

FSA Examiner

Watch for advertisements, interviews and articles

As the FSA test date draws near the topic is gaining more attention in the media. The BCTF is currently running a concentrated print and radio ad campaign to reach parents in targeted South Asian and Asian communities. The focus is to have parents withdraw their children from writing the FSA. At the same time BCTF officers are busy appearing on radio talk shows and are meeting with groups in these communities to address our concerns with the testing agenda and to build support for a strong and stable public education system. Go to the following link: www.bctf.ca/parents.aspx?id=72

Watch for the Surrey Teachers' advertisements in the Now, The Leader and the Peace Arch News.

Locals in the news

There have been an amazing number of news stories on the FSA and the testing agenda in papers around the province during the lead up to the FSA. Congratulations to locals for ensuring teacher voices and concerns about the FSA are in the media.

“One of the measures of our society is the way we educate our children. Will our government pass the test?” (quote from the comment section, *Times Colonist-Victoria*, December 15, 2009).

“The Mount Arrowsmith Teachers’ Association is recommending that parents withdraw their Grade 4 and 7 youngsters from the set of upcoming annual provincial tests...’ This is not a call to end all testing,’ (MATA vice-president Debbie Morran) said, but a repudiation of this particular kind of testing.” (*Oceanside Star*, December 17, 2009)

Partner groups express concern over ranking of BC schools

There is growing consensus from education partner groups to write a letter or a public statement expressing shared concerns about the Fraser Institute ranking of BC schools.

Boards honour parent request

Many trustees are supportive of parent requests to withdraw their children from writing the FSA, and the Vancouver school board is once again letting parents know that they will honour parent requests. At the BCSTA meeting, trustees from Delta and Coquitlam indicated that their districts will honour parent requests as well.



Quality in education is a complicated issue. Good schools have good academic and good vocational programs; they support students with many different needs, aspirations, and cultures; they teach respect, self confidence, good citizenship, creativity and good humour. The research shows that parents want schools that provide a positive and supportive environment for their kids, where they can learn and grow as people, not as test-taking machines.

**Educators united in challenging Fraser Institute Rankings, March 2001,
Statement supported by the BC Teachers’ Federation,
the BC Principals’ and Vice-Principals’ Association,
BC School Superintendents’ Association, and
the BC School District Secretary Treasurers’ Association.**

Withdrawing Students from FSA TESTS: BCTF Information & Advice

In a September 7, 2007 Report on Education, the deputy minister asserted that “FSA is not an ‘optional’ test. All students in Grades 4-7 should participate.” However, there is nothing in the *School Act*, Regulations, Ministerial Orders, or ministry policy that require students to write FSA tests, and the ministry’s own guidelines continue to require that certain students be exempted, and provide mechanisms for parents to request that their children be excused from writing FSA tests.

It is therefore important that teachers and parents focus on the actual rules rather than the rhetoric.



Which students should be excused from FSA?

The ministry’s guidelines for student participation in FSA tests direct principals to excuse the following students:

- students who have previously written the FSA. Students write the FSA for a specific grade once only. If a student is retained, s/he does not write a second time.
- students who have IEPs documenting a disability that significantly impacts their performance in reading, writing or numeracy and who cannot meaningfully participate in all or part of the assessment, even with adaptations,
- students with IEPs who would need extensive adaptations or who would need such extended periods of time as to create a hardship for the individual student, or
- those students who are reported and funded as receiving ESL support who have not yet reached a level of proficiency sufficient for them to provide meaningful responses to the reading or writing or numeracy sections of the FSA.

The principal must notify a parent or guardian if a student is being excused from participating in one or more components of the Foundation Skills Assessment before FSA is administered. Principals must mark these students as “excused” on the ministry forms.

Can parents request that their child be withdrawn from the FSA?

The ministry’s guidelines make it clear that it is the **principal** who determines which students, if any, are excused from one, two, or all three components of the FSA. However, the instructions to principals clearly state that a **parent** may request that their child be withdrawn: *Parents may request the principal to excuse a student in the event of a family emergency, a lengthy illness or other extenuating circumstances.* “Extenuating circumstances” is a broad phrase which can arguably cover parents’ philosophical and political opposition to this testing regime, their concern that such testing erodes their child’s classroom learning experience, or their fear that the test results will be misused by the Fraser Institute to unfairly attack their school and community.

Parents who do not want their children to write FSA tests cannot simply keep their children home from school that day. Schools are expected to have students who are absent the day of the test write anytime they return during the entire FSA administration period.

Therefore, parents should be advised to send a letter to the principal requesting that their child be withdrawn from writing the FSA. The BCTF brochure includes a tear-off letter for parents to use for this purpose. Principals are under considerable pressure to have high participation rates on FSA and therefore often put pressure on parents who want to withdraw their child.

