Report of Feedback to Alberta Education

Fall 2015
Grade 3 Student Learning Assessment Pilot

SLA
Student Learning Assessment

Alberta Government

Contents

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OVERVIEW

The following provides an overview of feedback from teachers, school administrators and school authority personnel on the Fall 2015 Grade 3 Student Learning Assessment (SLA) pilot collected by Alberta Education to help inform next steps. The report explains the context for the SLA, criteria for pilot success, pilot participation, methodology, data collected, results, and opportunities for improvement.

CONTEXT

Provincial assessments are meant to complement, not replace, day-to-day teacher observations and classroom assessment. They are sources of information that must be interpreted, used, and communicated within the context of regular and continuous assessment by classroom teachers.

The Grade 3 SLA is a beginning of the year "check in" digitally based provincial assessment that Alberta Education is developing to enable both parents and teachers to identify student strengths and areas of growth at the start of the school year.

The SLAs have three stated purposes:

- to improve student learning (primary purpose);
- to enhance instruction for students; and
- to assure Albertans our education system is meeting the needs of students and achieves the outcomes of the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning.*

The SLA is being developed primarily as a tool for teachers and parents to inform and support student learning. Alberta Education will continue to work with stakeholders to determine the best way to assure Albertans the education system is meeting the needs of students and achieving desired outcomes.

The Grade 3 SLA is focused on literacy and numeracy and uses the outcomes from the provincial programs of study. The Grade 3 SLA includes both digital questions (marked by Alberta Education) and performance tasks (marked locally by teachers):

- digital literacy questions
- a literacy performance task
- digital numeracy questions
- a numeracy performance task.

In Spring 2015, Alberta Education committed to remaining in pilot phase until the SLA is deemed a valuable tool for teachers, parents and students.

CRITERIA FOR PILOT SUCCESS

In May 2013, the government announced the conclusion of Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) and provided the directive to replace the Grade 3 PATs by June of 2014 for the beginning of the 2014–2015 school year.

Year 1

For Year 1 of the pilot, success was defined as developing and administering an entirely new provincial assessment program meeting the following criteria:

- designed as a beginning of the year "check in" assessment, which was different from other end-of-the-year provincial assessment programs developed prior to the SLA
- developed to assess literacy and numeracy related outcomes across provincial programs of study
- administered primarily online and comprised of digital questions and performance tasks (student activities with audiovisual clips and written response questions)
- developed to include professional learning supports provided to teachers prior to the first administration of the SLA.

Year 2

For Year 2 of the pilot, success was defined as teachers and administrators agreeing that there was improvement over Year 1 of the pilot in relation to the following criteria for which minimal percentages weren't set.

- The instrument engaged students and effectively assessed literacy and numeracy.
  - New for 2015, it also assessed basic number facts.
- Professional learning activities before, during and after the SLA administration, were available and helpful.
- Documents and resources before, during and after the SLA administration were easily available and useful.
- The sign-up process to access the SLA Application was easy to understand and use, as was the SLA Application itself.
- Technology and related supports required to successfully administer the Grade 3 SLA were accessible.
- Materials were streamlined and helpful during the administration and marking of performance tasks.
- Provincial funding for marking enabled timely, local marking of the performance tasks.
- Efficiencies were made in the process to reduce time spent on preparing, administering and marking the SLA.
- The content of official student and class reports for the digital questions provided helpful information to inform teaching and learning.
- Official student and class reports for the digital questions were made available to teachers earlier in 2015 (by November 16) than in 2014 (December 4).

PILOT PARTICIPATION

- In 2014, 59 of 61 public, separate and Francophone school authorities participated in the pilot. 42,378 students completed both the literacy and numeracy digital questions and another 1,467 students completed one of the two. 2,891 teachers took part in the 2014 pilot.

- In 2015, 57 of 61 public, separate and Francophone school authorities participated in the pilot. 44,680 students completed both the literacy and numeracy digital questions and another 1,269 students completed one of the two. 2,589 teachers took part in the 2015 pilot.

METHODOLOGY

Alberta Education collected feedback on the Fall 2015 pilot through a variety of methods: the SLA Application, the Alberta Education HelpDesk, focus groups and online surveys.

