

# The New Alberta K–4 Curriculum: Why It's *Never* Too Early for the Assessment Conversation



Effective curriculum provides a blueprint that guides the design of instruction and assessment. Given the inseparable nature of curriculum and assessment, it is critical that any new curriculum be compatible with the principles of sound assessment practice, as agreed on by leading assessment researchers and authors worldwide. The new Alberta *Teaching Quality Standard* (TQS) is consistent with these principles.

Consider the following three key characteristics of effective curriculum as you have the opportunity to review the new Alberta K–4 Curriculum through the lens of assessment.

## **EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM provides clarity as to what is to be taught and assessed.**

Whether a curriculum is based on knowledge and skills, or on concepts and competencies, the learning destination must be evident. Within an effective curriculum:

- various organizational components work together to clarify the intended learning destination
- outcomes are written in clear language that enables teachers to easily share the learning destination with students and parents

### **INDICATORS of CONCERN**

- multiple organizational levels presented as discrete sections
- ambiguous language making the learning destination unclear

*The new Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) requires that student assessment and evaluation processes “accurately reflect the learner outcomes within the programs of study.”*

## **EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM is designed to engage students in meaningful learning and assessment.**

The *2013 Ministerial Order on Student Learning* expresses a vision of students engaged in meaningful learning, which in turn requires students to utilize higher level thinking processes. To fulfill this vision, curriculum must be written so as to accommodate assessment methods that go beyond conventional selected response and written response prevalent within current provincial assessments. Within an effective curriculum:

- verbs (or other directing words) denote deep learning for students (e.g., analyze, support position, demonstrate, evaluate, design, develop, create)
- a broad range of assessment methods are necessary to gather evidence of learning
- assessment of student performance requires teacher professional judgment, as a variety of student responses may be appropriate

### **INDICATORS OF CONCERN**

- outcomes that contain verbs for which assessment evidence cannot be gathered (e.g., explore, examine, experience, recognize)
- an abundance of outcomes with verbs at lower levels of thinking (e.g., identify, list, describe, solve) that can be assessed using conventional assessment methods (including digital items) and for which there is one generally accepted correct answer

*The new TQS requires that student assessment and evaluation processes “provide a variety of methods through which students can demonstrate their achievement of learning outcomes” and “support the use of reasoned judgment about the evidence used to determine and report the level of student learning.”*

## EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM supports the *process* of formative assessment.

Formative assessment is not about a set of quizzes or practice tests that don't 'count' towards a student's final grade. Rather, formative assessment is an intentional process of ongoing communication between teachers and students that guides instructional decision making and facilitates deep learning for students. It is based on the belief that all students have the potential to be successful when appropriate support is provided. Within an effective curriculum:

- outcomes provide opportunities for students to develop competencies and to take risks with their learning; give, receive and reflect on feedback; integrate feedback into work in progress; and focus on *learning*

### INDICATORS OF CONCERN

- outcomes that are overly prescriptive and/or narrow leaving little room for students to engage in the formative assessment process

*The new TQS requires that student assessment and evaluation processes “generate evidence of student learning to inform teaching practice through a balance of formative and summative assessment experiences” and “provide accurate, constructive and timely feedback on student learning.”*

In summary, what are the fundamental desired changes that this new curriculum is seeking to create within Alberta classrooms?

To what extent will this new curriculum be able to accomplish the intended goals?

What adjustments might be considered to the current draft before the new curriculum is approved and implemented?

## AAC Resources to Support a New Curriculum

AAC has been supporting classroom assessment in Alberta for 25 years! AAC resources are based on foundational principles of sound assessment practice that are linked to the Alberta curricular context. AAC resources will be updated and new materials developed to reflect a new curriculum. As such, AAC web, print and professional learning resources will continue to be a valuable source of support as new curriculum is implemented.

