

A word cloud of various terms related to graduation requirements, arranged in a circular pattern. The words include: creative, communication, learning, critical, reflect, responsibility, exploration, awards, knowledge, innovation, portfolios, literacies, opportunities, competencies, personalize, community, thinking, core, and flexible. The words are in various colors (brown, green, blue, yellow) and orientations (horizontal, vertical, diagonal).

creative
communication
learning
critical
reflect
responsibility
exploration
awards
knowledge
innovation
portfolios
literacies
opportunities
competencies
personalize
community
thinking
core
flexible

Graduation Requirements Dialogue

Metro Region

Facilitator: Lynn Archer

Surrey, Delta, Richmond, Vancouver, New
Westminster, Burnaby, Coquitlam, North
Vancouver, West Vancouver, Sunshine Coast,
and Sea to Sky

The pathway to our future

Introduction

The Metro Region's dialogue sessions took place in eleven districts: Surrey #36, Delta #37, Richmond #38, Vancouver #39, New Westminster #40, Burnaby #41, Coquitlam #43, North Vancouver #44, West Vancouver #45, Sunshine Coast #46, and Sea to Sky #48. Each district hosted its own community dialogue session with facilitator Lynn Archer that included participants from the following partner groups: students, teachers, parents, administrators, and community partners ranging from colleges and university representatives, independent school representatives, members of the Aboriginal community and Francophone community, RCMP, social services, health services, business groups such as Boards of Trade and Chambers of Commerce, Board of Education trustees, City mayors and councillors, provincial MLAs and federal MPs.

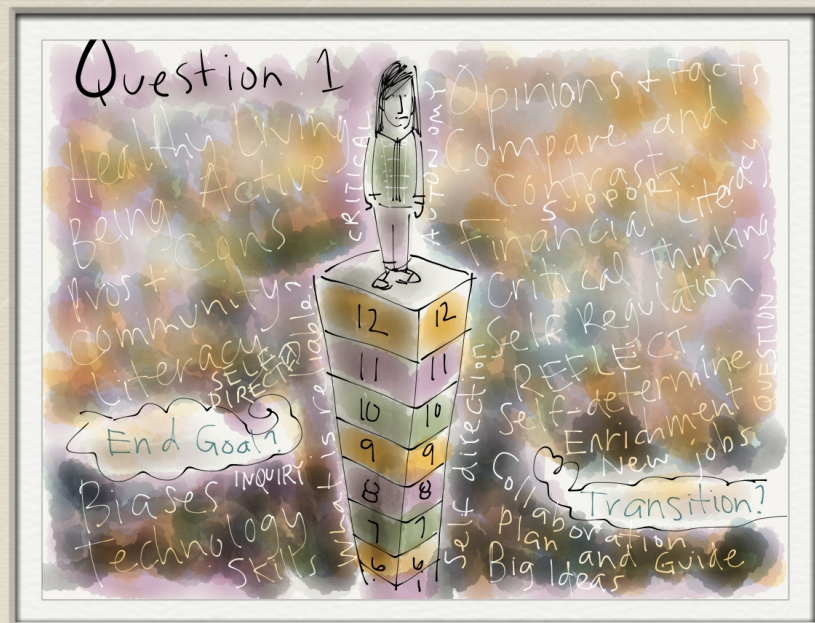
The sessions were facilitated table conversations that typically included participants from the various partner groups to ensure a rich dialogue about what people would like to see in a new Graduation Years Program. In all of the sessions, the dialogue from the various tables was entered into Thought Stream to help facilitate the collection, organization and analysis of the participants' ideas.

In some districts separate sessions were also held for specific groups such as Students, Teachers, Administrators, and Community members. The Graduation Requirements Dialogue sessions began in the Metro Region in late August and ended in late November. Approximately 1,250 people participated in the Metro Region's dialogue sessions.

Themes

The overarching themes that emerged in the Metro Region may be summarized as follows:

- Competency based learning threaded throughout all types of learning experiences;
- Flexible learning experiences within and without school settings;
- Clear criteria and performance standards for ongoing learning and culminating presentations of learning;
- More opportunities for students, parents and teachers to communicate about learning; and
- An awards/scholarship system that reflects diversified learning experiences.



What do you think are the core or essential things all students should know, understand and be able to do by the time they leave secondary school?

There were approximately 2,400 responses to question one that may be summarized into the following categories.

- Competency based learning (1298 responses)
 - o Communication
 - o Thinking: critical, creative, and reflective
 - o Personal and social responsibility: collaboration, citizenship/volunteerism, Canadian culture, and environmental stewardship, practical life skills, and healthy living
- Literacy – multiple types (265 responses)
- Discipline knowledge (269 responses)
- Career and work experiences (92 responses)

Competency based learning

Communication

Participants were clear that they wanted students to have a strong level of competency. These competencies or skills were connected both to content/discipline learning and being a contributing citizen who will be a self-motivated life long learner.

