

**Alberta Provincial
Achievement Testing**

**Assessment
Highlights
2010-2011**

**GRADE
6**

English Language Arts



**Government
of Alberta** ■

Alberta ■

Freedom To Create. Spirit To Achieve.

This document contains an assessment highlights report on the 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

The assessment highlights report provides information about the test overall, test blueprints, and student performance on the English form of the 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test. Also provided is commentary on student performance at the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* both in *Part A: Writing* and on selected items (common to both the 2010 and 2011 achievement tests) from *Part B: Reading*. 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 only in 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 posted on the Alberta Education website. A test blueprint and an answer key that includes the difficulty, reporting category, language function, 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.

For further information, contact

Robyn Pederson
Grade 6 Humanities Assessment Standards Team Leader
Robyn.Pederson@gov.ab.ca;

Darla Kurylo
Grade 6 Humanities Examiner
Darla.Kurylo@gov.ab.ca;

Ken Marcellus, Director
Achievement Testing
Ken.Marcellus@gov.ab.ca

in the Assessment Sector, or call (780) 427-0010.
To call toll-free within Alberta, dial (780) 310-0000.

The Alberta Education Internet address is education.alberta.ca.

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Contents

The 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test 1

Part A: Writing—2011 Test Blueprint 2

Part A: Writing—2011 Student Achievement 3

Part A: Writing—Commentary on 2011 Student Achievement 4

Part B: Reading—2011 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement..... 7

Part B: Reading—Commentary on 2011 Student Achievement 8

Achievement Testing Program Support Documents 10

The 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test

This report provides teachers, school administrators, and the public with an overview of the performance of those students who wrote the 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 39 467 students in Alberta wrote the 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

What Was the Test Like?

The 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test had two parts that were weighted equally.

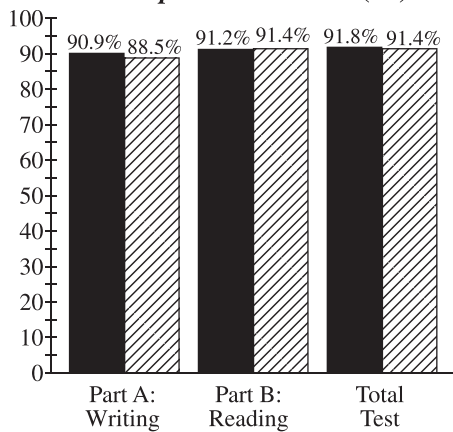
Part A: Writing consisted of a narrative/essay writing assignment (worth 35 marks) and a functional writing assignment (worth 20 marks) for a total of 55 marks. The narrative/essay writing assignment provided students with a coloured picture to which they were to respond in narrative form. The functional writing assignment required students to use specific information to create a newspaper article.

Part B: Reading consisted of 50 multiple-choice questions based on reading selections that were either informational or narrative/poetic in nature.

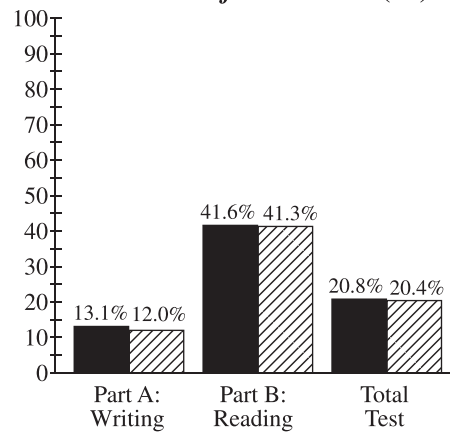
How Well Did Students Do?

The percentages of students meeting the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* in 2011 compared with 2010 are shown in the graphs below. Out of a total score of 110 on the test (parts A and B), the provincial average was 71.8/110 (65.3%). The results presented in this report are based on scores achieved by all students who wrote the test, including those in French Immersion and Francophone programs. Detailed provincial assessment results are provided in school and jurisdiction reports.

Percentage of Students Meeting the
Acceptable Standard (%)



Percentage of Students Meeting the
Standard of Excellence (%)



■ 2010 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province that met the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* on the 2010 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

▨ 2011 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province that met the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* on the 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

Part A: Writing—2011 Test Blueprint

The blueprints for *Part A: Writing* identify the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which 2011 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities; a description of the writing assignments; and the achievement standards.

