



School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake)
Office of the Superintendent
570 Johnstone Road, Nelson, B.C. V1L 6J2

January 17, 2012

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Re: Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)

This letter is being distributed to all parents of students in Grades 4 and 7 who have expressed concern with the expectation from the Minister of Education that students in these grades are required to write the Foundations Skills Assessment (FSA). The FSA is very similar to basic skill assessments given in all other provinces in Canada.

The FSA is a basic test of reading, writing and numeracy, and measures the skills a student has developed over a period of years, not just in a single year. The FSA is designed to give schools, school districts and the province information about how these foundation skills are being addressed all over BC and to make plans for improvement. It is also designed to give parents and schools information about individual students. The FSA is not intended to rank students or schools. It is unfortunate that some organizations have taken it upon themselves to engage in this highly inappropriate process.

In our School District, we recognize that Teachers work with your children every day, and are accountable for their observations and assessment of your children's progress. Your children's progress is assessed on a frequent and regular basis. We value the skill and professional expertise that Teachers bring to this important work. We also recognize that purposeful assessment includes data from a variety of sources. The Foundation Skills Assessment is another source of data that inform our work in the district and with your children. The FSA has been designed and developed by British Columbia Educators and is directly linked to the provincial curriculum and performance standards.

I must emphasize that we do not rely solely on the FSA results to make decisions about a child's progress. Nor do we rely solely on this data to determine the effectiveness of our programs and strategies. However, these assessments do provide important information that assists in our planning and resource alignment. The data we gather is considered in its entirety; we do not rely on one source of data to inform our work.

I trust that the attached Facts sheet will provide an increased understanding of these assessments.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Jones', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jeff Jones
Superintendent of Schools/CEO

FSA Fact Sheet

What is FSA?

- Foundations Skills Assessment is a **standards-based** (not standardised) assessment of reading, writing and numeracy done in Grades 4 and 7
- Test items are aligned with one or more learning outcomes from BC curriculum
- It measures performance over a period of years, not just grades 4 and 7.
- It is meant to be a “snapshot” measure of learning to the date of the assessment

How is the FSA developed?

- All the questions, tasks, scoring rubrics are written by practicing BC classroom teachers. There are 6 teams with 24 teachers from different regions of the province. Each item is written according to the test specifications and linked to learning outcomes.
- All items are field tested for validity and there is an extensive process to review the quality of the FSA, including a team of external assessment experts

What Happens in Other Provinces?

- All provinces in Canada and many other jurisdictions in the world have some level of provincial or large scale assessments
- Eg: Alberta: Provincial Achievement Tests in English, Math, Science and Social Studies in Grades 3, 6 and 9
- No province does it on a random sample basis – all students take the assessment
- There is little or no provincial protest about their provincial assessment

What is the purpose of the FSA?

- Provides a system check regarding our progress in meeting the outcomes of provincial curriculum
- Provides parents with information about how their student does in relation to a provincial standard
- Provides schools and districts with information for large scale planning
- **EDUDATA** provides schools with an item-level analysis (how many students answered a question incorrectly) to use in school planning
- FSA is recognized as an example of Assessment OF Learning

Is the FSA optional?

- No, all students are expected to write FSA unless they meet clear criteria for being excused

Who might be excused?

- Students who have previously written the FSA
- Students with a disability that would significantly impact their performance even with adaptations
- ESL students who do not have sufficient English skills to understand the assessment tasks
- Students with IEP's who need extensive adaptations or such extended time periods that it would create a hardship for the student

Who decides who might be excused?

- The principal is responsible for identifying students who might be excused
- The principal must notify the parent/guardian if they intend to excuse a student
- The principal may also excuse a student in the event of a family emergency, a lengthy illness, or other extenuating circumstances

What is happening in other Districts?

- Participation rates are higher and parents are not asking principals to excuse students
- Students performance results have not declined provincially as much as they have in SD 8 (it should be noted that students who are excused or do not write, are included in the "not yet meeting" category, which is very misleading).
- Practice activities are completed
- Teachers score the FSA on a volunteer basis

What are the Concerns about the FSA?

- The results of the FSA are used to rank elementary schools by the Fraser Institute– this is a totally invalid measure to rank schools, as it is only one of many pieces of information about the quality of a school (**This is the major concern and the Board of Education wrote of letter of protest last year**)
- There have been concerns expressed about the impact on instructional time (4.5 hours in each grade, or 9 hours in the first 10 years of school). There are about 800 hours of instruction in a school year. Time for

assessment – tests, quizzes, exams and the FSA is actually counted as “instructional time”.

- It is suggested the test items are invalid, despite the fact they are written by BC teachers and linked to the learning outcomes
- There were initial technical difficulties related to doing the FSA electronically. The Ministry has added extra technical support this year
- Statements have been made that FSA “harms children”, but in 2009, the SD 8 DPAC wrote a letter refuting that claim. Principals report no substantiated claims of harm to a child.