Examining the myths

Sometimes the proponents of increased standardized testing, data collection, and ranking imply that teachers are afraid of assessment, want to control the system, and actually create the test anxiety in students.

In fact, teachers rely on assessment—authentic assessment—to support student learning. We have always understood the need to work in partnership with parents, trustees, administration, the ministry, and others to do the very best for our students. We know that when teachers’ voices are left out of the education dialogue, critical information is missing and poor decisions are more likely. Daily, in myriad ways, we bring out the best in our students. We understand that creating anxiety is counter-productive and we do our very best to encourage our students and help them engage in learning.

No longer just a tool for program review or curriculum evaluation, test scores are increasingly used to create competition in education by publicly ranking schools according to test results. Testing is also a multi-million dollar industry with spin-offs in all directions.

Marita Moll, education researcher, author, Passing the Test: The False Promises of Standardized Testing

Supporting your child’s learning

✓ Take time to talk to parents and others about teaching, learning, and the importance of assessment that helps students succeed.
✓ Talk to your child about what they have learned. Use questions that avoid “yes, no or nothing” answers. Instead, start your question with “tell me about____,” “what is the same or different between____,” “how would you explain____.”
✓ Check to make sure that your child is prepared for school, with homework and assignments completed.
✓ Take time to talk to your child’s teacher about the teaching, learning, and assessment used in the classroom.
✓ Consider making an appointment to talk about how your child is doing.
✓ Ask yourself, who or what will give me the best information as to how my child is doing.

More ideas on supporting your child’s learning are available at www.bctf.ca/parents.

School principals around the world believe that many current student testing policies and related accountability practices contain flaws that detract from what should be our primary goal of improving learning. Instead, many jurisdictions appear to be more concerned with providing comparative statistics on a narrow range of student abilities resulting in an incomplete and misleading picture presented to the general public.

Canadian Association of Principals, “Valid Uses of Student Testing as part of Authentic, Comprehensive Student Assessment”
A Statement of Concern from Canada’s School Principals

Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts.

Albert Einstein
Teachers are very proud of the first-class public education system in BC. We welcome all students in public schools. We believe that every student needs support and encouragement. As professionals, we know that learning is a complex process and that students learn in different ways and at different rates. We understand that children and youth need time to create, experience, learn, and grow.

When they assess for learning, teachers use the classroom assessment process and the continuous flow of information about student achievement that it provides in order to advance, not merely check on, student learning.

**Best practice**
We continually examine our practice, collaborate with colleagues, and stay current in our knowledge of the very best ways to help students learn. We have seen many trends come and go in teaching and we strive to make professional choices based on what will best meet our students’ needs. We know that standardized tests are often overused, misused, and not useful for student learning. We believe the proliferation of testing moves education backwards while doing nothing to help our students learn.

**Educational reform in Canada should not just be about narrowing numerical gaps in easily measurable outcomes, but about striving to benefit and enrich the learning of all students and all aspects of every student in an inspired and inclusive social and educational vision of what the country still stands for today and must aspire to become tomorrow.**

Andy Hargreaves, Thomas More Brennan
Chair in Education, Boston College,
The Long and Short of Educational Change

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**Using assessment for learning**
BC teachers are highly qualified, caring professionals. We work with students in classrooms every day and we put our students’ needs first. We know that testing is an important part of the learning cycle. We believe that assessment must support learning.

We are knowledgable and trained to know the purpose and appropriate uses of tests. Because no single test or assessment strategy is completely reliable, teachers use a wide variety of assessment tools and strategies such as projects, presentations, goal setting, quizzes, classroom tests, writing samples, and much more.

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**Supporting teaching and learning**
Establishing needs is easy—finding the resources to meet those needs is the hard part and the very thing that the public system struggles with daily due to funding priorities that do not reflect community needs.

Eden Haythornthwaite,
former school trustee, Cowichan Valley
Board of Education

It’s easy for politicians and bureaucrats to focus on test results and data collection in order to deflect from the resources they should be providing to schools. But teachers understand the importance of quality teaching and learning conditions. As professionals, we are accountable to our students and for speaking out on their behalf.

If testing was deployed to find schools or children in need, then we would be seeing the progressive increase in funding for those schools.

Eden Haythornthwaite,
former school trustee, Cowichan Valley
Board of Education

We expect the government and boards of education to be accountable, too. Teachers must be given the teaching and learning conditions, resources, and time to help all students succeed. When teaching and learning is undermined, everyone loses. The most recent Statistics Canada report (2010) revealed that the BC student-educator ratio is considerably higher than the national average. While the employment of educators grew substantially in Canada between 2001–02 and 2007–08, BC experienced a significant loss of educators. We believe that our province can afford to fund and maintain the quality public education system our students need.