

November 23, 2007

The Superintendents of Achievement have been travelling the province since the beginning of September meeting with leadership teams in Board Offices around BC. As you know, Rick Davis and Marion Turner are filling these roles soon to be joined by Rod Allen as he leaves his position as Superintendent in School District No. 54 (Bulkley Valley). Jacquie Taylor, who was working with the Achievement Division, has taken on new responsibilities as the Superintendent, Literacy and Life-long Learning.

While the Superintendents of Achievement have barely had their feet touch the ground, they have found time to brief me on their findings so far – some very promising reports result. First, they report system wide acceptance of a commitment to improving student achievement and improving the life chances of each and every student. Our focus on the individual learner and differentiating instruction to provide for success of each student has really captured the interest of teachers, principals, superintendents and trustees – now to convert that interest into action and results.

The SOAs report great success in some districts with improving individual student achievement. Bill Reid, Superintendent, and Pat Dooley, Director of Achievement, in School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake), achieved some impressive results in their vulnerable students project. Teachers and Principals identified 167 students not yet meeting expectations. They intervened in a variety of ways and by the end of the project, 154 of these students were meeting or exceeding expectations!

But how many of you reading this article know about this particular achievement project or this result? The Superintendents of Achievement hope to “shine a light” on this sort of success story so that it can have impact on other districts. However, we know that not every

initiative is transferable as the context of districts varies substantially. But with appropriate adaptation, the ideas out of this initiative hold promise for all of us.

And what about School District No. 40 (New Westminster) - check out that district’s improvement in reading results over the past few years. SMART reading championed by Susan Close, soon to retire Assistant Superintendent, is credited with making this difference. SMART is central to the improvement, but it has been implemented within a district culture that believes that every child can succeed. The district focuses on developing knowledgeable SMART teachers through staff and professional learning activities, student teacher placements and hiring practices to provide a consistent approach to improving achievement. This is an important lesson for us – it is not just the program but also the context, consistency of practice and commitment around it.

Partnerships in learning are important. School District No. 50 (Haida Gwaii/Queen Charlotte) and School District No. 19 (Revelstoke) are working and learning together to see how an individual student data base developed in Revelstoke might be helpful in the Queen Charlottes. This partnership may inform the Revelstoke practice while assisting Haida Gwaii with a manageable system within that district.

The SOAs also identified some capacity challenges facing school districts. There are many sources of these challenges. Strategic intervention unique to the needs will be required to allow school districts to move ahead.

This is not a time to panic about our challenges. The SOAs have confirmed that many students, classrooms, schools and districts prosper. They have seen the innovative and purposeful attention given to improving

student achievement. Fullan and Hargreaves said, “Hope makes a difference when it represents the capacity not to panic in difficult situations, the belief that all is not lost, that problems can be solved and that one’s own actions and interventions can have an important effect.” We have much to be hopeful about as borne out by the findings of the Superintendents of Achievement in their first tour of duty.

You-Tube

When Orson Wells produced “War of the Worlds” or George Orwell wrote 1984, do you think they could have imagined the connected world in which we live – the web, e-mail, Facebook and You-Tube? This truly is a “Brave New World” – but it is not all good. This past week we read media reports of a young student bullied, photographed and broadcast on You-Tube to be humiliated and viewed by many others.

As adults, we need to understand our new world of values and ethics around these technological tools and teach our children to live with these tools without abusing their use. It is only a matter of time until a teacher, principal or other educator is subject to abuse or bullied on You-Tube. This has been the case in an eastern province. We need to ask ourselves – what do we want to teach our children about these tools and their use so that they are not used in a hurtful and damaging manner as in this recent bullying example?

Revitalizing e-boards

Given the Ministry’s array of program areas, we want to ensure that we are communicating effectively with all of our education partners. Getting the right information to the right people in a timely, user-friendly manner is an ongoing necessity. Therefore I’m pleased to announce that we’re in the process of revitalizing the Ministry’s e-boards, making them more effective and more efficient.

The Ministry operates two distinct sets of e-boards: Independent Schools and Public Schools. The Independent School e-board predominantly serves authorities and school principals. There are three e-boards serving Public School users: (i) Superintendents, (ii) Principals and Vice-Principals and (iii) Secretary-Treasurers.

The Ministry will soon be announcing a series of changes that will make e-boards much more user-friendly.

In the meantime, I would like to draw your attention to a change we’ve already implemented. Since the start of this school year, e-board messages are now being posted on-demand. New messages can appear on any day of the week, and I would encourage you to review the e-boards frequently.

Access to e-boards is password protected, and I would like to clarify the process for the distribution of passwords to superintendents, principals, vice-principals, or secretary-treasurers who have either been newly hired or who have lost their password. Please email EDUC.DMSUPERS@gov.bc.ca to request that a new password be sent to you.

School authorities or independent school principals and vice-principals who need a new password should email EDUC.independentSchoolsOffice@gov.bc.ca.

In the coming months you will see other changes that increase usability. I look forward to providing you with more details as these changes roll out.

Learning in Action Showcase

The Ministry of Education, BC School Superintendents Association and BC School Trustees Association together invite all members of the education community, including superintendents, school trustees, teachers,

parents and other interested individuals to attend the Learning in Action Showcase on Friday, December 7, 2007 from 3:30 - 5:30pm at the Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre.

The Learning in Action Showcase provides an opportunity to recognise and celebrate the creative ways school districts are enhancing student learning, and supports the Ministry's goal to increase student achievement by providing a venue for educators to share solutions and opportunities on a number of key topics.

All school districts have been invited to send a two-person team to the Showcase to share their district's innovative learning practices with BC's education community. Participants have been asked to create presentations around innovative practices based on one or more of the themes explored during the 2007 Interactive Innovations Conference:

Leadership: Building Capacity;

- Literacy: Reading Across the Curriculum;
- The First 10 Years: Windows of Opportunity;
- Middle Years to Secondary: What is Really Important; and,
- Equitable Futures: Engaging all Learners.

All members of the community are invited to visit the showcase to learn more about exciting education initiatives in BC schools. For more information on the Learning in Action Showcase, go to <http://www.learninginactionshowcase.ca/>.



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