



Realtor CHER CHANG

## Choice of schools drives many homebuyers

There's more to buying a home than finding a house, says Lower Mainland realtor Cher Chang.

The Sotheby's International Realty agent says choosing the right school is one of the most important considerations when purchasing a family home.

The rookie realtor — she's been in the field for two years — dedicates a corner of her website ([www.cherc.com](http://www.cherc.com)) to the Fraser Institute's High School Report Card.

"I think it's very, very important," she says of the annual ranking. "I've got leads just from the report."

Chang says home buyers — particularly newcomers from Asia — place a high priority on neighbourhoods with good schools.

"They talk about how old the kids are and they ask me, 'OK, how good are the schools?'"

Chang says she makes "a handful" of recommendations based on the Report Card each month.

"We know that we need additional resources . . . We know that in certain parts of our community, our students are hungry. They live in poverty. We know all of that." — *Jinny Sims, president, B.C. Teachers Federation*

# It's all talk, no action: Critics

**WHAT NOW?** If public schools are failing, give them help, experts say

STORIES BY MIKE ROBERTS  
STAFF REPORTER

Criticisms of the Fraser Institute's High School Report Card come in three flavours.

1. Ranking a high school in Masset against a school in Vancouver's Shaughnessy district is like comparing "apples and oranges" and serves no constructive purpose.

2. The academic indicators used to rank schools — exam marks and graduation rates, for example — are "too narrow" and exclude qualitative measures that may produce a more rounded picture of a school's success.

3. The Fraser Institute, a "conservative think tank," believes private schools should receive the same financial support from the government as public schools, and uses the Report Card to push that agenda.

Jinny Sims, president of the B.C. Teachers Federation, says the Report Card makes a big show of highlighting the failings of the public school system while doing nothing to redress them.

"We know that we need additional resources . . . We know that in certain parts of our community, our students are hungry, they live in poverty. We know all of that," says Sims.

"If they were to use the data and say, 'OK, these are the schools now that the government needs to infuse extra resources in so that we help the kids.' But that isn't where they go."



PETER COWLEY  
Co-author of Report Card

Adds Sims: "What you're doing is ranking the kids. Kids who go to school in those communities already get told. They already feel it."

Sandra Mathison, a professor of education at the University of B.C. and an expert in the evaluation of education, says the Report Card has a degree of snap-shot value.

"But it gives a very simplistic and not contextualized view of the quality of any school," she says.

Mathison says parents would be remiss if they judged their child's school or made decisions about sending their child to another school



JINNY SIMS  
President, B.C. Teachers Federation

based solely on the Report Card.

"People are buying here — if they can, if they have the money — based on the Fraser Institute, and that bothers me," says Jill Philipchuk, principal at Point Grey's University Hill Secondary, the top-ranked public school.

"You think because your kid comes here they're going to be smart? No."

Linda Coyle, president of B.C.'s Charter for Public Education Network and a former college administrator, believes the Report is a politically motivated push for the privatization of education.

"We have an issue with the increase in the provision of public funds to support private and independent schools," she says. "If we have a quality public education system, we ought not to have independent schools that are better than. They can be as good as, but not better than."

Peter Cowley, co-author of the Report Card, is accustomed to the criticism.

"I have never heard anyone, except the critics, who would even consider comparing St. George's to a school at the bottom of the list," he says. "However, there are people who would compare St. George's to Prince of Wales or Lord Byng. The Report Card's for them."

Cowley readily agrees that the Report Card's indicators are narrow in focus and says he would gladly include factors like attendance records — if only schools would provide them.

"In general, it's a predictable and annual audit of how the school's doing," he says of the Report Card. "I've always believed that the most useful comparison is the simplest one: How are we doing at our school versus our own history?"

It is not the Fraser Institute's mandate, he says, to solve the problems highlighted by the report — "but it's more difficult now than it used to be for a principal to say everything's fine and smile beatifically and hope that that'll be it for the evening," he says.

## THE BEST PRIVATE SCHOOLS



St. George's head boy Hafiz Kassam says students pay their parents back by succeeding. JON MURRAY — THE PROVINCE

## These six sch

The so-called Six Pack — Crofton House, Little Flower Academy, St. George's, York House, Southridge Senior Secondary and West Point Grey Academy — topped the Fraser Institute's High School Report Card in a six-way tie for first place this year.

We wondered: Besides the \$10,000-\$15,000 tuition fees, what's in their water?

Isabel Chen is the head girl at Crofton House. The Grade 12 Vancouver student has already been accepted at Yale.

"Crofton is this oasis in the city where you step on to campus and you're transported into this entirely different universe," she says. "You leave the city and you're in this environment where the teachers are so