

**Response from the  
First Nations Education Steering Committee & First Nations Schools Association  
to the BC Ministry of Education's Proposed Directions for Graduation**

**January 2013**

The BC First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEESC) and First Nations Schools Association (FNSEA) are pleased to submit this initial response to the Ministry of Education's *Proposed Directions for Graduation* questions and power point presentation, as now provided on the Ministry's web site.

We understand that the Ministry is in the process of gathering broad public feedback, to be followed by more focused dialogue about graduation requirements. FNEESC and the FNSEA appreciate the chance to share our preliminary input into this phase of the consultation process, and we would also welcome opportunities for further involvement as this important initiative proceeds.

Overall, FNEESC and the FNSEA support the Ministry's expressed intention to build upon its "strong, stable system" in an effort to create "a more nimble and flexible one to better meet the needs of all learners." FNEESC and the FNSEA fully recognizes the importance of flexibility in order to meet the evolving needs of students and communities, reflecting the significant changes that are taking place in terms of twenty-first century learning. Accordingly, we support many of the ideas and principles outlined in the Ministry's proposed directions, and offer additional suggestions for consideration.

However, we also believe that the changes that are being considered, while they may have the potential to make the system more fluid and less directed, also have the potential to increase existing challenges for First Nations learners and families unless specific supports are included, some of which may have to be mandated from the Ministry to be most effective. It is critical to ensure that any changes that are eventually implemented do not further marginalize First Nations students and families. As the Ministry is fully aware, there are currently numerous challenges related to First Nations education in this province, and any efforts to increase flexibility and choice should work to eliminate these challenges. Like the Ministry, FNEESC and the FNSEA also want all learners, including First Nations learners, to have every opportunity to pursue their own unique goals according to their own strengths and circumstances. Yet, it must be remembered that the systems and processes that currently exist are not meeting the needs of all students equitably.

We therefore strongly hope that the recommendations we provide are given every possible consideration as the Ministry proceeds with this systemic changes to the Graduation requirements. We are confident that working together, First Nations and the Ministry of Education can ensure that the needs of First Nations learners, parents, and communities are met in a meaningful and effective way to improve the 54% graduation rate of Aboriginal students in BC, and to ensure that first Nations students graduating from the K-12 system have the skills and knowledge necessary to continue on with their goals, including post-secondary education and training.

Under the Tripartite Education Framework Agreement (TEFA), First Nations schools are significantly impacted by changes to Ministry of education policy and programs, and we need to closely monitor over time the impact of changes to the graduation program to ensure that they are effective.

## Ministry Question 1:

**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?**

*Response:*

### **Strong Academic Expectations**

FNESC and the FNSA acknowledge that the Ministry's background information regarding this issue reflects a holistic and comprehensive perspective of core skills and knowledge required by all students. The power point presentation that is now available on the Ministry's website states:

The Educated Citizen ...

- thoughtful, able to learn and to think critically, and who can communicate information from a broad knowledge base;
- creative, flexible, self-motivated and who have a positive self-image;
- capable of making independent decisions;
- skilled and who can contribute to society generally, including the world of work;
- productive, who gain satisfaction through achievement and who strive for physical well-being;
- cooperative, principled and respectful of others regardless of differences;
- aware of the rights and prepared to exercise the responsibilities of an individual within the family, the community, Canada, and the world.

Such a broad, inclusive perspective of students' needs and quality education are entirely consistent with continued assertions by First Nations peoples of the need for a holistic view of learning, FNESC and the FNSA also recognize that all of the components of an educated person outlined above are extremely important. In addition, we believe that First Nations learners must have an education that...

- ensures that they are confident in their self-identity, their families, their communities and traditional values, language and cultures;
- gives them the skills they need to thrive in contemporary society, including 21st century technological skills; and
- prepares them to access any opportunities they choose for higher learning, employment and life choices.

However, while supporting those broad principles about what students should know, ***we also want to emphasize the importance of ensuring that all students are provided a strong foundation in academic achievement.*** Currently, far too many First Nations students are leaving school without the academic skills and credentials they need to pursue a full range of advanced education and career opportunities. The Ministry's Foundation Skills Assessment results highlight on-going concerns related to First Nations students' literacy and numeracy rates. Lower overall participation rates in post-secondary-recognized English, math, and science courses are also problematic. Therefore, while understanding the need for a broad perspective of student success, FNESC and the FNSA maintain that there must be a strong focus on ensuring that all students are building the *full* range of competencies – including a strong academic core – in an equitable way.

A key component of the strong academic core is the meaningful integration of a First Nations strong language and culture component for First Nations students to ensure that they receive a relevant

and holistic educational experience that respects the unique identity of First Nations peoples in Canada.

### **On-going Collaboration with First Nations Communities**

In addition, FNEC and the FNSA support the suggestions included in the Ministry's documentation related to a need to focus on the community, including promoting learners' involvement in the community, and preparing them for life after K-12. Ensuring that all First Nations learners are able to remain connected to their homes and communities, and can contribute to their Nations after they complete their education, is critical. In order to facilitate this, the Ministry of Education should work in partnership with First Nations at provincial and local levels to support the economic needs of the communities in terms of education and training. At the same time, there should also be a focus on ensuring that those students who choose to leave their communities to pursue employment or further education are fully prepared to do so.

We believe that addressing this issue requires on-going and full collaboration with First Nations to ensure that efforts specifically relate to First Nations communities. This can be supported through the collaborative development, implementation and monitoring of effective Local Education Agreements (LEAs) and Enhancement Agreements (EAs).

### **Knowledge and Understanding of First Nations Cultures and Histories**

Consistent with the Ministry's background information, First Nations have long-asserted the importance of ensuring that **all students leave the BC education system with a reasonable and meaningful awareness of First Nations peoples and cultures.**

We also support the stated objectives that guide the work of the Ministry of Education:

- Aboriginal voice is increased in the Provincial education system.
- Knowledge of Aboriginal language, culture and history is increased throughout the Provincial education system.
- The Provincial education system provides for focused leadership and informed practice for increasing Aboriginal student success.

How ...

- Increase Aboriginal voice by involving Aboriginal people in educational planning and decision-making at all levels;
- Increase the knowledge of Aboriginal languages, cultures, histories and pedagogy for all students and teachers (as this will benefit both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students); and
- Use informed practice to help Aboriginal students succeed.

The principles outlined in these statements must be clearly articulated in any new graduation requirement program, and need to be monitored over time with measurable deliverables.

While the move to reduce the prescribed learning outcomes in courses allows for greater flexibility in the classroom, it could also easily allow for even fewer opportunities for all students to develop knowledge and understandings about First Nations cultures and histories in BC. Currently, optional courses in Aboriginal studies such as FNS 12, EFP 10, 11, and 12 have very low enrollment and are

often not even offered in most schools. We must work collaboratively with our partners to increase enrollment in these courses.

Developing and understanding of First Nations perspectives and knowledge in the education system would serve as an important step to begin to address ignorance, indifference, bias and misunderstanding of First Nations peoples and cultures, and a more in-depth knowledge of First Nations people and histories would provide all students with a foundation for developing mutual understanding and respect. **Therefore, we strongly encourage the Ministry to require that a course in Aboriginal studies be a part of graduation requirements for all students in BC.** If the Ministry considers a move away from specific course requirements to a focus on demonstrated learning, there should still be a clear requirement for all graduating students to demonstrate a reasonable awareness of the First Nations in BC, as this would be a meaningful step toward reconciliation, honouring the commitments made by the province of BC in the New Relationship and Transformative Change Accord.

First Nations content in course/subjects should be throughout the K/12 system to ensure there is a deep understanding and success for all students enrolled in the mandatory Aboriginal studies that are part of the graduation requirement. We note that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has a number of recommendations for education that need to be discussed and addressed here in BC. These recommendations should also be taken into serious consideration in the graduation program requirements.

#### **Ministry Question 2:**

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

#### ***Response:***

FNESC and the FNSA agree that increasing choice for students is beneficial, recognizing the growing possibilities for career and life choices. However, while supporting the potential benefits that could result from increased choices of “pathways,” it is critical to ensure that First Nations students are not streamed or directed in limited ways.

As the Ministry’s annual data collection makes clear, too many First Nations students are currently not being encouraged to explore a full range of “pathways.” As an example, within the 54% of Aboriginal students who graduate, a disproportionate number of First Nations students complete their education with a school leaving certificate rather than a Dogwood. First Nations students are proportionately over-represented in alternate programs, and they are disproportionately taking courses that are not eligible for post-secondary entrance or for a range of career options.

FNESC and the FNSA fully recognize the benefits that can be gained by appropriately supporting students in pursuing various options, including trades and training, high quality apprenticeship programs, and other post-secondary possibilities. However, structures must not be put in place that will limit students’ potential. It is ***imperative*** that all students – especially First Nations students – are effectively supported in making choices that are right for them, and that high expectations are maintained equitably for all learners.

Specifically, First Nations must be fully involved in developing and monitoring clear mechanisms and data review processes for monitoring how “pathways for choice” are affecting First Nations students. There also must be strong efforts to ensure that all education system personnel are aware of the problems that now exist in regard to streaming, as well as the potential for continued, or increased marginalization of First Nations students.

Generally, there must be a stronger commitment to helping **all** students to achieve to their highest potential. Of particular importance is the need to ensure that the graduation program contains mechanisms to address the needs of vulnerable students on the school system. Experiences and concerns shared by First Nations students, parents and families, and well-supported by data reported through the annual How Are We Doing? report, all demonstrate that Aboriginal students are currently marginalized and not fulfilling their potential. Aboriginal male students in particular are achieving far too limited success – even less so than Aboriginal females. In addition, Aboriginal students are disproportionately enrolled in almost all special education categories, particularly behavior disabilities – at almost four times the general rate.

Another vulnerable group, children in care, must be considered in any graduation program. As of 2010-2011, the graduation rate for all children in Continuing Custody Orders was at 40%; the graduation rate for Aboriginal children in care was below 35 %; and the graduation rate for male Aboriginal children in care was less than 30%. It is imperative that any graduation program take into account, and begin to address these critical issues.

The Ministry must guard against systemic bias directed toward First Nations students. Too many First Nations students are put in the non-academic stream because of their colour, how they dress, or where they live. They are not placed based on their skill and knowledge. In addition, too often, schools move First Nations students to non-academic class to fulfill their class size and class composition goals.

### **Ministry Question 3:**

**To be successful in and after school, students need to develop these five cross-curricular competencies: communication, critical thinking, creative thinking and innovation, personal responsibility and well-being, and social responsibility. How do you think students could demonstrate these competencies?**

#### ***Response:***

It is clear that if the graduation requirements and choices for students become more flexible, there will be a need for new ways of assessing the range students' final competencies, as opposed to relying on course completions alone. FNEC and the FNSA recognize the benefits that can be gained by exploring multiple assessment approaches, such as portfolios of learning, student self-assessment, exemplars for cross-curricular competencies, and new methods for demonstrating learning. Any assessment of the competencies will need to be done with the contexts of the students in mind, and exemplars should include respectful examples that incorporate First Nation knowledge and understandings.

As the role of individual teachers will likely increase as the emphasis may shift from course completions to students' demonstrations of learning, efforts must be made to ensure that all teachers are aware of the specific issues that affect First Nations students' educational success – including the continued existence of racism in society and lack of understanding of First Nations peoples and cultures. It is therefore critical that all educators in the system are prepared and supported to develop their awareness, knowledge, and understandings of First Nations peoples and cultures in BC.

### **Ministry Question 4:**

**How could student learning be communicated to students, parents/guardians, and post-secondary institutions/employers?**

**Response:**

As the Ministry considers a shift from “reporting” to “communicating student learning,” we assert the need for a clear indication of the plans being made to support the engagement of First Nations parents in educational programming. First Nations in BC have long expressed concern about the need to increase the involvement of First Nations parents in the education system. In spite of the widespread evidence of the importance of involving parents as partners in the education of their children, a well-documented range of factors make it less likely for First Nations parents to be meaningfully involved in their children’s education. As greater flexibility and more complex reporting and assessment processes are implemented, there is a significant risk that First Nations parents (and possibly all parents) may find it increasingly difficult to monitor their children’s progress, and ensure that they stay on track for accessing future opportunities.

Another factor that needs to be taken into consideration is the challenge presented by low internet connectivity in many First Nations communities. An emphasis on technology to access student information/ reporting may be problematic for parents and care-givers who do not have equitable access to technology.

Currently, far too many First Nations students are either leaving school early, or working through the K-12 education system only to find that they complete school without the credentials and skills they need to pursue their goals. Currently, 4% of Aboriginal students leave school with School Leaving Certificates compared to only 1% for non-Aboriginal students. The results of this situation are detrimental not only for individual students and their families, but also for entire First Nations communities, and the BC post-secondary education system. **It is critical that high expectations for First Nations students are maintained, and there must be clear ways to monitor and ensure that those expectations are being met.** The demand for upgrading programs for young adults who have left the K-12 system only to find that they need additional educational support because they are not equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills to proceed with their goals in post-secondary education or training represents a significant challenge, and a serious and unnecessary financial burden to First Nations learners and families.

