



British Columbia Teachers' Federation • www.bctf.ca

The students of our province need more time learning and less time wasted on unnecessary, bureaucratic testing

Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)

What teachers believe: Teachers believe that the purpose of assessment is to support and promote learning.

- Teachers know that it is important to use a variety of methods to effectively assess student progress and meet student needs. Ongoing classroom assessment allows students to demonstrate what they are learning in a variety of ways and provides information to inform teaching and learning.
- An assessment that provides information to a teacher about what an individual student needs to develop understanding of a subject or topic is different from an assessment of how an education system is performing according to general goals for education.
- Large-scale random assessments of student performance could be appropriate in the evaluation of provincially prescribed educational programs. The results then could be used only to inform curriculum development, in-service activities, and learning resource development.

What the research says: Research says that it is effective classroom assessment that can help a student learn, not large-scale assessment. This is why researchers have started referring to classroom assessment as “assessment for learning” and large-scale assessment as “assessment of learning.”

Effective assessment for learning can improve student achievement substantially, and that improved classroom assessment helps low achievers the most. (Black and William, 1998, U.K. Assessment Reform Group.)

Research has shown that costly, large-scale testing can have negative effects on student motivation and learning, and that those effects are greatest for low-achieving students, the ones who most need support.

Common negative effects of testing include:

- narrowing of instruction and instructional methods
- less successful students concluding they are unable to succeed, and therefore reducing effort
- students inappropriately focusing on short-term performance goals: “What’s on the test?”
- students experiencing test anxiety
- students, parents, and others inappropriately generalizing test results to overall “value” or “intelligence.”

(Wynne Harlen and Ruth Deakin Crick (2002). Review: What is the evidence of the impact of summative assessment and tests on students' motivation for learning? Presentation, International Conference, Assessment Reform Group, March 5, 2002.)

What teachers are concerned about: FSA tests undermine classroom assessment and have a negative impact on student motivation and learning.

Teachers do not simply assess students' learning so they have marks to put on report cards. The main purpose of classroom assessment is to support student learning, not simply to measure it. Constantly assessing the learning of students in their classroom allows teachers to monitor progress and adjust their teaching accordingly

The misuse of FSA testing results is leading to narrow and misleading assumptions about how well schools are doing. Under pressure to find improvement, some districts and schools may be eager to report increases that are not statistically significant. Often the increases are a result of practising FSA-type tests several times a year or simply a result of exempting low-achieving students from the test. The most blatant misuse of FSA results has been the ranking of schools by the Fraser Institute and then reported by the media. Unfortunately, it misrepresents the efforts of teachers and trustees to serve their communities.

What teachers are doing:

- Teachers remain opposed to the FSA not only because it interferes with instruction but it is costly and ineffective in improving achievement.
- Teachers are asking parents to consider requesting principals to withdraw their children, according to ministry guidelines concerning exemptions, from the participation in the Grade 4 and Grade 7 FSA assessments.
- Teachers are urging the BC Ministry of Education to adopt a two-year moratorium on all standardized tests, including the Foundation Skills Assessment.
- Teachers are calling on the government to establish a Testing and Assessment Task Force to explore the issues, review the research on student assessment, and make recommendations before the end of the moratorium.
- Teachers will continue to use a range of assessment tools in their classrooms to support student learning.
- Teachers are actively speaking out and working with parents and others in the education community to effect positive change by moving to another structure for assessment—a random sample.

What you can do:

- Write a letter to the minister of education opposing the FSA.
- Encourage parents to consider asking principals to withdraw their children from the FSA assessments, according to ministry guidelines concerning exemptions.
- Talk to teachers about the range of assessment tools they use to support learning.
- Urge your board or PAC to support a two-year moratorium on all standardized tests, including the Foundation Skills Assessment.

For further information: www.bctf.ca