

Standardized Diagnostic Assessment Tools





The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Foreward

This report on Standardized Diagnostic Assessment Tools (SDAT) provides insight into teachers' experience with standardized tests now being employed for screening, diagnostic and summative evaluation purposes. In Alberta, the testing regime has expanded dramatically, particularly in the early elementary school grades, giving these insights new relevance.

Commissioned by the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and led by Dr Richelle Marynowski of the University of Lethbridge, the study examines the impact of diagnostic assessments on teaching practices and the student's classroom experience, based on teacher and school leader survey responses.

The report underscores the importance to teachers of insuring that instructional supports, professional development and alignment between assessment practices and curricular goals are in place to ensure testing is meaningful and ultimately contributes to enhanced student learning. The survey results highlight the need to consider policy responses that address implementation challenges as well as the psychological and emotional effects of testing on students.

The Alberta Teachers Association is committed to advocating for policies and practices that contribute to improving the conditions of teaching and learning in our province's classrooms. I invite you to engage with the findings presented here and to join with colleagues and supporters of public education in a larger dialogue about enhancing the efficacy and authenticity of student assessment in Alberta.

I wish to extend my thanks to the teachers and school leaders who participated in this study by sharing their perspectives. In addition, I am grateful to the efforts of the Mathematics, Early Childhood Education and English Language specialist councils of the Alberta Teachers Association who helped to connect teachers and school leaders to assist with this project.

*Dennis Theobald,
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Introduction

Standardized exams have been part of the Alberta educational landscape since 1984 (Alberta Teacher's Association (ATA) 2004). Though the examination program has gone through an evolution over the past ten years, its core aim, of providing accountability measures for public assurance in the education system, remains consistent (<https://www.alberta.ca/accountability-education-system>). In Grades K–3, many schools and school divisions mandated literacy and numeracy assessments to provide information to teachers and parents about areas of student success and growth (Alberta Education 2022).

Since the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the education system and lives worldwide, a resurgence has occurred in Alberta in the expectation that students meet literacy and numeracy targets. In fall 2021, the Government of Alberta announced that school divisions would receive targeted funding to support students that were deemed at risk of not being successful based on student results on literacy and numeracy diagnostic assessments in Grades K–3 (Education News Canada (ENC) 2022). This first round of Standardized Diagnostic Assessment Tools (SDATs) was tied to \$45 million in funding, to be distributed across school divisions. The intent of the assessments was diagnostic in nature, and they were intended to provide teachers data that could inform instruction and consequently improve student learning, specifically within literacy and numeracy (Alberta Education 2024). In this first year, the Government of Alberta provided a list of approved SDATs that schools and school divisions were required to use (Alberta Education 2023). However, since the list did not necessarily include SDATs that school divisions were already using, they could apply to have additional instruments approved that were not already on the list.

In Fall 2022, the administration of these assessments became mandatory (Alberta Education 2024). The second year of SDATs administration did not include targeted funding for specific students.

The assessment program as mandated by Alberta Education is currently going through a consultation phase where teachers, principals, school division leaders and postsecondary representatives are being asked a series of questions to gather feedback. The timing of this study will hopefully provide insights regarding the future of SDATs in Alberta schools.

Research Questions

This study was conceived as a result of the announcement regarding mandated assessments in Alberta for K–3 students. From conversations with teachers and following the announcements of an expansion to the provincial examination program, concerns arose regarding the supports available to teachers to effectively administer and analyze the results of the SDATs to advance student learning. Alberta Education’s stated goals for SDATs were as follows: “These screening assessments will help teachers identify students in the critical early years who are most in need of additional support and provide a means to monitor growth over time” (2024, para. 5), and “Assessing students in their early years provides essential information to teachers, schools, parents and Alberta Education about potential student learning issues and needs and ensures students at risk get the help they need early in their education” (para. 6). And it would be a wonder if this was what was being experienced in schools. The focus of this study is to determine a response to the following research questions: What is the impact of mandated SDATs on teachers and teaching? What supports are being provided to teachers for the administration, scoring and analysis of the mandated SDATs? How are the results of the mandated SDATs being used to support student learning? Have teachers noticed an increased number of mandated SDATs from the previous year?

Methodology

This study was framed through a convergent mixed-methods methodology (Cresswell and Cresswell 2018; Cresswell and Plano Clark 2018) where the selected response questions provide overall data regarding trends in responses and the open-response questions further illustrate participant experiences. The interviews were intended to allow participants to further elaborate on their experiences and provide context and clarification of their survey responses. The data from both the open-response questions and the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Participant responses to individual open-response questions were grouped according to theme and are described in this report. The themes are illustrated with specific examples of respondent comments to elaborate on how the themes were developed. The study intends to be descriptive of teachers' experiences and enable an understanding of the role of SDATs in teaching and their implementation across the province.

Research Instrument Development

A comprehensive survey was developed to get the perspective of teachers, school leaders and division personnel regarding SDATs and to respond to the research questions above. The survey focused on gathering both selected-response and open-response answers to questions designed to address the research questions. A copy of the survey questions is included in Appendix A. The survey development was tested by research assistants to ensure appropriate flow of the logic of the questions. The intent was to be able to distinguish between administrators' responses and teacher responses. Administrator questions were for them to provide context about their school or their school division, while teacher questions were designed to elicit responses specific to their experiences. The survey design ensured that participants could elaborate on their experiences with SDATs and not provide correlational evidence. This study used descriptive statistics and qualitative data analysis to examine the responses.

Method

Association members across the province were surveyed through an e-mail invitation sent by the Association. A random sample of 3000 was chosen to receive the invitation. The sample included classroom teachers, school administrators (principals and vice principals), substitute teachers and school division personnel. Due to a low return rate during the first round of invitations, the link to the survey was also sent to members of three Association councils: the Mathematics Council, the English Language Arts Council and the Early Education Council. This meant that some teachers could have received the invitation twice and might have responded to the survey more than once. However, in analyzing the responses to the demographic data, no two identical responses were found; thus, each response was determined to be unique.

In total, there were 416 responses to the survey: 319 were complete and 97 were partially completed. All 416 responses were included in the analysis. Participants were asked to participate in a follow up focus group conversation once they completed the survey. Although 30 participants responded that they would participate, only three participated in the end.

The survey was developed to ensure that all possibilities of engagement with SDATs were captured, including provincial-, divisional- and school-mandated and optional diagnostic assessments. The focus groups were an opportunity for participants to elaborate on their experiences with SDATs.

Overall, because of a disappointing but not surprising turnout for the focus groups, the discussions did not provide any additional insights; however, participants did confirm, quite strongly, a disagreement regarding the way in which Alberta Education was handling the provision of supports for students to become successful. They also explained that the messages being communicated about funding and targeted support did not align with what was actually being experienced in the classroom.

Data Analysis

The data from the different administrations of the survey were combined into one dataset. The demographic data was the summary data. The proportion of responses to some of the closed-response questions are included, along with participant responses to the corresponding open-response question. The presentation is based on the themes present in each question. Summaries of the overarching themes and sub-themes are also presented.

Participant Information

The demographic information gathered by the survey included role, grade levels taught or present in the school, geographic region based on teacher's convention attended, age, number of years teaching, gender and identification of inclusion in a minority group. Given the low rate of return of the initial randomly stratified survey participant pool and the combination of those results with specialist council participants, where possible, information will be included from the Association's 2023 Annual Report to show limitations based on representation within the data.

Role in the School Division

Of the 411 respondents that identified their current role, 81 per cent indicated they were classroom teachers only, with 93 per cent indicating that they had some teaching role during the 2022/23 school year. The responses regarding current assignment are illustrated in Figure 1 below.

The proportion of respondents to the survey mirrors the proportion of teachers in these roles throughout Alberta.

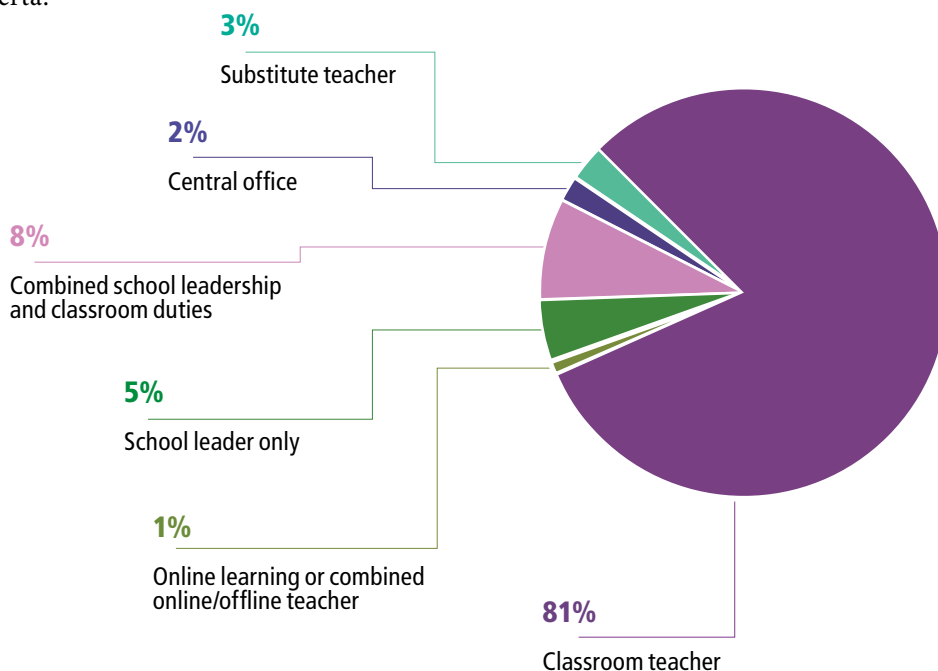


Figure 1. Current teaching assignment

Grade Levels

Most of the schools where the respondents were working, 65 per cent, were K–3 schools. The distribution of grade levels is represented in Figure 2.

The proportion of teachers in each of those grade levels are inconsistent with proportions of teachers in those grade levels across the province. For those that were teaching in the 2022/23 school year, the majority of respondents, 27 per cent, were teaching Grade 1, with the next highest being Grade 2 at 20 per cent (Figure 3).

The overweighting of respondents teaching in Division I can be explained in part by sampling methods that solicited responses from members of the Association's Early Education Council, the majority of whom teach early-years students.

Type of School Authorities

Of the 318 people that responded to the question asking which type of school authority they were employed in, 81 per cent were within public schools and 19 per cent in separate schools. There were no teachers from Francophone schools represented in this survey. These results are inconsistent with the proportion of teachers across Alberta within each of the school divisions. Additionally, because this survey was sent to Association members, teachers in private schools or in federally funded schools, who are not required to be members of the Association, are not represented.

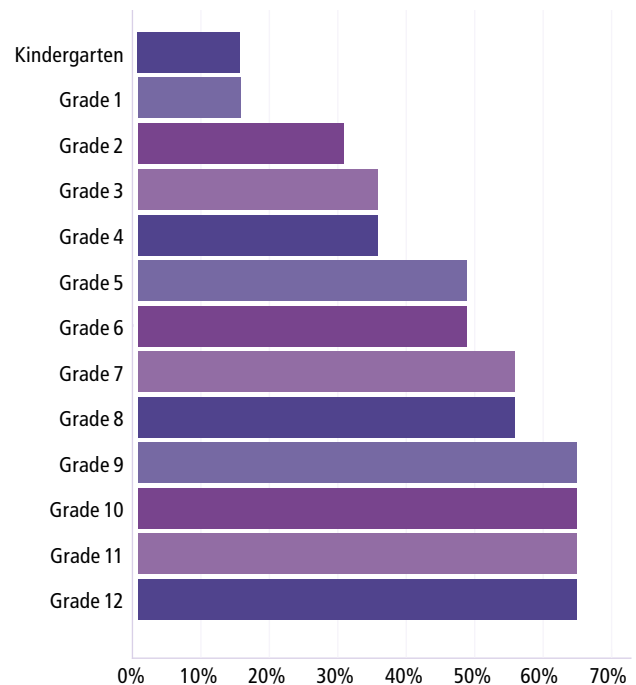


Figure 2. Grade levels in the school

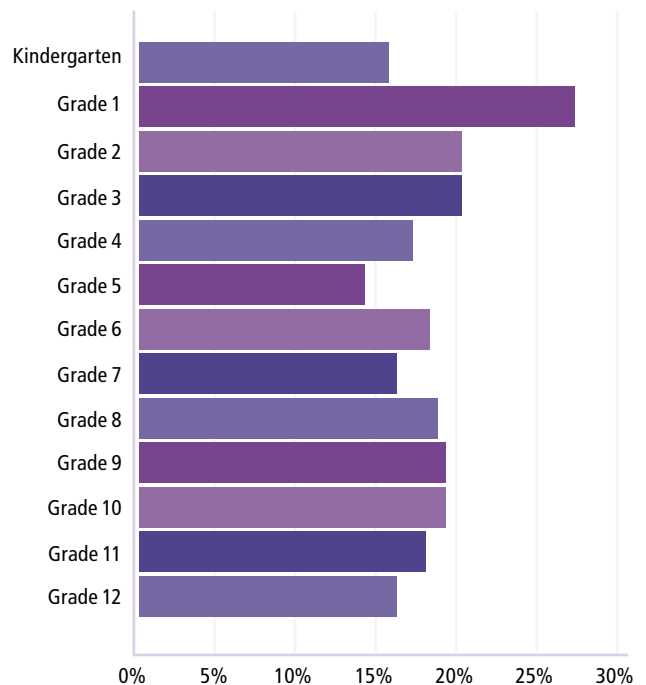


Figure 3. Grade levels respondents teach

Teachers' Convention Attended

Of the respondents, 31 per cent were from Calgary city and 19 per cent from the Greater Edmonton area, with other respondents from each of the different regions of the province. Comparing this with the Association's 2023 Annual Report, 27 per cent of Association members are from Calgary city and 24 per cent are from the Greater Edmonton area. The Annual Report reflects actual numbers of teachers in each area of the province and, given the differences between the Annual Report and this study, it follows that the geographic representation may be a limitation in this study.

