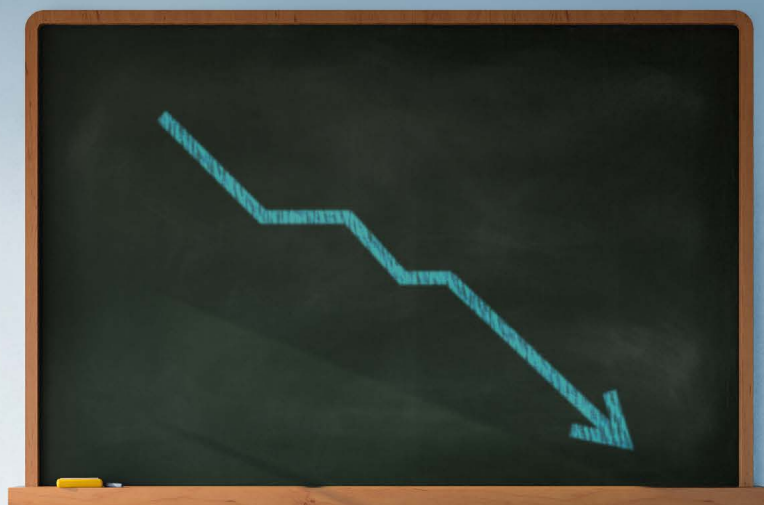


THE DECLINE OF STANDARDIZED TESTING IN CANADA

Michael Zwaagstra



2022
Fraser Institute

The Decline of Standardized Testing in Canada

by Michael Zwaagstra

Contents

Executive Summary / i

Introduction / 1

Current Status of Standardized Testing / 2

Key Change #1—Less Focus on Content / 4

Key Change #2—Declining Emphasis on Standardized Tests / 6

Key Change #3—Fewer Standardized Tests / 7

A Tale of Two Provinces—Manitoba and Prince Edward Island / 9

Standardized Tests and COVID-19—a Cautionary Warning / 10

Conclusion / 11

References / 13

About the Author / 16

Publishing Information / 17

Purpose, Funding, & Independence / 18

Supporting the Fraser Institute / 18

About the Fraser Institute / 19

Peer review—validating the accuracy of our research / 19

Editorial Advisory Board / 20

Executive Summary

This study examines how standardized testing has changed in Canada over the last twenty years. There are three clear national trends: [1] standardized tests today place less emphasis on subject-specific knowledge; [2] standardized tests are not given the same value as they once were; [3] standardized tests are administered less often and at fewer grade levels. In addition, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the future of standardized testing in Canada is of some concern.

The first trend is that standardized tests today place less emphasis on subject-specific knowledge than they did twenty years ago. Instead, most of these tests now focus on generic literacy and numeracy skills. This is consistent with a general shift among many provinces away from knowledge in their curriculum guides. Nowhere is this trend more apparent than in the province of British Columbia, where the new curriculum places a strong emphasis on so-called higher-order learning rather than on knowledge and memorization. The problem with this approach is it assumes that literacy and numeracy are easily transferable skills when the reality is that these skills are heavily dependent on content. Unfortunately, when provincial assessments no longer measure content knowledge, there is little incentive for teachers to help students acquire the background knowledge they need to be successful.

The second major trend is that standardized tests are not given the same value as they once were. In many provinces, standardized tests (other than those written in Grade 12) do not count toward students' final grades. Even in the provinces where they do count, the percentage value of these tests has steadily declined. As a case in point, Alberta's Grade-12 diploma exams were once worth 50% of a student's final grades. Several years ago, this was reduced 30%, and for the 2021/22 school year, is down to only 10%. Students are less likely to take these tests seriously if they know it will not have a significant impact on their final grades. While it is understandable that standardized tests written by younger students would not be included in final grades, it is disappointing that they often do not affect high-school grades either. It makes sense for standardized tests to have at least some value, particularly at the high-school level.

The third national trend is that standardized tests are administered less often and at fewer grade levels. The shift away from standardized testing in Saskatchewan and Manitoba has been particularly striking. While Saskatchewan used to administer standardized tests several times between Grades 4 and 11, it now only has standardized tests at the Grade-12 level, and even these tests are written only by students in courses with non-accredited teachers. Meanwhile, Manitoba had once planned to implement standardized testing

in the four core subjects of mathematics, English or French language arts, science, and social studies at Grades 3, 6, 9, and 12. Today, Manitoba students write standardized tests only at the Grade-12 level and in only two subjects.

