

March 27, 2007

More legislation today – Day 2 of Education week. Amendments to the *School Act*, the *Independent School Act* and the *Teaching Profession Act* were introduced today that will improve the safety of children in our schools. Unfortunately, we have had several high profile teacher misconduct cases occupy many column inches of newspaper space over the past few years. These cases are rare when you think about the vast number of very ethical and caring teachers in our province. All of us in this profession find misconduct that harms children intolerable.

These cases have made it clear that current practices for dealing with misconduct through the British Columbia College of Teachers (BCCT) can be improved. The amendments today have been under consideration for some period of time and been the focus of discussion among the Education Partners. Today, government has brought forward amendments designed to better protect the welfare of our students.

Amendments are made to the *School Act*. Bill 21, the *Teaching Profession (Teacher Registration) Amendment Act*, clarifies what must be reported to the BCCT. All serious forms of misconduct must be reported. Whenever a college member holding a certificate or letter of permission is suspended or dismissed, the circumstances must be reported by the superintendent to the BCCT. Whenever a person holding a certificate or letter of permission is disciplined for misconduct that involves physical harm, sexual abuse or exploitation or significant emotional harm to a student or minor, the superintendent must report the circumstances to the BCCT. In addition, the superintendent is required to report to the BCCT when a person holding a certificate or letter of permission violates the BCCT's standards of competence or conduct. Reports must also be made if a member resigns and the superintendent believes that it is in the public interest to make a report to the BCCT.

Reports must be followed up immediately with provision of all relevant documents. Superintendents who fail to meet this obligation are considered to have committed an offence.

Amendments are also made to the *Teaching Profession Act*. New requirements are made of the BCCT with respect to reporting certificate holders to the public who are disciplined by the BCCT for misconduct. All certificate holders will be listed on a registry that includes their name and status of certificate. In addition, information will be included for persons disciplined for causing physical harm, sexual abuse or exploitation or significant emotional harm or who have had their certificate cancelled or suspended or who have been disciplined for conduct or competence that breached the BCCT standards of professional conduct or competence. Names of persons who are disciplined for misconduct will be withheld only in very limited circumstances where the publication of their identity would have serious impact on a victim. Discipline records other than a record of suspension or cancellation of a person's certificate can be removed only after five years if it is shown to be in the public interest to do so. This registry will be accessible to all members of the public. Unlike the current registry, this new registry will have more information and will be "evergreen".

Amendments are proposed creating an employment registry to reduce the risk that a person holding a certificate does not disclose a complete employment history. There have been two recent examples of situations where a board would not have hired a teacher if they had known all previous employers and been able to do complete reference checks. The Bill will require school districts to report to the BCCT all certificate holders employed and will require the BCCT to maintain an employment registry that is accessible to prospective employers only.

Bill 21 seeks to repeal parts of the *Teaching Profession Act* that prevented the BCCT from pursuing an investigation while any grievance regarding the conduct at question was unresolved. This had the effect of delaying investigations and taking action with some examples of egregious conduct for several months and years. The BCCT will now be enabled to act in a timely manner to provide for the protection of children.

Parallel changes have been made to legislation governing teachers in independent schools so that all BC students are safer at school. Bill 21 is available at website http://www.leg.bc.ca/38th3rd/1st_read/gov21-1.htm.

Safe children are one of our first considerations. Successful children achieving their potential is another. Here are two Education Week stories from Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows school district shared by Superintendent John Simpson.

Mount Crescent Elementary School

Staff of Mount Crescent (an elementary school with many vulnerable children) strongly believe that ‘our kids can learn just like any kid can’. Their journey began approximately six years ago as they looked more closely at student writing. They collected samples of student work and, using the writing performance standards, worked in cohort groups to determine the important areas on which to focus. As part of their school improvement plan, decisions were made about teaching strategies, areas to emphasize, how they would work with students to self-evaluate their work and ways the staff works together to develop their knowledge and expertise.

During the subsequent school years the staff would frequently regroup and use the performance standards to track how well their students were doing. They saw significant gains in “personal, impromptu writing” and “writing to communicate ideas and information” with

many students moving from “not yet meeting” to “meeting expectations”. Students talked about how proud they were of their improvement and relished the opportunity to share it with their parents. An exciting part of their journey has been maintaining the focus and the level of achievement.

As this school continues its journey to improve student achievement, they are now shifting their primary focus to reading. The staff is actively involved in using authentic practices to collect information on student reading. Modeling their processes from what they learned by working on student writing, the staff uses the DART in the fall and marks in cohort groups and then determines areas of focus with students. The conversations in their learning community are rich as they pursue further ways to engage students in their learning and to prove that where you are on ‘vulnerability indexes’ doesn’t mean you aren’t a learner.

Westview Secondary School

Steve Wiebe, a secondary support teacher at Westview, continually questioned how to better connect with students, to excite them about learning and to hang on to them so they could be part of learning. Steve initiated an outdoor component to his program aligned with the Duke of Edinburgh awards, because he saw that physical fitness was a way to help these students feel good about themselves, to take risks, to try harder, and to believe that they could succeed.

Not satisfied with just that component because he saw that many of his students needed further ‘hands-on’ learning, he sought out and established a ‘trowel trades’ option for his students. He worked with the various trades to arrange for the training, talked the school district into accessing an older facility that could be used by the students to give them a space to learn and connected with other schools about the availability of the option.

The program has now grown beyond the school. It has become another choice and an option for all secondary students. An exciting component of this support is that Steve is meeting his goal of keeping students in school and exciting them about their learning. A number of students who are in the program are on track to graduate and become contributing members of the community.

This is an example of an elementary school and its teachers providing for student success – successful students are more likely to stay in school when equipped to learn and achieve. And an example of a secondary school and a teacher making a difference to relevance and choice – keeping students in school to ensure graduation. There are hundreds of stories like these around our province. When we can produce stories like this coming from every classroom and every school, we will see success for all students and further improvement in our learning results.



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