

**Alberta Provincial
Achievement Testing**

**Assessment
Highlights
2011–2012**

**GRADE
9**

English Language Arts

Alberta  Government

This document contains assessment highlights from the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Assessment Highlights provide information about the overall test, the test blueprints, and student performance on the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. Also provided is commentary on student performance at the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* on selected items from the 2012 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 posted on the Alberta Education website. A test blueprint and an answer key that includes the difficulty, reporting category, 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 Alberta Education Internet address is education.alberta.ca.

This document was written primarily for:

Students	
Teachers	✓ of Grade 9 English Language Arts
Administrators	✓
Parents	
General Audience	
Others	

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The 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test

This report provides teachers, school administrators, and the public with an overview of the performance of all students who wrote the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 37 625 students wrote the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

What Was the Test Like?

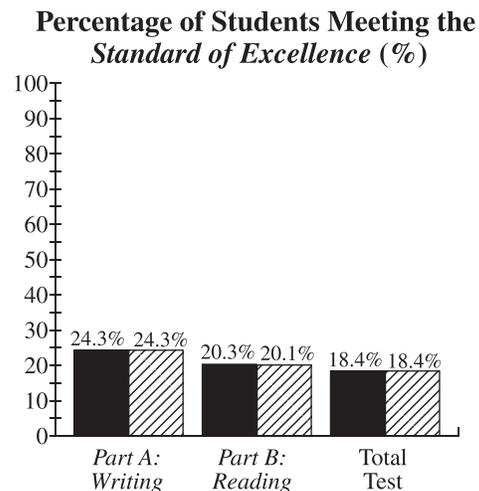
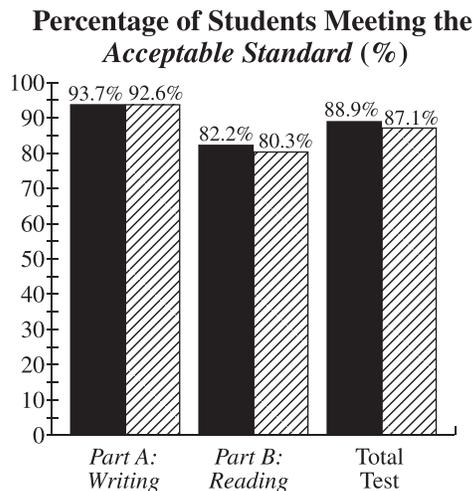
The 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test had two parts that were weighted equally.

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 topic and some graphic and textual prompts to which they were to respond in either narrative or essay format. The Functional Writing Assignment required students to respond to a specific situation by addressing an envelope and writing a business letter to a specific audience.

Part B: Reading consisted of 55 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 2012 are consistent with 2011, as shown in the graphs below. Out of a total possible score of 110 (parts A and B), the provincial average on the test was 73.8 (67.1%). 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.



 2011 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* on the 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

 2012 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* on the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

Part A: Writing—2012 Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part A: Writing* identifies the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which 2012 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities; it also provides a description of the writing assignments and the achievement standards.

Writing Assignment and Scoring / Reporting Category	Description of Writing Assignment	Achievement Standards
Assignment I—Narrative / Essay Writing	The Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment requires students to respond to a prompt that consists of a topic, as well as a collection of materials that students may use if they wish. These materials include graphics, quotes, and short literary excerpts. Students may use ideas from previous experience and/or reading. Students are to respond by writing a narrative or an essay.	Student achievement in each scoring/reporting category will be described according to the following achievement descriptors:
<p>Content* (selecting ideas and details to achieve a purpose) Students respond to a given topic by writing a narrative or an essay. Students establish their purpose, select ideas and supporting details to achieve the purpose, and communicate in a manner appropriate to their audience.</p>		Excellent
<p>Organization* (organizing ideas and details into a coherent whole) Students organize their ideas to produce a unified and coherent narrative or essay that links events, details, sentences, and paragraphs, and that supports the purpose.</p>		Proficient
<p>Sentence Structure (structuring sentences effectively) Students control sentence structure and use a variety of sentence types, sentence beginnings, and sentence lengths to enhance communication.</p>		Satisfactory
<p>Vocabulary (selecting and using words and expressions correctly and effectively) Students choose specific words and expressions that are appropriate for their audience and effective in establishing a voice/tone that will help to achieve their purpose.</p>		Limited
<p>Conventions (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively) Students use conventions accurately and effectively to communicate.</p>		Poor
Assignment II—Functional Writing	The Functional Writing Assignment requires students to write to a specified audience in the context of a business letter. They are also required to address a blank envelope correctly.	Insufficient
<p>Content* (thought and detail) Students develop, organize, and evaluate ideas for a specified purpose and audience.</p>		
<p>Content Management* (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively) 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—2012 Student Achievement

In 2012, 92.6% of all students who wrote the test achieved the *acceptable standard* on *Part A: Writing* of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 24.3% 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 2012 Grade 9 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.

Writing Standard	Score*	Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment					Functional Writing Assignment	
		Reporting Category					Reporting Category	
		Content	Organization	Sentence Structure	Vocabulary	Conventions	Content	Content Management
		% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students	% of Students
Excellent	5.0	6.9%	6.2%	6.8%	7.2%	6.9%	5.5%	7.5%
	4.5	8.4%	8.2%	7.8%	8.0%	8.4%	7.3%	9.0%
Proficient	4.0	22.5%	22.3%	21.5%	21.2%	22.1%	20.5%	22.8%
	3.5	17.4%	17.7%	17.7%	17.6%	17.1%	15.3%	15.3%
Satisfactory	3.0	31.2%	31.3%	33.1%	38.3%	28.4%	34.3%	26.8%
	2.5	7.0%	7.6%	7.3%	4.6%	8.3%	8.0%	8.1%
Limited	2.0	5.3%	5.5%	4.8%	2.3%	7.5%	7.3%	8.5%
	1.5	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%	0.2%	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%
Poor	1.0	0.5%	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%	0.4%	0.6%	0.6%
Insufficient / No Response	0	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.6%	0.6%

* Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged. In 2012, 28 796 (76.5% of the total of 37 625) 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 5.8%.

