

**Alberta Provincial  
Achievement Testing**

**Assessment  
Highlights  
2010-2011**

**GRADE  
9**

# English Language Arts



**Government  
of Alberta** ■

*Alberta* ■

Freedom To Create. Spirit To Achieve.

This document contains assessment highlights from the 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

Assessment Highlights provide information about the overall test, the test blueprints, and student performance on the 2011 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 2011 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](http://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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## *Contents*

The 2011 Grade 9 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 .....	11
Part B: Reading—Commentary on 2011 Student Achievement .....	12
Achievement Testing Program Support Documents.....	16



# The 2011 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 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test. It complements the detailed school and jurisdiction reports.

## How Many Students Wrote the Test?

A total of 38 271 students wrote the 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

## What Was the Test Like?

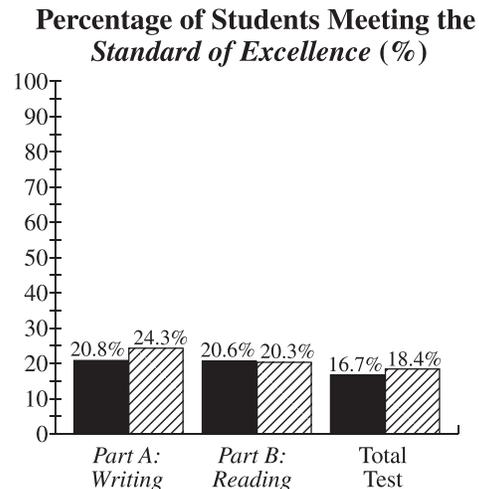
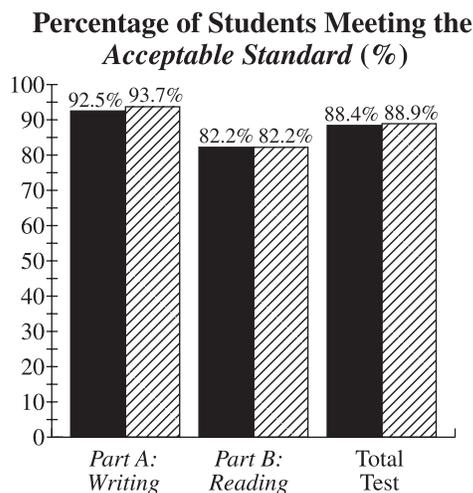
The 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test had two parts that were weighted equally.

*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 2011 are consistent with 2010, 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 74.0 (67.3%). 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.



 2010 Achievement Standards: The percentage of students in the province who met the *acceptable standard* and the *standard of excellence* on the 2010 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test (based on those who wrote).

 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).

## Part A: Writing—2011 Test Blueprint

The blueprint for *Part A: Writing* identifies the scoring/reporting categories by which student writing is assessed and by which 2011 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
<b>Assignment I—Narrative / Essay Writing</b>	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:  Excellent  Proficient  Satisfactory  Limited  Poor  Insufficient
<b>Content*</b> (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.		
<b>Organization*</b> (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.		
<b>Sentence Structure</b> (structuring sentences effectively) Students control sentence structure and use a variety of sentence types, sentence beginnings, and sentence lengths to enhance communication.		
<b>Vocabulary</b> (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.		
<b>Conventions</b> (using the conventions of written language correctly and effectively) Students use conventions accurately and effectively to communicate.		
<b>Assignment II—Functional Writing</b>		
<b>Content*</b> (thought and detail) Students develop, organize, and evaluate ideas for a specified purpose and audience.	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.	
<b>Content Management*</b> (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.		

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

## Part A: Writing—2011 Student Achievement

In 2011, 93.7% 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 2011 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.

		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
Excellent	5.0	6.2%	6.1%	6.6%	6.9%	6.8%	6.3%	8.4%
	4.5	7.5%	7.9%	7.6%	7.4%	7.7%	7.5%	8.9%
Proficient	4.0	23.1%	23.7%	23.5%	22.4%	23.2%	22.3%	24.8%
Satisfactory	3.5	17.6%	18.1%	17.5%	17.7%	16.1%	14.9%	14.6%
	3.0	33.7%	33.0%	32.4%	39.1%	29.5%	32.2%	27.2%
	2.5	6.3%	6.1%	6.8%	4.1%	8.0%	7.6%	6.7%
Limited	2.0	4.5%	4.2%	4.8%	2.0%	7.4%	7.8%	7.9%
	1.5	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.2%	0.7%	0.5%	0.6%
Poor	1.0	0.4%	0.3%	0.2%	0.1%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
Insufficient / No Response	0	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.4%	0.4%

\* Scores of 4.5, 3.5, 2.5, and 1.5 occur only when local marks and central marks are averaged. In 2011, 27 949 (73.0% of the total of 38 271) 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 5.9%.

