



2025-2026 Research Package

Topic 2: THW ban standardized testing in Canadian schools (e.g. Provincial Achievement Tests, Diploma Examinations, etc.)

Background

What is Standardized Testing?

Standardized testing is a form of assessment that evaluates students' performance through a uniform criterion, where each student is compared relatively to all other students with the same characteristics, such as grade level or number of courses taken. They have played an important role in assessing educational institutions, influencing funding decisions, and shaping university admissions processes. Because education is a provincial jurisdiction, each province and territory has its own set of requirements and regulations for standardized testing.

For example, in Alberta, grades 6 and 9 students write the Provincial Achievement Test (PAT) in English or French language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies, while grade 12 students write the Diploma exams in a variety of courses: biology, chemistry, English or French language arts, mathematics, physics, science, and social studies. The weightage of standardized exams has varied throughout the years, typically at 30%. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the weightage was dropped to 10%.

History of Education and Standardized Testing

During the early 20th century, the first standardized tests began to emerge on the West Coast of Canada, notably in British Columbia, in the context of growing immigration rates and the need to establish a standardized criterion for assessing students' intelligence. Over the years, standardized testing spread to the rest of Canada, coinciding with the development of the public schooling system, the introduction of standardized textbooks, teacher training, classroom organization, and curriculum.

Currently, standardized testing has undergone 3 major changes throughout the years. First, there is a shift in focus from content to emphasizing generic literacy and numeracy skills, adopting a higher-order learning, student-centred, personalized approach to instruction, and placing greater emphasis on the deeper understanding of concepts and the application of processes. Second, there is a declining emphasis on standardized testing, particularly in terms of its weightage. This places greater emphasis on teacher-created assessments and may even call for the removal of standardized testing altogether if the value of these tests is decreasing on average. Third, standardized tests are administered less often and at fewer grade levels. For example, Manitoba and Saskatchewan only administer grade 12 standardized exams; prior, students in Saskatchewan wrote standardized tests on a two-year cycle between Grades 4 to 11, while Manitoba used to administer tests for mathematics, English or French language arts, science, and social studies at Grades 3, 6, 9, and 12.

Why is Standardized Testing Relevant?

Despite being ranked among the top 10 countries in terms of literacy skills, Canada's education system has been facing a slow decline over the past few years, according to the latest mathematics scores tested by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). This has left many adults struggling in the job market, where many core skills such as literacy and numeracy are needed; a strong educational foundation is key to success in the workforce. While there are many educational factors that come into play, standardized testing is a primary component of the education system, prompting debate on whether it is truly delivering the educational outcomes it is designed to achieve. Arguments can

be made on both sides, and debaters must carefully consider how the future of Canada's education system will unfold in relation to standardized testing.

Questions to Consider

1. Who are the important stakeholders in this debate?
2. Should standardized tests be banned for all grade levels or only a few?
3. Do the harms of standardized tests outweigh the benefits or vice versa?
4. What are some alternative ways to assess learning in classrooms?
5. Is standardized testing fair and equitable to everyone from all backgrounds?
6. What role does student well-being play in determining whether to ban standardized testing?
7. How reliable and valid are standardized tests?

Links:

1. [Standardized Testing: Overview](#)
2. [The Case for a Canadian Standardized High School Test](#)
3. [Decline in Standardized Testing](#)
4. [ATA and Standardized Testing](#)
5. [The Value of Standardized Testing](#)
6. [Standardized Testing - Britannica](#)