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## 'Think-tank' stands by its harsh report; [Final Edition]

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### Abstract (Document Summary)

Peter Cowley, director of school performance studies at the Institute and co-author of the 'Report Card' spent a significant portion of the evening addressing concerns around the think-tank's study, which has consistently handed out low marks for Prince Rupert schools.

Cowley uses the example of attendance records, one of the areas that some have criticized the report for not including. The Fraser Institute sent out letters to all 60 districts requesting the information; only six responded.

Cowley says a quote by former Education Minister Christy Clark that a B.C. student can get the same excellent education anywhere in the province, something people wouldn't say about cars or restaurants, is enough reason for pause.

### Full Text (649 words)

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The Fraser Institute made a presentation in Prince Rupert last night, and faced a slew of criticism for their ranking and analysis of the province's schools.

Peter Cowley, director of school performance studies at the Institute and co-author of the 'Report Card' spent a significant portion of the evening addressing concerns around the think-tank's study, which has consistently handed out low marks for Prince Rupert schools.

The most common criticism of the report card was that it is too narrow in focus and doesn't take into consideration other elements that make up school life.

"We have said from the very beginning that the report card should provide as much information as would be relevant for parents, if parents want a certain type of information, if they want information about fine arts ... they should have that information and we would willingly put it in the report card," he said. "Ironically, it is the most vocal critics of the report card -- who say it is too narrow in focus -- who are precisely the same organizations who, if they wanted to, could generate data that would measure effectiveness in these other areas."

Cowley uses the example of attendance records, one of the areas that some have criticized the report for not including. The Fraser Institute sent out letters to all 60 districts requesting the information; only six responded.

Vancouver offered them the data for the Vancouver School District at the cost of more than \$140,000.

"I continue to strongly encourage the other education stakeholders to consider the development of more data," said Cowley. "So far they've chosen not to do that."

Another common criticism of the report card is that it's just a snapshot and represents just one day.

"There are a number of different measures, with the elementary report card we look at six tests," he said, adding that the

data is also looked at over a period of five years in addition to the current report card year.

"I look at it not so much as a snapshot, but as a motion picture ... it's a whole bunch of snapshots over time that give you a sense of where things are going."

Critics also claim the report card is unfair because it pits private schools, which can select their own students, against public schools.

"In fact, the vast majority, more than 80 per cent of enrollment in private schools in this province do not select their students ... on the basis of an academic test," said Cowley.

"Look at Roosevelt Park. Is there a reason to compare that to West Vancouver's Collingwood (private) School ... there's very little use. But, there may be very interesting comparisons for other schools."

Cowley also addressed the feeling, particularly by teachers, that the ranking makes staff and students feel demeaned and that a variety of social factors should be taken into account.

"The thing about the public reporting of results is, it gives you a place to start, you say 'okay this what we're doing now'," he said. "If you concern yourself with making an overall rating out of 10 that takes into account parents and family, in some sense you're setting yourself up by suggesting it might be all right if we don't do all that well because of the characteristics of our kids."

Cowley says a quote by former Education Minister Christy Clark that a B.C. student can get the same excellent education anywhere in the province, something people wouldn't say about cars or restaurants, is enough reason for pause.

"The idea of rating as an incentive (from) positive competition is something we accept every day in virtually every other area of society except in schools," he said.

The Fraser Institute provides report cards across Canada for 6,500 school including three in B.C.

**[Illustration]**

Photo: James Vassallo, The Daily News / The Fraser Institute's Peter Cowley.

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