Part A: Writing—Commentary on 2012 Student Achievement

During the 2012 scoring session, 165 teachers from throughout the province scored 37 625 student test booklets. Teachers who marked the tests were generally pleased with the quality of most papers. Students who wrote *Part A: Writing* of the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test achieved an average of 37.9 out of a total raw score of 55 (68.9%). The provincial average on the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment was 24.2 out of 35 (69.1%), and the provincial average on the Functional Writing Assignment was 13.5 out of 20 (67.5%).

Throughout the 2012 marking session, every effort was made to **reward student strengths** where evident rather than to consider what was missing or what a student should have added or included. When marking, markers were asked to conscientiously return to the “**Focus**” section of the scoring categories to reorient themselves to the distinctions within the scoring criteria. There are several scoring descriptors in each scoring scale in each scoring category to be assessed in order to arrive at judgments regarding the qualities of a response. Markers were encouraged to **review**—at the start of each marking day—**each assignment and the prompt materials** given that many students’ ideas regarding the topic are informed by details within the prompts. Occasionally, markers needed to reread a response to appreciate what a student had attempted and, in fact, accomplished. All markers acknowledged that student responses are **first drafts** written under examination conditions.

Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment

Students were required to “Write either a narrative or an essay about the importance of memories in people’s lives.” This assignment was accessible for students at all levels of achievement. The literary prompts—that included quotations from works by Thomas Moore, Alfred Bunn, Samuel Woodworth, and Burton Stevenson—provided many students with opportunities to explore ideas related to the lasting impact of memories, being reminded of “days that have as happy been” spent with a loved one, “fond recollection” of “scenes of ... childhood,” and the power of “fondly dear” memories to comfort a person “Through many a weary year.” The visual prompts—that included an elderly person telling two young people about when she “first came to Canada” as a youth and was “able to work hard to become successful,” two youths chatting about a memorable “fishing trip” with their father that was “one of the best times ... spent together,” a group of students who have “gone through a lot together since grade one” talking about being “in high school next year,” and two friends remembering when they “met at summer camp”—also offered students a variety of ideas to choose to explore in their responses.

Many students approached the topic from a personal standpoint, examining the importance of times spent with siblings, parents, grandparents, and/or friends or the significance of trips to a different city, summer camp, or vacations to resorts in Mexico or Hawaii. Other students analyzed how memories can have “a positive or negative impact upon a person,” how “lessons can be learned” from memories, or how people’s emotions can be affected by memories. Others chose to reflect upon the role of memories in “defining a person’s identity,” forming the basis of a close friendship, or providing solace when suffering “the loss of some one.” In some responses, students narrated or discussed the influence upon individuals of past experiences from elementary or junior high school or memorable occasions such as birthdays, high school graduation, and weddings. Some students explored the impact of memory loss or the difficulty of overcoming painful memories of being bullied or mistreated while others illustrated the benefits of memories in shaping people’s present circumstances and guiding individuals into the future.

Still others responded to the assignment by recounting or explaining the memorable actions of camp counsellors, school teachers, or veterans of war or by incorporating the recollections of a parent or grandparent. In some responses, students drew connections to the topic through a discussion of the importance of memories in the lives of characters in literature or movies such as *The Book Thief*, *Touching Spirit Bear*, *The Notebook*, *The Giver*, and *The Outsiders*. A number of students examined memories associated with the achievement of a goal (such as achieving high marks in school, acquiring

material possessions, or overcoming challenges), participation in recreational activities (such as sports, the performing arts, or volunteer work), or the recognition of milestones in life (such as the first day of school, becoming best friends with someone, or being successful in a chosen career). In most responses, students have shown that memories are important given the indelible impact they have upon people's lives.

Students who achieved the *acceptable standard* often approached the topic from the stance that "memories are important in people's lives." In many responses, students based their ideas on everyday experiences and presented generalized comments related to the "need to remember the good memories and forget the bad memories," the benefit of memories in "helping to think about someone who passed away," or the way in which memories can "show you how far you've come over the years." Some students illustrated how memories may provide "learning opportunities," offer insight into "who you are," or remind you of "good times with friends." Others presented examples of individuals suffering from amnesia "caused by an accident" or illness or presented situations wherein an inability to recall certain memories results in "personal disappointment or frustration." A number of students examined the importance of honouring the memory of historical leaders, famous inventors, or renowned explorers by referring to their impact on "the advancement of society today." Still other students purported that memories "are what make us unique," contended that "we need memories so that we know what direction to go in the future," or moralized that "memories are what makes people stick together in good times and in bad times."

