

DATE: January 20, 2015

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Grade 3 Student Learner Assessment (SLA) Pilot (Response to Request for Information #069)

ORIGINATOR: Mary Michailides, Assistant Superintendent, Support for Schools

RESOURCE STAFF: Amanda Forster, Sandra MacRae, Greg McInulty, John Scammell, Colin Woelfle

REFERENCE: November 4, 2014 Board Meeting (Trustee Hoffman)

ISSUE

The following information was requested: provide information outlining learnings that have emerged from the pilot of the Grade 3 student learner assessments. This information should include strengths, challenges and how we as a district can relay feedback to Alberta Education in support of ensuring student success.

BACKGROUND

In May 2013, Alberta Education announced the replacement of the existing Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) with SLAs, beginning with a pilot in Grade 3 in September 2014. The Superintendent of Schools determined that all district elementary schools would take part in the optional provincial piloting of the Grade 3 administration of the SLA. The SLA pilot was planned to be administered between September 29 and October 10, 2014, and then was extended two weeks by the Minister of Education. This extension was provided to reflect the delay in publishing required support materials for principals and teachers, and to reflect the time required for scoring of the assessments. This initial pilot administration consisted of four parts: a digitally scored literacy component, a literacy performance task component, a digitally scored numeracy component and a numeracy performance task component.

CURRENT SITUATION

The administration of the SLA pilot is complete. The release of classroom reports and individual student results to the teachers occurred December 3, 2014. A group of district principals and Grade 3 teachers were brought together on January 6, 2015 to discuss how best to share the results of the SLA with students and parents. Information regarding strengths, challenges and possible implications communicated to Research and Innovation for Student Learning by schools and central staff and gathered from the January 6 meeting is summarized in Attachment I.

Early feedback indicates strengths in this new assessment process. For example, Grade 3 teachers indicated they received valuable information about their students through this assessment. Many challenges were reported as well, including in the areas of teacher workload and lack of clarity regarding student exemptions and accommodations.

Representatives at Alberta Education have indicated their awareness that challenges exist. Alberta Education has created a digital feedback survey and district staff have been made aware of how to locate and complete the feedback survey. Alberta Education will be holding parent focus groups in January to provide parents the opportunity to provide feedback on how to best share results in the second year of the pilot. Alberta Education has communicated that individual districts will have other means to provide feedback such as through the College of Alberta School Superintendents and by providing feedback directly to Alberta Education's Assessment Sector. To that end, the feedback provided in this report will be sent directly to the Executive Director of the Assessment Sector at Alberta Education.

KEY POINTS

- Research and Innovation for Student Learning has received information regarding strengths, challenges and possible implications of the pilot administration of the SLAs from district staff.
- Teachers and principals have expressed that they value the changes to the provincial achievement testing program that are embodied in the SLAs.
- There have been challenges in the preparation for and in the administration of the assessment during this pilot year.
- Alberta Education has provided mechanisms for teachers, principals, parents and school districts to provide feedback regarding the pilot.

ATTACHMENTS & APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Strengths, Challenges and Possible Implications Identified by District Staff September 2014 to January 2015

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**Strengths, Challenges and Possible Implications Identified by District Staff
September 2014 to January 2015**

Strengths:

- Teachers reported receiving valuable information about how their students are doing using the evidence provided through the completion of the tasks.
- It was reported that activities progressed from a basic level to a more in depth level of understanding.
- When collaborative scoring time was provided for teachers, the conversations about the tasks and student performance were reported as valuable.
- The question structures embedded in the SLAs were reported as providing opportunities for students to demonstrate their thinking in various ways (e.g. numbers, pictures or words).
- Student needs are identified early and an opportunity to work with and inform parents in October is seen as a benefit of these assessments, assuming results are provided in a timelier manner in future administrations.

Challenges:

- Principals expressed a need for clarity around the process of exempting students from taking part in the pilot.
- Principals expressed a need for clarity around the use of accommodations, such as the use of a scribe.
- Principals reported challenges with the process of securing extranet accounts for their Grade 3 teachers, which was required for the administration of the SLA.
- Staff reported technical challenges, such as slow response time, intermittent static in the headphones making the audio difficult to hear, and the mouse freezing on some questions.
- Some students had never completed an assessment on a computer before, and hence found the design of the assessment difficult.
- Scheduling was difficult, given the requirement that some components of the assessment be completed on computers.
- Combined grade classes and special needs classes with multiple grades involved presented an additional challenge for completing the assessments.
- Given the structure of the assessment, and the fact that students work at different paces, this meant long administration times and some students left waiting for others to complete sections.
- The scoring of the performance tasks was reported as time consuming for teachers, often taking more than 40 minutes per student.
- The five point scale on the scoring rubric was reported as difficult for teachers to use to describe student performance.
- The exemplars of student performance and the scoring rubrics were reported to be not well aligned.
- The online material related to exemplars was reported as cumbersome to navigate due to the volume of information.

- Student self-reflection in the numeracy performance task was reported as redundant.
- Redundancy in aspects of both the numeracy and literacy performance tasks was noted.
- The task exemplar provided was reported as not reflecting a variety and range of student responses.
- It was reported that rendering judgments about a student's use of strategies without engaging directly with a student was difficult for teachers.
- It was reported that timelines for staff to prepare for the administration of the SLA's were short.
- It was reported that there was difficulty meeting the additional demands on the number of supply teachers needed.

Possible Implications

- In district planning for the pilots for the SLA 6 and the SLA 9 in the future, it may make sense to have only some schools take part in the pilot.
- With advance planning, schools could organize to work in their catchments to engage in collaboratively scoring the performance tasks components of the SLA.
- Smaller sites with less technical support could be provided with additional support in advance.
- Grade 3 teachers could organize to work together through their catchments to analyze SLA results in advance of sharing results with parents and students.
- Grade 3 teachers could work together through their catchments to share best practices in response to the SLA results.