The study also notes how two smaller provinces, Manitoba and Prince Edward Island, have gone in opposite directions with standardized testing: Prince Edward Island added more tests and Manitoba scrapped nearly all of them. Interestingly, while Manitoba students once outperformed Prince Edward Island students on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), these two provinces have essentially switched places. It is striking that two provinces that chose different paths regarding standardized testing have seen such disparate results on their PISA scores.

Finally, the study raises a concern about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on standardized testing. At the outset of the pandemic, many provinces cancelled standardized tests outright, or at least made them optional. While this initial response was understandable, standardized tests are now being disrupted for the third year in a row. Unless provincial governments are prepared to defend the value of these tests, it will be tempting to give in to political pressure and abolish them entirely. As life gradually returns to normal in Canada, it is important that standardized tests not become a casualty of this pandemic.

In the end, provincial governments need to place a stronger emphasis on standardized testing. If Canadian students are going to successfully compete against other students from around the world, they need to be well educated. Standardized testing is an important component of a quality education system.

Introduction

Next to health care, education is the biggest line item in every provincial budget. Providing an education for every student is not cheap, nor should anyone expect it to be. It costs money to build schools, hire teachers, develop curriculum guides, and purchase textbooks for students. Virtually everyone agrees that providing a quality education to the next generation is an important goal for any society.

Obviously, it is important to ensure that all students receive a quality education. This is why we must be able to accurately measure student academic achievement. Because teacher-created assessments vary from school to school and even from teacher to teacher, it is important to use standardized tests when drawing conclusions about student achievement on a broad scale. As Poulsen and Hewson (2013) explain, several characteristics must be present for a test to be considered standardized. Specifically, standardized tests are administered with consistent instructions, written by all students at the same time and within the same time limit, and scored in the same manner. Standardization makes it possible to compare student achievement data from teacher to teacher and even from classroom to classroom.

However, it is important to note that this popular definition of standardized testing differs from the technical definition of standardized testing used by social scientists. In the social sciences, a standardized test yields scores standardized against a specified grade level or age population. Results are reported on z-scaled scores, typically percentiles, and reports the relative ranking of each test-taker compared to all other test-takers. Most provincial assessments administered in K-12 schools do not meet this technical definition of standardized testing, although they do meet the popular definition. Hence, the popular definition is used throughout this paper.

Unlike most other countries, Canada does not have a national department of education. This is because Section 92 of the Constitution Act (1867) places education under provincial jurisdiction. As a result, each province is responsible for its own education system. While provinces can and do work together on shared education goals, there is significant variation from province to province. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify general curricular and assessment trends. To evaluate how standardized testing in Canada has changed over time, it is important to first outline what standardized testing looks like today in each province.

Current Status of Standardized Testing

Because education is a provincial, rather than federal, responsibility, there is no national repository of standardized exams, nor are there any national standards that students from all provinces must meet. As a result, the websites of provincial education departments provide the primary source of information about the nature and frequency of standardized testing across Canada. In a recent review of provincial math assessments, Allison and Geloso (2021), noted that these tests differ greatly from each other and that commonly used reporting categories such as “does not meet the standard” and “meets the standards” lack the necessary precision for proper comparisons. Nevertheless, there is sufficient information to make some general observations.

In British Columbia, all students in Grades 4 and 7 write the Foundations Skills Assessment (FSA) on an annual basis (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021: *Foundation Skills Assessment*). The FSA is administered in the fall and measures the reading, writing, and numeracy skills of students. Data from the FSA is used to help provincial officials determine the literacy and numeracy skills of students across the province. Students in Grades 10 and 12 are also required to write literacy and numeracy assessments (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021: *Graduation Assessment*). Grade 10 students write both a numeracy and a literacy assessment while Grade 12 students are only required to write a literacy assessment. Students must complete each of these assessments in order to graduate.

Alberta students in Grades 6 and 9 are required to write Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT) annually (Alberta Education, no date: *Provincial Achievement Tests*). Students in both these grades write assessments in English or French language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Grade 12 students write diploma exams in the following courses: biology, chemistry, English or French language arts, mathematics, physics, science, and social studies. These exams are centrally marked and typically count for 30% of a student’s final grade in that course. However, as a result of the learning disruption caused by COVID-19, these exams have been temporarily reduced in value to 10% of a student’s final grade during the 2021/22 school year (Alberta Education, no date: *Diploma Exams*).