## ***Part A: Writing—Commentary on 2011 Student Achievement***

During the 2011 scoring session, 160 teachers from throughout the province scored 38 271 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 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test achieved an average of 38.2 out of a total raw score of 55 (69.4%). The provincial average on the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment was 24.3 out of 35 (69.4%), and the provincial average on the Functional Writing Assignment was 13.7 out of 20 (68.5%).

Throughout the 2011 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**

The assignment, requiring that students “Write either a narrative or an essay about **the importance of striving to achieve personal goals**,” was highly accessible to students at all levels of achievement. The visual prompts provided—including representations of a boy regarded as “a great athlete” who “gets the best marks,” students celebrating graduation having acquired “the tools” needed to “pursue” their “dreams,” a boy yearning to buy a “New System” in the window of a store, and a man receiving an award for “recognition of ... service to the community”—offered students a variety of ideas to choose to explore in their responses. As well, the literary prompts—including quotations by Benjamin E. Mays, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Calvin Coolidge, and Steve Jobs—were expanded upon by many students when writing about the value of “having a goal to reach,” “working diligently toward one’s goals,” being “persistent and determined,” and disregarding “other people’s criticisms.”

Many students addressed the topic by providing an analysis of the steps involved in “finding out what you’re good at, setting that goal, and carrying out a plan to achieve that goal” whereas other students approached the assignment from a personal stance, relating elements of their own lives to their ideas and speaking from lived experience in school or recreational activities. Others chose to narrate events that illustrated the value of goals in providing a person with “something to work toward,” enabling a person to overcome “fear of failure,” or giving a person “a direction in life.” Some students examined the need to have both “short and long term goals,” the importance of “working hard,” and the “positive impact one’s goals can have on their lives.” In some responses, students spoke of having a goal inspired by the example of a teacher, parent, grandparent, or sibling or explained how, by striving to achieve goals, a person can serve as an example to inspire others.

A number of students commented on how, in order to achieve personal goals, an individual may need to be courageous, patient, committed, focused, or resourceful. Many student responses contained ideas related to acquiring material possessions (such as video games, smart phones, or lap top computers), playing sports (such as basketball, hockey, football, or track and field), performing in the arts (such as singing, acting, dancing, or playing a musical instrument), achieving high marks in school (such as in high school or university), or being successful in a chosen career (such as being a doctor, lawyer, truck driver, or child care provider). Students also often commented on the feelings of pride or self-confidence that result from being successful in achieving personal goals.

Students who achieved the *acceptable standard* often approached the topic from the stance that “personal goals are important.” In many responses, students based their ideas on real world examples and provided generalized comments related to “having a schedule,” saving “money for the future,” “practicing in order to improve,” “balancing sports with school,” “never giving up,” or “becoming a better person.” Some students spoke of the lessons an individual learns when pursuing personal goals, including how to be “self-reliant,” how to set “goals that are reasonable,” how to become “reliable and trustworthy” in the eyes of others, or how to “always do your best.” In addition to framing the topic in terms of how goals can be “big or small,” “help you get somewhere in life,” or enable a person to feel “a sense of accomplishment,” many students referenced the value of “doing well in school” in order to “get a good job.” Other students purported that achieving personal goals provides people with opportunities to make their dreams come true, citing the examples of role models (such as Justin Beiber, Terry Fox, Wayne Gretzky, or Barack Obama) or characters from literature or film (such as *The Outsiders*, *The Wild Children*, or *Dead Poets Society*) who have striven to achieve their personal goals.

The following excerpts illustrate some of the ideas presented by students who achieved “Satisfactory” scores:

- “Do you have goals? How do you achieve goals? There are several ways you can achieve goals, here are three of them hard work, balance, and perseverance. If you can do all of these things then you can achieve your goals.”
- “To achieve your goals they must be realistic. You can’t set impossible goals, you’ll never reach them. Goals need to be achievable because striving for the best will only get you the best ... Achieving your goals is rewarding, and not only in one way. You don’t just get what you were striving for, you also get knowledge and experience.”
- “Willys days of school were always consisting of helping people that he knew would probely not get anywhere in life ... Those people that he chose to help were the people that would turn on him and tease him for being the smart one ... But he always helped just to try and be kind ... So by helping others Willy achieved his own goals.”
- “Todd was an only child so he got lonely a lot when at home. So one day he asked his parents for a dog, they told him he had to show that he was responsible enough to take care of one ... The next day ... his teacher told him that he had to set a plan, follow the plan, keep his goal in mind, review his plan, and work towards it. Todd though it didn’t sound so hard so he started making his plan ... Todd always remembered what his teacher told him about achieving goals and used it to help him achieve many other goals, big and small.”
- “People who want to achieve their life long goals or dreams always have to try and believe. You can not go far with that plan if you keep giving up or loose hope. You may not always end up succeeding, but deep down you will feel better then before because you know that you have tried your hardest and never gave up.”

