
Early Years Standardized Assessment Report



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Background

Key priorities related to the assessment of students in the early years of Alberta's K-12 education system have been identified. Engagement on these key priorities related to Early Years Student Assessments has been undertaken to help determine future steps in the development and implementation of provincial assessments.

In April 2021, the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) sent out a survey to all school authorities (including public, separate, Francophone, charter, First Nations, and independent schools), asking them to provide details on their existing practices for early years literacy and numeracy standardized assessments.

The survey's findings are provided in the following sections.

How many school authorities completed the survey?

A total of 70 school authorities responded to the survey, representing about 80% of the total student population in Alberta. 182 unique survey responses were received, or about 2 – 3 surveys for each authority. (Note: each school authority was asked to complete a separate survey for each standardized assessment used.)

Survey Findings

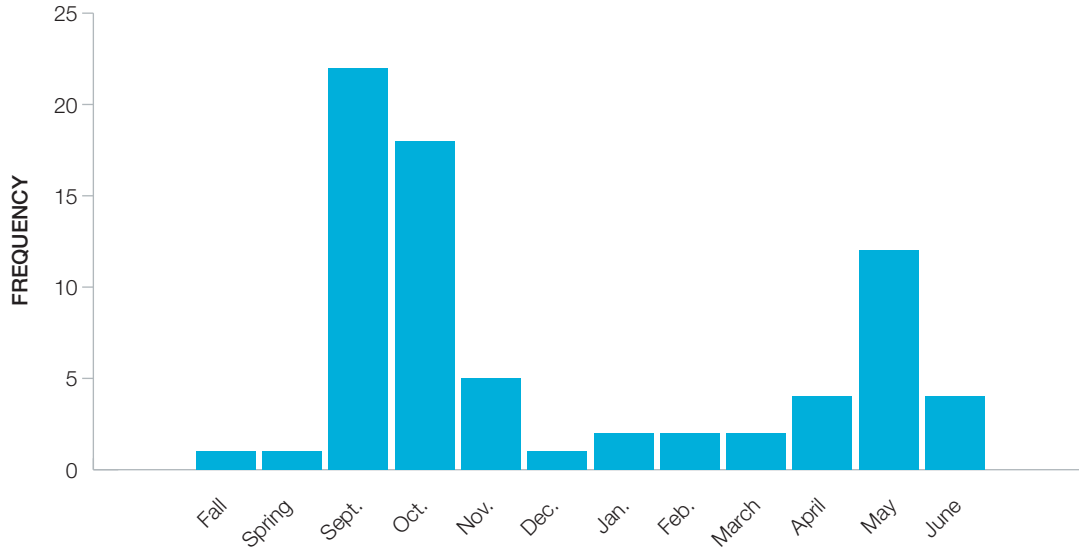
What are the most commonly used standardized assessments across the province?

Most assessments are used as tools to determine student strengths and difficulties in language literacy.