The changes now being contemplated for the graduation requirements have the potential to make this situation even more pronounced, emphasizing the need for continuous, systemic mechanisms for engaging and meaningfully informing First Nations students and parents about graduation requirements and pre-requisites for higher learning. Addressing this issue may require more effective and specific counseling services for First Nations students and parents so that they are able to make relevant decisions throughout their educational path, ensuring that students do not complete grade 12 without the skills and credentials that are appropriate for their future plans. Addressing this issue could also involve more pro-active efforts by school district staff to work in partnership with community-based First Nations Education Coordinators to ensure that they are fully equipped to support families and students as they make important decisions in their educational journeys. A spot light must be maintained on First Nations data as found in such documents as the HAWD? report. Without such public accounting First Nations will continue to be marginalized.

**Ministry Question 5:**

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

**Response:**

We understand that in January 2012, Ministry staff convened a focus group of senior staff in five school districts to consider the future of a provincial awards program. The group suggested the following changes:

- revise the provincial awards program to better align with personalized learning
- divert scholarship funding from passport to education and the provincial exam scholarship to the district/authority award,
- renew scholarship criteria to focus on all aspects of student success
- develop criteria with enough flexibility to reflect unique district and community priorities

FNESC and the FNSA recommend that in any further considerations of this issue, there should be specific consideration of ways to increase access of First Nations students to provincial awards. In particular, we support a stronger focus on awards to encourage and fully recognize the contributions made by First Nations students to their communities, as well as their efforts to learn about their languages and cultures. There is also a clear need to ensure that there are not systemic barriers stemming from low expectations of Aboriginal learners. Currently, approximately 2% of the general school population is designated “gifted”, while slightly more than 0% of Aboriginal students receive this designation. These statistics demonstrate the need to increased awareness and understanding of First Nations peoples and cultures by all people in the education system.

Also, recognizing historic inequities, as well as the financial barriers many First Nations families face in helping their children attend higher educational opportunities, school districts must work more closely with First Nations communities to ensure that increased numbers of First Nations students are successful in accessing awards programs. Associated activities could include better promotion of any opportunities that exist, developing awards criteria that are more relevant to First Nations students and communities, and ensuring that there are scholarships specifically directed for First Nations students. For many awards and scholarships there is a citizenship component that often speaks to volunteering. Some School Districts do not recognize our First Nations students volunteering in their communities and we have to ensure this is promoted and recognized by all Districts.

What is key, overall, is that the final bullet highlighted above – “develop criteria with enough flexibility to reflect unique district and community priorities” – be interpreted with a strong emphasis on a range of communities, specifically including First Nations communities, and that district priorities not take precedence over those of any communities.

We are confident that with increased collaboration between the Ministry of Education and First Nations, especially parents, we can see increased results in terms of higher graduation rates and post-secondary education and training readiness for First Nations students. This collaboration, along with the effective implementation of TEFA and Jurisdiction, will effectively support First Nations learners in BC and enhance the delivery of quality education in BC.

Once again, we thank the Ministry of Education for the opportunity to provide these initial suggestions, and we look forward to further involvement in the ongoing consultation efforts.

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# Thompson-Okanagan Regional Report to the Graduation Requirements Dialogue

A Synthesis of Community Meetings

September-January 2012 Process • Thompson-Okanagan • Report Date: 14 January 2012

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# Thompson-Okanagan Regional Report to the Graduation Requirements Dialogue

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## SUMMARY REPORT

In September and October of 2012, the nine school districts of our region were tasked with gathering feedback within each of their respective communities on the topic of secondary graduation requirements in BC. The participants of these community forums were challenged to propose changes, adaptations and reforms to this process. The nine school districts included

- SD 19 Revelstoke
- SD 22 Vernon
- SD23 Kelowna
- SD 53 Okanagan-Similkameen
- SD 58 Nicola-Similkameen
- SD67 Okanagan-Skaha
- SD 73 Kamloops-Thompson
- SD 74 Gold Trail
- SD 83 North Okanagan-Shuswap

The discussions on the future of graduation centered on five critical questions, and the responses were noted by group facilitators. Invitations to attend these meetings were extended to those directly connected to the field of education, such as students, teachers, administrators, district staff, support workers, adult education personnel, Aboriginal Education members, school trustees and post-secondary institutions. Community input was essential to this process and to the ultimate value of the data. In all, nearly 300 people contributed their opinions and personal insights to this process. Some of the community partners present at the meetings included

- civic leaders,
- chamber of commerce members, employers and labour organization leaders,
- First Nations elders and members,
- parents (including Francophone and independent school), PAC and DPAC members,
- students (including Francophone and independent school),
- government services (e.g., RCMP, MCFD, CYMH).

The responses documented in these meetings touched on many different issues and the scope of the responses was large. This report is an attempt to draw upon major themes that emerged from this process and to highlight reoccurring ideas that differ from what is currently required to graduate in our province. In light of this two-tiered objective, not all responses will be mentioned specifically in this report, but rather only those that were found to be occurring with a moderate to high rate of frequency. The reader is reminded that this report is a reflection of many different views and opinions, and as such, points made within the document are to be considered suggestions of a larger group and not the opinion of any particular person, including the author of this report.

## Question 1

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?

This question asks what it means to be an educated citizen in British Columbia. This question was very accessible to all participants as it appeared that everyone had an opinion on what is essential to being prepared to contribute to our larger society. The many responses to this question were varied in scope and the major themes that emerged were as follows:

### Career Preparation & Employability

**Work Experience** was considered essential to the readiness of BC grads entering the workforce. Numerous skills and attributes were identified, and the following were reported with the highest frequency:

**Hands-on opportunities** in which students get out of the school buildings and get more opportunity to be immersed in work culture and subsequently benefit from career mentoring.

**Basic commercial skills** was identified as an essential component at every forum. Skills such as practical math, counting change and other workplace computations were discussed.

**Personal employability** feedback included fairly general terms like work ethic, flexibility and 'drive'. As well, it was established that students should have the knowledge and skills to navigate the portal to get a job. In this vein, it was suggested that students know how to construct an effective resume, know how to obtain and complete job applications and be versed in the manner in which to engage in a job interview.

**Early identification of interests and goals** was also identified as essential to career preparation.

'You [schools] teach them,  
we'll train them.'

- Forum Participant, Business Owner and  
Chamber of Commerce Representative



“Our students need to know about personal finances - I think that has been made really clear by recent developments both locally and globally.”

*Forum Participant*

## Life Skills

**Financial capacity** was the number one response in this category. Students should be expected to understand the concept, ramifications and importance of mortgages, loans and general financial management.

**Problem solving** was highlighted and the tools suggested included collaborative and team-building skills as well as personal goal-setting.

**Personal skill sets** deemed essential included basic reading ability, self-awareness, and healthy living strategies, such as proper nutrition and wellness. Some participants specifically mentioned the need for education that touches on family dynamics and issues.

## Education Skills

**Literacy skills** exceeded the combined total of all other responses in this category. Participants were adamant that reading and writing skills are as important as ever. Essay writing was mentioned specifically as a skill to be emphasized in schools.

**Post-Secondary and trades** transition training preparedness was discussed as essential as well.



## Other Considerations

- The concept of mandatory **First Nations education** was suggested. Numerous community members argued that all students should have a basic understanding of BC's First Nations cultures and traditions.
- **Technological literacy** was considered critical in the schooling process. Students should be expected to have basic computer skills, but this was widely acknowledged to be a pillar of our existing system. Much of the conversation around technology hinged on the social responsibility and protection issues surrounding social media. Issues such as exploitation, digital foot print and online presence were highlighted.
- **Critical thinking skills** such as recognizing reliable sources, and also subjective sources were identified as well. This issue was connected by many to the conversation around technological literacy. Our students are subjected to ever increasing sources of information and as this list becomes less traditional, such as blogs and online forums, it is important to effectively sift through what is authentic and what might be questionable.
- **Social responsibility** was uniformly identified as a critical requirement of all graduating students. Included in this conversation were the notions of respecting different views, of illustrating environmental responsibility and of instilling empathy. Community involvement was also included in this conversation. The emphasis on community and civic duties was discussed, as well as the expectations of a 'global citizen'.



## Question 2

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

This question asked participants to go deeper than question number one; to ‘colour outside the lines’ as one participant suggested to his group. As another person suggested, this question might be considered to be the value-added portion of a BC graduation. This question asked participants to ponder and discuss what an education system might look like in an era of specialization, when unique qualifications and value-added traits may likely prove more valuable than ever.

### Personalized Learning

**Electives** were widely discussed at numerous forums and a few interesting ideas emerged. Participants suggested that BC expand the availability of courses that fall outside the ‘required’ category and that a greater number of these courses be required to graduate. An interesting idea that arose from this conversation was to grade more of these electives as pass/fail grading schemes rather than attaching a specific grade standing. The argument behind this notion is that it is perceived that many students shy away from taking an elective that is not considered a personal strength as the student fears that the grade will hurt his/her ultimate grade standing. Courses feared to be grading liabilities are not considered by students who are competitively vying for scholarships and university entrance.

**Extra-curricular activities** were identified as an essential to the health of the individual and to the betterment of the community. Awarding more credits for these activities was suggested.

**Personalized learning** as a term was discussed with some forum participants struggling to arrive at a common definition. Despite some struggles over quantifying this term, people did put forth suggestions as to how we might personalize education. Here is a sampling of the more common responses:

- assist students in identifying passions;
- expand project-based and inquiry-based learning opportunities;
- develop classroom and curricular models that emphasize flexibility in both delivery and assessment;
- encourage students to both produce and present personal portfolios;
- allow students to design personal curriculum paths suited to interest areas or job goals;
- adopt programs that allow students to focus on career paths at earlier grade levels.



## Community and Global Educational Opportunities

**Connections to industry, post-secondary and apprenticeships** dominated the data collected in this category. No sub-category of any question in this entire report was more populated with responses than this one. The message is clear that across our region, people see the need for students to gain access to experiences and assets beyond the bricks and mortar school environment. Extending community-based credits was highlighted as an area in need of exploration. The concept of schools delivering the basics and community members providing the specific, context-based instruction was particularly stressed in every one of the community forums.

**Distance learning** is deemed essential by some communities as a way to allow students to access an educational experience that might be difficult to deliver within the constraints of the existing school system.

‘We’re raising global citizens whether we like it or not.

Our students have access to the world every day, every minute, every second.’

Forum Participant



## Question 3

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

- a) Communication
- b) Critical Thinking
- c) Creative Thinking and Innovation
- d) Personal Responsibility and Well Being
- e) Social Responsibility

How do you think students could demonstrate these competencies?

The Ministry of Education is developing five competencies considered to be essential in forming the Educated Citizen. Forum participants were asked to provide input as to how the actions, products and assets of students in BC might best relate to these categories.

### Communication

**Differentiation in demonstrating learning outcomes** was a major theme in this category. Sometimes termed ‘show what you know’, this notion suggests that schools adopt delivery and assessment models that allow students more varied options when it comes to providing a manifestation of understating and knowledge acquisition.

**Multi-level groupings** was a concept explored at one of the forums. The suggestion being that we group some students by variables other than simply by the number of years they have been in school.

### Critical Thinking

**Case studies and real life-scenarios** were promoted in this category, as was the teaching of critical thinking at the primary level. This category prompt received very few responses.

### Creative Thinking and Innovation

**Differentiation** was highlighted in this category as well. A number of suggestions were introduced as methods to achieving this goal:

- project-based learning was identified as being the route to more creativity and deeper learning opportunities;
- case studies to be used more extensively;
- exposure to 21<sup>st</sup> century issues and problems;
- less rote memorization termed as ‘learning’;
- awarding more credits for these activities was discussed.





“If schools could provide a way to incorporate mental health and well-being then the ability to learn these five competencies will come easier.”

Forum Participant & BC First Nations Member



## Personal Responsibility and Well Being

**Healthy living and relationships** were terms discussed by forum participants when addressing this category. Suggestions included slowing the pace of learning, teaching the importance of relationships, addressing the concept of spirituality and emotions in education and the importance of making safe choices.

## Social Responsibility

**Volunteer and leadership opportunities** and the availability of them dominated the data collected in this category.

## Other considerations

**The ‘Five Competencies’** proposed by the government may not be the true competencies we want to explore.

**Adult to student ratios** are critical to this conversation. Class sizes must be reduced for these competencies to be fully realized.

**Measurement** of these competencies should be conducted in cooperation with community members in each of the last three years of secondary schooling.

**Holistic education** should be considered. A sound education system needs to adopt the ‘circle of life’ model that encompasses the physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual needs of each student.

## Question 4

How could student learning be communicated to:

- a) Students?
- b) Parents/Guardians?
- c) Post secondary Institutions/Employers?

Communication is critical to the education system as it is unavoidable that evidence of student learning must be conveyed to others. These forums provided an ideal opportunity to include members of all three of the groups listed in this question, and to glean pointed feedback on how best to relay student achievement information.

### Students

**Self evaluation** was a major theme in this category. Participants strongly suggested that more avenues need to exist that allow students to convey their own understanding to themselves and others.

