

Saskatchewan Student Assessment

Program Overview
2026

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Introduction

This document is intended to inform educators, administrators and policymakers about the vision and purpose of the province's new educational assessment program, Saskatchewan Student Assessment (SSA). The document provides an overview of the program's background and operational parameters.

Please direct inquiries to the Assessment Unit at assessment@gov.sk.ca. You may also request further information online through the QR code.



Saskatchewan Student Assessment: Vision

Guiding Principles of Saskatchewan Student Assessment

The vision for Saskatchewan Student Assessment is grounded in guiding principles that describe what educators, parents/caregivers, the public, government and students themselves want for all Saskatchewan students.

The Saskatchewan Student Assessment program will help to ensure that all Saskatchewan students:

- are **prepared** for success with the skills and knowledge they need for future learning, work, life and participation in their communities, province and country.
- are **supported** with accommodations and opportunities for success, recognizing that students' needs will vary.
- know that their education is globally **recognized**.

At the centre of such an education system is a shared commitment to fostering a culture of achievement. Students must be given the opportunity to reach their full potential, educators must possess the tools required to fully understand their students' learning and progress, and parents/caregivers and the public must have confidence in the quality of Saskatchewan education. In pursuit of this end, it is necessary to have a provincial understanding of student achievement and identify areas of need at the student, classroom, school system and provincial levels. The implementation of an assessment program will provide a timely snapshot of student performance in multiple grades in key areas, help identify needs at system-based and provincial levels and enhance Saskatchewan's education system.

Rationale

Supported by the Education Sector

The creation of a provincial-level assessment program came from the collaborative development of the Provincial Education Plan (PEP). The PEP was developed through extensive public consultation and collaboration with the education sector since 2018 and has been endorsed by all 27 school divisions. The PEP is aligned with the goal of growing a skilled labour force through education and training as outlined in the Saskatchewan Growth Plan.

The Provincial Education Plan Implementation Team, made up of leaders from school divisions, First Nations and Métis education organizations, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation Professional

Learning and the Ministry of Education, identified Supporting Student Learning and Assessment (SSLA) as one of four priorities in the PEP, including a milestone to develop and implement a provincial assessment plan. Reviewing Grades 1 to 3 reading data collection is also an action in the SSLA priority. A common approach to reading is being implemented with input from sector partners.

Supported by Parents/Caregivers

A Leger poll, commissioned by the Fraser Institute in 2022, indicated 92 per cent of parents/caregivers found it was important to “know how your child is doing in the core subjects of reading, writing and math, relative to other students by a fair and objective measure.” Interestingly, support was highest among parents/caregivers in Saskatchewan, despite being the only province without any type of consistent provincial assessment.

Supported by the Province’s Youth

In spring 2024, the Youth Council, made up of 12 Saskatchewan students in Grades 10 to 12, was asked to provide suggestions on what could be done provincially to ensure that all Saskatchewan students graduate with the skills they need for success beyond high school. The students on the Council wanted assurance that they were meeting curricular expectations so they would be prepared for each step in their educational journey; from elementary to high school and from high school to either the workforce, training or post-secondary education.

Supported by Data

Saskatchewan education organizations are doing great work in the area of assessment at the classroom, school and system levels. At the provincial level, however, Saskatchewan is an outlier in Canada. Saskatchewan is the **only** province that does not have any mandatory provincial assessment for Grades 1 to 12 students. This lack of consistent, province-wide assessment leaves Saskatchewan students at a competitive disadvantage as the province is without a means to gauge overall performance of the education system or to analyse the impact of policies or programs on student achievement.

Data from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an assessment of 15-year-olds, show that although Saskatchewan students are performing at international norms, their performance is near the bottom in Canada and has been declining since PISA’s inception in 2000. To help improve achievement and assist students, it is essential we collect province-wide data that can be used at all levels for continuous and targeted improvement.

Purpose and Aim

The purpose of this program is to assess Saskatchewan students' knowledge, skills and academic progress in a consistent and objective manner based on Saskatchewan’s curriculum. The SSA program will provide valuable information for educators, policymakers and parents/caregivers to gauge the effectiveness of educational programs and identify areas where improvement is needed.

The aim of Saskatchewan’s assessment program is to foster a culture of achievement in the province by strengthening accountability and supporting students in their educational journey. It will provide an avenue for measured curriculum improvements to ensure that Saskatchewan curriculum outcomes are

preparing students to be globally competitive. As well, it will assist in judging the impact of various policies and programs.