In responses such as those from which these excerpts are taken, students explored the topic in a clear and/or logical way and provided relevant and/or generic details to support appropriate and/or predictable ideas. These students established a focus that was generally sustained, developed their ideas in a discernible order, and provided a mechanical and/or artificial closure. Also evident in such student responses was generally controlled and sometimes effective and/or varied sentence structure, appropriate and general vocabulary, a discernible voice or tone, and generally correct use of conventions.

Many of those students who achieved the *standard of excellence* demonstrated an appreciation of how the “intrinsic rewards” of achieving personal goals are often greater than the extrinsic recognition of others, how “not only talent and ability but determination and perseverance are needed to achieve success,” how success in achieving one goal “paves the way for the achievement of subsequent goals,” or how “failing to succeed may provide opportunities for learning.” Some students asserted that the value of striving to achieve personal goals is found in the “obstacles overcome in the journey rather than in the attainment of the goal itself.” Inherent in many student responses was an awareness of the “sacrifices that may be involved in the pursuit of goals,” and that “risk taking and venturing into the unknown may be daunting to those who are faint of heart.” Additionally, some students suggested that personal goals empower individuals to “assume responsibility for their lives” and to “have a positive impact upon others.”

In some responses, students examined factors that enabled icons in politics, sports, or popular culture to achieve their stature. The far-reaching impact of the actions of leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Napoleon, or Alexander the Great in striving to achieve their goals was acknowledged by some students, while others referenced inventors such as Alexander Graham Bell or explorers such as Christopher Columbus. Other students lauded the efforts of those who “strive to serve those members of the community who are in need,” “remain true to their ideals,” “defy incredible odds,” or “leave a lasting legacy.” Some students elucidated upon the work of environmentalists in striving to “save endangered species and preserve wildlife habitat” and of the reciprocal benefits for humanity of conservationism.

The following excerpts contain examples from responses that received “Proficient” or “Excellent” scores:

- “Setting goals is like building a house. You have to make a plan or blueprint of how you are going to get there ... Not only do you need the materials of which the house will be made, but you also need the required tools to succeed ... Once you are done you can be proud of your accomplishment.”
- “All her life Risa Vandelli had been made fun of. Mocked. Shoved in the hallways when the teachers were not looking. Bullied. Risa was tired. Every day was a struggle to maintain her dignity. Of course, being overweight, her self respect had been gone for so long, she couldn’t even remember liking the way she looked. She covered the mirror in her bedroom with a shirt, for it was just another reminder that she was different ... From her original weight of 155, Risa lost 30 pounds and her mother, who had joined her in her struggle to lose weight reached her goal of 20 ... As she stood in her room, Risa tore the shirt covering her mirror down. She didn’t even recognize herself, but not because of her size. It was because she was smiling.”
- “The ball moved slowly across the air, and as Billy watched it, time seemed to freeze. As the ball’s path intersected with his own, he jumped, his body one with the air. He felt the ball on his forehead, felt it surge forward, and watched, full of adrenaline, as the ball arced gracefully into the net. Then, with his heart pumping furiously, he was lifted up by his team mates and carried off ... Through his perseverance, determination, and effort, he knew in his mind, body, and soul that he had played his best, and would always strive to do so.”
- “My father left when I was two years old, which is probably why I feel so obliged to set up my lemonade stand. Nobody asked me to do it; being the oldest an’ all I just felt it my duty. When I want something I go an’ do it; nobody needs to do it for me. People say I’m too young to support myself, but I know I’m helping Ma. She works two jobs full-time, alternating every day ... I am proud of myself. Being able to start my own ‘bizness’ at this age ain’t easy. I’ll tell you that. But the kindness of strangers and the inspiration of my mom have strengthened me. They have given me the courage to succeed in life and achieve my goals.”
- “Sherpa mountaineer Tenzing Norgay and Sir Edmund Hillary were the first to reach the summit of the highest mountain in the world, Mount Everest. Now this is an extremely difficult thing to do and only a handful of people have been able to achieve this. Their efforts nonetheless serve as examples to us all of the heights we may reach.”