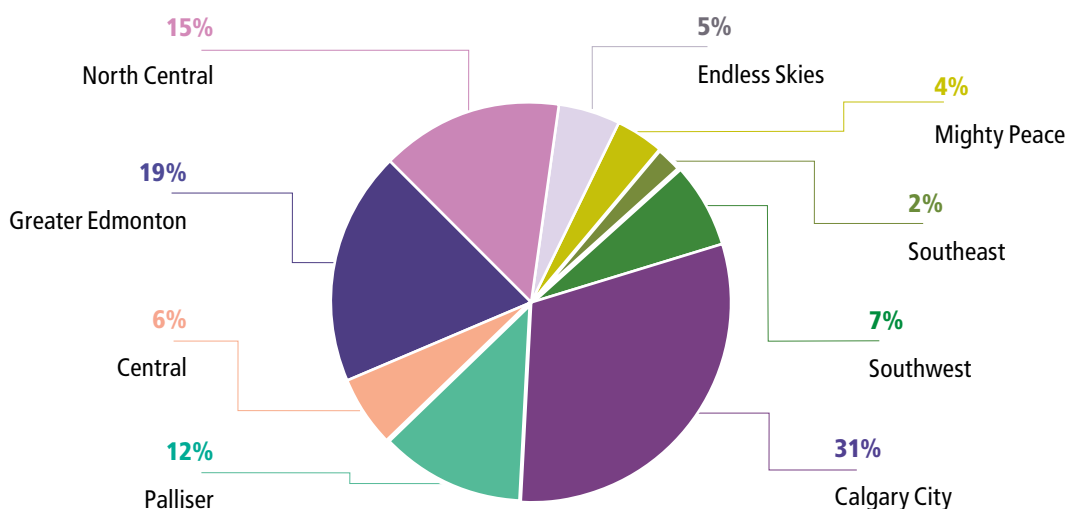


Figure 4. Teachers' convention attended

Teaching Experience

Of those that responded to this question, 43 per cent have 10–19 years of teaching experience. The data represents teaching experience from the first year to over 30 years.

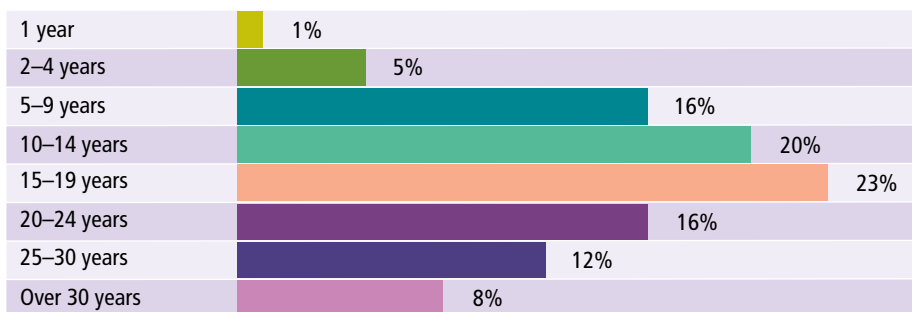


Figure 5. Teaching experience, including current year

Age of Respondents

The ages of respondents who answered this question varied, with over 55 per cent being between the ages of 36 and 50. Comparing this with the Association's 2023 Annual Report, 42 per cent of Association members are between the ages of 36 and 50. The age range of respondents in this study is overweighted in some areas and can be considered a limitation in this study.

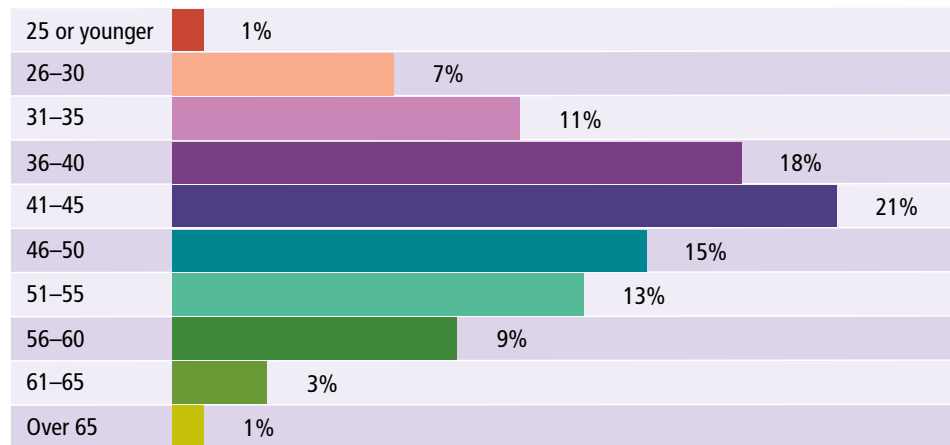
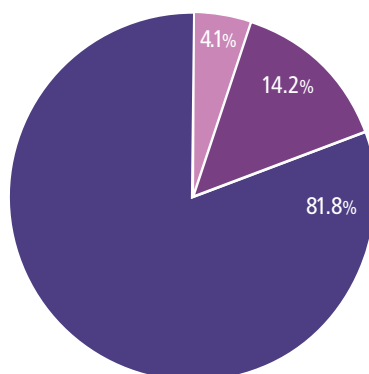


Figure 6. Age of respondents

Gender of Respondents

The majority of the respondents identified as female. Comparing this with the Association's 2023 Annual Report, 71 per cent of Association members identify as female, 23 per cent identify as male and 6 per cent as other, unknown or prefer not to say. Therefore, females are overrepresented and males are underrepresented. Representativeness of respondents' gender is a limitation of this study.



Value	Responses
Female	260
Male	45
Prefer not to answer	13

Figure 7. Gender of respondents

Underrepresented Groups

Table 1. Underrepresented groups identified by respondents

Question	Yes	No	Prefer not to answer	Responses
Do you identify yourself as a member of a sexual or gender minority?	17	283	15	315
Do you identify as a member of the Black community or of a community of Colour?	9	294	12	315
Do you identify as a First Nations, Métis or Inuit ancestry?	9	291	14	314
Do you identify as a person with a disability?	13	291	10	314

Use of SDATs

Twelve respondents said “No” or “I don’t know” to the question “Have you used, or do you intend to use, either literacy and/or numeracy screening tools during the 2022/23 school year?” Six of these were substitute teachers. Of the six classroom teachers that responded this way, four said yes to the question “Have you or teachers in your school(s) used, or do you or teachers in your school(s) intend to use a SDAT during the 2022/2023 school year?”

Of those who responded, 57 indicated “I don’t know” to “Have you or teachers in your school(s) used, or do you or teachers in your school(s) intend to use a SDAT during the 2022/2023 school year?” Of these, 50 were from Grades 4–12 schools.

Eleven respondents indicated that the “SDAT(s) will not be administered during the 2022/2023 school year” and each of those respondents were in schools that were Grades 4–12.

The majority of the SDAT and literacy and numeracy assessments are occurring at the K–3 level.

Literacy and Numeracy Tests Administered

With respect to the literacy assessments that were administered, the most commonly used assessment was the Castles and Coltheart 3 (CC3) test, with 112 respondents indicating that they administered this instrument. The second most commonly used was the Letter Name-Sounds (LeNS) test, with 110 respondents indicating they used this assessment. Other literacy assessments that were

administered and have been recommended by Alberta Education were the Test of Silent Reading Efficiency and Comprehension (TOSREC) (13); the Test of Word Reading Efficiency - Second Edition (TOWRE-2) (10); and the Wechsler Individual Achievement Test - Third Edition (WIAT-III) (5). No participants indicated that they used the Wide Range Achievement Test - Fifth Edition (WRAT5) for literacy.

Table 2 reveals assessment instruments identified for those that indicated they used instruments other than those recommended by Alberta Education.

The most frequently administered numeracy assessment was the Provincial Numeracy Screening Assessment (EMA@School), with 105 respondents indicating its use. The Number Sense Screener (NSS) Set, K–1, Research Edition was second, at 11 respondents, and the KeyMath 3 Diagnostic Assessment: Canadian Edition (KeyMath 3 DA) was third at 1 respondent. No respondent indicated that they used either the Wide Range Achievement Test - Fifth Edition (WRAT5) or the Test of Early Mathematics Ability - Third Edition (TEMA-3). In Table 3, respondents identified the assessments that were not included.

Table 2. Identified assessment instruments

Assessment instruments	Responses
Fountas & Pinnell (French)	1
Fountas & Pinnell	5
Phonological awareness assessment created by my district	2
QPAS	1
GB	1
DIBELS	1
Sound Symbol	1
RRST	13
ELL Oral Screener	2
EYA – TA	11

Table 3. Assessments not included

Assessment instruments	Responses
Ed Cath - (MAST)	6
Elk Island Assessment	1
Cat 4	2
EYE	9
MIPI	4
NSAT	1
Running records – 1	1
Anecdotal	1
Teacher created	2

The following section provides the analysis of the closed-response and open-response questions specifically relating to the administration, interpretation and use of SDATs in K–12 schools in Alberta. The overall ranking, the proportion of responses to the closed questions and the thematic analysis results to the survey and interview questions are presented in the sections that follow.

Administration, Interpretation and Use of SDATs

Respondents that identified that they had administered or were to administer SDATs at some point during the school year were asked further questions about the training they received both to administer the assessments and interpret their results. In addition, they were asked to rate their level of agreement with several statements regarding the administration, interpretation and uses of the results. Opportunities to comment on specific questions as well as general opportunities to comment were given throughout the survey.

Table 4. Teachers' experiences with SDATs

Statement	Average level of agreement	Not applicable	Mode	Number of responses
The training that I received to implement the SDATs helped me implement the tool.	4.8	62	1 (35 responses)	208
The training that I received to analyze the results of the SDATs helped me make sense of the results for my students.	3.7	70	1 (43 responses)	196
The interventions that were developed based on the results of the SDATs were effective.	4.4	53	1 (36 responses)	203
I will use the same SDATs for future groups of students.	5.1	25	1 (39 responses)	187
In the 2022/23 school year, there has been an increase in the use of SDATs compared to the 2021/22 school year.	7.1	15	10 (85 responses)	210

Survey respondents were asked to rank statements regarding their experiences with SDATs by level of agreement, with 0 being the lowest level of agreement and 10 being the highest. Table 4 shows the results of those questions.

According to this data, respondents found that the training provided to both implement and analyze the data and to apply effective interventions did not help them. There was also an overwhelming sense that there were more SDATs administered during the current year than the previous year. Comments from teachers following this set of questions clarified that they had no choice but to administer the same assessments for future groups of students as these were mandated either by their school division or by Alberta Education. Specifically, for teachers in Grades K–3, 6, 9 and 12, there was no opportunity to opt out of administering the assessments. When teachers who teach in those grade levels were removed from the responses for this question, there were 13 responses to these ranking questions with the average response to the prompt “I will use the same SDATs for future groups of students” being 5.5. This indicates that the SDATs that are not being mandated by Alberta Education for Grades 4, 5, 7, 8, 10 and 11 will be used for future students.

The following sections report on both the proportion of respondents that responded “yes” and “no” to the closed-response questions and a thematic analysis of the comments provided by participants to the corresponding open-response question when respondents chose “yes.” The first two sections are about training the respondents received for both administering the assessment and interpreting its results; the next three sections illustrate challenges that were experienced by teachers and students through the SDATs process; and the final two sections address the uses of data gained from the SDATs and the positive experiences from and successes of the SDAT process. Each section includes illustrative examples that speak to the themes that emerged from respondents’ contributions. Additional comments are included in appendices at the end of this report.

Training to Administer SDATs

The survey asked questions about the training that teachers received to administer the SDATs to students. Of the respondents, 69 per cent indicated that they received no training at all. Based on the 93 responses from teachers who did receive training, the main areas teachers commented on were the types of training they received. Respondents also noted that this training was insufficient for administering SDATs.

The types of training that teachers received varied. Respondents indicated that they received training through online courses, professional development sessions, videos and in-person workshops. Comments regarding online courses and videos included comments such as the following: “We received a virtual hour-long session about the T series assessments, but no training for the numeracy

assessments”; “Online course over the course of a few months”; and “A basic zoom call with a learning coach to go through each assessment. The zoom call was after school one day. Even though this is my own personal unpaid time I felt I had to attend to know how to administer the tests.” Respondents described professional development sessions as “1 day workshop for the EYE [Early Years Evaluation] and a yearly refresher if needed; 3 workshops for the RRST [Reading Readiness Screening Tool]”; “Coach from division spent a few minutes going over the numeracy assessment. No training received for the literacy assessments”; and “2 30-minute sessions after school.” As described above, some training occurred through a combination of methods.

As noted in the comments above, most of the training experiences offered were at the school or division level. At the school level, the training was often from literacy specialists or learning coaches: “Learning coaches from our school division held a meeting to go over administration and marking of the assessments.” Additionally, training was offered by the groups that developed the SDATs, but teachers either needed to take this on their own time or it was offered outside of their regular duties. Several teachers commented that they had training for the RRST (Reading Readiness Screening Tool) which took 9 to 10 hours over three days. A significant number of respondents reported having to teach themselves (“Read it myself”) or rely on online videos or documents due to the lack of structured training. For those that did receive training, many responses indicated that the training was too brief, often consisting of short sessions or overviews. One participant commented: “This was done on a voluntary basis. Some teachers received six-ish hours of training. Not all teachers who administered the SDATs received training. The training was inadequate, and many teachers were at the beginner level.” Respondents expressed a need for more thorough and detailed training to effectively administer and understand the assessments.

