



Greater Victoria Teachers' Association

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Via email

September 11, 2020

Trustees
Greater Victoria School District No. 61
556 Boleskine Road
Victoria BC V8Z 1E8

Dear Trustees,

RE: FSAs

We are aware the Superintendent is bringing a recommended motion to Monday's board meeting to rescind your motion of January 19, 2015 directing the Superintendent to inform principals to honour parent requests to withdraw their child from the Foundation Skills Assessment tests (FSA). The GVTA hopes you will recommit to your position of supporting parent choice in student FSA participation.

We are aware our District has been singled out by the Ministry of Education as having a high rate of FSA withdrawal. This is indicative of a high level of engagement by SD61 parents in their children's experience of assessment and evaluation.

Teacher opposition to the FSA is well known. However, over the years the reason for our opposition has become less clear and is frequently defined narrowly as the objection to the ranking of schools by the Fraser Institute. Although this is a particularly odious use of the FSA results, it should by no means be considered the sole reason to object to the use of this standardized exam.

Giving a test to students in an unfamiliar format and unrelated to the current classroom learning is bad pedagogical practice. It is completely contrary to best practice in assessment and evaluation and does not align with BC's new curriculum.

Administering the FSA takes up an enormous amount of teaching time. Time that could be spent serving the student is in fact spent serving the test. The lag time between test taking and distributing the provincial results means they are outdated and of no use to teachers when planning. Low scores for a school result in no additional support or resources for students.

Although intended to provide a snapshot of literacy and numeracy achievement in grades 4 and 7 across the province, the flawed design of the FSA means it in fact tests many other things. The data it collects is flawed. Better data could be collected using a randomized sample model. There is no statistically valid reason to test every school every year.

Schools in higher socio-economic areas have the unfair advantage of more access to student technology, which unfairly skews student results. IT support, newness of computer hardware (crashes and freezes are common), familiarity and practice with computer test taking and typing are all impacted by a student's access to technology.

There is a lack of standardization in amount of student support provided during test taking. No one is really checking to see how much assistance or extra time individual students are given when trying to navigate the test.

The students' ability to manage anxiety and otherwise self-regulate in an unfamiliar and stressful situation has an obvious impact on their success. Every year teachers report students displaying behaviours indicating high levels of distress.

The GVTA supports parents in their understanding of the inherent problems with the FSAs. We hope the Trustees will find a way to ensure our policies protect parents who make this choice from questioning or coercion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Winona Waldron', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Winona Waldron

President
Greater Victoria Teachers' Association

cc: GVTA Executive Committee