Responses that contained ideas such as those in these excerpts illustrate student work in which the exploration of the topic was adept, plausible, insightful, or imaginative. Such students have demonstrated the ability to present thoughtful, sound, perceptive, or carefully chosen ideas supported by specific, apt, precise, or original details. These responses were purposefully or skillfully focused, coherently developed, and appropriately or effectively concluded. In such responses, students also employed consistently controlled and varied sentence structure, accurately or deliberately chosen vocabulary, a distinct or convincing tone or voice, and had few errors in conventions.

Student writing that did not meet the *acceptable standard* was often characterized by tenuous, simplistic, minimal, or tangential assertions about personal goals such as “without goals you have no thing to strive for And with no thing to strive for you have no goal” and “everbody can achieve a goal all you have to do is try.” In some responses, students quoted randomly from the prompts provided without elaborating upon them or connecting them to ideas presented or they depicted scenarios in which little context was provided regarding characters’ personality, circumstances, or behaviour in the synopsis of events presented. Some students addressed the topic with sweeping generalizations such as “you will

all ways achieve your goals or you will fail” and “with out goals your going nowere.” These students struggled with focusing and developing their ideas in relation to the topic and were not always successful in conveying their ideas clearly.

The intent behind such responses was often vague or insubstantial, and the ideas were sometimes of questionable validity, such as in the following excerpts from student responses that received “Poor” or “Limited” scores:

- “Sure it will suck but the worlds not going to explode if you dont get your goal it sucks but like I said life goes on.”
- “If you dont get personal goals you will get nowere becaus you are absent you should buy a alarm clock that can wake you up early in the morneing so you can achive your goal.”
- “On day wile cutting down a tree the tree fell right on his house, Eric said why did that happen and then decied that his goal would be to build a new house.”
- “Wake up its time to go Roberts mom said and he got up and left to join the military Robert got in to the military, because he got in the military he acheived his goal.”
- “There are many people out their in the world that make personal goals they want to achieve these goals to make a better person or to make the smarter more in shape.”

Such responses also often contained ideas that were superficial, ambiguous, overgeneralized or underdeveloped and details that were imprecise, irrelevant, or abbreviated. The development of events and/or details was not clearly discernible or lacked coherence and these students typically had limited control of sentence structure, used imprecise diction, had a tone or voice that was indistinct, and convention errors that blurred or reduced clarity.

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 or prompts, and their responses were 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 examination manager made a final judgment.

### Functional Writing Assignment

During Standards Confirmation, working group members found that most students successfully identified with the situation regarding food sold in the school store contained in the Functional Writing Assignment in terms of its relevance to their own lives and the assigned viewpoint of the writer (Tony Lazo) being “a Grade 9 student.” While nearly all students referenced ideas provided such as those regarding the school store being operated by Grade 9 students, the profit being used to fund “a three-day adventure camp,” and “the amount of nutritionally poor food the students are consuming,” the manner in which this information was elaborated upon and employed to achieve the student’s purpose—to “Write a business letter to “Darren Blairton, principal of Tiller Junior High School” to **present your suggestions for promoting the sale of healthy food in the store while making a profit**” and to “Provide enough information to **persuade the principal of the advantages of implementing your suggestions**”—was significant in distinguishing strong from weak responses. Most students were able to recognize that in order to “encourage healthy food consumption,” the store would need to “change the products it sells to the students and yet retain its profitability.” Students also included a variety of “suggestions about how to make healthy food appealing to the students and how sales could be promoted” in order to fulfill the purpose of the assignment.

In assuming the role of a “student who attends Tiller Junior High School,” nearly all students identified the merits of “healthy food,” the need for “profits from sales,” and the value of “promoting changes to the school store’s menu.” A variety of suggestions were presented with regard to “raising prices on unhealthy foods,” informing students of the benefits of healthy foods through “posters” and “announcements,” and the lasting effects of “healthy lifestyle eating habits.” In many responses, students provided information regarding how the addressee may contact the sender should he or she wish to do so although this was not required in this situation.

