

January 5, 2007



2007 Promises to be an exciting year for education in British Columbia.

Last November the government's Select Standing Committee on Education published their first report entitled "Literacy Through Leadership" which outlines an adult literacy strategy for British Columbians. A copy of the report can be found at:

<http://www.leg.bc.ca/cmt/38thparl/session-2/edu/reports/Rpt-38-2-1-Edu-30Nov2006.htm>

The first issue faced by the committee was to define the problem. The committee suggested there is no consensus in the field of education on a definition of literacy, so they opted to focus on functional literacy. This concept, they suggest, is amenable to measurement and simple to understand. Functional literacy "links a person's capacity to read, write and do math with their ability to function in everyday life and to participate fully in the modern economy and society". (p. 5)

Although this report focuses on the ages 16-65, it has several recommendations that will form the basis for follow-up changes that should be contemplated in the K-12 sector.

A second report filed on December 5, 2006 was the BC Progress Board's report entitled "Working Together to Improve Performance: Preparing BC's Public Education System For The Future". This report was prepared by Dr. Charles Jago, former president of the University of Northern BC. The Progress Board was established by Premier Campbell in July 2001 as an independent panel to provide advice on ways to improve provincial performance.

Dr. Jago's report provides several recommendations on how various components of the provincial education system can be changed or modified to improve student outcomes. A key suggestion underlying all of the report's recommendations is..."Working together, rather than at cross purposes, is something that we, as British Columbians, can do to ensure a better future for our children, our schools, and the province as a whole. After all, it is for the sake of the kids." If all partner groups focused on the children's achievement as a common purpose, imagine the success we could have in our province.

Attempts at developing better working relationships have been made through meetings such as the Learning Roundtable, the Education Advisory Council and partner group sessions. Also this past year, the Premier and Minister have hosted congresses with teachers and parents to discuss possible solutions that might increase student achievement.

The Progress Board report goes on to identify six positive suggestions or recommendations for changes to the K-12 system.

- (1) The Ministry of Education is advised to stay the course and expand upon using information in an open and public manner. The Accountability Framework and its component parts should continue as part of our overall improvement plan.
- (2) The Ministry is encouraged to adopt an approach similar to Ontario's 'turnaround strategy'. These strategies are well described in Fullan's new book Turnaround Leadership (2006) which is definitely worth a read.
- (3) It is suggested that districts should be given primary oversight and responsibility for educational programming for pre-school, K-12, and adult education. It further suggests that school boards collaborate with colleges to ensure appropriate adult literacy programming and transitioning.
- (4) The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Advanced Education are urged to develop new organizational structures to integrate secondary and post-secondary educational programming.
- (5) Systematic use of test results should be developed to assist in a continuous, coherent and contextual long-term approach to improvement.
- (6) Government should review current fiscal arrangements relating to the funding of K-12.

Last year in the Throne Speech, reference was made to the need for "Transformative Change" of the education system. These reports will obviously be major considerations in any change agenda. Also the Premier in a year-end statement indicated that a priority of government will be to focus on improving education in 2007.

So 2007 promises to be an exciting year with changes to the system as we know it. But the real excitement comes from your ability to ensure that learning is alive and well in your school, in every classroom and for every child. Expanding the life chances of our young people is the real challenge and the real excitement in education.

Have a great New Year!

The above is a synopsis of the key recommendations. I encourage you to read the report and its recommendations. The report can be located at:

<http://www.bcprogressboard.com/index.php>