Communication skills were recognized as vital for all types of learning and success in life. Communication ranged from being able to clearly articulate your learning and thoughts to being able to listen and speak as a caring and responsible citizen. Further discussion of communication was apparent in the category of multiple types of literacies.

Competency based learning

Thinking

The ability to think clearly and effectively was discussed by many participants. It was also important to participants that students in the graduation years are able to think about relevant and meaningful topics of learning.

Many responses mentioned being able to think critically and make thoughtful decisions. Mentioned almost as often was the ability to think creatively and do something as a result. A third component of thinking was reflective or meta-cognitive awareness. Thinking critically, creatively, and reflectively are how learners make sense of their experiences and a result are vital for students in all types of learning experiences.

Competency based Learning

Personal and social responsibility

Every dialogue session presented many variations of students being responsible for their own personal and social well-being. Components of personal and social responsibility included being able to collaborate with others for a variety of purposes, demonstrating good citizenship through voting, volunteering in the community, being involved in political and social communities. Participants also wanted students to care and know about Canadian culture and environmental stewardship. The last component of personal and social responsibility discussed was the need for students to learn practical life skills such as cooking and sewing and leading healthy lives through participation in physical fitness activities and positive social activities.

Literacy - multiple types

Fundamental literacy skills such reading, writing and speaking were mentioned many times.

The need for students to be able to:

- Speak well, listen actively, write clearly for a variety of purposes and read with comprehension and purpose are clearly seen as important for all types of learning.

Other types of literacy that were discussed included:

- Financial literacy – multiple responses mentioned the ability to manage money, balance a cheque book, understand mortgages, and organize and implement a budget.
- Numeracy as a literacy included components of financial literacy but also the fundamental skill of understanding numbers and being able to do basic functions with numbers.
- Technology literacy was seen as a very important part of life in the 21st Century. Being able to use and understand various types of technology was mentioned frequently as well as being able to use technology as a tool to support learning such as finding information on the internet and then being able to make critical or creative decisions about the obtained information.

Discipline knowledge

While most commonly participants talked about the competencies or skills that students need to be citizens in today's world, they were also aware that students in the graduation years need to continue to learn various subjects or discipline knowledge.

Reading, writing, speaking, listening, and media were mentioned frequently as was language arts and the creative and performing arts. History, geography, politics, social sciences, and civic knowledge were also considered important areas of learning.

Mathematics and sciences were mentioned as core areas of learning that participants wanted to see connected to daily life such as how is mathematics meaningful and practical and how is scientific learning connected to problem solving, practical applications and environmental awareness.

Applied technical skills and physical skills were also mentioned as necessary for well rounded competent learners. This included physical activities such as recreation and athletics to hands-on learning such as sewing, cooking, and carpentry.

Dialogue participants wanted students in the graduation years to continue to learn the content and skills of the disciplines but in a more inter-connected and inter-disciplinary manner.

Career and work experiences

Discussion of career and work experience types of learning invariably mentioned enhanced connections to the community and career pathway choices.

Participants also wanted to families and educators to broaden the scope of career pathways to highlight trades and technical learning competencies as much as the competencies required for university. Other career and work experiences opportunities mentioned were more co-op learning opportunities, life skills training, practical hands-on trades training at school and within the community, and more apprenticeship training.

Some of the responses from Question One



- Political understanding/comprehension - Voting (crucial)
- Knowledge of World History/Current Events / Newspapers
- Understanding of social/environmental issues
- Media awareness

Burnaby (DSAC) Forum Participant

- Reading, writing and comprehension across media & domains
- Ability to work collaboratively
- Inquiry, research, record, communicate, share research, report out
- Understanding the why and linking in an interdisciplinary manner

Coquitlam Forum Participant

- Big Picture critical thinking, problem solver
- Practical skills - financial planning, resume, market self
- Empathy, tolerance
- Human impact on environment

Delta Forum Participant

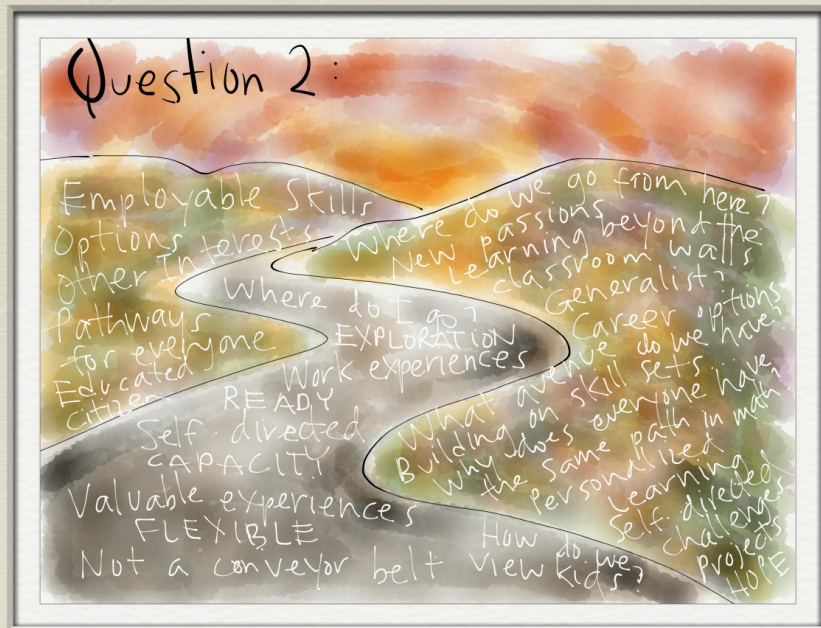
Recommendations and Summary for Question One

