

October 19, 2007

Superintendents of Achievement District Visits Continued...

The visits to school districts around the province continue, and by the end of November each school district will have had a meeting with one of the Superintendents of Achievement. The purpose is to discuss matters related to district context, the achievement contract, the district literacy plan, other matters related to student achievement, and issues districts want to include in the conversation.

The Superintendents of Achievement have been impressed by the welcome and willingness of each superintendent and staff members to meet with them to discuss important issues around student achievement. The thoughtfulness and authentic inquiry have contributed greatly to conversations that provoke deeper thinking. In each district, staff have been very proud, and rightfully so, of the dedicated work being done in schools and classrooms across the district. Superintendents and their district staff are knowledgeable about programs in schools to support each learner and engage with their colleagues in the quest for increased success for struggling students.

The shift in the provincial conversation to a focus on success for each individual student has become evident. Each conversation now references how the district is working to improve results for the students they are "worried about".

One example is the school based teams that meet in each school in a district in the fall. The team reviews the progress of each student in the school to plan programs and ensure needs are being addressed.

In several districts people have talked about the variety of ways that they are monitoring students at risk of leaving the system. Students do not just disappear off the radar. Someone reaches out to them to help them find a placement that will meet their educational needs.

One aspect of capacity building is the dialogue in several districts on target setting for growth plans. Questions for consideration include "What target makes sense for each cohort group under consideration?" and "What is happening to achieve targeted results?"

Other aspects of the meeting include an opportunity for district staff to ask questions related to Ministry of Education initiatives thus helping to improve communication in the field.

Around the province there appears to be a pervasive sense of determination to increase the number of secondary students who are successful. We are encouraged and optimistic about the positive benefits for our students that this signals. A question for all of us to ponder further is, "What indicators will demonstrate improvement in the short term as we work toward increased student completion across the province?"

Rural Schools Conference

Pat Pearce, Superintendent of School District No. 74 (Gold Trail), has the additional responsibility of coordinating the Ministry's rural education strategy. Following is Pat's report of the Rural Conference held in Richmond last week.

Rural schools are on the cutting edge of educational practice and are creating ways of providing educational equity and quality for all rural students. Over 300 educators from around the province participated in a 2-day conference on October 11 and 12 which focused on issues pertinent to rural schools. Educators, parents and trustees were present from all across BC: from Nisga'a to Port Hardy and from the Queen Charlottes to Kimberley. Participants learned from master teachers and networked with each other to gain effective practices to address rural issues. The conference was also webcast into School District No. 54 (Bulkley Valley). For those of you who missed the conference, archived sessions will be on the LearnNow BC site in a week or so.

On October 10, pre-conference sessions were held for both technical training and new teacher training. Thirty-eight participants attended the technical "train the trainer" session which was a huge success. Participants became proficient at using Elluminate Live and understood the practical uses of it.

Thirty-five new rural teachers were provided with focused learning sessions. The new teachers have formed teams of 6 with a master teacher mentor/coach to help them develop understandings on 3 main themes. The feedback indicated that they feel supported and not alone as they meet the challenges in their classrooms.

Samantha from Gitwinksihkw Elementary School comments, *"It is important to me that you know that the rural schools conference, this year and last, has really changed my perception of my work and the work of other rural educators. I used to attend conferences in urban centres believing that the experts who could teach me about the cutting edge teaching practices were all from urban areas. After attending this conference, I now know that we also have powerful practices to share."*

Minister Shirley Bond gave an inspirational address and highlighted how technology is opening doors of equity for rural students. The Minister demonstrated how a teacher from Lumby can simultaneously teach students in multiple schools which are hundreds of kilometres away, via the use of webcasting and other technology.

Linda Kaser, Faye Brownlie and Leyton Schnellert inspired educators in talking about how small schools can have a BIG impact on student learning, how people can work together to help students with special needs and how to teach and learn in diverse and multi-grade classrooms. Practical suggestions were given to educators to take back to their schools to implement. Along with the keynote speakers, master teachers provided professional learning sessions on topics such as: "Successful Strategies for Engaging Aboriginal Learners and Their Families"; "The Power of E-learning"; "Creating Communities" and "Working Together to Support Learning Communities".

As some of our colleagues stated:

"Last year, Faye Brownlie's plenary taught me to cherish the opportunities unique to a multi-grade classroom, rather than dread their challenges; this year, I am just as inspired by the super-star teachers that have shared the dramatic change they've affected through their practices."

The enthusiasm, expertise and passion of teachers like Bev Ferner, Janis Bruce, Jutte Hobenshield, Alison Campbell, and Nancy Reid are equal to the calibre of any of the more well-known 'experts'."

"I feel like I learn more from my rural peers because they have a much closer understanding of the setting, class make-up and community politics that I live and work with. When I bring their strategies to my classroom, they are more immediately effective and deliver greater impact to the change I strive to make."

With the expertise of our rural educators, technology and our ability to work together, our rural schools are breaking new ground in providing quality education for rural students.

We are pleased to inform you that next year's conference has been confirmed to take place on October 15 and 16 at the Sheraton Wall Center in Vancouver. Plan to attend.



Emery Dossdall, Ed D
Deputy Minister of Education