The training sessions described by respondents varied in duration from a few minutes to three days. Additionally, in many cases, the training was identified as being optional and after hours during unpaid time. The inconsistency of the training also varied between literacy and numeracy assessments. For example, one principal noted that there was “some system PL [professional learning] for literacy, none for numeracy.” One teacher noted that they “discussed how to make modifications for needed students.” The inconsistency of the messages given to those that administered the assessments calls into question the standardization of test implementation and the corresponding assessment of its results.

Training to Interpret SDAT Results

Along with questions about training received to administer the SDATs, the survey also asked about training to assess the results. Dramatically, 82 per cent of respondents indicated that they did not receive training to interpret SDAT results. Based on the 43 responses to the open-response question

to describe the training received, majority of the respondents indicated that they often had to resort to self-directed learning and seeking out additional resources and information independently to better understand the assessments. Many responses noted that the training provided was insufficient in depth and scope, leaving them underprepared to effectively interpret assessment results.

Comments, including “I paid to take the Level B Assessment course”; “voluntary online workshops provided by [division] specialists”; “1-hour lunch session going over some of the reports available”; and “district made video recordings for us to watch,” indicate that the level of training was not mandatory for teachers and was not individualized to help them interpret their students’ results. One respondent noted that the training consisted of “More propaganda to explain ... that we need these tools. The trainers refuse to acknowledge that the tools measure competencies that are not, nor were in the AB PoS [programs of study].”

However, some respondent comments indicated that they were provided support to use the data from the assessments to assist in providing instructions in their classroom. One respondent indicated that they were given “Ways to use the data to target instruction. Either with small group/whole group instruction in the classroom for literacy intervention.” Another noted that they will “meet in grade level teams to discuss the results.” Both comments are promising as the use of the assessment data to inform instruction in the classrooms to support learning is an excellent use of the data.

With both the training for administering and interpreting the results of the SDATs, there were inconsistencies with who was providing the training, how the training was provided and if teachers were expected to complete the training outside of their regular work hours. The inconsistencies are troubling, particularly for administration purposes. Because the validity of the assessment tool results depends on standardized administration and scoring, these results have error built into them due to these differences in training.

Challenges Administering SDATs

Participants were asked if they experienced any challenges administering SDATs. Based on the responses, 67 per cent indicated that they experienced challenges. As a follow up to that question, participants were asked to describe the challenges. The 184 responses to this question focused around four major themes: time constraints; lack of support and training; technical and human resource issues; and negative impacts on students, including English language learners. In the sections below, each of these themes are explored further.

Time Constraints

A recurring challenge is the lack of sufficient time to administer, mark and input assessment results, often leading to teachers using personal or instructional time to complete the tasks associated with

administering the assessment and collecting the required data. Comments related specifically to the time taken to administer the assessments centered on five main areas: the amount of time to administer individual assessments; the amount of time taken away from regular instruction; the additional time needed outside regular work hours to prep, score and input scores; the time of the year when the assessments were to be administered; and the short time frame to ensure all data was collected and inputted.

Time to Administer. The sheer amount of time that was needed to administer the assessments appropriately to individual students, as per the assessment instructions, or to the class as a whole, was the main focus of these comments. The time needed to administer the assessments meant that other instructional tasks were not being attended to. Some illustrative teacher comments include the following: “I got one day to do DIBELS, but my class is so large I couldn’t finish in one day (even though three students were away);” “The time it takes to administer the test”; and “Lack of coverage and time to conduct a long assessment for every child in my class along with having to manage and teach.” The comments in this theme illustrated that the assessments were time consuming to administer.

Time Taken Away from Instruction. Respondents commented on the amount of time they spent focusing on SDAT-related activities, which was seen as lost instruction time. Although this theme is connected to the above theme about time required to administer the assessments, comments under this theme specifically mentioned that the time required to administer the assessments would have been used for instructional purposes rather than assessing. Illustrative responses include the following: “loss of instructional time in the classroom”; “There is little time to do anything but this for several weeks when they have to do two literacy and one numeracy assessment for all children”; and “Time to administer one-on-one assessments with each student—time consuming, takes away from teaching and learning.” In addition to these comments, one particular response clearly articulated the time aspect with respect to instruction:

These assessments took up SO MUCH of our instructional time this month. Constantly pulling students for individual testing, the math group test took many class periods, and inputting results made this month so difficult to complete actual teaching and learning.
(emphasis in original comment)

These comments illustrate that the time to administer the assessments took time away from the integral work of the classroom and that it was not necessarily seen as a valuable addition to the teacher and student experience.

Time Needed Outside Regular Work Hours. Many participants commented that they needed to take time outside their regular hours to prepare resources for the assessments, score the assessments and input the scores into a database or an online system. Additional time was needed for the data

collection if students were away or if there was not enough time allocated during class to administer assessments to all the students. Illustrative comments related to this theme include the following: “I had to use instructional time and my preps to finish collecting all the required data”; “Marking and inputting results done in my own time”; “Hours of entering the data, prep work to get the materials ready”; and “All marking was done after school hours as well as the data entry was done after school hours.” This additional burden on teachers takes away from the time they need to prepare for instruction and to attend to other student needs. Two other participant comments further illustrate the extended time needed outside scheduled class time to complete SDAT requirements.

Given the significant amount of time that needed to be dedicated to entering the data, our principal took on this task. It took her approximately half a day to completely enter the data for 76 Grade 1 students.

With no support in the classroom, it was difficult to administer the literacy assessments one-on-one, as some students required consistent supervision. I administered some of the assessments during my recess and lunch breaks.

The additional workload of administering, scoring and entering the data was seen as a challenge for teachers. This time-related challenge, along with the others, added to teacher stress and workload.

Timing in the Year. There were two specific times of the year that were mentioned in this theme: September and January. Depending on the grade level that the respondent was teaching, assessments were to be administered at different times of the year. Teachers in Grades 2 and 3 administered the assessments in September and again in June. Teachers in Grade 1 administered the assessments in January and then again in June. Both administration timings proved challenging for teachers in different ways.

Comments regarding the administration of SDATs in September were related to the lost opportunities to develop classroom community, expectations for behaviour and developing supportive relationships with students. Illustrative teacher comments include the following: “because these assessments were given at the beginning of the year, it interrupted community building, creating of routines with kids, and learning”; “Timeline was also difficult as September is a time to establish routines, expectations and getting to know students, not constant testing”; and “September and October are busy months trying to get to know students and establish routines and expectations. Adding additional expectations was exhausting and challenging.” Not only was the administration of the SDATs interrupting important instructional time, classroom community building was interrupted and further expectations were added to teachers, causing more stress and exhaustion.

Further comments related the timing of the assessments as connected to other expectations that were part of teachers’ duties. Two participant comments illustrating this include the following: “The time frame for Grade 1 was unreasonable. It was to be administered in January during the height of report

card time for our teachers” and “doing these tests at inconvenient times of the school year (Sept/Jan) when getting class routines established as well as during major division reporting period for report cards and individualized personal plans (IPPs).”

As noted in previous themes, the time to administer the assessments was extensive and took away time from other important tasks in the classroom. The administration of assessment in September was not seen as ideal as teachers were focusing on developing classroom norms and getting to know their students. Administering assessments in January, then in June, did not seem appropriate as there was not enough time for learning in Grade 1, in addition to teachers’ responsibilities such as report cards and other requirements during that time of the school year.

Timeframe Within Which to Complete. Comments related to this theme identified that the quick timeline that was expected to ensure all data was collected and inputted caused additional challenges to teachers and students. Similar to the previous theme, the timing of the assessments, which needed to be administered in September, was inappropriate due to the numerous other tasks teachers need to complete at the beginning of the school year. Specific participant comments regarding the timeframe are as follows: “The challenge was getting everyone assessed by the Sept. 30th deadline. It was a lot of assessments that needed to be done in a short period of time”; “Time frame. We had three weeks from the first day of school to input data”; and “Quick deadlines with insufficient time to learn how to administer the test and to complete the assessment.” In addition, other participants commented that they were administering both the mandated SDATs by Alberta Education and further assessments mandated by their school division: “It was overwhelming due to the timeline and other mandated screeners from our school division.” The combination of expectations for two different sets of SDATs further complicated the start of the school year.

This quick timeframe to administer, score and input data put stress and pressure on teachers and students at a time when the focus should have been on building classroom community. One participant’s comment illustrated this well: “The tests were required within a very tight timeframe at the beginning of the year when teachers were trying to prioritize creating a welcoming, respectful classroom environment.” With respect to scoring the results, respondents indicated that data entry for certain assessments was cumbersome and there was insufficient time between when examinations were administered and when data was to be recorded. In addition, as noted by one participant, the process for “data entry was also onerous and very time consuming as the platform was glitchy and not intuitive.”

As noted in a previous theme, both scoring and recording of data was generally completed after school hours. If any of this work was done during the school day, there were often not enough substitute teachers available to provide respondents the opportunity to complete the work during the day. Furthermore, this work was done in addition to regular planning for teaching. One participant commented that there was “no support, no release time for marking, no explanation of tests, no time to replace lost instructional time, pointless exercise given; not only can I tell you my students’

literacy and numeracy needs, but I can also tell you they need social emotional support.” The following comment from a learning coach within a school division further illustrates the challenges experienced by teachers with respect to time:

As a learning coach, I work with students and teachers. We had to have the assessments administered, marked and put into the online database early on in the school year when we were just getting to know our students. Some parts of the literacy and numeracy assessments have to be done one-on-one, and it can be a challenge to find that time in a classroom, especially with a tight deadline. Last year when they were implemented, guest teacher time/ release time was provided by the government, but not this year.

The notion of insufficient time to complete tasks is an ever-increasing concern for teachers and school divisions. The focus on continuously adding to a teacher’s work without removing any of the expectations means that the sustainability of the teaching population is at risk.

The following sections illustrate further challenges beyond time administering SDATs that were noted in the participant responses to the open-response question “Please describe the challenges you experienced” while administering the SDATs.

Lack of Support and Training

Educators reported inadequate support and training for administering assessments, including a lack of clear instructions and guidelines. Comments to the previous open-response question related to the types of training provided and indicated that some training was provided to participants. In addition, some also indicated that participants were unsure about how they could use the results effectively to support student learning.

The following illustrative comments refer to either not receiving training or receiving inadequate training for the administration of SDATs: “We had not been told how to perform the assessments. We were told to google the assessments to find out how to complete them. They weren’t difficult but there was no instruction or explanation, we were just told we have to do them now”; “The instructions were so poor, I was honestly not certain how to administer certain sections. To this day, I’m still not certain I did it correctly”; “I was given no training in any of the assessments and had a difficult time entering them into the correct system for the government.” Participants that did not receive information on how to administer SDATs expressed uncertainty about whether the assessments had been administered appropriately, which in turn calls into question the validity of their results.

With respect to challenges related to the lack of support and training, respondents noted that they were not sure what to do with the results of the assessments. In later questions, participants were asked specifically about the interpretation and uses of results; however, part of the challenges that

were noted were specifically related to the scoring and useability of results. Illustrative comments include the following: “Not sure how to grade the results”; and “Calculation of scores challenging, not all directions are clear if beginning past the start (assuming they have the prior correct, when in fact we know that this is not the case and there is no way to input prior scores in system).” Along with scoring, interpreting and using the results were identified as a challenge. Respondents stated, “I don’t know what to do with the information I’ve found from the testing. I have no resources to address the lack of understanding in students”; “How to evaluate the results to guide instruction. Results were sent to the government and then we had to wait for them to be passed on to us”; and “how do I implement the results?” One specific response called into question a variety of areas that teachers lacked support and training in. They said,

As a virtual teacher, the assessments are designed to be administered in person. Parents were helping my students at home. I also have had questions about the LeNS [Letter Name-Sound] that nobody had seemed to be able to answer nor could the questions be found in the teacher documents. There is an “at risk” document for Grades 2, 3, 4 but I have yet to find one for Grade 1 so I don’t know what the “at risk” cut off is.

For teachers that are in nontraditional classroom settings, the challenges of administering SDATs are compounded by the contexts of the teachers and the students. The usability of the mandated SDATs in nontraditional contexts and the teacher’s ability to administer and use the results has potentially been overlooked in mandated SDATs. This collection of comments indicates that even though there were SDATs administered, the teacher’s ability to interpret and use the results was lacking due to inadequate support and training.

Technical and Human Resource Issues

Challenges with technology, such as poor internet connectivity or computer issues, and insufficient resources, including extra staff or substitute teachers to support the administration of the assessments, were the main issues discussed in the comments related to this theme. Each of these issues will be addressed separately.

Technical Issues. Respondents noted problems in the administration of SDATs due to technology issues related to student interactions with the technology and the challenges teachers experienced. These issues were associated with the compatibility of the available technology in schools with the system required for the students to take the SDATs and the ability of students to correctly manipulate the technology to respond to the questions. For example, respondents noted that there were “issues with Quest A+ compatibility with Chromebooks” and “the setup of this digital test was not designed for student success. Students could not see both the question and the answer choices at the same time.” Other comments were concerned with connectivity issues experienced while students were completing the assessments: “Poor wifi/website performance limited student ability to complete the assessments” and “Student data upload” were identified as problems related to technology.

Additional comments noted that students did not have the appropriate skills to effectively respond to questions in a digital form. In particular, Grades 2 and 3 were mentioned in the following comments: “We did CAT 4 for numeracy with 2/3 and student’s understanding [of] how to use technology was [a] problem” and “Grades 2 and 3 trying to use Chromebooks to do an assessment that required skills they may not have learned or mastered for the technology.” These comments raise additional concerns regarding the validity of the assessment results and of the construct of what is being assessed on the digitally administered SDATs.