The following excerpts illustrate some of the ideas presented by students whose responses were awarded "Satisfactory" scores:

- "Memories are very important. They are your life story and without them you will have nothing to hold onto. Memories are important for 3 things, remembering the good times in life, remembering the bad, and remembering to share your life memories with people. Memories are an essential part of life and will always benefit you in the long run."
- "Memories are an important factor in all our lives. We use them to form relationships, they help us learn, and enable us to make choices. We remember times spent with family members with fondness. We also remember lessons we have learned and we can make decisions that help us do the right thing."
- "Andrew was only 7 that year, his grand mother was diagnosed with Alzheimers, a disease that causes memory loss which is usually caused by getting old. Slowly and slowly as time is passing by, Andrew's grand mother was losing pieces of her memories. ... Andrew couldn't understand why she would remember him sometimes and not remember him other times. When his parents finally told him that this was what Alzheimers was he was sad. He spent as much time as he could with his grand mother. He learned that you need to make a point of sharing memories with other people, so that you can remember them."
- "My name is Abdi and I'm from Africa. I came to Canada a few days ago because there is a war in my county. Today is the first day I start school in tenth grade. My principle showed me to my class and when I stepped in everyone just stared until a guy named tony came up and asked me if I want to be friends. ... One day I invited tony over. He asked me if I remember life in Africa. I showed him pictures and some cultural keepsakes I had and told him how these things help me remember the past."
- "Memories can have a positive impact on people. This is demonstrated in the film 'The Blind Side'. In this film Michael Oher finds himself poor and unhappy, but after being accepted in to school. With help from his adopted family, he uses these memories to motivate him to become the football star he is today."

In narrative and essay responses scored "Satisfactory" in "Content," such as those from which these excerpts are taken, the students' exploration of the topic is clear and/or logical, the purpose is evident, relevant and/or generic details are provided to support appropriate and/or predictable ideas, and the writing is straightforward and/or generalized and occasionally appeals to the reader's interest. The "Organization" of such responses is characterized by a functional introduction that establishes a focus that is generally sustained, events and/or details that are developed in a discernible order, transitions that mechanically connect events and/or details within and between sentences and paragraphs, and a mechanical and/or artificial closure that is related to the focus. Student responses scored "Satisfactory" in "Sentence Structure," "Vocabulary," and "Conventions" demonstrate generally controlled and sometimes

effective and/or varied sentence structure, general words and expressions that are generally used appropriately, a discernible voice or tone, and generally correct use of conventions.

Many of those students who achieved the *standard of excellence* demonstrated an understanding of the value of memories in “strengthening personal relationships,” building a person’s “self-confidence,” or enabling an individual to “pass on wisdom” to others. Inherent in many responses was an awareness of how memories can “show people how to avoid repeating past mistakes” and lead to self improvement or how memories may allow “someone who is gone to live on in our hearts.” Some students examined the contrast between other people’s perceptions of the past with one’s own or juxtaposed current circumstances with past experiences. Other students illustrated that memories allow individuals to “learn about one’s cultural origins” or enable people to “take pride in accomplishments” or drew distinctions between having “meaningful memories” versus simply having “vague recollections.” Through reflecting on the influence of people in positions of power (such as political leaders, wealthy entrepreneurs, or pop culture icons) on the collective memory of members of society, some students reflected upon the value of memory in “the socialization of individuals in society.” In some responses, students spoke of the need to remember “the Holocaust in Nazi Germany” or the “Rwandan genocide” in order to ensure that such events “never happen again.” Additionally, some students exhorted the merits of memories in enabling individuals to “keep our humanity in this fast paced society we have created.”

Examples from student responses that received scores of “Proficient” or “Excellent” are contained in the following excerpts:

- “Maddison could feel it. Every fiber of her body, every dust molecule that floated across the shaft of sunlight the crack in her blinds let slip in told her that it was over. She tied up her dishevelled hair, but she could not ignore the ticking of the clock at her bedside. She stood and knew that it was inevitable. She would have to face the day, the day she thought she had prepared for but clearly did not succeed. How could she attend her last day of school, knowing she would forever lose part of herself, an existence that had become part of her being. . . . Reminiscing with her classmates, Maddison knew that these moments would be frozen in time, a refuge from an uncertain future.”
- “My first memory is the faint aroma of sterility and murmuring voices nearby. My eyes weakly open to see a white hospital room and I try to utter a sound through my sandpaper mouth. Concerned faces gather close and I sink into blackness. . . . When I wake again, I see concern on both the man’s weathered face and woman’s piercing gaze. She asks how I feel and do I know where I am. I have no idea how I got here or who these people are. Terror wells up and I cry uncontrollably, lost in a turbulent sea with no life raft. No security in knowing who I am, no comfort in once familiar things, and no one I can share experiences with. I am a shell of my former self.”
- “Memories are pieces of the puzzle that reveal who we are. Some pieces just seem to be gone forever until miraculously, they reappear in our minds, triggered by something from the subconscious. These pieces of the past can lift our spirits when we recall succeeding in achieving a goal and ease the pain of failure or loss of a loved one. In victory and in defeat, our memories define our character, and provide us with a more complete picture of ourselves.”
- “The train rattles through town again, the clanging of metal and tossed up pebbles in its wake. It sounds its melancholic moan, like an old clarinet, as it disappears into the ebony night. The silence is broken gently, as fat drops of rain stream down the cheeks of the crying clouds pelting the earth with a rhythmic harmony. I close my eyes and lightning fills my eyes with red. I count silently waiting for the crescendo of thunder, as my dad once told me to do. I used to sit on this very windowseat with him, awed by his wisdom. Watching the storms sweep through the sky, I am now alone. Entirely alone. Except for my memories. And then I realize he will never be far from me.”
- “Unlike most animals, Humans have the incredible ability to remember events which took place in the past. This evolutionary advantage has given Man an astounding aid over his mammal brothers. This development of memory has allowed Man to record his own history, recognize and make use of key elements of his physical environment, and establish complex social interrelationships. Memory is by far Mankind’s most fundamental achievements.”