Writing Assignment and Reporting Categories	Description of Writing Assignments	Achievement Standards
Assignment I—Narrative / Essay Writing		
<p>Content* (selecting ideas and details to achieve a purpose)</p> <p>Students respond to a picture prompt by writing a narrative. Students establish their purpose, select ideas and supporting details to achieve the purpose, and communicate in a manner appropriate to their audience.</p>	<p>The Narrative Writing Assignment is a picture prompt meant to stimulate the imagination of the student completing the narrative writing assignment. Students may organize their story ideas on a provided planning page.</p>	<p>Student achievement in each reporting category will be described according to the following standard statements:</p> <p>Meets the <i>standard of excellence</i></p> <p>Approaches the <i>standard of excellence</i></p> <p>Clearly meets the <i>acceptable standard</i></p> <p>Does not clearly meet the <i>acceptable standard</i></p>
<p>Organization* (organizing ideas and details into a coherent whole)</p> <p>Students organize their ideas to produce a unified and coherent narrative that links events, details, sentences, and paragraphs.</p>		
<p>Sentence Structure (structuring sentences effectively)</p> <p>Students control sentence structure and use a variety of sentence types, sentence beginnings, and sentence lengths to enhance communication.</p>		
<p>Vocabulary (selecting and using words and expressions correctly and effectively)</p> <p>Students choose specific words and expressions that are accurate and effective, and enhance the student's voice.</p>		
<p>Conventions (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively)</p> <p>Students use conventions accurately and effectively to communicate.</p>		
Assignment II—Functional Writing		
<p>Content* (thought and detail)</p> <p>Students organize and develop ideas for a specified purpose and audience.</p>	<p>The Functional Writing Assignment requires students to write to a specified audience in the context of a news article.</p>	<p>Clearly below the <i>acceptable standard</i></p> <p>Insufficient</p>
<p>Content Management* (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively)</p> <p>Students communicate accurately and effectively by selecting words and phrases appropriate to their purpose. Students demonstrate control of sentence structure, usage, mechanics, and format.</p>		

*These scoring categories are weighted to be worth twice as much as the other categories.

Part A: Writing—2011 Student Achievement

In 2011, 88.8% of students who wrote the test achieved the *acceptable standard* on *Part A: Writing* of the Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 12.0% of students who wrote achieved the *standard of excellence*. These results are consistent with previous administrations of *Part A: Writing* of the achievement test.

Student Achievement by Assignment and Reporting Category

The quality of the writing on the 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test is consistent with that of previous years. The chart below illustrates the percentage of students achieving writing standards for each writing assignment and reporting category.

		Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment					Functional Writing Assignment	
		Reporting Category					Reporting Category	
		Content	Organization	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Conventions	Content	Content Management
Writing Standard	Score*	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students
Meets the Standard of excellence	5.0	3.4	3.1	4.2	4.2	4.5	1.7	2.4
	4.5	4.7	4.4	4.9	5.1	4.9	3.0	3.6
Approaches the Standard of excellence	4.0	14.9	14.7	16.7	16.1	16.8	12.0	13.9
Clearly Meets the Acceptable standard	3.5	15.6	15.5	15.0	15.3	13.7	13.7	14.3
	3.0	43.1	42.6	42.5	48.7	36.5	41.8	42.9
	2.5	9.3	10.1	8.5	6.2	10.2	11.1	10.0
Does Not Clearly Meet the Acceptable standard	2.0	8.1	8.7	7.3	4.0	11.7	13.6	11.3
Clearly Below the Acceptable standard	1.5	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.5	0.3	1.3	0.9
	1.0	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.5	1.2	0.6
	0	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.7	0.7
Insufficient / No Response								

* Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged. In 2011, approximately 68% of papers were marked locally, and these scores were submitted to Alberta Education. Papers with discrepant scores were given a third adjudicating reading. The third reading rescore rate was 8.3%.

Part A: Writing—Commentary on 2011 Student Achievement

During the 2011 scoring session, 180 teachers from throughout the province scored 40 665 student test booklets. Teachers who marked the tests were pleased with the quality of most papers.