Benefits

The Saskatchewan Student Assessment program will benefit every level of the education system:

- *Students*: Students will understand how they are doing based on fair and objective assessments and recognize the areas where they excel and/or where they require support.
- *Parents/Caregivers*: Results from the assessments will provide parents/caregivers with a fair and objective measure of their child's achievement on a provincial level. Parents/Caregivers can collaborate with teachers to discuss strategies to meet the unique needs of their child.
- *Teachers*: Provincial assessments will inform teachers' instructional practices and curricular expectations. Teachers may use assessment results as part of the overall classroom-based evaluation of students' learning. Teachers may strengthen their professional practice through involvement in developing and scoring provincial assessments and through setting the provincial-level standards.
- *System*: Educational organizations can monitor student achievement with precise, timely and consistent data to guide resource allocation and policies.
- *Province*: Developing an assessment program aligns Saskatchewan with all other Canadian provinces, which already have their own assessment programs. This strengthens accountability and increases public confidence in education among students, parents/caregivers, community, post-secondary education institutions and the business sector.

Saskatchewan Student Assessment: Program Parameters

Program Development

Development and implementation of the Saskatchewan Student Assessment program will be guided by the following parameters:

- **Curriculum-based** – Assessments will be based on Saskatchewan curriculum and therefore, are administered annually in spring. Mathematics assessments will be provided in both official languages.
- **Authentic and engaging** – Student's authentic participation will be essential and assessments will be designed to engage the learner.
- **Designed to engage and support teachers** – Teachers will be engaged in development and testing of assessments and will be supported with professional development throughout the process of administering the assessments and responding to results.
- **Easy to administer** – Assessments will be on a user-friendly online platform that is accessible from a variety of devices.
- **Inclusive** – All students will participate. Students will have access to accommodations as needed.
- **Fair, appropriate and free from bias** – Assessments will be fair, appropriate and free from gender, cultural and regional bias.

- **Transparent and timely** – The purpose of the assessments will be clear to all stakeholders. Results will be provided to students, parents/caregivers, teachers and administrators in a timely, clear and accessible manner.
- **Developed to inspire improvement** – Results of assessment will be used to inform improvement at the classroom, school, system and provincial levels.

The assessments will be based on the Saskatchewan curriculum teachers are teaching and students are learning. Teachers and school systems may choose to use the provincial assessments as one of their classroom assessments towards students' overall outcome mark.

Teachers and administrators are critical partners in many components of this assessment program, including developing, validating and reviewing assessment questions, administering the assessment, scoring the written components, standard setting, and participating in professional development.

To ensure scientific defensibility, the development of test forms will be done with reference to the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing* (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 2014). The development and implementation of the provincial assessment program will be aligned with the guiding principles of [Supporting Student Assessment in Saskatchewan \(2022\)](#) and [The Adaptive Dimension \(2023\)](#).

Program Evolution

The goal will be to move to adaptive assessment within three years of implementation. At that point, there will be enough field-tested questions for Saskatchewan's assessment program to evolve to a multi-stage adaptive assessment.

Adaptive assessment tailors questions to each individual student's ability. In practice, this means that each student will receive an assessment that is targeted to their level of achievement. This approach results in a better test-taker experience that is also more precise, inclusive and efficient in measuring subject-specific knowledge and skills. The beginning years of the assessment program will be used to build a sufficiently large question bank to permit the development of a multi-stage adaptive assessment.

Test Specifications

Literacy and numeracy skills are foundational as students become contributing members of society and part of the workforce. Students in Grades 4, 7 and 10 will be assessed on select outcomes in English language arts and Grades 5 and 9 students will be assessed on select outcomes in mathematics. Some curricular outcomes are best addressed in the classroom and will not be assessed on the SSA.

Beginning iterations of mathematics and reading comprehension questions will be closed response, multiple choice style items. Alternative question types will be piloted and integrated into the assessments over time. ELA assessments will contain constructed response questions.

Timeline (Scope)

Assessments will be implemented in a staged approach. Before each assessment becomes operational, it will be preceded by a field test. The following table shows the planned timeline for these stages. This

phased approach helps ensure that all assessments are rigorously developed, refined and validated before they are officially made a part of the assessment program.