In responses receiving scores of “Proficient” or “Excellent” in “Content,” such as those from which these excerpt are taken, students have explored the topic in an adept, plausible, insightful, and/or imaginative

manner, the purpose is intentional or deliberate, ideas presented are thoughtful, sound, perceptive, and/or carefully chosen, details are specific, apt, precise, and/or original, and the writing is considered, elaborated, confident, and/or creative and draws or holds the reader's interest. In "Organization," "Proficient" or "Excellent" student work contains a purposeful or engaging introduction that clearly or skillfully establishes a focus that is capably or consistently sustained, events and/or details that are developed coherently in a sensible or judicious order, transitions that clearly or fluently connect events and/or details within and between sentences and paragraphs, and an appropriate or effective closure that is related to the focus. Student responses scored "Proficient" or "Excellent" in "Sentence Structure," "Vocabulary," and "Conventions" demonstrate consistently controlled and usually or consistently effective and varied sentence structure, specific or precise words and expressions that are used accurately and/or deliberately, a voice or tone that is distinct or convincing, and minor convention errors that rarely, seldom, or do not reduce clarity or interrupt the flow of the response.

Student writing that did not meet the *acceptable standard* was often characterized by an exploration of the topic that is tenuous, simplistic, minimal, and/or tangential. For example, some students reduced the topic to a discussion of the need to remember to do chores in order to "avoid punishment," how "memorys make the world go round," or the importance of memories in helping an individual to "walk into and back from school." In some responses, students quoted randomly from the prompts provided without elaborating upon them or connecting them to ideas presented. In other responses, students have depicted scenarios in which little context was provided regarding a character's personality, circumstances, or behaviour in the synopsis of events presented. Some students addressed the topic with sweeping generalizations such as "memries are goode and also bad so keep the goode ones" and "withought memories we would have nothing." Students at this level of achievement often struggled with clarifying their ideas in relation to the topic and were not always successful in conveying their thoughts clearly and completely.

The following excerpts are taken from student responses that were awarded "Poor" or "Limited" scores:

- "Memories some informative others just for fun. I have had my fair share of memories some good some bad but what can you do, memories can be good and bad depending on what your rembering. If your at a job interview and you say to a friend 'Remember that time we went to jail?' then ya good luck on that job."
- "In a persons life their memories have lots of meaning for myself as an example. All memories have some thing in common, (they all leave a person with some kind of happieness, sadness, ability, strength, and courage)."
- "It all strated with Steve's dad said lets go to Nova scotia this year. Ever two years Steve's family went their usually they fly but this time they drove. And thats why Steve's sayed lets drive for a change so the did and it was 2 monthes from tomorrow and they went down east. Steve never forgot the fun he hade there."
- "Memories are the past because you remember all the times you had, if we didnt have memories we wouldnt have a past. If you cant remember the past then you have no memories."
- "Jim and Bill been frends long time like it wuz yesturday, they meet in school the frist time Hi said Jim Hi said Bill. They hung out all the time When their older. he rembered this day and wundred What happind to Bill havnt seen him scince school so I give him a call but didnt have his number."

In student responses scored "Poor" or "Limited" in "Content," such as those from which these excerpts are taken, the purpose is vague or insubstantial, ideas presented are superficial, ambiguous, overgeneralized, or underdeveloped, details are imprecise, abbreviated, irrelevant, and/or scant, and the writing is uncertain, incomplete, confusing, and/or lacking in validity with little appeal to the reader's interest. In "Organization," the introduction lacks purpose, is not functional, is obscure, and/or is ineffective, the development of events and/or details is not clearly discernible, haphazard, and/or incoherent, transitions are lacking, indiscriminately used, absent, or inappropriately used within or between sentences and paragraphs, and closure is abrupt, contrived, unrelated to the focus, ineffectual, and/or missing. "Sentence Structure," "Vocabulary," and "Conventions" in responses receiving scores of "Poor" or "Limited" typically demonstrate a lack of control and little variety in sentence construction, the use of imprecise

and/or ineffective words and expressions and a voice or tone that is not clearly established, indistinct, not evident, and/or indiscreet, and errors in conventions that weaken or impair communication, blur or reduce clarity, and interrupt or impede the flow of the response.

As is often the case each year, 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 assignment. Most often, there was evidence that students had implicitly addressed the topic and/or prompts, and should be assessed. If, however, extensive examination of a student's work by both a marker and a group leader led to the conclusion that the response was "Insufficient," then the floor supervisors in consultation with the team leader made a final judgment.

Functional Writing Assignment

Most students were able to connect the context provided in the "Situation" to their own experiences in school. From the viewpoint of "Jamie Gardner, a grade nine student who attends Inspiration School," students advocated for the "need to establish a policy regarding the amount of daily homework students are assigned." In most responses, students referenced or listed the suggested guidelines provided, such as "the development of consistent expectations among students, teachers, and parents," "cooperation among teachers," increasing daily homework by "10 minutes with each grade," having "no homework on non-school days," being given homework that is "relevant and meaningful," and striving to "accommodate the needs of all students." However, the extent to which these guidelines have been analyzed and particularized to achieve the student's purpose in the "Assignment"—to "Write a business letter to Mrs. Helen Westminster, chairperson of the Carver School Board," to "present your ideas regarding the need to establish this homework policy" and to "Provide enough information to convince Mrs. Westminster and members of the school board of the benefits of implementing this policy"—is significant in determining the quality of student responses.

Most students were able to recognize the merits of "having a homework policy" and presented arguments in favour of its implementation "so that students don't do bad on their tests and do better in school," have a "sense of accomplishment," or "gain confidence in their abilities." Many students acknowledged that homework "provides students with opportunities to reinforce classroom learning" but stipulated that guidelines are necessary to "make sure that students can do what is expected of them." Some students contended that, in the absence of a homework policy, what is assigned is unfair or pointless" or that students will rebel by refusing to complete "unreasonable amounts of homework" and stated that a homework policy would make teachers "consider how much homework they are assigning" so that homework is more meaningful to students and how "homework will not feel like a punishment."

