

Alberta Provincial
Achievement Testing

Assessment
Highlights
2009

GRADE
9

Social Studies (2007 Program of Studies)



Government
of Alberta ■

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Freedom To Create. Spirit To Achieve.

This document contains assessment highlights from the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test (2007 Program of Studies).

Assessment highlights provide information about the overall test, the test blueprints, and student performance on the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test (2007 Program of Studies). Also provided is commentary on student performance on the 2009 achievement test. This information is intended for teachers and is best used in conjunction with the multi-year and detailed school reports that are available to schools via the extranet. **Assessment Highlights reports** for all achievement test subjects and grades will be **posted on the Alberta Education website every year** in the fall.

Released test items, which contained approximately 25% of the total number of test items from previously secured achievement tests, were mailed to school administrators each fall from 2004 to 2006 and have been made available to teachers in only print form because of copyright limitations. **Every second year**, as of the fall of 2007, **a complete test** for all achievement test subjects and grades (except grades 6 and 9 Social Studies; grades 3, 6, and 9 Français/French Language Arts; and Grade 9 Knowledge and Employability courses) will be **mailed** to school administrators in conjunction with the Assessment Highlights report for that year. In this way, teachers will receive complete forms of achievement tests. The parts of those tests that are released in print form for which electronic copyright permission is received will subsequently be posted on the Alberta Education website. A test blueprint and an answer key that includes the difficulty, reporting category, test section, and item description for each test item will also be included. These materials, along with the Program of Studies and Subject Bulletin, provide information that can be used to inform instructional practice.

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The 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test (2007 Program of Studies)

This report provides teachers, school administrators, and the public with an overview of the performance of those students who wrote the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test (2007 Program of Studies). It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 29 134 students wrote the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test (2007 Program of Studies).

What Was the Test Like?

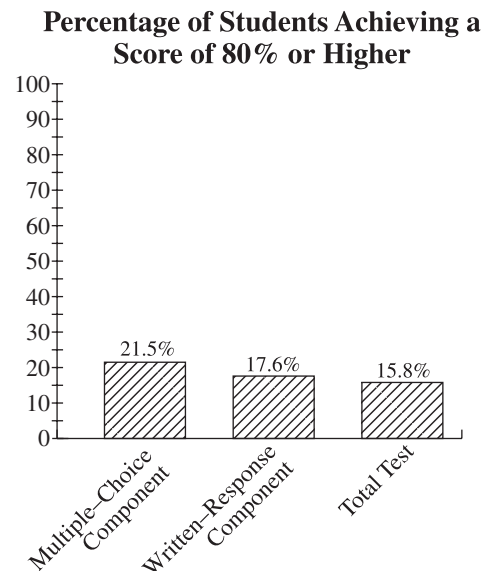
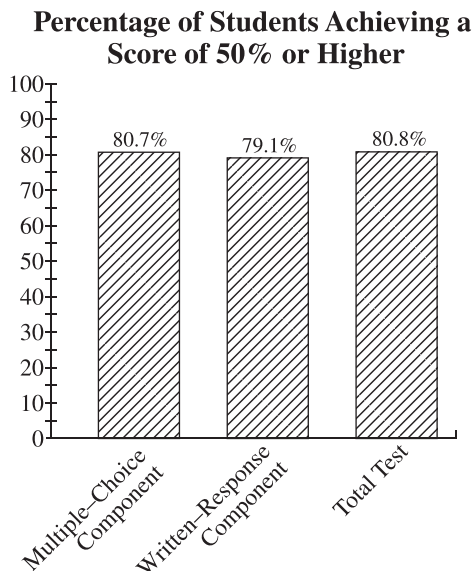
The English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test (2007 Program of Studies) had two parts: a multiple-choice component worth 70% of the test total and a written-response component worth 30% of the test total.

The multiple-choice component consisted of 50 multiple-choice questions based on specific outcomes (SOs) within each of the two general outcomes (GOs) in the 2007 Grade 9 Social Studies Program of Studies: GO 9.1 Issues for Canadians: Governance and Rights and GO 9.2 Issues for Canadians: Economic Systems in Canada and the United States.

The written-response component consisted of one writing assignment that was anchored within the issue presented in one source set that related to a given specific outcome (SO). Students were required to consider alternative viewpoints, perspectives, and/or values regarding the issue, take and defend a position, provide evidence to support arguments made, and present ideas clearly.

How Well Did Students Do?

Student achievement in 2009 is shown in the graphs below. Out of a total weighted score of 100, the provincial average on the English form of the test was 63.5%. The results presented in this report are based on scores achieved by all students who wrote the English form of the test; results for those students in French Immersion and Francophone programs who wrote the French form of the test are reported separately. Detailed provincial assessment results are provided in school and jurisdiction reports.



Multiple-Choice Component—2009 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement

In 2009, 80.7% of students who wrote the English form of the test achieved a score of 50% or higher on the multiple-choice component of the Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test (2007 Program of Studies), and 21.5% of students achieved a score of 80% or higher. Student achievement on the English form of the multiple-choice component of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test (2007 Program of Studies) averaged 32.2 out of 50 (64.4%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and test sections (curricular content areas) by which 2009 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities, and it shows the provincial average of student achievement on the English form of the multiple-choice component of the test by raw score and percentage.