Specific comments were made by respondents regarding the technical challenges they experienced while administering SDATs. Several respondents noted that they needed to administer different levels of assessments to a group of students. One respondent noted, “I had issues with administering it online for different levels of students. Not all of my students were completing the same grade level, and I had issues with being given the correct assessments.” Having access to the correct assessment or the appropriate sign-in information was also reflected in the following comment: “Technology - incorrect link, not having password to start STAR reader. User names.” Each of these challenges adds to teacher and student stress at the time of administering an SDAT, which already has stress connected to it. Even for those that administered assessments in paper form, there were technical issues as noted in the following comment:

To report them to the district we had to scan them. Issues with tech. We also weren’t provided digital versions so we had to individually request from printing. Nobody managed this centrally and the whole process was painful due to not having mass resources ready.

The concerns that were raised from technical issues both while administering and scoring the assessments show that in addition to the time needed for students to complete the assessments, there was time lost due to technical glitches. These glitches have the potential to impact student results.

Human Resource Issues. The main comments regarding other challenges related to administering SDATs were associated with human resource issues. The previous themes on time and lack of support and the current theme of a lack of human resources to administer SDATs are closely connected. In particular, the lack of available funds or of substitute teachers overall meant that the latter could not be brought in to help with the administration of the SDATs. Illustrative comments include the following: “No release time given by govt. School had to cover costs of sub”; “We needed to hire additional subs to ensure teachers had time to complete the assessments”; and “Shortage of guest teachers to assist with coverage.” The following comment shows that a lack of human resources impacted everyone in the school and not necessarily only the ones responsible for administering SDATs:

No sub time provided to administer or input data into Power School [software]. We rely on each other in the school to cover for us when administering the CCS, for example. Some can be administered in large groups but a fair chunk of it is individual assessment.

A lack of human resources to support the administration, scoring and recording of the assessments further drew on potentially already stretched resources at the school level, with teachers having to give up their own time for others to complete the tasks associated with assessment administration.

Negative Impacts on Students

The final theme in this section, related to challenges experienced while administering SDATs, is concerned with the impact of the tests on students. A later question asks participants to comment on the challenges experienced by students; however, respondents indicated that some of the challenges they experienced were in relation to student stress, anxiety and emotional well-being, as well as the appropriateness of the mandated SDATs to assess students at the appropriate level.

Specific concerns were raised about the stress and anxiety caused to students by the assessments, particularly for those with exceptional needs or those who were English language learners (ELLs). One respondent commented that the “test is not accommodating to ELLs or those with medical conditions such as selective mutism,” and a second respondent noted, “Students who do not have English as a first language struggle with understanding what they need to do to complete the testing.” In addition, a third respondent stated, “Justifying subjecting refugee students who don’t know English to a literacy and numeracy test that doesn’t even align with the curriculum” was a challenge for them as teachers. When the person administering the SDAT does not feel like the assessment is appropriate and is unsure about the value of the assessment, they don’t know how to justify the stress and anxiety the assessment causes.

Comments about the anxiety and stress students experienced were related to the content level of the SDAT: “Many students felt upset that they were not able to read all of the words.” Comments were also concerned with students not knowing how to complete the assessment: “Students crying as they did not understand how to complete the test.” Other comments highlighted the issue with having timed assessment portions: “The timed portion was not appropriate for young students. A few were upset for not being able to finish and have longer.” Teachers were also concerned with anxiety about SDATs affecting students in other areas: “High student anxiety about the assessment that led to challenging behaviours.” When we consider that SDATs are mandated for K–3, these impacts on students are concerning for the children’s future concept of themselves as learners.

The concern for the well-being of students was clearly evident in responses to this, and the later, question on challenges while administering SDATs. More extended comments regarding concern for students follow:

Having to test on content not yet covered, timed tests which led to many children answering no questions and crying despite them knowing it. Having to test children who know no letters or sounds on pages of complex words that are not decodable at this time in the year. Not being with my class in January for days while I try and pull out and test them all.

These assessments are not age or developmentally appropriate. Lens could be useful, should include all alphabet letters and sounds, then move on to diagraphs, 2 letter blends, bossy r, diphthongs. NOT be mixed CC3 is useless for Gr. 1 Take a look at The Measured Moms Phonics assessment. Numeracy: number line practise questions are only to 10 then they have to do a number line 0 to 100 for points. Crazy! More appropriate would be a number line to 20, or putting numbers into a 100' chart. Timed addition and subtraction is ridiculous. More appropriate would be a page with 10 to 12 questions. Give students a minute to complete what they can, not having to work across in rows left to right top to bottom. My Gr. 1's at this point are really good at answering 0 and 1 plus or minus. I had one little boy who in kindergarten had many emotional outbursts, tantrums, etc. Those have stopped in Gr. 1, except for when he had to complete this ridiculous assessments!

These tests were emotionally hard on students who were unaccustomed to being asked to distil their learning down in too long, multiple choice tests. The questions were not aligned with Alberta curriculum. For students who are not working at grade level, teachers had the choice of having students right at grade level or three levels below. Both options were inappropriate, and in my opinion harmful to students. They either wrote an exam that was way too hard for them and it was demoralizing, or way too easy and patronizing.

These comments from respondents indicated clear concern for the emotional well-being of their students during and after the administration of the assessments. The emotional and psychological consequences on students were concerning to teachers. These themes underscore the need for better and more practical assessment methods that consider the diverse needs of students and that are more developmentally appropriate. The potential long-term impact that these experiences might have on students throughout their educational careers is concerning.

The answers to the open-response prompt for participants to identify challenges they experienced while administering SDATs provided many themes to consider during future planning for the administration of SDATs. The themes related to time, including the time of the year, the amount of time taken away from instruction, the time frame within which to administer and score the assessments, lack of support and training, technical and human resource issues, and negative impacts on students. These challenges could be mitigated by either Alberta Education, the school division or the school when creating guidelines and practices for administering SDATs.

The themes above were illustrated further in comments that transcended several of the individual themes. These comments showed that many of the challenges in administering the assessments were not felt in isolation or one at a time; rather, they were experienced all together in some instances. There were many other comments regarding the tests themselves, including concerns over the validity/reliability of the assessments and the usefulness of the results, given the challenges

experienced. These extended comments are provided in Appendix B. Each of these comments express frustration with the SDAT system that has become part of the education system in Alberta. Participants identified some serious flaws in the administration, scoring and reporting of the results of the assessments that call into question the validity and reliability of the results. The next section further illustrates challenges students experienced during the administration of SDATs.

Challenges Experienced by Students

Of the respondents, 74 per cent indicated that their students experienced challenges writing the SDATs. Respondents were offered an opportunity to provide examples of the kinds of challenges students experienced in a follow-up open-response question. There were 189 unique responses to this question. Many of the comments are reflected in the previous section, about the challenges faced while administering the assessments; however, there are comments in this section that further illustrate the kinds of challenges students experienced. The comments are representative of the following five themes: anxiety and stress; difficulty with level of content; language and comprehension of instructions; technology; confidence and self-esteem. These themes are further illustrated below.

Student Anxiety and Stress

Many respondents indicated that students experienced significant anxiety and stress, particularly during timed tests or when facing unfamiliar content. The level of anxiety and stress increased as students were unable to complete sets of questions, did not understand the questions or were in a timed environment. Specific to either the length of the SDAT or to having a time limit on the assessment, respondents noted the following: “Having a time limit is stressful”; “The time limit for the numeracy assessments seemed to worry a lot of students, affecting their performance”; and “Length of test and method (online) made several students anxious (some to the point of tears).” Many students do not experience stress due to only one factor but a combination of factors: “Anxiety during timed portions and not being able to finish vs. the substantial amount of questions on the page, frustration at too much time required to do independent work.”

Additionally, not being able to do some of the questions or not understanding what the questions are asking caused stress and anxiety in students. Illustrative comments include the following: “Some are not able to do some of it and they become anxious”; “Stress during MIPI [Math Intervention Programming Instrument] if they did not understand”; “Students were stressed by the numeracy assessments that evaluated concepts they hadn’t learned yet.” When the concepts being assessed were not ones that students had experience with or exposure to, and the SDAT was stressful and timed, students “got frustrated.” This sometimes led to behavioural concerns: “Lack of confidence,

frustration of completing tasks they'd forgotten over the summer or never been introduced to. This led to MAJOR behaviours that resulted in classroom relocation multiple times." In addition, students could develop their own understanding of why they were being asked to take the SDATs.

I found that plenty of my students had major test anxiety, especially my students who were struggling academically prior to Covid. I heard multiple negative remarks from students, who felt like they were being tested because Covid made them all fall behind.

There seemed to be several unintended messages to students, and they believed that having to take these assessments was somehow their own fault. The comment below clearly articulates impacts of administering the assessments on students:

The timed aspect creates undue pressure and stress. Children are coming to school and all they want to do is perform well and please their teachers. For many students, they develop a sense of failure when these tests are designed to be nearly impossible to finish within the timing boundaries. I love the chance to meet individually with each student, but I am also often doing classroom management inside the classroom while I am outside the classroom testing a student one on one. We both feel pressure to finish. Is this really the best use of our classroom time?

From the comments, students had negative experiences with the assessments, which could impact their scores and their belief in themselves as learners.

Difficulty with Test Content

Responses indicated that students often found the assessment content too difficult, with some questions being beyond their grade level or covering material not yet taught. Example statements include the following: "They were uncomfortable with content" and "Too hard beyond grade expectations." In particular, the Alberta numeracy assessment was identified several times as one of the assessments that "assessed on skills that haven't yet been taught." The following comments give specific examples of how the assessment content was too difficult for the grade level:

For example, the number line question for Grade 1 has an example using a number like from 1 to 10, but the assessment asked them to locate a number on a number line from 1 to 100. There is also way too many addition and subtraction questions for Grade 1.

In the numeracy screener some students haven't learned the concepts they were being asked to do. For example, placing numbers on a number line up to 1000 in Grade 3 when they only had to know numbers up to 100 the year before.

These comments are illustrative of several other comments regarding the numeracy assessment provided by Alberta Education being an inappropriate measure of student understanding of concepts, which further served to cause stress and anxiety in students.

Language and Comprehension Challenges

In addition to difficulty with content, as noted above, respondents raised concerns that identified other issues regarding the ability of students to comprehend the questions and figure out their responses. Specifically, students whose first language is not English could have developmental delays that impacted their comprehension, or they had to have a certain level of English language skill even to read the assessment questions.

Several responses focused on ELLs and students with language delays who struggled with understanding test instructions and questions: “Don’t understand the instructions”; “Not speaking the language for test, ELL”; and “Confusion over the purpose (due to language barriers).” The students were unsure how to respond to questions and thus were unable to respond appropriately or simply skipped the questions. One respondent noted, “A lot of them don’t know the subtests for the RRSST [Reading Readiness Screening Tool] as we have not taught most of the content on it. Therefore, a lot of them stand blankly with “I don’t know” as responses. For ELL students especially, it’s totally unfair.” There were several comments regarding ELLs, which is reflective of the complexity of the community of learners in Alberta classrooms and the suitability of the SDATs for them. Comments on this theme included points about limited language and cultural experiences: “Literacy screening does not take into account the limited cultural experience my students have”; “Students who are not native English language speakers struggle with comprehension for the numeracy test as well as with understanding of letter sounds for the literacy tests”; and “ELLs and students below grade level struggled with the amount of reading required to complete the numeracy assessment. The examples did not align with questions students were expected to complete.” The following comment illustrates how SDATs were also a challenge for students in French Immersion schools:

Because I teach Gr 1 French Immersion, my students had to be given all tests, including numeracy, completely in French. The students found it hard to understand the directions and instructions. I feel, particularly with numeracy, this put them at a disadvantage to the English counterparts as they do not yet have the vocabulary and oral comprehension they needed.

These comments indicate that there are potential validity concerns with the results of the assessments since students were not familiar with the contexts and language needed to complete a numeracy assessment in particular.

There were several comments related to students struggling while responding to SDAT questions because they were in need of either a scribe or a reader, particularly in the numeracy assessments: “For ELLs and struggling readers, not having a scribe or speech to text makes it challenging to understand if it is the math skill or reading skill that is being assessed”; “Math section of CAT 5 required students be proficient readers. The students who were weak readers did not do as well as when they can be given a scribe/audio”; and “I teach Strategies and have autistic, behavior, opportunity and strategy students with a variety of abilities. Many need someone to read to them. Often, they randomly pick an answer without reading the info or question.” Accommodations to support students are part of regular practice in a classroom; however, these are not modelled in the administration of SDATs.

Not only were there challenges with students understanding questions and how to respond to questions, some students did not even understand why they had to write these assessments in the first place: “Difficulty understanding why they are taking tests like this when their teacher would never assess them in this manner.” Each of these challenges calls into question the validity of the assessment results and whether the results can be used by teachers to support students.

Technology and Accessibility Issues

As noted earlier in this report, problems administering the assessments and with technology, such as poor internet connectivity and difficulties using digital platforms, created barriers for some students. In addition to the barriers to successful completion and appropriate level of assessment, as one teacher noted, “Anything online created problems because the network wasn’t robust enough to handle all the students on the network at the same time.” As a continuing concern when there are issues with the technology for the administration of an assessment, students get stressed and do not necessarily perform to their best. Respondents noted, “They experienced stress and when doing STAR there were lots of issues with technology”; “Doing SDATs on a Chromebook is stressful for students. Internet fails and some students don’t know how to scroll to continue to read questions info”; and “CAT-IV [Canadian Achievement Tests 4]: Poor wifi/website performance limited student ability to complete the assessments.” Respondents also noted that not all students know how to operate the technology appropriately to respond to the questions.

Impact on Confidence and Self-Esteem

Respondents commented that the assessments often negatively impacted students’ confidence and self-esteem, particularly when they felt they couldn’t complete the tasks or didn’t understand the material. This theme is connected to the previous theme on stress and anxiety but is more related to how students perceive themselves as learners through engaging with SDATs. Students made

comments such as “I’m no good at rhyming,” or as another respondent noted, “several students displayed negative self-esteem and self-talk when seeing several dozen empty questions on a page.” One particular respondent stated, “They didn’t know the answers and they cried (3 students).” These kinds of student reactions to SDATs are concerning as they can impact their belief in themselves as learners beyond the assessment. Another respondent noted that students as a group were impacted negatively due to the sheer number of SDATs they had to complete in the first few weeks of the school year: “Kids had to sit 6 exams thru the first 5 weeks of school. They suffered test exhaustion and immediately decided how their year was going to go.”

