

September 28, 2007

StrongStart BC Early Learning Centres

We're off to a strong start this school year with the opening of more StrongStart BC Early Learning Centres across the province. Twenty-seven centres opened in 2006/07. This fall, an additional 59 will be opening. This will mean at least one centre in almost every district of the province. This is great news for BC children and their families.

Reports are already coming in about the positive impact these programs are having on children. For example, a Kindergarten teacher from Ucluelet Elementary reports she can easily tell which children attended the StrongStart BC Centre and that their transition to Kindergarten was very successful. Parents have indicated that attending the centres with their children has had a positive impact on their families and how they support their children's learning.

What is a Strong Start Early Learning Centre?

StrongStart BC Early Learning Centres are free early learning programs for children birth to Kindergarten entry accompanied by their parents or caregivers. Centres are operated by licensed early childhood educators. Adults attending this play-based program with young children learn how to support their children's early learning. The programs are designed to address all developmental domains: cognitive, language, social-emotional, and physical.

StrongStart BC Early Learning Centres are located in elementary schools using vacant space, which turns the challenge of declining enrolment into an opportunity. The centres are open five days a week for at least three hours a day.

Provincial StrongStart BC Centre Meeting

On September 24th, staff from districts piloting last year met in Vancouver to learn about the findings of the first stage of the program evaluation---which were very promising.

The next day, 150 school district staff and StrongStart BC facilitators from 59 school districts gathered for the first ever Provincial StrongStart BC meeting entitled "Creating Success and Making Connections". The meeting was sponsored by the Ministry in partnership with UBC Human Early Learning Partnership. Rich sharing took place among the pilot centres and new ones just opening this fall. The meeting was a kick-off for a Provincial Early Learning Network.

New StrongStart BC Resource

The Ministry has produced a DVD that explains the StrongStart BC early learning initiative. StrongStart BC Early Learning Centre facilitators and other district staff who attended the September 25th meeting each received a copy to take back to their districts.

This is an excellent resource for school districts. Additional copies will be made available in the weeks to come.

Rural Education Takes Center Stage

October 11th and 12th will mark the second annual Rural Schools Renewal Conference. This year's conference theme is: *It Takes a Village: One Learner at a Time!*

Once again, the conference is learner-focused, designed to meet the learning needs of educators who work in BC's rural communities and schools, and those parents and community members who support their efforts. The conference will focus on the unique needs and successes of rural learners. The keynote speaker is Linda Kaser, and plenary sessions are presented by Faye Brownlie and Leyton Schneller.

There will be a pre-conference session for new rural teachers. The session will focus on developing the technology skills of new teachers in rural areas. It is a hands-on workshop that will familiarize the participants with technology tools that will enhance instruction and professional development opportunities. This training session will focus on Elluminate Live software, LearnNow BC resources and a sharing of technology best practice.

This conference is helping rural educators move their focus from teaching to learning in order to create sustained improvement in student achievement. A few conference spaces are still available. Registration can be done online at http://www.learnnowbc.gov.bc.ca/educators/Rural_Education/Conferences.aspx.

CMEC and VANOC Launch

On September 24th and 25th, we hosted the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) and the Advisory Committee of Deputy Ministers of Education (ACDME), together with their advisors, in Victoria. This meeting marked the 40th Anniversary of CMEC. Literacy, for which BC has the lead, was a major part of the agenda. At a press conference following the meeting, Minister Bond announced a major Pan-Canadian Forum on Literacy to be held next spring. The forum will be hosted simultaneously in a number of locations coast to coast to coast, linking thirteen jurisdictions in a virtual, real time, meeting space. This is the first event of this kind in Canada, and BC is leading this national initiative.

On September 25th, VANOC launched its education portal, /EDU, at the CMEC meeting site. Ministers from all jurisdictions were invited. /EDU links students, teachers and schools across Canada to Vancouver 2010 and to each other. Each province and territory will be contributing content to this bilingual, e-zine and portal located at <http://vancouver2010.com/en/edu>

Have a look!



Emery Dosdall, Ed D
Deputy Minister of Education