Initial Mathematics Assessment
Grades 1-8
Initial Assessment for English Language Learners

It is important that newly arrived English language learners (ELLs) receive a warm welcome during their transition into Ontario schools. The initial assessment process has a strong impact on the first impressions of these students and their families. During this process, it is important to learn about the whole child and celebrate the diversity each student will bring to our classrooms.

School boards will assign staff to assess the English language proficiency of all English language learners. The assessment will include:

• a structured interview to assess oral communication skills (i.e., listening and speaking);
• an assessment of reading comprehension;
• an assessment of student writing;
• an assessment of mathematical knowledge and skills.

An initial assessment can be conducted in many ways. Some boards have centralized facilities where all newcomer students and families go to obtain orientation information regarding schools in Ontario and where the assessment takes place over the span of one day. In other boards, initial assessment is conducted at the school level and can be spread over a period of days.

The initial assessment is an important first step in getting to know the English language learner. It is an opportunity to get a clear picture of the student’s educational, cultural, and personal background, including his/her individual learning style and interests.

The initial assessment also serves as a diagnostic assessment of level of achievement in mathematics and level of proficiency in English. Moreover, it can yield valuable information about students’ linguistic, academic, and other strengths, interests, and needs, including any Special Education needs. Initial assessment results need to be recorded and used as a starting point to inform programming for the student. They also need to be communicated to the student, parents, and all staff working with the English language learner.

Guidelines for the Initial Mathematics Assessment

ELLs arrive in Ontario schools with varying background experiences and English language skills. There are many factors which may impact the performance of a student during the initial assessment, e.g., acculturation process, performance anxiety, and subject-specific language. The assessor should consider the individual student needs and use professional judgement in the use of this assessment tool. At any point, if the student is experiencing difficulty, the assessor should allow the student to move ahead to the next question or stop altogether. As well, assessors should be aware of how age and fatigue can affect the performance of the student.
The initial mathematics assessment provides ELLs with an opportunity to demonstrate understanding of their mathematical strengths related to numbers, symbols, and representations. In addition, this assessment tool can provide information regarding the general academic background of a new student. Students may not have the language proficiency to count in English but may have those skills in first language. Counting in first language gives the assessor an indication of the student’s knowledge of numbers.

For each grade-level assessment, a cluster of expectations from the Number Sense and Numeration strand has been selected as a starting point in determining the mathematical knowledge and skills of the student. It would not be reasonable or appropriate to assess all curriculum expectations within this initial assessment. It is recommended that the other mathematics strands be assessed at another time and in a manner appropriate for supporting student learning.

Clear and concise instructions for administering the assessment are provided for each grade level. Manipulatives should be available for students for all grade assessments.

The assessment tool is based on previous grade-level expectations. For example, an ELL placed in a Grade 6 classroom is assessed based on selected Grade 5 expectations. If a student arrives mid-year, the assessor should consider using some current grade-level expectations.

The combined Kindergarten/Grade 1 assessment tool is based on selected expectations from the Kindergarten Program (2006). The assessor should consider the age and educational background of the new kindergarten student when determining the appropriateness of using this assessment tool.

The assessor is encouraged to use professional judgement in deciding when to rephrase instructions and/or questions. Some prompting may be appropriate provided that the focus does not shift from an initial assessment to student instruction.

**Administering the Assessment**

1. Review the assessment tool and prepare the materials necessary.
2. Review the Assessment Flow Chart for suggested options and pathways.
3. Using the Number Sense and Numeration strand assessment, begin with counting and simple computation.
4. Give students access to manipulatives. It is important to gather information about the student’s previous experiences to determine if using manipulatives will support the student with this assessment.
5. Encourage students to skip items that seem unfamiliar and look for others that they understand. If the student is struggling at grade level, choose an assessment package at an earlier grade.
6. Accept different ways to show responses, as children learn mathematics differently in different countries.
7. Record your observations as you work with the student.
8. Communicate the results of the initial assessment, in a supportive way with the student, the parents, the school administrator, classroom teacher, and applicable staff.

Expectations involving investigation are generally not included in the initial assessments. They are best assessed through multiple opportunities given during classroom practice. Expectations that are highly language-based have been excluded from the assessment.
**Assessment Flow Chart**

The assessor can decide whether to administer the reading assessment or the mathematics assessment first.

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**Getting Started**

*Family Interview*

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**Reading, Writing Assessment**

**Mathematics Assessment**

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**Is the student able to participate in grade-appropriate mathematics assessment?**

- **No**
- **Yes**

**Administer assessment tool from an earlier grade.**

**or**

**Assess the student’s ability to:**

- *count objects;*
- *read and recognize numbers.*

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**Is the student able to participate with ease?**

- **No**
- **Yes**

**Stop the Initial Mathematics Assessment.**

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**Communication**

*Share Program recommendations with students, parents and school.*

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Adapted from *Supporting English Language Learners: A practical guide for Ontario educators Grades 1 to 8*, p.36