

CHAPTER 2: PROVINCIAL ASSESSMENTS

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

Criterion-Referenced Tests (CRTs)

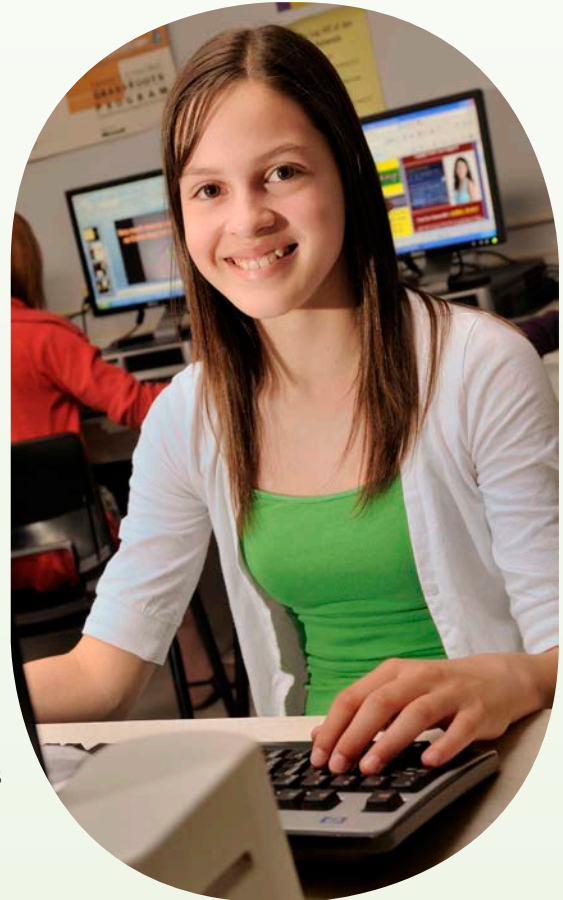
Students in Grades 3, 6 and 9 complete CRTs every spring. These results provide information to teachers, administrators, district personnel and the Department of Education which may be used to:

- 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 3 and 4 will explore student performance in the two subject areas assessed in 2010/11 - English language arts and mathematics. Where possible, performance trends over the past five years (i.e. 2006/07 – 2010/11) will be provided. 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.gov.nl.ca/edu/sp/main.htm).

The information provided is based on student responses to constructed response and multiple choice questions. Constructed response questions are evaluated on a five level rubric¹ 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.



¹ A rubric is a scoring tool that uses a set of criteria and standards linked to learning objectives to assess student performance.

The Mathematics CRT

During 2007, the Department of Education announced the *Excellence in Mathematics Strategy*. This new strategy was comprised of three main components:

- *Curriculum Development and Review* focused on the nature and amount of curriculum covered and a review of textbooks;
- *Excellence in Teaching and Learning* focused on professional development and resources for teachers; and,
- *Parent Support* focused on developing materials and providing sessions/ workshops to assist parents at home.

Under this strategy, an independent review of the provincial mathematics curriculum was undertaken. This review made a series of recommendations that centered around four key areas:

- New curriculum, adopted from the Western and Northern Canadian Protocol, which will follow a three-year implementation schedule;
- New textbooks for all grade levels;
- Significant initial and sustained professional development for teachers; and,
- Development of guidelines for the assignment of homework.

In March 2008, the Department of Education announced it accepted these recommendations which led to significant changes being made to the mathematics curriculum (Department of Education, 2008). Starting in September 2008, the new mathematics curriculum was phased in and by September 2013 all grade levels will have the new curriculum in place. For Grade 9 students, the new curriculum was introduced in September 2010. In response, the mathematics CRT was updated to assess the new outcomes defined in the curriculum. Due to this, trend data on student performance over the past five years is not reported. The 2010/11 results will serve as the starting point to chart future results.

Public Examinations

Chapter 5 explores the performance of high school students on provincial 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.

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.