SLA Application Feedback Mechanism

Teachers, school administrators and school authority personnel who accessed the digital platform (Teacher Dashboard) had the opportunity to ask questions and/or provide feedback to Alberta Education about any aspect of the SLA on an ongoing basis during the 2015–2016 school year, as they did the first year of the pilot.

Alberta Education HelpDesk

Phone calls and emails for assistance with the SLA were documented and reviewed as part of the generation of this report.

Focus Groups

Alberta Education conducted face-to-face discussions with key education stakeholder groups:

- Fall 2015 Curriculum Coordinators' Meetings (7 zone meetings in all) – 135 participants
- College of Alberta School Superintendents' Fall 2015 Conference – 40 participants
- SLA Working Group
- Alberta Education Curriculum Policy Advisory Committee.

Online Surveys

Alberta Education administered online surveys:

- school authority staff (teachers, school administrators, school authority personnel)
- parent and school council survey for which there were 51 responses (new to 2015).

In 2015, the school authority survey built upon and included more questions than the 2014 survey to seek feedback on a broader range of topics. There were 761 responses in 2015, compared to 217 responses in 2014. Of the 2015 respondents:

- 491 were teachers, 186 were school administrators, 42 were school authority administrators, and 27 were school authority staff responsible for technology
- representation was 37% rural, 32% urban, and 31% metro
- 501 or 66% of respondents participated in both the 2014 and 2015 pilot, and 246 or 32% of respondents participated only in the 2015 pilot.

The school authority survey was intended to complement the feedback gathered throughout the Fall 2015 Grade 3 SLA3 pilot via the SLA Application, HelpDesk and focus group discussions with stakeholders following the Fall 2015 pilot. It was available in English and French until the end of December 2015.

Survey Overview:

Survey respondents were categorized as:

- Grade 3 teachers
- Non-Grade 3 teachers
- School Administrators
- School Authority Administrators
- School Authority Staff Responsible for Technology
- Other

The survey was comprised of 33 questions organized in 3 sections.

- Pre-Pilot Administration
- Pilot Administration
- Post-Pilot Administration

Comment boxes were provided for most questions. The survey was designed to be completed in 20 minutes.

Most questions are reported in percentages of agreement on a 5-point scale.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

DATA COLLECTED

Alberta Education collected two forms of data:

- Qualitative data via the SLA Application and the school authority survey in addition to comments from participants who attended focus group sessions
- Quantitative data based on the school authority survey results.

RESULTS

Of the 2,589 teachers who piloted the SLA in 2015, 492 teachers (19%) completed the online survey.

In this section, an analysis of the qualitative data is presented first with overall feedback and opportunities for improvement. The qualitative data are further analyzed within the following categories:

- SLA instrument
- professional learning supports
- pre-administration
- administration
- marking and reporting.

The frequency of similar terms was also taken into account in identifying common themes emerging from the qualitative data. It is important to note that all feedback sources are considered when presenting the qualitative data, whether obtained through the SLA Application, focus groups or school authority survey.

The quantitative data found in this report are pulled from the school authority online survey only. These data are presented in the form of percentages of teacher, school administrator and/or school authority administrator agreement on given questions. The parent survey had too small a response rate to include in the quantitative results.

Qualitative Data – Overall Feedback

- Marked improvements were noted in 2015 for the Grade 3 SLA, including the assessment instrument, SLA Application, professional learning supports, and results reports for the digital questions.

- Feedback for Year 2 reflects an enhanced experience by both teachers and students.

- The fact that official results for the digital questions were made available by Alberta Education 3 weeks earlier in Year 2 (by November 16, 2015) in comparison to Year 1 (December 4, 2014) was acknowledged.

- Teachers found the information in the individual student reports and class reports for the digital questions more helpful to inform teaching and learning in Year 2.

- The validity and reliability of the digital questions were recognized.

- Streamlining of the performance tasks was appreciated and performance tasks helped build teachers' assessment capacity.

- It took teachers less time in Year 2 to administer and mark performance tasks.