There is only a limited amount of standardized testing in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. In Saskatchewan, only Grade 12 students write standardized tests (known as provincial examinations) in English or French language arts, mathematics, chemistry, physics, and biology. These tests count for 40% of a student’s final grade in that course. However, students in courses taught by teachers who are provincially accredited in that subject area do not need to write these provincial examinations. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, all teachers have been temporarily deemed accredited for the 2021/22 school year (Saskatchewan Education, no date: *2021-22 Registrar’s Handbook for School Administrators*). The situation is similar in Manitoba except all Grade 12 students are required to write provincial exams in English or French language arts and mathematics.

These exams count for 30% of a student's final grade. Like several other provinces, the provincial examinations are on hold for the 2021/22 school year (Manitoba Education, no date: *Assessment and Evaluation*).

In Ontario, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is responsible for designing and administering standardized tests throughout the province. Students in Grades 3 and 6 must write assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics while Grade 9 students must write an assessment in mathematics. Grade 10 students must complete the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test. Successful completion of this test is a requirement for high school graduation (Education Quality and Accountability Office, no date: *Assessments*).

Quebec students write standardized tests in Grades 4, 6, 9, 10, and 11. Grade 4 students complete a French language arts exam while Grade 6 students write standardized exams in English or French language arts and mathematics. Meanwhile Grade 9 students write an exam in French language arts. Grade 10 students must write standardized exams in history of Quebec and Canada, mathematics, science and technology, and applied science and technology. Finally, Grade 11 students complete standardized exams in English and French language arts (Ministère d'Éducation, no date: *Guides for Parents*). [1]

There is significant variability in testing among the four Atlantic provinces. For example, students in New Brunswick write assessments in a variety of subjects during alternate years from Grades 4 to 12 (New Brunswick Education, no date: *Provincial Assessments*) while Nova Scotia students only write literacy and mathematics assessments in Grades 3, 6, and 8 (Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development, no date: *Nova Scotia Assessments*). In Prince Edward Island, students write literacy and mathematics tests in Grades 3 and 6. They also write mathematics tests in Grades 9 and 11 (Prince Edward Island Education, no date: *Provincial Assessments*). The students of Newfoundland & Labrador write the provincial reading and mathematics assessments in Grades 3, 6, and 9 (Newfoundland & Labrador Education, no date: *Provincial Reading and Mathematics Assessments*). They also write comprehensive final exams in a variety of Grade 12 courses (Newfoundland & Labrador Education, no date: *Public Exam Information*).

While there is significant variability across Canada, most provinces have generalized provincial assessments in literacy and numeracy during the K-8 grades while high school assessments in many provinces tend to be more content specific. In addition, COVID-19 has led to many standardized tests being cancelled or at least reduced in value. It is uncertain at this point whether these changes will be temporary or permanent.

Over the last twenty years, there have been some significant changes to standardized testing in Canada. Below, three clear national trends are identified and explained.

[1] Grade 12 is not administered in high school in Quebec but as part of the CEGEP program of public two-year college that follows high school. Thus, with the exception of select English private schools, secondary school in Quebec ends in grade 11 ("Secondary V").

Key Change #1—Less Focus on Content

Research is clear that there is a strong correlation between background knowledge and reading comprehension (Wexler, 2019; Hirsch, 2016). Give students an article to read on a topic they know nothing about and they will struggle to understand it. But they will have little difficulty reading an article or book when they possess background knowledge about the topic. The more they already know, the more effectively they can read and understand. Reading comprehension depends on background knowledge. Thus, it is important to immerse students in a content-rich learning environment. Not only does the curriculum need to have a strong knowledge focus, but there must also be an accountability mechanism in place to ensure that teachers cover the full curriculum.

Unfortunately, standardized testing in Canada is moving in the wrong direction on this issue. Instead of measuring specific knowledge outcomes, most of these tests now focus on generic literacy and numeracy skills. This is consistent with a general shift among many provinces away from knowledge in their curriculum guides. Nowhere is this shift more apparent than in the province of British Columbia.

British Columbia's new curriculum emphasizes so-called higher order learning and takes a student-centred and personalized approach to instruction. Specifically, it places "more emphasis on the deeper understanding of concepts and the application of processes than on the memorization of isolated facts and information" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, no date: *BC's Redesigned Curriculum*). While this might sound innovative, the reality is that there is nothing new about this approach. In 1918, William Heard Kilpatrick, a well-known American education professor, wrote an article for the *Teachers College Record* titled "The Project Method" (Kilpatrick, 1918). This article outlined Kilpatrick's educational philosophy and it looks strikingly similar to what the British Columbia Ministry of Education is trying to pass off as new and innovative. Kilpatrick believed that his project method would lead to students being engaged in "purposeful acts". He contrasted this with the "regime of coercion" found in regular schools and envisioned an environment where students spent their time working on purposeful projects such as kite building. Simply put, British Columbia's new curriculum is the modern-day version of a philosophy that is more than a century old.