**Portfolios** were the most suggested avenue for how to improve student-based communication. Further suggestions included developing a 'Life Plan' with students that might include the mentorship provided by an adult within the community. One idea presented was the concept of a 1:10 ratio of teacher mentor to students in the education system. A necessary component of this type of structure is that more time be made available for students to meet with teacher mentors.

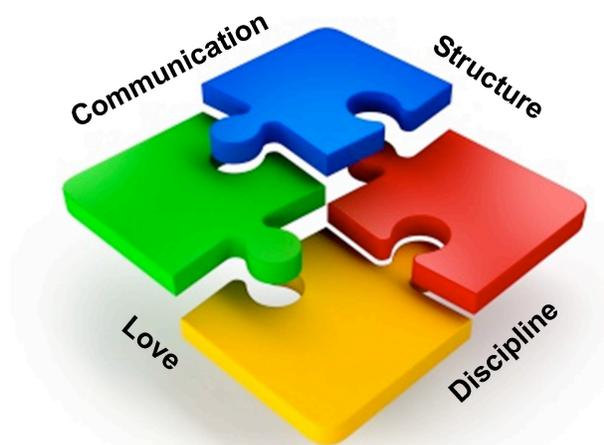
### Parents/Guardians

**Interactive platforms** were widely discussed at numerous forums and nearly all of these conversations centered around more frequent and effective communication between parents and the those in the education system. Some of these suggestions were rooted in current technologies,

whereas others were based on more traditional communication systems.

**Technologically-based systems** serve to inform parents on a need-to-know basis. Some participants suggested using programs such as Jupiter Grades that allow parents immediate, continuous and ongoing access to detailed information on the academic standing of their children. These systems are online and operate 24-7 so as to suit the varying time constraints of parents.

**Parent-Teacher interviews** do not appear to be slipping into the shadow of online options. Forum participants clearly communicated that face-to-face meetings between parents and teachers are not only important, but that this communication format needs to be injected with increased availability and flexibility. This conversation included the acknowledgement that parent-teacher interviews are incredibly valuable and that many parents who should attend these meetings for the benefit of their children choose not to. At least four different partner forums included the suggestion that parents be legally obligated to attend.



## Post-Secondary/Employers

**Personal interviews** were mentioned in numerous forums as a way to better connect students to outside institutions. As well, employers have a strong desire to have a teacher/mentor contact for each student within the school system. Having improved school-institution communication would:

- Better the relationship between post-secondary/employers and the school system.
- Better prepare the student to adapt to the work environment.
- Improve the readiness of post-secondary and employers to meet the needs of the students/employees arriving in their care.

## Other Considerations

**Reporting processes** currently used rely too heavily on percentages. Not only are these percentages inconsistent between different teachers and schools, but they do not necessarily provide accurate reflections of learning.

**Comment-based** reporting is more effective and critical to this conversation. Some parents attending the forums spoke of needing better explanations relating to the progress of their children. Class sizes must be reduced for these competencies to be fully realized.

**High school resumes** were discussed at a number of the community forums. The idea would be to have each student produce a resume during his/her high school years highlighting his/her competencies and accomplishments. This resume could be useful to students, parents, employers and post-secondary institutions.



## Question 5

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

Through the process of reviewing graduation requirements, it is worthy to consider the awards process that is associated with it. Millions of dollars are currently distributed to students through awards in British Columbia, and processes for awarding money to grads varies between districts.

**Alternative criteria for awards** were widely discussed at every community forum. There appears to be an strong appetite for awards to be based on factors that extend well beyond a student's grade point average. A number of alternative considerations for determining awards came out of the community forums:

- Awards should be based on factors that are more difficult to measure, but important to being a well-rounded student. Some of the criteria listed included self-motivation, drive, perseverance and determination.
- Awards should include student-designed criteria and students could in-turn play a role in highlighting the extent to which they have met the criteria.
- Awards should be based on family/socio-economic needs.

**Post-secondary award** implications were discussed and some suggestions included extending the timelines during which the money must be used and providing financial assistance to anyone in need.

**Passport to Education** funding was certainly scrutinized by a number of forum participants in multiple jurisdictions. Many felt that the definition of 'success' should be considered to fall well beyond

ones grades and greater flexibility in the Passport to Education criteria was encouraged. The mention of an 'unlevel playing field' was made in reference to financial aid being given based on student skills.

**Local districts** have an interest in determining award criteria that reflect individual communities and their unique cultural elements: money could be managed locally in order to better suit the specific needs of students and to address the often unique situations found in schools.

**Personalized learning environments**, and the discussion surrounding this concept, seems to be incongruent with the current system of determining awards (such as Passport to Education). Further discussion may be required if an awards system is to reflect education plans that are individualized.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This report is the result of the efforts of many people.

Special thanks to the regional managers who organized the community forums across the Thompson-Okanagan area:

Mike Hooker  
SD 19 Revelstoke

Joe Rogers  
SD 22 Vernon

Norm Bradley  
SD23 Kelowna

Marcus Toneatto  
SD 53 Okanagan-Similkameen

Karen Goetz  
SD 58 Nicola-Similkameen

Myron Dueck  
SD67 Okanagan-Skaha

Bill Hamblett  
SD 73 Kamloops-Thompson

Teresa Downs  
SD 74 Gold Trail

Gene Doray  
SD 83 North Okanagan-Shuswap



Data compilation supplied by **WH Data Management**,  
Penticton.



**BCSDCEDA Professional Development Workshop  
September 13, 2012  
Graduation Requirements Advisory Dialogue (GRAD) Team**

**BCSDCEDA GENERAL MEETING – PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SESSION  
SEPTEMBER 13, 2012**

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**Facilitated by: Janine Hannis, Coordinator, Adult and Alternate Education and Tim Winkelmanns, Manager, Alternate Education**

Ministry Timeline- - June – December 2012

Initial Planning Meeting was held in June - - 6 Regional Representatives

In August – Partner Groups were invited to a meeting (15 groups represented) including:

1. BC Colleges
2. BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils
3. BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association
4. BC School Superintendents Association
5. BC School Trustees Association
6. BC Student Voice
7. BC Teachers' Federation
8. Research Universities' Council
9. BC Association of Institutes and Universities
10. BC Chamber of Commerce
11. Council of Administrators of Special Education
12. Continuing Education Directors' Association
13. Conseil Scolaire Francophone de la Colombie-Britannique
14. Federation of Independent School Associations
15. First Nations Education Steering Committee

This Fall – Regional Meetings will be held to come up with draft synthesis by January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013.  
After the draft – feedback and response and then development of proposed directions for Graduation.

Meeting facilitators can use the graduation toolkit at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/graduation/>

The toolkit contains:

- Invitation templates
- Feedback sheets
- Tips on running successful meetings

Themes will likely emerge. When the regional dialogue is over Ministry will synthesize the feedback.

**Focus: What's best for learners.**

**Inquiry based on five essential questions:**

1. 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?
2. Beyond the core, how could pathways for choice or exploration be provided?
3. Research is underway with focus on the following five cross-curricular competencies\*:
  - Communication
  - Critical Thinking
  - Creative Thinking and Innovation
  - Personal Responsibility and Well Being
  - Social Responsibility

How do you think students could demonstrate these?

*\*In development*

4. How could student learning be communicated to:
  - Students
  - Parents/Guardians
  - Post secondary Institutions/Employers
5. How would you design an awards program to recognize student success in a personalized learning environment?

Align with education citizen (see powerpoint slides)

- critical thinking
- problem solvers
- knowledge about self
- self regulated
- self motivated
- creative
- metacognition
- contribution to group
- communication with others
- work experience
- functional literacy
- computer technological literacy
- social media skills

**BCSDCEDA Member Response:**

**Question One:**

**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?**

- How is this different than what we're doing now? Our expectation is that we're now trying to get the education citizen through curriculum -what other ways can we build those skills?  
End is not the exam, the 80 credits etc. – perhaps a portfolio that demonstrates the skills and knowledge they've gained over the years.

- Some acceptable learning standards need to be developed to ensure that students achieve the required skills before graduation.  
Functional teams, ability to learn, understanding of how to learn.
- A “culture shift” is required in these areas.
  - Citizenship
  - knowing how to learn – downgrade content
  - physical - - i.e. hand eye coordinate
  - engagement
  - basic skills - - reading, writing, arithmetic
  - emphasis on employability skills
  - ability to plan
  - practical skills are critical
  - learning how to develop your own gifts
  - health and wellness, lifestyle, balance
  - multi-dimensional citizens
  - emotional IQ
  - financial literacy
  - mechanical competency
  - balance between physical, social and artistic skills
- Ensure that graduation designation leads to success in workplace or in a post-secondary environment.
- Digital literacy - - need to understand how to use the tools ethically and effectively.
- Need to teach students how to be learners and evaluate what they are learning - - think critically about what they are learning.
- Ability to make judgments about what they are thinking or learning.
- Will we apply the same core requirements across the board - - with school aged students as well as with adult learners?
  - Can we apply benchmarks?
  - What will the standards be?
  - What does lifelong learning look like?
  - More electives
  - More work experience
  - Functional literacy
  - Computer or tech literacy
  - Team/leadership/Psychology
  - Understand social dynamics, friend, interpersonal relationships Civics Success-graduate  
Age of the graduate?

**Question Two:**

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

- There is a need to publish pathways for students to be able to explore options for learning within the province (is this a “Ministry responsibility”?).

- Develop strong partnerships with post-secondary, business etc.
  - Make it possible for students to know what the pathways are within the province - - student awareness of other options for learning that they can participate in.
  - We don't want post-secondary to drive what we do in the secondary system.
  - Remove some of the barriers to learning by bringing in trades and technical focus to allow students to gain employable tangible skills. BCIT model v. UBC model.
  - Appreciating and valuing trades and technology as a viable career.
  - James Gorman - trades plan coming. Skills shortages coming. How can K-12 address these?
    - see trades discussion - -Ministry and Jobs Plan (Tim Winklemans)
      - Ministry developing a strategy for shortfalls in the skilled jobs area
        - Top three shortages:
          - Heavy Duty Mechanics
          - Pipe fitting
          - Millwrights
  - Make connections with industry to allow students to explore pathways towards skills and jobs.
  - School>work>apprenticeship>post-secondary training
  - Removing barriers for adults to enter trades.
  - Virtual experiences v. practical experiences
  - Teacher competencies
  - Have teachers participating in research and partnerships to increase engagement/excitement in their subject areas – (models like the environmental school in Maple Ridge were discussed where teachers are in the field with the students exploring and doing research).
  - Focusing less on content and fact retrieval and more on critical thinking.
  - Focusing more on IDS model - - ability to pursue questions of inquiry and interest rather than completed allocations of time.
  - Inquiry based v. project based learning.
  - “High tech high” – Rosenthal <http://www.hightechhigh.org/>
  - Community involvement in the school - - both in and out of the school
  - Community based model
    - Beyond the core, how could we provide pathways Wexp, job shadow,
    - - High Tech High, Larry Rosenberg, California
- \*\*check out Finland slide\*\*** and Germany

**Question Five:**

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

- Referral, interview, presentation

Unfortunately, ran out of time before we could engage in dialogue about questions 3, 4, and 5 in a deep and meaningful way.

*Thank you to Janine and Tim for facilitating this workshop.*

**BCSDCEDA recommends that members participate in regional meetings.**

## GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS REVIEW: SUMMARY OF MINISTRY FEEDBACK

In addition to the Advisory Group-led regional consultations that took place across the province in the fall of 2012, the Ministry received graduation requirements review feedback directly from the following sources:

- Graduation-related feedback from Curriculum & Assessment Framework Regional Working Sessions that were held across BC in the spring of 2012. Eighteen such sessions were held, with hundreds (or more) participants in total.
- The Ministry's Education Plan Engagement website, which includes two graduation program/graduation requirements-specific questions, and direct submissions to the Ministry. Altogether, 92 comments/submissions were made as of December 12, 2012.
- Ministry consultations with specific groups, using the slideshow and the five questions developed for the regional consultations. The groups consulted include school district directors of continuing education, career educators, trades and technology sector representatives, and internal Ministry staff. About 100 participants in total were consulted in this way.

An analysis of this feedback formed the foundation for this report, which summarizes, interprets, and develops the feedback in terms of the 'big ideas' contained therein.

### THE 'BIG IDEAS'

#### **Big Idea #1: Students take responsibility for themselves and their own learning...**

In a nutshell, what people said is that by the time they graduate, students should be self-directed learners who can examine themselves critically (including their own learning, abilities, and interests), and who are responsible for themselves and able to manage their own transition from K-12 to work/post-secondary/whatever else awaits them upon graduation.

Broadly, by the time they graduate, students should possess the knowledge and abilities they will need in order to be successful 'in the real world'.

This involves both caring for themselves...

- Skills for life, including financial literacy and maintaining a household
- Personal health and well-being
- Career and transition planning, including use of labour market information

... And taking their place in the world.

