

Chapter 5: English Language Arts Assessment

In 2014/15, students in Grades 3, 6 and 9 completed the English Language Arts (ELA) provincial assessment. This chapter will explore how students performed at the district, regional and provincial levels. In addition, gender differences and five year provincial trends will be highlighted. This five year trend actually spans six school years (2009/10 to 2014/15) because the ELA provincial assessment was not administered 2013/14. In addition, it must be noted that the format and scoring of the ELA assessment was revised in 2012/13. While provincial multiyear trends are reported, the charts must be viewed with caution.

For each grade level, a brief summary of some of the potential skills and knowledge students may have developed is provided. The English Language Arts curriculum guides provide a complete list of grade level expectations. These documents can be accessed on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's website (<http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/curriculum/index.html>). This is followed by reporting student performance using two indicators:

- *Average score* based on student performance on the multiple choice section, and
- *Student proficiency* or the percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations. This indicator is based on student performance on a series of constructed response questions. For these questions, students must write a response rather than selecting an answer from a list.



Primary level

The primary years span Kindergarten to Grade 3. This is when children begin to develop literacy skills and growth in language development. During this time, students are provided with the opportunities to:

- develop language skills with a focus on oral/spoken language;
- use the processes of thinking: predicting, sequencing, synthesizing, self-monitoring, analyzing, evaluating, inferring, and making connections;
- interact and engage with a variety of texts daily;
- learn how to view, think and respond critically to texts that they encounter;
- create imaginative representations;
- use the four cueing systems to develop proficient reading and writing skills; and
- learn to speak, listen, read, view, write, and represent through an integrated teaching style.

(Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2015, p. 40).

The provincial assessment occurs at the end of the primary stage – Grade 3. It focuses on measuring student ability in two components: reading and writing. For the reading component, students are provided with two types of writing (fiction and nonfiction) to read and answer a series of questions. To assess writing, students are expected to create two samples of their writing. For one sample, they are provided with a written prompt and a visual prompt for the second.



Grade 3 reading and writing performance

Students did well on the multiple choice section of the assessment with an overall average score of 83.6%. Across the province, average scores ranged from a low of 79.6% in the Labrador region to 84.0% in the Eastern region (see figure 11a). Along gender lines, there was little difference between the male and female average scores (82.7% and 84.6% respectively).

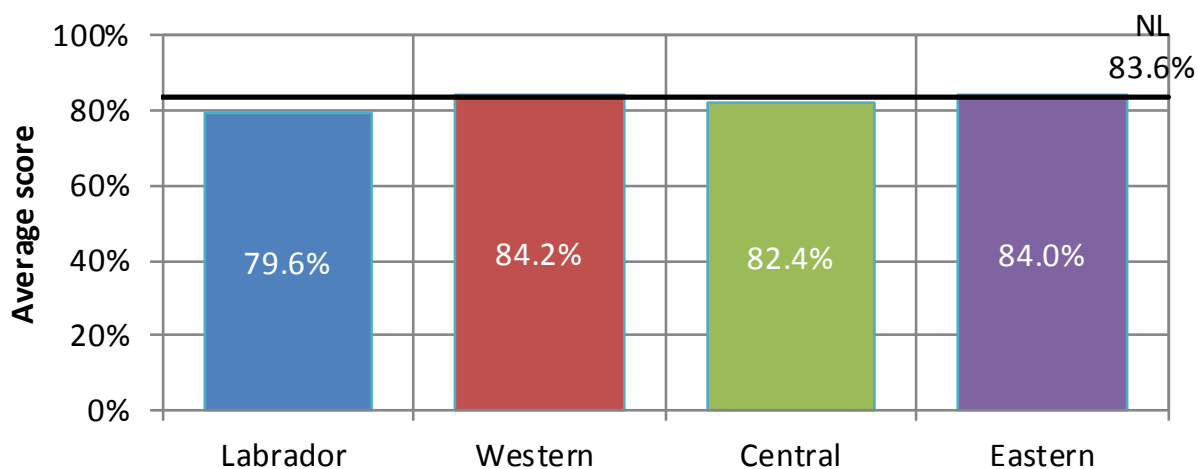
Students tended to perform slightly better in reading than writing (see figure 11b). Provincially, 76.8% of the students assessed met or exceeded grade level expectations for reading. For writing, this percentage was 73.6%. Regionally, the percentage ranged from 71.3% in the Labrador region to 77.4% in Eastern region for reading compared to between 64.7% of students in the Labrador region to 77.1% in Eastern.

A higher percentage of girls than boys were proficient in both reading and writing (see figure 11c). The largest gender gap was in writing where the percentage of girls meeting or exceeding grade level expectations was 16.2 percentage points higher than the boys (82.0% vs 65.8%). For reading, the gender gap was 8.4 points.