- Teachers and administrators expressed appreciation for the funding that Alberta Education provided to help with the local marking of performance tasks by teachers. Performance task results were reported locally.

- The additional funding provided by Alberta Education enabled release time and collaborative marking sessions by teachers at the local level. These provided opportunities for teachers to meet with other teachers to discuss marking and help enhance assessment capacity.

- Teachers and administrators noted that professional learning supports were enhanced in Year 2 [e.g., face-to-face and online supports provided by the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia (ARPDC)] and provided positive feedback on the high quality of these supports.

- Materials to support SLA technology setup and administration were simplified.

- There were fewer technical issues at the local level during this administration (most of the technical issues were related to registering students, viewing/using the features on the teacher dashboard, distorted screen displays of some questions, and problems printing reports for the digital questions).

- The paper version of the digital questions, which was significantly improved in Year 2, was used by approximately 600 students who did not have access to technology to complete the SLA.

- Alberta Education was commended for having listened to and acted upon much of the feedback from the Fall 2014 pilot.

Opportunities for Further Improvement – Overall Feedback

- Results for the digital questions must be provided much earlier for a beginning of the year assessment. Not having results earlier significantly decreases the value of the information provided by the Grade 3 SLA.

- Consolidate support documents to facilitate access and ease of reference.

- Provide additional supports to assist teachers with local reporting of performance task results.

- Simplify reports for the digital questions and consider a parent-friendly report in 2016.

SLA Instrument – Feedback

Literacy and Numeracy

- Adjustments made in 2015 to assist in developing understanding of where literacy and numeracy reside in provincial programs of study were helpful.

- Performance tasks were streamlined and materials such as marking rubrics were simplified.

Literacy Questions

- The SLA effectively assessed literacy for most students. However, it was seen as being less effective for certain groups of students (e.g., ESL students, students performing below grade level, students with limited reading skills, low SES students).

- Most of the digital questions were visually engaging, appropriate, and straightforward to administer.

- The performance task was engaging for students and easier to administer. The rubric and exemplars were easier to use but some of the terms used need further clarification.

Numeracy Questions

- Most of the digital questions were visually engaging, appropriate, and straightforward to administer.

- The performance task was engaging for students and easier to administer compared to 2014. In Numeracy, it was challenging to use one rubric to assess both parts of the task. Some of the terms used need further clarification.

SLA Instrument – Opportunities for Further Improvement

- Provide further supports to foster understanding and clarity as to how the Grade 3 SLA assesses literacy and numeracy related outcomes across provincial programs of study.

- Look for opportunities to reduce the number of digital questions and maintain the validity and reliability of the assessment.
- Continue to refine the digital questions and streamline the performance tasks.
- Use more digital question types to help identify student strengths and areas for growth.
- Better support teachers in the administration and marking of performance tasks (including multi-step problems) as well as the interpretation and use of results to help inform instruction.
- Some respondents questioned whether or not some of the outcomes can be assessed using the digital platform.

Professional Learning Supports – Feedback

- Teachers and administrators appreciated that more comprehensive professional learning supports were available prior to, during, and after the pilot administration in Year 2.
- Earlier access in 2015 to SLA support materials and the addition of "How To" videos this year was greatly appreciated by teachers and administrators.

Professional Learning Supports - Opportunities for Further Improvement

- Continue to work with the ARPDC to ensure PD sessions are timely and support PD provided by school authorities.
- Provide greater clarity about Assistive Supports for students in the digital questions.
- Consolidate – where possible – professional learning support documents.

Pre-administration – Feedback

- Teachers appreciated earlier access to SLA support materials in 2015.
- The time and cost for printing SLA performance task materials at the local level was significantly reduced.

Pre-administration – Opportunities for Further Improvement

- Enhance communications so that school authorities, schools, and teachers are aware of changes to the SLA.
- Explore ways to simplify access to the SLA Application.

Administration – Feedback

- The administration of the SLA was smoother and more manageable than last year.
- Early access to the SLA Application and preview of digital questions and performance tasks was valuable.
- Teachers were more familiar with the SLA instrument and the teacher dashboard in Year 2.