Test Sections (Curricular Content Areas)	Reporting Category		
	Knowledge and Understanding¹	Skills and Processes²	Provincial Student Achievement (Average Raw Score and Percentage)
<p>The Political and Judicial System (9.1.4, 9.1.5)³ Students examine the structure of Canada’s federal political system and analyze the role of citizens and organizations in Canada’s justice system by exploring and reflecting upon questions and issues regarding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how federal laws are passed • branches of the federal government • selection of MPs and senators • accountability of MPs and senators • the role of federal political parties • the role of media in political issues • lobby groups and government decisions • extent to which political and legislative processes meet the needs of Canadians • participation in Canada’s justice system • citizens’ legal roles and responsibilities • the Youth Criminal Justice Act 			<p>7.1/11 (64.5%)</p>
<p>Individual and Collective Rights (9.1.6, 9.1.7)³ Students critically assess the impact of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms on legislative processes in Canada and how increased demand for recognition of collective rights has impacted legislative processes in Canada by exploring and reflecting upon questions and issues regarding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recognition of individual rights • exercising individual rights • conditions in the workplace • rights and responsibilities of citizens • recognition of collective rights • the needs of Francophone minorities • the needs of Francophones in Québec • the rights of official language minorities • the Indian Act • Treaty 6, Treaty 7, and Treaty 8 • legislation and Métis cultures and rights 			<p>6.1/11 (55.5%)</p>
<p>Immigration (9.1.8)³ Students critically assess how legislative processes address issues of immigration by exploring and reflecting upon questions and issues regarding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • factors influencing immigration policies • changes to Canadian policies on immigration and refugees • immigration and Aboriginal peoples • provincial immigration policies • immigration policies in Québec • immigration policies and the Charter • how Canada benefits from immigration 			<p>5.6/8 (70.0%)</p>
<p>Economic Decision Making (9.2.4)³ Students analyze principles and practices of market and mixed economies by exploring and reflecting upon questions and issues regarding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • principles of a market economy • government intervention • Canada’s mixed economy • consumers in market and mixed economies • consumer individual and collective identity • the economic impact of labour unions • government intervention in the economy • the basic economic question of scarcity 			<p>5.4/8 (67.5%)</p>
<p>Consumerism, Quality of Life, and Political Decision Making (9.2.5, 9.2.6)³ Students critically assess the relationship between consumerism and quality of life in Canada and the United States and the interrelationship between political decisions and economic systems by exploring and reflecting upon questions and issues regarding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • indicators of quality of life • individual consumer behaviour • how marketing affects consumerism • consumerism and quality of life • consumerism as a power of a collective • consumerism and economic growth • values underlying social programs • economic platforms of political parties • political party philosophies and platforms • the underground economy • environmental issues and quality of life 			<p>7.9/12 (65.8%)</p>
<p>Provincial Student Achievement (Average Raw Score and Percentage)</p>	<p>12.6/19 (66.3%)</p>	<p>19.6/31 (63.2%)</p>	<p>Multiple Choice Raw Score = 50</p>

¹**Knowledge and Understanding**—includes the breadth and depth of information, concepts, evidence, ideas, and opinions fundamental to decision making as identified in the Grade 9 Social Studies Program of Studies (2007).

²**Skills and Processes**—the application of critical and creative thinking, historical thinking, geographic thinking, decision making, problem solving, and media literacy to relevant situations as identified in the Grade 9 Social Studies Program of Studies (2007).

³Bolded numbers in parentheses cross-reference specific outcomes in the Grade 9 Social Studies Program of Studies (2007).

Multiple-Choice Component—Commentary on 2009 Student Achievement

The following is a discussion of student achievement on the multiple-choice component of the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test (2007 Program of Studies). Sample questions are provided to highlight levels of achievement of students who achieved a score of 50% or higher, students who achieved a score of 80% or higher, and students who did not achieve a score of 50% or higher. For each question, the keyed answer is marked with an asterisk.

Together, the first three blueprinting categories encompass outcomes within General Outcome 9.1 Issues for Canadians: Governance and Rights, wherein students are expected to analyze the relationship between Canada’s political and legislative processes and their impact on issues pertaining to governance, rights, citizenship, and identity. In the **Political and Judicial System** blueprint category (composed of 11 questions), students were expected to examine the structure of Canada’s federal political system (Specific Outcome 9.1.4) and analyze the role that citizens and organizations play in Canada’s justice system (Specific Outcome 9.1.5) by exploring and reflecting upon questions and issues pertaining to:

- What processes are used to determine members of Parliament (MPs) and senators?
- To whom are members of Parliament and senators accountable?
- How do lobby groups impact government decision making?
- What is the intention of the Youth Criminal Justice Act?

Students who achieved a score of 50% or higher were able to identify aspects of the Senate selection process in Canada, how lobby groups influence government decisions, and differing viewpoints regarding the Youth Criminal Justice Act. Students who achieved a score of 80% or higher additionally illustrated strengths in applying their understanding of principles underlying Canada’s political processes, forming conclusions regarding the power of lobby groups, and integrating aspects of multiple sources to evaluate the validity of ideas presented. Students who did not achieve a score of 50% or higher, while generally able to recognize some of the basic features of the legislative branch of Canada’s federal government, often struggled with questions addressing similarities and differences in the roles of members of Parliament and senators and did not always recognize the fundamental basis for government regulation of lobby groups or for legislation such as the Youth Criminal Justice Act. Some of these differences in student performance are evident in the following question taken from the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test.

Question 1 (blueprinted as a **Knowledge and Understanding** question) required students to identify factors that pertain to members of the Senate in Canada.