- Workplace readiness – [essential/employability](#) skills, and all that they entail
- Political awareness/citizenship/contributing to the community
- Environmental/global understanding (possibly including a second language)
- Social awareness (history, culture & arts, language, geography)
- Socially competent

Several individuals, who recognize that preparing students for life after K-12 is not the sole responsibility of schools, raised the matter of the role of the education system vis-a-vis other social institutions (including the family) in preparing youth for success in the real world: What is the school's responsibility? And what is the responsibility of other social institutions?

The question was raised, but not answered, in the feedback.

This brings to mind the three goals of the school system (as contained in [Statement of Education Policy Order](#)):

- Intellectual Development – prime goal of school system, supported by family and community
- Human and Social Development – goal shared among school, family, community
- Career Development – goal shared among school, family, community

This information is offered as background should there be an interest in considering these goals and having a conversation on the respective roles of schools and other social institutions in preparing students for life after K-12.

That said, the next ‘big idea’ addresses this issue to a certain extent. And it is directly tied to Big Idea #1: Students take responsibility for themselves and their own learning, yes...

**Big Idea #2: ... But they are supported by educators and the family & community, beginning early and on-going**

Within school, vocational counselling (e.g., via teacher-advisors) should start early in K-12 for all students and then be on-going, in order to help students identify interests and aptitudes (and ultimately, possible careers), and to personalize students’ learning.

Both in and out of school, people believe that we should do a better job of involving the community in the school and students in the community, including connections with employers/business/industry, and making use of community mentors for students to connect school and community. This could include older students mentoring younger students (thereby making use of an under-utilized resource already in the system – namely, students themselves), and recent graduates mentoring soon-to-be graduates.

What might such support look like? Examples of ideas include the following:

- projects that are co-created by students and teachers, and under general teacher supervision, but (in keeping with the notion that students assume responsibility for their own learning) that involve student-led interdisciplinary research to solve ‘reasonable’ problems
- recognizing various in-school (e.g., courses, clubs, sports) and out-of-school (e.g., jobs, community activities, volunteerism, personal projects) activities
- on-going communications between educators, family, and community members, with the goal of facilitating and improving student learning. In addition to on-going communication, it is suggested that there be regular ‘checkpoints’ for teachers to ensure students are on-track, as well as designated ‘points-in-time’ in which teachers connect with parents (like report cards now)
- on-going teacher/advisor-provided written (non-verbal) feedback on projects/tasks/assignments

That students assume responsibility for their own learning suggests another ‘big idea’, namely...

**Big Idea #3: Allow students to meet education (including graduation) requirements in their own way (personalization/flexibility/pathways)**

It is recognized by many (though not necessarily explicitly stated) that current graduation requirements appear to be based on preparing (almost) all students for academic post-secondary education programs (i.e., there is one 'stream'). Almost all who commented agree that graduation requirements/the graduation program should be flexible and able to prepare students for any and all future pathways (post-secondary, work, other), or alternately that there be multiple graduation programs/requirements for different student populations (e.g., pre-employment or post-secondary preparation – vocational and academic 'streams').

Conjoining student responsibility for their own learning with this idea of flexibility, coupled with the recognition that as students progress through K-12 they mature and their needs and interests change, leads to the view that students should develop and pursue their learning pathways earlier than the graduation program years, and that (to use the vernacular of the current graduation program) personalization should exist in the meeting of 'core' requirements, not just 'electives'.

In the graduation program, personalization may take the form of pathways to graduation, but pathways that are responsive to changes in the student; that is, pathways that are flexible/adaptable/'living' and not fixed or static. All pathways should allow students to meet graduation requirements; that is, students should not be penalized for switching pathways during their graduation program.

This idea of personalization can manifest itself in student-led project work that recognizes both in-school and out-of-school activities (as mentioned earlier), and that is then reflected in student portfolios.

Many respondents expressed the concern that such personalization might endanger accountability. To address the concern, they contend that all students have a personalized learning plan that includes an assessment component, and that (also as previously mentioned) there be on-going dialogue and communication between student, educators, parents, and others.

Apart from accountability, this notion of flexibility/personalization/pathways comes with some concerns or issues, as raised by respondents:

- Inflexibility of current school practices (e.g., Grade groupings, fixed-time course entry), school schedule (calendar/day) and school buildings hinders personalized learning and the pursuit of student choice/exploration/pathways
  - ❖ Make the structures of schooling more flexible (e.g., move beyond an 8:30 – 3:30 instructional day; students proceed to higher-level study based on ability/readiness, not age)
  - ❖ Eliminate age/Grade groupings: Group students by ability, or allow students to self-select on the basis of their interests – and allow them to progress at their own speed
- How mobile will students be who have a personalized education program? There is a need to ensure that student mobility is not adversely impacted by personalized learning and student choice/pathways (including outside of BC)
- Equity concerns with personalized learning and student choice/pathways (wealthier families and larger communities have more options for students)
- Need dialogue with post-secondary institutions (including PSIs outside BC) to ensure that students can transition smoothly from K-12 to post-secondary, regardless of their personalized (graduation) 'pathway'

The next 'big idea' has already been mentioned a few times, but will now be briefly elaborated upon.

#### **Big Idea #4: Learning through projects, and evidenced in student portfolios**

This 'big idea' goes hand-in-hand with the previous 'big ideas' on students assuming responsibility for their own learning and flexibility/personalization/pathways.

In considering how student learning can be demonstrated, assessed, and rewarded, there was agreement that it not be through the current provincial exam program, which should be eliminated.

Instead, student learning, and demonstrations of student learning, should be 'authentic', with students demonstrating learning by 'doing' and not via pen-and-paper tests.

Student and teacher co-created but student-led projects, involving interdisciplinary research to solve 'reasonable' problems for example, are seen as the means for students to learn, as well as the means by which student learning (both competencies **and** content) is assessed and communicated (to parents/guardians, PSIs, and employers) in student portfolios.

Projects then form the basis of portfolios of student work and other 'authentic' demonstrations of learning, such as:

- case-studies
- competitions
- presentations (e.g., project results)
- student self- and peer evaluation

The next 'big idea' has also already been mentioned, and it is...

#### **Big Idea #5: Involve students in the world outside of school, to prepare them for life after K-12 and to make a smooth transition from school to 'the real world'**

If students are to manage their own transition from K-12 to work, further study, or something else beyond the K-12 education system, and if they are to be prepared to take their place in the world upon graduation as socially competent, productive and engaged citizens, then it follows that they be prepared for life beyond K-12 by involving them in their communities and the larger world while they are students.

This 'big idea' is aligned with the other 'big ideas' in that activities outside of school, such as might be undertaken as part of a student-led project, can further a student's pathway to graduation and help the student to meet graduation requirements.

A focus on students preparing for life after K-12 and making a smooth transition from school to 'the real world' leads to the next 'big idea', which is...

#### **Big Idea #6: Graduation is a process, not an event**

We need to move beyond thinking of graduation as an event. Students mature at different rates and are ready to transition at different times. Students should 'graduate' not because they have accumulated a set number of credits and reached a somewhat arbitrary time (June of their Grade 12 year), but when

they, their teachers, parents and others involved in their education (e.g., community members) believe they have demonstrated the content and competencies required for graduation.

It has been suggested that the graduation program be re-branded as ‘the transition years,’ and further, that it be communicated to students from early on in their education and throughout K-12 that the goal of K-12 is not graduation per se, but a successful transition from K-12 to work, further study, or whatever else the student wishes to pursue.

The concerns with accountability that were mentioned previously bring us to our next, second-to-last ‘big idea’, namely...

### **Big Idea #7: Have provincial assessments to ensure high standards**

Concerns with accountability due to personalization can be addressed to some extent with measures already stated, including:

- student learning plans that include an assessment component
- on-going communications between educators, family, and community members
- regular ‘checkpoints’ for teachers to ensure students are on-track
- designated ‘point-in-time’ teacher/parent check-ins (e.g., report cards)

But there is also support for provincial assessments to ensure high standards and rigour. There is agreement that the current provincial exam program should be eliminated, and replaced with more ‘authentic’ assessments of student learning that involve students demonstrating their learning by ‘doing’ rather than via pen-and-paper tests. Such provincial assessments could be high-stakes (pass/fail) exit assessments intended to ensure that students are meeting at least minimal standards of content and competencies.

And the final ‘big idea’ is...

### **Big Idea #8: Recognize and reward authentic student learning and commitment**

Students should be recognized and rewarded for authentic demonstrations of and commitment to learning, and not just success on pen-and-paper tests. Recognition should be provided for:

- various in-school (e.g., courses, clubs, sports) and out-of-school (e.g., jobs, community activities, volunteerism, personal projects) activities, including community contribution/service
- demonstrations of competencies/skills, including student projects
- student success in achieving their personal goals (as articulated in a personalized learning plan)
- improvement, not just achievement

In addition, and in terms of an awards program, there is widespread support for recognizing students throughout K-12, and not just at graduation. And by recognizing improvement and not just achievement, it will not just be the ‘top performers’ who are impacted, but rather, it will provide encouragement/incentive for at-risk students and those who may be less supported at home.

Finally, in terms of an awards program, it is suggested that students be nominated not just by teachers, but also by other students and individuals outside of school (public nomination), and possibly that a local panel be established to make recommendations/determinations of recipients.



# British Columbia Teachers' Federation

100-550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2 • 604-871-2283, 1-800-663-9163 • [www.bctf.ca](http://www.bctf.ca)

*A Union of Professionals*

Executive Office fax: 604-871-2290

## GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS REVIEW

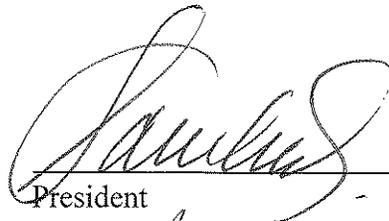
*A Brief to the*

### Ministry of Education

*from the*

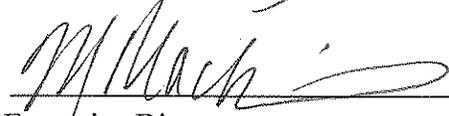
### British Columbia Teachers' Federation

December 2012



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President



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Executive Director



# British Columbia Teachers' Federation

100-550 West 6th Avenue, Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2 • 604-871-2283, 1-800-663-9163 • [www.bctf.ca](http://www.bctf.ca)  
TTY 604-871-2185 (deaf and hard of hearing) Executive Office fax: 604-871-2290

# GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS REVEIW

*A Brief to the*

**Ministry of Education**

*from the*

**British Columbia Teachers' Federation**

December 2012

\_\_\_\_\_  
President

\_\_\_\_\_  
Executive Director

# Graduation Requirements Review Brief 2012

## BC Teachers' Federation

*bctf.ca/BriefsAndPositionPapers.aspx*

### **Preamble**

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation is the union of professionals that represents the 41,000 teachers in the public education system in British Columbia. The BCTF is committed to success for every student in a strong and stable public education system.

In reviewing the current graduation requirements for the province of BC, the BCTF encouraged discussion and input from all members, and specifically requested teachers who sit on BCTF committees and Provincial Specialist Associations to provide advice.

### **Recommendations for consideration**

The BCTF recognizes that the ministry will receive input from many sources suggesting amendments to the graduation requirements. It is a priority for BC's teachers that any changes made to the graduation requirements for students continue to foster the growth and development of every individual, to the end that she or he will become a self-reliant, self-disciplined, participating citizen with a sense of social and environmental responsibility within a democratic, pluralistic society. This is the sacred trust of public education, which prepares all students to engage in a world each generation will shape and build. The public education system must provide students with knowledge and wisdom; the system must protect and nurture their natural joy of learning, encourage them to become persons of character, strength, and integrity, infuse them with hope and spirit, and guide them to resolute and thoughtful action.

Public education plays a pivotal role in providing opportunities for those students who are disadvantaged in their wider, general communities. Children who live in poverty, who are marginalized because of their physical or mental challenges, or who are not of the dominant culture must be able to enter and graduate from public schools on the same basis as all other children. Schools must therefore provide support systems to mitigate the inequities of society as a whole. Specifically, schools in BC must address their historic failure with Aboriginal students.

All education partner groups share responsibility in this. The BCTF strongly urges the ministry to include, as part of its graduation requirements, that all students must successfully complete one course in Aboriginal history and/or culture before leaving school at the end of Grade 12. As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada stated in its interim report,

“There is a need to increase public awareness and understanding of the history of residential schools. This will require comprehensive public-awareness efforts by the federal government and in-school educational efforts by provincial and territorial governments and educational institutions.”<sup>1</sup>

In addition, all appropriate K–12 Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) should embed Aboriginal content. The ministry will need to provide additional funding for an adequate array of resources to support embedded Aboriginal Prescribed Learning Outcomes (PLOs). We believe that this may begin to rectify the historic failings of the public education system with Aboriginal students, and help further the goal of reconciliation in society as a whole.

