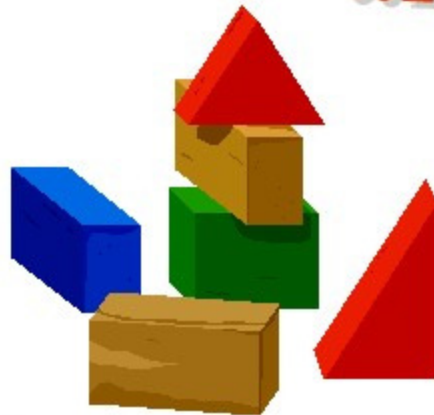


School District # 73 Parent Survey
Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)

District Parent



Advisory Council

SD 73

February 10, 2009

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Executive Summary

The District Parent Advisory Council for School District 73 (DPAC) hosted an information night to provide information to parents on the issue of Foundation Skills Assessment. Subsequent to this information session, a web-based survey was launched on January 15, 2009 and ran until February 02, 2009 to gather input from district parents on the issues and perspectives being communicated by the various interested parties. This report provides a summary of the survey results and provides recommendations for further action by DPAC.

One hundred and twenty six (126) surveys were completed and provided representation for high schools (70% represented) and elementary schools (58% represented) throughout the District. Respondents felt they understood the issue adequately, with over 79% stating that they felt they knew something about the Foundation Skills Assessment. Newspapers were the most popular source of information with school principals, the District Parent Advisory Council, Parent Advisory Councils and/or the respondents' own children's experience with FSAs also being key sources of information (>50% of respondents).

Overall, respondents "support the use of standardized testing as means to measure that [their] children are receiving a quality education". When asked specifically about Foundation Skills Assessment, the majority of respondents do not feel that the test is harmful to students, nor that it causes stress in the family, nor that it is a distraction from the learning process by reducing instructional time. Instead, respondents support the use of FSA, in combination with other assessment tools, to inform the school, district, and provincial level planning. Respondents believe the FSA plays an important role in measuring the effectiveness of the public education system and holding the system accountable.

The BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) position on Foundation Skills Assessment does not align with the respondents' perspective. While respondents acknowledge the BCTF may have legitimate concerns with the current FSA process, the respondents do not support the process (boycotting) being used by the BCTF to resolve these concerns. As well, respondents do not support the Fraser Institute's use of the FSA results to rank schools through out the province.

Based on the survey information gathered and the fact that the majority of respondents favour the use of standardized testing, including the FSA, this report recommends that:

1. DPAC write a letter to Minister of Education advising that parents in School District 73 support the administration of Foundation Skills Assessments and encouraging them to continue to fund the FSA process.
2. DPAC work with education partners to express concern with the inappropriate use of the FSA data by the Fraser Institute.
3. DPAC share the results of the survey with parents in the District and other education partners.
4. DPAC formulate an official position on FSA that articulates continued support for standardized testing and the continuation of FSA tests in the province and the belief that the Fraser Institutes use of FSA data is inappropriate.

Background

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is a test mandated by the Ministry of Education to be given to all grade 4 and 7 students in public and provincially funded independent schools in the province.

As described on the Ministry of Education website:

“The Foundation Skills Assessment 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. FSA is designed and developed by British Columbia educators. The skills tested are linked to the provincial curriculum and provincial performance standards.”¹

The Foundation Skills Assessment has been in place for almost 10 years. In 2007-08, the administration of the test was moved from May to February. For the first time, individual FSA results, and the students' actual written answers were available to parents, teachers, and schools by the end of March, in the same school year the test was taken.

Recently, the BC Teachers Federation (BCTF) has launched a public awareness campaign raising concerns about the use of the test and has publicly stated that it does not support the use of Foundation Skills Assessments. Furthermore, the BCTF held a vote in December 2008 and reported that 85% of teachers opposed the government's Foundation Skills Assessment². The press release also stated that BCTF members would not prepare for, administer, or mark the FSA exams in February 2009 unless the government moved towards random sampling. BCTF President Irene Lanzinger stated, “The FSAs drain much-needed time and resources away from teaching and learning. This particular standardized test is unfair, does not help students learn, and is not an accurate measure of student progress.” The BCTF aggressively campaigned against the FSA tests, directing their members to boycott the administration of the test. The British Columbia Public School Employers' Association challenged the BCTF position at the Labour Relations Board on February 02, 2009.