This explains why British Columbia has abolished its provincial content-based exams and replaced them with literacy and numeracy assessments. These assessments focus on general concepts rather than on specific content (Culbert, 2019). The problem with this approach is it assumes that literacy and numeracy are easily transferable skills when the reality is that these skills are heavily dependant on content. As John Hattie and Gregory Yates (2014) explain, memorization of basic facts still plays an important role in the learning process, because committing basic facts to memory helps reduce cognitive load and

makes it possible for students to tackle higher-order concepts. This is why students who have not memorized the times table typically struggle when trying to solve algebraic equations. It is also why students who do not know basic facts about Confederation 1867 (such as the names of the key people and colonies involved) are unlikely to do any critical thinking about the factors that led to this important event. Unfortunately, because British Columbia's provincial assessments no longer measure content knowledge, there is little incentive for teachers to help students acquire the background knowledge they need to be successful.

Other provinces have moved in a similar direction. For example, Ontario's EQAO tests are exclusively focused on literacy and numeracy and do not evaluate subject-matter knowledge. While it is important to evaluate literacy and numeracy, measuring these skills alone is not sufficient. Focusing on these two skills puts pressure on school administrators to ensure that students do well in these areas. As a result, K-8 schools in particular end up putting less emphasis on science and social studies courses and more emphasis on test practice sessions. It is important for students to receive a well-rounded education, and this is far more likely to happen if standardized tests measure a variety of subject areas and not just literacy and numeracy.

Key Change #2—Declining Emphasis on Standardized Tests

Another key change is that standardized tests are not given the same value as they once were. For example, students in British Columbia used to write course-specific provincial exams that made up 20% of their final mark in Grades 10 and 11 and 40% of their final mark in Grade 12 (Zwaagstra, 2011). Instead, students now write low-stakes numeracy and literacy assessments that do not even count towards their final marks.

This declining emphasis on standardized testing can also be observed in Alberta. The diploma exams written by Grade 12 students used to be worth 50% of a student's final grade in that course. However, in 2015 the Alberta government changed the value of these exams to only 30% of the final grade. The ostensible reason for this change was that it was important to put more emphasis on teacher-created assessments rather than on a single exam (Gilligan, 2015). On the surface, this appears to be a minor change. However, the message this sent is that these diploma exams are not considered as valuable as they once were. Anytime the government reduces the weight given to its standardized tests, it provides fuel to those who would like to abolish these tests entirely. Interestingly, during the 2021/22 school year, the diploma exams are worth only 10% of the final mark, which reduces it to little more than a symbolic token (Alberta Education, no date: *Diploma Exams*). While this is supposed to be a temporary adjustment to meet the challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there will no doubt be significant pressure on the Alberta government to keep the value of these exams as low as possible.

To make matters worse, most other provinces (with the notable exception of Quebec) follow British Columbia's example and do not assign any weight at all to standardized tests written before grade 12. The problem with this approach is that students are less likely to take these tests seriously if they know it will not affect their final grades. While it is understandable why standardized tests written by younger students would not be included in final grades, it is disappointing that they often do not affect high school grades either. Of course, since these tests are becoming increasingly disconnected from specific content, it is not surprising that they would not count for marks. However, if these tests are going to continue, it makes sense for them to have at least some value, particularly at the high school level.

Key Change #3—Fewer Standardized Tests

One of the most obvious changes over the last twenty years is that standardized tests are administered less often and at fewer grade levels. For example, in 2011 students in British Columbia wrote standardized tests in a wide variety of subjects in Grades 10, 11, and 12 along with the literacy and numeracy assessments in Grades 4 and 7. Now, students in these grades write examinations only in literacy and numeracy. The end result is that British Columbia students write standardized tests in fewer subjects and at fewer grade levels. In Alberta, the change in frequency is less dramatic although the Grade 3 standardized tests have been abolished. Now students in that province write standardized tests only in Grades 6, 9, and 12.

