



School District 72

Campbell River, B.C.

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A Message to Parents About the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)

In recent weeks, there has been quite a bit of discussion through the media about the upcoming Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA), the concerns of the BC Teachers' Federation in the application of the test, and the requirements from the Ministry of Education in its administration. This letter is being sent to parents to answer some questions and concerns you might have around the FSA and to present a balanced picture of this assessment.

What is the FSA?

The FSA is an annual, province-wide assessment given in February to all students in Grades 4 and 7. Students spend approximately four hours writing tests in reading, writing and numeracy. The skills tested are linked to the provincial curriculum and BC performance standards.

When is the FSA?

The dates for this year's FSA are from January 18th to February 26th and marking will be done soon after. All our students' FSA scores will be reported to the Ministry of Education and individual students' results will be sent home by the end of March.

Does my child's result on the FSA count towards his or her final marks?

No. Your child's score on the FSA is not part of any report card mark or any other report from your child's teacher or school.

So if it doesn't count towards their marks, what is the purpose of the FSA?

The primary purpose of this assessment is to help schools, school planning councils, school districts and the province evaluate how well students are achieving basic skills and, if appropriate, make plans for improvement. The secondary purpose is to give parents, teachers and principals information about the progress of students in the district.

What will the FSA look like in schools?

The assessment will be administered over several sessions and close to half the time will be spent online answering questions. Students will be given more time to complete the assessment as needed and to enable all students to successfully complete the test. Students will be familiarized with the online portion of the FSA before actually writing the test to ensure that they are comfortable with the technology.

Why the controversy?

The FSAs are controversial among some groups in BC as there are cautions and limitations of the tests. Here are a few of the issues:

- The strength of tests like the FSA – to provide a quick, outside look at how students are doing in key areas – is also their weakness. Tests are often criticized as being too general and too far removed to be helpful.
- The reliability of wide-scale tests is generally high for large populations, but drops as the population decreases. Although the ministry tries to report results in a way that makes this clear, these points may be ignored.

- The Ministry collects some information that can be used to compare categories (e.g. boys/girls; ESL/non-ESL). However, FSAs provide descriptive measures that can point to relationships but not explain them.
- People may use results to make comparisons or judgments about districts, schools, classes and students. Many of these comparisons will be based on small differences that are neither statistically nor educationally significant. For example, the Fraser Institute uses the data to create a ranking of the public and private schools in the province.

Is there animosity between teachers and administrators in Campbell River?

No. There is no animosity between Campbell River teachers and administrators. We are doing our best to collaborate with the Campbell River District Teachers' Association to preserve the positive relationship that we enjoy and that benefits our children. As a district, we hold in great regard the professional opinions and practices of our teaching staff and are very proud of our assessment practices – the FSA is only one small part of those practices. Both teachers and district staff are responding to the advice of their professional associations. The Board of Education has stated that the FSA will be administered in our district in accordance with the School Act and its regulations and it is our goal to accomplish this with minimum disruption to classes, students and schools.

Is the FSA optional?

The FSA is required by law, under the BC School Act, and, although there may be varying opinions about their value and use, the FSA is not optional. School District 72 will therefore ensure that this year's FSA is administered in accordance with the ministerial Student Learning Assessment Order. All Grades 4 and 7 students who attend public and independent schools, or who are enrolled in a distributed learning program, are expected to participate. However, a few students with exceptional needs or extenuating circumstances may be excused from some or all of the assessment.

What would be considered extenuating circumstances for excusal from the FSA?

Illness, a family emergency, or extensive adaptation requirements could be considered for excusal of a student from the FSA. Schools receive guidelines to help identify these students and will inform parents or guardians if a student is exempted. Your child's principal has the authority to excuse students from participation. If these reasons apply, discuss any concerns with your child's principal and teacher.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to learn as much as possible about the different types of assessment that are used in our schools and across the province. Your child's teacher and principal can provide you with a wealth of information. You are also encouraged to discuss your child's results with the school staff at any time after you receive their results. For further information on Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) please refer to the following websites:

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/info/> or <http://www.bccpac.bc.ca>

Sincerely,



Tom Longridge
Superintendent of Schools, School District 72