

Dear parents,

It is important to understand that for teachers the FSA tests are fundamentally an educational issue. We know that:

- the FSAs are not accurate indicators of individual progress since no single measure of assessment provides reliable data by itself.
- teachers do not get any useful information for their professional practice from these tests.
- these assessments were intended to be an external measure of student learning, which could be provided by the random sample method, instead of all children taking the tests.
- the data has been misused to create unscientific school rankings.
- there is no evidence that the tests have been used to provide additional resources.

### **Parental choice**

Information about these tests has been sent to parents of Grade 4 and 7 students in BC for several years. In some districts the school board has sent its own letter explaining the rights of parents to choose whether their children write these tests. Teachers fully support the principle that parents have the right to decide whether their children participate in activities which are not part of the curriculum.

### **Communications to parents**

Arbitrations and court rulings over the past decade made it clear that teachers have not only a right, but a professional responsibility to speak out about issues in education.

In 2005, the British Columbia Court of Appeal stated in upholding the 2004 Munroe arbitration on teachers' rights to display materials in schools, "It may also be seen as the School Boards' duty, and indeed as teachers' duty, to ensure public schools are and are seen to be places open and receptive to a wide spectrum of views, particularly in political discourse."

In 2008, arbitrator John Kinzie noted, "In my view, the administration of FSA tests to students in Grade 4 and 7 clearly concerns their education... discussions on such issues... further the values of democratic discourse and truth finding which underlie freedom of expression."

The Munroe and Kinzie arbitrations and others on teachers' rights to freedom of expression have been upheld, and in some cases strengthened by the courts.

### **Letters home**

There is a protocol for information-sharing agreed to by the BCTF and BCPSEA, the employers' association representing BC's school trustees and the provincial government. All materials reviewed under the protocol agreement can be sent home in a sealed envelope addressed to parents. The contents of these communications are reviewed by BCPSEA for accuracy of content.

Kinzie, 2008, "This method of communication is the one commonly used by teachers to communicate with parents about their children's education. The students/children are not inappropriately involved in this discourse because the pamphlet is sent home in a sealed envelope to parents."

**Withdrawal from testing**

Ministry of Education policy states that “principals may excuse a student in the event of a family emergency, a lengthy illness or other extenuating circumstances.” Many parents over the past few years have used the extenuating circumstances provision to have their children excused from writing the tests, or have simply insisted that they have the right to make this decision on behalf of their children. We commend the large numbers of principals and school boards who have honoured this parental choice.

BC’s teachers care deeply about your children’s education, and we’re always pleased to hear from the many parents who tell us about their positive experiences with BC’s public school system. The excellent quality of the education BC’s students receive is internationally recognized and is a credit to the dedication and professionalism of our 41,000 members.

BCTF members believe that there is no valid purpose in forcing children to write the FSA tests as currently configured, and that to withhold this professional judgment would not be honest or fair. Teachers respect the right of parents to make decisions on this issue on behalf of their children once they have been provided all of the relevant information.