

## National and International Assessments Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What are national and international assessments?

**National assessments** are tests written by students from across Canada. Results from these assessments allow for comparisons in student achievement over time and among the provinces and the Yukon (*note*: The Northwest Territories and Nunavut do not currently participate in national assessments).

**International assessments** are tests written by students from around the world. Results from these assessments are presented by jurisdiction. A *jurisdiction* is a country or a region (such as a province) with its own education system. The results from international assessments allow for comparisons in student achievement over time and among national and international jurisdictions.

### 2. In which national and international assessments does B.C. currently participate?

B.C. participates in the following national and international assessments:

- Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) – Assesses Grade 8 students in reading, mathematics and science
- Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) – Assesses 15-year-old students in reading, mathematics and science
- Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) – Assesses Grade 4 students in reading

### 3. Why does B.C. participate in national and international assessments?

- To help determine how our education system performs in relation to education systems nationally and from around the world,
- To gather information on factors that affect educational outcomes provincially, nationally, and around the world,
- To help ensure that B.C. students have the skills and knowledge to meet the demands of a global society.

### 4. Do all B.C. students participate in national and international assessments?

No. National and international assessments are done on a sample basis, which means that only some students in some schools participate. The number of B.C. students included in the sample varies from one assessment to another and ranges from 2000 to 4000 students. It is possible for national and international assessments to be done on a sample basis because results are required at the provincial level only. The purpose of these assessments is to compare achievement among provinces and countries, not to provide student, school, or district-level achievement information.

### 5. How are schools and students selected to participate?

The sampling takes place in two steps. First, schools are randomly selected from a list of all public and independent schools that have students at the target age/grade. Once the schools have been selected, individual students or classes of students from those schools are randomly selected. In small schools, all students at the target age/grade may be selected to participate.

### 6. Are selected schools required to participate?

Yes. For more information, see the [Large Scale Assessment Policy Document](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/large_scale_assess.htm) ([http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/large\\_scale\\_assess.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/large_scale_assess.htm)) and the [Student Learning Assessment Ministerial Order](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/e/m60-94.pdf) (<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/e/m60-94.pdf>).

**7. What do the assessments look like and how long do they take?**

Usually, the assessments contain both multiple-choice and open-ended questions and take about two hours to administer. In order to better understand factors related to student achievement, short questionnaires are also administered to students, teachers, principals, and sometimes parents.

**Sample questions** and copies of the **questionnaires** for each assessment are available on the Ministry of Education website at:

[www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/nat\\_int\\_pubs.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/nat_int_pubs.htm)

**8. Who creates national and international assessments?**

Teams of representatives, including teachers, from a number of the participating jurisdictions develop the assessments. All participating jurisdictions have the opportunity to provide input on the assessments and the questionnaires.

**9. Do students need to study for national and international assessments?**

No. These assessments are “snapshots in time” that generally cover topics students have already learned. Students should take the tests seriously and try to do their best.

**10. Are students assessed in different languages in different jurisdictions?**

Yes. International assessments are written in many different languages around the world. Strict translation procedures are used to ensure that an assessment is equivalent in all languages.

**11. Do French Immersion students write national and international assessments in French?**

No. B.C. French Immersion students write national and international assessments in English. Only students registered in the Conseil scolaire francophone (SD 93) write the assessments in French.

**12. When are results released?**

This varies from one assessment to another. In general, assessments are written in the spring, and results are released one and a half years later in the fall.

**13. Are results reported at the student, school and district levels?**

No. Results are reported at the provincial and national levels only.

**14. How does B.C. do on national and international assessments?**

Generally, B.C. does very well on national and international assessments. Results are available on the Ministry of Education website at:

[www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/nat\\_int\\_pubs.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/nat_int_pubs.htm)

In most reports, results are presented in terms of *ranges*. When the ranges of two jurisdictions overlap, it means that there is no statistically significant difference between the two jurisdictions. When the ranges do not overlap, it means that there is a statistically significant difference between the two jurisdictions.

**15. Where can I get more information on national and international assessments?**

You will find more information on national and international assessments on the Ministry of Education website at: [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/nat\\_int\\_pubs.htm](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/nat_int_pubs.htm)

If you have additional questions, please send them to [NatIntQuestions@gov.bc.ca](mailto:NatIntQuestions@gov.bc.ca)