Participants were strongly in agreement that students need to develop a set of competencies and skills in order to meet the ever-changing demands of living, learning, and working in the 21st Century. It was also clear that participants want students to be able to know, understand and be able to demonstrate the content, skills, and processes of the current disciplines of study such as science, English, mathematics, history, geography, music, languages, fine arts, applied skills and physical education. As well, they want students to have community and work based experiences to make their learning experiences meaningful and realistic.

In summary, most responses of participants indicated that they would like to see students learning core skills and knowledge in a more interconnected inquiry and experiential based manner.

Students' voices
are important





Beyond the core, how could pathways for choice or exploration be provided?

There were approximately 1600 responses to question two that may be summarized into the following categories.

- Flexible learning opportunities (887 responses)
 - o Core learning along with flexible pathways
 - o Inquiry and project based learning
 - o Teams of teachers with cohorts of students
- Community and field experiences (209 responses)
 - o Volunteerism and community service
 - o Mentorships and field experiences
- Career experiences (176 responses)
 - o Work experience and co-op programs
 - o Apprenticeships

Flexible Learning Opportunities

In response to question two, participants were clearly interested in ensuring that students are able to learn in a more flexible environment than currently exists. Participants consistently used words such as choice, flexible, variety, options, and inquiry when discussing ideas regarding how pathways for choice might be provided.

Core learning along with flexible pathways as well as student having more opportunities to choose areas of focus, passion, or deep exploration was ardently desired. Participants were aware that students needed to learn core knowledge ranging from the traditional academic areas to applied skills and fine arts. However, they also wanted to see schools organized differently so that students may be less tied to the traditional block structure of learning. They discussed students working with teams of teachers in cohort groups where they would work on inquiry and/or project based learning. Responses also mentioned interest-based learning, seminars, independent directed studies (IDS), academies, blended learning, and being able to explore in-depth, in school and in the community, areas of passion and personal choice.

Community and field experiences

The flexible learning experiences talked about by participants typically referred to students doing volunteer work and being actively involved in community service. They saw this as an important means of making connections between learning done in school and what might be occurring within a local community. It would also enable students to see the relevance and meaning of their studies. Participants talked about the need for students to apply school-based learning in the community and they felt these types of opportunities would help produce graduates who would be contributing citizens in their local and global communities.

Community and field experiences

Aligned with doing meaningful volunteer and community service, participants discussed the need for field experiences that ranged from the typical field trip that currently exists to field experiences that might be longer in length. For example, one week to one month to one year experiences were mentioned. These longer field experiences might take place in the local community or might be in another location all together. To support students' community and field experiences, participants also discussed the role of adult mentors or advisors. Developing relationships with teachers, either individually or as a team, to receive needed advice, support, and guidance was mentioned often as a vital component to the implementation of student learning in the community and further afield. Students and parents, in particular, talked about wanting to be known and understood by their teachers. Another aspect of mentorship considered was developing graduation years students' skills to be mentors for younger students.

Career experiences

When discussing pathways for exploration and choice, career focused opportunities were examined frequently as well. Participants talked about too much emphasis being placed on being prepared to attend university. They wanted to see value being given to other types of learning experiences, which might not lead directly to university. Whether it was apprenticeship programs, more opportunities for work experience/explorations, ACE-IT/industry connect programs, or co-op programs, responses clearly indicated the need for students in the graduation years to have more opportunities to experience different types of careers and work opportunities. However, participants also want the career experience opportunities to keep doors open for students to be able to explore an area of learning and change their minds to go in another direction without it creating roadblocks and delays for future areas of study.

motivated
 standards
 interests
 Goals
 trades
 Volunteer
 integrate
 Cooperative
 Arts
 mentorships
 Cohorts
 Opportunities
 choice
 structure
 passions
 academies
 collaborative
 processes
 flexibility
 options
 engagement
 independent

Some of the responses from Question Two

- Flexibility in how students learn: project based, face to face, online, IDS, IB personal projects, community service, careers, internships, volunteer opportunities

North Vancouver Forum Participant

- Partnerships with other groups and organizations. Work experience placements should be mandatory. Peer mentorships. Partnerships with colleges. Exploratory work for students before they make a commitment.

