

December 15, 2006

The Learning in Action Showcase: Celebrating Innovation in BC Schools

Last Friday I had the pleasure of attending the Learning in Action Showcase and Gala Dinner that was held in conjunction with the BC School Trustees December Innovation Academy.



The Showcase was designed to celebrate our collective efforts in building a provincial culture of excellence in learning

and teaching that is focused on sharing best practices and improving achievement. The event featured the work of 51 school districts. Each district presented an innovative initiative under the themes of literacy, early learning, equitable futures, secondary learning or shared leadership. These themes were directly linked to our very successful Interactive Innovations Conference held in May 2006. Each district received an engraved crystal book to take back to their districts to acknowledge their work in developing an innovative practice, as well as for their active participation in this exciting event.

Over four hundred educators, trustees, parents and members of the community visited the Showcase at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Vancouver. The



conference ballroom was filled to capacity, and there was an incredible buzz of energy and enthusiasm in the room as teachers confidently talked about their displays.

I found it personally rewarding to engage in conversation with teachers from across the province about their initiatives and how these practices were making a difference in the lives of students.

As I periodically stood back and observed the showcase in action, I noticed that teachers assumed the leadership role

in sharing their district's innovative practice. It was highly evident that district staff and trustees were very proud of the contributions made by their teacher leaders to improving student success.



I also noticed that the teachers found creative ways to connect with teachers from other districts to garner

new ideas and share promising practices. Trustees and district staff talked with me about the number of new ideas that they planned to take back to their districts.



The creative potential and collective talents of our BC educators is truly unlimited when we learn and work together in the best interest of students. The Showcase proved to be a powerful way to help us further our commitment to build provincial capacity for excellence in education!

Highlights from the Showcase and Gala Dinner are currently available online at <http://www.creativespirit.bc.ca/learning/lia.wmv>.

Interactive Innovations continues...

The second Interactive Innovations Conference will take place on February 28, March 1 and 2, 2007. Again the conference themes will be presented in five sites, Vancouver, Victoria, Prince George, Kelowna and Nelson. All sites will host world class experts such as Richard Allington and Michael Fullan and will be connected via WebCast Technology. In addition, this year BC will broadcast out to a variety of sites that include a teachers' faculty at Samford University in Alabama as well as sites in Alberta and Ontario.

British Columbia educators can be proud of their work as we share our expertise with an ever widening audience and know that at the same time we are participating in an ever increasing global dialogue about learning for all.

Achievement Division

A great deal of interest has been expressed to me regarding the appointment of Jacquie Taylor, Bendina Miller and Rick Davis as Ministry Superintendents focusing on improving student achievement and learning. Over the past number of years, much attention has been placed on student learning and improving achievement by districts and schools resulting in significant gains. You have heard me express concerns recently about an apparent plateau in student achievement, but we must remember we do have a very high performing system, among the best in the world. Although we are doing very well, we must all have relentless commitment to making each individual student successful.

I have asked Jacquie, Bendina and Rick to focus on and go deeper into the issues affecting student achievement. They plan to bring a highly individual focus to the issue – which individual students are not achieving success and how can we work together to intervene to produce successful results for all students. The Superintendents will work as a team reporting to me. They will rely on the resources of a number of ministry departments to seek information and advice regarding student achievement, school districts and schools. Drawing on the successes of networks established around the province these superintendents will connect districts and schools to share proven strategies.

The work will be highly individualized to the context and culture of different schools districts. In some districts, one superintendent may work with a district, and in other the team may be involved in some capacity. The Superintendents, Achievement will be able to connect resources with school districts to assist in enhancing student learning.

One of the initial activities of the team will be to look at districts and schools to identify anomalies – rapidly improving, high performing and, yes, under performing schools and districts. This will provide the basis of a discussion among districts and ministry as the superintendents play the role of critical friend. We know that inquiry is very effective in pointing the way for improvement, and Jacquie, Bendina and Rick look forward to many conversations with you.

Jacquie and Bendina will begin this work in earnest in April as they transition from their district roles. Rick, too, is transitioning from his previous duties and doing some preliminary coordination of this division. You may want to anticipate ways that you can make use of the resource of this division and what advice and support you can provide.

Think about using this in your next newsletter to parents

Festive Eating and Physical Activity

Take this golden opportunity during the festive season to be a major influence on what your children think, do and eat. You have the power to ensure your children have a healthy balanced lifestyle by making sure you and your family always have a variety of healthy choices available to them throughout the holiday season.

- Keep nutritious food on hand so it's always available.
- Involve your kids in planning and preparing meals; kids are more likely to eat foods they've had a hand in choosing.
- For snacks, choose foods like fresh fruit, veggies, cheese and nuts that don't cling to teeth. Clingy foods like dried fruits, granola bars, crackers, cereal, tortillas, potato/corn/apple chips and some candies stick to teeth and can encourage tooth decay. These foods are better eaten when children can brush their teeth immediately after eating.
- Keep fruits and veggies on the counter or in the fridge at eye level. Make a low-fat yogurt dip – sweet or savoury – to make fruits and veggies even tastier.
- Be active yourself and demonstrate how easy and enjoyable it is. Give presents that encourage physical activity, like skipping ropes, balls, rackets, bats, bikes and sidewalk chalk for drawing playground games on the driveway at home.
- Use music as a motivator. Plug into your favourite festive songs to help motivate.