The Labour Relations Board ruled, “the administering/supervising the FSA tests is *prima facie* work which teachers are obligated to perform. Consequently, the BCTF is ordered, on an interim basis, to do the following:

1. cancel its direction to members not to administer/supervise FSA tests and to take reasonable steps to communicate that cancellation to its members as soon as possible and no later than 4:00 PM on February 4, 2009; and
2. cease and desist from authorizing or directing its members not to administer/supervise FSA tests”³

¹ <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/>

² Press Release dated December 11, 2008, BC teachers vote to oppose Foundation Skills Assessment, British Columbia Teachers Federation. <http://www.bctf.ca/NewsReleases.aspx?id=17168>.

³ <http://www.bcpea.bc.ca/access/publications/aissue/2009/ai2009-07-lrbdecision.pdf>

The BCTF has advocated that random testing would be an acceptable alternative to the FSA process. The BCTF also believes that the Fraser Institute's ranking of schools based on FSA results is an inappropriate use of the survey data.

"The results are used by the Fraser Institute to rank schools and erode confidence in our public schools. This type of test and subsequent ranking is based on an American-style ideology that has already been widely discredited south of the border"⁴.

The Fraser Institute describes their report card as follows:

"The *Report Card on British Columbia's Elementary Schools 2009* collects a variety of relevant, objective indicators of school performance into one, easily accessible public document so that anyone can analyze and compare the performance of individual schools. By doing so, the *Report Card* assists parents when they choose a school for their children and encourages and assists all those seeking to improve their schools."⁵

FSA test results are used in the compilation of the school rankings.

The annual report cards are published in March-April for BC Secondary Schools and April-May for BC elementary schools.

To help SD 73 parents better understanding the issues surrounding the FSA, an information workshop was held January 13, 2009 at the Henry Grube Education Centre. This workshop was sponsored by School District 73 District Parent Advisory Council and was attended by approximately 20 parents.

Assistant Superintendent Karl deBruijn and Kamloops Thompson Teachers' Association President David Komljenovic provided different perspectives on the issue. This information night was advertised and the outcomes of the evening were subsequently reported in the local media.

Commencing January 15, 2009, School District 73 District Parent Advisory Council undertook an online survey to gain feedback from parents on FSA tests. The goal of the survey was to provide sufficient information that DPAC could formulate a response to the current debate and best represent parents' interests.

This report provides the results from the DPAC #73 survey.

⁴ Press Release dated December 11, 2008, BC teachers vote to oppose Foundation Skills Assessment, British Columbia Teachers Federation. <http://www.bctf.ca/NewsReleases.aspx?id=17168>.

⁵ <http://www.fraserinstitute.org/researchandpublications/publications/6485.aspx>

Methodology

An electronic survey⁶ was developed and posted at:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=jiUX26qZdrhNCAB_2bXWoTAW_3d_3d between January 15 2009 and February 2, 2009. For parents without Internet access, a paper copy of the survey was made available and DPAC volunteers then manually entered the data into the electronic survey database. Results were tabulated using the summary functions available through Survey Monkey.

Notification to parents was done through direct e-mail, posters posted in schools by PACs, notices in either school newsletters or PAC bulletins, and word of mouth between parents.

A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix A.