As in other years, there was no prescribed length for responses to the Functional Writing Assignment. While some students concisely fulfilled the requirements of the task, others elaborated more extensively upon the ideas and/or examples presented. Such brevity or embellishment was neither beneficial nor detrimental in and of itself, and markers needed 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. Markers were reminded, however, that other formats/styles are equally acceptable; a student should be consistent in applying a chosen format to both the envelope and letter. When assessing this assignment, it was important that markers not penalize students for deviations from the Canada Post guidelines. Markers were, above all, to judge the degree to which each student's response effectively communicated with the intended recipient of the letter. The fact that this assignment was written under examination conditions resulted in many student responses wherein there were varying amounts of white space between the heading, inside address, and salutation of the letter as well as single- or double-spacing of the body of the letter. 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 the conflict inherent in the writer's vested interest in the success of the school store in generating revenue and his or her concerns regarding the poor nutritional quality of the food sold. As well, most students acknowledged that resolving this conflict would entail "convincing other students to continue to purchase food from the store" and that altering the store's menu would require the endorsement of the school principal. Among the advantages of healthy foods cited by many students were the ability to "concentrate better in class," "have more energy throughout the day," and "improve your ability to play sports." Suggestions for promoting healthy foods often included recommendations to "sell juice instead of pop and fruits and vegetables instead of junk food" and marketing strategies such as "half price Tuesdays," "two for one sales," and "prizes for repeat customers." The majority of students presented relevant information supported by enough detail to fulfill the purpose of the assignment.

Qualities of student writing that received "Satisfactory" scores are evident in the following excerpts from student responses:

- "The school store is selling unhealthy food which I believe students should not be eating ... Here at Tiller Junior High we should fill our store with healthier food. We will gradually get rid of the unhealthy foods and replace them with healthy foods."
- "I want to change the food products because it is very unhealthy for the children that are buying it. If we were to change it to healthy items but also still tasty then people might still buy items from the store so that we can still have our 3 day adventure camp in spring ... We need to promote the importance of eating healthy."
- "The food that is being sold there is very unhealthy, and kids our age should be eating healthier. All of the grade nine students are really looking forward to the adventure camp in spring. We want the store to have healthier choices but we also want to go on the trip ... Low fat treats cost the same amount as the treats the school was selling before ... Everyone will benefit by getting healthy."
- "The schools store that sells food at lunch has too much unhealthy food ... I would like to present to you with new food ideas for students here to have healthier lives. We need to sell food that would appeal the students so they would actually want to buy it ... things like salads and fruits."
- "I help run the school store at noon and after school ... the store is a good place to get a quick snack and it also helps us raise money for our adventure camp. But I am concerned about the amount of junk food and other food with low nutrition value students are buying ... We need to sell healthier foods ... We could show how the healthier foods improve brain power and even make you better at sports to make it more appealing."

In responses such as these, a tone appropriate for the addressee was generally maintained, generally accurate and occasionally effective words and expressions were used, basic control of correct sentence construction, usage, and mechanics was evident, and the letter and envelope contained occasional format errors and/or omissions.

In strong responses to the topic that achieved the *standard of excellence*, many students particularized and elaborated upon the physical and educational benefits of consuming healthy foods and the detrimental effects of consuming unhealthy foods. Students often commented on the low nutritional content of “junk foods” (including potato chips, chocolate bars, soda pop, energy drinks, and pizza), the consequences of eating unhealthy foods (such as obesity, high blood pressure, or diabetes), the high nutritional content of “low fat alternatives” (including fresh fruits and vegetables, salads, granola bars, and bottled water), or the benefits of healthy foods (such as “increased intellectual vigour and physical strength” and promoting “resistance to illness”). Many students conceded that students might be reluctant to support changes to the school store’s menu but contended that educating students about their own health and wellness could convince them to act in their own best interests. As well, students sometimes highlighted how the principal himself could play an active role in improving the quality of the lives of students in the school.

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

- “Given that many students prefer to buy foods that are unhealthy for them, we need to act in their best interests. Consumption of unhealthy foods could lead to childhood obesity and health concerns such as clogging or hardening of the arteries. We must promote healthier lifestyles among students.”
- “Though the store does sell a wide variety of food to students, much of the items sold are not healthy. Students need to learn to eat healthier, and having healthy alternatives will not only benefit the students short term, but will encourage them to have healthier eating habits for the rest of their lives ... To improve the eating habits of students, we need to sell nutritional options that include calorie-reduced or low-fat alternatives such as granola bars and wheat thins.”
- “I would like to help find a way for the school store to offer healthier, better options for students. Healthy foods would provide students with more energy and they could lower their risk for diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and other medical conditions. They would also likely carry these healthy choices into the rest of their lives.”
- “Healthy foods do not only consist of fruits and vegetables. There are appealing healthy foods as well. For example, instead of chocolate bars, we could sell granola bars and trail mix. Instead of potato chips, we could sell vegetable chips or crackers, which have the same crispiness of potato chips. Instead of pop, we could sell juice. These are all healthier alternatives and they taste just as good as junk foods.”
- “Right now the store sells hot dogs, hamburgers, candy, and pop. These kinds of food items are detrimental for our students, especially the ones who visit our store frequently. I believe we should replace pop with water, bring in salads, and limit the amount of candy we provide. Giving students the nutritional facts regarding the food they eat will help them to make informed choices in order to improve their health.”

