



SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

S O U T H E A S T K O O T E N A Y

January 7, 2021

Hon. Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Education
Room 124 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Whiteside,

RE: Foundation Skills Assessment

School District 5 (SD5) Southeast Kootenay Board of Education would like to congratulate you on your posting to Minister of Education. We look forward to a long and productive relationship.

As you may or may not know, our Board has had previous communications with former Minister of Education, Rob Fleming as both the Minister of, and Shadow Minister for, Education regarding the FSA. We wish to continue this dialogue, as we believe this issue is important to the well-being of our schools, educators, parents and students.

While our Board appreciates that the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) has been postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our Board believes that a delay in the administration of the controversial standardized test does nothing to address our ongoing concerns with its blanket application and unethical use of the FSA by the Fraser Institute.

Therefore, at our October 13th, 2020 Public Board meeting the Board once again carried the following motion:

That the Board write a letter articulating our continued opposition to the FSA on a province-wide basis for all students in grades 4 and 7.

Our Board deferred this letter, pending the outcome of the recent provincial election, subsequent cabinet appointments and the recent winter break.

Frank Lento (Chair) • Trina Ayling • Bev Bellina • Krista Damstrom
• Chris Johns • Kathryn Kitt • Doug McPhee • Wendy Turner • Patricia Whalen

In addition to this letter, you will have received a letter written to former Minister Fleming dated On April 11, 2019 and the October 15, 2018 letter from School District 5 (SD5) Board of Trustees in order to provide context to some of the content of this letter.

In former Minister Fleming's response to our letter of October 15, 2018 he states that, "These [FSA] assessments are informed by international best practice and robust evidence towards greater equity and improvement in student outcomes."

However, as we indicated in our 2018 letter, "*Random* sampling has been the standard international education assessment method for many years and has been proven to be statistically sound".

He further stated that "It would be inconsistent for the Ministry to sample students when its policy for student success focuses on the success of every single student in the Province", and further stated that, "Province-wide assessments allow us to...ensure that students across the province are receiving equitable education experiences".

Yet, as indicated in our 2018 letter, "Lower overall FSA scores for a specific school does not result in additional funding or resources for that school".

The former Education Minister also asserted in his letter that, "Along with classroom assessment information, the FSA provides valuable information to parents on how their child is performing...[and]...allows educators to make early interventions that can enhance student success later in each child's schooling".

Our Board agrees that classroom assessment information is extremely valuable in assessment and identification of students' needs however, as we indicated in our 2018 letter:

- There is zero proof that when all students write an assessment, parents, teachers, schools and the province receive accurate information on how students are learning.
- FSA results are not used to calculate report card grades.
- FSA results are not used to diagnose learning problems.

The Minister's 2018 letter also states, "The FSA reflects current practices such as...collaboration and reflection...[and] choice over reading topics".

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We reiterate the strong sentiment of our 2018 letter:
“Standardized testing cannot adequately capture or reflect personalized learning (the focus of the revised curriculum), due to its *inherently oppositional structure*.”

Personalized learning requires students to learn “by exploring their interests and passions” and then demonstrating understanding in uniquely personal ways, while standardized tests encourage and reflect “boiler-plate” learning, regardless of now suggesting students use “collaboration and reflection” when responding to test questions or providing them with limited “choice over reading topics”.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) and stakeholders have expended years of research and expertise and considerable financial resources in order to revise the BC curriculum so that “students can succeed in the 21st Century”. These efforts need to be reflected with **21st century assessment practices**.

We also note the omission in the Minister’s 2019 letter to any reference regarding our Boards concern over the unethical use of the FSA results by the Fraser Institute.

As the newly appointed Minister of Education, we want to ensure that you are aware that, according to the final report of the Advisory Group on Provincial Assessment (AGPA), past provincial assessments have been misinterpreted and that there is need for “...assessment within the educational system [to] be performed in an ethical, equitable and consistent manner.”

Teaching to and/or administering the FSA consumes valuable time and precious teaching and learning opportunities within our schools. Given the unprecedented challenges to financial resources, the additional burden of hand-washing on classroom instruction time and the increased anxiety of students due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there is no better time than now to replace the FSA with an assessment tool(s) that allows “students, parents, teachers, schools, boards of trustees, and the Province [to] receive accurate information on how students are learning with the ongoing aim of improving outcomes for all students.

It is still our hope that, under your leadership as Education Minister, the FSA will be replaced with randomized testing, and eventually with evaluation methods that reflect and assist the innovative revised curriculum teaching and learning practices our District continues to embrace.

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We look forward to your timely response to our concerns regarding the Ministry's current standardized method for testing the foundational skills of students.

Sincerely,



Frank Lento, SD5 Board Chair

Cc*: John Horgan, Premier, BC New Democratic Party
Shirley Bond, Interim Leader, BC Liberal Party
Sonia Furstenu, Leader, BC Green Party
Tom Shypitka, MLA Kootenay East BC
Jackie Tegart, Education Critic BC Liberal Party
Stephanie Higginson, President, BCSTA
BCSTA for distribution to member Boards of Education
Teri Mooring, President BC Teachers' Federation
Andrea Sinclair, President, BCCPAC
Shelley Balfour & Chris Kielpinski, CFTA Co-Chairs
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