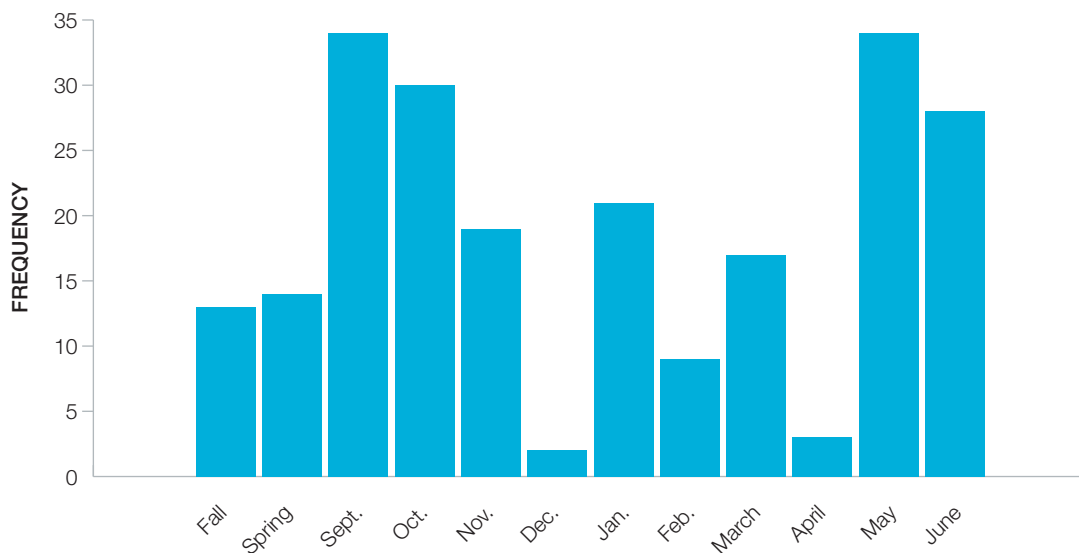
Top 8 Standardized Assessments Used by School Authorities Surveyed	Grades	Purpose	Number of School Authorities	Percentage of School Authorities
Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System (BAS)	K–6	Used as a global reading screener to identify students who are not meeting grade level expectations for reading.	39	55.7%
Math Intervention Programming Instrument (MIPI)	2–10	Used to evaluate a student’s understanding of concepts taught at the previous grade level.	26	37.1%
GB+ (French)	1–6	Used as a diagnostic reading tool that provides insight into a child’s ability to read in French with comprehension and accuracy.	11	15.7%
Highest Level of Achievement Testing (HLAT)	1–9	Used to measure a student’s growth in writing.	8	11.4%
STAR Accelerated Reader - Renaissance Learning	K–12	Used to gauge the reading comprehension skills and abilities of students.	7	10.0%
Early Years Evaluation (EYE)	K	Used to provide information about a child’s development and early learning associated with readiness to learn in formal settings, including an emphasis on reading readiness skills.	6	8.6%
Reading Readiness Screening Tool (RRST)	K–1	Used to support the early identification of reading difficulties encountered by young children.	6	8.6%
Woodcock-Johnson II or IV	K–12	Used to assess both academic achievement (what children have learned in school) and cognitive development.	4	5.7%

How often is an assessment administered and in what month?

42.5% of the time an assessment is **used once** during a school year. The administration frequency and time of year of these “one-off” assessments is shown in the graph below.

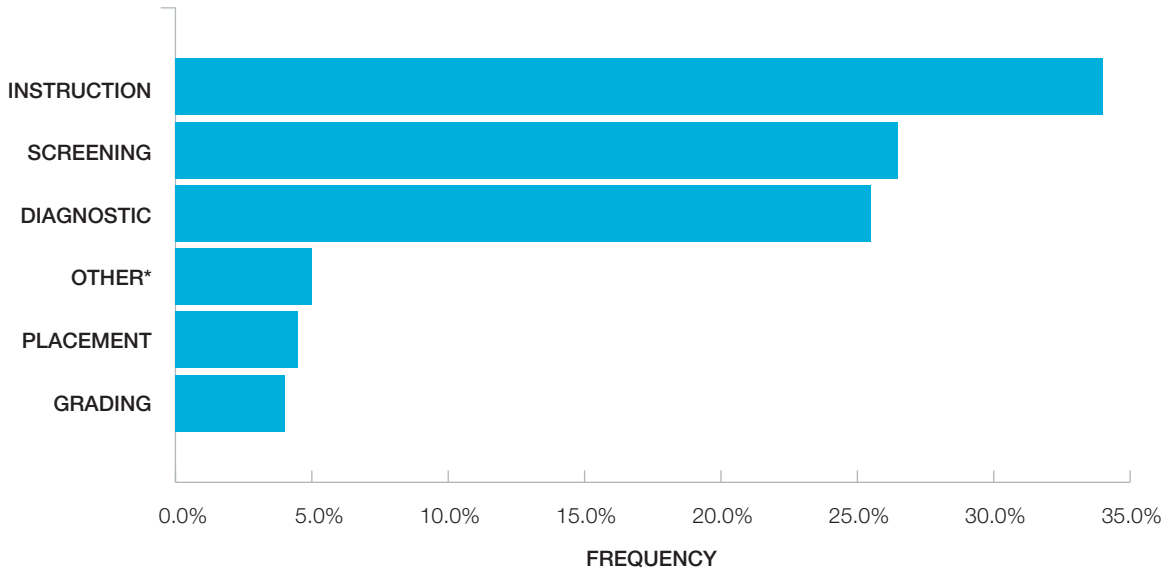


57.5% of the time an assessment is used more than once during a school year. When assessments are used **more than once**, the administration frequency and time of year of these “repeatedly used” assessments are shown in the graph below.



What are some primary reasons for administering assessments?

