



May and June are the months in which all students in Grades 3, 6, 9 and 12 are expected to write Provincial Achievement Tests and Diploma Exams in the province of Alberta. The provincial testing program is an example of summative assessment, or assessments given to students at the end of a unit or program of study. Although there has been a great deal of debate and discussion over the past number of years regarding the value of these tests, they continue to be used as one measure of accountability for all schools and school systems across the province. Summative assessments, like the provincial achievement tests, are one measure of a student's achievement, and should be used in combination with a number of other assessments to determine a student's achievement as well as their learning needs.

Referring to Alberta Education's website, <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/resources/exams.aspx>, the purpose of the provincial testing program is to:

- determine if students are learning what they are expected to learn;
- report to Albertans how well students have achieved provincial standards at given points in their schooling;
- assist schools, authorities, and the province in monitoring and improving student learning.

Information about student performance on achievement tests is provided to schools, school authorities, parents, and the public so that they may know how well students in their schools are meeting local targets and provincial expectations.

Monitoring and improving student learning involves much more than administering an annual test on a single day. Ongoing assessment, or formative assessment, takes place in our schools and classrooms daily, providing timely and pertinent information for teachers to use in guiding students' learning.

Much valuable information is gathered in our classrooms daily. Teachers often develop their own tests and quizzes, tailored to the material they are teaching. Ongoing student assessments also include daily observations, the use of locally-developed assessment rubrics, group work, project work, oral presentations, multi-media presentations, large and small group discussions, interviews and student-teacher conferences.

When discussing the variety of assessment strategies used throughout our school system, it is also important to acknowledge the value of student self-assessment. An individual student's self-evaluation is a very credible source of information for teachers. Students can articulate what they have learned as well as identify areas where they need more assistance. An effective method of allowing students to examine their own body of work is through the development of student portfolios. By gathering examples of student learning over the course of a semester, a year, or multiple years, students, parents and teachers can measure the growth and development of a student's skills and knowledge.

Both formative and summative assessments assist educators in truly meeting individual student learning needs through the personalization of student learning.

Personalizing learning for all of our students is a primary focus in the Calgary Board of Education's Three-Year Education Plan (2009-2012). In order to effectively meet all students' learning needs, each teacher must constantly assess the skills and knowledge students are gaining in each curricular program of study. Using both formative and summative assessments allows educators to gain the most comprehensive view of a student's achievements and their future learning needs.

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