New Westminster Forum Participant

- Schools of choice - specialty schools e.g. Fine Arts, Hockey Academy, Magnet School, ACE IT, SSA, Tupper Tech, Online Learning, AP courses, IB...

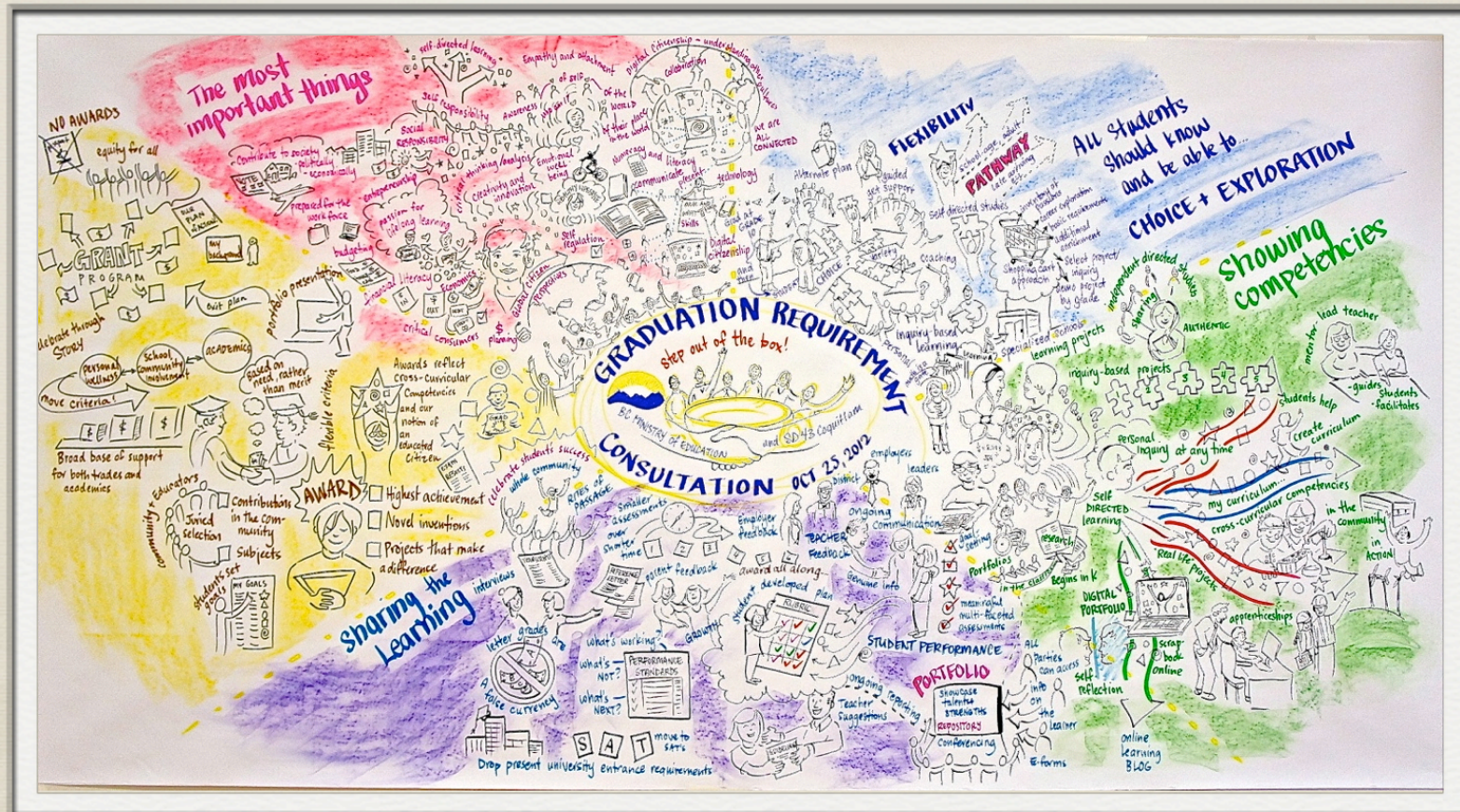
Vancouver Forum Participant

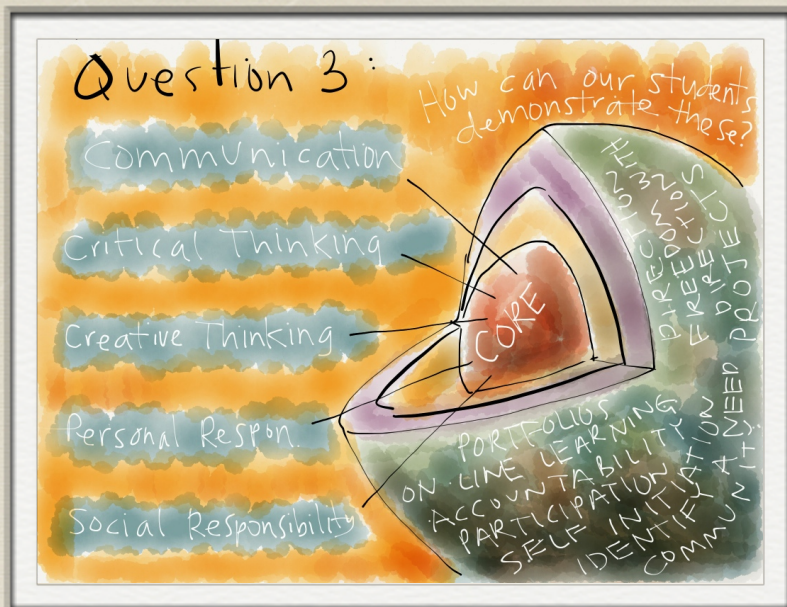
Recommendations and Summary for Question Two

Participants were keen to have students in their graduation years learn in a more flexible structure and for students to be supported in making sound personal learning decisions based on their interests, needs and future goals. Within school itself, the structure and organization for learning needs to change. Frequently members of the dialogue sessions talked about students having more choice, working with teams of teachers in cohort groups, making more connections between areas of study, and being involved in community and career experiences.

In summary, students, parents, educators, and community partners want the graduation years learning experience to be re-structured to provide relevant, engaging, and deep learning in a flexible environment.

Parents' and educators' voices are important





Research is underway with a focus on the following five cross-curricular competencies:

- Communication
- Critical Thinking
- Creative Thinking and Innovation
- Personal Responsibility and Well Being
- Social Responsibility

How might students demonstrate these competencies?

There were approximately 1450 responses to question three that may be summarized into the following categories.

- Competencies in all areas of learning (510 responses)
 - o Integration of competencies within all learning
 - o Work experience and field experiences
 - o Flexible learning opportunities
- Presentations of learning (435 responses)
 - o Conferences and presentations
 - o Portfolios
 - o Projects with mentor support
 - o Performance based assessments
- Assessment criteria (171 responses)
 - o Performance standards
 - o Criteria
 - o External and self assessment

Competencies in all areas of learning

Participants generally talked about students demonstrating the five competencies throughout and within all learning experiences. In other words, the competencies would be embedded as part of the learning in science, English, music or physical education. As well, they wanted students to be able to demonstrate their level of competency in varied and flexible settings such as work experience, volunteer projects, and integrated inquiry-based learning activities. Respondents clearly saw the importance of students being able to communicate effectively, think critically, and be creative and innovative in all types of learning. They also saw the value of students demonstrating social responsibility and personal responsibility while questioning at the same time how those competencies would be learned, demonstrated and assessed.