On *Part A: Writing* of the 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test, students who wrote the test achieved an average of 35 out of a total of 55 (63.6%). The provincial average on the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment was 22.7 out of 35 (65.4%), and the provincial average on the Functional Writing Assignment was 12.2 out of 20 (61%).

Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment

In the 2011 Narrative Writing Assignment, students were required to use a picture prompt to write a narrative response. The colour picture prompt shows a boy and a girl kneeling in a field, feeding a glowing skunk.

Training for the marking session always emphasizes the need to look at the strengths of the writer and to mark what is written. Markers conscientiously use their exemplar documents to support the scoring criteria in helping them distinguish between the scoring categories. Each response is to be reviewed according to each category in the scoring criteria. Every effort is made to score each response in a valid and reliable manner.

Students responded in a wide variety of ways to the picture prompt, bringing their prior knowledge, experience, and imagination into their writing. Students achieving the *standard of excellence* included substantial details, effective connections, and precise vocabulary that created vivid images and enhanced the students' voice.

The following excerpts from student responses illustrate a few of the responses given that related to the picture prompt at the *acceptable standard*:

- As Mike and Susan were using there telescope to view the meteor shower Susan noticed something glowing and moving on the ground. Mike and Susan searched where they had seen the glowing object and after a while they where almost read to give up when a glowing skunck began walking toward them.
- Ashley got up and ran into the house and grabbed five cookies freshley made after dinner made by Ashley and her mom, and ran back outside. Luckily the skunk was still there, the the skunk had actully been coming closer. Ashley quickly took the five cookies out of her pocket and gave them to Dylan Dylan broke the cookie into a bunch of little pieces and made a trale for the skunk to come closer to him and Ashley.
- Kaiden and Jacee told them everything that happened. The dad giggled and said “are you sure it wasnt a big makebeliefe dream?” Kaiden said no,no it wasnt a dream then right away they asked “can we please keep the skunk?” The dad said yes and the mom hesitated to say sure but she still did. They named it puffy and took care of it like as if it was a small puppy.

These examples illustrate the type of content and organization that some Grade 6 students used in their responses to the picture prompt. Some corrections have been made to aid readability.

Each of these examples illustrates ideas that are appropriate and straightforward. The ideas are organized and have both an adequate beginning and end. The vocabulary clarifies meaning and generally enhances the students' voices.

The following excerpts from student responses illustrate a few of the responses given that related to the picture prompt at the *standard of excellence*:

- It was a glorious morning. The sun shone through the glass double-doors of the Johnson’s grand house.
Ann Johnson was just waking up. She stretched her petite arms, and gave a great yawn. Then, she sat up straight, pulled the covers off, and sauntered into the kitchen. Her older brother George, was already sitting at the table eating waffles. Ann grabbed some Cornpops, and sat down beside her brother. It was a typical morning.
“Look George! I still see a star!”
Doubtfully, George looked up. He saw it too. There in the brilliant blue sky, was a lone star, like a white waterlily in a pond. George gasped.
- There was a small hush before we went back to mindless chitter-chatter and munching on delicious homemade peanut-butter cookies we’d smuggled after dinner.
We were at the peak of mind-numbing jibber-jabber (as we were chatting about the weather) when there was a big, loud *whoosh* sound and branches on the oak tree bobbed up and down like bungee cords...I felt so anxious that I wanted to run away, but it felt like my body was bound to the earth underneath me... I remembered that I wished to meet a skunk , but the books I had read about skunks did not mention anything about them looking like this.

These examples illustrate the type of content, organization, sentence structure, and vocabulary that some Grade 6 students used in their responses to the picture prompt.

Each of these examples illustrates how some students selected clear and precise details, and organized them in a purposeful and effective order. Words and expressions helped to create vivid images and enhanced the students’ voices. Few errors in conventions were noted in the student responses from which these examples were taken.