Many students demonstrated a pronounced reliance upon the guidelines of the homework policy provided, possibly a result of the seemingly prescriptive specification in the "Assignment" of the importance of establishing "this homework policy." Thus, markers should recognize that, although many students have adhered closely to the information provided, doing so is acceptable given the manner in which the assignment is framed. In some responses, students elaborated upon how a homework policy will "help kids stay on track, "give them a feeling of empowerment," or contribute to "the well being of students at Newsome School." Other students ruminated on the long-term benefits of a homework policy in teaching "valuable time-management skills" that will benefit students when they "go to university" or "get a job." In some cases, students provided suggestions with regard to "how any potential problems could be addressed" such as establishing a "rewards program" that could include offering students "one school night homework free per week." In many responses, students provided information regarding how the addressee could contact the sender should she wish to do so, but this was not a requirement of the assignment.

As in other years, markers were to acknowledge that there was no prescribed length for responses to the Functional Writing Assignment. While some students may concisely fulfill the requirements of the task, others may elaborate more fully upon ideas presented. Such brevity or embellishment is neither beneficial nor detrimental in and of itself, and markers were to take into account the overall effectiveness

of each response when assessing its quality. With regard to envelope and letter format, recommendations are provided in the guidelines of Canada Post. Other formats/styles are to be considered equally acceptable and markers should assess the extent to which a student has been consistent in applying a chosen format to both the envelope and letter rather than “deduct marks” for deviations from the Canada Post guidelines. There were a number of student responses in which there were varying amounts of white space between the heading, inside address, and salutation in the letter and some students single-spaced the body of the letter while others used double-spacing. These issues specifically were not to be viewed as detrimental to the quality of student work and were not to be penalized in the assessment of “Content Management.”

Students whose responses were of sufficient quality to achieve the *acceptable standard* typically recognized how a homework policy could “give students extra practice,” “prepare students for high school,” or “guarantee completed assignments and a healthier lifestyle.” As well, most students acknowledged that “we need a homework policy to even out what students have to do” because “if there is too much homework it could cause poor effort” and that “teachers will be willing to work together” because doing so is in the “best interests” of students. Among the advantages of a homework policy cited by many students were “more effort from the students,” “teachers working with students,” and “students having free time.” Some students speculated that students at the school would “welcome the policy” whereas other students were concerned with the indifference of some students at the school. Still others provided suggestions for “gaining support for the policy” that included “conducting information sessions with students and parents,” “gift certificates for students who always have their homework done,” and “giving the class with the best performance a field trip.”

Qualities of student writing awarded “Satisfactory” scores are evident in the following excerpts from student responses:

- “I am writing to you today to discuss a homework policy. I believe this policy is needed to ensure constant learning and achieving in children and young adults. This policy would expect a certain amount of work done by students every school day and will ensure that every student get the amount of homework they need to do their best in school and have time management skills.”
- “Right now, student think they have too much homework, and we need to fix this. We understand that numerous students take part in after school activities, so we need to make a time for all grades that is good for all students. I, feel very strongly that there should be set homework guidelines for all students and ensure that all students will get equal amounts of homework on each night on school days.”
- “I am Jamie Gardner and along with other students we believe that a homework policy needs to be established. Firstly, students will get higher, more persistent marks if this policy is in effect. ... Secondly, this policy also includes a no homework detail on days out of school activity with no homework on weekends or holidays. ... Thirdly, a daily homework routine is manageable for students leading to less stress on the mind. ... A homework policy will make sure that we all work together in all schools in the Carver School Division.”
- “I feel that its best to give homework based on age and grade. Every year you will gain ten minutes as you pass each grade starting from grade 1. This will be fair and students would be more willing to do it more students would get better grades. Teachers will work together to give a certain amount of homework and nothing more. This way, students will have free time and be more fresh to learn when they go back to school again.”
- “Students should be getting the right amount of homework per grade. They will learn more and stay caught up, and teachers should cooperate to make sure only a certain amount is assigned so students have less stress. Weekends and holidays should be free of homework so students can relax and enjoy life. School spirit will grow and students will learn better. ... Please think of these benefits when making your decision.”

In responses scored “Satisfactory” in “Content,” as illustrated in these excerpts, students have presented appropriate ideas and adequately developed the topic. Relevant information is presented and supported by enough detail to fulfill the purpose of the assignment. A tone appropriate for the addressee is generally maintained. In responses scored “Satisfactory” in “Content Management,” words and expressions used are generally accurate and occasionally effective. The writing demonstrates basic control of correct sentence

structure, usage, and mechanics and contains errors that may occasionally impede meaning. The envelope and letter contain occasional format errors and/or omissions.

In strong responses to the topic that achieved the *standard of excellence*, students often personalized the topic by including first-hand experience with the challenges of “balancing school work with outside of school activities” and the wisdom of encouraging students to “become accountable” for their time. In some responses, students effectively conceded that homework is beneficial in “reinforcing concepts that are being studied” and presented arguments related to how, with a homework policy in place, “marks will actually be based on ability rather than homework completed” and “overall student achievement” is likely to increase. Some students contended that “if students have prepared for class by completing their homework, teachers waste less time reviewing what has been covered” and that “if punishments are set up for students that don’t comply, such as detentions or calling home, the policy will work.” In some cases, students have adopted a tone of indignation with regard to the detriments of not having a homework policy in attempting to convince Mrs. Westminster of the need for its establishment. As well, students sometimes recommended how members of the Carver School Board could act as “guest speakers who could visit the schools to show how students could benefit” from the establishment of a homework policy.