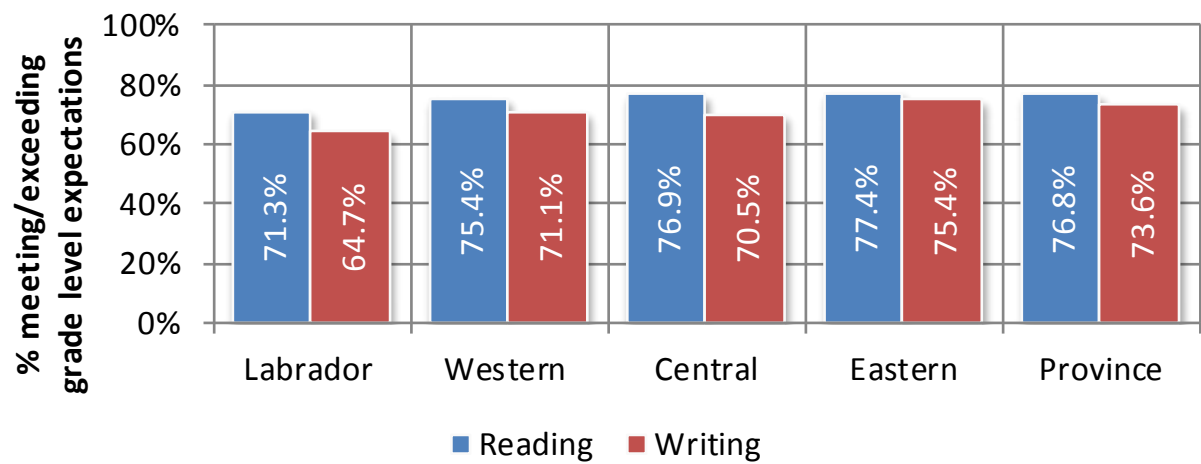


Figure 11: Grade 3 student performance (2014/15)

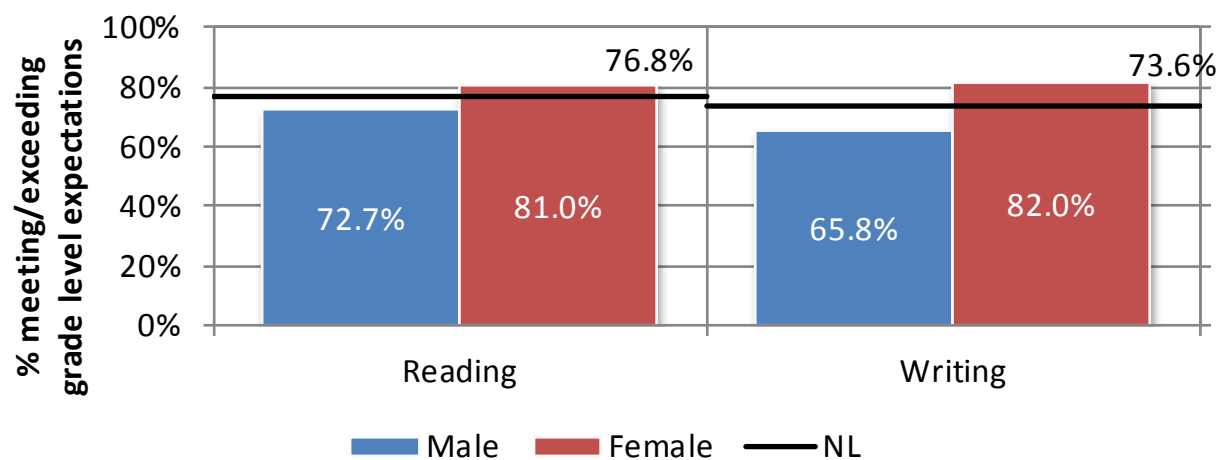
(a) Average reading scores across the province



(b) Student proficiency



(c) Gender difference in provincial proficiency levels



(Source: Table 11)

