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Canada

Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) Data Sets: Terms of Availability

- Data on student achievement and the learning context are available to researchers
- PCAP achievement data provide provincial/territorial, gender, and language breakdowns
- PCAP contextual data include school and out-of-school contexts
- PCAP data provide a unique opportunity for policy-relevant research
- Terms and conditions
- Contact information

Data on student achievement and the learning context are available to researchers

The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) is CMEC's most recent commitment to informing Canadians about how well their education systems are meeting the needs of students and society. The information gained from such a pan-Canadian assessment gives ministers of education a basis for examining curricula and other aspects of school systems.

School curricula vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction across the country, so comparing the results from these varied programs is a complex task. However, young Canadians in the different jurisdictions learn many similar skills in reading, mathematics, and science. PCAP was designed to determine whether students across Canada reach similar levels of performance in these core disciplines at about the same age, and to complement existing assessments in each jurisdiction so they have comparative Canada wide data on the achievement levels attained by students across the country.

In August 2003, a PCAP working group of experienced and knowledgeable representatives from several jurisdictions and including an external authority on measurement theory, large-scale assessment, and educational policy, began the development process. A concept paper was commissioned that would elaborate on issues of structure, development planning, operations, and reporting. Drawing on this concept paper, the working group defined PCAP as a testing program that would:

- be administered at regular intervals to students who are 13-year-olds at the start of the school year;
- be based on the commonality of all current jurisdictional curricular outcomes across Canada;
- assess mathematics, science, and reading;

- provide a major assessment of one domain, with a minor concentration on the two other domains;
- focus on reading as the major domain in the first administration in 2007, mathematics in 2010, and science in 2013.

As of 2010, it was determined that PCAP would be administered to students in Grade 8/Secondary II (in Quebec), and, whenever possible, intact classes would be selected in order to minimize the disruption to classrooms and schools. For each subject area, a thorough review of curricula, current assessment practices, and research literature was then undertaken, and reports were written to indicate the common expectations among all jurisdictions.

Domains	Actual or proposed date of PCAP assessment		
	Spring 2007 (13-year-olds)	Spring 2010 (Grade 8/Secondary II students)	Spring 2013 (Grade 8/Secondary II students)
Major	Reading	Mathematics	Science
Minor	Mathematics	Science	Reading
Minor	Science	Reading	Mathematics

The accompanying questionnaires for students, teachers, and school administrators were designed to provide jurisdictions with contextual information that would contribute to the interpretation of performance results. Such information may also be examined and used by researchers, policy-makers, and practitioners to help determine what factors influence learning outcomes.

Both achievement and contextual data from PCAP are available to researchers through CMEC.

PCAP achievement data provide provincial/territorial, gender, and language breakdowns

The PCAP assessments were designed to yield achievement data at pan-Canadian and provincial/territorial levels. Data are also available by language of instruction, i.e., English or French, and by gender. The sample size is too small, however, to yield reliable results from analysis within subcategories of a jurisdiction (such as by schools or school boards/districts). For reasons of confidentiality, all information pertaining to the identity of students, schools, and school districts/boards is removed when final data sets are prepared for analysis by CMEC.

Consequently, no data sets allowing for the identification of schools, school districts, or individuals can be made available.

PCAP contextual data include school and out-of-school contexts

The introduction of the contextual questionnaires allowed for research into the linkages between the school, home, and social environment and student performance. The ultimate goal of the contextual questionnaires was to link the responses to the three questionnaires (student, teacher, and school) with the students' results, in order to examine, in detail, how contextual factors are related to achievement.

PCAP data provide a unique opportunity for policy-relevant research

PCAP, a pan-Canadian assessment with well-structured contextual questionnaires, afforded unique opportunities for providing information related to key policy areas of concern to ministries and departments of education. PCAP gave jurisdictions a simple way to compare their performance with that of the rest of Canada. PCAP data also provided information to jurisdictions about the performance of their own education systems.

CMEC is committed to encouraging policy-relevant research and maintaining, as a priority, the dissemination of research results to policy-makers and practitioners. Researchers requesting access to the PCAP data sets will be asked to provide a signature of agreement to the terms of availability described below.

Terms and conditions

CMEC will maintain a registry of all requests for the use of PCAP data so that jurisdictions can be up to date about the research being undertaken using this data. Requests from researchers outside the field of education who are interested in using PCAP data are welcome.

For the purposes of the registry, researchers wishing to use PCAP data should include the following information when requesting access to databases:

- Name(s) and affiliation(s) of researchers working on the project (i.e., name of university, college, ministry/department of education, school district/board, research foundation, organization, etc. where the researcher is employed or for whom the researcher is undertaking the work)
- Contact information for the lead researcher on the project (mailing address, phone number, fax number, e-mail address)
- A succinct description of the project, including:
 - the purpose(s) of the project
 - the proposed methodology to be used for the research

- the proposed sources of information and interviewees
- CMEC documentation required to complete the research
- the software to be used (to ensure compatibility with the PCAP database)
- the proposed dissemination plan

Owing to sample-size considerations, researchers shall not use PCAP data to rank schools or school districts/boards, as such comparisons would not be valid.

Requests for access to confidential assessment materials such as test booklets will be considered by CMEC only with the strict assurance that booklet contents and identification numbers will not be divulged in any manner in the ensuing report.

Dissemination of results is a priority for PCAP research. CMEC is particularly interested in opportunities for dissemination to policy-makers and practitioners, and would welcome research initiatives that include such activities. Publication of the research results will be the responsibility of the researcher(s), unless CMEC decides to play an active role in the dissemination of the research findings. The researcher(s) will be responsible for the research and its conclusions. The researcher(s) will be asked to submit a report of the research findings or a copy of the paper/journal article to CMEC prior to any publication or presentation of the findings. CMEC will distribute, under a confidentiality agreement, the report of the findings to member jurisdictions that are named or identified in any research findings one month prior to the publication or release of the findings, so that the jurisdiction(s) involved can prepare communications strategies before the report is released. Unless otherwise agreed, this report would be used by CMEC for information purposes only, and CMEC would not publish the report without the consent of the researcher(s).

The source and original purpose for which the data were collected must be acknowledged when publishing or presenting secondary analysis of the data. The researcher(s) shall undertake to ensure that data sets are not made available to others by any means whatsoever.

Contact information

For more information about PCAP data, please contact pcapinfo@cmecc.ca



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Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP)

I, _____ , agree to the terms and
(please print)
conditions set out by CMEC in the document “Pan-Canadian Assessment Program
(PCAP) Data Sets: Terms of Availability” and to the submission of a copy of the final
report of my research findings to CMEC **one month** before the report is released.

Signature

Date

Title, Affiliation

CMEC Officer

Date