These excerpts demonstrate writing in which students presented thoughtful or perceptive ideas, effectively developed the topic, included significant or pertinent information substantiated or enhanced by specific or precise details in order to fulfill the purpose of the assignment. These students clearly or skillfully maintained a tone appropriate for the addressee, employed words and expressions accurately and effectively, showed competent or confident control of correct sentence structure, usage, and mechanics, and had few if any format errors or omissions in the envelope and letter.

Those students who did not achieve the *acceptable standard* sometimes relied too heavily on the information presented in the “**Situation**” of the assignment and merely quoted or paraphrased the content given with little of their own thinking or development. Other students misconstrued the role of the writer of the letter to be that of the principal informing students of the new program being implemented in the school, erroneously argued that the store must make a profit in order for the school “to have books or pay teachers” or even to continue to operate at all, implied that the principal “runs the store” and hires “the workers,” or argued against the selling of healthy food in the school store. In some responses, students presented dubious contentions regarding how to “raise profits by lowering prices,” how to “have a competition between nutritional and nonnutritional food,” how to “make the great nine attitude alittle better because it sucks right now,” or how “the money that is going to be left over the school can use to buy some new stuff.”

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

- “Selling health food will make enuf money to keep the school open so please support our school so that we dont have to go somplace else.”
- “The food shoold look very dellcious and shoold have lot fattys in it so the students can enjoy it and can get something out of it like nutrition by making the prices higher by 50cents.”
- “If you want to increase sales just put flyers everywhere, everyone loves flyers ... the concesion is fun we should keep it that way.”
- “You better sell the food we want or else well go to the store next door if you wont sell food to us kids arent that desperate for food.”
- “I look around the school and I see that it is some students don’t like the food at the store they don’t eat at all resulting in a poor food cycle.”

In student responses such as those from which these excerpts are taken, ideas were superficial, flawed, overgeneralized, or misconstrued. Development of the topic was inadequate or ineffective, supporting details were insignificant, lacking, obscure, or absent, and the purpose of the assignment was only partially or not fulfilled. In some cases, the tone used by the writer was either evident but not maintained or there was little awareness of a tone appropriate for the addressee. These students typically used vague, inexact, or inaccurate words and expressions, made frequent errors in sentence structure, usage, and mechanics, and had frequent or numerous and glaring format errors and/or omissions in the envelope and letter.

Overall, student responses to both the Narrative / Essay Writing Assignment and the Functional Writing Assignment in *Part A: Writing* of the 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test were consistent with the quality of student work in previous years. The vast majority of students (93.7%) 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 6.3% did not meet the *acceptable standard*.

## ***Part B: Reading—2011 Test Blueprint and Student Achievement***

In 2011, 82.2% 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 20.3% 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 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test averaged 35.8 out of 55 (65.1%).

The blueprint below shows the reporting categories and language functions by which 2011 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	
<b>Identifying and Interpreting Ideas and Details</b> Students construct meaning by interpreting ideas and details pertaining to setting/atmosphere/context, character/narrator/speaker (actions, motives, values), conflict, and events.			<b>11.5/17</b> <b>(67.6%)</b>
<b>Interpreting Text Organization</b> 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.			<b>7.0/11</b> <b>(63.6%)</b>
<b>Associating Meaning</b> 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).			<b>7.2/11</b> <b>(65.5%)</b>
<b>Synthesizing Ideas</b> Students draw conclusions and make generalizations by integrating information in order to identify the tone, purpose, theme, main idea, or mood of a passage.			<b>10.0/16</b> <b>(62.5%)</b>
<b>Provincial Student Achievement</b> <b>(Average Raw Score and Percentage)</b>	<b>13.7/22</b> <b>(62.3%)</b>	<b>22.1/33</b> <b>(67.0%)</b>	<b>Part B: Reading</b> <b>Total Test Raw</b> <b>Score = 55</b>

## Part B: Reading—Commentary on 2011 Student Achievement

The following is a discussion of student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2011 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 interpret a writer’s recollections of a personal experience in an excerpt from a memoir, a writer’s reflections on being a homesteader in the early 1900s in an excerpt from a memoir, and a writer’s thoughts in an article recounting a personal excursion through the wilderness. The seven narrative/poetic texts—including a short story, two poems, excerpts from two novels, and two cartoons—enabled many students who met the *acceptable standard* to demonstrate their ability to understand how elements of an analogy contribute to the development 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 questions taken from the 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts *Part B: Reading* Achievement Test.

