Curriculum REDESIGN > Student Learning Assessments Update

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Background

In May 2013, Education Minister Jeff Johnson announced that Alberta would be giving teachers more support to help students succeed by introducing assessments that will replace the existing Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs).

The new Student Learning Assessments (SLAs) contribute to realizing the vision of *Inspiring Education* by enabling parents and teachers to be aware of a child's strengths or areas needing improvement at the start of the school year. The new SLAs will support student learning while more effectively assessing literacy, numeracy, and competencies such as critical thinking, problem solving, and the ability to apply knowledge to different scenarios. Alberta Education, in partnership with teachers, is developing the new SLAs. They will be administered at the start of Grades 3, 6 and 9.

Structure of the Grade Three Student Learning Assessments (SLA 3)

Components of the SLA 3 have been determined by Alberta Education in partnership with the Alberta School Boards Association, Alberta School Councils' Association, Alberta Teachers' Association, College of Alberta School Superintendents, and Alberta Assessment Consortium.

The four components of the SLA 3 are the following:

> a digitally scored literacy component
> a literacy performance-task component
> a digitally scored numeracy component
> a numeracy performance-task component.

The SLA 3 will reference the current provincial programs of study until the implementation of new programs of study developed through the Curriculum Redesign Initiative.

Reporting Results of Student Learning Assessments in 2014/15

Following the administration of the SLA, Alberta Education will provide student, school and authority detailed reports, as it has in the past with Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs).

Reporting models for the SLA 3 are being developed and will be piloted in the fall. Feedback regarding the content and structure of the reports will be collected. This information will be used to evaluate the effectiveness of these reports and to guide decisions about revisions.

For the Grade 3 SLA pilot in 2014, students, parents, schools, and school authorities will receive detailed reports that will provide them with valuable information to improve learning, enhance instruction, and help students succeed. However, reporting at the provincial level to the general public will not occur immediately. After piloting of the new assessments concludes, reporting to the general public for Grade 3 and Grade 6 will begin in the 2016–17 school year. Reporting to the general public for Grade 9 will begin in the 2017–18 school year.

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Field Testing

Field testing is an important component in the development process as test questions are administered to determine their difficulty level and their appropriateness for use in the SLAs. As well, teachers are able to provide comments about potential questions, thereby contributing to the development of fair, valid and reliable assessments.

Field testing of Grade 3 Literacy and Numeracy SLAs commenced on April 22 and was completed on May 30, 2014. Over 38,000 digitally scored and performance task field tests in English and French were scheduled for administration during this time.

During the administration of the field tests, student and teacher feedback as well as statistical data was collected and analyzed. This information will be used to inform the further design and development of the pilot SLA 3. Students' responses from the performance tasks were collected and they will be used to create assessment guides as well as provide exemplars. Teachers will use these documents when they assess their own students' performance tasks this fall.

Questions that students can use to gain familiarity with the new question types and practice the various digital interactivities are located at https://questaplus.alberta.ca/. The practice questions are available in English and French. There are 15 Literacy practice questions and 10 Numeracy practice questions. The practice questions have been accessed over 42,000 times since they were posted this spring.

SLA 3 Pilot Administration

The pilot SLA 3, and all future SLAs, will include operational questions (questions that will be released after each administration) and a few embedded field test questions (questions that will be used on future assessments). Embedding field test questions supports the consistent development of high-quality assessments and the annual release of all the operational items.

The process of piloting the SLA 3 consists of more than just administering the digital questions and performance tasks to students; it is also a pilot of the delivery, scoring and reporting systems as well as other related operations. Given that virtually all aspects of the SLA are new, the pilot for the Grade 3 SLA will be two years to build upon learnings and implement changes. Grade 6 and 9 SLAs will be one year pilots. Overall timelines for the development and implementation of SLAs remain unchanged.

For September 2014, the administration dates of the SLA 3 pilot will be from September 29 to October 10. For September 2015, the pilot administration date will move up a week to September 21 to October 2. Although enthusiastic about the SLA experience, administrators, teachers and students say mid-September for the first administration of a new assessment is too soon because of the other early school year activities. After the first administration, schools will be able to "ramp up" more quickly the following year.