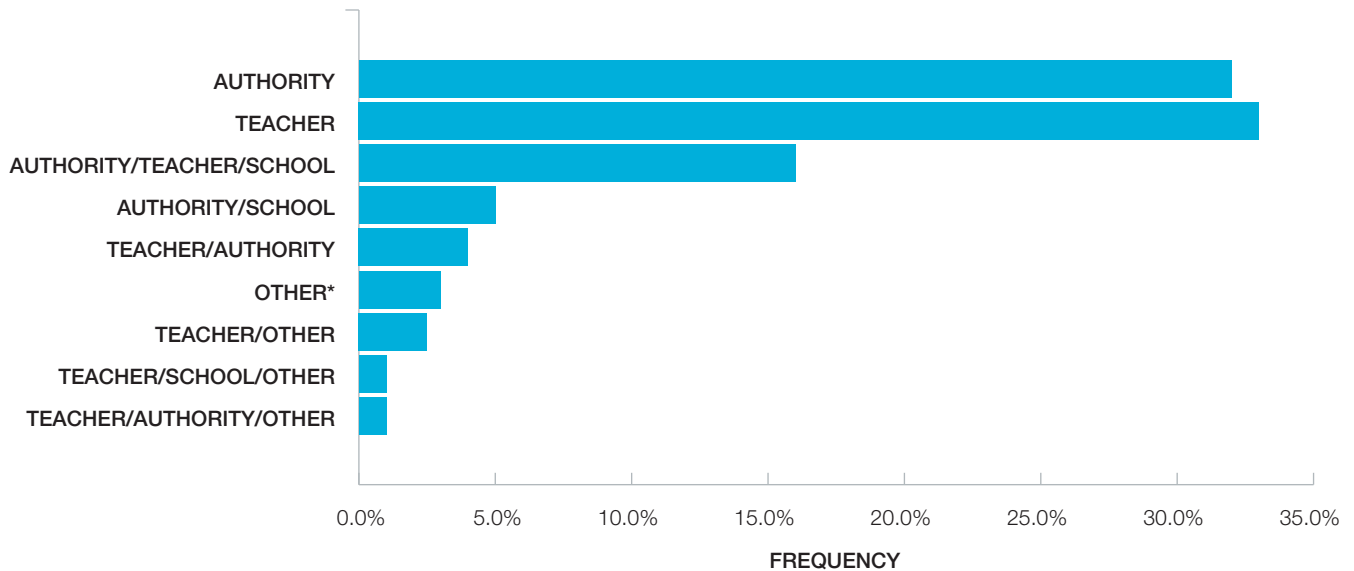
The most common reason school authorities employ standardized assessments is to inform instruction, followed by use for screening and diagnostic purposes. It is important to note that an assessment is sometimes used for more than one reason: e.g., for diagnostic and instructional purposes.



*“Other” includes: to inform parents, to help plan for appropriate intervention supports, and to benchmark student progress.

Who decides which students are assessed?

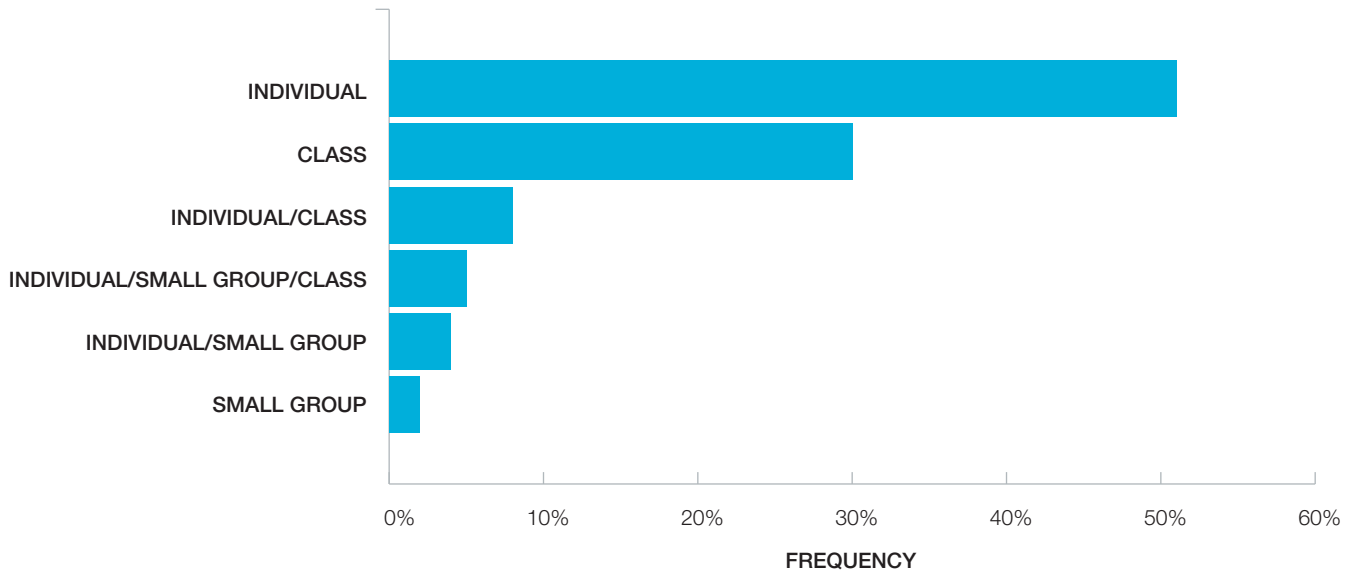
65% of the time it is the school authority or the teacher who decides which students to assess.