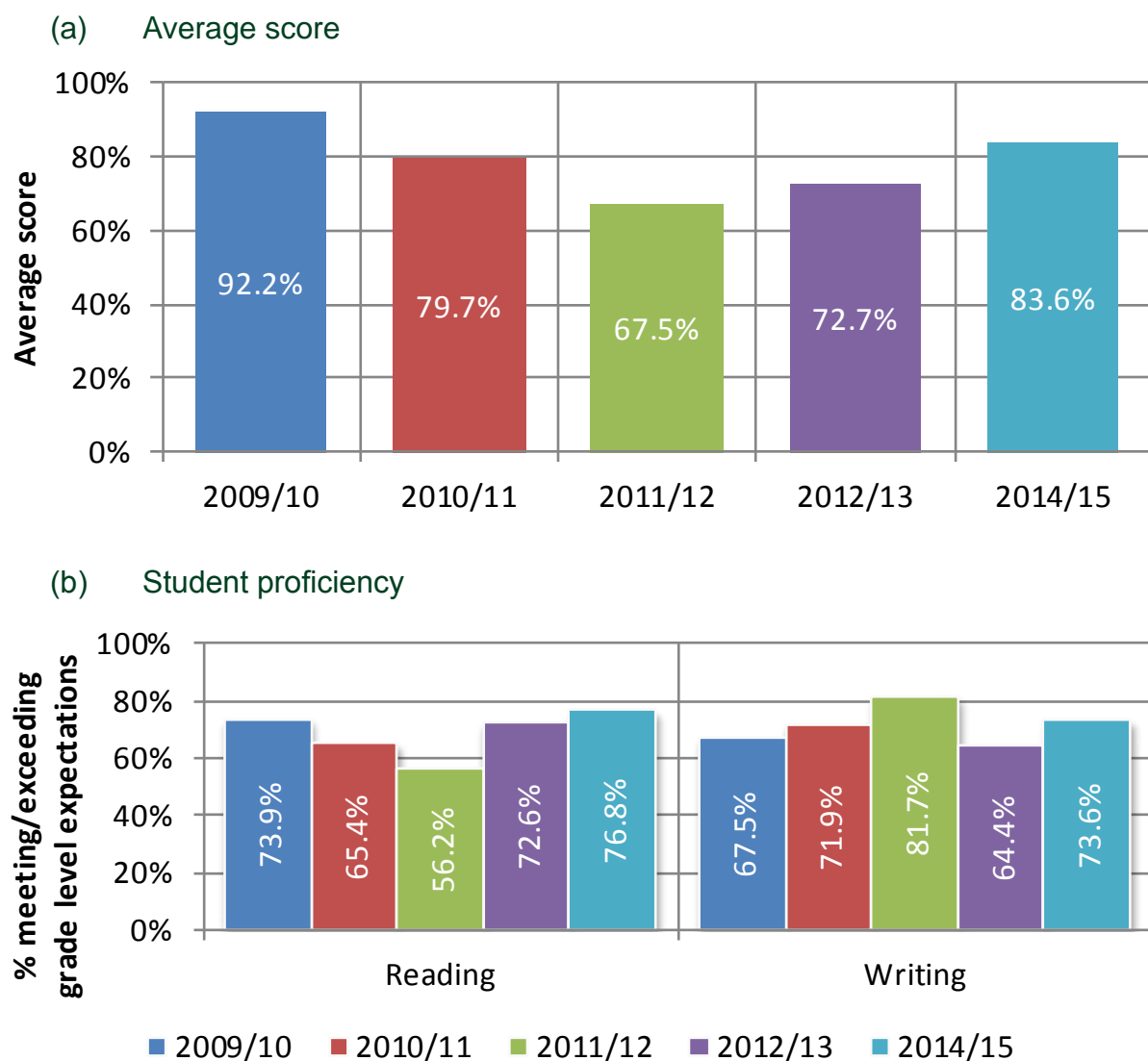


Trends in student performance

Over the past five years, student performance has varied (see figure 12). For reading, the average score and percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations decreased each year between 2009/10 and 2011/12. The average score declined by 24.7 points and the percentage of proficient students declined by 17.7 points. In 2012/13, this stopped with both percentages steadily increasing in each of the next two assessments (by 16.1 points and 20.6 points respectively between 2011/12 and 2014/15).

For writing, a different trend can be seen (see figure 12b). The percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations steadily increased between 2009/10 and 2011/12 before decreasing by 17.3 points (from 81.7% in 2011/12 to 64.4% in 2012/13). This was followed by an increase to 73.6% in 2014/15.

Figure 12: Provincial trends in Grade 3 performance (2009/10 – 2014/15)



(Source: Table 12)

Elementary level

During the elementary years, students continue to build on the skills developed during the primary years. Students are encouraged to take part in various activities and experiences that will help them become skilled in using language for learning and communicating in both personal and public contexts. Specifically, students are provided with the opportunities to:

- analyze issues/messages in texts related to fairness, equity and social justice;
- analyze the structure and elements of a variety of texts;
- apply knowledge of language conventions in creating texts;
- be creative in generating and developing ideas for texts;
- create increasingly complex texts, using a variety of text forms;
- extend endurance for independent listening, reading and viewing;
- navigate appropriate texts fluently with expression and confidence; and
- use cognitive strategies to make meaning of more complex texts.

(Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2015, p.40).

This provincial assessment occurs at the end of the elementary stage - Grade 6. As in the primary level, the elementary assessment measures student ability in reading and writing. To assess reading, students are asked to read two types of writing (fiction and nonfiction) and answer a series of multiple choice and closed response questions. For the writing component, students are expected to write two pieces of text. For the first piece, students are given a written prompt to start and a visual prompt is used for the second piece.



Grade 6 reading and writing performance

Students performed well on the multiple choice section of the assessment with a provincial average score of 81.0%. Regionally, the average score ranged from 76.7% in the Labrador region to 81.5% in Eastern (see figure 13a). Along gender lines, the male and female average scores were quite similar with only 2.3 points separating the two (79.8% and 82.1% respectively).

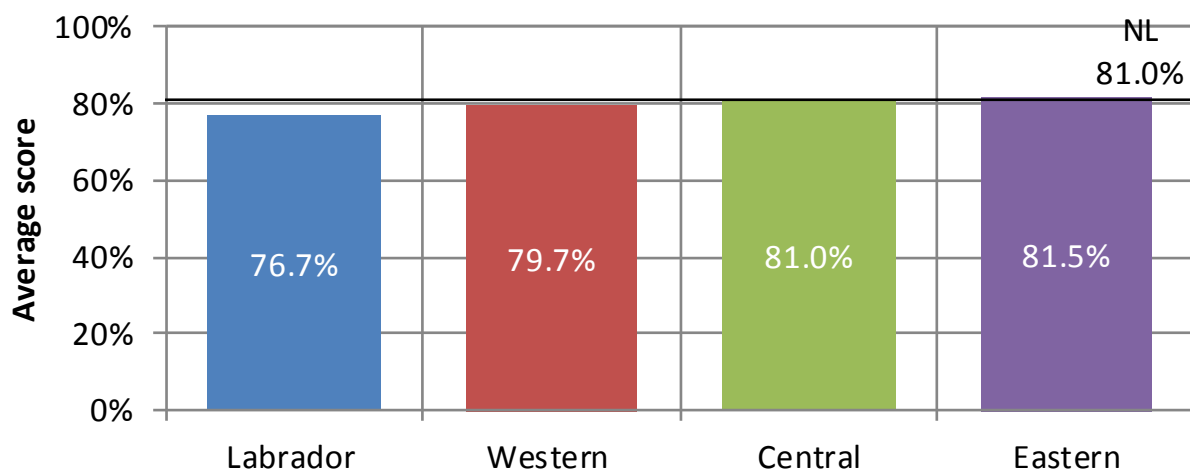
The majority of Grade 6 students were proficient in English language arts with over 85% of students meeting or exceeding the grade level expectations for both reading and writing. As in the primary assessment, students tended to perform better in reading than writing (see figure 13b). Across the province, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations for reading ranged from 82.6% in the Labrador region to 88.1% in Eastern. For writing, the percentage ranged from 76.6% in the Labrador region to 85.9% in Eastern.