The following comment captures how Grade 1 students were impacted by SDATs:

Challenges students experienced include: - poor self-talk re: their inability to do the assessment. - some students cried or became upset before, during or after some assessments were given. - the TOSREC [The Test of Silent Reading Efficiency and Comprehension] is especially awful. Grade 1 students are expected to read statements that are not decodable. Most students were unable to read the statements or answer questions. Self-talk and self-esteem noticeably impacted by this particular assessment.

These comments highlight the need for assessments that are developmentally appropriate, considerate of diverse student needs and supportive of their mental well-being.

Even when students were competent in the discipline being assessed, one participant noted that “if a student’s level was lowered in one area (eg literacy) then it had to be lowered in math as well,” indicating that the student might not be writing the appropriate assessment based on performance in a different area. A respondent noted, “Some students who had a strong understanding of numeracy scored “at risk” because of their slow and cautious approach to answering the questions,” while another noted, “Timed tests may not show what students actually know and are able to do.” Students that prefer to take time to complete questions were potentially identified as “at risk” even when they have a solid understanding of the concepts but are slower in responding. These kinds of experiences can cause students to lose confidence in their abilities.

Challenges Interpreting Results

A third open-response question asked participants to comment on any challenges they experienced interpreting the results of the assessments. Based on the responses, 48 per cent of respondents indicated that they experienced challenges. Even though many comments about interpreting results were included in the earlier section, which asked about overall challenges, there were further

comments in this section regarding results of the SDATs. There were 124 responses from participants about the difficulties they faced in interpreting results. The challenges relate to five general themes: lack of training; relevance and purpose; unclear instructions and standards; delays in receiving and accessibility of results; and being able to translate results into actionable insights. Each of these themes will be further illustrated in the following sections.

Lack of Training and Guidance

Many respondents expressed a lack of training or clear guidance on how to interpret the assessment results. Though this can relate to interpreting results to obtain actionable insights, an additional theme, the specific comments in this section were directly related to the training for interpretation. The majority of the comments in this section were along the lines of “I was given zero info about results and how to interpret them” or “Not explained clearly to me.” Some specifically commented further on the lack of training or guidance for interpreting the results of the assessments.

Comments were also associated specifically with the lack of information about the scores and how the scores provided give little or no information to act upon. For example, “No one has told me what these scores mean. There is no “median” or “average” dataset provided to see if students are at level or not,” and “Not provided with norms (as initially promised), nor with any direction on how to interpret the results OR how the data should drive instruction.” Being given the appropriate information in a timely fashion is important for teachers to be able to act on it for students. One respondent noted,

This is based on last year when I completed these assessments. We won't get the results for this year probably until end of April. The problem with the results is this. Students are either above average, below average or at risk. And one mark makes all the difference between above and below average. Where is average? It makes no sense.

Respondents were trying to make sense of the data in order to support their students, yet they were not given the information needed to do so. Respondents noted specific assessment tools and their uncertainty regarding how the results were to be interpreted: “I have received no feedback from AB Ed regarding what exactly the CC3 [Castles and Coltheart 3] results mean for my students - what areas weakness/growth”; “The gross motor skills from the Early Years Evaluation has very little description of how to evaluate each item”; and “I understand the basis of the results of the CC3 assessment: able to read regular words, irregular words and non-words. However, I am not sure what type of information each level of each sections the assessment gives.” These comments speak to the

lack of training and information provided to teachers to enable them to use the results in a purposeful way for their students. One respondent comment connected the ideas from the previous question on challenges to administering the assessments and the results. They said,

To reiterate, when teachers are not trained properly, they fail to understand the data that they have collected. Also, if they are not trained, the data collected may not be a true reflection of the student's ability. Teachers lacked the time to administer the test to all students. So, the data might be a partial reflection of student ability.

In each of the above comments, the respondents were indicating an inability to interpret the results of the assessment because they did not have adequate instruction and training to do so. The question before this on the survey asked participants to indicate if they had received training to interpret the results. Of the respondents, 52 per cent of those that responded said no. This is very concerning as teachers are expected to implement strategies that target areas of need for students, and if teachers do not know how to interpret the results, there cannot be an expectation for them to develop strategies to support students.

Unclear Relevance or Purpose

Some of the respondents indicated that they were unsure of the relevance or purpose of the assessments. These included comments regarding the alignment of the assessment to expectations for students at a particular grade level or regarding whether the assessment assessed the full range of students' skills. Two areas that these comments were focused on are the literacy assessments and numeracy or math assessments and the sense of irrelevance of the things the assessments were testing which, in turn, made the analysis and use of resulting data difficult.

With respect to the literacy assessments, the comments from respondents were extensive and specific to particular assessments or skills being assessed and the timing of the SDATs with respect to what was being assessed:

The EYE-TA [Early Years Evaluation—Teacher Assessment] is weighted to mostly consider the cognitive and language areas. I don't actually have challenges interpreting this data, I have challenges trying to understand the relevance and purpose of this screener, to group and identify children that are at risk, when I already would've known this anyway. And then to have no actual additional support based on the results anyway makes this a pointless task.

The tests assume that the teacher has taught the outcomes of the Grade 1 program by the end of December and all students are capable of demonstrating this understanding regardless of ELL level, communication delays, prior exposure, etc.

There is no “average” benchmark. Students are either above or below. With degrees of being below. Why is it necessary to divide those below average into a little bit below or really below. Best practices in assessment have been refuting this for years.

Interpreting data from the CC3 [Castles and Coltheart 3] was meaningless. It doesn't provide any valuable information about my students' ability to read. Students' first introduction to reading is phonemes and simple cvc words. The only cvc word on that regular test was “bed.” While the understanding is there because students often flip the b/d consonants, there was no other level to provide them with to show growth. A major flaw which is designed to allow students to easily be shifted into two groups “pass/fail.” On the LeNS [Letter Name-Sounds], having students read diagraphs and blends without context, as well as long vowels provides very little indication of their understanding. We don't teach in isolation. We teach these things to make meaning.

I didn't find the literacy LeNS [Letter Name-Sounds] tests useful. If students had too many errors on the first page, they could not progress, which means, even though they may have known letter names and sounds on the next page, the test stopped before that. This does not give a comprehension perspective. Also, the progression of sounds in French didn't really match what is generally taught in Gr 1 FI [French Immersion].

The comments indicated a misalignment with what students are expected to do on the assessment and what students are being expected to do according to the developmental expertise of teachers. Regardless of whether training to interpret results was provided or not, participants found the assessments themselves problematic.

With respect to the numeracy SDATs, there were concerns raised regarding the level of assessment and what students were being required to do, which were not aligned with expectations. Even if students did not have issues understanding or responding to the questions on the assessment, the information gleaned was not seen as valuable. For example, “I found that the results did not give a clear picture of a child's current knowledge, particularly for the math assessment”; “How is this data useful when we are testing skills students have not been taught (numeracy)”; and “Numeracy outcomes that cover the whole year mean that I can only see who is unable to do end of year

requirements, not January expectations.” Respondents noted that having the assessment at the appropriate level for when it is administered in the year and the grade level would provide them with more actionable information. One respondent noted, “Most of the numeracy test results gave zero information to me because the assessment itself was either kindergarten level outcomes or way above grade level outcomes for the grade they just came from (in my case Grade 2).” Further comments include the following:

I am still unclear as to how this would help me with formative assessment. It is a summative assessment testing skills that are developmentally inappropriate (example: here is a number line 1–10. Now show us numbers 1–100 and then 1–1000). It feels like a witch hunt.

How are the math assessments accurately reflective of a student’s understanding? It seems like students just randomly guess and they aren’t actually interpreting the information. A lot of them would just try and get the page done in the 30 seconds without actually thinking about what they are doing because they are 7.

In addition to the inappropriate expectations on the numeracy assessment noted by the comments above, an additional concern was raised regarding the purpose and useability of the results of the numeracy assessment by the following respondent:

Purpose of numeracy assessment isn’t clear, so planning next steps is challenging. Data returned in very dense package. In my division, central office staff made it more appropriate and useful for classroom teachers, a huge time commitment. The label of “at risk” seems most paramount, but there are other insights offered which might be more helpful if teachers had appropriate time and resources to understand and decode the results.

Without clear purpose for SDATs, follow up to support students is difficult. The responses below further articulate the challenges they had with the data that was provided by SDATs and the lack of ability to use the data. There were concerns about the relevance and purpose of certain assessments, especially questioning their utility in identifying at-risk students and how these students could be supported with targeted programming:

Schools were not even allowed to keep their data to try and interpret it. The mandate was that data was entered into a divisionwide spreadsheet and then the data disappeared. The data was then supposed to be sent back to administrators. My administrator shared the data he received back. It was a complete load of garbage - nothing was interpreted. It was literally a ppt with 2 pages. One page had 2 bars on a bar graph, the other had 3 bars on the graph. Informed us at the school level of exactly NOTHING.

I am still not really sure how to effectively respond to the data collected. I say this with respect to my administrator role. We have the data but translating it into individual student learning tasks has proven difficult.

Without usable data, the respondents noted that there was little they could do to support students to be successful. These comments cause concern as the information provided is intended to support student learning. If results are not usable, then the effort and time put into administering and scoring SDATs cannot be seen as being worthwhile.

Delays in Receiving and Accessibility of Results

There were many statements indicating that there were issues with the results of the assessments being communicated back to the schools or the teachers in a timely manner. Responses that indicate that teachers did not have access to the results are along the lines of “I was not shown results to interpret. I only know how kids responded”; “Nobody has shared the norm data with us”; and “Long time before the data was sent back to us.” Having a long delay or not having the results shared at all with teachers seems to go against the purpose of the assessments to further guide teaching and to support learners that are experiencing difficulties or that are identified as at risk. If the results are to be used to further learning, obtaining the results in a timely fashion is important.

Lack of Added Value

Even when results were given to teachers in a timely fashion and support was given for interpretation, the results were not seen as providing valuable information that the teachers did not already have a sense of, nor did the results directly impact teaching. As noted in earlier and later sections of this report, participants noted that there was no additional information provided that was seen as useful: “They weren’t useful and did not redirect or improve my teaching” and “I’m still not clear how these assessments were normed and feel that the information gathered from these assessments was not in any way surprising to teachers and offered no real additional insight.” The data was also not seen to have added value to what respondents already knew about their students: “Wondering how these results are useful to me - I know how my students are doing - I don’t need these tests to figure that out” and “The data provided was not more insightful than what teachers already collect in their classrooms. The tests were administered, and the data haven’t been used beyond the assessment.” Another respondent noted that the information gathered from the SDAT was inconsistent with what was gathered from a different assessment instrument:

I was not sure how the numeracy assessments could be used to inform instruction. Some students who tested at risk for addition and subtraction showed a high level of understanding of the concepts when assessed without the time restraints using a Math running record.

This comment not only questioned the value of the results from the numeracy SDAT but also called into question the timed aspect of the assessment and the validity of the results to accurately assess student comprehension. A common challenge was translating assessment results into practical classroom interventions or teaching strategies and that these assessment results were of no added value to what teachers already knew about their students. The value of the SDATs, even when results were given in a timely fashion, were seen as not valuable to inform instruction or advance learning.

Use of Assessment Results

As a follow-up question to the previous question asking about the challenges interpreting the results, an open-response question asked respondents how they were using the results of the assessments. This question received 247 responses, the highest number of open-ended responses to an open question on this survey. The themes that the comments reflect include the following: using the assessment results for grouping students for specific supports; identifying individual students needing support; communication to parents; reinforcing teacher observations; and not using the results at all. Each of these themes will be further explored in the sections that follow.

Grouping Students for Supports

Participant comments identified that results from the assessments were being used to create groupings of students to provide targeted instruction and supports. These targeted supports are being either provided in the classroom or outside the classroom. Some respondents noted that they work as a team to develop a larger scale strategy while others work with the data more independently.

Several respondents noted creating reading groups and adjusting their practice specifically for reading: “I have built a differentiated literacy block to support students with a variety of learning needs. The RCAT [Reading Comprehension Assessment Tool] helped illuminate areas of reading to focus on with students”; “Assess reading & spelling level to determine groupings & next steps for students’ learning”; and “I have used F&P results to create reading groups and spelling assessments to determine what skills students need to work on.” Another respondent indicated that SDAT are one of the assessment tools they use to support student learning. They noted, “I do use that assessment as one of the ones I use to help me create guided reading groups, lead conferences and see where the reading needs are for students.” One respondent noted that the “MIPI [Math Intervention Programming Instrument] results are reviewed from the year before to help with areas of weaknesses and strengths” as a way to individually support student success and growth.

On a larger scale, respondents noted that they have teams that work together to determine a pathway forward to support student learning. The following comment illustrates how teams are working together: “As a team of teachers we used the results to identify some areas of strength and areas for growth in our students. We use this information on an ongoing basis to design responsive targeted instruction.” Additionally, one respondent noted that their “school has a numeracy class once a week for schoolwide numeracy development” as a result of student performance on the SDATs.

Even though there are positives in using the results from SDATs to create intervention supports for students, a respondent noted that they have the ability to support students in one area but not in another, even if there is a need in more than one area. They stated, “We have used the results to provide reading intervention groups led by the school resource teacher. We currently do not have a plan for the math results. The resource teacher is employed for 5 hours making it an either/or scenario for math.” Even if there is a team of teachers that work together for a specific level of students, sometimes they do not necessarily all use the results of SDATs to inform practice, as this next comment illustrates:

Out of the 4 teachers on my team, I am the only one who really looks through them. Although I don't believe in teaching to the test. I do use the information and use it to pinpoint areas and curricular objectives that are not being learned by the students. I find it also helps me with my high levelled ability students and makes me prepare learning materials for them to excel as well.