1. Which of the following phrases correctly completes the diagram in Source I?
- A. Report to the governor general
 - B.*** Are appointed by the prime minister
 - C. Form the official opposition in Parliament
 - D. Are members of the prime minister’s cabinet

Of all students who wrote the English form of the test, 72.9% were able to choose the correct answer (**B**) by recalling—from their study of issues related to the processes used in Canada to determine members of Parliament and senators—that Senate members are appointed to their positions by the prime minister (knowledge fundamental to the issue of whether senators should be elected rather than appointed that is addressed in the set of sources upon which this and other related questions are based). Of those students who did not select the keyed response, 7.9% chose **A** (a choice indicative of the misunderstanding that the governor general is a member of the Senate or that in some way senators are monitored by or accountable to the governor general), 9.3% chose **C** (wherein students may have incorrectly associated senators with a role typically played by members of the political party with the second highest number of representatives elected to the House of Commons), and 9.7% chose **D** (which may have resulted from confusion regarding the fact that although members of the Senate are part of the legislative branch, which is also called Canada’s Parliament, cabinet members are typically chosen from among the elected members of the House of Commons). Of those students who achieved a score of 50% or higher, 75.9% selected the

correct answer while 93.0% of those students who achieved a score of 80% or higher chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not achieve a score of 50% or higher on the multiple-choice component, 46.6% chose the correct answer.

In the section of the 2009 pilot achievement test blueprinted for curricular content pertaining to **Individual and Collective Rights** (composed of 11 questions), students were required to assess, critically, the impact of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms on the legislative process in Canada (Specific Outcome 9.1.6) and assess, critically, how the increased demand for recognition of collective rights has impacted the legislative process in Canada (Specific Outcome 9.1.7) by exploring and reflecting upon questions and issues regarding:

- In what ways has the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms fostered recognition of individual rights in Canada?
- How does the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms support individuals in exercising their rights?
- What is the relationship between the rights guaranteed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the responsibilities of Canadian citizens?
- In what ways has the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms fostered recognition of collective rights in Canada?
- In what ways does the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms meet the needs of Francophones in minority settings?
- To what extent should federal and provincial governments support and promote the rights of official language minorities in Canada?
- How does the Indian Act recognize the status and identity of Aboriginal peoples?
- How does legislation such as Treaty 6, Treaty 7, Treaty 8 recognize the status and identity of Aboriginal peoples?

Students who achieved a score of 50% or higher were able to recognize rights and responsibilities guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, form generalizations regarding recognition of individual and collective rights in Canada, and identify rights guaranteed by federal legislation that recognizes the inherent rights of Aboriginal peoples. Students who achieved a score of 80% or higher were additionally able to appreciate challenges inherent in exercising individual rights, assess how rights are guaranteed to both English and French Canadians under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and apply knowledge of federal legislation related to the collective rights of Aboriginal peoples to determine factors that are key to recognition of inherent rights. For students who did not achieve a score of 50% or higher, questions that required forming generalizations from more than one source regarding how individuals are guaranteed full and equal benefit of the law, making connections between historical events related to official language rights in Canada, or synthesizing information to determine issues pivotal to constitutional entrenchment of Aboriginal rights frequently proved challenging. The following question illustrates some of these differences in the levels of student achievement on the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test.

In question 22 (blueprinted as a **Skills and Processes** question), students were expected to synthesize information in three sources to determine a main principle underlying constitutional recognition of Aboriginal rights.

- 22.** All three sources illustrate that constitutional recognition of collective rights is **mainly** based on the ties of Aboriginal peoples to Canada's
- A.** cultural identity
 - B.*** land and history
 - C.** national independence
 - D.** economy and government

Overall, question 22 proved difficult for many students which, in part, could be due to the fact that students needed to bring background knowledge regarding the Indian Act (1876), Treaty 6 (1876–1899), Treaty 7 (1877), Treaty 8 (1899), and the Constitution Act (1982) to the discussion of inherent rights in

order to form the conclusion that recognition of Aboriginal and treaty rights requires acknowledging the historical connection of Aboriginal peoples to the land in Canada; the correct answer (**B**) was chosen by 55.9% of all students who wrote the English form of the test. The three distractors (**A**, **C**, and **D**) are all potentially plausible in a larger context than that established in the sources, but none of these options is explicitly addressed within the source set as is the correct answer. **A** (selected by 30.9% of all students) may have been selected based upon a more generalized understanding of how recognition of collective rights is integral to the cultural identity of certain groups within Canada, a choice suggestive of a less in-depth examination of information contained in the sources than that required to choose the best answer to the question. **C** (selected by 7.6% of all students) or **D** (selected by 5.5% of all students) could have been chosen if students were to extrapolate beyond the sources and conclude that recognition of collective rights is related in some way to either Canadian sovereignty or Canada's political and economic systems. The correct answer to this question was selected by 55.9% of those students who achieved a score of 50% or higher, 78.5% of those students who achieved a score of 80% or higher, and only 37.4% of those students who did not achieve a score of 50% or higher.

In the **Immigration** blueprint category (composed of eight questions), students were expected to assess, critically, how legislative processes attempt to address emerging issues of immigration (Specific Outcome 9.1.8) by exploring and reflecting upon questions and issues related to:

- What factors influence immigration policies in Canada (i.e., economic, political, health, security)?
- How are changes to Canadian policies on immigration and refugees a reflection of world issues?

