

# Vernon Teachers' Association VOICES

Volume 57

January 2010

4004-31st Street, Vernon B.C. V1T 5J6

Ph: 542-0456/Fax: 542-0564

[www.vernonta.com](http://www.vernonta.com)

## Foundation Skills Assessment:

Foundation Skills Assessment teaching doesn't help students learn or teachers teach. Instead, FSA results are used by the Fraser Institute for American-style ranking of schools that only erodes confidence in public education.

Teachers teach their students every day. We care passionately about their success. We believe in regular assessment and testing, and working with parents and staff to improve learning.

With so much to learn and so many challenges facing our children, why is the provincial government wasting valuable classroom time on a discredited approach to teaching?

If this government really wants to improved student achievement, they should keep their promise to reduce class size and improve support for students with special needs.

**Kids matter Teachers care**



**A special FSA themed VOICES to inform and support all teachers .....**

*Speaking for Teachers in the North Okanagan*



## *Reflections.....*

### **Greetings Colleagues.**

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 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 a myriad of 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.

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.

*From the BCTF brochure "Testing, You Bet!"*

### **We call on the trustees, parents, and general public to join with us:**

- **in sending a public statement to stop the ranking of schools and to call on the government to cease publication of FSA results.**
- **to honour parent requests to have their children not write the FSA.**
- **to support the call for a moratorium on standardized testing.**

***Bruce Cummings, VTA President***

---

**MEMO TO: Local Presidents, Local Representatives**  
**COPIES TO: Executive Committee, Administrative Staff**  
**FROM: Irene Lanzinger**  
**SUBJECT: Stay the course on FSAs—we have a plan**

**DATE: January 5, 2010**

The BCTF FSA action plan is proceeding well. Locals are creating their own local plans, ads are being booked, meetings organized, materials ordered or printed, and teachers are gearing up to distribute the withdrawal letters and talk with parents. Our focus in the weeks prior to the start of FSA testing is to encourage parents to withdraw their children from the FSAs and provide support to Grade 4 and 7 teachers.

The ministry and many school boards are very worried about the decline in participation rates resulting from our campaign last year. The superintendents of achievement have been visiting districts to pump up participation rates, and board staffs are putting pressure on principals in schools with high withdrawal numbers last year.

They know that the withdrawal rates are jeopardizing the reliability and validity of the FSAs overall, and further discrediting the tests with parents.

Teachers in affected schools must be aware of, and prepared for, this pushback. They must feel confident that they are supported by their colleagues and their union.

On the other hand, there are boards that share our views on FSAs. They have said they will honour parent requests to withdraw their children. Our position is gaining support as we talk with partner groups.



## ***ADVICE FOR TEACHERS***

The BCTF is reminding teachers (including TTOC's and retired teachers) NOT to volunteer to practice for or mark the FSA. For a number of years now, the BCTF has advised members not to participate in the writing of test items, field-testing, or marking of the FSA.

Tests are overused and misused by groups like the Fraser Institute for school rankings, causing unnecessary anxiety for both teachers and parents. The BCTF and its locals are continuing to campaign for the elimination of the FSA or at least the administration of the test on a random-sample basis.

Concern has grown over the degree to which the use of the FSA has negatively affected teaching and learning. The BCTF does not wish to see the continued erosion of valuable teaching and learning time through the use of a test that has been shown to bring no improvement to classroom conditions and support for students.

**Please talk with your staff rep or contact Bruce Cummings, our local president, should you be directed to participate in practicing for or marking the FSA.**

### ***Edited excerpt from BCTF FSA Momentum Bulletin #3***

Vernon: Last year many teachers right here in Vernon, were very effective in persuading parents to withdraw their children from the FSA. As a result of this success, teachers can face pressure to stop such concerted efforts.

Susan Lambert has been in contact with the local and teachers . You can find the participation rates in your district (or in any school in your district) or in neighbouring districts at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reporting/>. If you have a concerted pushback happening in your school, inform the VTA/BCTF.

Please be aware that there are districts in B.C. such as the Vancouver School Board and the Greater Victoria School Boards that will be honoring parent requests for exemption.

# **FAQ's for FSA's**

## **Do I have to administer the tests?**

YES, you do. We are legally required to administer the tests as instructed in the booklets in the timeline given.

## **Do I have to mark the tests?**

NO, you do not. As is stands, marking is voluntary. The BCTF is urging you not to participate in the training or marking of FSA tests.

## **What if I have serious concerns about certain students writing the FSA?**

You (and possibly your LAT) should be speaking to your administrator about these students. The ministry's guidelines are very clear that it is the principal who determines which students are excused from any component of the test. And there are also ministry guidelines for which students can be excused.

## **Can I urge parents to request that the principal withdraw/excuse students from writing any part of the FSA?**

YES, you can. However, be clear with parents that it is the duty of the principal that all students write. Due to this directive, parents may be contacted by principals regarding their decision to have their child not write. Parents need to be informed of this possibility.

## **Can I distribute information to parents about the FSA?**

The BCTF states that we have the right to distribute information to parents about the FSA and our concerns around it. Having said this, the information must be factual and educationally framed. So, you may distribute brochures or letters on the basis that the teacher is communicating about educational issues with parents as part of their normal duties and practice.

All grade 4/7 teachers have been sent a sealed envelope that can be distributed in class to go home to parents. Teachers wishing to have the sealed envelope distributed by their staff rep may make this request to their staff rep. All information in the envelopes has been previewed by district staff and has the OK.

## **What should I do if I am being strongly encouraged to practice for, mark, or otherwise go beyond what I'm legally required to do with the FSA?**

Inform your Staff Rep and call the VTA office with this. We are here to support you in any way we can.

## **What should I do if a student is in my class and I know the parent has requested that the student not write the FSA?**

Refer the parent and student to the principal.

***Thank you for your resolve on this issue.***