Question 15 required students to recognize from details in specified lines of a poem the characteristic a successful poet must possess when writing poetry. Note: This question was Question #13 on the 2010 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

15. Details in lines 27 to 33 suggest that to succeed in writing poetry, a poet must be
- A. compassionate
  - \*B. determined
  - C. insightful
  - D. forthright

Of all students who wrote the test, 83.8% were able to recognize—given the context established by the central metaphor of the poem—that details in lines 27 to 33 (“The game must go on / After every defeat / you lick your wounds / study the mental draft choices / always on the lookout / for a Gretzky”) suggest that a successful poet needs determination to overcome failure and achieve success, and chose the correct answer (B). Of those students who did not select the keyed response, 7.7% chose A (possibly assuming that details related to being defeated and wounded mean that a poet’s efforts to succeed are worthy of sympathy); 6.9% chose C (wherein the reference to studying “the mental draft choices” may have led students to conclude—without considering the context established in the lines cited regarding the value of persistence—that a poet must possess insight to succeed); and 1.5% chose D (which may have resulted from students inferring, from the forthright manner in which the poet presents ideas, a conclusion that is neither relevant to the question presented nor substantiated by details in the lines cited). Of those students who achieved the *acceptable standard*, 85.5% selected the correct answer and 96.5% 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, 51.9% chose the correct answer.

In question 22, students were expected to determine the motivation underlying a character’s statement in an excerpt from a novel. Note: This question was Question #20 on the 2010 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

22. Billy’s motivation for making the statement “By the way, in case anyone should ask, I’m Canadian” (line 64) is to
- A. expose his experience as a lumber worker
  - B. increase his acceptance by the other men
  - C. demonstrate his fondness for the country
  - \*D. enhance his chances of being selected

In question 22, students needed to take into account Billy’s reasoning that because the men on the ship are “all Brits,” they would be more likely to choose a Canadian than a “Yank” from the United States to serve on the ship. The correct answer (**D**) was chosen by 62.4% of all students who wrote the test. The three distractors (**A**, **B**, and **C**) are all based upon interpretations that are unsupported by details in the text. **A** (which was selected by 4.5% of all students) could have been chosen by students who noted Billy’s reference to having “cut enough lumber” in Canada to warrant being “an honorary citizen” without acknowledging that this statement is made in relation to his awareness of how closely “Canada is still tied up with England” politically and economically. **B** (selected by 24.5% of all students) may have been selected by students who incorrectly inferred that Billy’s statement suggests a desire to increase his popularity among the other men. **C** (selected by 8.5% of all students) could have been chosen if students mistakenly assumed that Billy’s comment is in some way motivated by fond memories of time spent cutting lumber in Canada. The correct answer to this question was selected by 61.5% of those students who achieved the *acceptable standard*, 85.2% of those students who achieved the *standard of excellence*, and 30.0% of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*.

In the section of the 2011 achievement test blueprinted for curricular content pertaining to **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 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 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 proved challenging. The following question illustrates some of these differences in the levels of student achievement on the 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

In question 18, students were required to identify the manner in which a character in an excerpt from a novel clarifies the meaning of a statement. Note: This question was Question #16 on the 2010 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

18. In lines 21 to 22, Perce clarifies the meaning of his statement by
- A. presenting factual evidence
  - B. recounting a childhood memory
  - C. examining contrasting viewpoints
  - \*D. providing a corresponding example

The correct answer to this question (**D**) was selected by 74.3% of all students who wrote the test (based on their recognition of how Perce clarifies his assertion—that Shackleton “didn’t even know what to expect” on his expedition to the South Pole—by providing the analogous example of an individual

“setting off to walk across the United States” without knowing “if there were mountains or deserts or what to cross”). **A** was selected by 12.2% of all students (who may have based their answer upon historical information documented elsewhere in the text). **B** was selected by 3.8% of all students (which could be the result of misconstruing the example provided by Perce to be a recollection of a childhood experience). **C** was selected by 9.6% of all students (possibly a result of mistaking the example provided by Perce of a comparable situation to be in some way contrary to the statement he has made). Many students who achieved the *acceptable standard* were able to choose the correct answer, with 75.2% choosing the keyed response. Most students who met the *standard of excellence* (92.7%) chose the correct answer whereas 37.9% 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 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test are shown in the following question.