Those students who achieved a score of 50% or higher were able to recall knowledge of the categories into which immigrants to Canada are classified under Canada's immigration policies and identify premises upon which Canada's policies on immigration and refugees are largely based. Students achieving a score of 80% or higher could acknowledge contradictions inherent in the experiences of many immigrants to Canada and how Canada's policies on immigration and refugees have evolved. Students who did not achieve a score of 50% or higher sometimes had difficulty distinguishing factors characteristic of many immigrants to Canada and acknowledging the broader implications of Canada's policies on immigration and refugees. Such differences in levels of student achievement are illustrated in the following question taken from the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test.

In question 25 (blueprinted as a **Skills and Processes** question), students were required to analyze ideas in a news commentary to determine a characteristic of many recent immigrants to Canada.

- 25.** The speaker in Source II suggests that many recent immigrants to Canada are
- A.** wealthy
 - B.** idealistic
 - C.*** highly trained
 - D.** relatively young

This question was answered correctly (**C**) by 65.8% of all students who wrote the English form of the test (based on their ability to infer from the ideas presented regarding the proportionately higher number of university graduates among immigrants to Canada today than among Canadian-born citizens of the same age group that these well-educated individuals are highly trained). **A** was selected by 2.4% of all students (possibly based on the tangential assumption that individuals must possess financial resources to cover the costs of post-secondary education) and **B** was selected by 13.9% of all students (which could be due to the fact that some students may have based their answer upon their own perception of how a university education could enable immigrants to Canada to pursue personal ideals). **D** was selected by 17.8% of all students (likely from misinterpreting the discussion of the proportion of university graduates among individuals of comparable ages who have graduated from university at some point in their lives to be referring to students who have recently graduated from university, many of whom have done so at a relatively young age). Many students who achieved a score of 50% or higher were able to choose the correct answer, with 68.0% choosing the keyed response. The majority of those students who achieved a

score of 80% or higher (86.1%) chose the correct answer, whereas 41.9% of those students who did not achieve a score of 50% or higher were able to determine the correct answer.

The final two blueprint categories encompass outcomes within General Outcome 9.2: Issues for Canadians: Economic Systems in Canada and the United States in which students are required to demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of how economic decision making in Canada and the United States impacts quality of life, citizenship, and identity. With regard to curricular content in the blueprint category related to **Economic Decision Making** (composed of eight questions), students were required to compare and contrast the principles and practices of market and mixed economies (Specific Outcome 9.2.4) by exploring and reflecting upon questions and issues pertaining to:

- What are the principles of a market economy?
- Why do governments intervene in a market economy?
- Why is Canada viewed as having a mixed economy?
- What are some similarities and differences in the way governments in Canada and the United States intervene in the market economies?

Students who achieved a score of 50% or higher demonstrated knowledge of features characteristic of a model private enterprise economic system and an understanding of the differing extent of government intervention at various positions on an economic spectrum. In addition to these abilities, students who achieved a score of 80% or higher were able to form generalizations regarding income distribution and individual economic freedom in Canada and the United States and correlate the positions of certain individuals with values underlying various positions on an economic spectrum. Students who did not achieve a score of 50% or higher were often challenged by questions that required understanding measures by which governments intervene in a mixed economy or that involved determining the central economic issue to which information in multiple sources relates. Such differences in student achievement on the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test are shown in the following question.

Question 35 (blueprinted as a **Knowledge and Understanding** question) required that students recall knowledge of Crown corporations in Canada's mixed economy.

- 35.** The answer to the question that is presented on the web page in Source I is
- A.** wealthy investors
 - B.** individual citizens
 - C.** corporate executives
 - D.*** government officials

Of all students who wrote the English form of the test, 69.3% were able to draw upon their knowledge of aspects of market and mixed economies and knew that Crown corporations are publicly owned and, therefore, operated by government officials—the answer to the question “Who is in Charge of Crown Corporations in Canada?” posed on the web page—and chose the keyed response (**D**). Alternatives **A**, **B**, and **C** refer to individuals who may privately own businesses and students who chose either of these distractors likely confused private with public ownership. **A** was chosen by 6.0% of all students, **B** was chosen by 7.2% of all students, and **C** was chosen by 17.4% of all students. Of the students who achieved a score of 50% or higher, 72.4% answered this question correctly. Of those students who achieved a score of 80% or higher, 94.9% chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not achieve a score of 50% or higher, 38.1% selected **D** as the correct response.

In the blueprinting category that encompasses questions related to **Consumerism, Quality of Life, and Political Decision Making** (composed of 12 questions), students were expected to assess, critically, the relationship between consumerism and quality of life in Canada and the United States (Specific Outcome 9.2.5) and assess, critically, the interrelationship between political decisions and economic systems (Specific Outcome 9.2.6) by exploring and reflecting upon questions and issues regarding:

- What are the indicators of quality of life?
- How does individual consumer behaviour impact quality of life (e.g., environmental issues)?
- How does consumerism provide opportunities for and limitations on impacting quality of life?

- What societal values underlie social programs in Canada and the United States?
- How do government decisions on environmental issues impact quality of life (i.e. preservation, exploitation, and trade of natural resources)?

