BRITISH COLUMBIA
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Report on Education
from the Deputy Minister of Education

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What are some possible futures for delivering quality educational programs?

We live in exciting times – and I'm not just talking about the start of the NHL season. Technological developments have put new tools in the hands of teachers to make quality instruction broadly accessible. I have been musing about some of the potential developments that will affect our province in the years ahead. Later this month, a rural conference will be held in part to create some discussion and awareness around the potential for doing things differently. Many of these potential changes hold great promise in rural and urban British Columbia alike. Let me describe some of the musings.

Have you thought about the potential for virtual classrooms? What do you do in a small secondary school in our province when you do not really have enough students electing to enrol in French 12 to offer the program? Or, what do you do when you do not have a teacher with the subject expertise to teach Principles of Mathematics 12 and you have several students who wish to take that course? We have had great success developing webcasting use in the province and applied it mainly to professional learning for teachers and leaders. Many schools and school districts now have sufficient conductivity to accommodate webcasting on an ongoing basis

Many schools have software called Illuminate (or something like it) that accommodates web-based real time conversations and meetings. These tools open the door to the virtual classroom. A French teacher in Golden can teach French 12 to students assembled in high schools in Kimberley, Ivermere and Revelstoke. Staff in the satellite schools do not need to be experts in the subject area but do need to help facilitate the learning of French 12 students in their schools. At minimal expense for hardware, software and staff training, we can achieve enhanced accessibility for students and better utilization of specialist teachers.

We have also been talking about the "hybrid classroom" – a combination of the usual bricks-and-mortar classroom enhanced with web-based learning opportunities and resources. "Learning objects" that directly support the provincial learning outcomes were produced initially for use in the online learning environment but they have great potential for use in conventional classrooms. "Learning objects" address particular topics in provincial courses. Think of an acid base titration in Chemistry 12. Click on this website to experience a learning object available to you. Try the animated titration.

http://www.coolschool.ca/lor/CH12/unit4/U04L15.htm

Now, think of how that tool might be used - used by a teacher who is teaching Chemistry 12 for the first time and is unfamiliar with the course or the content. This could be used by a student who was absent on the day the class did the "wet" lab. It could be used for review by a class. This resource – and many more for many different courses – are available on the BCEDOnline website http://bcedonline.com/2006/node/47 by clicking on Coolschool. Many other resources for the "hybrid classroom" are available on this site.

Many districts are continuing to develop instruction in the online environment to provide additional choices and options to students. I will be writing about the online world in more detail later. Typically we think of online courses for students who do not attend conventional schools. More and more frequently, we find that students who are also enrolled in schools are accessing online learning opportunities. We found as well that many students made use of online tutoring services that were made available in some provincially examinable subjects last year. Over 16,000 students took advantage of online tutoring in Science 10 and Principles of Math 10 and 12.

As you muse about these new opportunities for students, consider your role in making them available in your school. What promise does technology offer your students? How will you allow your student to take advantage of these opportunities?

BCeSIS Update for Principals

October 2006

All BC school districts are partnering with each other and the Ministry of Education on a common systems initiative that is helping improve how schools manage student information. The common system is known as the British Columbia enterprise Student Information System, or BCeSIS.

BCeSIS is the customized web-based software application that provides schools and districts with the ability to use a common system to manage the operation of schools. The application provides school and district users with access to a central student registry and permanent student records.

When fully implemented, the system will reduce the administrative burdens on schools, enable flexibility and choice by better tracking students who take courses in multiple schools, and create an integrated network to manage student achievement and the movement of student records between schools.

The system recently completed its first full year in production, and has experienced a huge amount of growth and change. BCeSIS now contains records for 225,000 students in 646 schools in the system, and during busy periods, has experienced more than 3,500 users online at the same time. This surge in demand has resulted in some significant performance issues with the system this fall, which have now been substantially addressed, however work is underway to ensure that system performance is increased to meet usage growth.

It's important to note that an undertaking such as the common system for BC schools and districts is complex, unprecedented and leading edge. A project of this scope is bound to have some challenges as it grows, and BC school districts have shown true leadership and innovation in their unique approach to managing student information, and have worked in partnership to resolve issues that have arisen during implementation.

When fully implemented, BCeSIS will provide long term benefits for our schools and local administrators and educators. BCeSIS will help provide:

- better management of student performance information
- data-driven decision making
- further sharing and collaboration
- sector-wide data standards and quality control
- improved protection of private personal information
- reduced information sharing burden on schools