Presentations of Learning

Much of the discussion surrounding how students might demonstrate the five competencies focused on students presenting their learning in the form of conversations, interviews, conferences, projects, case studies, and portfolios. As participants discussed types of presentation formats for the competencies, they also spoke about performance based assessments and presentations. Clearly, participants were interested in enabling students to demonstrate their learning and level of competency through methods that were not always summative and test oriented. Often they spoke of students being able to talk with the teacher or mentor to share their learning, participate in a critical challenge, write essays or journals, or undertake research on a chosen project/inquiry.

Assessment criteria

Underlying the conversations as to how students might demonstrate the competencies was the need for performance standards and criteria to be developed and for students, parents and educators to be supported in their understanding and implementation of the assessment criteria for the competencies. Participants spoke about criteria and clear feedback being provided by teachers to support students' ongoing competency development. They also spoke about students needing to learn how to be reflective, undertake self-assessment, and set goals. Generally, participants wanted the assessment criteria and performance standards for the competencies to be clear effective tools for communicating competency development over time.

Some of the responses from Question Three



- Creative media presentations and group projects to promote healthy living choices
- Individualized health plans/goals for personal responsibility

Fraser Health(New Westminster) Forum Participant

- The role of education staff is to support and coach rather than teach. This would also enable staff to stretch and encourage students by facilitating emerging skills and awareness. Maybe assessment could be by portfolio. BUT NOT THE OLD PORTFOLIO.

Sea to Sky Forum Participant

- Real-world knowledge, but in a safe environment
- Standardized assessment to measure all of these competencies
- Mentorships / co-op
- Motivate students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding
- Make learning intrinsic so that students want to be creative

Richmond Student Forum Participant

Recommendations and Summary for Question Three

Participants wanted students in the graduation years to demonstrate their communication, critical thinking, creative and innovative thinking, personal responsibility and well being, and social responsibility in less traditional ways and for the demonstrations of the competencies to be embedded and integrated throughout students' learning experiences.

