

September 7, 2007

Last year's controversy over the FSA exams will surely continue this year. The criticisms seem to be about either the need for data or the lack of data on individual students. Critics contend that if the data is needed, it should come from individual teacher analysis. Well, the FSA exams will continue, and the data should provide teachers and administrators the opportunity to determine individual student progress and assist teachers in determining where re-teaching or emphasis might be required. The data should be used in a positive manner.

Further, contrary to some publications, FSA is not an 'optional' test. All children in grades 4 and 7 should participate. This is especially important in light of the recommendations of the Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, and the Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Perry Kendall, in the May 2007 Joint Special Report entitled "Health and Well Being of Children in Care in British Columbia: Educational Experience and Outcomes". The report recommends that the Ministry of Education 'assess all children in the province on their reading, writing and numeracy skills'.

The availability of high quality and timely data is basic to helping schools change. But change requires leadership at the school level that "encourages the use of data to set the course for a school" Wilms and Flanagan (2007).

So the province, in an attempt to get the data to you in a more timely and usable format, will be making several changes to the FSA this year.

Summary of Changes

- FSA 2008 results will provide a new baseline for student performance and new trend comparisons. Individual student reports will be ready to send home (along with the students' written response booklets) by the end of March. School reports will be ready before the end of the school year. The new school reports will focus on a school's improvement over time and provide an international point of comparison on literacy. Schools will also get reports of "at risk" students, to plan ways to help them. Item-level information for each school will give direct feedback to teachers on how well students do on specific topics covered on FSA.
 - This year we will make it clear that FSA is for virtually all children in grades 4 to 7.
 - FSA 2008 written questions will be scored at the district level. The goal is to build capacity by increasing teachers' knowledge of provincial expectations. FSA isn't just the responsibility of Grade 4 and 7 teachers. With district level marking, a broader cross-section of teachers will be involved and become familiar with provincial scoring guides and student performance in relation to expectations.
 - School districts will be given funds to provide teachers with training and tools to score written response questions quickly, accurately and fairly. Nine training sessions across the province will be organized this fall.
 - District scoring will be supported by summer monitoring. During this monitoring session, written responses from 10 - 15% of BC public and independent schools will be re-scored. Monitoring examines how closely local scoring aligns with provincial standards. Monitoring sessions will model best practices in large-scale scoring, with activities such as scorer training and inter-scorer reliability procedures. Participants will be given added training and tools to share with colleagues in their own school districts. Teachers from
- FSA will be administered from February 4 to 15, 2008. Test questions and scoring guides have been adjusted to fit mid-year learning profiles in reading comprehension, writing and numeracy.

every district in the province will be able to participate in summer monitoring. The Ministry will cover these costs.

Electronic FSA: Faster and Greener

In February, students will do multiple-choice sections of FSA on the internet, using a “point and click” approach. As soon as students’ written responses are scored locally and results are entered in the e-FSA system, students’ individual reports may be generated by principals from a secure website. The one-page report of a student’s results will be attached to the student’s written response booklet and sent home to parents, giving them an opportunity to see their child’s actual responses and scores, in relation to provincial expectations. Turn-around time will go from months down to a few weeks. Instead of nearly 100 pages of student booklets and answer sheets, e-FSA will take about 20 pages per student – and no booklets will have to be shipped to the Ministry or kept at school.

One hundred schools – a selection of rural, urban, large, small, public and independent - have been randomly selected to participate in a mid-October field test of e-FSA. The purpose of the field test is to identify matters that may need fine-tuning before February, such as implementation requirements, connectivity, scheduling logistics, technical and security requirements, and teacher training needs. Principals of selected schools and their superintendents will receive details next week.

Let’s focus on using the data for good decision making and support our staff in its use.



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