Grade	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
1	Reading Data Collection	Reading Data Collection	Reading Data Collection	Reading Data Collection
2	Reading Data Collection	Reading Data Collection	Reading Data Collection	Reading Data Collection
3	Reading Data Collection	Reading Data Collection	Reading Data Collection	Reading Data Collection
4		ELA Field Test	ELA Assessment	ELA Assessment
5	Math Field Test	Math Assessment	Math Assessment	Math Assessment
6				
7	ELA Field Test	ELA Assessment	ELA Assessment	ELA Assessment
8				
9	Math Field Test	Math Assessment	Math Assessment	Math Assessment
10		ELA Pre-Field Test*	ELA Field Test	ELA Assessment

**ELA 10 Pre-Field Test will only be written by students taking the new ELA 10 curriculum.*

	Reading Data Collection		No assessment		Field Test		Assessment
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Field Test

The field test stages of program implementation play a crucial role in gathering information and feedback from students, teachers and administrators. Field testing the essential components of Saskatchewan's assessment program is vital to ensuring a high standard of program delivery.

Some of the objectives of the field test include:

- determining the suitability of test questions for their inclusion in the official program;
- ensuring the valid and reliable performance of scoring rubrics;
- evaluating the assessment content for bias and fairness; and,
- ensuring assessment administration procedures and the assessment platform function as intended during the administration window.

It is important to note that the field test is more than an assessment of the technical viability of the program. It provides real data that is used to set the provincial standards for each subject and grade that is assessed. Following each field test, educational organizations will receive school-level reports outlining participation and metrics of data quality.

Participation

Because results from the assessments are an important indicator of future achievement, all students in the grade and subject being assessed will be expected to participate in the program. To foster inclusion of all students, students will receive the same supports (e.g., readers, scribe and extra time) during the

assessment that they are accustomed to receiving in the classroom. Communication to parents/caregivers and students about the assessments prior to the assessment date will be provided to mitigate assessment anxiety. All students, whether attending online classes or in-person classes, will be required to participate in provincial assessments.

If a student performs poorly on the assessment, the Ministry of Education will rely upon the local/division administration to coordinate a plan for increasing achievement and setting realistic future goals.

Authentic participation in the assessment program is expected and is of utmost importance. If students do not take assessment participation seriously and this leads to compromised data, it will impact the value of the assessment for the student, the teacher, the school system and the province. School division administration will establish and implement appropriate procedures and processes to encourage authentic participation and address issues of non-compliance.

Achievement Standards

Setting achievement standards is an important feature of an assessment program. Provincial achievement standards for each of the grade and subject assessments will be developed in cooperation with educators and other subject matter experts. Levels of performance within achievement standards will align with the existing four-point scale created in consultation with the educational sector and currently used by a significant number of organizations. Performance levels will be described in parent-friendly language and included in reports for parents/caregivers, teachers and administrators.

Administration of Assessments

The assessments will be administered on an online platform that will provide a user-friendly experience for both teachers and students. Assessments will be completed within a two-week window of time at the end of May and beginning of June. This window of time is to allow teachers flexibility in scheduling the assessment to fit their school day. Each of the assessments will be designed to be approximately 120 minutes and to be completed in multiple sittings. Students who are accustomed to receiving supports in the classroom will have access to the same supports (e.g., readers, scribe and extra time) during the assessment.

Teacher Support and Engagement

Teachers will be supported and engaged throughout the assessment process:

- Pre-Assessment – Teachers’ expertise is critical in the development process. Teachers will be recruited and contracted to develop and validate assessment questions. Following the first year’s field test, a panel of teachers will set the provincial standards for the assessment and determine four levels of achievement for each grade and subject area.
- During Assessment – Teachers will be supported in the facilitation of the assessments through webinar opportunities to learn more about the assessment, platform exploration to practise logging into the system with their classes, sample assessments for familiarization with the assessment design, and detailed instructions for seamless facilitation.

- Post-Assessment – Professional development will be a significant component in the success of the assessment program. Teachers will be supported in learning how to interpret the data produced by the assessment program and how to use it to inform their classroom practices. Data will also help identify areas of strength and areas that require additional support. English language arts teachers may also benefit from being involved in scoring the written component of ELA assessments. The written component of *English language arts* assessments will be scored by contracted teachers in the summer.

Reporting

Results from the assessments will be accessible as appropriate, according to the role of the stakeholder. Provincial-level reports will also be made publicly available as part of the Ministry of Education’s commitment to communicating the state of educational achievement in the province.

Results of the computer-scored portions of the assessment will provide timely feedback for teachers and students and may be available in as few as 48 hours after the assessment window closes. Educational organization and provincial reports using the spring assessment data will be available in fall of the same year. These reports may then be used for educational organization planning and included in their respective annual reports. Results will not be used by the Ministry of Education as school rankings, nor to evaluate teacher performance.