“Marginalization is the social process by which individuals and groups are relegated to the fringe of society. It is closely tied to the concepts of social exclusion and social disadvantage, which refer to processes by which people are systematically blocked from rights, opportunities and resources that are normally available in a society.”<sup>2</sup>

The issue of marginalization is of central concern to teachers. To provide a quality public education to all students, no matter their life circumstance and regardless of their geographic location, socio-economic status, and language of instruction, the ministry should ensure that all students have equitable access to all core and elective courses offered within the province. Students who live in remote locations should be able to enrol in core and elective courses on the

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<sup>1</sup> Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Interim Report. (Winnipeg: Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada, 2012), p. 7

<sup>2</sup> The Honourable Wally T. Oppal. Forsaken: The Report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry. Executive Summary. (Victoria: Missing Women Commission of Inquiry, November 19, 2012), p. 12.

same basis as those who live in dense urban areas. Boards of education should not have to choose which courses to offer students because of a scarcity of funds.

In summary, the Federation recommends that:

1. Any changes include support systems to mitigate the inequities of society to provide all students with the opportunity to graduate from high school.
2. All students in BC's public schools be required to successfully complete one course in Aboriginal history and/or culture before graduation.
3. All K–12 courses in public schools embed Aboriginal perspectives and content as appropriate.
4. The ministry should ensure that all students, no matter their life circumstance, their geographic location, socio-economic status, or language of instruction, have equitable access to all core and elective courses offered within the province.

Students throughout the province should be able to graduate with a proficiency in a second language in the course of 12 years of formal education. To that end, the BCTF recommends that second-language instruction begin in Kindergarten, and be supported throughout a learner's public education experience. French, one of the two official languages in Canada, should be offered to students at the outset of their school careers and continue throughout the elementary years so that by graduation, students are proficient in the language.

In addition to second-language proficiency, the BCTF believes that students must graduate as well-rounded individuals who have had the opportunity to achieve success in both the Fine Arts and Applied Skills areas. Therefore, we recommend that the ministry include the requirement that students take both a Fine Arts and an Applied Skills course as part of their graduation program.

Public education in British Columbia has been available to children between the ages of 5–19, and adults who want to complete their Grade 12 graduation. We recognize that not all students learn at the same rate, and that some leave school before completion and then return to finish their studies. We recommend that the ministry provide quality, publicly funded education,

including self-paced programs, to students over the age of 19 who are still completing or upgrading their Grade 12 diploma. In addition, the ministry should support those adult learners by ensuring that extra learning support services, including adequate access to counselling, psycho-educational testing, and learning-support specialists be available for adult students.

The BCTF supports the acknowledgement from the ministry that students should obtain cross-curricular competencies. Therefore, we recommend that the term “social justice” be included as part of those competencies under the domain of Personal and Social Competency. These students are going to inherit a world grappling with war, gridlock, climate change, gun control, discrimination, the legacy of colonialism, poverty, and a variety of other critical long-term and emerging problems. Central to all the work that we do in schools, and central to any reconceptualization of curriculum and graduation requirements, must be a commitment to enabling students to create systemic change.

Students have to develop the skills, understanding, and responsibility to analyze and take on these issues. The province and the teaching profession are responsible for creating such active citizens who work for social change for the betterment of humanity. We must act in the interests of the children we teach, so they may live in a world that has enhanced equity, security, and sustainability.

Cross-curricular competencies should be integrated across the curriculum through various and appropriate IRPs. Rather than becoming an “add on,” thus resulting in fewer contact hours for students enrolled in courses needed for graduation, cross-curricular competencies must be embedded within existing and future IRPs. Teachers are challenged to complete the PLOs in required courses needed for Grade 12 graduation. Teachers have specifically requested that more time not be taken away from the current contact hours they have with students.

In short, the Federation recommends:

5. Students throughout the province should be able to graduate with a proficiency in a second language.

6. Graduation requirements should include the successful completion of at least one Fine Arts and one Applied Skills secondary course.
7. The ministry provide quality, publicly funded education programs to students over the age of 19 who are still completing or upgrading their Grade 12 diploma, including support services such as psycho-educational testing and learning support.
8. A social justice cross-curricular competency be included under the domain of Personal and Social Competencies to acknowledge the need to graduate students with the skills and attitudes of engaged citizens.
9. Cross-curricular competencies should be embedded across the curriculum in appropriate IRPs rather than be added to graduation requirements.

One competency not currently being addressed before a student graduates from Grade 12 is that of sexual health education. Throughout K–12, students should receive age and developmentally appropriate education that allows them to become aware of the issues and facts connected to their sexual health. In particular, LGBTQ youth, who have traditionally been marginalized and often bullied within our schools, must have their needs considered and addressed by ensuring that sexual-health curriculum and learning resources are relevant to their relationships and lives.

Of course, sexual health must be taught within a safe and supportive school environment, whether in a discrete course, or embedded within existing curriculum.

Another recommendation to address systemic marginalization and its attendant effects of exclusion, harassment, bullying, and disenfranchisement, is for the ministry to provide an elective at the Grades 11/12 level in Women’s Studies. Social Justice 12 was a course set up to address all areas of discrimination, but sex discrimination is still a pervasive and pernicious problem within our society that directly affects half our population and indirectly affects all of us. For example:

“Violence against women continues to be a serious and pervasive social problem despite years of concerted effort. Aboriginal women experience higher levels of violence in terms of both incidence and severity and are disproportionately represented in the number

of missing and murdered women across Canada... In British Columbia and around the world, vulnerable and marginalized women are exposed to a higher risk of violence including sexual assault, murder and serial predation.”<sup>3</sup>

Violence against women, economic disparity, and the dual responsibilities of wage-earner and homemaker still plague women throughout the developed and developing worlds. The importance of the status of women to the emotional, economic, and physical health of a society has been documented for decades by the United Nations and a host of academic and political bodies. Yet, in 2012 there is no provincial, elective Women’s Studies course for students to take before they graduate.

In summary, the Federation recommends:

10. Throughout their K–12 school years students should receive age and developmentally appropriate sexual health education that considers and addresses the needs of all students, including LGBTQ youth.
11. Women’s Studies 11/12 be an additional elective offered to students.

To keep as many students in our schools to the point of completion of their program of study, the BCTF recommends that Grade 10 be removed as part of the Graduation Program. Students who are 15 and 16-years-old are often not mature enough to make wise decisions about their future needs. Facing barriers to graduation, such as the Grade 10 Science exam, may be just enough to convince immature thinkers that school is not for them. Experience and data shows that many of our Aboriginal students leave school before finishing Grade 10, often during their Grade 10 year. It is incumbent on the province to find as many pathways to success for all of our learners, especially our Aboriginal students. Removing Grade 10 from the Graduation Program is one such step.

All students deserve the opportunity to graduate from Grade 12 with the requisites necessary for any post-secondary program.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 7

Recognition of the diverse range of literacies, such as numeracy, fine arts, ecology, science, applied skills, information technology, physical, and communication literacy in existing or revised IRPs will help create more pathways to successful graduation. In our diverse and rapidly changing society, a graduate needs the ability to adapt quickly. Possession of a range of literacies will help students face their future work and personal lives.

For those students supported with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for learning disabilities, graduation pathways should be offered that allow for completion of a Dogwood Certificate or the Adult Dogwood Program. Alternate pathways should be explored that would allow such students to complete a Dogwood Certificate so they may enrol in a post-secondary institution of their choice.

In summary, the Federation recommends:

12. Remove Grade 10 from the Graduation Program.
13. Maintain program requirements such that all students graduating from Grade 12 have the necessary requisites for any post-secondary program.
14. Recognize diverse literacies such as numeracy, fine arts, ecological, scientific, and communication literacies as pathways to successful graduation.
15. Offer alternative pathways, in particular for students with special learning needs, to completion of graduation requirements for the Dogwood certificate.

Strong library programs support students' individual pathways and choices. Teacher-librarians are able to provide the ultimate personalized learning for students. Today's school library is a thinking laboratory that must be properly funded, staffed, and supported. Dr. Ken Haycock and others have repeatedly documented a strong correlation between student achievement and the presence of a well-stocked, properly funded, and professionally staffed school library.<sup>4</sup>

Teacher-librarians are skilled at finding and evaluating information from print, digital, and electronic sources. They are experts in assessing information for currency, accuracy, authority,

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<sup>4</sup> Ken Haycock. *The Crisis in Canada's School Libraries: The Case for Reform and Re-Investment*. (Toronto: Association of Canadian Publishers, 2003).

relevance, and bias, and in the teaching of these skills to students who must become critically aware of the authority of information they access and cite. As a result, the collaboration of teacher-librarians and classroom teachers enhances the teaching and learning environment.

Children have opportunities in well developed school library programs to acquire, develop, and use the important skills of lifelong learners. The ministry needs to ensure the development and maintenance of strong library programs in every school in British Columbia.

In short, the Federation recommends:

16. Ensure that every school is supported by a properly funded, professional staffed school library.

No matter what alternate pathways are created to aid students' pursuit of graduation, it must be clear that those pathways are to be provided by certified teachers. While it is often appropriate and warranted to bring in community members to augment students' understanding or complement their learning, those special guests must always be under the supervision of a certified teacher. Teachers ensure that the IRPs are followed and know the best way to introduce PLOs to their students. Members of the external community may be useful at certain times and for specific activities, but they are not teachers and should not be used as a replacement for a certified professional. In British Columbia, teachers are highly trained and qualified. The BC public education systems' quality is due in large part to the strength of its professional teaching staff. Efforts to reduce costs in their jurisdictions by introducing lay personnel to teaching roles is short-sighted; it robs whole education systems of their quality and students of critical learning opportunities.

For several years, the BCTF has supported the use of a wide variety of assessment and evaluation practices. Along with the ministry, faculties of education, and pedagogical experts, the BCTF has encouraged teachers to engage in assessment practices that inform students' learning as well as provide them with feedback on their learning. The Graduation Program in British Columbia must continue to support teachers' autonomy to use assessments for, of, and as learning, in ways teachers deem appropriate.

If there are any substantive changes to the reporting/communicating process in the Graduation Program as a result of this review, the BCTF urges the ministry to work with the BCTF and its locals to provide any needed in-service for teachers. That in-service must not be provided as mandated teacher professional development. Teachers must remain in control of their own professional-development needs, which must be integral to their individual practice. New methods or systems in the workplace, require the employer, be it the ministry or the individual board of education, to provide the time and money needed to retrain the workforce. Whatever changes are brought to the reporting/communication process must also be manageable by teachers. The overwhelming bureaucracy of the current system is crippling. Teachers' time must not be spent filling out forms and producing data and reports, rather than working directly with, and offering service to students.

In summary, the Federation recommends that:

17. Do not replace qualified teachers with lay personnel.
18. Encourage the use of a wide variety of assessment and evaluation practices that inform student's learning.
19. Work with teachers through their union, the BCTF, in the development of reporting and communication process and policies and other education change initiatives of the ministry.
20. Provide in-service for teachers expected to implement change.
21. Insure that change addresses and reduces the current burdensome requirements for data collection and reporting that are robbing teachers of instructional time.

## **Conclusion**

Public schools are places where all students are welcomed and supported in their learning. Making changes to the Graduation Program should reinforce and support students' opportunities to learn and grow. The BCTF has made several recommendations that we believe will enhance students' growth and help them realize their full potential. With regard to Aboriginal education, we must address the system's failings and contribute to the reconciliation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in BC. We must continue to foster the growth of all children, regardless of

their socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, or geographic location. Their future and the future of our province depend upon it.

JT:cep/sytfeu



# Graduation Requirements Dialogue

A Community Conversation About the Future of  
Graduation Requirements

*Fraser Valley Region  
Robert Bateman Secondary School, Abbotsford BC*



## SUMMARY REPORT

On October 25, 2012 more than 250 parents, students, teachers, school administrators and community members participated in a Ministry forum to help inform the development of future requirements for British Columbia high school graduation. The six school districts in the region, Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Fraser-Cascade, Langley, Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows and Mission were represented. The wide ranging discussions centered around five key questions and responses were captured and submitted by group recorders. This paper is the writer's attempt to analyze and synthesize a large amount of information into some key themes and ideas that might serve to provide some direction for further action.

### METHODOLOGY

Content analysis and synthesis has, by nature, a subjective component and the writer has attempted to identify themes that are mutually exclusive and capture the breadth of responses by forum participants. The goal is to capture the big picture and avoid overemphasizing what appear to be singularly unique or outlying statements. To this end, the synthesis captures responses that were provided with a moderate to high level of frequency.

*“Most of the schools that today’s children attend were built when prevailing wisdom assumed that children were born to be taught rather than to learn. Which is why, for so many children, the wonder of learning has been replaced by the tedium of trying to remember what they were taught about something which really didn’t interest them very much in the first place.”*

*John Abbott  
Overschooled, But Under-Educated*

### RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS - A SYNTHESIS

In general terms, participants expressed strong support for the notion of the Educated Citizen and the five core competencies, and encouraged the Ministry to pursue novel ways in which evidence could be provided that our education system is graduating students who possess the described attributes.

They supported the need to focus on core skills while at the same time providing opportunities to explore their interests and passions through expanded choice and pathways to graduation.

Relevance of the learning experience was a recurring theme. Strengthened K-12 Career Education/ Exploration programs and related activities were identified as an area of needed improvement with a view to helping students make thoughtful and informed choices.

