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Vote to boycott tests upsets some parents; Teachers object to Fraser Institute's use of test results to provide school rankings

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Abstract (Summary)

According to a document leaked to The Vancouver Sun, the teachers' federation plans to distribute information to parents of Grade 4 and 7 students about the reasons for their opposition to the tests and how parents can withdraw their children from the tests.

Full Text (536 words)

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Parents are disappointed and concerned about a teachers' vote last week to boycott the standardized tests known as the Foundation Skills Assessment, says the president of a provincial parents' organization.

"Parents are hopeful that common sense will prevail," said Ron Broda of the B.C. Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils.

"We are hopeful that teachers will carefully consider their position of influence as role models to our children and perform all of the required steps in successfully facilitating the education of our children. This includes administering the FSA tests."

Broda's comments, made in a news release, came after teachers voted 85 per cent in favour of a boycott plan put forward by the B.C. Teachers' Federation.

Under the plan, voted on by just over half of the 41,000 members, teachers would refuse to administer the tests early next year unless the government agrees to an alternative system of randomly sampling students instead.

The FSA now tests all Grades 4 and 7 students in the province on reading, writing and math.

Broda said that in addition to providing a snapshot of how students are performing in comprehension, writing and numeracy, the individual student reports encourage parent-teacher dialogue about those students.

"Therefore, it is important that parents receive their child's FSA results," he said. "Parents wonder what all the fuss is about."

Broda's group is a non-profit organization that includes parent advisory councils and district parent advisory councils across the province.

The group speaks provincially for parents and is recognized -- along with the B.C. Teachers' Federation and the B.C. School Trustees' Association -- as among half a dozen key partners in the education system.

BCTF president Irene Lazinger says the FSA is not a good assessment of a student's individual progress and is an unnecessary waste of school resources.

"The FSA tells us how we are doing as a province," she said. "In order to do that, you can conduct that test on a random sample basis."

One of the reasons the teachers object to the FSA is the Fraser Institute's use of the results to produce yearly rankings of B.C. schools.

According to a document leaked to The Vancouver Sun, the teachers' federation plans to distribute information to parents of Grade 4 and 7 students about the reasons for their opposition to the tests and how parents can withdraw their children from the tests.

Teachers will also seek meetings with local parent advisory councils to talk about the issue and publicize their opposition to the FSA in newspapers and on radio.

The BCTF will also sit down with representatives from the confederation of parent groups to discuss their opposition to the tests, Lazinger said.

Broda noted parents have passed several resolutions at confederation meetings supporting the FSA.

But Julianne Doctor, vice-chair of the Vancouver District Parent Advisory Council, said that doesn't mean every parent advisory council member agreed with the resolution.

Last week, Education Minister Shirley Bond called the union's position "irresponsible."

She said she is prepared to look at concerns about the test itself but will not revert to random sampling, particularly when parents are seeking more information about their children's learning, instead of less.

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