



## SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT INDICATORS PROGRAM (SAIP)

### *Report on Writing Assessment III 2002*

#### **Highlights**

The School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) was conceived in 1989 by members of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) as a program of pan-Canadian assessments of student performance in core subjects, assessments that would be administered on a cyclical basis to measure student achievement over time in mathematics, reading and writing, and science. Two complete cycles were conducted in the 1990s, Cycle I between 1993 and 1996 and Cycle II between 1997 and 1999 with two age groups, 13-year-olds and 16-year-olds.

The third cycle began with Mathematics III in 2001 and has continued in 2002 with Writing III. This domain was previously assessed as part of the Reading and Writing assessments carried out in 1994 and 1998. But for Cycle III, writing was separated out for assessment on its own. Reading, too, will be assessed separately, in 2005.

Approximately 24,000 students, working in either English or French, participated in the Writing III assessment on test items and instruments designed, developed, and reviewed by representatives from the participating provinces and territories. Some modifications were made to the previous SAIP writing assessment instruments and to the scoring procedures in order to reflect current pedagogical practices. Although the essence of the assessment and the scoring criteria remained, the changes were significant enough that comparisons with writing assessments of student performance in the 1990s are not pursued in these reports. Also for the 2002 assessment, a new task was added to link critical thinking skills to the skills associated with writing. Analysis of the results from this exploratory study are included as “The Secondary Study” at the end of the public report.

#### **Levels of Achievement**

The development team that designed the assessment also described the criteria for measuring student achievement on a five-level scale representing a continuum of the knowledge and writing skills acquired over the span of the students’ elementary-secondary school experiences in Language Arts. Thus, the same assessment was administered to both age groups, 13-year-olds and 16-year-olds, with the expectation that most 13-year-olds would perform at level 2 or better and most 16-year-olds at level 3 or better.

The table below provides generic descriptions of the criteria used for each level in this assessment. Level 1 describes the earliest stages of writing abilities, while level 5 describes the knowledge and skills expected of a student at or near the end of secondary school.

<b>Performance Level</b>	<b>Examples of Criteria for the Level</b>
Level 1	The writing demonstrates an elementary and uncertain grasp of fundamental elements of writing relative to purpose. Integration of those elements is not evident. The writing conveys simplistic and/or partial and/or fragmented meaning.
Level 2	The writing demonstrates an uneven and/or uncertain control of the elements of writing relative to purpose. Integration of some of the elements is apparent, but development is sketchy and/or inconsistently maintained. The writing conveys a simple and/or uneven meaning.
Level 3	The writing demonstrates a control of the elements of writing appropriate to purpose. The writing is generally integrated, and development is generalized, functional, and usually maintained throughout. The writing conveys a clear perspective.
Level 4	The writing demonstrates an effective control of the elements of writing appropriate to purpose. The writing is integrated and clearly and fully developed, and it comes together as a secure whole. The writing conveys a thoughtful perspective.
Level 5	The writing demonstrates an effective and confident command of the elements of writing appropriate to purpose. The writing is thoroughly integrated and precisely and fully developed, and the elements enhance one another. The writing conveys an insightful and sophisticated perspective.

Additional information on these criteria, including examples of student work, may be found in the public report, entitled *Report on Writing Assessment III*, SAIP 2002, which is available on the CMEC Web site at [www.cmec.ca](http://www.cmec.ca).

### **Pan-Canadian Expectations**

In the fall of 2002, a panel of representatives – both educators and non-educators – was drawn from various sectors of Canadian society to develop a set of performance expectations to help interpret the results actually achieved by students. Generally, Canadian students of both age groups met the levels expected by the panel, except for 16-year-olds at level 3. Details of these results may be found in the section “Results of the 2002 Writing Assessment” in this report.

### **Gender and Achievement in Writing**

There were significant differences between males and females in writing achievement. Girls performed consistently better than boys at almost all levels in both age groups. These differences

are consistent with results obtained by Canadian students in the OECD–PISA study of 15-year-old students in reading.

### Comparisons for Canada and Individual Jurisdictions

The following table compares the results of individual jurisdictions with the overall results at the pan-Canadian level. The test was designed so that most 13-year-old students should achieve level 2 or better and most 16-year-old students should achieve level 3 or better.

<b>Jurisdictions<sup>1</sup> Performing Better Than Or About the Same as Canada<sup>2</sup></b>	
<b>13-year-old students at level 2 or better</b>	
Canada (E) <sup>3</sup> (82.4 % achieved level 2 or better.)	Alberta British Columbia Manitoba (E) Ontario (E) Quebec (E)
Canada (F) (87.3 % achieved level 2 or better.)	Quebec (F)
<b>16-year-old students at level 3 or better</b>	
Canada (E) (57.7 % achieved level 3 or better.)	Alberta British Columbia Manitoba (E) New Brunswick (E) Newfoundland and Labrador Ontario (E) Quebec (E) Saskatchewan
Canada (F) (71.7 % achieved level 3 or better.)	Quebec (F)
<sup>1</sup> Jurisdictions appear in alphabetical order. <sup>2</sup> Differences in scores are statistically significant only when confidence intervals DO NOT overlap. Detailed results appear in the public report. <sup>3</sup> (E) = English population (F) = French population	

### No Comparisons of 2002 Results with 1994 and 1998 Results

The changes that were made to the administration procedures, the tasks, and the scoring criteria for Writing III in 2002 were such that direct comparison over time is not appropriate and is not pursued in this report.

### **Students' Habits of Mind**

The Writing III assessment took the initiative of constructing a limited but valuable tool to study how thinking unfolds when students are asked to respond to a simple but thought-provoking text. It was hypothesized that cultivated habits of mind would be associated with higher levels of writing performance.

This secondary study tends to confirm what cognitive scientists and researchers into critical thinking have suggested. Students who practise higher-level habits of mind, in particular full exploration of an issue and critical judgment, also demonstrate higher levels of writing skills, as shown in the results of this assessment. CMEC anticipates that this type of study will provide other opportunities to develop significant and valid instruments for measuring generic skills in future SAIP and other assessments.

### **Context for Learning**

To better understand the personal and school contexts within which Canadian students learn to write, three questionnaires were developed to which students, their teachers, and their principals responded. The document *Student Writing: The Canadian Context* presents the results of responses to these questionnaires and analysis of how individual and school variables are related to achievement in writing. More detailed analysis of the data will be found in *Writing III: Technical Report*, which will be released later this year.