BCSTA believes that the conclusions drawn by the Fraser Institute are incomplete and misleading because it ranks schools based on a narrow snapshot of information that fails to reflect the breadth and depth of activities occurring in schools. Fine arts, sciences, athletics, student citizenship, and the success of many other school programs are not reflected in the report. Furthermore, the rankings are potentially harmful to the morale of those who work and learn in BC’s public schools.

BCSTA,e-Alert, May 6, 2008

Mounting Pressure, Ministry Worried!

The ministry is worried about the participation rates, and the validity and usage of the FSA data. Consequently the ministry, district staff, and principals are pressuring teachers and parents. This is especially apparent in schools and districts where large numbers of parents have withdrawn their child from the test.

Here are some of the pressures that may be put on parents along with suggestions for dealing with each:

Your child will be marked absent.

Principals who excuse students from FSA tests as a result of parental requests are required to mark the student “absent” on the test. It is important that parents understand that their children are being marked “absent” from the test only, not “absent” from school.

Your child’s name must be reported to the superintendent.

This is not a new rule and is a formality only. Parents should not be made to feel that there will be ramifications for them or their child as that has never been the case.

It will be difficult for the school to supervise your child while others are writing.

It will be helpful if the classroom teacher can provide clear assurances to parents that those students not writing the FSA tests will continue with their regular program. Parents who believe their children will be simply told to draw or read on their own, while other students write FSA will be more reluctant to withdraw their children.

Your child will be embarrassed to be excluded.

A possible solution is to have a group of parents work together and try to make their school an FSA free zone, or a Fraser Institute ranking-free zone so that students are part of a larger school community effort.

Your child meets expectations but will be recorded as not meeting expectations if they do not write the assessment.

FSA results do not count toward a student’s report card results. While the student who is withdrawn at parental request will contribute to the total number that does not meet expectations, the individual student will not be deemed “not meeting expectations.” Teachers can assure parents that students who are withdrawn at parental request will continue to receive accurate assessments of their progress on report cards.

Your request is denied; your child will have to write the tests.

Parents have two options if their request is denied:

- Parents can go public with their concerns about the principal over-ruling their wishes by making public presentations at school board meetings and going to the media.
- Parents have the right, under Section 11 of the *School Act*, to appeal any decision of district employees to the school board.



Too often, the rationale for standardized testing appears overly punitive: “We’re going to get these kids and schools to perform better—or else.” Such an approach forgets that assessment should serve one primary purpose: to improve student learning. The goal is not to flunk kids, not to wave fingers at lousy teachers, not to make bold pronouncements that will be remembered at election time, not to give kids more of the same even though it didn’t work the first time—but to provide information to help the student learn better.

**Alternatives to Standardized tests, Bob Peterson and Monty Neill,
Rethinking schools.**

What FSA Literature can be sent home with students?

What Parents Need to Know: Dear Parents Withdrawal Letter

<http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Parents/HotTopics/2009FSA-withdrawal.pdf>

What Parents Need to Know: Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)

<http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Parents/HotTopics/2009WhatParentsNeedToKnow.pdf>

What Parents Need to Know: Testing, You bet pamphlet

<http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Parents/HotTopics/TestingYouBet-parents.pdf>

Distribution of FSA Literature

FSA literature must be enclosed in sealed envelopes and clearly identify the Surrey Teachers' Association.

Note: If teachers hand out the literature directly to parents in parent/teacher meetings, or in any other venue, envelopes are not required.

Boycott FSA Marking

The Surrey school district is seeking teachers to mark the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) tests that will be administered to Grades 4 and 7 students January 19th - February 26, 2009. We are asking you to

Just Say No!

BC teachers have taken the position that the FSA program should be administered on a random basis or eliminated. The BCTF has raised teachers' concerns about the FSA with the ministry, education organizations, the academic community, parents, and the general public. The campaign has included information about the professional and ethical concerns regarding FSAs and has encouraged parents to withdraw their children from FSA tests. Part of the campaign is to advise teachers not to volunteer to mark FSA tests.

You may be offered release time or extra pay to mark the FSA tests locally this year. But there are good arguments for not accepting these offers:

1. Volunteering to mark FSA undermines the collective efforts of your colleagues to persuade the government to eliminate, or significantly change, the FSA program.
2. Marking FSA produces results that are misused by the Fraser Institute to create their annual ranking of BC schools. These rankings have been condemned by many educational partner organizations and discredited by educational researchers.
3. Marking FSA produces data for American-style accountability schemes. In New York City, testing data is now being used to justify closing schools.
4. Marking FSA involves you in marking processes that are the subject of serious professional concerns. The ministry no longer provides time to do double marking of the open-ended writing tasks. A single marking of open-ended writing tasks is a very low marking standard and will reduce the reliability of the results. In addition, the ministry estimates a marking time of 10 minutes per student booklet. 10 minutes, on average, to mark one open-ended reading question, one short piece of writing, one longer piece of writing, and two open-ended numeracy questions.