In summary, the competencies would, ideally, be demonstrated through performance-based assessments, interviews, or projects based upon clear criteria. In order to accomplish this, participants talked about educators, students, and families developing understanding of the competencies and the assessment criteria as this would be new to everyone.

Communication and performance standards

Participants in the Graduation Requirements dialogue sessions were keen to discuss how student learning should be communicated. In particular, they spoke primarily about the need for ongoing, clear, and informative communication between the teachers, students, and parents. It was obvious that participants thought that there should be more ongoing communication that provides clear and understandable information about student learning.

In order to communicate effectively about student learning, participants discussed the need for thoughtful, clear, and comprehensive performance standards. These performance standards were desired for curricular learning and the competencies. Other terms were used interchangeably with performance standards. These included criteria, rubrics, assessment continua, and benchmarks. Along with criteria or performance standards, participants talked about the need to ensure that students, parents, and educators all understand the criteria and how it is being used to describe learning.

Types of communication

Participants clearly wanted varied, frequent, and comprehensive communication of student learning. Many participants mentioned students having conferences, talks, or interviews with educators and community members. They also spoke about three-way conferences or student-led conferences involving students, parents, and educators. Another type of communication mentioned regularly was face-to-face time between parents and educators ranging from casually coming to the classroom to more open house offerings. It was common for participants to talk about the importance of developing relationships between educators and families so that it becomes easy to communicate effectively and clearly about student learning. It was also felt that this might encourage parents and students to be more engaged in the learning process.

Types of communication

Many participants also mentioned on-line or digital forms of communicating about student learning. They wanted to take advantage of current methods of digital communication more often (eg: e-mail or websites), but they also wanted to explore other methods of using technology such as on-line learner profiles that students, parents, and educators can access daily. Most respondents wanted the digital information to be more than numbers or letter grades. They were looking for comments and opportunities for dialogue about the students' learning.

Participants also talked about using portfolios as a means to communicate learning. Portfolios were seen as an effective method for students to participate in the assessment process and demonstrate learning in many different modes. Portfolios were also seen as an effective communication tool for students, parents, educators, post-secondary institutions and employers. Whether the portfolio was digital or traditional, participants clearly were interested in using them as a communication tool for student learning. The only caveat mentioned regarding portfolios was the need for the criteria and selection of items to remain clear and uncomplicated.

Types of communication

Participants had mixed responses to the traditional form of reporting learning via report cards with letter grades and percentages. Most respondents were interested in seeing changes to the use of letter grades and percentages as they believe these methods of communication relay limited information about student learning. They also wanted clearer and more personal comments on report cards. Participants felt the current comments on secondary report cards do not provide personal information about student learning. In fact, many of the participants simply wanted report cards, as they currently exist, to be eliminated. However, there were also participants who felt that letter grades provided useful information about student learning and it was a form of communication they understood. A small number of participants also felt the same way about the use of percentages.

Post secondary institutions and employers

At most Graduation Requirements dialogue sessions, there was limited discussion of specific forms of communication that would be appropriate for post secondary institutions and employers. Many respondents indicated that they would like to see post secondary institutions change what they look at for entrance requirements. Ideas such as letters of reference, essays, portfolios, performance standards based transcripts, and community experiences were mentioned as items that might be effective ways to communicate student learning to post secondary institutions. Most participants indicated that employers would find information about students' attributes, competencies and actions at school and in the community helpful. They thought that many employers want to know more than just letter grades and percentages, and might want to know more about students' work habits and sense of responsibility.

Some of the responses from Question Four



- Face-to-face interviews
- Corrective feedback, with opportunities to repeat to achieve better
- Students: conferences, interviews, self assessment and rubrics
- Dialogue with cohort, with mentor and with instructor
- Self assessment, peer assessment and clear expectations

Sunshine Coast Forum Participant

- The purpose of reporting to students and parents is different from the purpose of reporting to employers and post secondary institutions. It could be that the employers will have to dig deeper to find out what skills the students really have. The schools would simply provide a pass fail mark

Vancouver Forum Participant

- Employers are not really interested in grades
- Post secondary should look at other skills not grades
- Core competencies should be included for post secondary
- Importance of focusing on abilities and not just marks