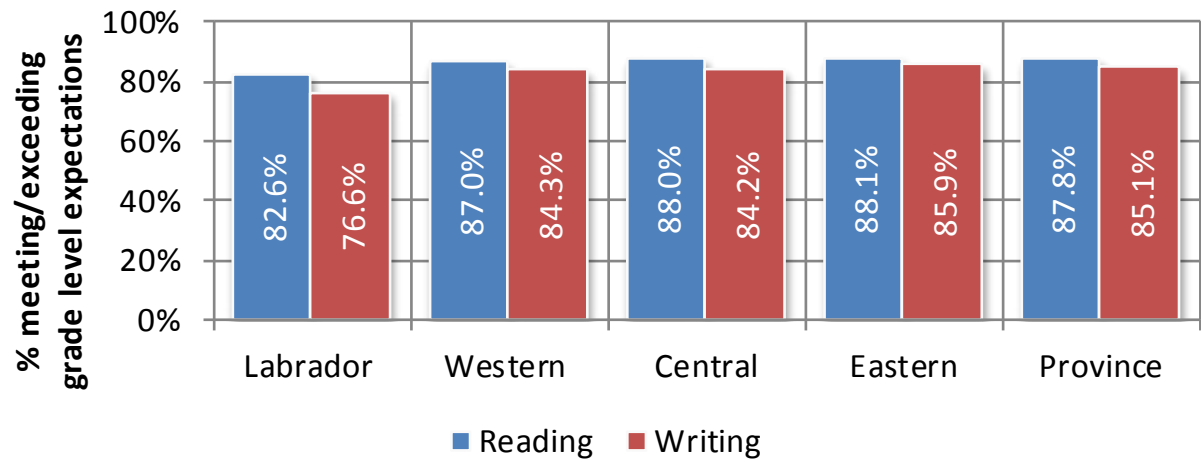
Overall, a higher percentage of girls met or exceeded grade level expectations in both reading and writing than boys (see figure 13c). As was the case in the primary assessment, the largest gender gap was in writing where the percentage of proficient girls was 13.9 points higher than the boys (92.0% vs 78.2%).

Figure 13: Grade 6 student performance (2014/15)

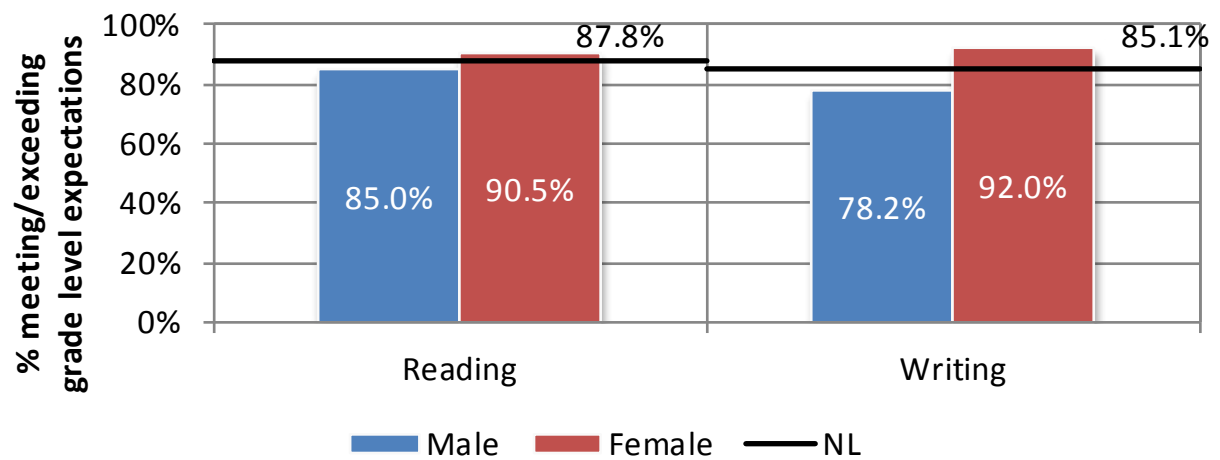
(a) Average reading scores across the province



