

Parents Should Know: FSA Tests Are Not Useful



SerrNovik/iStock/Thinkstock

Let's stop
wasting
class time on
Foundation
Skills
Assessment
tests that
education
partners
agree aren't
necessary

Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)

Teachers believe

The purpose of assessment is to support and promote learning.

- It is important to use a variety of methods to effectively assess student progress and meet student needs.
- Ongoing classroom assessment helps inform teaching and learning, and allows students to demonstrate what they are learning in various ways.
- There are better ways to assess how the whole system is addressing the learning needs of individuals and groups. BC currently uses a variety of national and international assessments, and there have been productive conversations provincially about alternatives to the FSAs.
- The FSA is not a reliable method of measuring individual progress.

Research says

Effective classroom assessment provides the best support for student learning. Large-scale assessment is only useful for broadly evaluating the educational system and its programs.

Large-scale testing may negatively affect student motivation and learning, with the worst effects being on low-achieving students who need the most support. Effects of testing may include:

- Students focusing on short-term performance goals: "What's on the test?"
- Less successful students concluding they are unable to succeed, and therefore reducing their effort.
- Narrowing of instructional methods to anticipate what might be on the test.
- Students, parents, and others equating test results to overall intelligence or capability.

When true learning has occurred, it will manifest itself in performance. The converse does not hold: mere performance on a test does not necessarily mean that learning has occurred. Learners can be taught how to score well on tests without much underlying learning. —Third International Conference on Assessment for Learning, Dunedin, New Zealand, March 2009

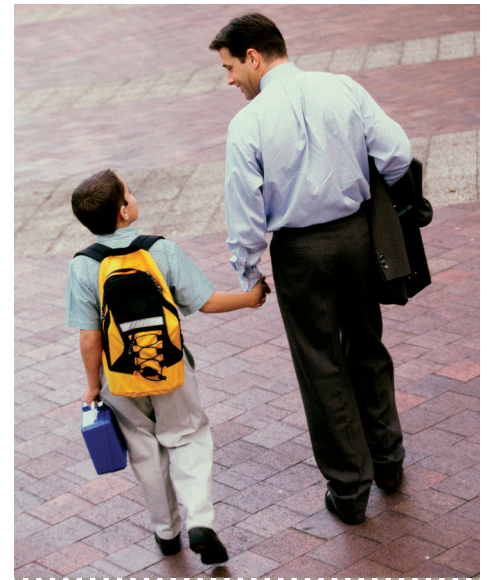


Teachers' concerns

- FSA tests have a negative impact on student motivation and learning.
- Teachers do not assess student learning only for use on report cards. The main purpose of classroom assessment is to support student learning, not simply to measure it.
- The blatant misuse of FSA test results by the Fraser Institute, with its unscientific and misleading school rankings, leads to incorrect assumptions about how well schools are doing. These rankings have no credibility in the educational community.

One of the significant failings of the current Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) program is that the results are used to make judgments that go beyond its mandate.

—Final Report of the Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment, May 2014



Purestock/Thinkstock

Teachers' actions

- Teachers are asking parents to request that principals excuse their children from participation in the Grade 4 and Grade 7 FSA tests, according to ministry guidelines concerning exemptions.
- Teachers oppose the FSA tests not only because they interfere with instruction, but also because they are ineffective in improving achievement.
- Teachers will continue to use a range of assessment tools in their classrooms to support student learning. Assessing the learning of students in their classes allows teachers to monitor progress and adjust their teaching accordingly.
- All education partners in BC are working together toward a new model of provincial assessment that is ethical, that will provide reporting, tracking, and information at all levels, and will ensure that at-risk students are well-served.
- Teachers will continue to actively speak out and work with parents and others in the education community to effect positive change.

Teachers don't want to spend valuable time endlessly preparing for "the test." They want to guide their students to ask insightful questions, offer well-reasoned opinions, and work diligently until they master content. Those are the types of classroom experiences that unleash students' ingenuity and reveal their understanding of the material. And that's the kind of learning that is being stamped out by the current pervasive fixation on testing. —Randi Weingarten, President, American Federation of Teachers, "Fixing the Fixation on Testing" in Huffington Post, Feb. 21, 2012

You can help

- Parents can ask school principals to excuse their children from the FSA tests according to ministry guidelines concerning exemptions. There is a withdrawal letter and form at bctf.ca/fsa.aspx
- Talk to your teachers about the range of assessments they use to support learning.
- Join other parents in a conversation on the impacts of the FSA testing.
- Watch for changes in the near future to provincial assessments in BC that everyone can support.

For further information: bctf.ca/fsa.aspx