

Student Learning Assessments Update

Background

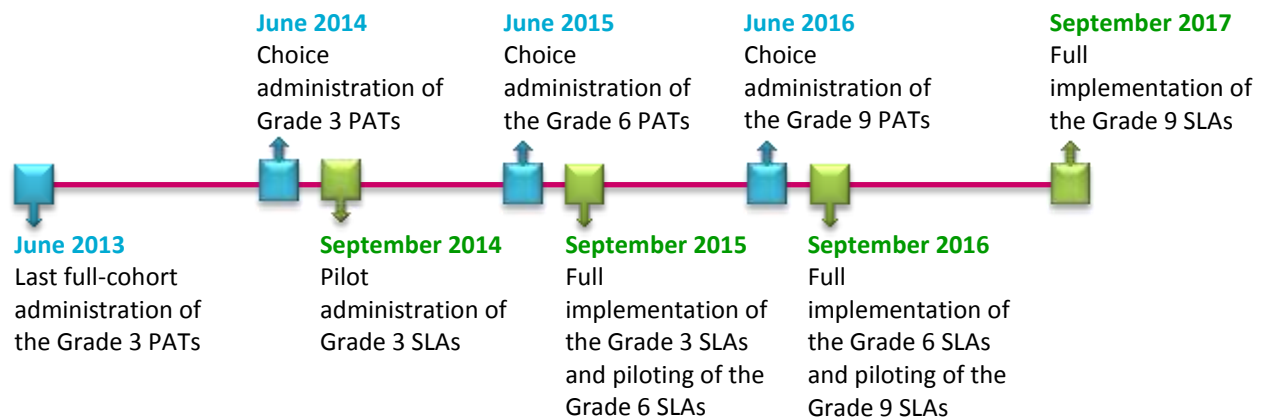
In May 2013, Education Minister Jeff Johnson announced that Alberta would be giving teachers more support to help students succeed by introducing assessments that will replace the existing Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs).

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 classroom teachers, is developing the new SLAs. They will be administered at the start of grades 3, 6, and 9.

Timeline for Implementation

Grade 3 students will be the first to write the new assessments, with pilots starting in September 2014. Full implementation for Grade 3 is expected by September 2015. Pilots for grades 6 and 9 are scheduled to begin in 2015 and 2016, respectively.

School authorities have a choice, school-by-school, whether to administer the Grade 3 PATs in June 2014, the Grade 3 SLAs in September 2014, or both. Alberta Education contacted school authorities in fall 2013 to confirm their participation in the Grade 3 PATs and/or SLAs. Based on school board decisions to date, nearly all Grade 3 students in Alberta will write the Grade 3 pilot assessment in September 2014, with approximately 30 per cent of Grade 3 students also writing the PATs in June 2014.



Literacy and Numeracy

The SLAs will be provided digitally and assess students within the context of the **working** definitions of literacy and numeracy that Alberta Education is currently using to guide its work:

- Literacy is acquiring, creating, connecting, and communicating meaning in a wide variety of contexts; and
- Numeracy is the confidence and habits of mind to engage with, critically assess, reflect upon, and apply quantitative and spatial information when making judgments and decisions or taking action in all aspects of daily living.

Structure of the Grade 3 SLAs

Components of the Grade 3 SLAs have been determined 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 Grade 3 SLAs are the following:

- a digitally scored literacy component;
- a literacy performance-task component;
- a digitally scored numeracy component; and
- a numeracy performance-task component.

The SLAs will reference the current provincial programs of study until the implementation of new curriculum through the Curriculum Redesign Initiative.

English and French

The literacy components of the SLAs are being developed independently for English, French Immersion, and Francophone students. The numeracy portions are being developed in English, and the French Immersion and Francophone versions will be translations of the English version. Grade 3 students take the SLAs in the language of their instruction (i.e., Grade 3 Francophone students will take only the French components).

Length

The SLAs are being designed to provide teachers with scheduling flexibility. While none of the Grade 3 SLA components will be timed when students write them, the components will each be designed for students to typically complete within 60 minutes. For example, teachers may wish to complete the digitally scored components with students in more than one session. The SLA components for grades 6 and 9 students will likely have longer administration times.

The two digitally scored components of the Grade 3 SLAs will consist of item formats such as multiple choice, numerical response, and short answer, as well as new and innovative formats that leverage the digital platform, including drag-and-drop, rearrangement, and highlighting.

Teacher Involvement

Early in the school year, many teachers in the early grades typically administer placement and readiness assessments in order to determine their students' areas of strengths and improvement. Many teachers also administer performance tasks. The SLAs are designed to assist teachers by providing an assessment created by Alberta teachers for Alberta students. The performance-task components, as part of the SLA, respond to requests that the new assessment be a cooperative combination of local and provincial information regarding student learning.

The two performance-task components of the SLAs will be provided to teachers digitally, but students will respond in whatever way is appropriate for the performance tasks, which may not be digitally. Teachers will administer the components under prescribed conditions, score the components using provided scoring guides and exemplars, and then report the results to Alberta Education digitally.

Alberta teachers will continue to be involved in blueprinting, item development, field testing, test validation, French translation validation, standards setting, and results interpreting.

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, please contact Ken Marcellus, Director of the Achievement Testing Program, at Ken.Marcellus@gov.ab.ca or 780-427-0010 (toll-free by dialing 310-0000).