So not only is this respondent using the results of SDATs to support students who are not meeting the criteria to be successful but also to further the learning of students at the higher learning levels to challenge them further. Several groups of students can be supported through the use of SDAT results.

Individual Student Supports

In addition to providing information on how to best group students according to interventions needed, respondents noted that they used assessment results to identify individual students who needed additional support or intervention and used the results as benchmarks for students to show growth.

Individual Supports. Alongside the comments in the section above, comments in this section further highlight how results are used in an individual way: “MIPI [Math Intervention Programming Instrument] - early in the year, identify students who many require interventions and encouragement to use remedial resources.”; “Informed us on our letters and sound assessments, for which students know what and who needs more support”; and “Grade level reading to help determine if students may require any adaptations.” The following comment further illustrates how results of SDATs are used: “We use the results of the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmarks to track and identify students who are

struggling in reading and then we program for universal, targeted and individualized instruction from there.” However, if the results are not specific to the areas of weakness, there is little one can do to support students in specific ways.

As a school we have taken the data from the at-risk students on these assessments to target support from resource teachers. Unfortunately, the CC3 [Castles and Coltheart 3], LeNS [Letter Name-Sounds] and numeracy assessments only identify children “at risk” and do not identify areas to focus on or specific learning gaps.

The usability of SDAT results depends on the preciseness of the information related to individual students and their needs. The more precise the information is regarding student strengths and areas of growth, the easier it is for programs to be built to support those students.

Benchmarks. Several respondents specifically stated that they use the results of SDATs as benchmarks or as a baseline to show student growth: “The results act more like a benchmark to see how each student grows by the end of the year.” The notion of using the assessment results to show growth over time are specific to these comments, rather than, as in previous comments, to develop targeted strategies without growth taken into consideration. For example, one respondent noted, “We use the results of the data to group students for targeted support and to determine baseline results. The students are assessed throughout the year to track growth.” Another respondent provided a more specific example:

At the beginning of the year, I use a general numeracy skill assessment that I have developed to get a sense of each student’s skill level. I use the same assessment at the mid-way and end of the year to help gauge progress throughout the year. I use the Leaps and Bounds preassessments to guide my teaching of each chapter. These are smaller assessments that I manipulate and use in small chunks. These results help me decide timing/pacing, and how far back I need to review and assist in relearning before progressing to the grade level material.

Whether students are individually supported or supported in groups, the focus on growth over time is key for these respondents who are using results as benchmarks for their students.

Informing: Report Cards and Parent Communication

Some respondents noted that results can be reflected in report card comments and are used in discussions with parents about student progress. There were two main groups of responses in this category. One group included respondents who felt no choice but to share results on report cards: “I

have no choice but to use some of the data on report cards because I had to use so much classroom time collecting the information. Thankfully parents don't really care (most of my students performed below grade level)" and

I have had no choice but to put some of the results on report cards because this is the data I have collected. Parents don't really care about the results; they want to know if their children are happy, do they have friends? Are they completing their work? Being kind to others? How do these screeners really help anyone but the government? The answer is, they don't.

The second group shared results with families: "I shared the Early Years Evaluation with each family and met with my administration to see which students required support." More specifically, this respondent noted that the

EYE-TA generates a parent/teacher report for the domains. I discuss the results with my principal and the parents. Based on the students' scores, I engage my student group, small group and targeted instruction. I work with the parents as well for home and school awareness and communication of what I am teaching and what they can do at home.

The two kinds of comments from respondents either show a frustration with the SDAT program or a perspective that the results are useful and worth sharing with parents.

Reinforcing Teacher Observations

Respondents indicate that the assessment results often confirm what teachers have already observed through their own assessments and interactions with students. As was noted previously in this report, this reinforcement can be seen as negative and, in a later section, this reinforcement is seen as positive. The comments in this section generally see the reinforcement of teacher knowledge as a negative: "The results of this assessment had no surprises" and "The results simply provided data proving what I had already discerned via my professional judgement. The literacy interventions implemented in my classroom predate the data collection." The tone of comments related to this theme are that SDATs do not provide information other than what had not been already obtained through one's classroom practice:

I looked at results, determined they told me what I already knew about my students via my own assessment and professional judgement. I use both formative and summative assessment on my students regularly and have a very accurate pinpoint on their levels. As a professional with tools and training I do not need the government's poor tests to tell me what I already know. It would seem the results were for their information rather than to help me.

This sense of the SDATs not being for the teachers but rather for Alberta Education or for other accountability measures was present throughout the comments in the survey and in the comments in the following section.

Limited or No Usage

In several cases, respondents mention not using the results at all. For some respondents, the results have not been shared with them yet or their students just wrote an assessment and results are not available yet. For other participants, they have not found the assessment results to be useful and so they are not using the results in their practice. These comments differ from the ones above as they don't specifically say that the results are consistent with what the respondent already knows. There are two themes within the comments in this section. One related to the availability of results to teachers and one more specifically related to participants resisting the use of the results.

Availability of Results. There are comments in this section regarding the results not being available for two main reasons. One of the reasons is that the SDATs have just been completed and the results are unavailable: "RRST [Reading Readiness Screening Tool] results haven't been entered yet"; "We just completed the tests"; and "We just finished our tests, so I'm not sure if we'll be receiving extra support or I'll just continue providing intervention to my students in the classroom like I already was." The second reason is that the results are not made available to teachers. Respondents stated, "Results are sent to the division. Results are not shared with classroom teachers" and "Data has not been used in the classroom because teachers do not have access to the data, nor are they allowed access to the data, nor has it been interpreted and given to teachers." These comments suggest that once the results of SDATs are provided to school divisions, it is not clear how the results are used to provide additional supports to students in classrooms.

Not Using Results. Comments by respondents indicate that even if SDAT results are available, they are not using the results to inform their teaching. For example, "The LeNS [Letter Name-Sounds] and CC3 [Castles and Coltheart 3] have not been used for any teaching practices in my room"; "They haven't. I am now just behind in the curriculum"; and "EYE [Early Year Evaluation] results haven't affected my teaching." These comments do not indicate why they are not using the results, just that they are not being used. Further comments state specifically that respondents are not using SDAT results because the information is not useful: "I have not. I filed the results as I was instructed to and have never felt compelled to look back to them. The data they provided is useless." Other comments noted that the data does not add to what they already know: "I don't. I would've collected the literacy and numeracy portions of this anyway as my own assessment and I know my students better than this 'data', therefore I could've identified and predicted the results I got with this before

even doing it.” Some respondents also felt that the data is not relevant: “I have not. They are not either developmentally appropriate or are not curricular based.” One respondent further detailed why they do not use the results of SDATs in their teaching:

I have not used these results. However, in my opinion they are invalid based on some of them not being even at an appropriate skill level for the students, especially those not working at grade level. Additionally, the questions students were asked to complete are not aligned with our curriculum, and therefore not aligned with learning they have completed in previous years. Also, the students I teach have only encountered multiple choice tests on the Chromebook to complete these standardized assessments. The students I teach are accustomed to more holistic methods of assessment (conversation, observation, products) that the school board has actively encouraged, and in my opinion, this type of assessment is not fair for assessing what students actually know or how they are accustomed to showcasing their learning.

The respondent identified that SDATs as mandated are not appropriate measures and have validity concerns with respect to the style and process of responding to the assessments. A further comment illustrates that some teachers want and need support, but these particular assessments and their results are not what are needed:

I haven't. We sent the results of all the testing and that was that. I don't have an EA [educational assistant] and if students need support for literacy and numeracy, it's about time the ATA start advocating for a change in inclusive education practices. Many struggling students have dyslexia, but we don't call it that and we don't provide programs to address it. Nor do we provide proper supports and programs for children who do not thrive in mainstream programming. Enough is enough, we are burnt out. HELP US.

Even if results are available to use, some respondents are not seeing the need or the value of the assessment, as seen earlier in this report, to warrant using the results to inform their practice.

The majority of the previous questions focused on concerns or challenges that were experienced during the SDAT administration and interpretation process. To ensure that the survey captured perspectives of those who found the SDAT process valuable, participants were asked if there were some successes or positive experiences with SDATs. These results are given in the following section.

Successes and Positive Experiences

In response to a closed-response question, 28 per cent of respondents indicated that they had some successes or positive experiences with the SDAT process. An additional open-ended question asked participants to describe the successes or positive experiences with SDATs. Fifty-six individual responses were provided, with themes identified in the responses being that the assessments provided affirmation of professional judgement; students were getting more targeted instruction based on results; and confidence increased for students that were successful.

Affirmation of Professional Judgment

Teachers felt that assessment results often confirmed their observations, providing a data-backed affirmation of their professional judgment. In previous sections of this report, respondents found that SDATs were repetitive and did not add to the understanding they had of their students; however, responses in this section view those consistent results as affirmation of teachers' professional judgement: "I was able to confirm suspicions about reading habits and skills. Students were able to communicate needs for interventions." An additional respondent noted that there was a "confirmation of observations and evidence gathered by teacher prior to assessment." Two further comments provide a more detailed description of the affirmation:

Helped validate challenges I was experiencing with huge learning gaps from Covid. Helped me know it wasn't me, this is a tough year because more kids than normal are coming in at a lower grade level.

Yes and No. We know those students would be at risk regardless of the test because we don't necessarily need a test to determine they are struggling. However, the test does help narrow down what sort of areas they are struggling with to guide you on improving their phonemic awareness.

These comments show that participants felt validated regarding their own observations and felt that SDATs provided them with more clarity regarding students' needs. The following theme addresses how this clarity informed teaching practice.

Informed Instructional Strategies

The results provided valuable insights for teachers to tailor their instructional approaches, helping them meet students at their individual levels. The ability to meet individual needs of students with respect to supports is an important positive result of SDATs where "[students] are getting strategic lessons based on their specific needs." These informed instructional practices "helped with guided reading groups, small group work, extra math support." A respondent noted, "We were able to create

targeted interventions and student literacy has improved as a result.” These comments align with the intent of the mandated literacy and numeracy assessments, where the results are to inform practice and, as a result, impact student performance positively.

Several responses indicate using data to inform instruction and that the SDATs provided them with the data they needed to act. The following two comments illustrate this point:

I find this information makes the learning in the classroom more relevant to the students that I am currently teaching. It also stops me from having to “back track” when teaching a new skill. I am able to meet the kids where they are, and they feel more successful and able to approach the new skills.

I enjoy using PRESS to quickly determine if intervention is required. I like how the assessment is quick and offers a snapshot of skill development. I also like how they offer a whole school RTI [Response to Intervention] model for managing significant intervention requirements. I enjoy the RRST [Reading Readiness Screening Tool] with younger students because it provides a detailed interpretation of phonological skills, specifically phonemic awareness. It gives me a clear understanding of language development and a structured tool for assessment of which students are at risk, compared to my opinion.

The use of data to inform practice is an important consideration when administering and scoring SDATs. If the data is usable and comes in a timely fashion to be actionable, then SDATs can provide valuable contribution to student learning. One respondent noted, “Evidence to guide instruction allows for successes. The question is if the time needed to administer the assessment is the most effective use of time to yield the best growth in student learning.” This is one of the main concerns around SDATs: are these the best use of time to yield the best results for students?

Positive Impact on Student Confidence

Respondents noted that some students felt a sense of accomplishment and confidence upon completing the assessments or performing well on SDATs. In addition, some students enjoyed having one-on-one time with the teacher to demonstrate their skills, in some instances showing more competence than the teacher expected.

Comments regarding the positive impact on student confidence included the following: “Some students enjoyed the experience and felt confident”; “Many students are strong readers and can comprehend successfully”; and “A few students who were able to recognize all sounds (LeNS: Letter Name-Sounds) and words (CC3: Castles and Coltheart 3) felt successful.” Some students were able to learn from the experience and clarify their own understanding in the future: “Some students were able to see where they made mistakes to correct them going onward.” These are very promising impacts on student learning.

Some respondents that had the opportunity to work with students in a one-on-one situation commented that “students love to show off their knowledge in a one-to-one situation.” The opportunity to have the teacher’s undivided attention might be rare in a classroom and “students enjoy the one-on-one time they get with me (the teacher) as they do the benchmark reading and discussion.” As a positive outcome of administering SDATs to their students, a respondent noted, “There were some students assessed wherein I was pleasantly surprised at what they could do.” These themes highlight the potential benefits of assessments in enhancing teaching strategies, supporting student learning and bolstering student confidence.

Additional Insights

Before completing the survey, participants were asked to provide any additional comments they had regarding SDATs. Additional comments included 141 responses to the open-response question. Many of the comments reiterated themes that were present in the previous open-response questions; however, many went into further detail about SDATs and their usage. The comments in this section were generally expansive and addressed several of the questions and themes observed earlier in the survey.

To honour the responses in this section and the further elaboration provided by respondents, a selection of illustrative comments are included in Appendix B. General themes in response to the open call for comments that are similar to previous themes include the following: too much time away from instruction; too much time to administer; too many assessments; assessments not aligned with the curriculum; ineffective use of time; and no choice to administer SDATs. There are several responses that are highlighted in this section that were not captured fully in the themes above or that expressed two or more themes in the response.

The comment below illustrates the notion that assessments are important; however, they need to be appropriate for the students being assessed:

I am all for the two literacy assessments we have used to continue to be used. We need to have baselines so that we can decide if a student is at grade level. We cannot rely solely on teacher judgement. We need data and that data needs to be assessments. Also, I need to know what skills my students are lacking in order to help them. I do NOT agree with the numeracy assessment. I think it is completely unacceptable to assess students' number knowledge to 1000 at the beginning of the school year, especially when the Grade2s coming into Grade 2 have only worked up to 20. Should you assess them with a number line to 100, sure, that seems a more acceptable number rather than 1000.

