

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

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January 19, 2011

PRESS RELEASE

What's up with the FSA?

If you have children in public school, chances are you've heard from the school a little more frequently than usual. This is, after all, the time of year when the FSA debate dominates education headlines and creates a flurry of communication from the school to parents about its use and value.

The BC Teachers' Federation suggests the FSA is a waste of time and that you can safely and easily excuse your child from writing those exams. The Ministry says the FSA is both mandatory and as valuable as an annual physical.

What's going on?

The FSA, or Foundation Skills Assessment, was developed by teachers in the province as a standardized measure of reading, writing and numeracy for the Grade 4 and 7 levels.

Principals and vice-principals spend a lot of time responding to questions about the FSA from parents and the public. In some districts there is an expectation that principals will contact each parent who sends in a letter to excuse their child from the tests. I have heard directly from principals and vice-principals that the number and length of these conversations would be better served focusing on student instruction and achievement.

Whether or not a standardized test can provide critical information to teachers, parents and students no longer seems to be the debate.

This is not because the test is flawed but because of three unfortunate circumstances that currently surround the tests and their administration.

1. The misuse of the data by the Fraser Institute to rank schools. The Fraser Institute's use of the data does not reflect the many unique challenges faced

by individual schools, nor does it credit the many unique successes of individual schools.

2. Although the Ministry insists that writing the FSA is mandatory, the BCTF has successfully undermined participation in many districts and, in some districts, the participation level is less than 50%. The low participation rates mean that the data collected is not sufficiently reliable to be used for district and provincial goal-setting.
3. The understandable lack of effort many students put into the tests.

These three circumstances have created a problem: the FSA as the chosen standardized testing measure is no longer able to do what it was designed to do.

As suggested by some in government it is time for the FSA to be replaced with another standardized measure that does not have the political baggage or rhetoric around it.

Government has the right to request and look for standardized testing measures in the education system. Is it possible to find one where the participation level and politicization are not distractions, nor a detriment to the good work that continuously goes on in our schools?

It is time for all parties to come to the table and have a meaningful discussion about assessment in our province, one where politics are put aside in the best interest of the students of BC.

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