Administration – Opportunities for Further Improvement

- Continue to improve the SLA Application, including making Assistive Supports easier to use, enhance the assessment management system, and address some technical issues with the SLA Application, such as the screen freezing in some cases.
- The most common suggestions for improvement included reducing the number of digital questions, enhancing the usability of the teacher dashboard, and clarification on using learning supports.

Marking and Reporting – Feedback

Marking

- Teachers and administrators expressed appreciation for the additional funding that Alberta Education provided to help with the local marking of performance tasks as it enabled release time and collaborative marking sessions. These provided opportunities for teachers to meet with other teachers to discuss marking and help enhance assessment capacity.

Reporting

- Note: Unlike in 2014 where preliminary results were provided within 24 hours of a class completing the digital questions, preliminary results were not planned for 2015. Based on focus group feedback, not providing preliminary results within 24 hours in 2015 negatively impacted the usefulness of the SLA to support teaching and learning.
- Teachers and administrators appreciated that an adjustment was made in response to feedback during the 2015 pilot. Preliminary results were provided by October 23, 2015 rather than having schools wait for the official results on November 16, 2015.
- Official individual student reports and class reports provided much better information in Year 2 of the pilot.

Marking and Reporting – Opportunities for Further Improvement

- Provide student results for the digital questions much earlier. The reports need to be available much sooner so the information can be used to improve student learning and inform instructional practices.
- Simplify reports to ensure they are both teacher- and parent-friendly as well as printer-friendly.
- Provide templates to support teachers in marking and reporting performance task results locally.
- There is uncertainty about how information from the SLAs could inform assurance at the provincial level.
- Professional learning activities are needed regarding interpreting, using and sharing the results.

This completes the analysis of the qualitative data collected in 2015.

Quantitative Data – Online Survey

The quantitative data follow in the form of percentages of teacher, school administrator and/or school authority administrator agreement on given survey questions. Results presented in this section are focused on questions associated with criteria for success in the second year of the pilot.

Results from the *Non-Grade 3 teacher*s and *Other* respondent groups are not reported here due to small response numbers. Also, the *School authority staff responsible for technology* respondents were combined into one group with the *School authority administrators* respondents.

Within this section, 2015 survey results are compared to 2014 results. However, there are no 2014 comparable data for school authority administrators. This is because there were fewer than 10 respondents to each question. In these cases, only 2015 analyses are presented.

For 2015, Alberta Education sought feedback on a broader range of questions on the following topics: pre-administration, administration, marking and reporting.

As with the qualitative data presented above, the quantitative data are presented within the following categories:

- SLA instrument
- professional learning supports
- pre-administration
- administration
- marking and reporting.

SLA Instrument (2014 and 2015)

Literacy Questions

- Agreement that digital questions effectively assessed literacy.

  Teachers

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 29%	2015	55%	23%	22%
	2014	26%	19%	55%

  School Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 38%	2015	51%	34%	15%
	2014	13%	30%	57%

  School Authority Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
NA	2015	57%	43%	0%
	2014	NA	NA	NA

- Agreement that digital literacy questions captured student interest and engaged students.

  Teachers

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 17%	2015	65%	21%	14%
	2014	48%	18%	34%

  School Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 16%	2015	51%	36%	13%
	2014	35%	30%	35%

  School Authority Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
NA	2015	73%	24%	3%
	2014	NA	NA	NA

- Agreement that the performance task effectively assessed literacy.

  Teachers

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 38%	2015	51%	25%	24%
	2014	13%	15%	72%

  School Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 45%	2015	50%	33%	17%
	2014	5%	33%	62%

  School Authority Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
NA	2015	67%	31%	3%
	2014	NA	NA	NA

- Agreement that literacy performance task captured student interest and engaged students.

Teachers

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 44%	2015	66%	21%	13%
	2014	22%	18%	60%

School Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 36%	2015	46%	41%	13%
	2014	10%	33%	57%

School Authority Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
NA	2015	69%	31%	0%
	2014	NA	NA	NA

Numeracy Questions

- Agreement that digital questions effectively assessed numeracy.