More details about the pilot SLA 3 will be posted this summer in the Grade 3 Literacy and Numeracy Information Bulletins. These documents will provide information about the purpose, design, administration, and reporting of the pilot SLA 3. This information will also be located in the General Information Bulletin.

Implementation Support for Teachers – Assessment Capacity

A plan is under development to provide teachers with implementation support to administer the SLAs and to effectively interpret and use the results from the assessments. The plan will include input from various stakeholder groups. Support for implementation will be delivered through the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia and the Alberta Assessment Consortia, beginning with the 2014/2015 school year.

Technical Specifications for Student Learning Assessments

Mandatory Software Requirements for SLAs

Devices	Operating Systems	Browser Versions			
		Google Chrome (Recommended)	Internet Explorer	Safari	Firefox
PC	Windows 7+	31+	10+		25.0+
Chromebook	Chrome OS 31+	31+			
Mac	OS X 10.8+	31+		6.0+	25.0+
iPad	iOS 6.0+			6.0+	
Android tablet	Android 4.0+	31+			

Mandatory Hardware Requirements for SLAs

> mouse, unless using a tablet
> headphones
> sound enabled and working with headphones
> minimum screen size of 9.7" and resolution of 1024 x 768 (e.g., a standard iPad)
> reliable Internet connection with a minimum network speed of 5 Mbps; for example:
  o At 5 Mbps, an exam package of 10MB should download in approximately 6 minutes for 30 students.
  o If the network connection speed is slower than 5 Mbps, the size of the exam package is larger than 10 MB, or there are more than 30 students, then the download time will be more than 6 minutes.

Recommended Hardware Requirements for SLAs

> screen size of 17" or larger
> SMART Board or projector to demonstrate Practice Assessments

Recommended Support Requirement for SLAs

> onsite technical support available before, during and after the exam

Highly Recommended Prior to SLAs

> Students should take the Practice Assessments at least two weeks in advance to ensure that:
  o the technology works with the assessments;
  o there is adequate time to solve any problems that occur; and
  o students are familiar with the technology and the assessments.

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For Further Information

If you have questions or require further information on Technical Specifications for Student Learning Assessments, please contact Alejandro Moreno, Systems Analyst, Examination Administration, at Alejandro.Moreno@gov.ab.ca or Kim Brockhoff, Curriculum Design Supports and Production, at Kim.Brockhoff@gov.ab.ca or 780-427-0010 (toll-free by dialing 310-0000).

Assessment Purpose Statements

Assessment is a process, and the primary purpose of assessment is to improve student learning. To facilitate this, assessment information can be used by:

> a student to be informed about, to reflect upon, and to initiate activities to enhance his or her learning;
> parents to have meaningful conversations with their child and their child's teacher(s); and
> a teacher to assist in meeting the learning needs of a student.

Assessment information is also available to enhance instruction for students. To facilitate this, assessment information can be used by:

> a teacher to be informed about, to reflect upon, and to initiate activities to enhance his or her instruction;
> a principal to strategically support instructional practices and address the organizational needs within the school;
> a school council to give advice about the learning opportunities, resources, and services provided by the school;
> a superintendent to allocate resources appropriately and promote effective instructional practices;
> trustees to create or amend authority policies and to guide their advocacy work; and
> Alberta Education to be informed about the implementation and delivery of curriculum.

Assessment information also assures Albertans that the education system meets the needs of students and achieves the outcomes of the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning*.

Provincial assessment programs, including SLAs, are sources of information that must be interpreted, used, and communicated within the context of regular and continuous assessment by classroom teachers.

For Further Information

If you have questions or require further information on Student Learning Assessments, please contact Deanna Wiens, Acting Director of the Achievement Testing Program, at Deanna.Wiens@gov.ab.ca or 780–427–0010 (toll-free by dialing 310–0000).