



January 8, 2008

A message to all School Trustees from Penny Tees regarding Foundation Skills Assessment

Dear Trustees

In the lead-up to the next administration of the Foundational Skills Assessment (FSA) in February, boards and trustees may have opportunities to speak with their communities, schools, and PACs, about the assessments or may receive presentations from teachers at board meetings.

As there are significant changes to the FSA administration this year, it may be useful to review the topic from both local and provincial perspectives so that you can be well-informed and prepared to engage with your community and respond to questions.

Possible considerations may include the following:

- The purposes, key aspects, and changes to the FSA for this year.
- Your board's responsibilities related to the administration of FSA.
- How your board and educators in your district use the FSA results at the school and district level: to plan for improvement of programs and services to students; for education or other committee discussions; for professional development; for dialogue between teachers and parents/students; and in context with other assessments.
- Familiarizing yourself with the FSA components that will be circulated to parents with the individual student results.

BCSTA has prepared the attached Backgrounder which includes links to more detailed information. We hope you will find it useful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Penny Tees'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Penny Tees
President

Attachment: Foundation Skills Assessment Backgrounder



Foundation Skills Assessment Backgrounder

Key facts

- FSAs are assessments of reading comprehension, writing, and numeracy administered yearly since 1999 to all BC students in Grades 4 and 7.
- The tests have been developed by BC teachers and link directly to BC's curriculum. They are designed to assess cumulative learning over previous and current school years. They are carefully screened for cultural and other biases that could disadvantage any student or group of students.
- The FSA results provide a snapshot of how well BC students are doing in these important subject areas. When results are viewed over several years as trends over time they can be valuable indicators of how well our province, school districts, and schools are doing in improving student outcomes.
- Classroom based tests developed individually by teachers are designed to determine the learning needs and progress of individual students, but they cannot help to analyze success beyond individual students and classrooms.
- FSA results can be used by schools and districts as one piece of information to plan for improvement. The results are not used as marks or grade promotion purposes for individual students, but can be used for discussion between teachers and parents.

Changes to the FSA this year

- The FSA is being administered in February this year rather than May. The earlier implementation will provide parents and teachers more time to use the results to help individual and groups of students before the end of the school year.
- The multiple-choice portion of the tests will be done online using computers in each school.
- Marking of the written component will be done by teachers in school districts.
- Marked written responses will be sent to parents along with individual student results.

FSAs are not optional

- The Ministry of Education has made it clear to all boards and superintendents that writing the FSAs is mandatory for all Grade 4 and 7 students with very limited exceptions.
- Some students with exceptional needs and ESL students who have not developed basic English skills may be exempted from all or part of the FSAs. Schools have been sent guidelines by the Ministry on determining exemptions.
- Boards and teachers may not opt out of administering the tests.



School rankings

- Using FSA results to rank schools, particularly when combined with other unrelated factors, is inappropriate.
- The FSA results are not intended for this purpose and the rankings are therefore largely meaningless.
- Such rankings are not endorsed by any of the public education partners or the Ministry.

Where to get more information

- Ministry of Education Assessment site <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/>
- A presentation on FSA Changes by the Ministry of Education
http://www.bcsta.org:8080/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-30789/2007-12-20_MoE_FSA_Changes.pdf
- A *draft* Ministry Q&A document
http://www.bcsta.org:8080/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-30788/2007-12-20_DRAFT_Ministry_FSA_Q&A.pdf
- BCPSEA's October 2007 @issue communication on FSA
www.bcpsea.bc.ca/access/publications/aissue/2007/ai2007-07.pdf