The limitations of the numeracy assessment indicated in this response have been mentioned several times by respondents throughout the comments to several open-response questions.

The following comments identify the need for further supports for teachers: "I really wish I could address the learning needs in my class but there's no one available to help, apparently." Comments also highlight the need for further supports for specific groups of students: "No accommodations or modifications can be made for learners with exceptional needs, English language learners, behaviourally challenged students or neurodiverse students." Respondents also noted the need for

supports provided in a timely fashion: “It is pointless to have these assessments if no money is given and no supports are in place to help students. It is a big rush to submit assessments to govt by end of September, but it is now December and nothing has been done on their part to help at-risk students.” Without resources or supports provided as a response to student performance on SDATs, there is a concern from respondents that the time that has been spent on SDATs is not of value. The two comments below speak to these concerns:

These assessments were incredibly time-consuming and a significant amount of in-class instructional time was lost this fall. The irony! Standardized assessments without funding to support needs is a waste of everyone’s time and money. Children deserve better.

In my school district, Grade 1 students are only assessed in January for the first time. Follow up assessments must be completed for June. I feel that this is not enough time in between assessments. Also, if a child is considered at risk it doesn’t mean that extra support will be provided for that child. The responsibility falls entirely on the classroom teacher still.

Based on the comments in this section and in previous sections, respondents want to see specific supports in place and an impact on student experience to value the administering of the assessments.

Another element that was brought forward in this open-response section was a concern that school divisions were adding to the work of teachers and the stress of students by insisting certain SDATs be implemented in a certain time frame. There is a sense of distrust of school division leadership and their support for teachers. The following four comments address different aspects of the SDAT program and the concerns they have about school division administration:

The board is searching for some way to measure literacy and numeracy skills. Since they had a quick turnaround, they picked the assessments that were familiar to more teachers. The timing of when the standardized tests were completed was problematic. For example, Fountas and Pinnell benchmarks should’ve been completed in May of the former year. Teachers would’ve had a better idea to assess whether the data that they collected was a fair evaluation of the students’ ability. I cannot stress enough the fact that the majority of teachers in my school were not familiar with the assessment and were expected to complete the assessment with very little training. Teachers were very stressed about administering this test and because they weren’t trained properly they failed to see the validity of the standardized test.

The administrative team has a significant influence in this topic. It is very unfortunate that they can manipulate the use and implementation of assessment tools. I have noticed their use and availability has been increasing; however, if there is no support it is very challenging for teachers to use them effectively.

The assessments and timelines are dictated to me by my district. We are not given enough sub release time to perform assessments or analyze results. Interventions are great only if schools can properly staff classrooms to meet the needs. Many teachers feel a lot of assessments at once has a negative effect on student morale and classroom community, especially the whole class timed assessments.

SDATs mandated by school authorities do not enhance student learning and/or classroom instruction. SDATs mandated by school authorities are a manifestation of a distrust of teachers and beliefs that teachers would be derelict in their duty if not held accountable. This has resulted in ongoing attempts to undermine teachers' status as professionals and infringe on teachers' autonomy.

While the comments above were not pervasive throughout the other sections, they were prevalent in this open-response section. The overall sense that SDATs are being conducted due to a distrust on either the part of Alberta Education, school boards, school division administration or principals comes out in several ways.

The final response to be highlighted as part of the data analysis is a response from a substitute teacher. Being a substitute teacher enables unique opportunities for observation of practice across and between schools and the differences with respect to the implementation and use of SDATs. This is underlined clearly in the comment below:

I have noticed more K–2 classes using literacy assessments like RRST [Reading Readiness Screening Tool]. The Right to Read program provides a significant amount of information, rational and understanding about why the RRST components are critical for language development. I have noticed when implementing the LeNS [Letter Name-Sounds] assessment, teachers are not gaining significant insight into the specific learning challenges. I have also noticed a huge discrepancy between individual schools and the expectations of students at different grade levels. I have noticed some schools will have any student, achieving below grade level or near grade level, provided with intervention supports. At other schools, in the same district and area, there has been zero interventions provided for students above Grade 3. For example, I subbed in a Grade 6 class, I provided whole class instruction at a Grade 3 level. When I consulted with teaching staff, I was informed that because almost all of the students were below grade level it was appropriate to provide instruction at that level. (Not scaffolding to accommodate the diverse learning but full instruction.)

These comments illustrate the differences between classes in the same school division with respect to supports provided to teachers to help their students to be successful. There is no single solution to the challenges that teachers and students are facing with respect to implementing the results of SDATs.

Throughout this section, the words of teachers have been used to highlight the themes coming out of the responses to both closed- and open-response questions. Themes are repeated between questions. The themes of time (to administer SDATs, away from other more valuable tasks, within a school year), support (to administer SDATs, to interpret results, for teachers and for students) and value (information gathered from assessments is worth what has been given up, information gathered is usable) are by far the most common comments in all the responses. In the sections that follow, answers to the research questions will be addressed as well as other learnings that came from the data. Implications and recommendations will also be provided based on the results of the study.

Results

The research questions that framed this study are as follows: What is the impact mandated SDATs are having on teachers and teaching? What supports are being provided to teachers for the administration, scoring and analysis of the mandated SDATs? How are the results of the mandated SDATs being used to support student learning? Have teachers noticed an increased number of mandated SDATs from the previous year? The results are organized below according to the research questions.

Impact on Teachers and Teaching

The impact of mandated SDATs on teachers and teaching is varied depending on the grade level of the teacher, the influence that the results have on teacher practice and the supports provided to teachers to administer, score, analyze and implement the results. There are some consistent impacts to teachers that come out clearly from the data. One such impact is the time required by the teacher to address the demands of administering, scoring and analyzing the results. The following comment summarizes the expectations from teachers for administering SDATs:

I found it extremely time consuming and we were not given the time and space to properly administer the tests. We were expected to teach ourselves how to administer the test, and how to mark it all. We were given sub time to deliver the tests; however, I was given 1.5 days, and the actual preparation, making sub plans, figuring out how to deliver the tests, the marking and the data entry added several more hours to the task, which I was expected to do on my own time, or using my preps.

All the time needed for the tasks related to preparing, administering, scoring and adding data from SDAT results was extensive. Combined with the time of year when the SDATs were to be administered and all the other tasks that teachers were being asked to attend to during that time, the impact on teachers was extensive.

The impact on teaching was also considerable because the time spent on SDAT administration had a high impact on valuable instructional time and it is not clear that the activity yielded valuable or usable insights for teachers to incorporate into their teaching practice; however, the impact on teaching based on the results is not as clear. As we saw in earlier themes and comments, the time that was spent attending to the SDAT tasks was taken away from instructional time, was considered to be extensive and as time lost: “even though I have spent so much of my class time and personal time, the

information from these assessments is not particularly useful in informing my practice.” For many respondents, if there was value seen in the usefulness of the SDATs results, they would be more at ease about what they perceived as lost. One respondent posed thoughtful questions regarding SDATs that should be posed at the provincial, division and school level: “Is this the most effective use of time? Does the time required to give the assessment hold the same or increased value for the student? Do all students require assessment?” Regardless of the assessment program, these questions are important questions to ask.

For those that found the SDAT results impacted practice and student learning, there was a stronger sense in the value of the SDATs:

Helpful to red flag students to check in with and provide extra support. Also helpful to look for trends or gaps where multiple students struggle that we can specifically address in classroom instruction. Used as an additional way to support my observations of student learning in the classroom.

Comments were often general as to how the results were used to influence teaching, like the comment above and like this comment: “To identify at-risk students. To guide some of my instruction.” Others were more specific to the kinds of interventions or changes to practice caused by the assessments.

In particular, the literacy assessments seemed to have more impact on practice than the numeracy assessments. The comments regarding how the data from SDATs were used were centered around reading groups, or creating levels for reading interventions or supporting students with specific literacy skills. For example, responses such as “we used the results, along with other data to identify our most at-risk kids and to begin/continue the government literacy intervention program” and “I use the LeNS [Letter Name-Sounds] & CC3 [Castles and Coltheart 3] data to compare it with my other assessments I do throughout the year. When comparing it, I look to see whether my students are on target for phonic sounds, reading words and knowing how to decode words” gave specific strategies or skills that respondents were paying attention to or changing.

As for numeracy, few comments stated that the numeracy assessments were valuable in impacting practice. A common response regarding the numeracy assessment was as follows: “The only thing I have used is the kids counting to 100.” Traditionally, there has been a lack of coordinated numeracy assessment and intervention across the province, so many teachers have more experience with literacy assessments and using the resulting data to inform instruction. Additionally, as seen earlier in this report, there were many responses regarding the inappropriateness of the numeracy SDAT mandated by Albert Education. This could be why there were fewer responses regarding how the numeracy data was impacting specific practices. The use of SDAT results to support learning will be further explored in the sections below.

Supports for Teachers

Supports provided for teachers to administer, score and analyze results of SDATs are inconsistent, and major gaps exist for the successful implementation of SDATs and for the results to be considered valid and reliable. As noted by respondents, the least amount of support provided was that participants had to learn on their own, while the greatest amount of support included several days of training or hours of online modules. There were very different approaches to supporting teachers with SDATs. There were division-wide supports in some divisions: “District office online with company representative”; and there were school-level supports in other divisions: “Brief instructions at a staff meeting.” Resourcing for providing supports to teachers did not come up as a concern; however, based on the varied levels of support, the ability of a school division to provide professional learning to teachers on the implementation, scoring and analysis of results might depend on the resources that the school division has to draw upon. However, because this is not explicitly spoken about in the data, this could be an incorrect conclusion.

The human resource supports needed during the implementation, scoring and analysis of SDATs was a recurring theme in responses throughout the open-ended questions. The lack of human resources for respondents to draw on for assistance, specifically during the administration of SDATs, was particularly frustrating. The following comments capture several of the human resource supports that were needed:

The time commitment is significant and meant considerable teacher time out of class. Sub coverage was used but finding subs is difficult for a variety of reasons. Teachers expressed frustration having to not only sub plan but then having to mark and input results. The time added on to existing work demands is significant and no additional prep time has been allocated. The word “teacher burn out” has been expressed in several conversations.

Not given enough time to mark the assessments/input the marks/do the assessments. Did on my own time as our school budget had to pay for sub costs so we only got one day to assess.

Some of the mandated SDATs required individual administration, and participants commented that they did not have someone available to administer the assessments while they instructed the rest of the class or to instruct the class while they administered the assessment: “Managing the class while trying to administer the EYE [Early Years Evaluation] individually or in a small group.” This lack of human resource supports puts further strain on teachers and potentially calls into question the validity of the results if the SDATs were not administered as intended.

Results Used to Support Learning

This was one of the most varied sets of responses. There was a definite divide between those who were actively using the results of SDATs to improve student learning and those who seemed to actively resist using the results at all. Respondents that indicated that they were using results of SDATs to support learning indicated that the results provided them with specific information that could be used to create groupings of students and provide targeted instruction. For example,

If I didn't assess my students, I wouldn't have data to compare. The data helps me to make decisions about groupings and skills my students are missing. My students enjoy the challenges of decoding the nonsense words. It helps to see that they can decode multi-syllabic words, which sets them up for success with reading in the future.

We have already implemented interventions that are meaningful and research based instead of wasting time on bad practice like LLI [Levelled Literacy Intervention] or Reading Recovery.

The usefulness of SDAT results could be dependent on the amount of training or supports one had to make sense of the results and implement interventions. This correlation cannot be confirmed or refuted from the data collected in this study.

Comments that called into question the usability of SDAT results pointed to the relevance of the assessments to curriculum, the specificity and actionability of the results and the developmental appropriateness of the assessments. For example,

I cannot choose not to administer these tests to my students. They do not give me any information that is helpful. Some of the numeracy tests are timed and go against the grain of what I know is effective teaching practice. The literacy test is just a word calling test, with three lists of nonsense words. Everything is out of context. Useless if you ask me. The [division] specialists have tried to read some sense into these assessments and provide activities or routines that could address some of the categories in both tests, but this really detracts from the understanding piece that we need to focus on in the classroom.

These are pretty much pointless without any extra supports being provided for interventions. I have no extra staff (not even an EA), no technology or resources to do effective interventions when I have a class full of students in Grades 1–9 all needing my help. The assessments just tell me that my students are all “at risk.” I already know that. I don't need a pointless assessment to tell me that. It just takes up instructional time.

These comments call into question the validity and reliability of the results and the usefulness of the data provided. Even if the respondent wanted to use the data, identifying students as “at risk” or “not at risk” without any further insights as to which specific content or skills caused them to be “at risk” resulted in the data being deemed not useful.

Differences in participant responses regarding the usefulness of the data to support student learning could depend on many factors that we were unable to interpret from the data collected through this survey. What is clear is that there is a divide within respondents about how valuable the results from SDATs are in terms of impacting student learning.

Increased Testing

Respondents noticed an increase in testing from the previous year. Combined with the perceived usefulness or lack of usefulness of the results of SDATs, further questions arise about the impact that this amount of testing has had on student learning and success. With a wide-ranging support system for teachers to administer, score and analyze the results, and a varied belief in SDATs as a way to gather useful information, increasing the number of SDATs does not seem to help in achieving the goal. Though a specific open-response question related to the number of SDATs administered in current and previous years was not included, the average score (out of 10) to the ranking question “In the 2022/23 school year, there has been an increase in the use of SDATs compared to the 2021/22 school year” was 7.1. The mode of responses, at 85 of the 210 responses, was 10, and over half (116 of 210) of the responses ranked as 8, 9 or 10. Additionally, comments from respondents like “I will end up spending more time ‘assessing’ students than I will being able to provide interventions to students” and “All I do is standardized assessments now. After finally completing the countless assessments by the end of October, I now have to revisit some of the testing to see if the results have changed...3 weeks later” seem like there has been, at the very least, an increase in the time spent attending to SDATs compared to previous years.