Students achieving a score of 50% or higher were able to recall factors that affect consumer behaviour, apply knowledge of social programs in Canada and the United States, and draw conclusions regarding aspects of environmental issues. Students achieving a score of 80% or higher could also foresee drawbacks to excessive consumerism, appreciate the interrelationship between personal income tax rates and government spending, and assess the economic implications of initiatives aimed at preserving the environment. Those students who did not achieve a score of 50% or higher often experienced difficulty answering questions that required acknowledging relationships between consumerism and quality of life, distinguishing examples of social programs, and pinpointing issues central to government decisions on environmental issues. Question 41 from the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test exemplifies some of these differences among the varying levels of student achievement.

In question 41 (blueprinted as a **Skills and Processes** question), students needed to be able to infer from information in an online news article the aspect of consumerism being researched.

- 41.** Which of the following topics is **most likely** being researched by a student who has accessed the online news article in Source III?
- A.** In what ways is consumerism created by advertising?
 - B.** What can consumers do to protect fragile ecosystems?
 - C.** How does consumerism contribute to economic growth?
 - D.*** How can consumers have a minimal effect on the natural world?

The correct answer (**D**) was selected by 52.8% of all students who wrote the English form of the test; these students were able to critically examine a news article that provides an account of how one family’s “choices add up when there’s still time to seek a greener lifestyle and heal the planet” to conclude that this information is most closely related to environmental issues surrounding the impact of individual consumer behaviour on quality of life. Students who chose **A** (3.5% of all students) likely did not read the article carefully as there is no mention of advertising or recalled a previous association of consumerism with advertising and answered without referring to the source. Students who chose **B** (33.5% of all students) may have read into the article an interpretation involving the importance of preserving fragile ecosystems, an idea related to but not specifically addressed by the content of the news article. Students who chose **C** (10.1% of all students) could have considered the economic choices of the family described to be conducive to economic growth, an inference not supported by the information in this source. Students achieving a score of 50% or higher found this question to be challenging, evident in the fact that 54.5% of these students chose the correct answer. A perceptive awareness of the environmental implications of consumerism was demonstrated by students who achieved a score of 80% or higher, 74.8% of whom chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not achieve a score of 50% or higher, only 29.1% answered this question correctly.

Overall, student achievement on the multiple-choice component of the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test was strong. Most students (80.7%) were able to achieve a score of 50% or higher on the multiple-choice component and 21.5% of students achieved a score of 80% or higher. Of all students who wrote the multiple-choice component, 19.3% did not achieve a score of 50% or higher.

Written-Response Component—2009 Test Blueprint

The blueprint for the written-response component identifies the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which summary data are reported to schools and school authorities; it also provides a description of the writing assignment and achievement standards.

Scoring/Reporting Categories	Description of Writing Assignment	Achievement Standards
<p>Significance of the Issue (recognizing the relevance of an issue to citizenship and identity in Canada)</p> <p>Students respond to an issue by writing a paragraph or paragraphs. Students establish their understanding of the issue and acknowledge alternative viewpoints, perspectives, and/or values regarding the issue.</p> <p>Personal Judgments* (choosing a position or proposing a solution to an issue)</p> <p>Students advocate a personal position or solution, present arguments or ideas in support of their position or solution, and consider the implications of their decision.</p> <p>Supporting Evidence* (selecting examples and presenting detailed information to validate arguments or ideas presented)</p> <p>Students support their arguments or ideas with relevant and accurate social studies examples.</p> <p>Clarity of Communication (expressing ideas clearly and coherently using the conventions of written language)</p> <p>Students focus, develop, and communicate their ideas using words and expressions correctly and effectively.</p> <p>*These scoring categories are weighted to be worth twice as much as the other categories.</p>	<p>Students will identify the relevance of an issue by either</p> <p>developing an informed position and respect for the positions of others to construct a personal point of view, taking and supporting a position on the issue, providing evidence in support of the chosen position based on knowledge and understanding gained from engagement in the Program of Studies, and presenting their thoughts clearly</p> <p>or</p> <p>engaging in problem solving and conflict resolution by examining alternative solutions advocated by others to arrive at and defend an informed personal decision, providing evidence in support of the chosen decision based on knowledge and understanding gained from engagement in the Program of Studies, and presenting their thoughts clearly.</p> <p>The approach students are to take (either developing an informed position or engaging in problem solving) is specified in the writing assignment with regard to the assigned topic. As the writing assignment topic will vary from year to year, so too will the approach students are expected to take.</p> <p>The writing assignment is conceptually anchored within the issue(s) raised in one source set pertaining to General Outcome 9.1 or General Outcome 9.2 and focuses on one of the Knowledge and Understanding¹ specific outcomes: Canada’s federal political system (9.1.4),² Canada’s justice system (9.1.5), the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (9.1.6), recognition of collective rights (9.1.7), emerging issues of immigration (9.1.8), principles and practices of market and mixed economies (9.2.4), consumerism and quality of life (9.2.5), or the interrelationship between political decisions and economic systems (9.2.6).</p> <p>Students will expand upon the issue(s) to address the implications for quality of life, citizenship, and identity—core concepts of the K–12 Program of Studies—by applying Skills and Processes³ such as critical and creative thinking (9.S.1), historical thinking (9.S.2), geographic thinking (9.S.3), decision making and problem solving (9.S.4), written and visual literacy (9.S.8), and media literacy (9.S.9).</p> <p>While student achievement of Values and Attitudes outcomes may be observable in some students’ responses, these outcomes are best assessed in the context of the classroom.</p>	<p>Student achievement in each scoring/reporting category will be described according to the following achievement descriptors:</p> <p>Excellent</p> <p>Proficient</p> <p>Satisfactory</p> <p>Limited</p> <p>Poor</p> <p>Insufficient</p>

¹**Knowledge and Understanding**—includes the breadth and depth of information, concepts, evidence, ideas, and opinions fundamental to decision making as identified in the Grade 9 Social Studies Program of Studies (2007).

