

# ***Guidelines for Interpreting the Diploma Examinations***

## ***Multiyear Reports***

These reports are intended to help school authorities and schools report the results of diploma examinations and to facilitate analysis of results over time. As noted in the *Guide for School Board Planning and Reporting*, using the results achieved on diploma examinations for planning and reporting is one of the keys to establishing processes that can lead to continuous improvements in education. School authorities and schools are to report results annually. Detailed reports are provided after each major administration to help with analysis for improvement.

Diploma examination results provide only part of the overall picture of the performance of the province, a school authority, or a school. Although provincial assessments are designed to assess the achievement of provincial standards, which are outlined in the Programs of Study, many important learning outcomes cannot be measured by timed, paper-and-pencil tests. In addition, many factors contribute to student achievement. The analysis, interpretation, use, and communication of results from diploma examinations need to take these factors into account.

The school and school authority are in the best position to accurately interpret, use, and communicate diploma examination results as they pertain to the school or school authority. Wherever possible, information about a particular school or school authority's results should be obtained from that school or school authority. **Alberta Education does not endorse the production or publication of rank order lists of results.** The analysis, interpretation, use, and communication of results on diploma examinations should adhere to provincial policy 2.1.3 *Use and Reporting of Results on Provincial Assessments*.

Three versions of the reports are provided. Entire school year reports (file J for school authorities, file S for school reports) show the performance of all students in the school authority or school (November, January, April, June, and August administrations). These reports are to be reported publicly. To aid the review of school or school authority performance where summer schools are operated separately from a regular school situation, two other reports are provided. Regular school reports (file R for school authority, file Q for schools) provide data excluding the August administration of the diploma examinations. The summer school report (file M for school authority, file N for schools) provides data on performance of students attending a summer school only (August administration of the diploma examinations). The provincial data is the same on all three reports. Participation data is reported only on the entire school year reports.

### **Five-Year Diploma Examination Results: 2004/2005 to 2008/2009**

1. For this table, each year's statistics are based only on the results of students who wrote diploma examinations in that year with a school-awarded mark at the same sitting. Students writing an examination in a particular course more than once in a year, for whom there are valid school-awarded marks and diploma examination marks, are reported in all schools and school authorities.

When reporting students with multiple writings in the same school or school authority and at the provincial level, the results for the administration with the highest final mark is reported. Students writing French translations of the diploma examinations are included in these statistics.

2. When reading this table, note the number of students who wrote the examination. The fewer the students, the more carefully the results must be interpreted. The overall results for small groups of students can be greatly influenced by the scores of one or two individuals.
3. Examine the results at the *standard of excellence* and the *acceptable standard*. Provincially, at least 15% of students are expected to meet the *standard of excellence*, and at least 85% of students are expected to meet the *acceptable standard*. A significance test is provided that indicates whether the percentage of students meeting standards on the examination is above, not different from, or below expectation for the province. School and school authority targets should be set locally in relation to provincial standards.
4. For diploma examination courses in the years prior to the use of equating, do not directly compare percentages from year to year. However, it is possible to identify changes in the performance of a school authority or school by comparing its results to provincial results and looking for a pattern from year to year and across courses. These calculations are in the rows labeled "Authority (or School) Minus Province". A negative number indicates that the school or authority is below the province. Look to see if the school authority or school is consistently outperforming the province or consistently doing less well than the province.

When looking at the difference in percentage between the school authority or school and the province, estimate how many students are accounted for in the difference. If the statistics are based on ten students, a 10% difference is equal to one student.

As a result of Alberta Education's initiative to maintain consistent standards over time in diploma examinations, direct comparisons of results are possible now for most courses. Specifically, direct comparisons of results may be made for Social Studies 30 and Social Studies 33 since 2003/2004, Pure Mathematics 30 since 2004/2005, old Chemistry 30 and Physics 30 from 2004/2005 to 2007/2008, and Applied Mathematics 30, Biology 30, English 30-1, and English 30-2 since 2005/2006.

In 2008/2009, as the majority of students in the province wrote the new Chemistry 30 and new Physics 30, the provincial results reported for the old courses are not representative of all students in the province. Therefore, discretion must be used if comparing the school/authority results to provincial or previous years' results for those two old courses.

5. The difference between school-awarded and diploma examination marks also provides useful information. Look for a consistent pattern in the difference across courses. Again, when the number of students is small, one student can have a sizable effect on the average.
6. Results on provincial assessments for individual students and for groups of fewer than six students are not to be publicly released.

## **Five-Year Diploma Examination Participation: 2004/2005 to 2008/2009**

1. A student who was over 19 on September 1 of the current school year is not included in school, school authority, and provincial reports. Schools where 50% or more of the students were over 19 on September 1 of the current school year are not included in school authority and provincial participation figures.
2. Students in their third year of high school are those students registered in a school on September 30th of the reported school year who are classified as having been in Grade 10 two years earlier.
3. A course can be completed in the reported school year or in a previous year. A course is considered to be completed if a student has received a final mark from Alberta Education. This would include students involved in field testing new Programs of Study who have not written the diploma examination and special case students who did not write the diploma examination.
4. Students are reported in the authority in which they were registered on September 30th, regardless of where they actually completed the course.

*To receive more information on the use of these reports please contact Tim Coates, Director (Humanities), Ken Marcellus, Director (Math/Sciences), or Nicole Lamarre (French Assessment), Learner Assessment, at (780) 427-0010, toll-free at 310-0000, or by e-mail at [Tim.Coates@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Tim.Coates@gov.ab.ca), [Ken.Marcellus@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Ken.Marcellus@gov.ab.ca) or [Nicole.Lamarre@gov.ab.ca](mailto:Nicole.Lamarre@gov.ab.ca) .*