Other Results

The research questions mostly focus on teachers and their experiences with SDATs; however, the data clearly shows that there is an impact on students. This was described to be mostly negative in nature, where the self-esteem and anxiety of students were directly impacted by being required to take SDATs. Comments regarding students and the impact on them were present in responses to each of the questions. One particular respondent commented on how SDATs impacted their own child:

My own child has come home from school feeling so bad about himself because of some of the screeners. He is actually very bright, but he isn't ready to perform well under pressure (he

is only 8!). How do I opt out of screening? I don't think it is fair that I as a parent cannot have a say in what he is subjected to, when I know as a teacher how useless and time consuming these screeners are. :(

This comment is very poignant. As a teacher and a parent, this respondent saw not only the impact SDATs were having on their students but also on their child. Because the SDATs are mandated at specific levels without the opportunity for a parent to exclude their children from the assessment, there is additional concern about the negative impact that these assessments have on students. The following comments echo these concerns:

These tools seem harmful to students. They also seem ineffective as assessments because they don't align with curriculum and seem developmentally inappropriate. I haven't seen any evidence of the findings being used in productive, positive ways.

These assessments do not have any adaptations or supports for students with learning disabilities or complex needs -I actually felt sick to my stomach assessing my students with needs on things that showed no regard for their learning styles, needs or experiences -it was ridiculous to be assessing letter sounds that are not even in the curriculum or that I hadn't taught yet -it was equally ridiculous to assess concepts in numeracy not yet taught -it was stressful and absolutely frustrating to spend so much teaching time on standardized tests at this point in the year -the money spent on this should have been put towards teacher time to develop and work on the new curriculum to create engaging and meaningful lessons for our students -this time and money should have been spent on supports in the classroom.

What is lacking in the data is the specific impact that SDATs had on student achievement. The survey was not intended to explore the impact on student learning specifically but focus more on the teacher or administrator perspective. The final two statements in the second comment are particularly interesting to consider as the financial cost of the SDATs has not been articulated. A future question to ponder is if these funds were redirected to the school system directly, could more direct supports have been provided to teachers to support student learning?

The data from this study served to answer the research questions posed while also providing information that gave additional insights into the experiences of administering, scoring, interpreting and using results from SDATs.

Discussion

In reviewing the data and the themes that emerged from participant responses, the impact that the mandated SDATs are having on teachers and teaching is more detrimental than beneficial. The main issue participants raised is that the value of the time lost to the administration, scoring and data entry of the results of the assessments is not being realized in the classroom with student success. In several instances, teachers are seeing negative effects of the prevalence of SDATs on student confidence and anxiety. Though there have been some positives noted by respondents, the negatives are articulated more often.

A lack of coordinated support for teachers with respect to training to administer, score and interpret the assessments calls into question the extent to which the SDATs were actually standardized in their administration. To achieve reliable results, the process of administering assessments must be as similar as possible to compare results. From the teacher comments, there were many interruptions and concerns with technology and time which did not allow for consistent administration of assessments to ensure comparable results.

There was concern raised that teachers are not necessarily seeing the results of the SDATs, ever or in a timely fashion, and thus are not using the results to support student growth. Additional participant comments noted that they received little information other than identifying students that were “at risk,” with no additional information to support the teachers in planning for those students.

The combination of district-mandated assessments alongside provincially mandated assessments meant that some teachers were administering five to seven different assessment tools to their students. This variety and collection of assessments were not necessarily adding value to the data received and programs developed for students.

Conclusion

The study has shown the following conclusions: a rise in SDATs in K–4, with the value of these not being realized in most classrooms across the province; the extensive time spent on administering, analyzing and reporting; the belief that the assessments are not worth the time they take away; and that there are no added benefits or value. For those that have been using some external assessments in their classroom, literacy assessments seem to have benefits, but the numeracy assessments seem to have very little benefit. Teachers commented that the numeracy assessments were causing more harm to students than providing any value. Reasons cited for this were that there was little curriculum alignment in the assessments, expectations were too high and timed assessments were anxiety provoking and not best practice.

The lack of training for teachers to administer and interpret SDATs is worrisome. The fidelity of implementation of a standardized assessment completely changes the reliability and validity of the results. If one teacher follows the implementation guidelines completely, for example, timing the numeracy questions, and a second teacher does not, the results of the two assessments will not be comparable and cannot be considered valid. Thus, the interpretation of those results is also flawed, and the consequences of those interpretations, that is, who is deemed to be at risk and which schools receive funding, cannot be trusted. Errors in decision making can be made and students who might need additional supports are not flagged and vice versa. Furthermore, students who might not need supports are told that they do. These are major implications for the trustworthiness of the results being reported by Alberta Education with respect to the proportion of students who are deemed “at risk” or “not at risk” and for them being successful in their learning journeys.

Recommendations

Several recommendations for different levels of the school system emerge out of the findings of this study. The recommendations are presented below in no particular order:

- A coordinated training strategy be developed for training teachers across the province to administer the same assessments to ensure that results are comparable across schools, within a division and between divisions.
- Support, both in terms of human and technical support, be given to teachers to fully administer, record and analyze data from the assessments. To ensure that results from SDATs are valid and reliable, they need to be administered in a standardized way. Without additional human resources, the administration of SDATs is subject to variability.
- SDATs be developed that are purposeful, align with the curriculum and have adaptations that can be made for students with complex needs.
- Results of SDATs, which include actionable information to support student growth, be provided in a timely and meaningful way to teachers.
- School divisions to not require teachers to administer multiple SDATs that assess the same students on the same constructs.

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Appendix A: Challenges Administering SDATs

Students who require this assessment are not grouped by class, and I don't teach or know most of them. I had to use many hours of my noninstructional time to administer and re-administer the assessments based on which students happened to be in attendance that day and would not refuse to participate. Administration offers no support in requiring students to attend to complete their assessments, but then they berate me if the data is not complete.

There were many challenges: 1) time of year was not appropriate. For example, last year we administered them in April, and this was for an end of the year diagnostic. At the beginning of April, my students had not been exposed to many of the learning outcomes and had no clue. There were still almost 2 1/2 months for the students to be able to practice and learn new curricular objectives. 2) We were given absolutely no time or exposure to learn how to give this test. We were told, "Give them the link—get them logged in—they do the rest." 3) None of my students had been exposed to taking multiple choice exams. My question therefore is, "What is the validity of this assessment?" I was able to teach and prepare the students to take multiple choice this year, so by the end of the year, students will be better prepared. 4) Within the first two weeks of this school year, my students had to complete almost five hours of testing. I had so many students crying and not wanting to come to school as we had deadlines to get the testing in. Students were literally not reading the question and just pushing the keyboard to advance and finish.

Didn't understand the purpose. Did not understand norms and/or how to use that information with regards to their students. For the two "randomly" selected schools that Dr. G's team completed the assessments for, neither schools received their results. All of those teachers had to reassess all students to input the data online for AB ED. Additionally, the researchers did not check or collect the consent and assent forms.

Time in the day, having to balance class management and a sheer number of tests right at the start of the year. We have "data" but now what? If you have four classes, for example, trying to do F&P with 90+ kids is too much, plus all the other tests. Kids need mental health support, not tests.

The challenges I experienced this year are 1) lack of time, on average I was only able to do a small number of students. To complete all the literacy and math assessments it took me 10 school days. 2) no sub coverage to support the time needed to assess students while also managing the classroom.

3) no coverage to mark and enter marks in the government database; this has all been done on personal time. 4) the amount of time required to administer both the literacy and numeracy assessments had a negative impact on the amount of teaching that occurred during each day. 5) I had to use daily prep time to assess students in order to complete assessments. The entire experience is awful, stressful and exhausting, for information that easily could be provided by the classroom teachers.

Administering all these tests was extremely time consuming. It took 17 hours of school time to complete all the one-to-one testing as well as the testing of the entire class. I also had to mark and input all the results on my own time. Thirty mins for the writing numbers entering, 15 mins each for entering, adding and sub, 30 for number line entering and 15 for comparing numbers. 15 for marking, adding and sub. It was between 2–3 hours in total. This was during the same time I had to complete report cards and IPPs. We were also told by our administration in the 11th hour (last minute) that the government decided that the Grade 1s needed to complete the CC3 test also. Talk about learning loss. Seventeen hours less instructional time because students have to be independent when I'm one-on-one testing a student.

Ethical issues of administering developmentally inappropriate assessments to students

I teach a multi-grade classroom, Grades 1–9. The numeracy assessments were nearly impossible to administer since each grade required instructions to be read to them. There were different time requirements as well. As I am the only teacher/staff at the school, the other students in my class had to be sent home in order to administer the tests. Impossible to be done without individual pull out or additional adults in the classroom.

1) Lack of time and place to administer the assessments, 2) inability to provide a calm quiet space for my students to focus during assessments, 3) high absenteeism during assessment period, 4) the time used for assessments replaced important time needed for classroom community and routine building in early September.

My students already have gaps in their learning, and I don't need a screener to tell me that. Many of my students are below grade level and lack independence. Taking precious time from instruction to administer a timed test caused severe anxiety for some of my students, and it wasted a lot of time that could have been spent on closing gaps. One student completely shut down as soon as he learned the activities were timed. I was required to put him in an uncomfortable space during the period of time when I should have been building a relationship. The majority of my students did poorly on the screeners.

Appendix B: Other Comments

Poor timing/too much assessment/time away from instruction/ineffective use of time

I am concerned about the amount of instructional time it will take to do these assessments in January. Our Grade 2 and 3 classes did them in September and nothing has come from them.

Being forced to administer this evaluation during the first month of school while teachers are attempting to create relationships with their students as well as implement routines and expectations is unfair to students and teachers. There is no reason these tests could not be administered either staggered throughout the first two months or pushed to October when students and teachers are better prepared to complete this task.

Standardized testing is not appropriate in the early years. PERIOD. It wasted two weeks of my students' time, my EA time and my DL time, that could have been spent on learning new concepts. The testing is not well thought out, does not show what students know, and made them anxious and worried. While I realize that we have no choice in whether or not to do them, I am hopeful that at some point feedback on these will be heard and we will no longer be required to have our classes do them.

“Not everything that matters can be measured and not everything that is measured matters” - Alfie Kohn. Waste of time. This govt is preoccupied with accountability and have chosen some poor tools to measure success.

I don't feel they should be administered in the first month of school before I have developed a relationship with my students, as we had to start administering the tests in the second week of school to get through them before the deadline. The math assessments don't follow best teaching practices; timing students as one example.

The time taken by teachers to administer and input data into the required places is astronomical and the increased stress this has on teachers is not ok. Also, there is no compensation or time given in lieu to make up for this extensive testing and the government just expects that teachers will fulfill their requirement with little results or money supporting students and the findings of these results. The amount of time taken away from students and their teachers when they could be working directly

with their students to support them is ridiculous. These are not having a positive impact on schools or teachers, and if the government wishes for these to continue, then it needs to support teachers in administering them, in similar ways that Grade 12 exams and PATs are administered on specific days and then time off from teaching is given so teachers can mark and input the data.

The testing was a waste of my time and my students' time. I needed to do further literacy testing to determine reading levels, which was used for grouping students into reading groups.

I do not believe that increasing standardized assessment during a child's first year of school, especially in a half-day kinder program, is a good use of my time.

I feel that these tests have taken away from other important activities I would like to do, like LLI reading assessments, guided reading, providing one-on-one support, etc.

Ineffective/not curricularly aligned/not developmentally appropriate

The results of the intervention remain to be seen, and for what it's worth, the results will be because a professional and highly capable teacher took the time to create appropriate tasks and strategies from their expertise. No credit is deserved by the "hub of support" provided by the government. I will use the assessments again because I'm being forced to! I don't have a choice. I have stepped up and been honest with my admin. I think the tests are not valid. I think it's unjust to subject our students to them. I think they are not inclusive, and they are highly racist as they don't take our diverse demographic into consideration. These assessments are why I think the education minister and everyone involved with the Ministry of Education don't have a clue how to do their jobs and were worthy of receiving the nonconfidence vote of 99% of the ATA at ARA last year. They should all be fired and people who actually value public education should be in the position that impact our children!

The literacy/numeracy screening assessments are awful. And I hate them. They provided stress and anxiety to both students and teachers. For teachers, a significant amount of time is taken away from "the teaching" in order to administer these assessments. And it is difficult for teachers to manage students while assessing students one-on-one. Teacher coverage is not provided to teachers to administer, mark or enter the data gathered from these screening assessments, so teachers are having to use their personal time. The assessments do not account for students with learning disabilities, speech delays/issues, student IPPs or AAPs or any other social/emotional issues that may inhibit a student's ability to be successful.

Extremely limited tests. We expected to have more students below average from the math assessments as most students were unable to complete the majority of the questions in the time allotted. However, we had very few that were below average. This tells me that they are either weighting the results against other students and all students did poorly, or the assessment is actually a very poor tool.

I only answered that I will be using these assessments next year again as it is mandated by our school board. I don't believe standardized tests should be administered in kindergarten.

Comparison to other assessments

I have been teaching for many years and have seen many different types of standardized tests from Provincial Achievement Test to SLA. I would have to say the best use for me in the classroom (as a method of understanding and guiding my instruction) was the SLAs, although the timing of late Sept to early Oct seemed unfair to the students. In this regard the PAT were a better snapshot of what the kids learned in Grade 3. Although administering at end of year and school results being publicly posted made you "teach to the test" for positive results. SLAs guided my practice much more and were useful when discussing levels with parents.

I found that the tools I was using previously and still use give me more actual, useful information.

We used LeNS and CC3 because it was province mandated. We used TOWRE and TOSREC because it was district mandated. Irritated that we are spending so much on them when most other universal screeners are free, and we could use money elsewhere in literacy. Acadience was provided by our great in-house literacy teacher—most useful.



The Alberta
Teachers' Association