The excerpts below are taken from student responses that received “Proficient” or “Excellent” scores:

- “Homework is an important way to reinforce student learning and, if assigned in manageable amounts can be extremely beneficial in raising student’s grades. The best way to achieve this goal is to implement a homework policy. Starting in grade 1, students should get no more than 10 minutes of homework each day, with the amount increasing by 10 minutes each grade. When necessary, teachers will coordinate what they assign. Homework would be meaningful for students and they could manage their out of school time better. With weekends and other nonschool days being homework free students can participate in activities without sacrificing school work.”
- “Having a homework policy would give students constancy in the homework they are assigned. Guidelines limiting homework to ten minutes per school day for grade one students and increasing that amount of time by ten minutes in each grade will make homework manageable for students. Knowing what is expected will help students manage their time efficiently and they will be likely to succeed in school. This will boost self confidence and with there being no homework on nonschool days, students can enjoy free time and be ready to learn when back at school. The benefits of this policy are many and I hope that you will take into consideration what I have proposed.”
- “Teachers could work together to coordinate assignments and students would feel less stress if they could manage their time more precisely in order to take part in recreational activities as well. By allowing for flexibility in its implementation, this homework policy emphasizes the need to focus on the individual needs of students to help them to succeed. Students will become accountable for their individual achievements and this will be evident in their increasing grades.”
- “Having a homework policy would reinforce the success of the students in a positive way throughout their school years. Students will achieve higher scores but will also gain self discipline through budgeting their time efficiently after school hours. Above all, school morale will be enhanced if teachers collaborate and work together to accommodate the needs of the students.”
- “By implementing this policy, students will be accountable for setting aside time to get their homework done. They would see that homework is manageable. They can take advantage of time available such as weekends, holidays, and vacations to participate in and enjoy personal interests. Studies have proven that students with diverse interests like playing piano or competitive sports in school and later on in life.”

Student writing scored “Proficient” or “Excellent” in “Content,” as illustrated in these excerpts, is characterized by ideas that are thoughtful or perceptive and development of the topic that is generally effective or clear and effective. Significant or pertinent information is presented, and this information is substantiated or enhanced by specific or precise details that fulfill the purpose of the assignment. A tone appropriate for the addressee is clearly or skillfully maintained. In responses scored “Proficient” or “Excellent” in “Content Management,” words and expressions used are usually or consistently accurate and effective. The writing demonstrates either competent and generally consistent or confident and consistent control of correct sentence structure, usage, and mechanics and errors that may be present rarely or do not impede meaning. The envelope and letter contain few, if any, format errors and/or

omissions.

Those students who did not achieve the *acceptable standard* sometimes relied exclusively on verbatim reiteration of information presented in the assignment with little of their own thinking or development. Other students misconstrued the role of the writer of the letter to be that of the school board chairperson, the principal of Inspiration School, or a concerned parent advocating the need for a homework policy. In some instances, students mistakenly argued against having a homework policy or contended that the homework policy stipulates “10 minutes of homework per nite in grade 9,” that “uncompleted homework will be done on weekends,” or that “kids are sick and tired of homework and will blow it off no matter what we do.” In other responses, students asserted that “I don’t go to school 6 hrs a day just to do 6 hrs of homework at night,” that “home work shoold be assinged by a students attitude,” or that there could be “problems like student protests or strikes.” To be persuasive, some students have inappropriately asserted that “only an idiot woodnt see how this is a grate polcy” or that “You must lissen to this letter and give more homework.”

Ideas such as these are shown in the following excerpts from student responses that received “Poor” or “Limited” scores:

- “More and more kids at our school are failing and flunking school because teachers just give kids assignments whenever this has to stop! I for one am fed up with getting in trouble all the time for doing my home work.”
- “Ther are problems with the school and the homes of students about the lack of homework not being done, what we need is a homework club afterschool hours and then we can catch up of the extra assignments and their studies.”
- “The program has more upsides than downsides, the ups being happier teachers and students and more homework, and the downs being homework all the time.”
- “What if your in grade 2 and get 5 hrs of Home work and what if your in grade 11 and get only 15 minutes of home work. I know that this is not fair because some times you just dont want to do home work and want free time a better rule would be to not have 5 hours of home work when you should only be getting 2. You should think about what I said and make this decision.”
- “As principle of this school, we need this homework policy so that our school can improve its grades. The students of Inspiration School in Newsome need guidelines to help students learn and make sure they have enuf homework. Teachers and I work together to make sure homework is worth students to do.”

In student writing scored “Poor” or “Limited” in “Content,” as illustrated in these excerpts, ideas are superficial, flawed, overgeneralized, and/or misconstrued and development of the topic is inadequate or ineffective. Information presented is imprecise, undiscerning, irrelevant, and/or missing. Supporting details are insignificant, lacking, obscure, and/or absent, and the purpose of the assignment is only partially fulfilled or not fulfilled. A tone appropriate for the addressee is either evident but not maintained or not evident. In responses scored “Poor” or “Limited” in “Content Management,” words and expressions used are frequently vague and/or inexact or inaccurate and/or misused. The writing demonstrates either faltering control or a lack of control of correct sentence structure, usage, and mechanics and errors that are present frequently or severely impede meaning. The envelope and letter contain frequent or numerous and glaring format errors and/or omissions.

Overall, student responses to both the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment and the Functional Writing Assignment in *Part A: Writing* of the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test were consistent with the quality of student work in previous years. The vast majority of students (92.6%) successfully demonstrated the skills required to meet provincial assessment standards and achieved the *acceptable standard*, and 24.3% of students achieved the *standard of excellence*. Of all students who wrote the *Part A: Writing* test, only 7.4% did not meet the *acceptable standard*.