(b) Student proficiency



(c) Gender difference in provincial proficiency levels



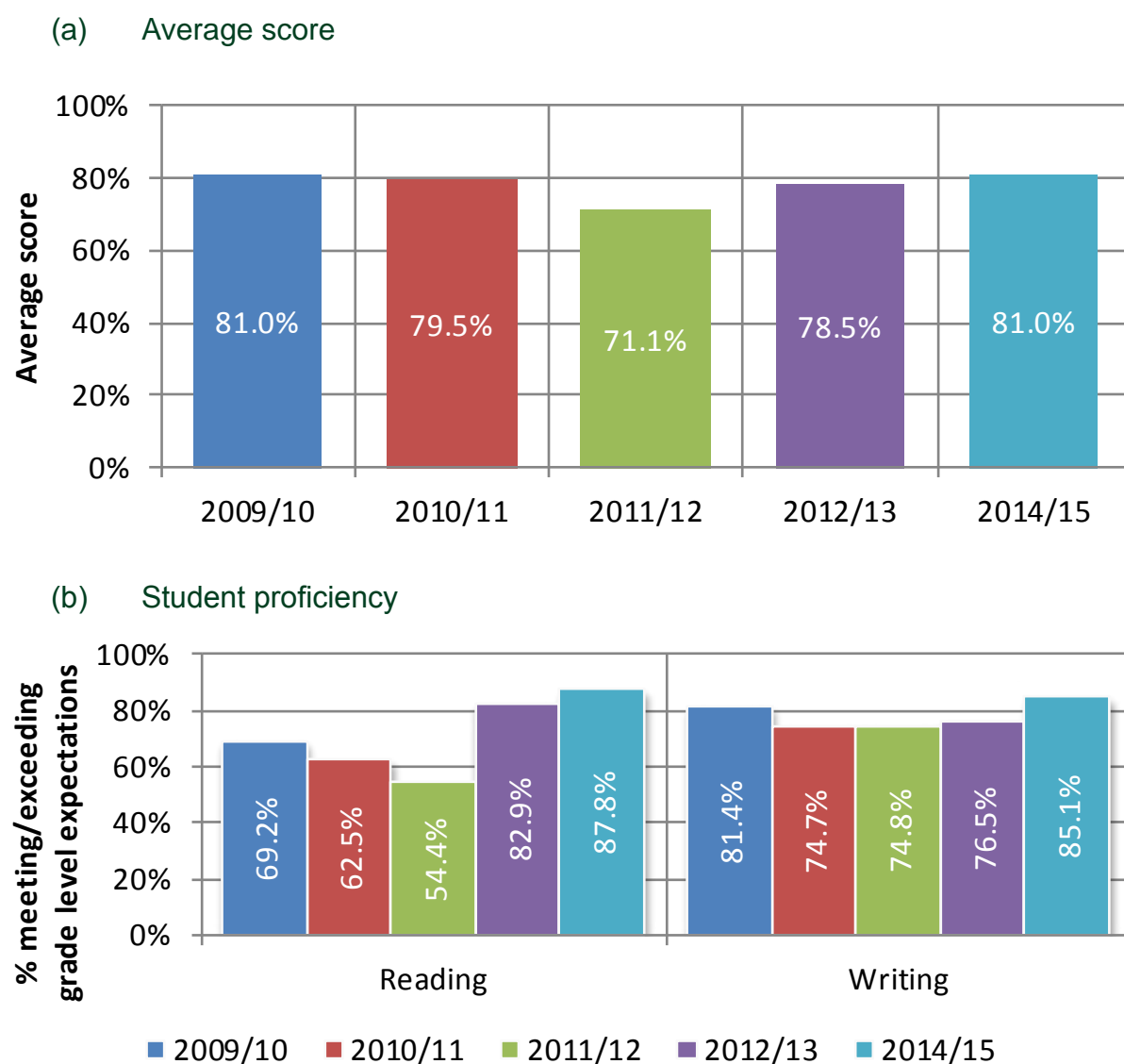
(Source: Table 13)



Trends in student performance

For the most part, student performance has been relatively stable over the past five assessments. As shown in figure 14a, with the exception of 2011/12, only 2.5 points separate the highest and lowest average reading scores. Student proficiency levels present somewhat of a different picture (see figure 14b). For reading, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations followed the same pattern as in the primary assessment – decreasing during the first three years followed by an increase. The percentage of proficient students decreased by 14.8 points between 2009/10 and 2011/12 followed by a sharp increase of 33.4% 2011/12 and 2014/15.

Figure 14: Provincial trends in Grade 6 performance (2009/10 – 2014/15)¹



(Source: Table 14)

¹ The ELA assessment was not administered in 2013/14.

Intermediate level

The intermediate years cover Grades 7 to 9. During this time, curriculum focuses on students' interaction with and the creation of texts. It is through this discussion and creation of various written work that students can grow in both their critical thinking and understanding of the impact language has on them and others. Specifically, students are provided with opportunities to:

- articulate their thinking about their learning as producers and consumers of information;
- be creative and imaginative in their oral communication, writing and representing;
- independently apply strategies when navigating or creating texts;
- interact with a wide variety of texts including, digital texts, drama, fiction, non-fiction, media texts, poetry and visual texts; and
- think and respond critically to texts they read, view or hear.

(Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2015, p.41).

The intermediate level provincial assessment occurs during Grade 9. This assessment measures student ability in reading and writing. Students are asked to read a sample of non-fiction text and answer a series of multiple choice and closed response questions. For the writing component, students will write one piece of text using a visual prompt as a starting point.



Grade 9 reading and writing performance

The provincial average score on the multiple choice section was 68.4%. There was little difference in student performance across the four regions with the average score ranging between 64.7% in the Labrador region to 68.7% in Eastern (see figure 15a). Along gender lines, the male and female average scores were quite similar with less than two points separating them (67.5% and 69.2% respectively).

