

TEACHER INVOLVEMENT IN PROVINCIAL STUDENT ASSESSMENT PROGRAMS

Within Alberta Education's Accountability and Reporting Division, Learner Assessment is responsible for the provincial assessment programs in basic learning (K-12). This involves the following key activities to facilitate system improvement:

- the development of individual questions
- the design and development of field tests
- production and administration of the provincial achievement tests and diploma examinations
- development of special format testing materials for students with special examination writing needs
- marking of provincial assessments, providing students' results, and reporting at the provincial, school authority, and school levels
- assessments for classroom use in support of classroom teachers' use of sound assessment and reporting practices
- external studies of achievement, including national and international studies.

How are test items developed?

The starting point for the development of **all** examination/test items is the provincial program of studies. The existing curriculum always determines the assessment items that are produced. Alberta teachers work closely with Learner Assessment staff, on item writing committees or through contracts, to develop items that reflect particular outcomes in the programs of study.

Why is field testing conducted?

The developed items are placed together on field tests that are administered to students in classrooms across the province. Superintendents are asked early in the school year to identify schools in their authorities that are willing to field test items. By field testing items with students, examination/test developers have a better idea about the appropriateness of individual items. The test developers use the statistics generated from field testing to design the examinations/tests to a specific standard. Items that have not been field tested are not used on diploma examinations or achievement tests.

Why have diploma examinations and achievement tests been held secure?

Historically achievement tests have been held as secure for up to two years because some of the items used will reappear on future tests to provide achievement-over-time data. Now the diploma examinations are also secure to enable the re-use of items so that results from one sitting can be compared with results from prior examination administrations.

What happens when the program of studies changes?

Since item development for assessment purposes is based on the program of studies, only items that assess the current program may be used on diploma examinations or achievement tests. When a new program of studies is developed, new questions are developed. Examination or test developers work in collaboration with curriculum developers to stay abreast of the pending changes so that the new program will be assessed with new questions that reflect the new program.

How can you become more involved?

Field testing and marking of diploma examinations or achievement tests are excellent ways to become involved with the provincial learner assessment programs. Alberta Education directly requests teacher nominations from Superintendents of Schools for marking and field testing. Once teachers have sufficient experience to meet the requirements set for markers, the superintendent and principal may nominate them as potential markers. Well over 1000 teachers across the province are nominated annually. Teachers who are interested in participating are encouraged to inform their principal and superintendent early in the school year.

Selection of markers is based on criteria set out in the nomination request letter and includes consideration of geographic representation, gender balance, and marking experience. Selection of field test placements is on a first come, first served basis, but if a teacher is not selected for one series, every effort is made to include him or her in the next series.

These activities afford teachers an opportunity to work with Alberta Education staff and provincial colleagues to gain insights into the assessment processes. Item writers are often identified at marking sessions and invited to attend workshops.

Where can I get more information?

The following sources provide additional information about the Diploma Examinations Program and the Achievement Testing Program:

- the Alberta Education website http://www.education.gov.ab.ca/k_12/testing, which is updated regularly
- the subject bulletins and General Information Bulletins for the Diploma Examinations and Achievement Testing programs, all available on this web site
- letters from the ministry to superintendents and principals, indicating important events or changes in the provincial assessment programs.

If you have questions about the provincial assessment programs, please contact Learner Assessment at (780) 427-0010, toll-free in Alberta 310-0000.