The shift away from standardized testing in Saskatchewan and Manitoba has been particularly striking. While Saskatchewan used to administer provincial standardized assessments in mathematics, reading, writing, and science on a two-year cycle between Grades 4 to 11, it now only has standardized tests at the Grade 12 level, and even these tests are written only by students in courses with non-accredited teachers. While the Saskatchewan government announced plans in early 2013 to implement regular standardized tests, opposition from the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation and other stakeholder groups forced them to back away from these plans that same year (Spooner and Orłowski, 2013). Meanwhile, Manitoba had once planned to implement standardized testing in the four core subjects of mathematics, English or French language arts, science, and social studies at Grades 3, 6, 9, and 12. Beginning in 1995, the Manitoba Progressive Conservative government began introducing standardized exams in these grade levels. These exams were in math and English Language Arts, and the government planned to add other subjects. These plans were scrapped in 1999 when a new NDP government was elected (Levin, 2005). This new government abolished the Grade 3 tests, then eliminated the Grade 6 and 9 exams. This left only the Grade 12 math and English Language Arts exams. Today, the Manitoba government has not added any standardized tests outside of those for Grade 12 students.

Fortunately, the reduction in the total number of standardized tests has been less dramatic in other parts of the country. Ontario students at the same four grade levels continue to write the same number of standardized tests as they did twenty years ago, although these tests assess only literacy and numeracy and do not count towards students' final marks. Students in Quebec, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland & Labrador continue to write standardized tests at multiple grade levels in a wide variety of subject areas. In a fairly significant shift announced in 2012, the Nova Scotia government moved its Grade 12 standardized tests to Grade 10 (Bennett, 2020). The rationale given at the time

for this change was that writing the exams earlier gave schools an opportunity to correct problems identified by the tests. Interestingly, Prince Edward Island is an exception to this trend since that province has not only kept its Grades 3, 6, and 9 tests, it now also requires Grade 11 students to write a mathematics exam.

Overall, the trend is clear—standardized testing is on the decline in Canada. Students are writing standardized tests in fewer subject areas and at fewer grade levels. Many of the tests that do remain are worth a smaller percentage of the final course mark than they were previously—assuming they are counted at all. Finally, standardized tests are used primarily to assess generic skills such as literacy and numeracy rather than subject-specific content knowledge.

A Tale of Two Provinces—Manitoba and Prince Edward Island

While most media attention tends to focus on the larger provinces, it is important not to overlook the smaller provinces, particularly when they provide relevant information in a policy discussion. Manitoba and Prince Edward Island are two smaller provinces who have gone in opposite directions over the last twenty years with their standardized testing programs. Since 1999, Manitoba has systematically reduced the number of standardized tests written by students. While Manitoba students used to write standardized tests in Grades 3, 6, 9, and 12, they now only write tests at the Grade 12 level in two subject areas—mathematics and English or French language arts. In contrast, prior to 2007, Prince Edward Island students wrote no standardized tests. However, beginning that year, Prince Edward Island began introducing standardized tests at several grade levels. Today, Prince Edward Island students write standardized tests in Grades 3, 6, 9, and 11, which gives it one of the most comprehensive standardized testing systems in the country.

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a standardized assessment developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development that is used to assess the reading, mathematics, and science skills of 15-year-old students around the world. PISA is administered on a three-year cycle and comparative data for all ten Canadian provinces is published by Statistics Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education. The first PISA data was published in 2001 and it showed that Manitoba students outperformed Prince Edward Island students in reading, mathematics, and science. Specifically, compared to other provinces Manitoba students were in the middle of the pack while Prince Edward Island ranked last or second last in each assessed skill area (Statistics Canada, 2001). However, by the time of the most recent PISA assessment in 2018, Prince Edward Island students had moved ahead of Manitoba students in reading, mathematics, and science. In fact, Prince Edward Island is now in the middle of the pack while Manitoba consistently ranks last or second last in all three assessed skill areas (Council of Ministers of Education, 2019). Essentially, these two provinces have switched places.

Obviously, it is important to remember that correlation does not necessarily mean causation. There are many other factors that could account for Prince Edward Island's improved achievement and Manitoba's declining performance. Nevertheless, it is striking that two provinces that chose different paths regarding standardized testing have seen such disparate results on their PISA results. Their different standardized testing policies is certainly one possible explanation.

