

The Foundation Skills Assessment

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is an annual province-wide assessment of British Columbia students' academic skills, and provides a snapshot of how well BC students are learning foundation skills in reading comprehension, writing, and numeracy.

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. The FSA is designed and developed by British Columbia educators. The skills tested are linked to the provincial curriculum and provincial performance standards.

The assessment is administered each spring to Grade 4 and 7 students in public and provincially funded independent schools.

BCTF Action

We understand that the BCTF is making the attached brochure regarding the FSA available to teachers to distribute to parents. The brochure is available on the BCTF website. It recommends parents withdraw their children from the FSA tests and it also contains information that the teachers consider FSA testing to be harmful to students.

The BCTF assertion that parents can withdraw their children from the FSA tests by writing a letter to the school principal is inaccurate and contrary to the FSA requirements.

FSA Requirements

There is no right for parents to exclude their children from participating in the FSA for the reasons cited by the BCTF.

The Student Learning Assessment Order (Ministerial Order 60/94 as amended) (the "Order") requires school boards to ensure that the FSA tests are administered to and completed by students in accordance with the assessment protocols, instructions, and invigilation procedures established by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry's 2007 Instructions for Principals and Teachers/Invigilators contain the following participation guidelines at page 15:

Participation Guidelines

All Grade 4 and Grade 7 students are expected to participate in the Foundation Skills Assessment. The only exceptions are: a) students who have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) documenting a learning disability directly related to reading, writing or numeracy, b) students with IEPs who would need adaptations with which they are not familiar (e.g., readers, scribes) or who would need such extended periods of time as to create a

hardship for the individual student, or c) those students who are reported and funded as receiving English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) support who have not yet reached a level of proficiency sufficient for them to provide meaningful responses to the reading or writing or numeracy sections of the FSA.

Principals determine which students, if any, are excused from one, two or all three components of the FSA.

Parents may request the principal to excuse a student in the event of a family emergency, a lengthy illness or other extenuating circumstances.

Principals of public schools are to send a list of those students the principal has excused to their superintendents.

As principal, you must notify a parent or guardian if you intend to excuse a student from participating in one or more components of the FSA.

Such notification should be made prior to the administration date. Provide a copy of the brochure, "Information for Students, Parents and Guardians." This brochure explains the purpose of the FSA; you would not then need to repeat all of the background information in your notification letter or telephone call.

In his April 13, 2007 *Report on Education*, the Deputy Minister of Education clearly states that "FSA is not an optional activity." The report is attached to this bulletin.

Therefore, as stated above, there is no right for parents to exclude their children from participating in FSA for the reasons cited by the BCTF.

Action for School Districts

School boards can direct teachers not to advise parents that principals can exclude students from taking FSA tests in the manner suggested by the BCTF, as this advice is not consistent with the Ministry procedures on the participation of students in the FSA tests.

Both the current BCTF brochure and draft letter for parents are inaccurate and contain information which is contrary to the Ministry of Education guidelines regarding exclusions from the FSA testing. School boards should advise teachers communicating on the FSA in any venue to remove any reference to exclusions from participation in FSA (this will include the draft letter for parents to sign), except for the exclusion of students which is permitted under the FSA procedure.

Accurate information on participation in the FSA tests should be communicated to parents by each school administrator, including the participation guidelines set by the Ministry. Any inaccurate information provided to parents by a teacher or the BCTF regarding FSA in public venues such as a PAC meeting should also be corrected.

Non-compliance with school board directives will need to be addressed.

Questions

If you have any questions, please contact your BCPSEA labour relations liaison.

Attachments: BCTF brochure
Report on Education, April 13, 2007, Deputy Minister of Education