

September 16, 2022

Dear Parents and Community Members,

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) was begun in 2000 at grades 4,7, and 10 as a series of standardized tests that would report to parents how their child was doing in the areas of reading, writing, and numeracy. It has faced criticism over the years for both flaws inherent in any standardized test (not reflective of the whole student, a snapshot, flawed assessment, and so on) and also because of the enormous weight the right-wing think tank the Fraser Institute put on it, rating schools on the basis of FSA results. Grade 10 was eventually removed from the FSA, but grade 4 and 7 have continued on. Concerns about the FSA have in turn meant some students do not participate, which makes overall results less valid for schools and school districts to understand and support struggling students.

In the past few years, the First Nations Education Steering Council (FNESC) has expressed their concern over a decline in participation in the FSA. Some sort of standardized testing is vital for Districts to be accountable to the communities they serve, and for true equity to emerge in British Columbia as a whole. Mission Public Schools' Board of Education discussed the significance of the Foundation Skills Assessment in November 2021 in relation to FNESC expressing their need for data and support for the FSA. The Board agreed to write a letter to parents explaining how vital the results from these assessments are, as both the Ministry and FNESC rely on the data to support student equity.

The British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) has long opposed the FSA, and it is certainly true that organizations like the Fraser Institute misrepresent their significance. The BCTF has been effective at messaging parents to not participate in the FSA, but unfortunately, this undermines the very students who could most benefit from the Assessments. The data is still utilized at both the District and Provincial level for evidence-based decision making, and it continues to be reported home to parents. FNESC also needs data for Grade 4 and Grade 7 and is very supportive of the FSA, which is a valuable system-wide measurement from FNESC's perspective. While the FSA is not the only data, and needs to be used in conjunction with other information – most teachers use a wide variety of formal and informal methods to effectively assess student progress and to meet individual student needs – it still creates some province wide measures that FNESC and others can use to help understand where support may be needed locally and provincially.

Thus, in November of 2021, the First Nations Leadership Council, the British Columbia Assembly of First Nations, the First Nations' Summit, and the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs submitted a letter to the Minister of Education and Childcare to express their concerns regarding the ongoing targeted campaign to cancel the (FSA) in BC public schools. The letter indicates that the cancellation of the FSA is contrary to the views of First Nations leadership and the legal commitments of the Province, which specifically address the FSA.

Therefore, the Board of Education of School District 75(Mission) would like to express its support for the position of FNESC and encourage all parents to allow their children to fully participate in the FSA as part of our ongoing efforts to improve the education of all students in our community. If you have questions about the FSA, or the position of the Board of Education, please don't hesitate to reach out to trustees@mpsd.ca to discuss further. Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

Sincerely

Tracy Loffler, Chair

On behalf of the Board of Education