

# 'They're saying you're not welcome..'

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 "I'd like to know if there is a legal precedent set within the province that makes this acceptable. I understand they want to bolster participation, but this is not the way to treat the students and the parents of your schools. Is this what they're doing in all the other districts?"

Not according to Matt Pearce, president of the Prince George District Teachers Association. He's heard from several other school districts which don't send students home for refusal to participate in FSA testing.

"That's not the policy in eight other teacher locals," said Pearce. "What the school board is obliged to do under the School Act is provide an educational program for the child, and what it seems to be in this case is they're suspending the child, because they aren't providing a program for the child at home and they aren't providing one at school."

"They're saying you're not welcome at school if you're not writing the FSA, and that's not the direction administrators are being given in other school districts. Parents are told they are valued partners in education, but on this issue they're told, our way or the highway, and that's not sitting well with parents."

The tests involve 4 1/2 hours of class time and include online and paper exams. The official testing period for B.C. schools began Monday and continues through March 7.

Southridge principal Jenny Rankin told the Wattallas they are required to keep Hannah at home if she doesn't write the test, and that policy was reinforced in a phone conversation with Lisa Carson, an assistant superintendent for SD 57.

Wattalla said his wife, a Prince George teacher not currently working for SD 57, will not be in the city next week and he will be forced to take time off work to be at home if Hannah is not allowed to be at school during the testing period. Adding to that complication, he said he has no idea when the tests are scheduled.

Students who do not participate in class field trips are provided alternate supervision during that time in the library, where they can read a book or do other school work, and Wattalla said that same courtesy should be extended to all SD 57 students not writing the FSAs.

## Parents don't determine eligibility: district

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 That includes those who are in a distributed learning (online) program; students in non-graded programs who were born in either 2003 or 2007; French immersion or programme francophone students; English as a second language (ESL) students; special-needs students who require adaptations outlined in their individual education plans (IEPs); and students receiving learning assistance services.

Pepper says it is up to school principals to identify students who should be excluded from any of the three components of the tests, which focus on reading, writing and numeracy, and must notify the parents or guardians of every student that will be excluded.

Those exempt from the assessments include students who are repeating a grade level and have previously written the FSA test; students who have IEPs which document a disability that significantly impacts performance in reading writing and numeracy and are considered unable to participate in all or part of the assessment; students who would need extensive adaptations or extended time periods to complete the tests; and those ESL students who are not yet proficient in use of the English language.

Parents can decide to keep their children at home during the tests but it's not up to the parents to determine that child's eligibility. Pepper said schools are not required to provide alternate learning opportunities for students who do not qualify for exemptions.

"The decision rests with the principal," said Pepper, who refused to discuss specifics surrounding the Wattalla family and their protest against the FSA process (see related story).

"The test is the educational program of the day in that particular class. The student should be there and should take the test unless [an exemption] has been granted and therefore the learning program for the day for that student who has been excluded will be different."

The letter, dated Jan. 9, advised parents to contact their principal if there are any extenuating circumstances, such as a family



Superintendent Brian Pepper says more than 90 per cent of Grade 4 and Grade 7 students in School District No. 57 completed FSA tests last year.

emergency or lengthy illness, which would prevent a student's participation in the FSAs. All instructions to principals are contained in a 32-page assessment administration document provided by the Education Ministry.

Pepper estimated more than 90 per cent of Grade 4 and 7 students in SD 57 completed the FSA tests last year.

"It's a province-wide slice of how our kids

are doing today and I think it's gained some worry and some political action because certain organizations use this information to rate a school and that has created some concern," said Pepper. "We in the school district try to be as by-the-book as we can be because that's the appropriate course to follow, so we typically have a high percentage of students who write the test."

## Liberal leadership candidates head west

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Candidates vying for the top spot in the federal Liberal party are turning their attention westward as the race's first debate looms.

On Jan. 20, the candidates will converge in Vancouver for their first face-off in the contest to replace Michael Ignatieff as leader of Canada's Liberal party.

Nine people are standing in contention as of the Jan. 13 entry cut-off: Ottawa lawyer David Bertschi; former cabinet minister Martin Cauchon; Toronto public servant Deborah Coyne; Montreal MP and former astronaut Marc Garneau; former Toronto MP Martha Hall Findlay; retired Canadian Forces officer Karen McCrimmon; Van-

couver MP Joyce Murray; Toronto lawyer George Takach and Montreal MP Justin Trudeau.

On Tuesday, Garneau laid out his economic strategy, saying that more focus on engagement with China and the Asia-Pacific region is necessary since the country's economy has shifted to western Canada.

"If Canada is to succeed in driving a new vision of engagement with Asia, many pieces are required and only when all the pieces work together will we succeed," he said, during a speech in Vancouver.

Those pieces include creating "clear, concrete and transparent" foreign investment rules; investing in transportation infrastructure to ensure reliable rail and shipping routes to interested markets; protecting the environment to fa-

cilitate development that's in the interest of both communities and businesses; and partnering with Aboriginal communities.

Ottawa-based candidate Bertschi is also spending time making inroads in the province prior to the debate. He was in Victoria Tuesday and will make his way up north following the Jan. 20 event, stopping in Prince George Jan. 22-23 before heading to Dawson Creek.

The Liberal train will continue through town with Trudeau scheduled to make a stop in Prince George on Jan. 23.

Since the race officially began in mid November the only other candidate to visit the city was Alex Burton, who ended up dropping out of contention three weeks after his Nov. 22 stop.

## Gravesite found after mother led police to isolated area

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 On Tuesday, Prince George RCMP Cst. John Graham testified that in late October 2004 Williams led them to an isolated area southwest of Miworth where Cook allegedly buried Adam's body a few weeks after his death.

He described Williams as very quiet, very soft spoken and very

withdrawn and mentioned she "seemed relieved" when the general area was found.

Graham said a gravesite was found at the scene and slightly more than 21 metres away a femur bone was uncovered. As well, pieces of a "somewhat blue" blanket were found scattered about the area.

Williams told the court Monday that Cook had wrapped Adam in a blue and white blanket before placing his body in the trunk of their car, parked outside their mobile home in the Glenview Drive area.

The judge-alone trial, which is being held in B.C. Supreme Court before Justice Glen Parrett, continues today.

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