



# *Report on Education*

## *from the Deputy Minister of Education*

May 12, 2006

### **Portfolio Power**

BC leads the way in requiring evidence of student learning in the form of a Graduation Portfolio, the learner-centred cornerstone of the new graduation program requirements. The Portfolio is a hot topic right now so this is a good time to review the background, share some successes and look ahead to June, 2007, when our first cohort will graduate under the requirements of the new graduation program.

### **Origins**

During a province-wide consultation about graduation requirements in 2002, the public was asked two guiding questions: "What skills are necessary for success in life?" and "How can we develop these skills in our graduates?" Thousands of educators, students, parents, community members, industry representatives and post-secondary staff responded by identifying the attributes of the ideal graduate – a person who is a lifelong learner, involved community member, informed citizen and healthy individual who takes responsibility for his/her own learning and success in today's changing world.

We heard concerns about the limitations of provincial exam marks and the need to assess student performance in relation to other important skills needed for success in life. Graduation Portfolio Assessment emerged as a tool that reflects current assessment research (eg. Paul Black and Dylan Williams, among others) and adds value to other, more traditional assessment measures. The Portfolio is a unique celebration and recognition of student achievement – all achievements of all students.

Ministry staff have spoken to more than 2,200 educators around the province, hosted regional workshops and presented at conferences as they continue to work closely with schools and post-secondary institutions to build understanding of the Portfolio initiative.

### **The Situation Today**

The Ministry has set standards for six Portfolio Organizers which can be broadly interpreted to allow students choice and flexibility. Within these categories, students document evidence of their learning and reflect on their accomplishments in the context of planning for life after secondary school.

The Portfolio is beginning to transform secondary school culture, in particular the way we celebrate the diversity of learning, the way we collaborate as educators and the way we encourage our students to develop and document competencies that will lead to their success in life after secondary school.

Reaction to the Portfolio province-wide has been mixed. Many educators call it "the most powerful learning tool yet seen." They recognize the value of the Portfolio in demonstrating the skill sets and aptitudes that students will take into the world after graduation. Others see Portfolio implementation as challenging and burdensome. Still others agree with the concept but are not prepared or fear their students are not prepared to meet expectations for this year.

### **Implementation**

The Ministry supports schools and districts by developing resources and strategies such as the "Graduation Portfolio for Families" booklets and other publications, the Portfolio web site, web cast, Portfolio Innovation Awards, binder tabs, the graduation program ListServe, and others.

On March 23, the Minister announced that additional resources from the Ministry will support Portfolio implementation in the coming school year, including:

- A more comprehensive Portfolio website with more information and samples of student Portfolio evidence;
- A video from Rutland Senior Secondary that demonstrates the Portfolio process and benefits;

- A grant to BCCPAC to coordinate a series of parent workshops on the Graduation Portfolios;
- Funding and materials to school districts to help hold parent information nights;
- A Portfolio email response site and a toll free helpline where parents and students can contact the Ministry with their questions.

The Ministry sets standards for achievement, and districts implement those standards in ways that are appropriate for their learning communities. Because the Portfolio affords teachers and students maximum choice and flexibility, implementation supports vary greatly from district to district and even from school to school. Because schools vary greatly in size, configuration and philosophy, principals and superintendents exercise their professional judgment in determining implementation strategies that will work best to improve student achievement in their learning communities. What we do know is that students require support structures in their schools to help them complete their Portfolios.

There are a growing number of examples of schools successfully supporting their students with Portfolio development. At Rutland Senior Secondary, a school with about 1,450 students in Grades 10-12, students receive a sound introduction to Portfolio in Planning 10, are supported through pull-out sessions in Grade 11, and finish their Portfolios in a mandatory Career Transitions course in Grade 12 that includes Portfolio support for their presentations.

Lord Tweedsmuir Secondary in Surrey is a Grades 8-12 school with about 1,240 students, and its graduates go on to both the workplace and a variety of post-secondary institutions. After Portfolio support during their Planning 10 class, Grade 11 students are supported by a Portfolio coordinator who meets with students as required depending on their progress. The school tries to empower its students to complete their Portfolios in a self-directed manner. However, the school's expectation is that every student will complete a certain percentage of their Portfolio in each of Grades 10, 11, and 12.

J.V. Humphries in Kaslo is a small Elementary-Secondary School with about 185 students in Grades 8-12. About 50% of their graduates go directly into the workforce and about 50% attend a variety of post-secondary institutions. They have split Planning 10 into two parts which allows them to support students with the Portfolio learning outcomes over two years. The school also has a Portfolio support teacher who meets with individual students and/or small groups of students. In addition, once each month they have a Portfolio block where every student in Grades 10-12 spends one hour working on a Portfolio related activity. Finally, the school principal has provided a bank of release time that teachers can use to develop Portfolio activities for their subject areas.

At a recent provincial graduation program conference in the Kootenays, two Aboriginal students talked about the way the Portfolio helps them demonstrate their culture as part of who they are. The students noted that a teacher who is positive and introduces the Portfolio in a positive way influences the students to have a positive attitude toward it.

## **Moving Ahead**

The Portfolio is part of transformative change in our secondary schools, and it calls for exceptional leadership. The Portfolio is a significant change for students, teachers and schools. Change is never easy, and the quality of implementation for any new educational program improves dramatically in the first several years after start-up. This innovative assessment and learning tool adds to our worldwide credibility as a public education system.

Successful implementation requires continued support, dialogue, and the sharing of success stories. This is happening all over the province in various ways.

My hope is that our educational leaders focus on developing the kind of school culture in which a Portfolio thrives. As our school leaders, you are vital to the success of the Portfolio initiative. You are also the guiding force in educational reform. Let us make it happen in a way that maximizes the life choices of all students.