

PCAP 2016 FAQ

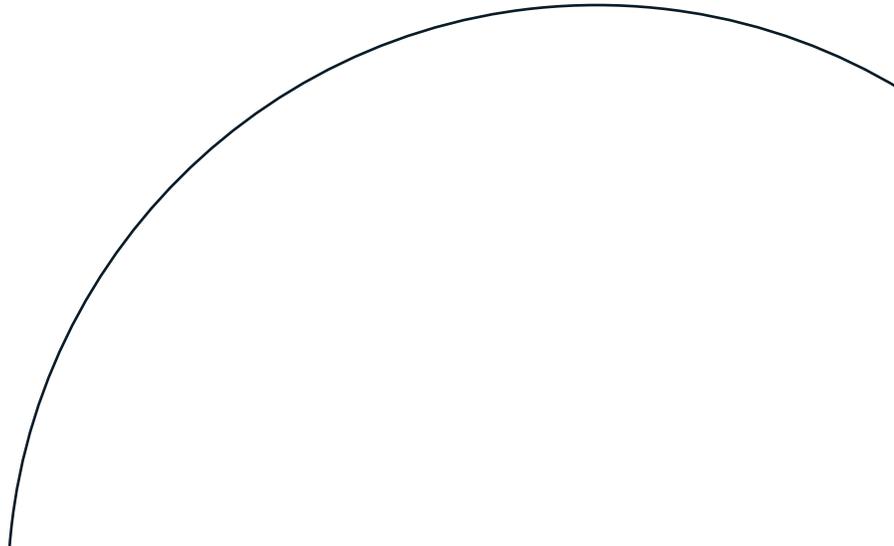


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PCAP 2016 FAQ

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What is PCAP?

The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) is a survey of the knowledge and skills of Canadian students in three core learning areas – reading, mathematics, and science. It was developed and is administered by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) with the active involvement of all participating ministries and departments of education.



Why was PCAP developed?

CMEC developed PCAP to ensure the availability of statistically valid, comparable data on student achievement in Canada. PCAP data will be used by education researchers, policy-makers, and government officials to understand and make improvements to provincial and territorial education systems.

Which students are assessed in PCAP?

For PCAP 2016, approximately 27,000 students in Grade 8 (Secondary II in Quebec) from close to 1,500 schools across the country were tested. Reading was the major focus of the assessment. Mathematics and science were also assessed. Approximately 20,000 students were tested in English and 7,000 in French.

Students from all provinces participated in PCAP 2016.



Who funds PCAP and how much does it cost?

PCAP is funded by provinces and territories through their long-standing intergovernmental body, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). On average, PCAP costs approximately \$1.2 million annually.

How often is PCAP administered?

PCAP is administered every three years on a nine-year cycle that allows for comparison of results over time in all three domains – reading, mathematics, and science. These data help provinces and territories understand how the performance of their education systems may have changed over time.

2007	Reading	Math	Science
2010	Reading	Math	Science
2013	Reading	Math	Science
2016	Reading	Math	Science
2019	Reading	Math	Science
2022	Reading	Math	Science



Each PCAP assessment has a major domain, or focus, and two minor domains. The major domain (in colour) changes every three years. A major domain assessment can be compared over time with another minor- or major-domain assessment in a same subject.

Why does PCAP have one major domain and two minor domains?

This particular structure was chosen to align PCAP with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD's) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). It is expected that a significant portion of the Grade 8/ Secondary II student cohort from PCAP 2016 will take the PISA 2018 assessment when those students are 15 years old. Because PISA 2018 will also have reading as its major domain, it will be possible to compare performance patterns between the two assessments.



Can performance among different provinces and territories really be compared?

Education systems and school programs differ from one province or territory to another, so comparing results can be a complex task. PCAP allows a variety of education systems to be compared according to a set of common benchmarks in reading, mathematics, and science. The benchmarks have been established through extensive consultation among provinces and territories and with the guidance of statisticians, psychometricians, and education experts.

By agreeing to common benchmarks, provinces and territories are able to determine their relative performance in relation to each other, even if their approaches to education may differ.



Is the assessment fair to students in each province and territory?

The assessment is not tied to the curriculum of a particular province or territory but is instead a fair measurement of students' abilities to use their learning skills to solve real-life situations. It measures how well students are doing; it does not attempt to assess approaches to learning.

Provinces and territories also work to ensure that the unique qualities of our country's education systems are taken into account. Factors such as linguistic differences, rural and urban school locations, and cultural influences are all considered in both the assessment itself and in related context questionnaires. In addition, the common curricular framework for each subject incorporated an agreed-upon perspective for all provinces and territories that was based upon the latest pedagogical research.



How are the results from PCAP determined?

PCAP uses four equivalent versions of the test to ensure both a broad content coverage and a fair and accurate means of comparing student performance across provinces. To render the scores obtained from the various versions comparable, assessment experts developed a statistically valid “common language.” This was done by converting the raw scores from the four versions of the test to a standard scale. Students' total scores in each subject area were transposed onto

a common scale, ranging from 0 to 1,000, with the average for the pan-Canadian population set at 500. The resulting scores are called “scale scores.”

As a result of this conversion, the scores of two-thirds of the students participating in PCAP 2016 fell within the range of 400 to 600 points, which represents a “statistically normal distribution” of scores.

How does PCAP define reading literacy?

While previous PCAP assessments focused solely on the process of reading, PCAP 2016 combines two terms: reading and literacy. Adding the term “literacy” broadens the meaning of the ability to read to include skills that will be relevant throughout life for attaining individual and societal goals.

For PCAP 2016, reading literacy is defined as the ability to construct meaning from texts through understanding, interpreting, and responding personally and critically to text content in order to make sense of the world and participate in society. It also includes metacognitive competencies that allow for awareness and application of different reading strategies appropriate to a given context. Reading literacy effectively involves the interaction of reader, text, purpose, and context before, during, and after reading.

In light of the interactive process of reader, text, purpose, and context, this assessment of reading literacy considers the reader’s engagement with text and response to it. Curricula across Canada identify the following major aspects of reading literacy: understanding texts (“reading the lines”), interpreting texts (“reading between the lines”), and responding personally and critically to texts (“reading beyond the lines”).

A forthcoming issue of *Assessment Matters!*, a series of articles and research notes available on the CMEC Web site, will show the types of knowledge and skills that are accessible to students at different levels of performance.



What do the performance levels in reading mean?

Performance levels represent how well students are doing based on the cognitive demand and degree of difficulty of the test items. Cognitive demand is defined by the level of reasoning required by the student to correctly answer an item, from high demand to low demand; degree of difficulty is defined by a statistical determination of the collective performance of the students on the assessment.

There were three levels of performance in the reading component of PCAP 2016:



Level 3	Students who scored 603 and above
Level 2	Students who scored between 400 and 602
Level 1	Students who scored 399 and less



Level 2 is the expected level of performance for Grade 8/Secondary II students. Level 1 represents the performance of students at a level below that expected of students in their grade. Level 3 represents higher levels of performance. The defined expected levels of performance were established by a panel of assessment and education experts from across Canada, and confirmed by actual student test responses.

When will the next PCAP assessment take place?

PCAP will be administered again in 2019. PCAP 2019 will have mathematics as its major focus; reading and science will be assessed as minor domains.