²Bolded numbers in parentheses cross-reference specific outcomes in the Grade 9 Social Studies Program of Studies (2007).

³**Skills and Processes**—the application of critical and creative thinking, historical thinking, geographic thinking, decision making, problem solving, and written, visual, and media literacy to relevant situations as identified in the Grade 9 Social Studies Program of Studies (2007).

Written-Response Component—2009 Student Achievement

In 2009, 79.1% of students who wrote the English form of the test achieved a score of 50% or higher on the written-response component of the Grade 9 Social Studies 2009 Pilot Achievement Test, and 17.6% of students who wrote achieved a score of 80% or higher.

Student Achievement by Reporting Category

The quality of student writing on the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies 2009 Pilot Achievement Test was impressive. The chart below illustrates the percentage of students achieving scores at each scoring level.

		Significance of the Issue	Personal Judgments	Supporting Evidence	Clarity of Communication
Scoring Level	Score*	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students
Excellent	5.0	5.0%	5.4%	3.5%	6.2%
	4.5	4.1%	4.2%	3.0%	4.7%
Proficient	4.0	17.5%	19.0%	13.6%	21.2%
Satisfactory	3.5	9.9%	10.4%	8.9%	10.5%
	3.0	35.3%	33.7%	32.0%	36.6%
	2.5	7.8%	7.5%	9.9%	6.2%
Limited	2.0	14.4%	14.0%	20.2%	10.7%
	1.5	1.6%	1.6%	2.7%	1.0%
Poor	1.0	3.1%	2.9%	4.9%	1.7%
Insufficient / No Response	0	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%

*Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged. In 2009, 15 545 (53.4% of the total of 29 134) papers were marked locally, and these scores were submitted to Alberta Education. Papers with discrepant scores were given a third reading. The third-reading rescore rate was 11.7%.

Written-Response Component—Commentary on 2009 Student Achievement

During the scoring of the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test (2007 Program of Studies), 111 teachers from throughout the province scored 29 134 student test booklets. Teachers who marked the tests were generally pleased with the quality of most papers. Students who wrote the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test achieved an average of 18.4 out of a total raw score of 30 (61.3%).

Throughout the 2009 marking session, markers strove to reward student strengths where evident rather than to consider what was missing or what should have been added or included. When marking, markers conscientiously examined the “**Focus**” section of the scoring categories to orient themselves to distinctions within the scoring criteria as well as the various scoring descriptors in each scoring scale in order to arrive at judgments regarding the qualities of a response. Markers were encouraged to review—at the start of each marking day—the assignment and the related source materials and questions provided in the test with the expectation that many students’ ideas were informed by details within the sources and/or questions. Occasionally, markers needed to re-read a response to appreciate what a student had attempted and, in fact, accomplished. All markers acknowledged that student responses were first drafts written under examination conditions.

The issue presented in writing the assignment in the question “**To what extent is the Youth Criminal Justice Act fair and equitable in addressing youth crime in Canada?**” enabled students to freely choose either a “pro” or “con” position regarding the effectiveness of the Act since it was introduced in 2003. In doing so, some students examined various facets of the Act and came to the conclusion that despite having some limitations, the Act fairly and equitably addresses youth crime. While such an approach may be viewed as expository rather than argumentative, it was nonetheless acceptable provided that the student’s position on the issue was made evident at some point in the response. Other students argued persuasively, with a convincing voice, in favour of their chosen position. Markers were cautioned to neither penalize nor reward a strong voice alone by recognizing the distinctions between the scoring categories in the Scoring Guide. The “**Key Questions**” that accompany the Scoring Guide provided markers with the means by which to dichotomize aspects of student writing and reward strengths where possible. During Standards Confirmation, working group members observed that the topic was accessible to most students in that they were able to identify the intent underlying the Youth Criminal Justice Act and examine the extent to which the act is fair and equitable—defined in the Student Resource as “governed by rules that apply to everyone, taking into account individual needs and circumstances” (56).

Many students drew upon information provided in the test to inform the content of their responses. The balance of information in the sources—ranging from a cartoon that suggests punishment of violent youth is merely a slap on the wrist and a newspaper article attributing increases in violent crime among youths to the leniency of the Youth Criminal Justice Act to a speaker advocating the need for rehabilitation and some statistics on youth crime in Canada—was useful to both proponents and opponents of the act. The multiple-choice questions themselves also contained ideas that some students incorporated into their responses, such as the need to respect the rights of young offenders, reintegrate them into society, consider the suffering of victims of youth crime, and protect the privacy of young offenders.

Students also brought to the discussion ideas and information studied in the Student Resource, particularly Chapter 2 wherein the chapter issue focuses on the question “To what extent is the justice system fair and equitable for youth?” When doing so, students sometimes took some latitude with this information—such as in blurring “adult sentences” (64) with “going to an adult court” or interpreting how the act “Allows most young offenders to avoid a criminal record” (64) to mean that a youth’s record is “destroyed” at age eighteen. Some students, with varying degrees of success, elaborated upon the options available to youths who break the law as presented in the flow chart on pages 66 and 67 of the Student Resource, the objectives of the Youth Criminal Justice Act as identified on page 70 of the Student Resource, and the roles played by advocacy groups (on pages 82–83 of the Student Resource) and

sentencing circles (on pages 84–85 of the Student Resource). Some students also connected their ideas to other outcomes in the Program of Studies, such as those pertaining to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Others included references to current events. Markers were reminded to consider the context established by students in their responses to determine the relevance and effectiveness of the content included.