Standardized Tests and COVID-19— a Cautionary Warning

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a huge impact on Canada's education system. For much of the 2020/21 school year, students across Canada were forced to learn at home as school boards scrambled to implement remote learning. Even though schools are generally open in 2021/22, they are far from back to normal. Most provinces have mandatory mask orders in place and some schools with COVID-19 outbreaks are still being forced into remote learning. Teachers and students are under enormous stress as they try to navigate constantly shifting public-health protocols. It will likely take years before we fully understand the total impact of this pandemic upon our school system.

Thus, it is understandable that standardized testing programs were disrupted by this pandemic. Many provinces cancelled these tests outright, or at least made them optional. Given the many uncertainties about COVID-19 at the beginning of the pandemic, this was a reasonable course of action. After all, it is hardly fair to expect students to write high-stakes exams when they could not even attend school in person. One thing we learned throughout this pandemic is that remote learning is a poor substitute for in-person learning. No doubt there is an academic deficit that schools will need to address over time.

However, it is concerning that standardized tests are being disrupted for the third year in a row. As noted earlier, Alberta has reduced the value of its diploma exams to only 10%—a token amount that raises doubts as to its value. Manitoba has cancelled its Grade 12 standardized tests outright for the third year in a row. Ontario and British Columbia had previously suspended its standardized tests in literacy and numeracy but is gradually reinstating them this year. However, administering these tests has been postponed until later in the school year. With these significant disruptions, there is an opportunity for opponents of standardized testing to demand their abolition. Unless provincial governments are prepared to defend the value of these tests, it will be tempting for some of them to cave into political pressure. As things gradually return to normal in Canada, it is important that standardized tests not become a casualty of this pandemic.

Conclusion

Standardized testing is an important way of measuring student achievement. In fact, both teacher-created tests and standardized testing are essential for a balanced approach to student assessment. Teacher-created tests ensure teachers can take individual student needs into account when designing and evaluating assignments and tests. Standardized testing introduces systematic balance with an objective measurement tool that makes it possible to determine whether provincial curriculum standards have been met. Knowing that their students will be tested on the curriculum provides teachers with a strong incentive to cover the key concepts thoroughly. Without standardized tests in place, it is almost impossible to be sure if teachers have actually taught the complete curriculum.

Unfortunately, there are some concerning trends that point to a decline in standardized testing in Canada. Standardized tests are being administered in fewer subjects at fewer grade levels and are focusing on generic skills such as literacy and numeracy rather than on subject-specific content. In addition, several provinces have reduced the value of standardized tests to students' final course grades. All of this leads to a decline in the availability of important student achievement data. This is further accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted public education across Canada and thrown many standardized testing systems into disarray. Provincial governments need to place a stronger emphasis on standardized testing. If Canadian students are going to compete successfully against other students from around the world, they need to be well educated. Standardized testing is an important component of a quality education system.

References

- Alberta Education (no date). *Diploma Exams – Overview*. <<https://www.alberta.ca/diploma-exams-overview.aspx>>, as of November 10, 2021.
- Alberta Education (no date). *Provincial Achievement Tests*. <<https://www.alberta.ca/provincial-achievement-tests.aspx>>, as of November 7, 2021.
- Allison, Derek J., and Vincent Goloso (2021). *Math Performance in Canada*. <<https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/math-performance-in-canada.pdf>>, as of January 21, 2022.
- Bennett, Paul W. (2020). *The State of the System: A Reality Check on Canada's Schools*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education (no date). *BC's Redesigned Curriculum: An Orientation Guide*. <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/supports/curriculum_brochure.pdf>, as of November 11, 2021.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education (2021, September 7). *Foundation Skills Assessment*. <<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/program-management/assessment/foundation-skills-assessment>>, as of November 7, 2021.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education (2021, April 30). *Graduation Assessments: Information for Administrators*. <<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/program-management/assessment/graduation>>, as of November 7, 2021.
- Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2019). *Measuring Up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA 2018 Study*. <https://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/396/PISA2018_PublicReport_EN.pdf>, as of February 16, 2022.
- Culbert, Lori (2019). B.C.'s new high school curriculum: genocide and indigenous studies, drones and mechatronics, more projects, fewer exams. *Vancouver Sun* (September 14). <<https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/the-abcs-of-b-c-s-changing-high-school-curriculum-assessments-bxxx-and-new-courses>>, as of February 16, 2022.
- Education Quality and Accountability Office (no date). *Assessments*. <<https://www.eqao.com/the-assessments/>>, as of November 10, 2021.
- Gilligan, Melissa and Emily Mertz (2015). Alberta diploma exams will be worth only 30% of final grade. *Global News* (March 16). <<https://globalnews.ca/news/1885060/alberta-diploma-exams-worth-only-30-of-final-grade/>>, as February 16, 2022.

