

ASSESSMENT FROM PLAP TO FSA—A DECADE OF DISCUSSION

The following article is reprinted as it appeared in the May 1999 BCCPAC IMPACT Newsletter focusing on the Provincial Learning Assessment Program (PLAP) in place at that time. It is especially interesting to discover that our membership a decade ago was telling us they had concerns about access to results and privacy issues regarding children at risk as part of the PLAP process.

Today with our ongoing dialogue about Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) we continue to explore and watch the role of student assessments into another decade. Will there ever be testing in place that has the endorsement of educators? What will it take for assessment to meet with the approval of parents and teachers? Today results are more accessible and student privacy is protected but parents and teachers will continue to have strong opinions on the validity and usefulness of FSA.

PARENTS WANT INDIVIDUAL STUDENT PLAP RESULTS

IMPACT Newsletter May 1999

BCCPAC members say parents want more than school and district level results for the Provincial Learning Assessment Program (PLAP). Delegates have amended a resolution from the Board for approval to urge the Ministry of Education to release school level PLAP results for this year and in the future. Delegates voted at the BCCPAC AGM to have the Board also lobby for individual student results to be released to parents upon request. The Ministry announced in February (1999) they had decided to release only district level results this year. *"This action was taken until the various partners involved in education...could agree on the steps necessary to ensure that the information made available is put in its proper context, and that those using the information are properly prepared for its use".* Deputy Minister Charles Ungerleider said in a letter to school districts.

In 1998, school and district level results were available to districts which requested them - 17 districts requested individual results.

BCCPAC believes PLAP provides valuable data to school communities in identifying areas requiring attention and/or in monitoring the progress of improvement in student achievement. *"We believe that the PLAP results are an invaluable source of information in supporting the goals of accountability and school improvement inherent in the accreditation process,"* the Board said in its rationale for the 1999 resolution.

A significant number of delegates spoke in favour of the amended motion. Some thought it was condescending of the Ministry to think parents could not place these results in context; others said students are entitled and need to see the results of tests they write.

Ungerleider has established the Foundation Skills Assessment Working Group, a committee of education partners including BCCPAC, to provide him with written advice on the *"contextualization, interpretation and communication of the results."* June 1, 1999 is the deadline for the group's report and recommendations.

PLAP has a checkered history. The BC Teachers' Federation consistently argues against the validity of the assessment. In 1998 the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIPOP) Commissioner, investigated a complaint from an MLA regarding the collection of students' personal information and disclosure of information from the essays to the Ministry for Children and Families. FOIPOP Commissioner, David Flaherty found that the Ministry of Education is required to report child protection issues. He recommended a more direct procedure for reporting legitimate child protection issues to allow people who know the child involved to deal more promptly with the information.

However Flaherty cited the Ministry's decision to ask children to write about their homes as an essay topic and recommended that in the future, the Ministry and its advisors not select an essay topic in province-wide tests that would invite or prompt students to write about sensitive or unsettling personal situations. He also recommended the Ministry stop collecting student names since this information is not required to mark the tests or prepare the results. This year the Ministry decided a few days before the assessment to pull booklets in the writing components of the Grade 7 and 10 tests. During the testing period there was heightened sensitivity to school violence and to the war in Yugoslavia. Concerns arose that certain questions and passages which were appropriate when tests were developed would now be considered sensitive in that context.

***Resources on assessment in BC Public Schools
are available on the BCCPAC website***

<http://www.bccpac.bc.ca/resources/assessment.aspx>