

May 4, 2007

This has been quite a week as Bills 20, 21 and 22, which were introduced for First Reading during Education Week, advanced through the House. On Monday, Minister Bond and Ministry staff met in Richmond with Board Chairs and Superintendents to describe and discuss the Legislation. The Minister was unable to attend in person but opened the proceedings with an address via webcast.

The meeting focused on some of the highlights of the Bills. I am confident your Chairperson and Superintendent will bring the details to you. Some of the major discussion included these items.

- Overview of the Legislation – Sherri Mohoruk, Superintendent, Liaison, provided an overview of the legislation in its totality. Many present at the meeting had heard parts of this information previously, but this consolidated view was helpful to set the stage for the rest of the discussions. The presentation, in a Power Point format, will be posted on the Principals' and Superintendents' eBoards shortly.
- Student appeals under Section 11 of the *School Act* – Rick Davis, Superintendent of Achievement, reminded the meeting of the provisions of Section 11 and advised that school districts should review their approaches to implementing Section 11. He discussed the principles of natural justice that apply to these appeals and pointed out some common pitfalls. It was noted that the scope of review of the decisions of Section 11 appeals is yet to be defined by regulation and that consultation with regard to scope has been promised by the Minister.
- Achievement Contracts – Marion Turner, Superintendent of Achievement, outlined the Ministry's thinking around the form and content of achievement contracts. The meeting heard that the achievement contracts are planned to be quite similar to accountability contracts, and the changes are evolutionary as we refine this work. The expectation remains that there will be coherence between school improvement plans and district achievement contracts.
- District Literacy Plans – Paige MacFarlane, Assistant Deputy Minister, and Jacquie Taylor, Superintendent of Achievement, clarified what the Ministry anticipates will constitute district literacy plans. With the expanded mandate of the "Boards of Education", district literacy plans should include elements for all ages. It was emphasized that these plans require strong community involvement and development behind them and that many community agencies and other ministries of government already have great literacy programs embedded in communities. School districts were cautioned about "taking over" and advised that collaboration and coordination were key words that should be reflected in district plans that outline activities for youngsters 0-4, students K-12, and adults. Of course school districts remain the main service providers in K-12 and in StrongStart programs for pre-school children.
- Paige MacFarlane, ADM, also took the opportunity at this gathering to talk about initiatives in developing Healthy Schools throughout the province. Information was presented on healthy food guidelines, Action Schools and crystal meth and tobacco strategies.
- Scott MacDonald, Executive Director, described some of the challenges we face with regard to the health of young persons. He presented information aimed at providing for daily activity. The requirements of other jurisdictions were outlined.

These presentations were interspersed with periods of table discussion among Board Chairs and Superintendents. A substantial list of questions of clarification was generated regarding the topics of the presentation. Some could be answered at the meeting directly. The remainder are being compiled by Ministry staff and the responses will be provided later.

This is the first time that I can remember of a meeting of this nature occurring. The discussions were open and frank. Clearly there were differences of opinion, but everyone in the room agreed on one thing – the student must remain the center of all discussions.

The remainder of the week was spent in the Legislature or close by as Bills 20, 21 and 22 went through Second Reading and Committee stages where they are debated. While all of this is going on in Victoria, it is heartening to know that over 600,000 students are being treated to a high quality education in British Columbia. The provisions of this new legislation will allow us to focus with even greater intensity on improving student achievement. As we work at all levels of the public education system together as a learning community, we will bring the achievement agenda to the individual student to improve the life chances of each child in BC, one at a time.

FSA

I received a number of replies to last week's Education Report which focused on the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) program. All the responses expressed support for the FSA as a useful snapshot providing data useful in planning for school improvement and relevant information about individual student achievement. However, principals responding expressed frustration with the reports produced by the Fraser Institute and the impact these reports have on schools which may be working very hard to improve student achievement. They asked, "Why does the Ministry give this data to the Fraser Institute when they misuse it?"

First, I agree with the concern regarding the use of the data in tables that rank schools by FSA score. I have said that the use of one year's data for a class or school or even a school district can be very misleading because of group variability. I know that educators across Canada agree that at least a three year data trend should be considered when looking for patterns - a longer term with smaller samples may be required. In my view, the average score of a school on FSA does not tell me much about the school. I am interested in what that average

score is doing over time. It is nice to have a school that gets high scores, but it is more important to be in a school that demonstrates continuous improvement over a long period of time. When all our schools are improving schools, our achievement results provincially will show improvement as well.

So why do we provide the Fraser Institute our data if we do not agree with how they use it? In a democratic system, citizens have the right to be informed. Governments have the duty to make information public so that citizens can make choices about policies and governments. Access to information is governed by Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy legislation. This legislation tells us what must be made available in the public interest and what can be withheld in the interest of the privacy of an individual. Group results are public information except when samples are small and the results are masked. Individual results are private information. Just as public accounts, salaries of administrators, mortality rates at hospitals and many more examples are public information, so are FSA results. The Fraser Institute or anyone else can decide how to use these results.

What can you do within this policy framework? **Tell your own school's story.** You have the FSA results long before the Fraser Institute gets the provincial results. What do the results tell you? Are you a low performing but improving school? That's a good story. What do you have to add to the story? Is your implementation of the DART assessment program contributing to improved literacy in your school? What are you noticing about the progress of students through your levelled reading program? Why did your stage band get asked to perform at the Winter Carnival opening? How did your theatre program do at the regional drama festival? Tell your story, because if you do not, the Fraser Institute will be the only story around about your school.



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