



Victoria Confederation of
Parent Advisory Councils

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Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) Tests Briefing Paper

January 11, 2010

*This briefing paper is intended to provide information related to the current FSA testing debate. It is intended only for the use of our members, the Parent Advisory Councils in the Greater Victoria School District. It is based on our interpretation of current information and is not intended to take a position on the issue of FSA testing. It should be noted that we are commencing a district-wide parent survey that may well result in an official VCPAC position. We invite you to **participate in our FSA survey** by clicking on the link at the end of this document.*

Overview

FSA stands for Foundation Skills Assessment. It is a series of tests given to all students in grades 4 and 7 in all schools in BC. These tests are mandated by the BC Government to provide a snapshot of how well BC students are learning the basic skills of Reading Comprehension, Writing and Numeracy.

The Ministry of Education website states that, “the main purpose of the assessment is to help the province, school districts, schools and school planning councils evaluate how well students are achieving basic skills, and make plans to improve student achievement. FSA is designed and developed by British Columbia educators. The skills tested are linked to the provincial curriculum and provincial performance standards.”

What the FSA IS:

- It is an assessment OF learning. (see Types of Assessment below)
- It is a series of tests that take approximately 4.5 hours over a 4 week period; once in grade 4 and again in grade 7.
- It is intended to provide data on how well the school system is educating our children.
- It is only one piece of data used by districts, schools and school planning councils to improve student achievement.
- It is used provincially and locally to determine how the school system is serving certain demographic groups of students such as girls or boys.
- It is administered province wide, thereby increasing the confidence level of the statistical results, especially when analyzing demographic groups.



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What the ***FSA IS NOT:***

- It is not intended nor appropriately designed to be used for ranking schools.
- It is not intended to evaluate individual teacher performance.
- It is not used to establish an individual student's grades or included on report cards. Therefore, students should not feel any stress other than the normal anxiety that some students feel writing any kind of test.
- It is not a test that requires specific preparation by students.
- It is not necessarily an accurate assessment of an individual student's progress. Many factors can affect a student's performance on a single test. It may, however, suggest to a parent that further inquiry may be appropriate. The performance of individual students can only be determined through ongoing evaluation by educators and communication with parents.

Types of Assessment

There are various types of assessment and they are used for different purposes.

- **Assessment *OF* learning** is a term commonly used to describe testing that is done at the end of a unit or term to summarize what students have learned so far. Report cards are a good example of assessment of learning.
- **Assessment *FOR* learning** is a term that refers to ongoing testing, observation, and interaction between teachers and students. Assessment for learning allows teachers to discover what students understand so far and what still needs to be taught. It provides information to both teachers and students on areas of strength and weakness.
- **Assessment *AS* learning** refers to students assessing themselves. When students understand their own strengths and weaknesses, they can take greater ownership of their learning. To accomplish this, students must be familiar with criteria or standards against which to gauge their own progress.

Does your child have to write the FSA tests?

The principal may excuse your child from writing the tests due to illness, family emergency, or extenuating circumstances. If a parent withdraws a student from participation without the approval of the principal, the school will mark the student as "absent" and not as "excused".



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What about the various opinions about FSAs?

Various education partners and other interested parties have made their own interpretations of the validity of FSA testing. Some of these positions are based on political perspectives or other special interests. We hope that the above information will assist our members in deciding their own views.

Additional Information:

Ministry of Education

There is a great deal of information on the Ministry of Education website. The primary FSA link is www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/.

From this site you can also access an extensive set of questions and answers at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/questions_answers_interpret.htm

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“BCCPAC FSA Information Kit for Parents”

[www.bccpac.bc.ca/UserFiles/file/Resources/BCCPAC_FSA_InfoKit_Jan2010\(1\).pdf](http://www.bccpac.bc.ca/UserFiles/file/Resources/BCCPAC_FSA_InfoKit_Jan2010(1).pdf)

“Student Assessment in B.C.'s Public Schools, A Guide for Parents” by Catherine Abraham and Joyce Gram

www.bccpac.bc.ca/UserFiles/file/Resources/StudentAssessmentBCParentGuide_2007.pdf

BC Public School Employers' Association

“Backgrounder: Philosophy, Politics, or a Combination of Both: The Foundation Skills Assessment and the Battle Over Testing”

<http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/access/media/backgrounder/backgrounder09-%20Jan14-fsa.pdf>

BC Teachers' Federation

“Testing? You bet. “

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

“What Parents Need to Know”

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

For comments or questions on this briefing paper, please contact the Victoria Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils at info@vcpac.ca.

To participate in VCPAC's survey on FSA Testing, please click on the following link:

www.surveymonkey.com/s/FSAsurvey