*“Other” may include conditions related to requirements of new students, students receiving supports from other service provider agencies, requests from parents, etc.

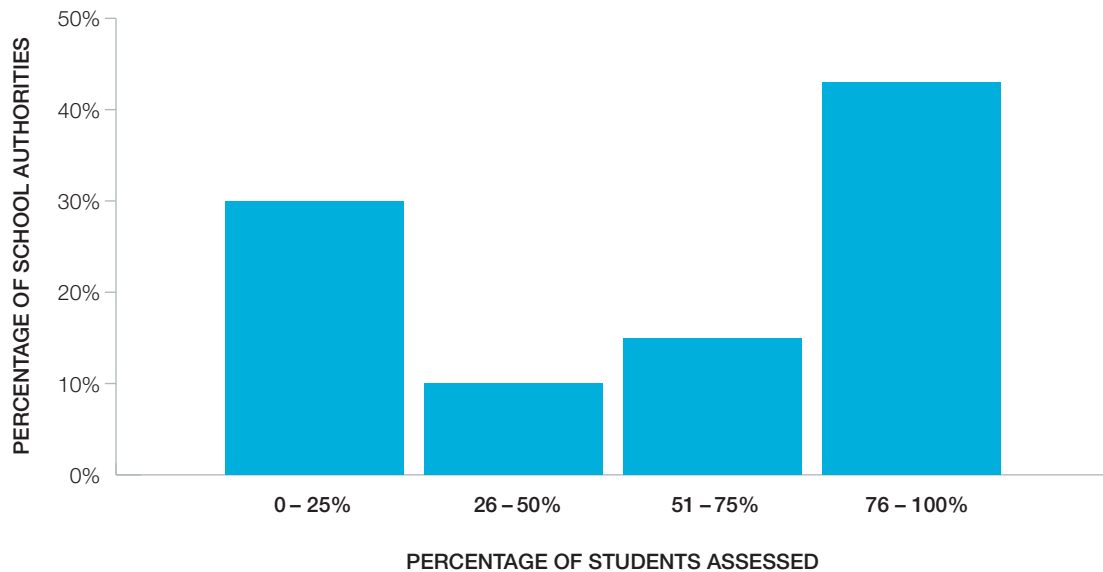
How are assessments administered?

Over 80% of the time an assessment is administered to an individual or an entire class.



Approximately what percentage of students in each school authority are assessed?*

