

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH & INFORMATION

THE PROPOSED NEW ASSESSMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Members are being asked to note that the Ministry of Education, Youth & Information is proposing new national assessments. This is largely in keeping with the Ministry's review of the current assessments. The review includes stakeholder feedback on the current manner in which students are being assessed.

BACKGROUND

A review of the Grade Six Assessment Test (GSAT) was commissioned by then Ministry of Education in response to concerns expressed by some stakeholders of the impact of the GSAT on students and schools and concerns related to the effectiveness of the test as a mechanism for transitioning to secondary school. The review was conducted in phases to include primary and secondary research as well as consultations with stakeholders island -wide. The work being undertaken to revise the National Standards Curriculum from Grades 1 – 9 will also impact assessment at the national level, given the commitment to a programme of curriculum – based assessment.

The changes to the national curriculum will increase the focus on assessment for learning and require greater use of assessment data to modify the curriculum, based on demonstrated learning needs.

REVISION OF ASSESSMENTS

The review of the GSAT suggested that the following should be considered:

- Aligning upper primary with lower secondary curriculum to enable the GSAT to be both a test of readiness for Grade 7 as well as achievement at the end of primary school; and
- A revised profile for the GSAT.

The national tests to be revised are the:

- Grade Three Diagnostic Test (G3DT);
- Grade Six Achievement Test (GSAT); and

- Grade Nine Achievement Test (GNAT).

The assessment approach that is being taken at Grades 2 and 9 is diagnostic in nature which will enable educators and other stakeholders to determine where students are in their attainment.

This will provide teachers with enough information to plan programmes that will help students to improve their performance.

Grade 2 Diagnostic

Currently, a diagnostic test is being administered at Grade Three. A Grade 2 diagnostic will replace the Grade 3 diagnostic. This is to facilitate intervention at an earlier stage and for a longer period. Students who are struggling with literacy and numeracy would benefit from a longer period of intervention before sitting the Grade Four Literacy Test. The diagnostic test will be used to further inform instruction and preparation of children to achieve international literacy standards.

In addition to Language Arts and Mathematics, the assessment will also include skills from the affective domain which describes learning objectives that emphasize the manner in which we deal with things emotionally such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations and attitudes. This approach to diagnostic testing will assist the Ministry of Education in early identification of students with special needs as well as provide support in the implementation of the proficiency pathway.

Grade 9 Diagnostic

The development of a Grade Nine Diagnostic is to address national assessment at the secondary level before students sit the CXC/CSEC examinations. The introduction of national assessments at this level will:

- Facilitate timely corrective action;
- Give a clear picture of how Grade 9 students in all schools are performing;
- Focus on and ensure the use at Grade -9 of the standardize National curriculum;
- Provide early assessment that will assist students in making informed decisions regarding their career path; and

- Facilitate movement of students among schools (i.e. providing a standard understanding of performance).

Secondary Transition Mechanism

It is proposed that the end of primary examination should be a test of attainment on the curriculum as now obtains, but this will be supplemented by an element of teacher assessment and an ability test.

The test will have three (3) components;

- The Higher Order Thinking (HOT) test which emphasises achievement and is curriculum -based;
- Teacher assessment which is also curriculum- based but these will be performance tasks; and
- An ability test which will assess verbal and quantitative reasoning.

The assessments will focus less on memorisation of content and more on higher order thinking skills within a “Depth of Knowledge” approach that is a key element of the new curriculum.

- The HOT test will not include content from the Grades 4 & 5 curricula because the knowledge being tested progressively deepens and needs to be tested at its latest stage, which is in the Grade 6 programme. The assessment will be referenced against the curriculum standards;
- The ability test will focus on verbal and quantitative reasoning which will also form part of the assessment at Grade 6. It will require an understanding and demonstration of skills rather than recall of knowledge; and
- The teacher assessment will be in the form of performance tasks that students will do at school under the supervision of their school teachers. This type of assessment gives students an opportunity to demonstrate their competencies which would not necessarily be able to be assessed in a regular paper and pencil test.

Assessment at Grade 6

The assessment at Grade 6 will continue to be referenced against the attainment targets within the curriculum.

The focus, however, will be more on higher order thinking skills based on a “Depth of knowledge” approach that is a key element of the new curriculum.

What will be different with the new end of primary examinations?

The end of primary assessment will continue to be curriculum- based; however a greater portion of the assessment will be on higher level thinking skills, with the assessment of critical thinking and problem solving skills aligned to the curriculum. An ability test of verbal and quantitative reasoning will not be curriculum- based. This will help to reduce social inequality as it will be difficult for students to be coached for this aspect.

Performance assessment will be another aspect of the test. The intention is to get students to demonstrate the use of several complex skills to complete a task. While the current GSAT is curriculum -based with fifty per cent (50%) of the items on each test being recall, the new test will focus more on higher order cognitive skills. Currently, ability test and performance assessment do not form part of the existing assessment but these two components will form part of the profile of the new assessment. The GSAT covers content from Grades 4, 5, and 6 and is administered in the second term of Grade 6. The proposed end of primary assessment will cover content from the Grade 6 curriculum only and the proposal is that the administration takes place in June of each year.

Expected Impact of the new Assessment at Grade Six

The new assessment is expected to have the following impact:

- Greater accountability for student performance;
- Improved student learning;
- Improved quality of data to guide decision making at school and national levels;
- Improved level of readiness of students for the next grade level; and

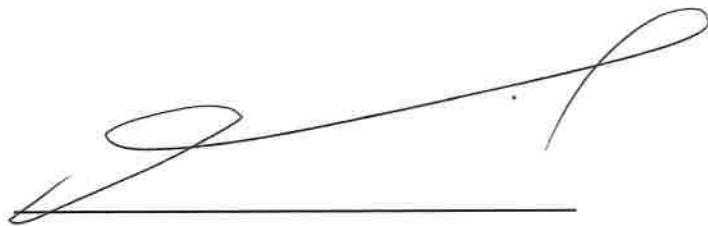
- Development of a culture of assessment in which strategic decisions and teaching/learning interventions are based on evidence gathered from a variety of data

Proposed Placement Method

The Ministry is reviewing the current placement mechanism, which allows students to transition from primary to secondary level of education.

CONSULTATIONS

To date, consultations on the new assessments were had with parents, principals, school boards, regional representatives and community members of Regions 3 and 4. Further consultations will be had in the other regions.



Senator the Hon. Rule Reid, CD, JP
Minister
June 2, 2016
File No. G 758/205

