards, regardless of where or how they receive instruction. Therefore, we have designed the achievement tests, and their administration, to ensure that the tests are accessible to most students in grades 3, 6, and 9.

Key Features of the Achievement Tests

A brief summary of the achievement tests is provided below. Further information is available in the Achievement Testing Program *Subject Bulletins* (see the *Resources & Web Documents* section).

Grade	Subject and Test Component†	Number Of Booklets	Answer Sheet	Official Scheduled Time Allotted	Extra Time Allowed
3	English Language Arts Part A	1	No	70 minutes	30 minutes
	English Language Arts Part B	1	No	60 minutes	30 minutes
	Français Partie A	1	No	70 minutes	30 minutes
	Français Partie B	1	No	45 minutes	30 minutes
	French Language Arts Partie A	1	No	70 minutes	30 minutes
	French Language Arts Partie B	1	No	45 minutes	30 minutes
	Mathematics	1	No	60 minutes	30 minutes
6	English Language Arts Part A	1	No	120 minutes	30 minutes
	English Language Arts Part B	1	Yes	60 minutes	30 minutes
	Français Partie A	1	No	120 minutes	30 minutes
	Français Partie B	1	Yes	60 minutes	30 minutes
	French Language Arts Partie A	1	No	120 minutes	30 minutes
	French Language Arts Partie B	1	Yes	60 minutes	30 minutes
	Mathematics	1	Yes	75 minutes	30 minutes
	Science	1	Yes	60 minutes	30 minutes
Social Studies	1	Yes	60 minutes	30 minutes	
9	English Language Arts Part A	1	No	120 minutes	30 minutes
	English Language Arts Part B	2	Yes	75 minutes	30 minutes
	KE English Language Arts Part A	1	No	80 minutes	30 minutes
	KE English Language Arts Part B	1	Yes	75 minutes	30 minutes
	Français Partie A	1	No	120 minutes	30 minutes
	Français Partie B	2	Yes	75 minutes	30 minutes
	French Language Arts Partie A	1	No	120 minutes	30 minutes
	French Language Arts Partie B	2	Yes	75 minutes	30 minutes
	Mathematics	1	Yes	75 minutes	30 minutes
	KE Mathematics	1	Yes	75 minutes	30 minutes
	Science	1	Yes	75 minutes	30 minutes
	KE Science	1	Yes	75 minutes	30 minutes
	Social Studies	2	Yes	80 minutes	30 minutes
	KE Social Studies	1	Yes	75 minutes	30 minutes

†All mathematics, science, and social studies achievement tests are available in French and English.

Ordering Test Materials

To ensure that schools are receiving the number, format, and types of testing materials required for their students, schools must confirm their achievement test requirements using the online *Achievement Test Confirmation* application. This application is available on Alberta Education’s extranet website at <https://phoenix.edc.gov.ab.ca>. For further information about when and how to use this confirmation application, see the *Administration Directives, Guidelines, and*

Procedures section.

Using Computers to Complete Extended Written Response Questions

When it is appropriate to do so, schools may permit students to use computers to complete the **extended written response** portions of all language arts achievement tests (see *Using Computers to Complete Extended Written Response Test Questions* in the *Using Calculators & Computers* section).

Writing Digital Format Achievement Tests Using Computers

All grades 6 and 9 achievement tests are available in digital format for administration using school computers. Achievement tests in this format must be administered to students using Alberta Education's *Quest A+* locked browser application, which is available for download at: <https://questaplus.alberta.ca/help>. For further information, see *Writing Digital Format Achievement Tests Using Computers* in the *Using Calculators & Computers* section.

Requesting Special Format Materials

In addition to paper and digital formats, Alberta Education produces all achievement tests in large print, Braille, and CD format. Use of these materials by a student must be pre-approved by a superintendent. To request any of these special format materials, a principal must complete a *Request for Special Format Materials* form (see the *Forms & Samples* section). This request form must be sent to Learner Assessment by the deadline for ordering special format materials (see the *Schedules & Significant Dates* section).

Improving Student Learning

Careful examination and interpretation of the Achievement Testing Program results can help reveal areas of relative strength and weakness in student achievement. Teachers and administrators can use this information in planning and delivering relevant and effective instruction in relation to learning outcomes in the Programs of Study.

Facilitating Accountability and Reporting

Alberta Education and school authority personnel are responsible for ensuring that high-quality education is provided to all students in the province. Information about student performance on achievement tests is provided to schools, school authorities, parents, and the public so that they may know how well students in their schools are meeting local targets and provincial expectations.

Results are reported in such a way as to encourage improved learning and to minimize possible harmful effects of testing for individual students. The percentages of students who achieve the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* are reported to enable comparisons of local results with provincial results, and with local targets. Group results for fewer than six students are reported to the school and authority but are not reported publicly.

Although the Achievement Testing Program provides high-quality information that is reliable and valid, it cannot provide all the information

that a school needs to know about students' achievement. School and authority results from provincial tests are best interpreted within the context of local quantitative and qualitative information.

Interpreting Results

Achievement tests can assess only part of what is to be learned. In addition, many factors contribute to student achievement. Personnel at the authority and school levels are in the best position to appropriately interpret, use, and communicate school authority and school results in the local context.