Part B: Reading—2012 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement

In 2012, 80.3% of all students who wrote the test achieved the *acceptable standard* on *Part B: Reading* of the Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test, and 20.1% of all 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 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test averaged 35.9 out of 55 (67.1%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which 2012 summary data are reported to schools and school authorities, and it shows 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 construct meaning by interpreting ideas and details pertaining to setting/atmosphere/context, character/narrator/speaker (actions, motives, values), conflict, and events.			10.7/17 (62.9%)
Interpreting Text Organization Students identify and analyze literary genres. Students identify and analyze the text creator's choice of form, tone, point of view, organizational structure, style, diction, rhetorical techniques (e.g., repetition, parallelism), text features (e.g., alliteration, onomatopoeia, imagery, dialogue, foreshadowing, suspense), and conventions.			7.4/11 (67.3%)
Associating Meaning Students use contextual clues to determine the denotative and connotative meaning of words, phrases, and figurative language (e.g., simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, irony, symbolism).			7.4/11 (67.3%)
Synthesizing Ideas Students draw conclusions and make generalizations by integrating information in order to identify the tone, purpose, theme, main idea, or mood of a passage.			10.5/16 (65.6%)
Provincial Student Achievement (Average Raw Score and Percentage)	15.0/22 (68.2%)	21.0/33 (63.6%)	<i>Part B: Reading</i> Total Test Raw Score = 55

Part B: Reading—Commentary on 2012 Student Achievement

The following is a discussion of student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. Sample questions are provided to highlight the achievement of students who met the *acceptable standard*, students who met the *standard of excellence*, and students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*. For each question, the keyed answer is marked with an asterisk.

In the blueprinting category of **Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details**, students were expected to construct meaning by interpreting ideas and details pertaining to setting/atmosphere/context, character/narrator/speaker (actions, motives, values), conflict, and events in ten reading selections. In the three informational texts, students who achieved the *acceptable standard* were able to examine one writer’s recollections of a personal experience in an excerpt from a memoir, interpret another writer’s thoughts in an article recounting a personal excursion through the wilderness, and analyze information presented by the writer of a newspaper article. The seven narrative/poetic texts—including two poems, two cartoons, excerpts from two short stories, and one excerpt from a novel—enabled many students who met the *acceptable standard* to demonstrate their ability to understand how elements of a metaphor enhance the meaning of ideas, identify traits that distinguish characters, determine the conflict underlying events, recognize the atmosphere created by facets of a scene depicted, account for a character’s change in attitude, determine the significance of a narrator’s recounting of a childhood experience, and make inferences from visual details. Students who achieved the *standard of excellence* additionally illustrated strengths in applying their understanding of each informational text as a whole to elements within to determine subtle interrelationships among events, details, and ideas. These students were also able to appreciate how characterization establishes conflict, how sensory details enhance realism, how seemingly coincidental events are causally related, and how universal experiences are illustrated in narrative/poetic texts. Students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*, while able to recognize basic details and straightforward ideas in informational and narrative/poetic texts, had some difficulty with questions requiring close reading of text. These differences in student performance are evident in the following question taken from the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts *Part B: Reading* Achievement Test.

In question 29, students were required to interpret the meaning of statements made by two characters in specified frames of a cartoon.

29. The statements of the characters in frames 1 and 2 are **best** described as

- *A. critical
- B. uncaring
- C. foreboding
- D. impractical

Of all students who wrote the test, 61.2% were able to recognize—from the mother’s comment regarding how Jeremy should “be more polite, like Hector” and from the teacher’s comment regarding how Jeremy should emulate his “brother Chad” who “always got A’s”—that the characters are making comments that are critical of Jeremy’s character and chose the correct answer (A). Of those students who did not select the keyed response, 19.8% chose B (likely a consequence of overlooking contextual details that establish that the other characters are offering constructive criticism arising from their regard for Jeremy), 11.7% chose C (a choice that could have been based on a superficial interpretation of the text wherein the characters’ comments are portentous of imminent danger for Jeremy), and 7.2% chose D (which may have resulted from inferring beyond the text that the advice offered by the other characters is inherently flawed or of little real value). Of those students who achieved the *acceptable standard*, 59.0% selected the correct answer. A total of 85.9% of those students who achieved the *standard of excellence* chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard* on the test as a whole, 37.4% chose the correct answer.

In the section of the 2012 achievement test blueprinted for curricular content pertaining **Interpreting Text Organization**, students who achieved the *acceptable standard* were able to identify features characteristic of various literary genres, recognize how awareness of tone enhances comprehension, and understand the significance of the point of view from which informational texts are presented. These students could also appreciate the effects of text features such as punctuation, italics, dialogue, sensory images, and sound devices such as alliteration and onomatopoeia in narrative/poetic texts. Students who achieved the *standard of excellence* were additionally able to recognize how a unifying effect is created by the organizational structure and diction employed by writers of informational texts and how writers' stylistic and rhetorical choices reinforce meaning in narrative/poetic texts. For students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*, questions that required an understanding of a writer's overall development or unique style of writing often proved challenging. The following question illustrates some of these differences in the levels of student achievement on the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Question 30 required that students recognize what the cartoonist uses punctuation to indicate in a frame of a cartoon.

