

Parents Should Know: FSA Tests Are Not Useful



Let's stop wasting class time on Foundation Skills Assessment tests

What teachers believe:

- FSA testing is not useful nor helpful, this is particularly true during a pandemic, when stress levels are already heightened.
- All students had their education disrupted last spring, and time is needed for students to adjust to all the changes in schools.
- Teachers need to use valuable in-class time to focus on teaching and learning rather than spending hours administering a test.
- Teachers use a wide variety of formal and informal methods to effectively assess student progress and to meet individual student needs.
- Ongoing classroom assessment helps teachers plan and adapt lessons and allow students to show what they are learning in many different ways.
- Teachers have long advocated for better ways than the FSA to see how the BC school system meets the learning needs of individuals and groups.
- The FSA is not a reliable method of measuring an individual child's progress and was not designed for this purpose.
- Better models of provincial assessment with protections to ensure the ethical use of students' data are possible.

What the research says:

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

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

- Student focus on short-term goals: "What's on the test?"
- Students decide they are unable to succeed and giving up.
- "Teaching to the test" instead of developing a real understanding of the subject area or skill.
- Students, parents, and others believing that test results are the best measurements of intelligence or ability.

There are millions of achievement tests, and multi-millions of test items, but there is little evidence that creating more achievement tests will help much. Even if the tests become more available online, more responsive, adaptive and efficient (and prettier) for as long as they are focused on providing information about student achievement, they will continue to tell us little.

—John Hattie, *What doesn't work in education: The politics of distraction*, 2015



What teachers are concerned about:

- The purpose of classroom assessment is to support student learning. Teachers oppose the FSA tests because they interfere with instruction and do nothing to improve student achievement.
- The misuse of FSA testing results by the Fraser Institute creates misleading school rankings that misrepresent the results and harms school communities.

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. [Outside groups] misinterpret and publicize results in ways that are damaging to classrooms and schools, and therefore damaging to learners."

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

What teachers are doing:

- Teachers are asking parents to withdraw their children from participation in the Grade 4 and Grade 7 FSA assessments according to Ministry of Education guidelines concerning exemptions.
- Teachers continue to use a wide range of assessment tools in their classrooms to support student learning. This allows teachers to monitor progress and adjust their teaching to meet student needs.
- Teachers will continue to work with parents and others in the education community to find assessments that are educationally sound and work for everyone.



Sometimes, the most brilliant and intelligent minds do not shine in standardized tests because they do not have standardized minds.

—Diane Ravitch, Education Historian and Education Policy Analyst

What you can do:

- Parents can ask school principals to withdraw their children from the FSA tests, according to Ministry of Education guidelines concerning exemptions. There is a withdrawal letter and form available on the BCTF Parent page at bctf.ca/parents.aspx.
- Talk to teachers about the assessments they use to support learning.
- Join other parents in a conversation on the impacts of the FSA testing.

For further information: bctf.ca/fsa.aspx