

June 29, 2007

These last weeks of June have found many of us focused on graduates. These are not only our Grade 12 students but those students making transitions, some from elementary schools to secondary schools, some from elementary schools to middle schools and some from Kindergarten to Grade 1. We are proud, like their parents, of what they have accomplished, and we wonder what the future holds in store for them. Advances in technology, transportation, life services, globalization of markets and communications will create new careers, new industries and new opportunities for them that we cannot imagine. They will be faced with new values and ways of thinking and will be presented opportunities not dreamed of today. So...did we prepare them for these new realities? Exciting thoughts – exciting challenges.

But we also need to focus on those students who did not cross the gym stages, wear the cap and gown or receive that magic door-opening diploma. What about those students who did not transition to the next challenge? What will they do? And what could we have done better or differently to extend their opportunities, their life chances? The mixed emotions arising at this time of year are an expected response from professional educators. We need to celebrate the successes, and we need to also challenge ourselves to find ways to help those who are not succeeding.

Within the Ministry, we have also spent some time over the last two weeks reflecting on challenges and successes over the past year as we begin plans for next school year. The changes to the agenda this school year have been extensive. Do you remember these?

- Consultations – Between the Premier and the Minister, each school district was visited this year. Minister Bond met with students, parents, school staffs and trustees in 56 districts – a remarkable accomplishment. The Learning Roundtable continued to meet to build better working relationships. A number of Congresses were held – student, parent, teacher – for the first time.
- Rural Strategy – Rural teachers, administrators and others, considered the unique needs of rural education. The first annual rural conference was held, and the rural network was established.
- Interactive Innovations II – A unique distributed conference engaged over 1,400 BC educators, produced ongoing learning materials and went inter-provincial.
- Learning in Action Showcase – Highlighted teachers' work showing the most innovative and successful practices in BC.
- The Virtual School was launched – and this school grew to 31,000 registrants in courses and touched thousands more in online tutoring.
- One Card – Public libraries stepped into the limelight by ensuring that every BC student has access to a public library.
- Literacy – Innovation grants and regional forums kept the focus as we work towards achieving the goal of being the "most literate and best educated" in North America.
- StrongStartBC – Early learning came to 27 schools soon to be in 80.
- Healthy Schools – Changes the way we think about nutrition, physical activity and health to improve the quality of life of all of our students.
- Key Concepts – A new curriculum document that focused us on what is most important in our world class curriculum was released.
- Social Justice 12 – A new elective course will be available as a pilot in September 2007.
- Enhancement Agreements – 35 signed and much productive dialogue in many communities hold promise of improved achievement for Aboriginal children.

- District Review – Revised and updated to fit better with our commitment to build capacity to improve student achievement.
- Student Centered Leadership – Five districts experiment with processes that move decisions closer to the action at the school level – Five more embark on this initiative.
- Student Transitions – Increased industry training opportunities and secondary school apprenticeship placements.
- New Legislation to be implemented next year.
  - » Superintendents of Achievement – monitor improvement and build capacity.
  - » Boards of Education – expanded mandate in early learning and district literacy.
  - » Achievement Contracts – bring sharper focus to student achievement.
  - » Employment and Teacher discipline registries to support quality teachers and administrators.
  - » Codes of Conduct required in all schools.

The list goes on, but I am out of breath. This has been a busy year for us in Victoria. But, I know that the legislation, policy, curriculum or program changes made at the Ministry or district level do not necessarily result in school or classroom changes. In today's society we can change many things by remote control. Just push the button and the channel changes, the music plays or the lights dim. But we cannot change attitudes, behaviours or actions by remote control. Too often we feel if we change a piece of legislation that this will automatically result in changes in the classroom. But in those "remote" level changes we often forget about the reality that you must deal with on a day-by-day basis. We forget about the hungry child, the angry parent in your office or the accident on the playground. The day-to-day, indeed hour-to-hour emergencies often must take precedence over the mandated program and policy changes.

I want to acknowledge these realities that you face and hope that in the coming year we can focus on ways to work with you, on strategies to keep "the main thing, the main thing".

Fullan describes capacity building as actions or strategies that enhance collective efficacy of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning for all students. I think of capacity building as "opportunities and professional responsibilities". Our job as leaders is to create opportunities for learning, for development. It is the professional responsibility of all of us as educators to take advantage of these opportunities to further develop and refine our skills and learning.

As a Ministry we will be focusing on how we can create more opportunities for you and your professional staff to collaborate, plan, and learn together. We will be offering several conferences, forums and planning/collaborations sessions and opportunities for you to better understand the changed policies and legislation. We will try to focus these opportunities on how you can keep student achievement as job #1, as you fulfill your responsibilities to implement the other required changes. The BC learning community is powerful and growing stronger – we are committed to fostering that continued growth for the purpose of building capacity among all of us.

Eliminating junk food, eliminating bullying and racism are all great strategies to put in place, but the real challenge is how do we increase the opportunities for every child to be successful - for every child to walk across the stage and receive the magic door opener, the Dogwood Graduate Certificate.

Take time this summer to enjoy family and fun times. Be safe. I look forward to working with you on these challenges in the next school year.



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