

September 1, 2006

Welcome Back

I know that most Principals and Vice Principals have already been in their schools for the last week or more preparing for school opening. This is the season of registration, planning, organizing, unpacking and district retreats as schools and school districts emerge from hot and hopefully lazy summer days. I hope all of you come back to your schools rested and enthusiastic about the year ahead.

I also know many of you are undertaking new positions and for many of you, this is your first leadership appointment as the rate of turnover of principals and vice-principals continues to escalate. This will be a theme that dominates our context for several years ahead. It highlights the needs for school districts and experienced principals to support those new to the role.

This is the first Report on Education for this school year. The report will be emailed to each principal to be shared with vice-principals each Friday. The report is also emailed to superintendents and district staff to the extent that we have been able to gather email addresses. Over the summer, our email list has been updated, but I am concerned lest we miss anyone. We are happy to add any principals, vice-principals or district staff. If you know of anyone who should be receiving this report and is not on our list, please invite them to forward their email address, school district, school and position to DM.Education@gov.bc.ca

Each school year is a fresh start and begins in a different context. I have witnessed many beginnings. Each new school year has some defining characteristics. So, what are that characteristics for this year ahead? From my perspective, here are some of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in the 2006/07 school year.

- Student achievement continues to be our focus. Our major indicator, school completion rates, tells us that our system is very high performing but results have plateaued. We need to recapture the improvement gradient and continue to improve the school completion rate for all students and particularly for Aboriginal students.
- This year we have reason for optimism as teachers conduct a ratification vote on a tentative agreement that is being recommended by the BCTF executive. There is real potential for an unprecedented period of labour harmony that will allow all parties to focus on the main thing – student learning.
- Our economy is healthy and growing substantially. The demands for skilled labour and the employment opportunities for our graduates are also growing. This is placing different expectations and demands on our education system that require response. There will be emphasis on technical training, apprenticeship and related job skills by employers. We need to respond to these needs to ensure our economy continues to grow and our graduates have the best life chances possible.

- Competition for resources in public funding remains high and grows as rising health care costs continue to put pressure on public spending. Funding for the K-12 system has been protected and improved despite falling enrolment. There will continue to be pressure to keep the focus on learning and make the best use possible of resources for this purpose.
- The changing demographic in British Columbia is shining a light on the value of our school-age youth. Only a few years ago, graduates from high school and university were struggling to find employment. We saw a generation of youth disillusioned and losing hope that they could achieve what their parents had achieved. Now, with numerous retirements in almost every employment sector, youth have tremendous opportunities as our economy demands their full and immediate participation in challenging careers. Your schools provide the keys to the doors of those opportunities.

There are characteristics of the year ahead that I am sure come to your minds – some specific to your school or community. I know there will be many chances to interact through the course of this school year as we pursue improving student achievement together. I wish you a successful and rewarding school year.

Interactive Innovations Lives On

Interactive Innovations was a breakthrough event. The conference held last May 25 and 26 was the first of its kind and scope in the world. Technology connected five distant conference sites to provide a smorgasbord of learning opportunities addressing the conference themes – Literacy, Early Learning, Secondary Learners, Shared Leadership and Equitable Futures. Conference

participants could not say enough about the impact of the presenters and these themes on their personal professional learning.

Now this great resource of professional learning has been archived and formatted for ongoing use in schools and school districts. Three formats of presentation have been made available using the original material from the conference including actual keynote addresses by renowned presenters. One format is appropriate for use at a full-day non-instructional day program. It includes keynote addresses, presentations by concurrent presenters, a facilitator's guide, graphic organizers to assist with processing information and focus questions to guide active learning. Other print materials are also available.

The second package is more appropriate for use in a series of seminars that might provide a staff meeting or department meeting series in a school. Again facilitator guides, focus questions and graphic organizers are used.

Parent packages are also available in full-day format, study group series or stand alone 30-minute programs. These are appropriate for use with Parent Advisory Committees and/or District Parent Advisory Committees as well as other groups of parents or communities.

All of these resources have been developed under the watchful eye of Audrey Hobbs-Johnson, conference coordinator. Yrsa Jensen, Director of Instruction, School District 36 (Surrey), was central in putting the materials together and was ably assisted by Surrey Literacy Helping teacher, Leah Christensen and Surrey Vice Principal, Laura Gills. This is truly a quality resource for professional learning and deserves a close look.

More information and ordering details are available from Julieta.Olivares@BCELC.ca The British Education Leadership Council assists with the administration and management requirements of the Interactive Innovations conference.

And more good news...

Interactive Innovations 2007

Set aside March 1 and 2, 2007 to attend Interactive Innovations at one of several sites throughout British Columbia. Audrey Hobbs-Johnson will again coordinate a conference building on the successes and learnings of last year. This year, community candidates for conference sites includes five British Columbia sites and Toronto, Salt Lake City, Denver, Alberta and, yes you are reading this right, Thailand. In addition to another outstanding conference program, we intend to further push the capacity of technology to make Interactive Innovations inter-provincial and international.

Check the website on November 1, 2006 for updated conferenced details and registration information.

www.interactiveinnovations.ca

And...one more

A Rural Conference

October 19 – 21

Forty-one school districts with rural areas have been invited to participate in a rural conference. Teams of educators and parents will come together in Richmond to discuss the challenges and opportunities of rural education. Specific sessions will deal with

- Teaching and learning in multi-grade classrooms
- Successful strategies for engaging Aboriginal learners
- Creating communities for Learners
- The power of E-learning
- Supporting learners with special needs.

Conference registration was limited to these districts because of the size of available conference sites and the need to place priority on our most rural areas. For more information, contact Julie MacRae, Superintendent, Liaison Department at julie.macrae@gov.bc.ca

The Last Word – Have a great year and keep the main thing, the main thing!