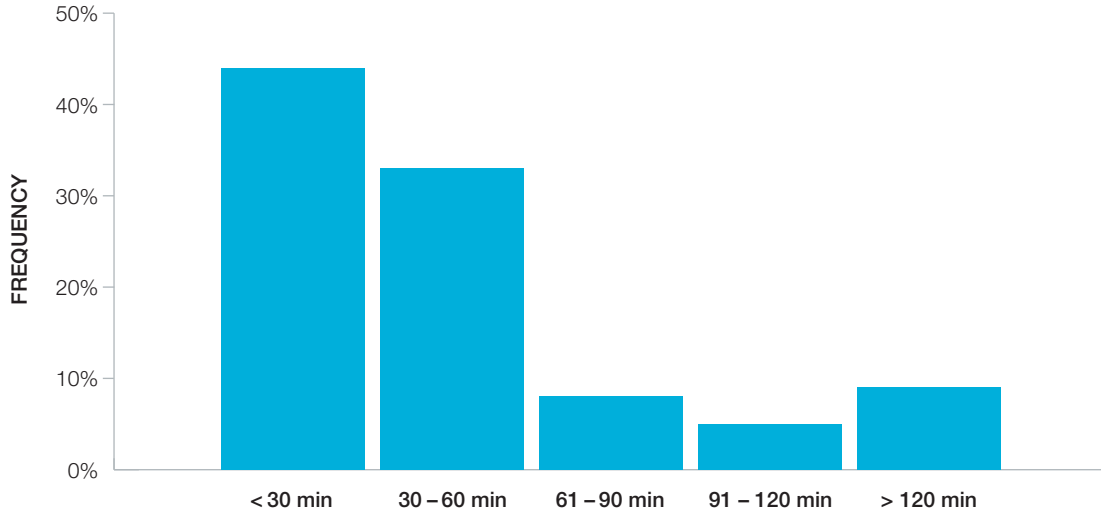
Over 40% of responding school authorities administer **standardized assessments** to 76–100% of their students, while about 30% only assess up to 25% of their students.



*These results pertain only to the administration of standardized assessments and not teacher-developed and -administered assessments.

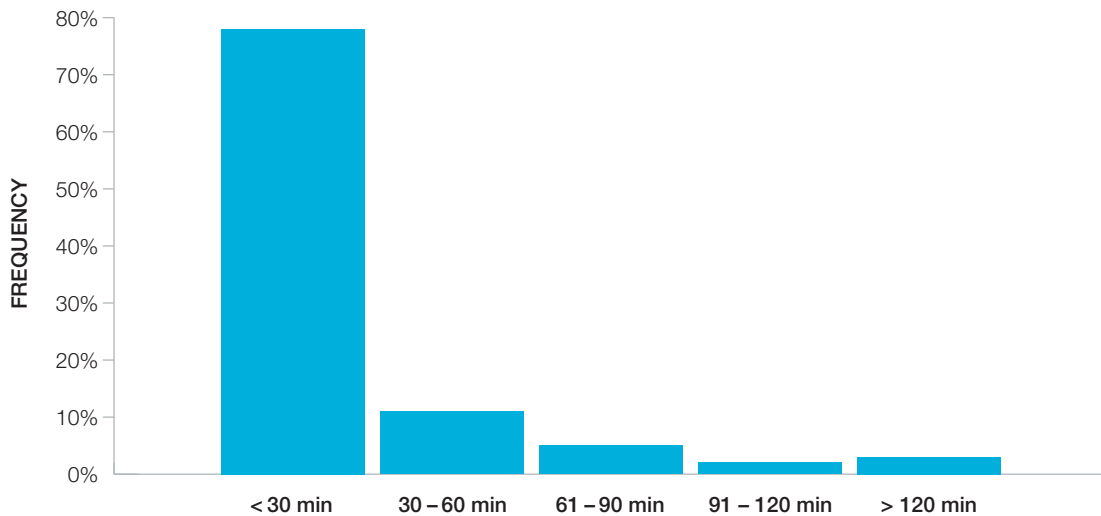
Approximately how many minutes does it take to administer an assessment?

About 44% of the time it takes less than 30 minutes to administer an assessment, and about 33% of the time 30–60 minutes.