Students whose writing demonstrated that they had achieved a score of “Satisfactory” in one or more of the scoring categories presented ideas regarding how “the YCJA accepts that youths are children who need guidance” or how the Youth Criminal Justice Act “needs to enforce stricter punishments to really change the lives of young offenders.” The following excerpts contain examples from responses that achieved “Satisfactory” scores:

- “The Youth Criminal Justice Act is a system than has been helping young criminals start a better way of life through helping the diliquents with encouraging groups and social services we are making a difference in their lives for the better. It gives them a chance to have a fresh start and live a less destructive life ... by looking at the person’s circumstances ... and having them take responsibility for their actions.”
- “The Youth Criminal Justice Act was put into place to punish youth criminals but still give them another chance to move on and change their life. It may seem unfair to the adults who commit a crime because they get more harsh consequences for maybe the same crime or to a victim who wants the youth to face serious consequences ... I agree with this act and think it is fair for everyone involved in the crime.”
- “For minor crimes like stealing, by just doing some community service a young person would learn his lesson and never do it again. I under stand if that young person murders someone, they should be put in jail because it is to serious and should be punished for his crime.”
- “The youth criminal justice act is fair because if they think or know that the child or teen has a mental, physical or emotional problem they will work with the child on that. They will support and give the child all the help he or she needs for treatment. If we did not have the youth criminal justice act there would be more children or teens participating in violence or breaking the law. Since we have had this justice act the percentage of youth crime has gone down from 56% to 43%.”
- “The Youth Criminal Justice Act is very fair and equitable in addressing youth crime in Canada. Many youth offenders have made mistakes and the Youth Criminal Justice Act gives them an increased opportunity of making better choices later in life by services such as rehabilitation. When a youth commits a crime, he/she is given sentences such as hours of community service. These actions still give proper punishment, without negative long-term effects such as a criminal record or jail.”

In responses such as those from which these excerpts are taken, students explored the issue in a conventional way and acknowledged alternative viewpoints in a straightforward manner. These students demonstrated an appropriate exploration of a chosen position, predictable arguments or ideas, and an adequate awareness of the implications of the position advocated. Also evident in such student responses was relevant but general evidence that was sufficiently incorporated into the arguments or ideas presented. These responses were also functionally focused and logically developed.

Those students whose work received scores of “Proficient” or “Excellent” in one or more of the scoring categories particularized the issue in terms of how the act addresses the need to rehabilitate young persons who commit offences and reintegrate them back into society. Others emphasized the value or ineffectiveness of community service, Youth Justice Committees, and the concealment of the identities of young offenders. The following excerpts illustrate some of the ideas presented by students who achieved scores of “Proficient” or “Excellent”:

- “The Youth Criminal Justice act is fair to both the victim and the accused. The YCJA aims to switch the frame of mind of a young offender and turn them in a positive direction. Unlike adult offenders, youths should not be incarcerated as often and the system always looks for ways to reintegrate youngsters back into their community, such as the programs that involve social workers and community service.”

- “The Youth Criminal Justice Act, formerly known as the Young Offenders Act is a federal law that was designed to address the rising trend of youth crime in Canada and how best to deal with young criminals. This act, though fairly easy on offenders, is unfair to victims of crimes. Many young offenders whom the police force took time to capture and detain walk away with little more than a slap on the wrist. The act does not effectively deter youths from committing crimes and this lack of accountability is unacceptable.”
- “The YCJA in Canada is intended to protect the rights of 12- to 17-year-old offenders so that they can become successful Canadian citizens. The act focuses on helping the offenders, and not punishing them. Youth courts try to avoid giving jail time to young offenders, and focus instead on giving them a chance to redeem themselves by being assigned community service and avoiding a criminal record.”
- “Some people think that because of the Youth Criminal Justice Act young offenders have been able to avoid being appropriately punished for committing crimes. They believe that young people are likely to commit crimes because they know that they will receive a simple punishment, unlike adults, where they may be given a harsh penalty such as jail time. However, other people view the act in a positive way. They see youths as too undeveloped to know right from wrong and believe that harsh punishments are unfair. In order for youths to learn from their mistakes, they must be given the chance to rehabilitate themselves.”
- “The Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) works with young offenders in a fair and equitable way. This system plays a huge role in addressing and preventing crime at young ages. Each lawbreaker is dealt with according to their individual circumstances and wrongdoing. The impact of the YCJA is tremendous in helping the young person become a valuable member of the community by accepting responsibility for their actions and making restitution to the victims of crime.”

Responses that contained ideas such as those in these excerpts demonstrate student work in which the exploration of the issue was thoughtful or insightful and the acknowledgement of alternative viewpoints was purposeful or deliberate. Such students showed the ability to present sound, perceptive, considered, convincing, sensible, or astute observations supported by specific, elaborated, precise, or comprehensive evidence. These responses were clearly or effectively focused and coherently or fluently developed.

