

Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)

The Foundation Skills Assessment is an annual province-wide mandatory assessment written by students in grades 4 and 7. The purpose of this assessment is to provide a snapshot of how well BC students are learning foundation skills in the areas of reading comprehension, writing and numeracy.

The FSA, which is designed, developed and marked by BC classroom teachers, based on BC learning outcomes (BC curriculum and performance standards), helps answer important questions including:

- Are BC students learning the vital skills they will need later in their schooling?
- What are the areas of strength and areas needing improvement?
- Are there any trends in student performance at the school, district and provincial levels?

The assessment is administered each year to grade four and seven students in public and provincially-funded independent schools. The amount of time required to write the FSA, in all three academic areas, is approximately five hours. The testing is carried out over the course of two weeks.

FSA is mandatory for all grade four and seven students with very limited exceptions. Some students with exceptional needs and ESL students who have not developed basic English skills may be exempted from all or part of the FSAs. Schools have been sent guidelines by the Ministry on determining exemptions. Boards and teachers may not opt out of administering the tests. For more information see

Student Learning Assessment Order:

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/e/m60-94.pdf>

Large Scale Assessment Policy:

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/policy/policies/large_scale_assess.htm

FSA Administration Instructions:

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/assessment/fsa/pdfs/08_admin_instructions.pdf

The main purpose of the assessment is to help the province, school districts, schools and school planning councils evaluate how well students are achieving basic skills, so they can make plans to improve student achievement:

- FSA is intended to measure the basic reading, writing, and numeracy skills over school years to date – not just skills acquired in a single grade or course.
- FSA is only one measure of student learning. It complements regular classroom assessment by teachers.
- FSA results help focus home and school discussion on how to improve student learning.



For the Information of our Members

- The results of the FSA do not count towards a student's report card marks.

The secondary purpose of FSA is to provide teachers, students and parents with individual and external information about student performance in relation to provincial standards. Individual student reports support student learning through parent-teacher dialogue; therefore, it is important that parents receive their child's FSA results. If a student is not yet meeting expectations, parents will want boards of education to assure them that their child is acquiring the foundation skills (as shown by recent classroom assignments and assessments), or that provisions have been made for their child to receive the individual attention needed in order to acquire these skills.

It is important to note that the assessment provides valuable information on student performance, but is only one measure of what students know and are able to do. FSA results should not be considered to be the only method used for measuring individual student, school or district performance.

In the past there has been much media attention paid to "school rankings," as developed and published by the Fraser Institute, an independent private organization. The information gathered by the Institute is obtained through the Freedom of Information Act and is used to rank schools. The intent of the FSA is to assist schools, districts and the Ministry to evaluate how students are achieving basic skills and provide a basis to make plans for improved student achievement. It is not intended to be used by others to rank schools. BCCPAC, along with the other provincial partner groups and the Ministry of Education, have all stated that they do not endorse using the data for these rankings nor do they support the "annual ranking of schools."

The dates for the administration of the grades four and seven Foundation Skills Assessments for 2008 are February 4-15, 2008.

Parents need to be aware that the FSA is mandatory for students in grades four and seven. It is important for parents to gather balanced information about FSA before making a judgement as to its value – due to political or media pressures that might occur. We have included more information in the 'Frequently Asked Questions on Foundation Skills Assessment.' We encourage parents to take time to read it and visit some of the websites listed in the document.