30. In the statement “YOU’RE AT A TOUGH AGE, JEREMY...I ONLY HAVE ONE PIECE OF ADVICE FOR YOU...” (frame 5), the cartoonist uses punctuation to indicate
- A. the speaker’s disinterested tone
 - *B. a pause in the character’s speech
 - C. the speaker’s feelings of discomfort
 - D. a change in the character’s emotions

The correct answer (**B**) was selected by 67.9% of all students who wrote the test (based on their ability to recognize how ellipses signify pauses in the father’s speech and suggest his hesitation in offering advice to Jeremy). Option **A** was selected by 3.8% of all students (who may have based their answer on the inaccurate conclusion that the ellipses signify that Jeremy’s father is aloof and uninterested in speaking with Jeremy). Option **C** was selected by 7.3% of all students (which could be the result of misconstruing the father’s uncertainty to be indicative of feelings of unease or discomfort). A total of 21.0% of all students selected **D** (possibly a result of mistaking the pauses in the father’s comments to be reflective of his undergoing a change of emotion, an interpretation not supported by the text). Many of those students who achieved the *acceptable standard* chose the correct answer, with 68.2% selecting the keyed response. Most of those students who met the *standard of excellence* (89.0%) chose the correct answer whereas 35.8% of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard* chose the correct answer.

With regard to questions blueprinted in the **Associating Meaning** category, students who achieved the *acceptable standard* were able to recognize the denotative and connotative meanings of words and phrases and could recognize the use of figures of speech—such as irony, metaphor, personification, and hyperbole—in informational and narrative/poetic texts. In addition to these abilities, students who achieved the *standard of excellence* were able to appreciate how meaning is reinforced through figurative language and how humour is achieved through the use of irony in informational and narrative/poetic texts. Students who did not achieve the *acceptable standard* were often challenged by questions that required defining words from context and encountered some difficulty interpreting literary comparisons in informational and narrative/poetic texts. Such differences in student achievement on the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test are shown in the following question.

Question 31 required that students identify the figure of speech used by the cartoonist to create humour in a cartoon.

31. The humour of the cartoon arises from the cartoonist’s use of
- A. personification in frame 2
 - B. metaphor in frame 3
 - C. simile in frame 4
 - *D. irony in frame 5

Of all students who wrote the test, 69.5% were able to choose the keyed response (**D**) by determining—from the contradiction between the advice offered in frames 1 to 4 (regarding the need to distinguish one’s character by mirroring others) with that provided in frame 5 (to “be yourself”)—that the humour of the cartoon stems from irony. Option **A** was chosen by 2.9% of all students, who may have selected this answer based on the incorrect understanding that the teacher’s comparison of Jeremy to his brother Chad demonstrates personification. Option **B** was chosen by 7.0% of all students, and could have been selected by students who may have mistaken the allusion to “Hendrix” to be a metaphor. Option **C** was chosen by 20.5% of all students who may have inaccurately interpreted the literal statement—that Jeremy “could look like Noah Wylie”—to be a simile based on a figurative comparison. A total of 69.3% of students who achieved the *acceptable standard* answered this question correctly. Of those students who achieved the *standard of excellence*, 93.6% chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*, 36.0% selected the keyed response.

In the blueprinting category of **Synthesizing Ideas**, students achieving the *acceptable standard* were able to draw conclusions and make generalizations by integrating information to identify the tone, purpose, theme, or main idea of informational and narrative/poetic texts. Students achieving the *standard of excellence* could also derive from elements within a passage overarching ideas, detect subtleties of language that suggest a writer’s tone, and appreciate the mood created in informational and narrative/poetic texts. Those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard* often struggled with questions that required synthesizing aspects of reading selections to form comprehensive generalizations or judgments and questions requiring recognition of the verisimilitude of sensory details. The following question exemplifies some of these differences among the varying levels of student achievement.

In question 32, students needed to be able to form a generalization regarding the main idea of a cartoon.

32. The main idea of this cartoon focuses on the difficulty of

- A.** gaining popularity
- B.** learning from experience
- C.** making informed decisions
- *D.** establishing a unique identity

The correct answer (**D**) was selected by 89.4% of all students who wrote the test; these students were able to determine that the cartoon centres on Jeremy’s consternation regarding the advice of others—purporting the need to model oneself after others—and the “one piece of advice” provided by his father—to “just be yourself.” Option **A** was selected by 3.0% of all students, who may have inferred beyond the text that Jeremy is motivated by a desire to achieve notoriety. Option **B** was selected by 2.9% of all students, who may have formed the incomplete judgment that Jeremy is able to learn from the interactions he has with others. Option **C** was selected by 4.6% of all students, who could have erroneously concluded that Jeremy’s dilemma stems from having little information upon which to base a decision he has to make. Students achieving the *acceptable standard* found this question accessible, evident in the fact that 92.5% of these students chose the correct answer. A total of 98.7% of students who achieved the *standard of excellence* chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the acceptable standard, 59.5% answered this question correctly.

Overall, student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2012 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test was strong and comparable to students’ levels of achievement in previous years. Most students (80.3%) were able to meet the standards within the *Part B: Reading* test and 20.1% of students achieved the *standard of excellence*. Of all students who wrote the *Part B: Reading* test, 19.7% did not meet the *acceptable standard*.

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. From the home page, follow this path: *Teachers > Provincial Testing > 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 directives, guidelines, and procedures; calculator and computer policies; test accommodations; test marking and results; field testing; resources and web documents; forms and samples; 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 (where applicable) as well as suggestions for preparing students to write the tests and information about how teachers can participate in test development activities.

Examples of the Standards for Students' Writing

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 achievement tests. The exemplars documents contain sample responses with scoring rationales that relate student work to the scoring categories and scoring criteria.

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 released items and/or 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 as well as descriptions of and sample questions for each achievement test subject.

Involvement of Teachers

Teachers of grades 3, 6, and 9 are encouraged to take part in activities related to the achievement testing program. These activities include item development, test validation, field testing, and marking. In addition, arrangements can be made through the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia for teacher in-service workshops on topics such as Interpreting Achievement Test Results to Improve Student Learning.