



B.C. Association of Mathematics Teachers (BCAMT)

The Honourable George Abbott
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

24 May 2011

Dear Minister;

In light of the recent decision by the Ministry of Education to have the Mathematics 10 exams available in electronic form only, the BC Association of Mathematics Teachers (BCAMT) would like to express, and have on record, concerns raised by math teachers from across the province.

Although we acknowledge some reasoning behind implementing e-exams – costs and sustainability – research that indicates educational benefits of e-exams is lacking, and we suspect that their implementation is primarily for fiscal reasons rather than for educational ones.

The current paper versions of the Mathematics 10 exams are problematic in their own right, by their very existence at the grade 10 level, and by their nature, with a lack of open-ended response questions. Notwithstanding widespread and well-documented concerns about the existing standardized exams, we believe that e-exams will only serve to exacerbate the concerns teachers already have about these exams.

Concerns about e-exams are both philosophical and practical in nature. If the e-exams are to be electronic versions of the existing paper exams, current philosophical concerns not only remain, but are coupled with many questions about the validity of such a format.

Teachers from across the province have identified barriers to the implementation of e-exams, not the least of which is the availability of computers. While different versions and different start times may solve a logistical problem, they create other problems. Having multiple start times may compromise the integrity and therefore the validity of the exam.

If students are to be tested on a computer, it seems not only fair, but also important, both statistically and educationally that they have sufficient practice for their exams actually on a computer, so that their marks are not compromised by the unfamiliarity of the testing device. While sample exams are available in an electronic format for practice purposes, it is felt that these exams discourage the use of pencil and paper. There is evidence from other large-scale standardized tests (e.g., FSA) that the configuration of computer labs, in many cases, will prevent students from engaging thoroughly in the exam. A lack of physical space in the vicinity of the station for students to juggle working materials (such as pencil, paper, calculator, formula sheet, data booklet) will result in random guessing and may encourage students to glance at neighbouring computer monitors. The reliability of computer networks has also been



called into question as there are inherent problems with networks, in addition to “save and send” issues.

At a time when the Ministry of Education is leading one of the most significant shifts in mathematics education, it seems ironic that it is concurrently pursuing an exam format which is inconsistent with these reforms. We believe that this decision undermines the positive reforms that are taking place in mathematics education and in mathematics classrooms. If e-exams are inevitable, it is incumbent upon the Ministry to ensure that exams are not just e-versions of the existing paper exams, but rather assessment tools consistent with the intentions of the new curriculum.

In our view, concerns about e-exams clearly outweigh any benefits. In fact, we cannot see any benefits to student learning. It is our hope, as an association which represents over a thousand mathematics teachers in BC, that the Ministry will address the above concerns and re-consider its decision to proceed with e-exams for the Mathematics 10 courses.

Sincerely,

David Van Bergeyk
BCAMT President

cc. Brenda Neufeld, Director, Student Certification Branch
Rod Allen, Superintendent Achievement and Learning Division
Renate Butterfield, Assistant Deputy Minister, Business, Technology, and Online Services
Nancy Walt, Director, Student Assessment Branch
Chantal Berard, Coordinator, Student Assessment Branch