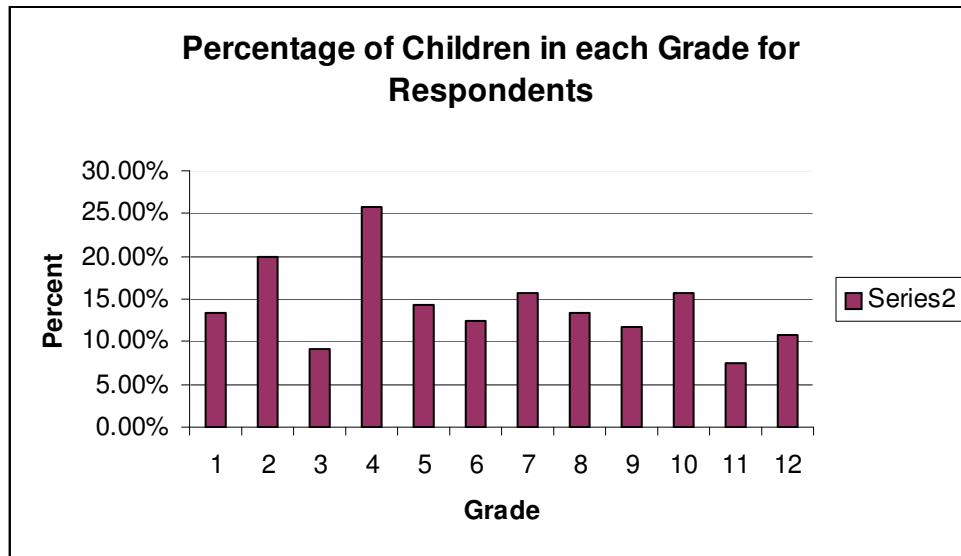
Survey Results

Parent Demographics

School District #73 has 10 high schools and 36 elementary schools within the District with a current enrolment of 14,217 students. From this student population, parents completed 126 surveys. Of the primary grade (K-7) schools in the district, 58% were represented in the survey. These schools represented 61% of the total respondents. The secondary grade level (8-12) was represented by 7 of the 10 high schools in the district with 49 responses (39%) attributed to this group.

⁶ SurveyMonkey at www.surveymonkey.com was used for collecting and compiling results from survey.

The distribution of children, by grade, represented by the parent respondents is shown in the table below.



Six respondents chose not to indicate which grade their child(ren) was in. The majority of respondents have children attending a public school (99%) while the remainder attend private school. Less than 1% of respondents reported that they home school their children.

The majority of parents (68%) reported that their children have written the Foundation Skills Assessment.

When asked whether they have served on Parent Advisory Councils (PACs), School Planning Councils (SPCs) or District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC), parents responded that 64% have served on a Parent Advisory Council, 26% have served on a School Planning Council and 6% had served on District Parent Advisory Council.

Issues Knowledge

When asked to rate their knowledge of the issues/dialogue surrounding the Foundation Skills Assessment in British Columbia, the majority of respondents rated themselves as very knowledgeable (32%) or somewhat knowledgeable (47%). An overwhelming 79% felt they knew something about the Foundation Skills Assessment issue.

Respondents indicated that they used the following sources of information (in order of most popular to least popular) to gain knowledge about the Foundation Skills Assessment:

- 1) Newspapers (75%)
- 2) School Principal (55%)
- 3) DPAC/PAC (54%)
- 4) My student's experience with FSA (53%)
- 5) Teachers (49%)

- 6) Other Parents (42%)
- 7) BC Teachers Federation (34%)
- 8) TV (29%)
- 9) Radio (27%)
- 10) Websites (6%)

Websites cited in the survey include the Fraser Institute, Ministry of Education, School District, British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA), British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, BC Teachers Federation, and School Planning Council. Of these websites, the Ministry of Education was the most frequently cited.

When asked if parents would like more information on this and similar topics, the majority reported no (53%). However, a significant portion of the respondents indicated yes and further commented that they would prefer the information to be provided in written form (62%) with e-mail or website the next most popular form of communication. Only 25 percent favoured an additional workshop setting.

Standardized Testing

When asked about standardized testing, respondents indicated the following agreement (strongly agree or agree) to the following statements:

Statement	% agree or strongly agree
I support the use of standardized tests as a means to measure that my children are receiving a quality education	75
I believe standardized tests provide for accountability in the education system.	71
I support the use of standardized test results as a data source to be used by School Planning Councils.	75
Standardized test results are valuable in evaluating school goals for reading, writing and numeracy.	75

The statement with the strongest support was “I support the use of standardized tests as a means to measure that my children are receiving a quality education” with a strongly agree rating of 37%.

