

Q & A Related to Diploma Exam Weighting – March 2015

Q: What are the purposes of diploma exams?

A: The Grade 12 Diploma Examinations Program, established in 1984, has three main purposes:

1. to certify the level of individual student achievement in selected Grade 12 courses
2. to ensure that province-wide standards of achievement are maintained
3. to report individual and group results.

Q: Why not change the weighting to 20%? After all, it's only one exam and teachers spend much more time with their students? 20% seems much fairer.

A: The majority of Education stakeholders have indicated that they prefer the 30% weighting for diploma exams.

Q: Does a change to a 70/30 weighting increase or decrease the rigour associated to diploma exams?

A: The rigour of diploma exams remains high regardless of the weighting. All of the processes that were in place to produce diploma exams worth 50% will continue. This includes working with teachers for each step in the process. Maintaining consistent standards is and will continue to be an important part of the diploma exam program.

Q: Will the change in weighting mean that standards are being lowered?

A: The expectations for what students must learn remain the same. The same processes that give us high-quality diploma exams worth 50% will be in place for developing diploma exams worth 30%.

Q: Does a 70/30 change to weighting increase fairness to the students?

A: It puts more emphasis on the classroom work and school awarded mark. Increasing the weighting on the school-awarded mark will allow for a more accurate reflection of student performance by enabling those who work most closely with students on a daily basis (teachers) to assess student performance over a longer period of time, rather than relying so heavily on exams lasting only a few hours.

Q: Will some students be negatively impacted by this change?

A: There are some students who perform well on diploma exams. Alberta Education will ensure that all students are aware of the change in weighting so that students know the importance of working on their coursework year-round.

Q: What about adult students who wish to challenge the diploma exam?

A: This will still be possible.

Q: If a student rewrites a diploma exam after September 1, 2015, will it be counted as 30% or as 50% of their final mark?

A: Alberta Education will review its business rules and processes as part of preparing for the September 1, 2015 implementation of 70/30 diploma exam weighting. Clarification on this question will be provided prior to September 1, 2015.

Q: How will summer students or year-round students be affected?

A: Summer students who write in August 2015 will still have their diploma exam weighted at 50%. Some students may want to defer writing their diploma exams until after the September 1, 2015 effective date. The first diploma exam administration where the weighting will be 30% is November 2015. Students are encouraged to write their diploma exams as soon as they can after completing the course.

Q: Can students currently taking a Grade 12 diploma exam course complete their coursework and then write their diploma exam next year?

A: Yes. However, students may be advantaged by writing their diploma exam soon after completing the course.

Q: How will Alberta Education ensure that there are consistent standards at the school level?

A: Alberta Education has developed various documents that explain the standards for each diploma exam course. Alberta Education will continue to offer sessions to teachers through the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia: Alberta Education also has an Assessment Capacity Project that will support assessment practices in the classroom.

Q: Other than reducing stress, what are some other benefits for students?

A: Graduation rates may increase and drop-out rates may decrease. There may be a reduced utilization of “test-prep” companies, and more students will be eligible for scholarships, like the Rutherford Scholarship.

Q: Is this weighting change retroactive to the beginning of the 2014/2015 school year?

A: No.

Q: Why isn't the 30% retroactive to the beginning of the 2014/2015 school year?

A: Changing the parameters of the diploma exam program during the school year would contravene a principle of standardized testing. If the change was retroactive, some may perceive this as changing the rules mid-year and being unfair as they were not notified of this change prior to preparing for their diploma exams. Making the announcement now, effective September 1, 2015, will allow students, schools and post-secondary institutions time to plan accordingly.

Q: How will the post-secondary institutions respond to a 70/30 change?

A: Post-secondary institutions set their admission rules and requirements. Post-secondary institutions accept transcripts from a wide variety of authorities throughout the world and respond accordingly.

Q: Will the post-secondaries only look at the diploma exam marks for decisions related to admitting students?

A: Post-secondaries develop and apply their own admission rules and requirements.

Q: Does reducing the diploma exam weighting mean that post-secondaries will change/lower the mark needed to get into post-secondary programs?

A: This decision is up to each post-secondary institution.

Q: Will Alberta slip in its performance on international assessments, like PISA?

A: Alberta has various provincial assessments that help ensure that standards for learning are maintained. When compared with other, some Canadian provinces do not have an equivalent to Alberta's diploma examinations (e.g., Ontario, Quebec) and perform well on national and international assessments. British Columbia has a diploma examination similar to Alberta's, but with lower examination weighting (40%). They have performed on par or better than Alberta on various national and international assessments.