Student writing that was scored “Limited” or “Poor” in one or more of the scoring categories was often characterized by incomplete, minimal, superficial, ambiguous, abrupt, or uninformed assertions about the Youth Criminal Justice Act with little if any acknowledgement of viewpoints other than the student’s own. Such assertions included how “the YCJA can help people (teens) to smarten up and not do bad things anymore,” how “a kid just killed someone could be out on parole in 1 year,” and how “if you know that the YCJA is not a fair act you could challenge this in court and bring the YCJA down.” These students struggled with focusing and developing their ideas in relation to the issue, as can be seen in the following excerpts:

- “Someone who comits a merder when they are fourteen years old they could be put into Therapy or rehabilitation to be put back to normal even though they would have to spend Time in jail they could be released into society again unless they did a merder or Something really bad that they couldn’t be released for doing.”
- “I think that the youth criminal justice act is unfair to some kids because people think we don’t know better and that the max sentence is somthing like 2 years if you are under 14.”
- “If you are under 12 you can not be punished for your acitions but your parents can be sent to jail for it ... Youths who camit crimes are just runing there futer. It takes 5 years to be able to submit to get your crimanal record deleted and usally 2 more years to actually get it deleted. With a crimanal record you can’t get a job or leave the country so you can’t do pretty much anything.”
- “I think that it is good that the YCJA doesn’t give the young offendrs a criminal record because of something dumb the did when they were kids. If they gave them a criminal record then when the grow up they couldn’t go out of the country or get a good job because of their record.”

- “The person committing the crime like it cause all they get is a slap on the wrist. There is the victims who hate it cause they had something done to them and kids are being able to just walk away.”

The arguments or ideas in such responses were often vague, confused, simplistic, undeveloped, imprecise, or inaccurate, and students’ awareness of the implications of the position advocated was partial or questionable. The evidence, where provided, was trivial, tenuous, ineffective, or tangential and these students typically were inconsistent in presenting factual support for arguments or ideas presented. Such writing was also often weakly focused or largely unfocused and uncertainly or unclearly developed.

In some instances, the connection between the assigned topic and the ideas contained in some student responses was difficult to determine. Markers were to consult with group leaders when drawing conclusions about whether or not a given response sufficiently addressed the task presented in the writing assignment. Most often, there was evidence that students implicitly addressed the topic and their responses were, therefore, assessed. If, however, extensive examination of a student’s work by both a marker and a group leader lead to the conclusion that the response was “Insufficient,” then the floor supervisors in consultation with the examination manager made this final judgment.

Overall, the written-response component enabled students to demonstrate their attainment of selected outcomes from the program of studies as most students succeeded in meeting the requirements of the writing assignment on the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test. The majority of students (79.1%) achieved a score of 50% or higher, and 17.6% of students achieved a score of 80% or higher. Of all students who wrote the English form of the 2009 Grade 9 Social Studies Pilot Achievement Test, 20.9% did not achieve a score of 50% or higher on the written-response component.

Achievement Testing Program Support Documents

The Alberta Education website contains several documents that provide valuable information about various aspects of the achievement testing program. To access these documents, go to the Alberta Education website at education.alberta.ca. On the home page, click on the tab *Teachers*; then click on the link *Provincial Testing*. Next, click on the link *Achievement Tests*, and then click on one of the specific links under the *Achievement Tests* heading to access the following documents.

Achievement Testing Program General Information Bulletin

The General Information Bulletin is a compilation of several documents produced by Alberta Education and is intended to provide superintendents, principals, and teachers with easy access to information about all aspects of the achievement testing program. Sections in the bulletin contain information pertaining to schedules and significant dates; security and test rules; test administration and directives; test accommodations; field testing; resources and web documents; calculator and computer policies; test marking and results; samples, forms, and letters; and Learner Assessment contacts.

Subject Bulletins

At the beginning of each school year, Subject Bulletins are posted on the Alberta Education website for all achievement test subjects for grades 3, 6, and 9. Each bulletin provides descriptions of assessment standards, test design and blueprinting, and scoring guides as well as suggestions for preparing students to write the tests and information about how teachers can participate in test development activities.

Writing Samples

For achievement tests in grades 3, 6, and 9 English Language Arts and Français/French Language Arts and grades 6 and 9 Social Studies, writing samples have been designed to be used by teachers and students to enhance students' writing and to assess this writing relative to the standards inherent in the scoring guides for the achievement tests. The writing samples documents contain sample responses with scoring rationales that relate student work to the scoring categories and scoring criteria for the writing assignments.

Previous Achievement Tests and Answer Keys

All January achievement tests (parts A and B) for Grade 9 semestered students are secured and must be returned to Alberta Education. All May/June achievement tests are secured except Part A of grades 3, 6, and 9 English Language Arts and Français/French Language Arts. Unused or extra copies of only these Part A tests may be kept at the school after administration. Teachers may also use the print versions of released items that have been mailed to schools and/or the tests that are posted on the Alberta Education website.

Parent Guides

Each school year, print versions of the Parent Guide to Provincial Achievement Testing for grades 3, 6, and 9 are mailed to schools and posted on the Alberta Education website. Each guide presents answers to frequently asked questions about the achievement testing program; descriptions of and sample questions for each achievement test subject; and excerpts from the Curriculum Handbook for Parents identifying what students should know and be able to do in each subject by the end of grades 3, 6, and 9.

Involvement of Teachers

Teachers of grades 3, 6, and 9 are encouraged to take part in a variety of activities related to the achievement testing program. These activities include item development, test validation, field testing, and marking. In addition, regional consortia can make arrangements for teacher in-service workshops on topics such as Interpreting Achievement Test Results to Improve Student Learning.