

Q&A: Foundation Skills Assessment

Q1: What is the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)?

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is an annual province-wide assessment of Literacy and Numeracy skills for students in Grades 4 and 7, that provides parents, caregivers, teachers, schools, school districts and the Ministry of Education and Child Care with important information on how well students are progressing in the foundation skills of Literacy and Numeracy.

Q2: What is the role and purpose of FSA?

The purpose of the FSA is to provide system level information on student performance and inform strategic planning and decision making at the Ministry, district, and school level.

Q3: Why is FSA important?

FSA is BC's earliest provincial indicator of student performance (beginning at Grade 4) and provides a snapshot of how well BC students are doing in the key foundation areas of Literacy and Numeracy.

Q4: Who develops the FSA?

The FSA is designed by BC educators and assessment experts. Since the redesign in 2017, the work has been informed by the Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment (AGPA), made up of key education stakeholders and with support from measurement experts who helped to operationalize the ideas and provide an overall design for the new assessment. AGPA will continue to have a key role in shaping the directions for FSA as part of BC's assessment system.

Q5: What information does the FSA results provide and how can the data be used?

The main purpose of the FSA is to help the province, School Districts and schools evaluate how well fundamental skills are being addressed and make plans to improve student success. School districts rely on this information to inform local planning and to drive improvements and interventions to support student learning. Public awareness on how students are doing, with respect to fundamental skills at critical points in their education, is key to ensuring system accountability for our educated citizenry. FSA results are instrumental to the ongoing assessment of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational outcomes.

FSA is a system-wide indicator that provides the basis to measure progress towards our goal of achieving equity in BC schools. FSA data is important in understanding and addressing barriers faced by First Nations learners.

District-specific results in the form of school level PDFs, district level pivot tables and district level dashboards, are made available to School Districts.

Students, teachers, and parents and caregivers are able to use FSA information as a gauge of student performance in Literacy and Numeracy early in the school year. FSA data also provides

trend information on student performance over time. Schools and districts use their results for planning and monitoring trends in student achievement.

Q6: What are the updates to the FSA?

FSA was updated in 2017 to reflect the changes in the curriculum and global trends in assessment, as well as current classroom practices, such as providing opportunities for collaboration and self-reflection. The administration window was also changed to early in the school year (October).

A final step in aligning FSA with curriculum and the provincial assessment program was to modify the Reading and Writing sections into a single Literacy section (by eliminating the single Writing item and changing one of the three constructed response reading items), which took effect starting with the 2021/22 administration.

The FSA now consists of two components: Literacy and Numeracy. Literacy is assessed through 30 electronic items and 3 written items, instead of 30 electronic and 4 written items. This has reduced the administration time of FSA by 45 minutes.

This change has also resulted in better alignment across the whole suite of assessments in BC, including the FSA, the Grade 10 Numeracy Assessment and Grade 10 and 12 Literacy Assessments, as well as national and international assessments such as PCAP, PISA and PIRLS, that do not report out on writing as a separate component.

Q7: How has the Ministry collaborated with the sector during this shift?

The FSA was redesigned in 2017 based on recommendations from AGPA and included moving the administration to earlier in the school year. Engagement with the education sector and co-construction with teachers was key to all redesign efforts. Rightsholders and stakeholders were key members of the FSA redesign working group and created the outline for the redesigned 2017/18 FSA. Discussions with the development teams and the Assessment Working Group also supported modifications that emphasize the importance of a continuum of assessments for Grades 4, 7, 10 and 12.

Q8: How can data comparison to previous years' FSA results be achieved?

Comparison of proficiency scores between Literacy and past Reading proficiency levels is possible with the caveat that one constructed response item from Reading has been modified on the Literacy assessment. Additionally, comparisons for Literacy/Reading are provided with a new set of data, based on the selected response raw scores. The selected response items in Reading are now described as Literacy comprehension and the three constructed response items are described as Literacy communication. The Ministry has added this information to the FSA dashboard to support schools, districts, and partners with data comparisons.

While it remains possible to compare the Literacy results of the FSA 2021/22 to past Reading results, as this shift is not expected to significantly impact overall proficiency levels, direct comparison of the third constructed response item in the item level reports ([found here](#)) is not recommended.

In addition to proficiency level results, year-to-year comparison of Literacy/Reading selected response comprehension questions is possible. Specifically, the Reading selected response comprehension questions from 2017/18 onward may be compared to the Literacy selected response comprehension questions. This additional data has been provided in the dashboard.

As a result of curriculum transformation, the content administration, and item format of the FSA was significantly revised in October 2017. Therefore, FSA administrations prior to 2017 cannot be compared to FSA administrations from 2017 and onwards.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the FSA 20/21 was administered in February 2021 instead of October 2020. It is not advisable to directly compare the results of this assessment to other FSA assessments.