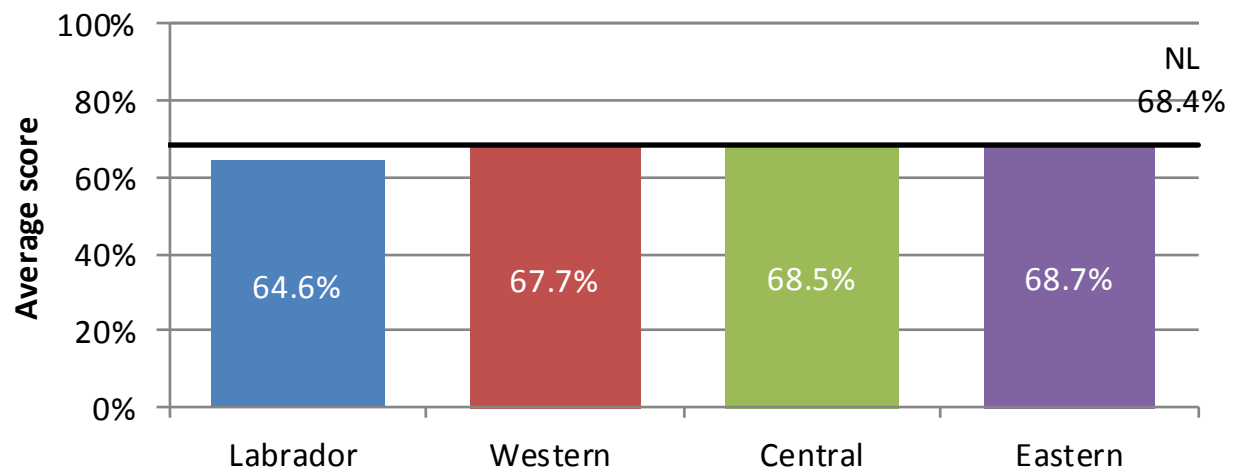
In contrast to the Grade 3 and 6 assessment results, students performed slightly better on the writing component as compared to reading (see figure 15b). Across the province, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations for reading ranged from 66.5% in the Labrador region to 82.6% in Western region. For writing, this percentage ranged from 71.4% in the Labrador region to 86.8% in Central.

Girls fared better than boys on the assessment. Overall, a higher percentage of girls met or exceeded grade level expectations in both reading and writing than boys (see figure 15c). The largest gender gap was in writing where the percentage of proficient girls was 14.5 points higher than the boys (92.8% vs 78.3%). A similar trend was seen in both the Grade 3 and 6 assessment results.

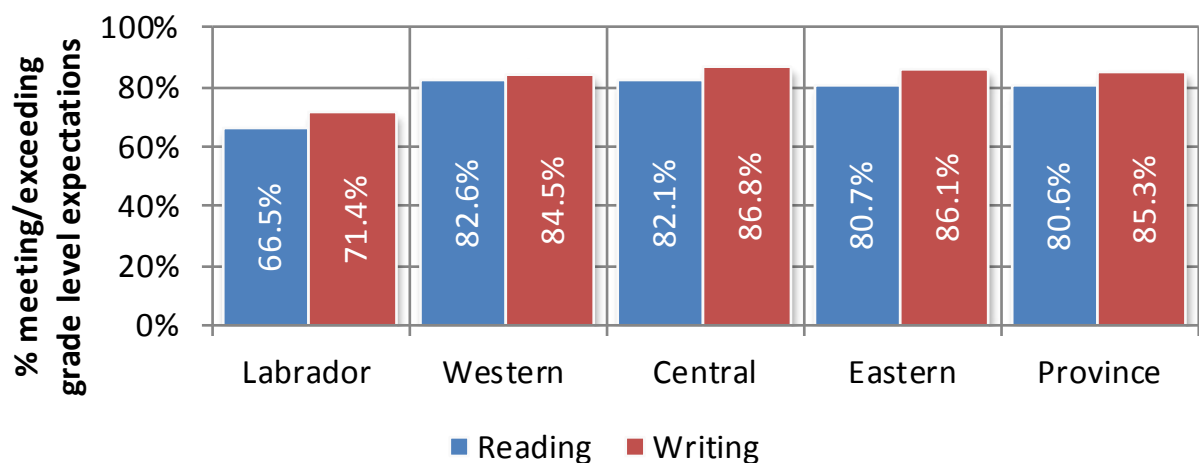


Figure 15: Grade 9 student performance (2014/15)

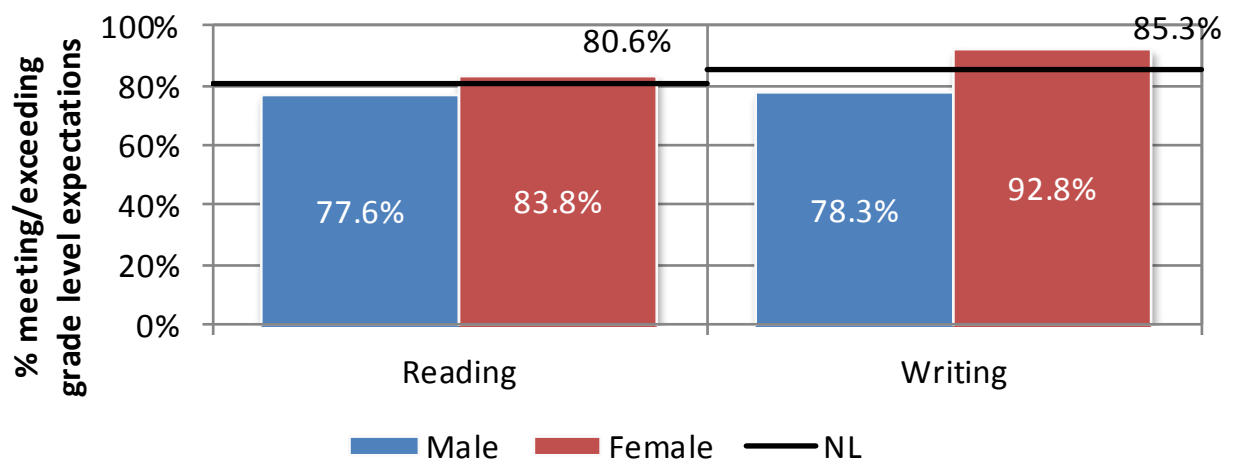
(a) Average reading scores across the province