Opinions on the Foundation Skills Assessment

Respondents were asked to rate the following statements as to whether they strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, or strongly disagreed. The combined percent total for agree or strongly agree respondents is shown in the table beside each statement.

Statement	% agree or strongly agree
I support the Foundation Skills Assessment process in its current form.	61
The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) test is a valuable tool for assessing student achievement against Ministry of Education standards.	68
FSA tests harm students.	21
FSA tests create stress in the family.	26
FSA tests are important to measure the effectiveness of the public education system.	65
FSA tests makes the education system more accountable.	62
I believe parents should continue to receive individual FSA results for their child.	75
I believe FSAs are effective in evaluating student skills in math and reading.	64
I believe the marking of the FSAs is fair and consistent	73
The full cost of FSA tests should be funded by the province, separately from annual school budgets.	93
Feedback on student answer sheets are helpful in identifying areas that require further study by the student	76
FSAs distract from the learning process by reducing instructional time.	33
FSA tests are reliable indicators of a student's progress.	56
I support the use of FSAs, combined with other assessment tools, to inform school, district, and provincial planning.	75
I support the use of FSAs as one method to give parents, teachers, and principals information about individual student progress.	68

Forty two percent strongly disagreed with the statement that “FSA tests harm students” while the statement with the largest strongly agree response at 57% was that “the full cost of FSA tests should be funded by the province, separately from annual school budgets.”

Opinions on Foundation Skills Assessment and BC Teachers Federation

When asked about their opinion on the BC Teachers Federation perspective on Foundation Skills Assessment, respondents indicating their agreement (strongly agree + agree combined) to the following statements:

Statement	% agree or strongly agree
I believe the BC Teachers Federation has legitimate concerns with the current FSA process.	50
I support the decision of BCTF to boycott FSAs despite the 2002 Labour Relations Board ruling.	34
I believe the BC Teachers Federation concerns with the FSA testing process is a labour issue and should be dealt with at the bargaining table.	41

The majority of parents do not support the BCTF position to boycott FSA tests. However, half of the respondents (50%) do feel that the BCTF has legitimate concerns.

Opinions on Fraser Institute

When asked their opinion on the Fraser Institute, respondents indicated their degree of agreement (strongly agree + agree combined) to the following statements:

Statement	% agree or strongly agree
The Fraser Institute's use of the FSA test scores to rank schools in the province is an appropriate usage of the test results.	34
The Fraser Institute ranking was a consideration in choosing which school my child would attend	13
The Fraser Institute rankings are an important tool for creating accountability in the school system.	36
The ranking of schools creates additional, often unhealthy stress on students, teachers, and parents especially for those schools that rank low.	62

Overall, respondents felt that the use of FSA test results by the Fraser Institute is inappropriate and that the way they are used to rank schools causes unhealthy stress.

Discussion

There was good representation across the spectrum of elementary and secondary schools, with 60% of the schools in the District being represented in the survey results. The majority of respondents have children in the elementary schools (61%). As well, the majority of respondents (68%) have children who have experienced Foundation Skills Assessments in either grade 4 or 7. The majority of respondents felt they were knowledgeable about the issue and dialogue occurring about FSA tests. The demographics of the survey respondents showed that over 62% were from a population of highly engaged parents (having participated on PAC, DPAC, School Planning Council, etc). This may be due to greater awareness of the survey within this group as they were the primary target of e-mail messages. Access to the survey may have been more challenging to parents than previous surveys. (e.g. School Fees 2007)., Unless they received the survey link via e-mail, the survey address had to be manually typed into a web browser (the address was given in printed newsletters). The DPAC should review this communications weakness for future surveys.

The survey also highlighted the effectiveness of written communication as a key vehicle to communicate with and engage parents. Attending workshops had very low appeal to respondents. This fact should be considered when planning or hosting future educational events of this nature. In particular, the Board of Education should note that engaging parents by public meeting might not be the most effective method to obtain meaningful feedback. The survey conducted by DPAC garnered far greater participation by parents than the information workshop.

Standardized Testing

Respondents overwhelmingly see (>70% agree/strongly agree) standardized tests as a means to measure that their children are receiving a quality education and ensure that the education system has accountability. Further, respondents believe the use of standardized test results are important to School Planning Council work and in evaluating school goals for reading, writing, and numeracy. Overall, respondents support standardized testing.