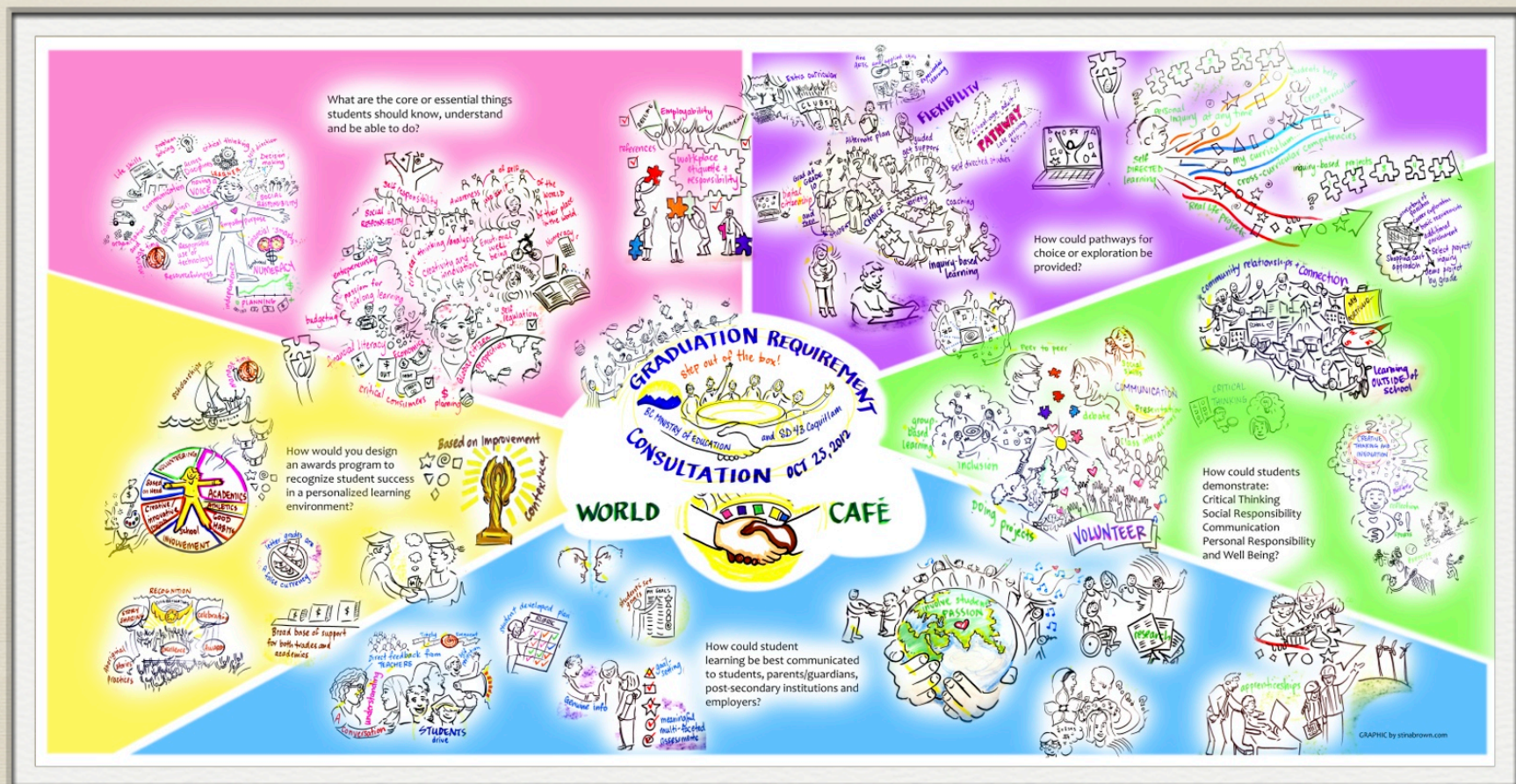
West Vancouver Forum Participant

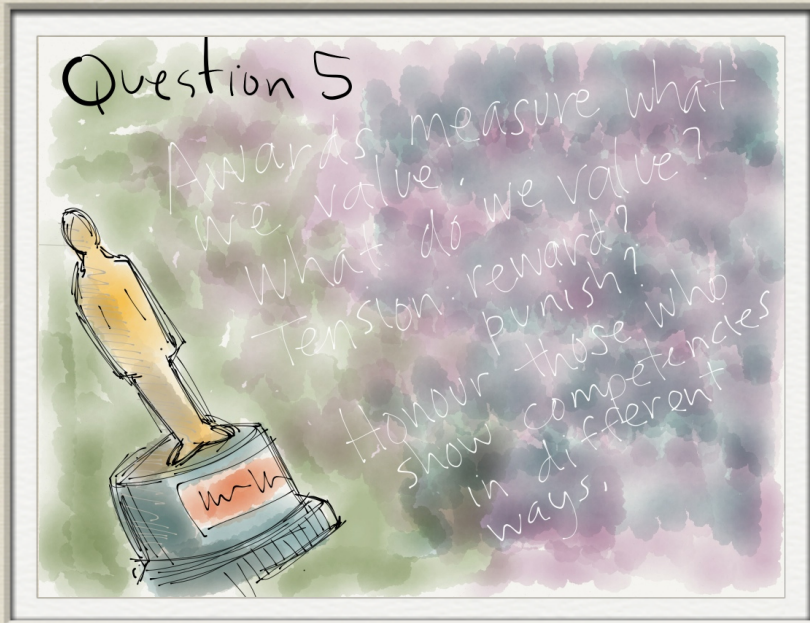
Recommendations and Summary for Question Four

It was obvious from the responses to question four that participants wanted student learning to be communicated more often and in a greater variety of methods than is done currently.