They expressed a desire to have a more flexible system in terms of graduation requirements, delivery of curriculum and learning experiences, communicating student learning, and acknowledging student achievement through financial awards.



## QUESTION 1

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?

Based on the working descriptions that were provided, participants voiced strong support for the five core competencies: **Communication, Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking and Innovation, Personal Responsibility and Well Being, and Social Responsibility.**

There were questions as to whether the core competencies adequately captured all of the attributes of the Educated Citizen.

Additional skills areas that might fall under the theme of **Personal Responsibility** (or alternatively, perhaps, **Employability Skills**) were identified:

- The ability to think independently and engage in self-direction and self-regulation.
- The ability to be flexible, resourceful, and adapt to change.
- The ability to set goals and make prudent decisions.

**Financial Literacy** was frequently identified as a fundamental skill area. Concerns were raised about whether this area was being adequately addressed in schools at this time.

There was also considerable discussion about physical health and well being, and there were questions about the adequacy of the way in which senior students are currently being asked to demonstrate their skill or involvement in this area.

**Social Responsibility** also generated considerable discussion. Some key ideas that might also fall under the theme of Social Responsibility were raised:

- The notion of service learning and voluntarism as a means by which to demonstrate social responsibility.
- The need to develop collaboration/teamwork skills and leadership skills was identified as a high priority (employability skills).
- An important component in demonstrating competency in Social Responsibility was described as an understanding of global economic, environmental, social and cultural issues and their impacts on our communities.

Participants also identified a number of additional essential skills areas.

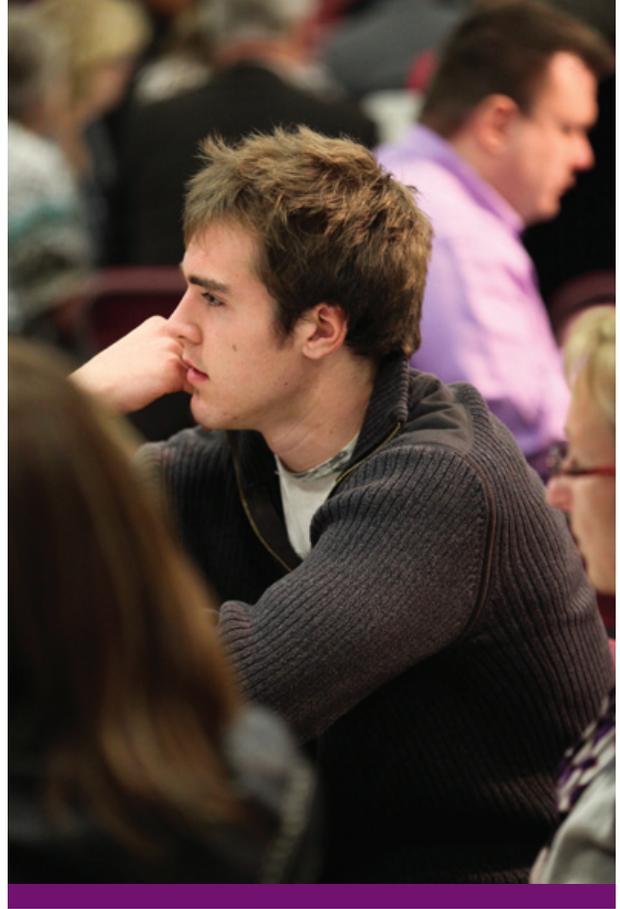
***“Authentic leadership skill development should be infused into the curriculum. Leadership is more than simply planning events. It’s about learning effective communication skills in order to lead a group”***

*Forum Participant*

**Literacy and Numeracy** - Being literate in all its forms (reading, writing, speaking listening) and numerate, especially in the application of maths to real world problems and personal finance.

**Information literacy** - The ability to access, evaluate, synthesize, and present information using appropriate technology.

**Career Awareness** - Career exploration, planning, and goal setting was identified as an important component of the graduation program. Questions were raised about the sequencing, timing and effectiveness of the current K-12 curriculum model for Planning and Career Education, in particular Planning 10 and Grad Transitions. Expanded work experience opportunities (possibly for all students) were identified as a means by which students can demonstrate key personal responsibility skills as described above.





## QUESTION 2

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

**Rethinking the Concept of Graduation** - If one subscribes to the notion that students learn at different rates, and learning is continuous and lifelong, it would follow that graduation would occur at different times for different students. Currently, graduation is perceived to be too much of a scheduled, culminating “event” to which students arrive on time (June of Grade 12), early, or late. Consideration should be given to creating:

- Multiple exit points for graduation depending on the student’s chosen program and pathway to post-secondary
- A more seamless transition between high school graduation and post-secondary or the workplace.
- A graduation program that encourages all students to continue their education in some way, with a view to learning marketable skills that lead to gainful employment.

**Encourage risk taking - Removing the Deterrents** - Students need to be encouraged to take some risks, to try things and to understand that it is alright to fail. The current emphasis on achieving high marks and our punitive response to failure (F on a report card, no credit granted, and total repeats) are deterrents that need to be removed.

**Cooperative Education** - The expansion of Coop Ed programs was seen to be desirable. They are seen to be an effective means by which to create choice and pathways to graduation; they are usually cohort based, giving teachers the flexibility to design relevant cross-curricular learning experiences; they are less dependent on the school schedule; and they provide a significant work experience component.

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*“Graduation should have a softer deadline ..currently, we have tension, stress...some of our students are ready to graduate, some are not...we need to come up with a graduation dependent on “readiness to leave”*

*Forum Participant*

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*“Graduation should be a gradual process because it’s pushing people who aren’t ready “out” and its forcing people who are ready to leave to stay”*

*Student Participant*

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*“Let’s not always judge kids - give them opportunities to explore new things but at their own pace - it’s ok to fail - freedom to try and fail - and if they decide it’s not for them, let’s continue to search”*

*Forum Participant*

**Problem or Project Based Learning** - More opportunities for curricular and interdisciplinary project based learning should be encouraged. A greater number of students should be encouraged to engage in Independent Directed Studies (IDS). Appropriate teacher mentoring and the development of competency as independent, self directed learners in K-9 would help ensure student success and attainment of high standards.

**Extending Learning Beyond the Classroom** - Relevance can be brought to classroom learning experiences by reaching out to businesses and community organizations.

**External Credit** - Opportunities to obtain external credit for learning outside of school should be expanded. The need to adhere to rigorous standards is a given.

**Flexible Scheduling** - School schedules need to be more flexible so that learning is less time bound by the school day or school calendar. Enhanced flexibility offers opportunities for students to combine school and work, attend classes at more than one campus, or pursue learning interests offered in the community.



*“Flexibility in navigating pathways is key. Students should be able to move from one to another without being locked in no matter which grade they are in”*

*Forum Participant*





## QUESTION 3

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

- a) Communication
- b) Critical Thinking
- c) Creative Thinking and Innovation
- d) Personal Responsibility and Well Being
- e) Social Responsibility

How do you think student could demonstrate these competencies?

Participants discussed the five competencies separately and collectively. There was strong support for having students demonstrate their learning in multiple ways and for allowing some flexibility and choice as to how it should be demonstrated. The need for well developed standards and rubrics to support valid and reliable assessment was underscored. Participants opined that Personal Responsibility might be the most challenging to assess. They further suggested the following:

- Problem or project -based learning involving authentic tasks in the form of projects, scenarios, case studies, ethical dilemmas and other forms can be a powerful means for students to demonstrate all five of the competencies. This should be incorporated into all curriculum areas.
- The development of appropriate rubrics in order to properly evaluate PBL activities and the demonstrated competencies is of paramount importance.

- Presentation and demonstration skills using multi-media and with multiple audiences is an important component in the development of communication skills.
- Students should be provided with some flexibility and choice in representing their learning in a variety of ways with authentic tasks.
- Portfolios and graduate exit interviews are seen as another means by which students can demonstrate the five competencies.

*“In our offices and our classrooms we have way too much compliance and way too little engagement. The former might get you through the day, but only the latter will get you through the night”*

*Daniel Pink Drive*



## QUESTION 4

How could student learning be communicated to:

- a) Students?
- b) Parents/Guardians?
- c) Post Secondary Institutions/Employers?

There was general agreement that the present system of reporting could be vastly improved. Whatever changes are undertaken must be, and must be perceived as being, an improvement over the status quo. Change will not come easily; established practices have become entrenched for generations. Participants suggested the following:

- Regular, ongoing communication with students and parents about how students are learning is preferred over the episodic nature of current reporting methods.
- Technology should be utilized to the fullest extent possible to achieve this end.

Students need to take a more active role in communicating about their learning.

- Students need to be fully aware of their progress, their strengths and areas for needed improvement. Student self assessment should be encouraged and supported.
- Students should always be active participants in conferencing involving teachers and parents

Communicating about learning should have less of an emphasis on grades and a greater emphasis on what the student is able to do and recommended areas of improvement.

- More anecdotal reporting is preferable
- The use of rubrics, criteria, performance standards or other reference points provide common language in communicating learning
- A review of representations of student work, (portfolios, presentations) made available digitally or in hard copy should be an integral part of communicating learning.

*“We have to take incremental steps to make the changes, each of which would be huge in the broader context of a system that hasn’t changed in decades”*

*Forum Participant*

A significant amount of parent education about changes to student reporting will be required. A dramatic departure from what they currently experience or had experienced when they were students will be met with apprehension and resistance.

- Parents need to have a good understanding of the language, the how and the why of current and emerging trends in assessment, evaluation, and reporting.
- Parents will continue to expect that learning is measured against appropriate standards
- Ranking does matter to some parents and that will somehow have to be addressed.

Ensuring appropriate credentialing in order to achieve post secondary admission is a concern. Currently the BC Dogwood and its accompanying transcript finds ready acceptance not only in BC but also across Canada and internationally. Will that continue to be the case in the future?



***“Parents look to marks because it’s something they can understand. They will need to be educated in order to understand other forms of communication about learning”***

*Forum Participant*





## QUESTION 5

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

The conversation was focussed specifically on the various components of the provincial awards program, namely the passport to education, provincial scholarships, district scholarships, and apprenticeship awards. There was strong support for ensuring that awards were based on a broader set of criteria and less of an emphasis on course grades. To this end, it was suggested that

- Awards should recognize well rounded students who demonstrate the attributes of the educated citizen and/or the core competencies.
- Application and selection processes should be changed in order to achieve this.
- Decisions regarding who should receive the awards are best made at the school or district level.
- The ministry can enable this by allocating all of the funds to districts and schools in a fair and equitable manner.

It should be noted that a significant number of participants took a contrary point of view, suggesting that broader participation in post secondary education could be encouraged by making it more affordable for all students by

- Making funds available to every graduate who chooses to continue their education, or
- Eliminating the awards program and use the funds to lower post secondary tuition fees.

*“We should be recognizing students for doing amazing things, not just high marks”*

*Student Participant*

Their position is based on the premise that if we want all students to experience success, why are we not recognizing all of them?

It would be advisable to review, establish or affirm the broader purposes of these awards. Are they intended to

- Recognize high achievement?
- Encourage all students to continue their education?
- Encourage enrolment in specific post secondary programs or skills training?
- All of the above?

If our system is committed to encouraging all students to continue their education beyond graduation in some way, how might this pool of money be used to support that?



## ISSUES, CONCERNS, OBSERVATIONS

A number of issues, concerns, cautions, and queries arose during the discussions. These are noted here.

- Parent support for changes to graduation requirements, credentialing, and communicating about learning is of paramount importance. Considerable time and resources will need to be invested in ensuring that parents fully understand whatever changes are made, the rationale behind them, and the compelling argument that they and their children will be better served.
- Although there was general support for alternate pathways, many participants cautioned about having students choose directions from which there is no return. Students who have determined that a pathway is not for them and who therefore change course shouldn't face the consequence of delayed graduation.
- There was understanding and support for addressing the core competencies across curriculum areas. Questions were raised about the interrelatedness of curriculum content. Would steps be taken to help ensure that there are more relevant interdisciplinary learning experiences, as opposed to curriculum offered in "silos" through a series of disconnected courses which currently appears to be the norm?
- Questions were raised about how changes to graduation requirements might positively or negatively affect students with special needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow are an attempt to capture, interpret and expand on the general direction offered by the Graduation Requirements Dialogue participants. It is acknowledged that a system that provides more flexibility and choice and more meaningful, relevant learning experiences is desirable and should be a policy imperative. Schools and districts require flexibility to implement change. That said, they also need to be reminded of the flexibility that they already have to make incremental changes as BC's Education Plan moves through its various developmental and implementation stages.

The organization of time and space in our high schools needs to be enabling rather than restrictive by serving the learning agenda as opposed to driving it. Student scheduling, the school day and school year need to be made more flexible in order to support choice and exploration. Schools and districts are already empowered to implement them and should be encouraged to do so.

## THE CONCEPT OF GRADUATION AND SEAMLESS TRANSITIONS

Graduation should be seen to be less of a culminating event to which students are expected to arrive “on time” (June of grade 12). It is recommended that there be

- Multiple exit points for graduation depending on the student’s chosen program and pathway to post-secondary.
- A more seamless transition between high school graduation, post-secondary or skills training and the world of work. Dual registration should be a common occurrence.