(b) Student proficiency



(c) Gender difference in provincial proficiency levels



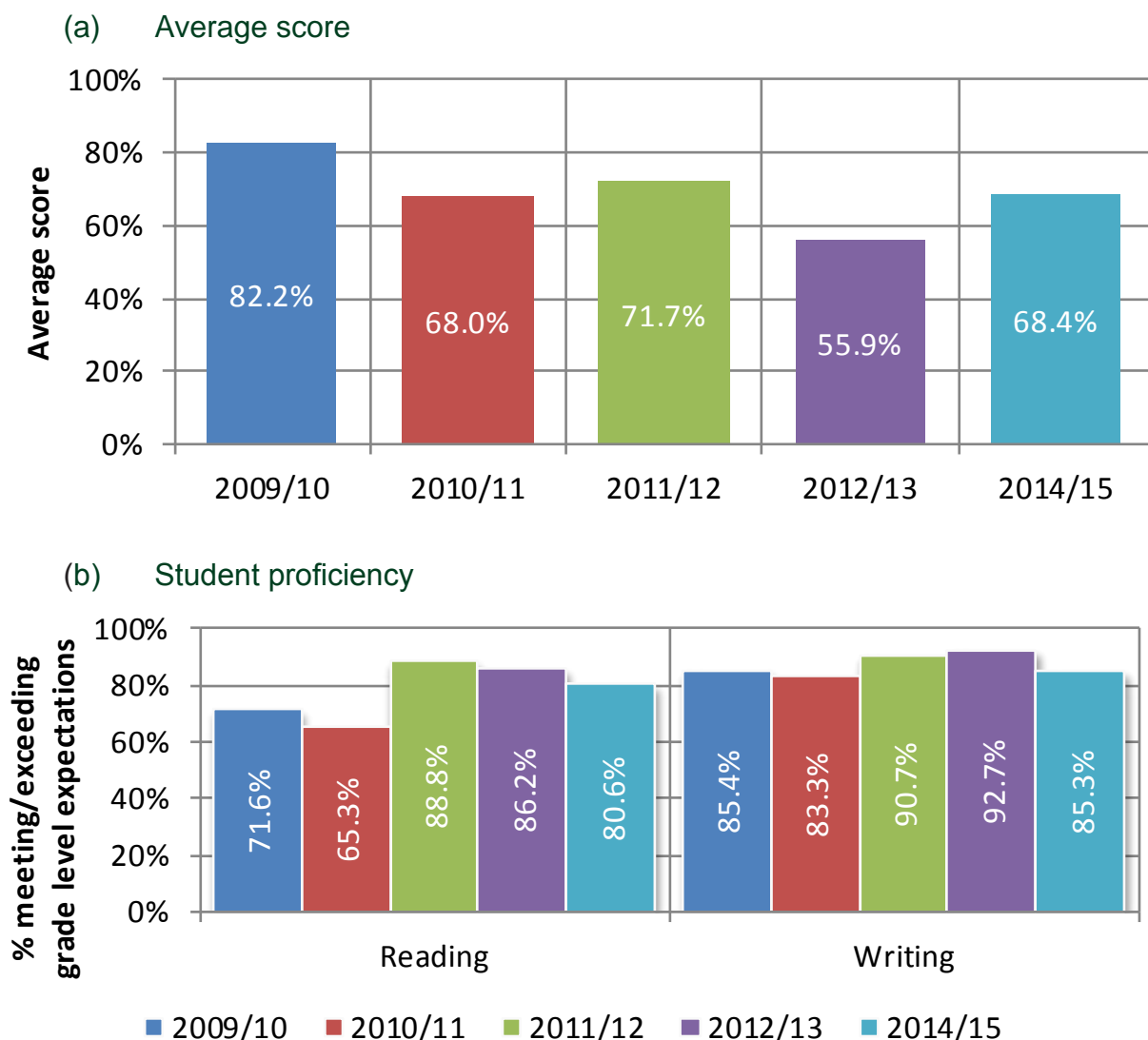
(Source: Table 15)

Trends in student performance

For the most part, student performance on the reading and writing components has varied (see figure 16). For reading, an overall decline occurred between 2009/10 and 2012/13 followed by a rebound in 2014/15 when the average score increased by 12.5 points (from 55.9% to 68.4%). The percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations has gradually declined in each of the last three provincial assessments (from peaking at 88.8% in 2011/12 to 80.6% in 2014/15).

For writing, performance has been fairly stable. The percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations has ranged from 85.4% in 2009/10 to 85.3% in 2014/15. There were two years that stand out – 2011/12 and 2012/13. In both years, the percentage of proficient students was over 90% (see figure 16b).

Figure 16: Provincial trends in Grade 9 performance (2009/10 – 2014/15)²



Source: Table 16)