Functional Writing Assignment

The 2011 Functional Writing Assignment presented students with the situation of writing a news article for their school newspaper. The students were provided with information about the International Space Station from which they were to construct an organized and effective news article. Students were successful in fulfilling the requirements of the Functional Writing Assignment by including the “what,” “when,” “where,” and “who” in conjunction with some supporting facts. Students were given a list of “Interesting Facts” that required some initiative on the part of students to organize the facts in a coherent and effective manner. Some students chose to select only those facts which best served their response, which was acceptable. Many students were successful in selecting vocabulary necessary for conveying a tone appropriate for a news article.

The following excerpts from student responses illustrate a variety of responses at the *acceptable standard*:

- Did you ever hear about the Internation Space Station?
Last week the entire school got a visit from astronaut Same Brentley. At Kinler Elementary School, Sam Brentley did a presentation about the Internation Space station. Knowen as the ISS.
It orbits above the earth about 360 km. It orbits every 92 minutes, and is orbiting laboratory....
- The space station has a robotic arm that is called the Canadarm2l. The astronates aboard the Space Station take pictures of earth every day the photographs can show us changes in the earths atmosphere water levels and vegetation.

- “Our space station covers more area than a football field.” Stated Sam Brentley during the presentation. “Astronauts on board the space station take photographs of Earth each day...” The international space station helps everyone. The discoveries from research done on the ISS will benefit people of all nations. Already 16 countries are involved in construction and operation.

Each of the previous examples illustrates how students wrote news articles that directly addressed the writing prompt that was provided. These students included the purpose of the presentation on which they were reporting, essential details, and some interesting facts that were provided. Some, but not all, students chose to include direct quotes from the astronaut or fictitious attendees.

The following excerpts from student responses to the Functional Writing Assignment illustrate a variety of responses that meet the *standard of excellence*:

- How many schools have had a real astronaut visit them? Not many, but Kindler Elementary had a rare visit from an astronaut last week to get some fascinating details about the one and only International Space Station (ISS)...the astronauts there have to deal with the effects of weightlessness while they are working, but their work will not go to waste. Their discoveries from research will benefit people of all the nations.
Even now, they are still researching, up there in space. Who knows what they will discover in the future?
- The students learned that the International Space station orbits our earth about 360 km above the Earth, weighing about 300 metric pounds. The students were amazed to hear that that weight equals out to be as much as 75 large elephants. Sam Brentley also informed the students that the ISS covers more area than a football field, yet is powered by solar energy...
- “It was a great opportunity to come share my knowledge with the Kindler Elementary School students,” stated Sam Brentley.

These excerpts from student responses to the Functional Writing Assignment illustrate the use of vocabulary, sentence structure, organization, and extensive details to create responses that, in their complete form, met the *standard of excellence*. The majority of the students at this standard included most, if not all, of the facts and details that were provided, and many incorporated them with quotations from the astronaut or other attendees. Many of the students at this standard embellished their responses with relevant descriptive details that further enhanced their responses. An appropriate tone for a news article was maintained at all times, with adept use of vocabulary and few errors in conventions.

Overall, student performance on *Part A: Writing* of the 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test was consistent with that of previous years. The majority of students continue to demonstrate success in achieving provincial assessment standards.

Part B: Reading—2011 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement

In 2011, 91.4% of students who wrote the test achieved the *acceptable standard* on *Part B: Reading* of the Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 41.3% of students who wrote achieved the *standard of excellence*. These results are consistent with previous administrations of *Part B: Reading* of the achievement test.

Student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test averaged 33.5 out of a total score of 50 (67%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which 2011 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities, and the provincial average of student achievement by both raw score and percentage.

Reporting Category	Language Function		Provincial Student Achievement Average Raw Score and Percentage
	Informational	Narrative / Poetic	
Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details Students recognize explicit or implicit ideas and details and make inferences about the relationships between ideas and details.			9.4/14 (67.1%)
Interpreting Text Organization Students identify and analyze the author’s use of genre. Students identify and analyze the author’s choice of form, organizational structure, style, literary techniques, text features, and conventions.			7.1/11 (64.5%)
Associating Meaning Students use contextual clues to determine the connotative meaning of words, phrases, and figurative language.			6.3/9 (70.0%)
Synthesizing Ideas Students make generalizations by integrating information from an entire selection in order to identify the purpose, theme, main idea, or mood of the selection.			10.7/16 (66.9%)
Provincial Student Achievement Average Raw Score and Percentage	13.9/20 (69.5%)	19.6/30 (65.3%)	Part B: Reading Total Test Raw Score = 50

Part B: Reading—Commentary on 2011 Student Achievement

The following discussion addresses specific areas of strength and weakness demonstrated by students who wrote the 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test. Sample questions from the 2011 Grade 6 English Language Arts Achievement Test are provided to highlight these areas for students meeting the *acceptable standard* and for those meeting the *standard of excellence* on *Part B: Reading*. For each sample question, the keyed answer is marked with an asterisk. These questions are no longer secured and will not be reused on future achievement tests.