Home Education Students

Students enrolled in home education programs are expected to write the achievement tests or an alternative assessment that has been approved by the superintendent and reflects standards similar to the provincial achievement tests. If, in the judgment of the parent, a home education student's performance will be adversely affected by taking the tests at a school, an alternative location, such as the home, may be used.

A parent may not administer the tests. The parent may, however, remain in the room while a child is taking the tests. A relative, friend, or person residing at the same address as the student shall not administer the tests to that student. In special circumstances, however, the supervising board may approve a member of the community, such as a member of the clergy, to administer the achievement tests to the student.

The school authority is expected to report to stakeholders the performance of all students in a home education program.

Preparing for the Achievement Tests

A goal of the provincial Achievement Testing Program is to obtain valid and reliable information about student achievement. How and what educators communicate to students and parents about the tests affects how well this goal is met. Similarly, validity and reliability are affected by the preparations that are undertaken before the tests are given.

The knowledge and skills that are assessed on the achievement tests are presented in the *Alberta Programs of Study* and will be part of each student's daily classroom life. Teachers should not have to halt instruction to prepare students for "the big test." Assessments at the classroom, school, school authority, and provincial levels should all support and reinforce important student learning outcomes.

Communicating with Parents and Students

School boards and school staff should communicate information to students and parents about the administration of the achievement tests and the results achieved. The communication should address the following:

- the purpose of the tests
- when the tests will be administered
- what the tests will be like
- how the results will be used
- how student, school, and authority results will be reported
- the use of test accommodations for individual students

School staff may find it useful to adapt the sample letter (see the *Samples/Forms/Letters* section) for use as an item in authority and school newsletters to parents or as a focal point for discussion at a school council meeting. This will also set the stage for discussing the results later.

Creating a Positive Environment

The school should develop a plan for helping students to do their best on the achievement tests. The plan should ensure that

- the environment for testing is appropriate:
 - a site that meets security and supervision requirements but is familiar and comfortable to students is selected
 - other school activities are scheduled so that there are no competing demands on students’ attention before, during, or immediately following the administration of the assessments
- rest periods that are included in the Grade 3 tests are provided to meet the physical, social, and psychological needs of students
- pretest activities such as the following are used to develop effective and appropriate test-taking skills and attitudes:
 - familiarize students with test and question formats
 - encourage students to try questions and tasks even if they are uncertain about them
 - help students relax and be confident
 - copy and distribute “Tips for All Students” (see the next page) to each student or discuss these with students
- excessive test rehearsal and coaching are avoided:
 - base teaching on the full range of expectations in the *Programs of Study*
 - familiarize students with the grade-level expectations

Tips for All Students

General Tips

- Before you begin, find out:
 - How much time you will have.
 - What materials you will need to complete the test.
- Skim through the whole test before beginning.
- Read all instructions carefully.
- Ask questions if you are unsure of something.
- Answer the easy questions first and then go back to the harder ones.
- Double-check to make sure you have answered everything before handing in the test.

Multiple Choice Tests

- Skim through the entire test. Find out how many questions there are and plan your time accordingly.
- Do not spend too much time on any one question. Make a note beside a difficult question and go back to it if you have time.
- Read each question carefully, underline key words, and try to think of an answer before looking at the choices.
- Read all the choices and see which one best fits the answer that you thought of.
- When you are not sure which answer is correct, cross out/erase any choices that you know are wrong.
- If time permits, recheck your answers.

Summary of Revisions for the 2011–2012 School Year

The following major revisions and/or changes to Achievement Testing Program dates, directives, and/or processes have been made and are described in *The General Information Bulletin* for 2011–2012. All major changes for the 2011–2012 school year are indicated by ***NEW**. Other, more minor, changes and updates have been made throughout this bulletin, but are not noted here. All of these changes may have important implications for administrators, teachers, and students/examinees, so it is important that they review this bulletin carefully as they prepare for the administration of achievement tests in the 2011-2012 school year.

Subject:	Changes made:	Section:
Materials not allowed in the test room	Updated information	Security & Test Rules, page 3
Selecting and Setting up Test Writing Facilities	Updated information	Administration Directives, Guidelines, & Procedures, page 12
Alberta Student Number	New requirement	Security & Test Rules, page 3
Alberta Student Number	New requirement	Administration Directives, Guidelines, & Procedures, pages 7, 9, 10, 14
Removal of test administration information and student responses from computers and/or digital devices	New information	Administration Directives, Guidelines, & Procedures, pages 8, 10, 15
Use of Personally Owned Devices	New information	Using Calculators & Computers, page 10
Digital recordings	New information	Accommodations, page 3
Types of audio files allowed	New information	Accommodations, page 5

Summary of Revisions–November Update

The following updates and/or changes to Achievement Testing Program dates, directives, and/or processes have been made and are described in The *General Information Bulletin* for 2011–2012. All pages which contain changes made in November have the ‘November 2011’ footer. Other minor changes and updates have been made throughout this bulletin, but are not noted here.

Subject:	Changes made:	Section:
<i>2012–2013 Test Schedule</i>	<i>Removal of Draft statement</i>	<i>Schedules & Significant Dates—pages 6 and 7</i>