Hattie, John, and Gregory Yates (2014). *Visible Learning and the Science of How We Learn*. Routledge.

Hirsch, Jr., E.D. (2016). *Why Knowledge Matters: Rescuing Our Children from Failed Educational Theories*. Harvard Education Press.

Kilpatrick, William Heard (1918). *The Project Method: The Use of the Purposeful Act in the Educative Process*. Teachers College, Columbia University. <<https://archive.org/details/projectmethodus00kilpgoog/page/n4/mode/2up>>, as of February 16, 2022.

Levin, Ben (2005). *Governing Education*. University of Toronto Press.

Manitoba Education (no date). *Assessment and Evaluation*. <<https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/assess/tests/index.html>>, as of November 10, 2021.

Ministère d'Éducation (no date). *Guides for Parents*. <<http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/parents-and-guardians/exams/guides-parents/>>, as of November 10, 2021.

New Brunswick Education (no date). *Provincial Assessments*. <<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/ed/pdf/K12/eval/AssessmentBrochure.pdf>>, as of November 10, 2021.

Newfoundland & Labrador Education (no date). *Provincial Reading and Mathematics Assessments*. <<https://www.gov.nl.ca/education/k12/prma/>>, as of November 10, 2021.

Newfoundland & Labrador Education (no date). *Public Exam Information*. <<https://www.gov.nl.ca/education/k12/exams/>>, as of November 10, 2021.

Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development (no date). *Nova Scotia Assessments*. <<https://plans.ednet.ns.ca/nova-scotia-assessments>>, as of November 10, 2021.

Prince Edward Island Education (no date). *Provincial Assessments*. <<https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/information/education-and-lifelong-learning/provincial-assessments>>, as of November 10, 2021.

Poulsen, John, and Kurtis Hewson (2013/14). Standardized Testing: Fair or Not? *Light on Teaching*, 2013-14 Issue: 31–36. <<https://www.ulethbridge.ca/teachingcentre/standardized-testing-fair-or-not>>, as of February 28, 2022.

Saskatchewan Education (no date). *2021-22 Registrar's Handbook for School Administrators*. <<https://pubsaskdev.blob.core.windows.net/pubsask-prod/97479/2021-22%252BRegistrar%2527s%252BHandbook%252BFINAL.pdf>>, as of November 10, 2021.

Spooner, Marc, and Paul Orłowski (2013). Standardized Testing (Almost) Comes to Saskatchewan. *Our Schools/Our Selves*. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2013/11/osos113_StandardizedTestingComesToSK.pdf>, as of February 16, 2022.

Statistics Canada (2001). *Measuring Up: The Performance of Canada's Youth in Reading, Mathematics, and Science*. Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/81-590-x/81-590-x2000001-eng.pdf?st=FtyUZxBF>>, as of February 16, 2022.

Wexler, Natalie (2019). *The Knowledge Gap: The Hidden Cause of America's Broken Education System—and How to Fix It*. Penguin Random House.

Zwaagstra, Michael (2011). *Standardized Testing is a Good Thing*. Policy Series No. 119 (October). Frontier Centre for Public Policy. <<https://fcpp.org/files/1/PS119StandardizedTesting.pdf>>, as of February 16, 2022.

About the Author

Michael Zwaagstra

Michael Zwaagstra is a public high school teacher and senior fellow of the Fraser Institute. He received his Bachelor of Education and Master of Education from the University of Manitoba and Master of Arts in Theological Studies from Liberty University in Virginia. He is the author of *A Sage on the Stage: Common Sense Reflections on Teaching and Learning*, and co-author of *What's Wrong with Our Schools and How We Can Fix Them*. He is a frequent author of education policy research and newspaper columns across Canada. His research mainly focuses on curricula, teaching instruction, and public education. Mr. Zwaagstra's research and commentary have been featured in radio, television, and newspapers across the country.



Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank the Lotte & John Hecht Memorial Foundation for its generous support of this project.

Any errors and omissions are the sole responsibility of the author. As the researcher worked independently, the views and conclusions expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of the Board of Directors of the Fraser Institute, the staff, or supporters.

Publishing Information

Distribution

These publications are available from <<http://www.fraserinstitute.org>> in Portable Document Format (PDF) and can be read with Adobe Acrobat® or Adobe Reader®, versions 7 or later. Adobe Acrobat Reader® DC, the most recent version, is available free of charge from Adobe Systems Inc. at <get.adobe.com/reader/>. Readers having trouble viewing or printing our PDF files using applications from other manufacturers (e.g., Apple's Preview) should use Reader® or Acrobat®.