## CREDITS, COURSES AND CREDENTIALING

Introduction of the credit system provided districts and schools with an opportunity to expand flexibility and choice for students by designing 1, 2, 3 or more than 4 credit learning experiences and allow for partial completion of 4 credit courses.

A general reluctance to move away from the classic bell schedule and traditional school day, equating credits with seat time, and assorted other organizational challenges have helped to preserve the status quo, resulting in virtually all scheduled courses moving to the default position, namely 4 credits.

The credit system can prove a useful way in which to provide the credentialing for graduation, and can be enabling in offering choice and in designing pathways to graduation. Furthermore, it is a widely recognized system that can be found (in different variations) across Canada and internationally.

It is recommended that the credit system be preserved and that districts and schools be supported in fully utilizing the flexibility it can offer in creating choice, through the reorganization of time and space during an extended school day.

### Planning 10/Grad Transitions /Career and Post Secondary planning, goal setting, decision-making

This topic received considerable attention during the forum. Questions were raised about the sequencing, timing and effectiveness of the current K-12 curriculum



model for Planning and Career Education, in particular Planning 10 and Grad Transitions. Presumably, this area will be reviewed as part of the curriculum revisions that are taking place. As the revision work is undertaken, the Ministry is urged to give attention to ensuring that quality service delivery models are in place across the province.

Exit interviews accompanied by presentation of a student portfolio have become a popular and growing component of Grad Transitions. With clear standards and an appropriate assessment rubric this provides a good opportunity for schools to present evidence of having attained the core competencies. It is recommended that this become a requirement for graduation.

### External Credit/Dual Credit

It is recommended that opportunities to obtain external credits for learning that takes place outside of school be expanded. External credits should be subject to meeting appropriate and rigorous standards. It is also recommended that dual credit opportunities involving post-secondary institutions, skills training, and apprenticeship programs be expanded.

## Problem or Project Based Learning

More opportunities for curricular and interdisciplinary project based learning should be encouraged. A greater number of students should be encouraged to engage in Independent Directed Studies (IDS). Appropriate teacher mentoring and the development of competency as independent self directed learners in grades K-9 would help ensure student success and attainment of high standards. It is further recommended that completion of a major “culminating” project be a requirement for graduation.

## Credentialing

Education is a global enterprise and the BC Dogwood and accompanying transcript are widely accepted as evidence of student performance in a quality education system. BC graduates seek to continue their education not only in this province but across Canada, the United States and beyond. Our credentials need to be somewhat aligned with other progressive educational jurisdictions. The credit system is a widely used method to indicate that graduation requirements have been met, and to identify areas of study and levels of achievement undertaken and attained by students. To this end, it is recommended that graduation requirements include the following:

- A minimum number of required and elective credits (as it is now).
- Satisfactory attainment of the core competencies including completion of a culminating project.
- An exit portfolio and interview.

## COMPETENCIES

It is recommended that the Ministry ensure that the five core competencies suitably capture all of the attributes of the Educated Citizen, and that particular attention be given to the manner in which students are being asked to demonstrate physical health and well being. As more specificity is brought to bear on the core competencies, the Ministry is encouraged to consider the advice provided on page 3 of this report.

## COMMUNICATING ABOUT STUDENT LEARNING

Communicating about student learning should be an ongoing process that is outcomes based, evidence rich, and easily understood by parents and students. There should be less of an emphasis on grades and more on what the student is able to do and areas of needed improvement. The established system of periodic reporting on up to 200 high school students three or four times per year makes such high quality communication extremely difficult, if not impossible. Progressive use of technology and more flexibility in provincial requirements would help achieve the desired ends.



*“Students today expect to learn in an environment that mirrors their lives and their futures—one that seamlessly integrates today’s digital tools, accommodates a mobile lifestyle, and encourages collaboration and teamwork in physical and virtual spaces”*

*ACOT2 Learning in the 21st Century*

## Student/Parent/Teacher Conferencing

Learners’ involvement in self assessment, self-correction, awareness of their own progress and communicating about their own learning can be enhanced by their active participation in student/parent/teacher conferencing. It is preferable and it is recommended that such conferencing be student-led. Given the large number of students involved, schools would need to rethink the commonly used one or two evening “event” of scheduled parent/teacher interviews.

## PROVINCIAL ASSESSMENT AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

Provincial Assessment is undertaken in order to determine, on a large scale, how well students are performing and to provide some degree of quality assurance that school systems are performing as they should. Current practice cannot adequately tell us that we are graduating students who possess the attributes of the educated citizen.

The existing format of provincial examinations needs to be reviewed and revised to include other performance tasks besides written tests. Performance measures need to be designed to address the competencies as well as key areas of learning.

A provincial strategy for collecting and reporting performance data on exit portfolios/interviews and the culminating project would also serve to tell stakeholders that the system is graduating students with the desired attributes.

## STUDENT AWARDS

It is recommended that the current system of student awards (Passport to Education, provincial scholarships, district scholarships, apprenticeship awards) be revised with a view to achieving the following ends

- To recognize the achievements of well rounded students that demonstrate the attributes of the educated citizen and/or the core competencies
- To encourage students to continue their education
- To provide for additional encouragement for students to enter specific post secondary programs or skills training
- To be awarded conditionally upon registration in a post secondary or skills training program.

Decisions as to recipients are best made at the district and school levels based on criteria established by the Ministry of Education.



# Graduation Requirements Forum Summary Report Vancouver Island Region

Submitted by Greg Johnson

## **Introduction:**

Five graduation dialogue forums were held in the Vancouver Island Region and involved participants from school districts 61,62,63,64,68,69,70,71,72,79,84,85 and 47. Over 435 participants representing all partner groups participated in these forums or provided input at a district level. This feedback has been included in this summary report collated by reoccurring themes that appeared in feedback to each question.

## **Question #1:**

**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?**

Most respondents felt students need to:

- Be taught the necessary skills to understand themselves as learners and develop the attributes (habits) necessary to be successful:
  - Curiosity
  - Perseverance and resilience
  - Self-respect
  - Self-advocacy
  - Empathy
  - Problem solving
  - Self-knowledge and awareness

- Moral and ethical purpose
  - Goal setting
  - Adaptability
  - Independence (risk-taking)
  - Creativity
  - Physical and mental wellness
- Be provided with a curriculum in which they develop core literacies:
    - Language literacy: (Oral, Reading, Written)
    - Technological literacy
    - Numeric and Financial literacy
    - Physical/health literacy
    - Arts literacy-Fine Arts; performing arts and traditional indigenous art
  - Be given the opportunities and taught the skills necessary to develop healthy, collaborative relationships with peers, team members, their community and world around them.
  - Understand and learn about the heritage, history, cultures and peoples- particularly Canada's indigenous peoples- they interact with in their schools, community, country and world
  - Understand democratic values and participate actively as responsible citizens
  - Apply their learning from school to real life projects and settings
  - Become leaders
  - Learn and ethically use technology
  - Be provided with a sense of belonging and understand their place in the world through knowledge and stewardship of those who have come before, those who are here and those who will come after
  - Develop their strengths, further explore and participate in their passions and future life and career goals.

## **Question #2:**

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

***How and where could students pursue their career and life goals?***

Respondents felt that:

- greater flexibility needs to be provided to students through:
  - Adjusting instructional hours, timetables, calendars and years to allow greater student participation/opportunities in the community – work experience, volunteerism, leadership; cultural experiences
  - Recognizing and giving credit for learning occurring outside the system
- self-paced continuous student learning based on competency attainment needs to be provided as opposed to learning being bound by age/grade level designations
- students need to have greater choice in determining their learning, and independence in how to proceed with it (independent studies, locally developed programs)
- More community partnerships with businesses, non-profit, post-secondary, and Aboriginal organizations need to be created which would provide more opportunities for students to participate in, and reflect upon a greater variety of service learning and work experiences (volunteerism; careers in community – not just trades - arts too)
- More community and global mentors need to be in schools and accessed through technology (Skype, etc.)
- In-depth blended project-based learning opportunities for students need to be created (class, on-line; in-community) that enable core curriculum/competencies to be taught through application of student learning, interests and passions.

- The number of apprenticeship, co-op, exchange and alternate programs need to be expanded, as well as the number of opportunities for students to achieve dual credits and access post-secondary institutions earlier
- A continuum of opportunities for inquiry, project based learning needs to be developed throughout the system (elementary, middle, secondary) to build student capacity and skills in self-directed learning
- Indigenous knowledge and cultural learning must be respected and included for all students
- more frequent exposure to life/career opportunities must be provided at an earlier level to students and parents so they are educated in, and aware of the many possibilities
- Integrated interdisciplinary studies around a variety of pathways (i.e.; Liberal Arts and Humanities; Tourism and Hospitality; Applied Sciences) must be created.

### **Question #3:**

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

- a) Communication**
- b) Critical Thinking**
- c) Creative Thinking and Innovation**
- d) Personal Responsibility and Well Being**
- e) Social Responsibility**

**How do you think students could demonstrate these competencies?**

*\*in development*

Most respondents felt:

- students must be able to self-assess in addition to receiving feedback from educators, peers, community members (mentors), post-secondary institutions and family
- students need to demonstrate their application of the learning of these competencies in interdisciplinary studies (not subjects) independently and with others in the school and larger community,
- students are involved in the design, application and demonstration/performance of their learning
- students must be explicitly taught the competencies as well as ways to demonstrate their learning early in their education to develop their skill and capacity in this area
- A developmental continuum of the competencies needs to be created (such as performance standards) so that students and others can assess their learning and determine and set further learning goals
- Post-secondary institutions must evolve to value demonstrations and other evidence of learning, beyond solely marks and percentages

- Student learning should be assessed through engagement in “real-world” project based learning and demonstrated through portfolios (on-line); work and volunteerism in communities
- Learning can be demonstrated through a variety of means-Celebrations of learning; performances (dance, drama, art, etc.); technology (media) mentoring; leadership
- parents/guardians need to be more involved in the process to increase their understanding and participation in creating and assessing their student’s demonstration of learning
- Aboriginal participants in the forums suggested a 6<sup>th</sup> competency that all educators, parents and students in the system need to demonstrate – that being a First Peoples Competency: which would include a clear understanding of Canadian history pre and post contact; potlatch ban; Indian act and colonization; local territories and aboriginal peoples and ensure the inclusion of Aboriginal content in all curricular disciplines

#### **Question #4:**

#### **How could student learning be communicated to:**

- a) Students**
- b) Parents/Guardians**
- c) Post-secondary Institutions/Employers**

Most respondents felt:

- Communication of learning to students and parents must be regular, in plain language, on-going and evidence based in relation to a student's progress in obtaining core competencies and outcomes
- A variety of methods of demonstrating learning such as digital portfolios "showcases of learning"; interviews should be incorporated
- Students must have a more active role in assessment; through establishing criteria; self and peer assessment; conferencing with educators and parents; establishing further learning
- Feedback to students and parents must be more detailed and accessible (this could be achieved through technological methods such as wikis, blogs, social networks, and school websites)
- Students, parents and others need to be provided support and education in assessment practices which use performance standards, rubrics, etc., to communicate student progress
- Performance standards must have/use consistent language throughout the province and be tied to the core competencies, not letter grades
- Post-secondary institutions need to move to a system where the competencies that are needed for their programs are specified and not so much based on Grade Point Average (GPA)
- More descriptive feedback will highlight and give employers and post-secondary institutions a more holistic picture of a student including attributes as a learner (methods might include reference letters, portfolios)

### **Question #5:**

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

Many respondents felt that an awards program does not fit in a personalized learning environment. In a true personalized learning environment students will become intrinsically motivated.

Suggestions for a different approach to recognizing student success included:

- Having recognition ceremonies or assemblies at school throughout the year highlighting progress made or goals met so that each student will be recognized for their individual strengths and accomplishments
- Public displays, showcase and celebrations of learning; student should have opportunities to share their learning with others; what the demonstration looks like is personalized
- A number of respondents felt that the Ministry of Education should not put money into awards or scholarships and passports - suggestions for better use of these dollars included:
  - Provide more supports into schools/intervention programs to prevent failures
  - Provide free first and/or second year tuition for students entering university and other post graduate learning institutions.

Should an awards program develop, respondents strongly felt:

- that the awards program be expanded beyond the academics to include fine arts, trade, community contributions, leadership, etc. and cross curricular competencies

- That there should be equitable access to awards and this would necessitate an increase in awareness of what's available and support in the application process
- That participation on the "local committee" who determines who gets the awards be increased to include community members and businesses
- That awards be achievement based not competitive based
- That clearly articulated criteria co-created with students, parents, and community members is used to determine recognition.
- That students are able to start earlier in receiving "credit" towards scholarships
  - i.e. passport to education
- That the use of award money be expanded to include books and material such as work boots, hard hats, vest, first aid certificate etc. for those entering the trades etc.
- provide the funding currently in place to those in financial need.