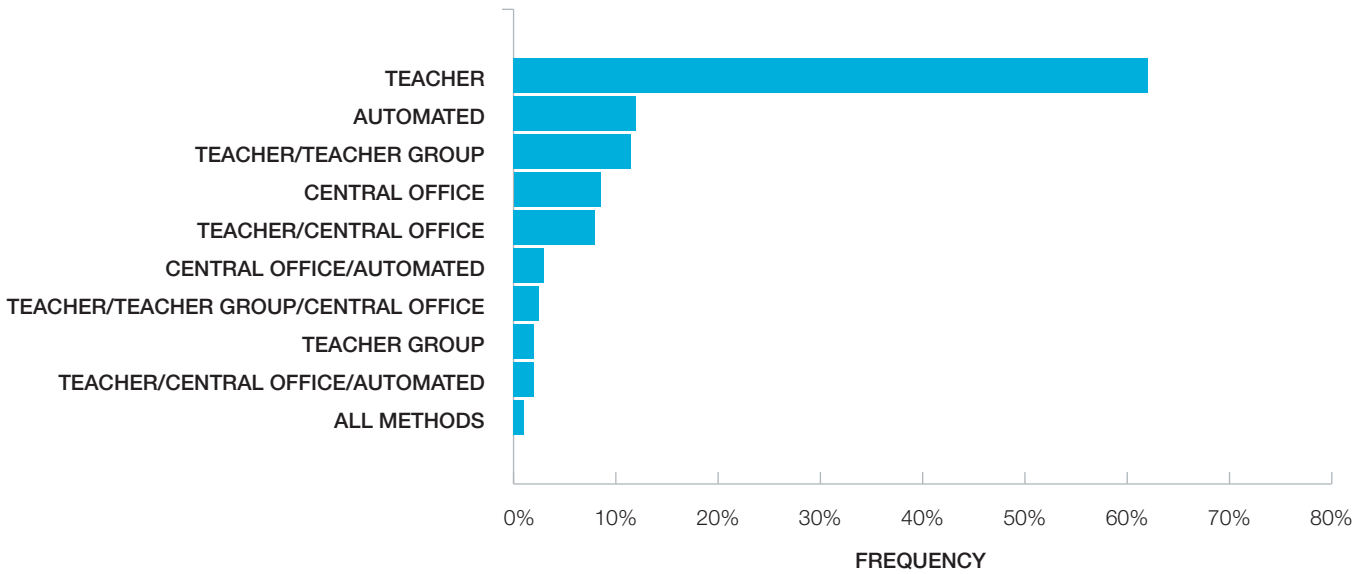
Approximately how many minutes does it take to score an assessment?

Almost 80% of the time it takes less than 30 minutes to score an assessment.



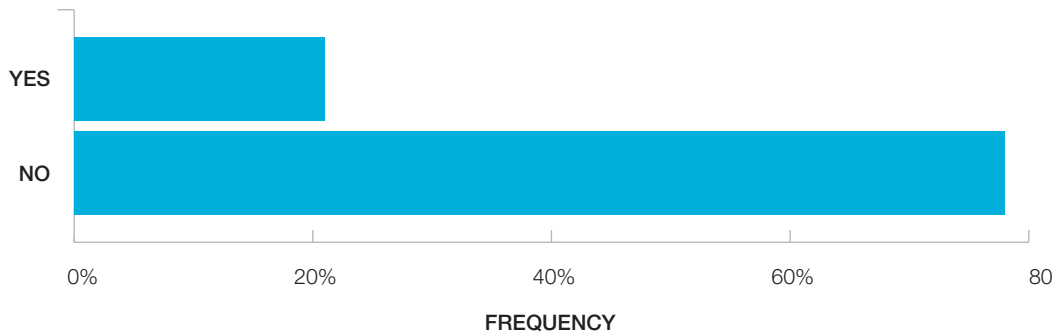
Who scores and prepares the report of an assessment?

Over 50% of the time it is an individual teacher who scores and prepares the results of an assessment.



Are parents/guardians consulted to decide whether their child will participate in an assessment?

About 75% of the time parents/guardians are not consulted to decide whether their child will be assessed. This is likely due in part to the fact that an assessment is part of a regular teacher practice under the umbrella of regular classroom assessment strategies. Parents expect teachers to conduct appropriate assessments as teachers and school authorities deem necessary.