Teachers

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 27%	2015	55%	22%	21%
	2014	28%	13%	59%

School Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 36%	2015	49%	34%	17%
	2014	13%	35%	52%

School Authority Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
NA	2015	68%	32%	0%
	2014	NA	NA	NA

- Agreement that digital numeracy questions captured student interest and engaged students.

Teachers

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 19%	2015	63%	22%	15%
	2014	44%	19%	37%

School Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 22%	2015	52%	35%	13%
	2014	30%	30%	39%

School Authority Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
NA	2015	69%	31%	0%
	2014	NA	NA	NA

- Agreement that the performance task effectively assessed numeracy.

Teachers

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 34%	2015	45%	22%	33%
	2014	11%	10%	79%

School Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 35%	2015	45%	36%	18%
	2014	10%	33%	57%

School Authority Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
NA	2015	61%	36%	3%
	2014	NA	NA	NA

- Agreement that numeracy performance task captured student interest and engaged students.

Teachers

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 35%	2015	49%	27%	24%
	2014	14%	8%	78%

School Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
↑ 35%	2015	45%	36%	18%
	2014	10%	33%	57%

School Authority Administrators

Change	Year	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
NA	2015	56%	36%	8%
	2014	NA	NA	NA

Professional Learning Supports (2014 and 2015)

- Teachers accessed PD for the SLA through the ARPDC, their school authority, both, or other.

Change	Year	Accessed PD
↑ 27%	2015	71%
	2014	44%

- Teachers who found professional learning activities:
  - before the administration helpful were more likely to agree that digital questions effectively assessed literacy and numeracy.
  - during the administration helpful were more likely to agree that the performance tasks effectively assessed literacy and numeracy.
  - after the administration helpful were more likely to agree that the content of the reports for the digital questions provided helpful information.

Pre-administration (2015 Only)

- Survey feedback indicates that teachers on average spent 6 hours preparing for the pilot.
- 67% agreed that the process to access the SLA Application was easy to understand and use, while 20% were neutral. 13% disagreed.
- 89% indicated that most or all of their students accessed practice questions prior to the administration. 66% indicated that most or all of their students accessed released questions prior to the administration.
- New for 2015, 63% of teacher respondents indicated that the two-week Teacher Preview of the questions was helpful in preparing for the pilot, while 27% were neutral. 10% disagreed.
- New for 2015, central office administrators were provided access to the SLA Application to help support teachers in pre-administration processes and marking. The majority of school and school authority administrators surveyed agreed that this access was helpful.

Administration (2015 Only)

- The 2015 target for students to complete both performance tasks was 2 to 2.5 hours. Survey results indicate that it took on average 4 hours to administer both performance tasks. This is an improvement over the average of 5 to 7 hours it took in 2014.
- 88% of teacher respondents indicated that they had access to the technology required to administer the SLA, while 6% were neutral. 6% disagreed.
- 81% had access to technology supports required to successfully administer the SLA, while 13% were neutral. 6% disagreed.

Marking and Reporting (2015 Only)

Marking

- For marking performance tasks, survey results indicate that there were efficiencies this year. It took 6 hours (on average) to mark both performance tasks for an entire class.

Reporting

- 36% of teacher respondents agreed that the October 23, 2015 preliminary results of the digital questions were helpful in informing teaching and learning, while 31% were neutral. 33% disagreed.
- The provision of official results for the digital question by Alberta Education on November 16, 2015 was 3 weeks earlier than in 2014 (December 4, 2015).
  - 48% of teachers agreed that the official individual student results for the digital questions provided helpful information to inform teaching and learning, while 23% were neutral.
  - 29% disagreed.
  - 48% of teachers agreed that the official class reports for the digital questions were helpful to inform teaching and learning, while 25% were neutral. 27% disagreed.

Staff	Individual Student Reports			Class Reports		
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Teachers	48%	23%	29%	48%	25%	27%
School administrators	51%	28%	21%	51%	29%	20%
School authority administrators	67%	27%	6%	71%	29%	0%

- Feedback in 2015 indicated that school and school authority administrators saw more value in the reports for the digital questions than did teachers. In 2015, 68% of teachers indicated that performance tasks results should only be reported at the local level and 32% indicated that they should be reported at the local level and to Alberta Education.