In summary, in the graduation years, student learning should be communicated in an ongoing and easily accessible manner. This would involve the development of more opportunities for students, families, and educators to meet together to talk about learning. This would also mean using communication tools such as portfolios, digital communication, and more personalized reporting.

Community voices
are important





How would you design an awards program to recognize student success in a personalized learning environment?

There were approximately 870 responses to question five that may be summarized into the following categories.

- Diversify awards criteria
 - o Scholarships for varied types of learning (334 responses)
 - o Criteria to reflect context (216 responses)
 - o Financial support (45 responses)
- Re-direct funding
 - o Funds for K-12 education and post secondary institutions (44 responses)
 - o No awards system (52 responses)

Diversify awards criteria

Participants were overwhelmingly in agreement for the awards/scholarships to be provided to a wider range of students. They talked about the criteria for excellence and achievement reflecting not only academic areas of study, but also elective or passion areas of study, citizenship, developmental progress and the final year's work, and portfolio demonstrations with goals. Almost as many responses spoke to the awards system being more contextualized to reflect the community of learners being supported by an awards system. Many respondents also felt that if examinations were going to be part of the criteria for receiving an award then the grade ten examinations should not be part of the criteria. A final item with regards to diversifying the awards criteria reflected the financial challenges that many students face regarding post secondary education. Participants wanted more students to receive financial support to further their post secondary studies either in the form of bursaries or decreased fees at the post secondary institution of choice.

Re-direct funding

There were also participants who wanted the funds currently going towards an awards program to be eliminated. There were essentially two perspectives regarding the idea of re-directing funding. The first was to take the funds currently being used for an awards program and put it into increased funding for the either or both the K-12 education system and the post secondary system. The second was to eliminate any type of awards system all together as it was felt to be too competitive and students should develop a sense of intrinsic motivation without an external award system.

Some of the responses from Question Five



- Continue to expand our definition of excellence to ensure a broad range of scholarships offered
- Every student registered in post secondary program gets a base scholarship
- Looking at innovation. sports, volunteers as well as academic

Burnaby Admin Forum Participant

- Students present and request for funds based on their exit plans and demonstration of learning
- Kids to struggle, who has challenges overcome
- Develop broad based application process where it targets career based pathways as opposed to university.

Coquitlam Forum Participant

- Should be based on competencies - outside the box - reward non-academic - everyone is good at something - music, organization - related to other skills, not always related to top marks

Surrey Forum Participant

Recommendations and Summary for Question Five

Responses to question five clearly indicated that participants wanted the criteria for an awards/scholarship system to be more diversified and that local communities should be responsible for most of the decisions regarding student awards. This would range from awards for financial, academic and personal development reasons.

In summary, most participants wanted to support and award students who wish to continue their education after completing their graduation years in the K-12 education system.

Conclusion

At all of the Graduation Dialogue Sessions in the Metro Region there was an overall desire for changes to be implemented for the graduation years. The discussions were energetic and informative for all participants ranging from those who were happy with the Graduation Years Program as it currently exists to those who wanted to see the whole system changed. Whether participants were in favour of minimal change or radical change, they agreed that for changes to be understood and implemented effectively, educators and families would need training and ongoing support to ensure that the new approaches would become fully embedded into practice.

The Dialogue Sessions provided wonderful opportunities for communities to share ideas together and contribute to the future vision for the graduation years throughout the province. The process also revealed that while the sessions provided many informative big ideas, there is still a great deal of work to be done to provide the working details for the big ideas. There was also a positive sense of hope that changes to the system would actually be realized and would reflect changes that are happening in education worldwide.

Conclusion

Students, parents, educators, and community partners wanted our students to leave the K-12 system as competent, thoughtful, and contributing citizens who may choose to enter the work force or continue their education. Whatever pathway they select, it was evident that participants in the Metro Region wanted graduates to have the capacity to learn how to learn, to follow their passions, and to be lifelong learners. To support this vision brings the report back to the overarching themes that emerged in the Metro Region.

These five themes provide the foundation upon which the Graduation Years Program should be based:

- Competency based learning threaded throughout all types of learning experiences;
- Flexible learning experiences within and without school settings;
- Clear criteria and performance standards for ongoing learning and culminating presentations of learning;
- More opportunities for students, parents and teachers to communicate about learning; and
- An awards/scholarship system that reflects diversified learning experiences.

Special Thanks

- ★ All Metro Region participants
- ★ Ray Appel, Coquitlam SD #43, for the visual responses to each question
- ★ Sure-Stina Brown and Avril Orloff for the visual graphics
- ★ Albert Lee, Burnaby SD #41, for technology advisory and statistical analysis