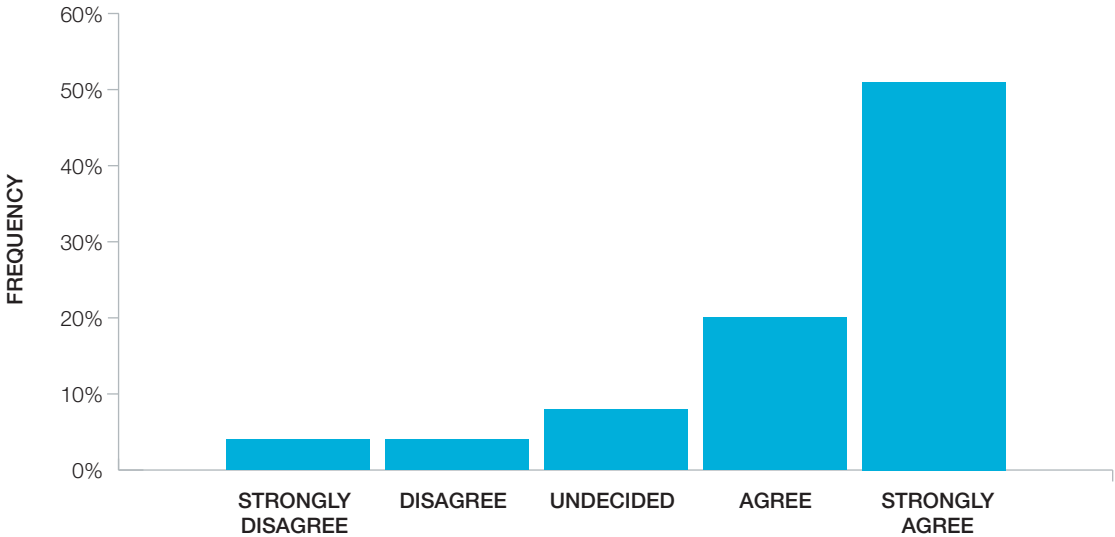


How are parents/guardians informed about an assessment’s purpose and results?

The most common method of sharing assessment information and results with parents/guardians is one-on-one meetings. The next most common method is formal reporting mechanisms: e.g., report cards, progress reports, comments placed on PowerSchool. Other ways assessment information is shared include student-led conferences, informally through conversations, letters home, newsletters or school policy statements. In some cases they are not informed since the results are intended for teacher planning and instruction.

Are the assessed knowledge and skills aligned with Alberta’s curriculum?

Over 50% of respondents strongly believe that the knowledge and skills being assessed by these assessments align with the Alberta curriculum.



Is there a per student fee for use of an assessment? If so, what is the per student cost?

There is usually an upfront cost to purchase an assessment after which the cost is minimal: e.g., \$1 - \$5/student for materials. However, this upfront cost can be as high as \$20,000: e.g., the full Fountas and Pinnell program was quoted as costing \$16,000.

In other cases, while the initial cost to purchase a program is lower, yearly fees are charged to administer the assessment and manage the data: e.g., \$20,000 a year for about 1800 students which covers an annual fee for using the assessment (which is dependent on the size of the district), a fee for hosting the data, and a fee for training costs. In cases like these, the average cost appears to be about \$5 - \$10/student per year.

Are school authorities assessing possible COVID-19-related learning impacts?

Many authorities plan to continue using all their current assessment tools as usual, while other authorities plan to increase the frequency of their use. It is important to note that some authorities do not want to cause any additional concerns for students at this time by doing more or different assessments – they do not want to add to the stresses already caused by COVID-19.

There is also increased attention to comparing classroom results with standardized assessment results; however, these comparison strategies were not shared. Many school authorities are in the process of exploring and planning additional assessment strategies in the fall of 2021.

It is worth noting that of the 70 school authorities that responded to this question, at least 21 school authorities, or about 30%, indicated that they have not made any formal plans to measure the impacts of COVID-19 on student learning at this time.

Specific comments related to changes in assessment usage:

- “We did not administer the EYE this year because COVID protocols would hinder teachers’ ability to complete accurate observations.”
- “We use the Student Orientation to School Questionnaire (SOS-Q) to measure the social emotional impact of COVID on students. Completed with students in grades 4-12. All literacy and numeracy assessments (Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE), MIPI, RRST) are reflecting impact of COVID on student learning.”
- “All of our current assessment tools would provide us with a picture of the possible impacts of COVID. Our fall assessments indicated a decline in students’ abilities in both literacy and numeracy.”
- “Using STAR reading, Fountas and Pinnell, MIPI and HLAT and will compare to fall 2021 results.”
- “The division is in the process of identifying Assurance Framework goals and strategies that align with early learning intervention and assessment strategies. We are hoping to be able to access COVID funding to support the interventions for next year. Examples - Early Reader Interventions.”
- “All of our students already have learning delays tied to their specific learning disorders in reading, writing and/or mathematics; therefore it would be difficult to determine what is COVID-related.”
- “We will administer subtests from Canadian Achievement Tests (CAT 4) in Reading, Mathematics and Computation/Estimation to students from grades 2-9 beginning in the fall of 2021. These tests will be administered again in the spring to measure student growth.”
- “COVID learning impacts are being assessed through the MIPI as well as teacher-reported learning impacts on individual students. Also, through a monitoring of who was present and/or absent through at-home-learning and how it impacted the in-class-learning upon students’ return.”
- “All of our students whether they are mainstream, mild moderate or severe have an individual learning plan. Therefore, it has been very easy to assess individual learning needs and the impact of COVID. Our students continued working last spring and did very well. This year only a few of our students have missed school and fell a little behind because of the need to isolate due to close contact with COVID.”

