

Chapter 12: Provincial Assessments

There are currently two standardized assessments used in the province's schools to measure student achievement: public examinations and criterion referenced tests (CRTs). The following chapters will explore student performance on each of these assessments in terms of provincial and district performance as well as gender differences.

Public examinations

At the senior high level, students are required to complete public examinations in selected academic or advanced Level III courses in mathematics, the sciences, social studies and languages. The results of these public examinations are used to determine a student's eligibility to graduate from high school as well as entrance to post secondary institutions.

Once students complete these public examinations, they are sealed and returned to the Department of Education for grading by a selected group of teachers. This helps to ensure that student performance on these examinations is graded in a consistent and reliable manner. Chapter 13 will provide an overview of student performance on public examinations.

Criterion-Referenced Tests

Students in Grades 3, 6 and 9 complete criterion-referenced tests every spring. The results provide information to teachers, administrators, district personnel and the Department of Education which may be used to:

- Determine student achievement in relation to curriculum outcomes;
- Improve both student learning and teaching effectiveness;
- Chart student progress over time; and,
- Offer a comprehensive data set and analysis supporting school development.

In other words, the ultimate goal of these assessments is to improve student achievement.

Chapters 14 and 15 will examine student proficiency in the two subject areas assessed in 2009/10 - English language arts and mathematics. The K-12 School Profile System website provides additional information on provincial assessments conducted during previous years (www.ed.gov.nl.ca/sch_rep/pro_year.htm).

For each grade level assessed (i.e., primary, elementary and intermediate), a brief overview of the skills students are expected to know is provided. For a complete list of curriculum outcomes associated with English language arts and mathematics, readers can refer to the curriculum guides available on the Department of Education's web site (www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/curriculum/index.html).

The information provided is based on student responses to both open constructed and multiple choice questions. The responses to the open constructed response questions are evaluated on a five level rubric⁸ where five is the highest level a student can obtain. The percentages listed throughout these two chapters refer to the percentage of students possessing at least an appropriate understanding of the content area. The provincial standard for CRT assessments is that 85% of students be assessed at level 3 or above.

⁸ A rubric is a scoring tool that uses a set of criteria and standards linked to learning objectives to assess student performance.

