



# What Parents Need to Know

## The students of our province need more time learning and less time wasted on unnecessary, bureaucratic testing

### School and district-wide testing

#### What teachers believe:

Teachers believe that the best assessment for learning takes place in a classroom context with assessment tools that match the curriculum that has been taught.

Under some circumstances, teachers find it useful to administer the same assessment tool and discuss the results. Teachers also sometimes find it useful to administer a standardized diagnostic test to an individual student to help them diagnose learning needs. However, teachers do not believe that the current increase in the use of standardized tests administered across a grade, school, or district helps them teach or students learn.

#### What the research says:

Assessment that provides descriptive feedback is more effective than assessment that provides evaluative feedback, such as a mark. Descriptive feedback focuses on:

- achievements students have or have not made, including improvements to earlier work.
- explanations to students that they are right or wrong, and why, in a timely fashion.
- specifies improvements students could make.
- invitation to students to suggest ways they can improve.

*(Harlen and Crick, 2007; Bangert-Downs et al., 1991; Crooks, 2001; Tunstall and Gipps, 1996)  
Improving classroom assessment by focusing more on descriptive feedback can improve student achievement substantially, and helps low achievers the most. (Black and William, 1998, U.K. Assessment Reform Group.)*

Research has shown that large-scale testing can have negative effects on student motivation and learning, and that those effects are greatest for low achieving students, the ones who most need support.

Common negative effects of testing include:

- narrowing of instruction and instructional methods
- less successful students concluding they are unable to succeed, and therefore reducing effort
- students inappropriately focused on short-term performance goals: “What’s on the test?”
- students experiencing test anxiety
- students, parents, and others inappropriately generalizing test results to overall “value” or “intelligence.”

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*(Wynne Harlen and Ruth Deakin Crick, (2002). Review: What is the evidence of the impact of summative assessment and tests on students’ motivation for learning? Presentation, International Conference, Assessment Reform Group, March 5, 2002.)*

## What teachers are concerned about:

Teachers are concerned that the current drive to collect student achievement data has led to an increased use of standardized tests and the development of similar tests by individual school districts. Even when they are used correctly, the tests often do not provide teachers with new information about their students' learning. Implementing and repeating assessments will not result in improvements in student learning. The pressure to improve scores on standardized achievement tests shifts the attention of teachers, students, and parents to test results and away from learning.

The administration of these tests is seriously eroding instructional time and narrowing curriculum areas. The money spent to implement provincial testing or to develop local alternatives is being taken from things that could help students learn.

## What teachers are doing:

- Teachers are speaking out and working with parents to stop the loss of instructional time to testing.
- Teachers are working to shift the focus from the current emphasis on provincial student-data collection to strategies and solutions that meet the learning needs of Aboriginal students and other vulnerable students.
- Teachers are urging the BC Ministry of Education and education partner groups to support the development of authentic, relevant, and engaging classroom opportunities that address the needs of the whole child.
- Teachers will continue to support student learning with a variety of classroom assessment methods that are integrated with instruction.

## What you can do:

- Speak out about the loss of instructional time to unnecessary, bureaucratic testing.
- Talk to teachers about the variety of assessment methods that are used to support student learning.
- Join other parents in a conversation on the impacts of standardized testing.

**For further information: [www.bctf.ca](http://www.bctf.ca)**

