

Report about the ESSA 2009 teacher survey

In November 2009, 61 176 Year 8 students in New South Wales participated in the Essential Secondary Science Assessment (ESSA). These students were drawn from 467 government schools, 63 Catholic sector schools and 63 independent sector schools.

Teachers from participating schools were asked to complete a survey. The following pages provide a summary of the results and comments received together with some responses from the ESSA Unit (provided in blue).

For further information regarding the ESSA 2009 teacher survey, please contact:

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ESSA 2009 teacher survey results		Strongly agree %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
These results were collected between December 2009 and February 2010, following the ESSA 2009 test.					
Percentages have been adjusted for responses of 'no opinion'.					
1	The ESSA test related to the science teaching programs in my school.	33	65	2	0
2	The ESSA test related to Stage 4 of the <i>Science Years 7–10 Syllabus</i> .	41	57	2	0
3	The ESSA test was different from tests I use with my classes.	11	49	23	2
4	The ESSA test covered a range of difficulty appropriate for Year 8 students.	18	73	4	1
5	The stimulus magazine provided suitable contexts for Year 8 students.	33	63	2	0
6	The extended response tasks capture important information about students' understandings.	16	67	6	2
7	The test length of 80 minutes was appropriate for Year 8 students to complete the tasks.	25	59	11	1
8	The type and number of tasks in the ESSA test were appropriate for Year 8 students.	21	66	7	1
9	The results from the test will provide important information for students and parents.	23	55	6	1
10	The results from the test will provide useful information for faculty programs.	31	54	5	1
11	The results from the test will provide useful information for planning classroom and other assessment.	28	54	6	1
12	The test and the results from the test will provide useful information for improving my classroom practice.	28	51	6	1
13	I intend to use the stimulus magazine articles as a classroom resource.	27	56	5	0
14	I will look for curriculum support resources and professional learning activities related to ESSA.	15	53	12	1

Summary of teacher comments and ESSA responses

15 Did you experience any administrative problems in the test? yes/no/comments

Most of the respondents did not have administrative problems. Of those few respondents who had problems, some referred to the administration surrounding special provisions whilst others mentioned administering the test to absent students.

The ESSA 2009 Administrative manual includes detailed information about the administration surrounding special provisions. A form is provided in the manual for ordering special test materials in September. It is important to mention that late receipt of special provisions requests from schools, particularly related to the visually impaired, increases the risk of late arrival of test materials to schools.

Questions regarding students requiring special provisions that cannot be resolved by the school's Learning Support Team should be referred to Louise Cullen, Coordinator Sensory Programs, 9244 5587.

The ESSA 2009 Administrative manual includes information outlining the provision for absent students to sit the test on the following day.

16 Any other comments?

Comments regarding the length of the test varied but most expressed that students completed the test in plenty of time. However, some respondents believed that the time was too short.

The test length is currently 80 minutes with a discretionary period of five minutes more or less. It is important to note that this time period should not include any time taken for the teacher to give instructions (which are included in the ESSA 2009 Administrative manual) or for the time taken for students to do the practice items. Similarly, time can be taken after the 80 minute period for the students to do the survey. It is also important to note that an extra five minutes per half hour may be given to students accessing special provisions such as a reader or large print.

A number of teachers commented that students enjoyed the test, the stimulus was well presented, particularly the graphics, and that the test gave a more prescriptive direction to teachers. Teachers stated that students were engaged, that some material was challenging and that the test was fair and appropriate.

One of the most important purposes of ESSA is to inform teaching and learning. Teaching programs that provide students with an opportunity to achieve all the outcomes in Stage 4 of the science syllabus provide appropriate preparation for the ESSA test. The ESSA test is intended to provide data to teachers about their students' learning. In this way, it can support programming and provide critical feedback to assessment for learning practices.

Some teachers expressed concern about the literacy level of ESSA. These concerns included that having a low level of literacy would affect a student's ability to do the test. Some teachers commented that there was too much reading and that the articles were too long. They felt that ESSA was testing science through literacy and that high levels of literacy were required to do the test.

Syllabus outcomes include accessing information from identified secondary sources (ESSA magazine) as well as evaluating the relevance of data and information (ESSA

magazine) and drawing conclusions based on information available (ESSA magazine). These outcomes are as much part of the syllabus as, for example, observing properties of substances using scientific models and theories or describing energy changes and the action of forces. Assessing these outcomes must therefore be as relevant and important.

There is no doubt that a student's literacy level will impact on learning in science. The science concepts that form the basis of the syllabus are described and explained using the specific (technical) language of science. While students can engage with these concepts at a primary school level to assist, support and develop their understandings, performance at the Stage 4 level requires that students demonstrate their understanding at the concrete symbolic level using the scientific or technical language as described in the syllabus. Students who have difficulty demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of science concepts and the processes of science using written scientific language will no doubt show low level of achievement on ESSA. These students will also be assessed at the school level using a variety of tasks and their performance on these tasks will be reported appropriately.

Students whose language background is other than English (LBOTE) and who are recent arrivals will experience difficulty with the literacy but it is important to note that, in general, their level of performance on ESSA improves, after the first LBOTE stage, to higher performance levels than students from an English speaking background (ESB). It is also important to note that very recent arrivals can be exempt from participating in ESSA.

The level of literacy required to participate in the test is considered appropriate for students aged around thirteen to fourteen years, after two years of secondary schooling. This is determined by experts in the field of test development and literacy. The mentor to the ESSA program in this area is Professor Len Unsworth, Head of School, Professor in English and Literacies Education, Centre for Research in English and Multiliteracies Education, University of New England.

The reading levels in the test book and stimulus magazine have intentionally been differentiated so that items vary in their literacy demands. Some of the stimulus materials and test items are written in very simple language while others use more complex language. This provides the ability to assess the level of literacy skills of all students in this written test, across the range from those students experiencing difficulty to high-achieving students.