- “Will administer Fountas and Pinnell, RRST, Test of English Language Learning (TELL) and MIPI, and locally developed teacher assessments for Gr 3, 6, and 9 in ELA and Math.”
- “We are analyzing classroom, school and division level results on all of our standardized assessments. We have used division data from the MIPI to consider the impacts of COVID on Math. Teachers have used reading assessments to guide their instruction at the classroom level and have reported suspected COVID impacts.”
- “We are just proceeding with our current assessment practices. We have many students who are schooling at home and others who are not participating at all. We will be assessing them upon their return to then organize and plan support.”
- “Our division will be engaging in training on the t-series assessments (TOWRE, TOSREC, TOSWRF) that will be administered by participating teachers K-6.”
- “We are opting into the LeNS and CC3 assessments for Division I.”
- “We will look at Canadian Test of Basic Skills (CTBS) results, PAT results, and SLA results. We are also planning to participate in the government initiative. Math and ELA are the primary subject areas being looked at. We are looking at additional measures to look at reading gaps. (Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency (TOWRF), Test of Silent Reading Efficiency and Comprehension (TOSREC), Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE2)).”
- “We will use our current assessment strategies to address any areas that need special attention. I wouldn’t say that this would be any different from any other year. We don’t want kids to have the mentality that they are ‘behind’ because of COVID, so we just stick with the same testing they are used to, so it doesn’t stress them out.”
- “We have assessed math and language arts (reading and writing) at the beginning of the year to see impacts from the end of the 2019-2020 school year. Will do so again in September 2021.”
- “Not using any additional assessments to interpret COVID-19-related learning impacts. Classroom teachers continue to use teacher-created summative assessments to determine student achievement of the learner outcomes, compare/contrast with student progress in typical years, and bridge learning gaps as needed.”

Future Planning and Additional Feedback

- “The Wechsler Fundamentals: Academic Skills – Canadian (WF: AScdn) is useful for the language portion of the test. We took time during the COVID shut down as a staff to dig into the mathematics questions and found that only about 50% of the questions aligned with the Alberta curriculum. Therefore, we are investigating better assessments that align with the curriculum. The MIPI is not comprehensive enough for our purposes and the KeyMath-3 Diagnostic Assessment is an individual administration which would take too much time.”
- “We have created a Division Student Success Assurance Plan to begin in the fall of 2021. We can share this plan with you. This was an authentic process that involved all the principals across our Division with multiple conversations to ensure ownership with the plan for several months of this school year. We also participated in a reading project with the U of A last year (and the year prior) that provided us with a richer understanding of areas to focus on along the reading journey.”
- “These reading assessment tools that we have developed will be used across the entire division and with all our students. We have also supported with supplementary resources that teachers will be expected to use to support skill building in reading (phonemic awareness in K and phonemic and phonic awareness in Grade 1. We have introduced them this year as a “soft start”). These tools will guide instruction (as well as support individual student programming as needed) and enable teachers to have a better understanding of the how to teach reading, and support students where they are at, and address identified gaps as needed, to create successful readers in our Division.”
- “We will no longer be gathering Division level Benchmark Assessment System (BAS) data beginning in the fall of 2021. We will be administering the Canadian Achievement Tests (CAT 4) Reading subtest to students from grades 2 - 9 in the fall and spring. This data will replace the Division level BAS data collected. Schools will continue to use the BAS assessment to gather information about student reading levels and behaviours to help inform instruction.”
- “Moving forward we will be using the Wide Range Achievement Test Fifth Edition (WRAT5) and Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) assessments with all grade 1 and 2 students to screen for literacy skills. Initially we were part of a research project with the U. of A. and the division is continuing this work as part of a literacy framework.”
- “Quality assessment is not only about measuring student growth. The tools we use need to be of high quality and depth that inform teachers’ instruction, not simply provide “screening” information. We’re hopeful that the Province will not mandate screening tools that take teachers’ time if a Division already has comprehensive assessments that provide both screening and diagnostic information.”
- “Providing the LENS and CC3 tools as well as scoring criteria and scoring guidelines would be very supportive for formative assessment purposes. It would also be supportive for independent schools to have MIPI to administer.”
- “GB+ is not an effective resource because results are not consistently used to improve teaching practices. Data is not analyzed, nor is there professional discussion on how to reach targets. Data is not used to create school-wide and District-wide literacy targets.”