

**British Columbia Parents on School Testing:  
Very Strong Support for Ministry of Education Testing Policy**

**A Representative Survey Undertaken on behalf of the School  
Performance Studies Research Program of the Fraser Institute**



**COMPAS Inc.  
Public Opinion and Customer Research  
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## **Very Strong Support for Ministry's Testing Policy, Overwhelming Support for Parents' Rights to Information**

The overwhelming majority of British Columbia parents of school age children believe that parents should have a right to school test scores in reading, writing, and maths to see how their school is doing. This is one of the key findings from a province-wide survey conducted for the School Performance Studies Research Program of the Fraser Institute.

The same COMPAS poll among more than a thousand parents shows strong backing for the Ministry of Education's policy of carrying out such testing.

In practice, 83% of B.C. parents believe that parents should have a right to such information (77%) or should probably (6%) have such a right, as shown in table 1. Eighteen percent take the opposite view. Among parents with strong views, those who favour parental rights on the matter outnumber more than 6:1 those who do not (77:12). When those with strong views are combined with those with moderate views, supporters of parental rights to that information outnumber opponents by a factor of almost 6:1.

Among parents who are themselves a teacher or married to one (n=98), support for parental rights to such information is virtually as strong, as shown in table 1. Thus, teachers and their spouses resolutely support parents' rights to the information. But, they are far less supportive of the policy to have such tests than parents as a whole.

Among parents as a whole, the overwhelming majority believes that the Ministry of Education is on the right track in its testing policy. A more than two-thirds majority (70%) agrees with the policy while 19% disagrees, as shown in table 2. Among teachers and their spouses, opinion is divided with a seeming plurality (49%) opposed and a large minority (41%) supportive of Ministry policy. In practice, the subset of teachers and spouses is too small to be certain that the plurality is actually opposed to Ministry policy.



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*Table 1: Parents' Right to Testing Information on Their Schools*  
*(Percent)<sup>1</sup>*

	All	Teachers <sup>2</sup>
Parents should have such a right	77	74
Probably	6	4
Probably not	2	2
Parents should not have a right to see the results	12	13
[UNPROMPTED] Don't know or no opinion	3	7

*Table 2: Agreement with Ministry Testing Policy (Percent)<sup>3</sup>*

	All	Teachers
Agree	70	41
Disagree	19	49
[UNPROMPTED] Undecided	7	8
[UNPROMPTED] Don't know or no opinion	4	2

While the overwhelming majority agrees with Ministry testing policy and believes that parents should have a right to the results, respondents are divided about how much province-wide testing the Ministry should be doing, as shown in table 3. Among those with an opinion, almost two-fifths believe that the volume of testing is about right; more than a third believe that too little testing is taking place; meanwhile less than a third believe that the volume of testing is excessive.

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<sup>1</sup> "The B.C. Ministry of Education has been carrying out province-wide testing in grades 4 and 7 in reading, writing, and math. Parents can use the results to see how their children's school is doing and to compare schools and see how individual schools are performing. All things considered, do you think that parents have a right to see the results from province-wide testing? [ROTATE POLES]."

<sup>2</sup> Households with a teacher in them, almost always the spouse.

<sup>3</sup> "The Ministry of Education has been carrying out province-wide testing for several years. Do you agree or disagree with this policy?"



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Table 3: “Do you think that British Columbia is doing...”

	All	After DNKs Excl.	Teachers
Far too much province-wide testing	6	7	17
Too much	18	21	32
[UNPROMPTED] About right	32	38	21
Too little	24	29	11
Far too little province-wide testing	5	6	2
[UNPROMPTED] Don't know or no opinion	16	NA	16

## Parents Under-Utilize Annual School Rankings

Respondents believe that only a minority of parents as a whole—38%—actually use school rankings to see how their schools are doing.<sup>4</sup> In a follow up question, respondents were asked if they thought that parents over- or under-utilized the information on school rankings, as shown in table 4.

Among those with an opinion, 60% believe that the data are under-utilized compared to 21% believing they are over-used and 18% used to the right extent. Thus, those who believe the data are under-used outnumber almost 3:1 those who believe the data are over-used. Those who believe the data are over-used are outnumbered almost 4:1 by the combination of those who believe that the data are under-used and those who believe that the data are used to the right extent.

Opinion among respondents in teacher households is more divided than among parents as a whole. When don't know opinions are considered, 34% of

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<sup>4</sup> This is the mean estimate among the 82% of parents who answered the question. Those who provided no estimate were then asked a forced choice question to estimate what proportion of parents used the scores to track their schools. Apart from a reiterated DNK (43%), the most frequent answers were 50% of parents use the information (23% of respondents chose this option) and 25% of parents use the information (16% of respondents chose this option).



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respondents in teacher households believe that parents make too much or far too much use of rankings information and 39% too little or much too little. Among parents as a whole, the corresponding numbers are 18% and 51%, respectively.

*Table 4: “Do you think parents use information on school rankings...[ROTATE POLES]”*

	All	After DNKs excl.	Teachers
Far too much	5	6	12
Too much	13	15	22
[UNPROMPTED] About right	15	18	12
Too little	39	46	26
Much too little	12	14	13
[UNPROMPTED] Don't know or no opinion	16	NA	14

## **Testing Policy Makes Schools Slightly More Receptive to Parents—Opinion Divided**

Parents were asked about the impact of testing policy on the willingness of schools to listen to parental concerns. Among respondents with an opinion, those who believe that schools have become more willing to listen represent a small majority (56%), as shown in table 5. Meanwhile, a minority, 31%, say that schools have become less willing to listen.

Like parents as a whole, more respondents in teacher households say that schools are more apt to listen than less apt to listen. Perhaps the biggest difference between respondents as a whole and those in households with teachers is a larger number in the latter category who seem neutral or uncertain on the matter. Compared to respondents as a whole, those in teacher households seem more inclined to be neutral about the effects on the



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willingness of schools to listen—37% saying that they either don't know the effects (17%) or that no change has taken place (20%) compared to 24% among parents as a whole (12% and 12%).

*Table 5: "As a result of the existence of province-wide rankings of schools, do you think that schools have become..."*

	All	After DNKs excl.	Teachers
A lot more willing to listen to parents' concerns about how their school is doing	14	16	17
Somewhat more	35	40	27
[UNPROMPTED] No change	12	14	20
Somewhat less	16	18	12
Much less willing to listen to parents' concerns about how their school is doing	11	13	6
[UNPROMPTED] Don't know or no opinion	12	NA	17

## Methodology

A representative sample of 1010 British Columbia parents of children under 18 years of age was interviewed by professional interviewers using computer-assisted telephone interviewing systems. By convention, samples of this size are deemed accurate to within 3.2 percentage points 19 times out of 20. Fieldwork was completed March 6, 2008. The principal investigators were Dr. Conrad Winn and Tamara Gottlieb.