Parents/Caregivers will be provided a report outlining their child’s performance with respect to both the provincial standard associated with each assessment as well as a measure of how well their child performed relative to the province.

Conclusion

Provincial assessments will provide significant and meaningful benefits for every stakeholder in education. But there are also things that provincial assessments will not do. The chart below provides clarity around what the provincial assessment program *will* and *will not* do.

Saskatchewan Student Assessments <u>WILL</u> :	Saskatchewan Student Assessments <u>WILL NOT</u> :
• be based on Saskatchewan curriculum; • inform grade-level understanding; • communicate student performance to students, parents/caregivers and teachers; • support data-driven decision-making; and, • inform review of curriculum, policies and programs.	• require teaching of additional content outside of curriculum; • replace teacher-prepared, classroom assessments; and, • be used by the Ministry of Education to rank schools or teachers.

The education sector has informed the key parameters of the assessment program through the development of the Provincial Education Plan. The ministry will continue to work closely with the education sector through the Provincial Education Plan Implementation Team (PEPIT) to further develop aspects of the program. The table on the following page provides an overview of the components that are established by the ministry and those that will be informed by the PEPIT.

The Ministry of Education:	PEPIT will inform:
• determines the structure of the assessment forms (length, types of questions) • determines how and when the assessment is administered • procures the online platform Teachers are engaged in much of this development process.	• What is done with data • What is reported • How data is reported • Professional development.

Appendix A: Glossary

Accommodation: A testing accommodation refers to a change in the standard procedures for administering the assessment. Accommodations do not change the kind of achievement being measured. If chosen appropriately, an accommodation will neither provide too much nor too little help to the student who receives it.

Achievement Standards: Descriptions of competencies in a particular area of knowledge or skill, usually defined as ordered categories. The labelling of these categories may vary from one assessment or testing program to another.

Assessment: In the context of large-scale assessment, a process designed to systematically measure the performance of individuals, for the purpose of drawing inferences; sometimes used synonymously with test.

Closed Response: A type of item format which requires the test-taker to select a response from a group of possible choices (e.g., multiple choice and matching).

Constructed Response: A type of item format that requires the test-taker to create their own responses (e.g., paragraph, table, graph) rather than choose from a supplied set of answers (e.g., multiple-choice).

Item: A general term referring to a single statement, question, exercise, problem, or task on a test or evaluative instrument for which the test-taker is to select or construct a response, or to perform a task.

Reliability: The degree to which test scores are consistent and dependable.

Standard Setting: A structured procedure that seeks to determine the cut scores that define different levels of performance.

Validity: The extent to which the test measures what it is intended to measure (i.e., the accuracy of the test).

Appendix B: Sample Table of Specifications

A table of specifications (ToS) provides a blueprint for constructing an assessment. Several assessment qualities may be specified within a ToS ranging from the total number of test items to key psychometric properties. Of central importance to any ToS within the new assessment program is the provision of clarity and test structure which is achieved by delineating the proportion of test items devoted to different curricular strands and outcomes and the cognitive demand associated with each.

The following outline is a sample ToS for the Grade 5 Mathematics assessment. The leftmost column contains the strands present within the curriculum as well as their relative total proportion, in terms of item content, on the assessment. The following columns contain the selected outcome groupings associated with each strand as well as the by-outcome range of items associated with each.

Although this level of precision is absent from the example, the items in each learning outcome group for the mathematics assessments would be further defined by the number of items corresponding to the cognitive processes of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy (remembering and understanding; applying and analyzing; evaluating and creating). The items on the English language arts assessments were developed with respect to three levels of reading comprehension.

Table of Specifications: Grade 5 Mathematics		
Curricular Strand	Outcome	Number of Items
Number (30%–40%)	N5.1	2–4 (4%–8%)
	N5.2 & N5.3	4–6 (8%–12%)
	N5.4	2–4 (4%–8%)
	N5.5	3–5 (6%–10%)
	N5.6 & N5.7	4–6 (8%–12%)
Patterns and Relations (10%–20%)	P5.1	3–5 (6%–10%)
	P5.2	2–4 (4%–8%)
Shape and Space (30%–40%)	SS5.1 & SS5.2	3–5 (6%–10%)
	SS5.3 & SS5.4	3–5 (6%–10%)
	SS5.5 & SS5.6	4–6 (8%–12%)
	SS5.7	2–4 (4%–8%)
Statistics and Probability (10%–20%)	SP5.1 & SP5.3	3–5 (6%–10%)
	SP5.2	2–4 (4%–8%)