Ordering publications

To order printed publications from the Fraser Institute, please contact us via e-mail: sales@fraserinstitute.org; telephone: 604.688.0221, ext. 580 or, toll free, 1.800.665.3558, ext. 580; or fax: 604.688.8539.

Media

For media enquiries, please contact our communications department via e-mail: communications@fraserinstitute.org; telephone: 604.714.4582.

Copyright

Copyright © 2022 by the Fraser Institute. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief passages quoted in critical articles and reviews.

ISBN

978-0-88975-685-4

Citation

Michael Zwaagstra (2022). *The Decline of Standardized Testing in Canada*. Fraser Institute. <<http://www.fraserinstitute.org>>.

Supporting the Fraser Institute

To learn how to support the Fraser Institute, please contact us via post: Development Department, Fraser Institute, Fourth Floor, 1770 Burrard Street, Vancouver, British Columbia, V6J 3G7, Canada; telephone: toll-free to 1.800.665.3558, ext. 548; e-mail: development@fraserinstitute.org; or visit our webpage: www.fraserinstitute.org/support-us/overview.aspx.

Purpose, Funding, & Independence

The Fraser Institute provides a useful public service. We report objective information about the economic and social effects of current public policies, and we offer evidence-based research and education about policy options that can improve the quality of life.

The Institute is a non-profit organization. Our activities are funded by charitable donations, unrestricted grants, ticket sales, and sponsorships from events, the licensing of products for public distribution, and the sale of publications.

All research is subject to rigorous review by external experts, and is conducted and published separately from the Institute's Board of Directors and its donors.

The opinions expressed by authors are their own, and do not necessarily reflect those of the Institute, its Board of Directors, its donors and supporters, or its staff. This publication in no way implies that the Fraser Institute, its directors, or staff are in favour of, or oppose the passage of, any bill; or that they support or oppose any particular political party or candidate.

As a healthy part of public discussion among fellow citizens who desire to improve the lives of people through better public policy, the Institute welcomes evidence-focused scrutiny of the research we publish, including verification of data sources, replication of analytical methods, and intelligent debate about the practical effects of policy recommendations.

About the Fraser Institute

Our mission is to improve the quality of life for Canadians, their families and future generations by studying, measuring and broadly communicating the effects of government policies, entrepreneurship and choice on their well-being.

Notre mission consiste à améliorer la qualité de vie des Canadiens et des générations à venir en étudiant, en mesurant et en diffusant les effets des politiques gouvernementales, de l'entrepreneuriat et des choix sur leur bien-être.

Peer review—validating the accuracy of our research

The Fraser Institute maintains a rigorous peer review process for its research. New research, major research projects, and substantively modified research conducted by the Fraser Institute are reviewed by experts with a recognized expertise in the topic area being addressed. Whenever possible, external review is a blind process. Updates to previously reviewed research or new editions of previously reviewed research are not reviewed unless the update includes substantive or material changes in the methodology.

The review process is overseen by the directors of the Institute's research departments who are responsible for ensuring all research published by the Institute passes through the appropriate peer review. If a dispute about the recommendations of the reviewers should arise during the Institute's peer review process, the Institute has an Editorial Advisory Board, a panel of scholars from Canada, the United States, and Europe to whom it can turn for help in resolving the dispute.

Editorial Advisory Board

Members

Prof. Terry L. Anderson	Prof. Herbert G. Grubel
Prof. Robert Barro	Prof. James Gwartney
Prof. Jean-Pierre Centi	Prof. Ronald W. Jones
Prof. John Chant	Dr. Jerry Jordan
Prof. Bev Dahlby	Prof. Ross McKittrick
Prof. Erwin Diewert	Prof. Michael Parkin
Prof. Stephen Easton	Prof. Friedrich Schneider
Prof. J.C. Herbert Emery	Prof. Lawrence B. Smith
Prof. Jack L. Granatstein	Dr. Vito Tanzi

Past members

Prof. Armen Alchian*	Prof. F.G. Pennance*
Prof. Michael Bliss*	Prof. George Stigler*†
Prof. James M. Buchanan*†	Sir Alan Walters*
Prof. Friedrich A. Hayek*†	Prof. Edwin G. West*
Prof. H.G. Johnson*	

* deceased; † Nobel Laureate