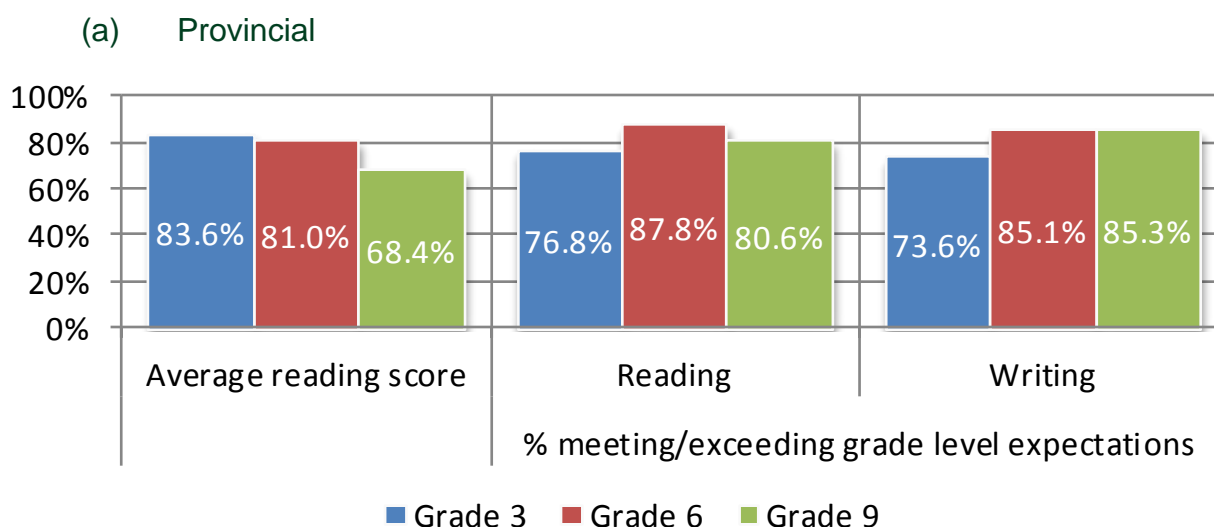
Student performance across the grades

Since provincial assessments occur at three different grade levels, the opportunity exists to explore how performance changes as students progress through the grades. Figure 17 reports the average scores and the percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations for Grades 3, 6 and 9 for the 2014/15 assessment. As shown, there were distinct differences present. For example, while average scores decline between Grades 3 and 9, the percentage of proficient students is on an upward trend. For writing proficiency, the percentage of students meeting or exceeding grade level expectations increases from Grade 3 to Grade 6 and remains there for Grade 9.

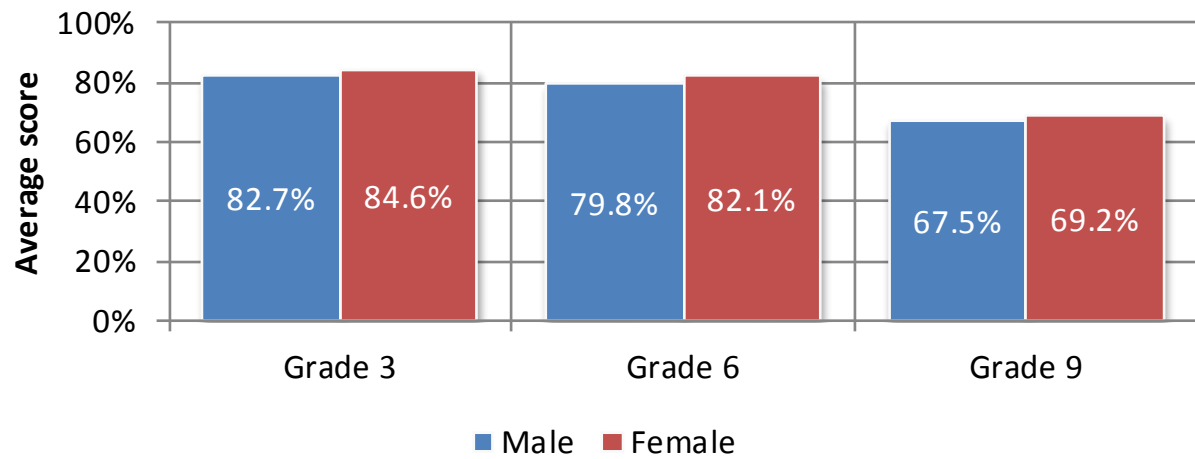
While the gender gap remains quite similar within each grade, it varies based on the component (i.e. reading or writing) assessed and how it was assessed. For example, approximately two points separate the male and female average scores in each grade (see figure 17b). However, approximately 15 points separate the percentage of males and females in each grade who met or exceeded grade level expectations for writing (see figure 17c).



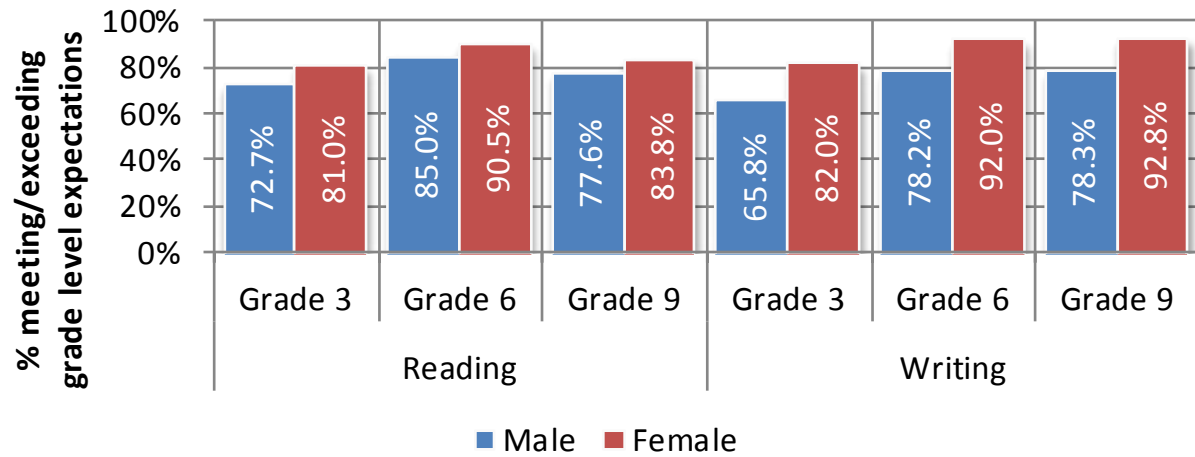
Figure 17: Change in student performance (2014/15)



(b) Gender differences in average reading scores



(c) Gender differences in reading and writing proficiency levels



(Source: Table 17)