Multiple choice question 20 required students to infer the author’s purpose for using questions in the introduction of an informational article and is found in the **Text Organization** reporting category.

20. The article begins with several questions (lines 1 to 6) **most likely** because the author wants to
- A. warn readers that the topic is difficult to understand
 - B. provide additional information about the topic
 - * C. introduce research questions
 - D. capture the reader’s interest

This question was somewhat challenging, with 62.3% of students answering correctly. Students needed to identify why the author used questions directed at the reader as an opening for an informational article. Option **A** was chosen by 12.9% of students. Option **B** was chosen by 18.4% of students. Option **D** was chosen by 6.4% of students. Approximately 63.5% of students who met the *acceptable standard* were able to answer this question correctly whereas approximately 82.6% of students who met the *standard of excellence* chose the correct response

Multiple choice question 21 required students to integrate information to identify the main idea of a paragraph in an informational article and is found in the **Synthesizing Ideas** reporting category.

21. The **main** idea in lines 8 to 17 is that camel milk is
- A. tasty when made into chocolate
 - B. hard to get in certain climates
 - C. a popular drink to buy or sell
 - * D. a nutritious drink

This question was quite challenging, with 59.4% of students answering correctly. Students needed to synthesize information within a paragraph of an informational article to identify the main idea of the paragraph. Option **A** was chosen by 19.9% of students. Option **B** was chosen by 9.4% of students. Option **C** was chosen by 11.2% of students. Approximately 61% of students who met the *acceptable standard* were able to answer this question correctly whereas approximately 75.7% of students who met the *standard of excellence* chose the correct response.

Multiple choice question 23 required students to identify the meaning of a phrase in an informational article and is found in the **Associating Meaning** reporting category.

23. In context, the term “Milk-on-the-move” (line 43) refers to the idea that
- A. milk from camels needs to be transported across the desert
 - B. milk from camels is sold all around the world
 - C. camels can supply food wherever they travel
 - *D. people in desert areas frequently travel

This question was fairly straightforward, with 76.8% of students answering correctly. Students needed to understand the implicit meaning of a phrase in an informational article. Option **A** was chosen by 2.7% of students. Option **B** was chosen by 11% of students. Option **C** was chosen by 9.5% of students. Approximately 81.4% of students who met the *acceptable standard* were able to answer this question correctly whereas approximately 95% of students who met the *standard of excellence* chose the correct response.

Multiple choice question 24 required students to identify a key detail in an informational article and is found in the **Identifying Details** reporting category.

24. According to the article, the taste of a camel’s milk depends upon what the camel eats and
- A. how often she is milked
 - B. the amount of water she drinks
 - *C. the quality of the water she drinks
 - D. what time of the day she is milked

This question was easy with 82.5% of students answering correctly. Students needed to find and identify a key detail in an informational article. Option **A** was chosen by 10.9% of students. Option **B** was chosen by 2.3% of students. Option **D** was chosen by 4.2% of students. Approximately 87.5% of students who met the *acceptable standard* were able to answer this question correctly whereas approximately 97.3% of students who met the *standard of excellence* chose the correct response.

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 Assessment Sector 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 (for grades 3, 6, and 9 English Language Arts and Français/French Language Arts) 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, [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 *Part A: Writing* achievement tests. The writing samples documents contain sample responses with scoring rationales, student self-assessment checklists, and scoring categories and 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 were mailed to schools and/or the tests that are posted on the Alberta Education website.

Parent Guides

Each school year, versions of the *Parent Guide to Provincial Achievement Testing* for grades 3, 6, and 9 are 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.