Question 41 required that students derive from context the meaning of a word in an article. Note: This question was Question #39 on the 2010 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

41. Context suggests that the word “pungent” (line 49) means

- A. unexpected
- B. unfamiliar
- \*C. strong
- D. faint

Of all students who wrote the test, 82.7% were able to choose the keyed response (**C**) by determining—from the description of how “The cabin smelled of woodsmoke and the pungent aroma of beaver and muskrat hides drying”—that the room is filled with strong odours. **A** was chosen by 4.2% of all students, who may have overlooked details that establish the oppressive atmosphere of the cabin’s interior and inferred that the smell of hides was surprising to the writer when he entered. **B** was chosen by 5.1% of all students, and could have been selected based on the assumption that the writer lacks familiarity with the environment he is in and finds the smell of hides to be foreign to him, an interpretation not substantiated by the text. **D** was chosen by 7.9% of all students, who may not have recognized from context the acrid quality of the aroma of the hides. A total of 84.4% of students who achieved the *acceptable standard* answered this question correctly and 97.1% of those students who achieved the *standard of excellence* chose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*, 47.3% 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 judgements and questions requiring recognition of the verisimilitude of sensory details. The following questions exemplify some of these differences among the varying levels of student achievement.

In question 30, students needed to be able to draw a conclusion regarding the contrasting views of homesteaders and agricultural-engineering authorities described in an excerpt from a memoir. Note: This question was Question #29 on the 2010 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

30. In this excerpt, the contrasting views of the homesteaders and agricultural-engineering authorities regarding the practice of locating wells centre on its
- A. difficulty
  - \*B. credibility
  - C. popularity
  - D. adaptability

The correct answer (**B**) was selected by 33.0% of all students who wrote the test. These students were able to determine that the contrast between the homesteaders' belief "in the witching of wells in the early days" and the skepticism of "Many agricultural-engineering authorities [who] scoff at this practice, dismissing it as nothing more or less than a simple delusion" centres on whether or not dowsing wells is a credible practice. **A** was selected by 44.3% of all students, who may have inferred beyond the text that the dowsing of wells is more difficult than applying "standard engineering principles" because of its scientific inexplicability. **C** was selected by 10.6% of all students, who likely concluded from the reference to there being "twenty-five thousand water-diviners engaged in this practice in North America" that homesteaders and agricultural-engineering authorities disagreed over whether or not dowsing was widespread. **D** was selected by 12.0% of all students, who could have erroneously concluded that the homesteaders and agricultural-engineering authorities had differing viewpoints regarding whether or not the practice of dowsing could be adapted or modified. Students achieving the *acceptable standard* found this question difficult, evident in the fact that 26.1% of these students chose the correct answer. However, 68.8% of students who achieved the *standard of excellence* were able to choose the correct answer. Of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*, only 17.0% answered this question correctly.

Question 55 required students to conclude from a cartoon what displeases one character most about the other character. Note: This question was Question #55 on the 2010 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test.

55. In this cartoon, Garfield is **most** displeased with Jon's
- A. desire to escape blame for his misbehaviour
  - B. refusal to acknowledge his limitations
  - C. reluctance to apologize for his actions
  - \*D. attempt to conceal his neglectfulness

This question was answered correctly (**D**) by 54.6% of all students who wrote the test. The correct answer is clearly evident in the accommodating manner in which Jon attempts to appease Garfield with "A NICE REFRESHING GLASS OF LUKEWARM TAP WATER" at "DINNERTIME" and Garfield's concluding reflection that Jon has neglected his responsibilities by "FORGETTING TO SHOP." **A** was selected by 23.7% of all students (who may have incorrectly assumed that by saying "SORRY" to Garfield, Jon is attempting to avoid taking responsibility for having misbehaved in some way, which is not evident in the cartoon). **B** was selected by 6.8% of all students (a number of whom may have recognized Jon's subservience to Garfield but may also have misinterpreted Jon's actions to be a futile attempt to defy the limitations of his authority). **C** was selected by 14.5% of all students (who may have misunderstood Garfield's behaviour to be the result of his frustration with Jon's unwillingness to offer an apology for something he has done rather than his dissatisfaction with the excuse Jon has provided). The keyed answer (**D**) was chosen by 51.9% of students who met the *acceptable standard*, 83.8% of students who met the *standard of excellence*, and 22.8% of those students who did not meet the *acceptable standard*.

Overall, student achievement on *Part B: Reading* of the 2011 Grade 9 English Language Arts Achievement Test was strong and comparable to students' levels of achievement in previous years. Most students (82.2%) were able to meet the standards within the *Part B: Reading* test and 20.3% of students achieved the *standard of excellence*. Of all students who wrote the *Part B: Reading* test, 17.8% 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](http://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 Student 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.