

B.C. Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association

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On the FSA

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It's that time of year again when our thoughts turn to the FSA in elementary and middle schools. Here is some information for principals and vice-principals that should bring some clarity to this year's proceedings:

1. Administering the FSA is Teacher Work

It was clearly ruled by the Labour Relations Board on February 2, 2009, that administering the FSA is work which teachers are obligated to perform. Teachers do not have the right to refuse to administer the FSA. The testing will take place January 17 – February 25, 2011.

2. Marking/Scoring

Marking and scoring must be completed by March 18, 2011 and individual results, including the test booklet must be sent home to parents by March 31, 2011. FSA marking/scoring was not addressed in the LRB ruling. The BCTF has advised teachers (including TOCs and retired teachers) not to volunteer to score FSA tests. The marking/scoring will likely look different in every district, like last year. Some districts hired TOCs or retired teachers or administrators. Some districts had administrators do the marking and provided TOCs for them, or an honorarium, or a day in lieu. Some teachers chose to mark them and receive an honorarium. It will be up to individual districts to decide how the tests will be scored.

3. Information to Parents

BCPSEA and the BCTF have rolled over for another year last year's agreement which allows for distribution of three BCTF pamphlets: *What Parents Need to Know*; *What Parents Need to Know: Foundation Skills Assessment*; and *Testing? You Bet*. These pamphlets may be sent home with students in sealed envelopes, clearly marked as emanating from the BCTF. Some districts have sent home additional information to counter-balance the information provided by the BCTF. The Ministry has provided a pamphlet for parents, which contains some useful information. It is available [here](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/pdfs/fsabrochure.pdf) or visit <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/pdfs/fsabrochure.pdf> I encourage principals to consider sending this pamphlet home with students or to

have them available in the office or on the school website. The BCCPAC has also produced a seven-page information kit for parents, which was sent to all PACs in the province. It is factual and informative and is available [here](#) or visit [http://www.bccpac.bc.ca/UserFiles/file/Resources/BCCPAC_FSA_InfoKit_Jan2010\(1\).pdf](http://www.bccpac.bc.ca/UserFiles/file/Resources/BCCPAC_FSA_InfoKit_Jan2010(1).pdf) You may want to alert your PAC president to this or put a link to it on your school website. If you have not done so, you can direct parents to the Ministry website, where they can do practice questions with their children. This resource is [here](#) or visit <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/info/preparation.htm>



4. Exempting Students

The Ministry has made it clear that the FSA is not optional. It has stated that students in grade 4 and 7 are expected to participate. However, as you know, the BCTF strategy to oppose the FSA has evolved over time. Its focus this year is clearly to

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undermine the administration of the FSA by encouraging parents to withdraw their children. The pamphlets, as well as extensive media coverage: radio and newspaper ads speaking against the FSA in Punjabi, Cantonese, Mandarin and Filipino are some of the ways they are doing this. Parents are being told that

they can ask the school principal that their child be excused. A tear-off letter to the principal requesting that their child be excused from the FSA is included in the BCTF *What Parents Need to Know* pamphlet. Although the Ministry does allow some students to be excused, the reasons are clear: family emergency, lengthy illness, or extenuating circumstances.

Principals need to get direction from their Boards of Education about how to deal with these requests.

I am aware of some boards issuing a letter to parents about this. Some are directing principals to inform parents that if their child is in school when

the FSA is being administered, they will be writing the FSA. Other boards are directing principals to allow the children to be excused and to provide an alternate activity. Some boards are asking principals to meet with individual parents or to phone them and provide them with additional information to counter-balance the BCTF information. I can't emphasize enough the importance for the school principal to get direction from the board and to follow that direction, regardless of personal feelings or opinions about the FSA. BCPSEA sees the FSA dispute as an employment issue: "The dispute over the use, efficacy, and need for a testing vehicle such as the FSA is an educational policy matter. Policy matters generally are resolved by policy makers." The BCPVPA has a role to play and will be a part of the provincial discussion on assessment.

5. Information from the Employers' Association

The BCPSEA has put out some useful information in its *@issue* and *Backgrounder* documents. They provide the historical facts as well as the current legal information. These documents are available at <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/access/publications/aissue/aissue.html> or click [here](#) (and see the following three documents: 1) *January 5 2010 (Operational Issues Before or During the FSA)*; 2) *February 9 2009, Joint Communication*; and 3) *December 18, 2008 (New BCTF Foundations Skills Assessment Pamphlet)*).

I hope this information provides some clarity to principals and vice-principals as you try and make sure that the FSA process goes as smoothly as possible in your schools. Please do not hesitate to contact the BCPVPA if you have any questions or concerns. We are here to help and support you. I will be surveying our members after the FSA and providing input to the Ministry and other partner groups about how things went this year.

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