“standardized testing is the only practical and objective manner to compare the academic performance of my child to the provincial average. Both parents and educators need to understand where deficiencies exist so remedial action can be taken”.

“As long as standardized tests are used within the schools to further educational goals, I am strongly in favor of the testing. I cannot think of another way to measure and assess what our children are learning and where schools need to place focus”

However, support was not unanimous:

“Standardized tests used to rank order children or their schools are unethical in my view. If there was a glimmer of hope that they were used as formative assessment I wouldn't object to their use. FSA tests written by my children have never provided data that was not already well known.”

When examining a specific type of standardized testing, such as the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA), respondents noted that they do not believe that the test:

- Harms students;
- Causes stress in the family; nor.
- It is a distraction from the learning process by reducing instructional time

Instead, the majority of respondents (>70%) felt that:

- Marking is fair and consistent;
- Full costs of the test should be funded by the province separately from the annual school budget;
- Feedback on student answer sheets are helpful; and,
- That parents should continue to receive individual FSA results for their child.

Most importantly, respondents support the use of FSAs, combined with other assessment tools to inform the school, district, and provincial level planning. Further, they agree that the use of FSAs is one method to give parents, teachers, and principals information about individual student progress. Again, the respondents' voices were clear: they support the use of the FSA in its current form, recognize the FSA as a valuable tool for assessing student achievement against Ministry of Education standards, believe that the FSA test is important in measuring the effectiveness of the public education system, and feel FSAs make the system more accountable.

Respondents agree that FSAs are effective in evaluating student skills in math and reading and are a reliable indicator of a student's process.

In summary, respondents want information about their child's educational progress benchmarked against known standards, accountability in the educational system, and a process to use the information to improve the education system.

"As a parent I want my child to take this test to know where my child is at against the Ministry of Education standards"

Respondents do not believe the FSA tests cause undue stress, take away from instructional time, or are harmful to students, three key arguments presented by the BC Teacher's Federation opposing FSA tests.

Respondent support for the BC Teachers Federation position to boycott the FSA process is weak with only 34% of respondents supporting this position. Respondents are split (50%) as to whether the BC Teachers Federation has legitimate concerns. As to whether this is a bargaining issue to be dealt with through collective agreement process, support was weak and inconclusive. The data suggests that on balance, parents do not agree with the BC Teachers Federation position on Foundation Skills Assessment.

Respondents overwhelmingly reject the Fraser Institute's use of FSA test results to rank schools throughout the province with a majority of respondents indicating that ranking can create additional, often unhealthy, stress on students, teachers, and parents (especially for those schools that rank low). Respondents do not feel the Fraser Institute's rankings create accountability in the school system.

Only a small minority of respondents (12%) indicated that they used the rankings as one of the considerations in choosing that school their children would attend.

“Speaking professionally, as a psychologist and a researcher, the actions of the Fraser Institute are misleading and reprehensible”

“This is a harmful and political misuse and misrepresentation of data”

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

Respondents tended to be well informed about the topic of Foundation Skills Assessment and the survey results highlight that the majority of respondents:

- Support standardized testing;
- Support the use of the FSA;
- Do not believe the FSA causes stress or is otherwise harmful to students;
- Believe the FSA is a valuable tool for accountability and planning in the educational system;
- Believe the Fraser Institute is using the data inappropriately;
- Do not support the BCTF boycott of FSAs.

The survey was successful in gathering a cross section of views and opinions on the FSA tests.

Recommendations:

1. DPAC write a letter to Minister of Education advising that parents in School District 73 support the administration of Foundation Skills Assessments and encouraging them to continue to fund the FSA process.
2. DPAC work with education partners to express concern with the inappropriate use of the FSA data by the Fraser Institute.
3. DPAC share the results of the survey with parents in the District and other education partners.
4. DPAC formulate an official position on FSA that articulates continued support for standardized testing and the continuation of FSA tests in the province and the belief that the Fraser Institutes use of FSA data is inappropriate