**“Skills have become the currency of 21<sup>st</sup> Century economies”**

**Andreas Schleicher, OECD Education Vice President**

## **Methodology**

The Grad Dialogue Consultations in the Kootenays were a collaborative effort, involving staff from School Districts 51, 20, 10, 8, 5 and 6. District staff facilitated conversations with principals/vice principals, school staff and students and forwarded the results to the Regional Facilitator.

The Regional Facilitator held public forums in five of the school districts. In addition, separate consultations were held with the following focus groups:

- a) School trustees
- b) BCSSA Kootenay Chapter
- c) West Kootenay Teacher Education Program
- d) Students and staff at Selkirk College and College of the Rockies
- e) Business representatives

In addition, some individuals and groups submitted responses via email.

The multiple responses to the five questions were collated and themes identified that captured the flavor of the written responses as well as the sharing and dialogue in the consultation sessions.

## **Summary of the Responses**

In the public forums, conversation and dialogue was fulsome and thorough and it was noted that all the sessions went beyond the 2 hours planned. Conversation was engaged and lively from beginning to end, indicating high levels of interest in this topic.

Forum participants expressed strong support for the BC School System. It was recognized that we have a system that is strong, that our students do well, and is envied by many educators around the world. The concept of the Educated Citizen was strongly endorsed. However, it was noted that it was very difficult to clearly identify the links between our current 80 credits of graduation requirements and the Educated Citizen.

The most clear trend was for the intentional and sequential development of a number of competencies. The concept of the five cross curricular competencies was strongly endorsed, along with a variety of other skills and attributes. It was felt that these

competencies not only were needed to be “taught” and developed, but assessed and communicated to students and parents.

There were many calls for increased flexibility, not only in the type of educational experiences students take part in, but for different methods for engaging in and demonstrating learning.

Another clear trend was for increased school-community connections, and for both extending the learning of students beyond the walls of the classroom as well as bringing members of the community into schools.

Relevance, meaning and authenticity were also clear trends. The use of real life, authentic projects and problems was seen as a necessary focus in our system.

Participants were also clear that, while they support shifts and changes in our system, they do not want us to lose our focus on basic skills/attributes such as literacy, numeracy and citizenship. It was clear that our system is not one in crisis, and that change needs to be managed in a reasonable and respectful manner.

### **Question 1:**

**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?**

In the public forums, a number of trends emerged, which could be generally divided into the following areas:

#### **1) Skills/Competencies**

By far the majority of “essential things” identified were competencies that forum participants felt were important for success in later life. The most common competencies identified were:

Functional Literacy – this was noted in every response. Literacy was seen by the groups as:

Reading – high levels of comprehension, the ability to read large amount of information and summarize, analyze and interpret the main ideas. The ability to read to learn.

Writing – the ability to write coherently, efficiently and clearly.

Information or Technical Literacy – the ability to research and find information, judge it's merit and source, and use in ethical and appropriate ways.

How to Learn – the skills needed to be a lifelong and engaged learner

Numeracy – forum participants identified basic numeracy skills of number operations, ratio, proportion, measurement, fractions, and estimation. Math programs should be clearly and closely tied to “real life” problems and applications. There was a great deal of conversation of the focus on “higher level math” and a sense that it was of little value for most students, yet caused a high level of anxiety. Forum participants were hopeful conversations were occurring with post secondary programs regarding the use of math as a program screen.

Communication – the ability to communicate in a variety of forms and genres –public speaking, writing in various forms, multi-media and electronic communication.

Critical Thinking/problem solving – along with literacy and numeracy, critical and divergent thinking was the most commonly quoted skillset. The ability to solve real life, complex problems and develop questions that led to divergent thinking was a clear trend.

Transferable employment skills – this was another commonly identified skills set -- workplace readiness, job search, people skills, resume, how to keep a job. Essential skills often quoted.

Personal Management and Social Skills – time management, self discipline, organization, conflict resolution, ability to work in collaborative groups, ability to self evaluate and set goals.

Relationship Skills – ability to build and maintain respectful relationships.

Leadership Skills were also quoted by many participants.

## **2) Personal Attributes/Qualities**

Resilience and Perseverance – this was the most commonly quoted personal attribute. It was felt by forum participants that the school system should make a concerted and intentional effort to develop resilience. This was strongly echoed by post secondary instructors, who spoke of the challenges many of their students have when they make the jump from high school.

High level of citizenship – forum participants felt we were generally doing a good job of this, but that it should have a greater emphasis. Related to this, many participants mentioned high degrees of cultural sensitivity and global awareness.

Desire to learn – in a world in which education and learning is seen as a lifelong endeavor, this was also seen as crucial.

Creativity – all groups identified creativity as an essential attribute.

The following are a list of other attributes mentioned in many of the forums:

Strong Work Ethic

Flexible and adaptable

Empathic

Self Confidence and Optimism

Tolerance and Respect for Others

Commitment to an active and healthy lifestyle

### **3) Knowledge**

Financial Literacy – this was by far the most common theme related to knowledge or content. Loans, mortgages, budgeting, personal finances and goal setting.

Career Awareness – enhanced knowledge of career opportunities, post secondary programs and global employment trends

Environmental Stewardship – knowledge of how to make the planet sustainable.

Government – knowledge of how our government works, democracy and responsibility of our citizens

Personal Health – the knowledge needed to lead healthy, happy, productive lives, but beyond physical fitness and nutrition to include issues related to emotional health.

After the public forums, follow up discussions were held with college instructors, business representatives and college students as there were few of those in the public forums. These were among the most intriguing conversations, as those groups pointed out that high school graduates take two routes – post secondary education or the world of work. They felt that post secondary education and work should be seen as the “clients” of the school system and that the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to be successful in those two pathways should be a focus of the K-12 system.

**College instructors** believe the school system should focus on developing competencies, and that the current focus on content acquisition in secondary schools is not as important as intentionally developing skills. They feel the K-12 system needs to focus on teaching kids “how to learn”. They especially noted:

- In college, students are taught from a conceptual, rather than a content, perspective. Many of the students they work with want “the list to memorize”, but instructors want them to think and analyze and understand the concepts deeply. They also want the students to be able to practically apply the concept in their field of endeavor, such as nursing.
- Instructors from all programs felt their students lack the practical numeracy skills they need for their programs. Ratio, proportion, estimation and measurement were needed, not algebra and calculus.
- Instructors feel their students need to be able to have higher levels of reading comprehension, and the ability to analyze, summarize and synthesize from large amounts of informational text, then write in a clear and coherent fashion to communicate their learning.
- Critical thinking were seen as a crucial skillset in college, and felt that students coming into college are deficient in this area. They said in college there is an acceptance that there is not “one truth’ or correct answer, but a wide variety of possibilities, and that they prize divergent thinking.
- College instructors also felt the public school system really needed to work on developing resilience, perseverance and the ability to deal with stress and anxiety, as this greatly inhibits their learning.
- College instructors wanted to pass the message on to high school teachers that covering all of the learning outcomes in a content-based course was not crucial – the development of reading (of informational text), writing and critical thinking skills was more important.

**College students** felt they had great experiences in high school, but now that they were in post secondary education, felt that there could have been a different focus for them. Of note:

- All said “we wish you had taught us to be critical thinkers; we really need that now”
- Financial literacy should be a big focus in school
- Felt that they were “spoon fed” in high school, and that they needed to be taught the skills to be independent learners
- They said the focus on memorizing content that they saw in high schools is way different than in college, where the emphasis is on thinking and understanding concepts.

- All felt the schools should focus more on developing the skills they needed to be successful in college.

**Business leaders** felt the K-12 system should focus more energy on those students who enter the work force directly from high school, as opposed to those students heading to university. Felt the school system should develop:

- Essential skills – quoted the nine essential skills developed by Skills Canada
- Job readiness – kids need to know what to wear, how to work, not to text all the time etc.
- Critical thinking and problem solving – most students will be hired in small businesses, where there is a need for people to do many things and help create solutions to challenges.
- Collaboration, team work, flexibility, dealing with the public and getting along with other employees was seen as very important
- Said basic numeracy skills were really important
- They said the school system should stop encouraging university as the best option, and put time and energy into promoting such things as the trades and technology.
- They also said schools had to impress on students that they would need to continue to learn no matter what job they got.
- Said kids are really tech savvy now.

These follow up conversations really did stress the need for better communication and dialogue, especially between high school teachers and college instructors, as the assumptions that both groups have about what the other group wants are not very accurate. For example, high school teachers commonly say they feel stressed about the volume of content in their courses, and the need to cover all the learning outcomes “because that is what the college and universities expect”. College instructors say the content is not important – send us kids who can read, write and think critically and we can teach them the content they need.

#### **Question #2:**

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

It should be noted that many of the opportunities identified by forum participants, including many educators, already exist in our schools. Many of them would fall in line with the enabling policies embedded in the 2004 Graduation Policy, such as IDS,

External Credits and Equivalency. This would point out that many of these policies are not understood or utilized to their fullest potential in the school system.

While there were a variety of options identified in the discussions of this question, it should also be noted that many participants wanted to see a shift in the culture of our schools to one in which all pathways and programs be given equal importance and prestige. Many participants felt our current system puts too much emphasis on traditional academic courses and university preparation. Having said that, all participants felt that it was important for strong academic programs for those students who choose them.

Forum participants were clear that there needed to be flexibility for students to shift between pathways throughout high school. There was concern that students may choose options at one grade, and then be “stuck” in that route.

In addition to those programs that are linked to current enabling policies, the following were evident in most of the responses to this question:

Trades Training – participants felt that the current trades opportunities (ACE-IT and SSA) should be enhanced and efforts should be made to improve their profile and importance. Many participants feel that the “university track” is still encouraged the most and that trades are seen as an option that is of lesser value. It was felt that students, educators and parents needed to shift this attitude.

Meaningful Work Experience – it was felt students should be offered more and varied types of work experience that would allow them to truly see what different types of works are like. Many participants felt that all students should be required to have an extended type of work experience, far more than the current requirements in Graduation Transitions 12.

Community Connections – it was felt that there should be many more opportunities for students to learn from and with members of the community. This included mentorships, apprenticeships, artisans in residence, connections with Aboriginal Elders and many others. A clear trend in this case was forming closer school-community connections, and recognizing that many members of our community could provide very valuable learning for our students. It was felt that credentials should be granted for engagement in community activities, such as coaching and community theatre.

Post Secondary Connections – as with community, it was felt that students would benefit greatly from having opportunities to spend time at post secondary institutions,

and explore programs they may be interested in. This could be accomplished through enhanced transitions agreements and opportunities for “program shadowing”. While there are opportunities for students to visit colleges, for example, many feel these are simply too short and somewhat superficial.

Passions – another clear trend was providing students with the opportunity to explore their passions and interests in more in-depth and meaningful ways. This could be accomplished through expanded use of IDS, inquiry, community mentorships and such programs as Navigator.

Service Learning – many participants talked of the value of service learning and would like to see expanded opportunities for this, and greater encouragement for these projects at all levels.

Project Based Learning– many participants felt that students should be involved in more interdisciplinary projects that pose real life problems and provide students with the opportunity to make meaning of their learning.

In order to provide the opportunities listed above, it was felt that schools would have to become much more flexible in their scheduling. Examples of programs in which timetables were radically altered, and where students spent time in the communities were often cited.

### **Question #3:**

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

- a) Communication**
- b) Critical Thinking**
- c) Creative Thinking and Innovation**
- d) Personal Responsibility and Well Being**
- e) Social Responsibility**

**How do you think students could demonstrate these competencies?**

General responses

The responses from this diverse group of people were interestingly very similar and trends were easily pulled from the evidence. It is clear that the people who attended and/or chose to respond to the questions are looking for a change in grad requirements that reflects these and possibly other competencies. Students and adults alike were aligned in their responses, requesting more authenticity and flexibility in the school system.

Trends:

### Flexibility

Recognizing that our students are multi-dimensional, there was a strong request for flexibility in the way students demonstrated their competencies. Ideas given were interviews with students, parents, mentors, e-portfolios, panel demonstrations, teacher evaluations, ongoing mentorships, student-collected evidence and community demonstrations

Although there were many examples given, the big ideas of flexibility were around "real" projects -- cross disciplinary demonstrations and integration of all competencies.

### Student involvement and ownership

Involving students in the decision making was another clear trend -- specifically student involvement in choosing, organizing and assessing projects for demonstrating their competencies

### Authenticity

Many of the comments referred to 'real' projects, deepening the learning on a given topic, community connectedness, integration of projects to create meaning, student choice and contribution to the community and the world.

## **Specific Competencies**

### Communication

There was strong support for this set of competencies, with a message that there needed to be development in multiple forms of communication. An increased focus on oral presentations and performance based skills was noted, along with web design and demonstrations while maintaining a focus on basic skills such as writing.

### Critical Thinking

Critical thinking was the most common set of competencies identified throughout the consultations. It was felt opportunities for students to learn about the BIG ideas of how the world works - politics, culture, economics, geography, etc were important, rather than focusing on the facts. It was stressed that a critical approach to dealing with information, looking at all sides of an issue and learning how to analyze, interpret and summarize information.

## Creative Thinking and Innovation

It was felt students should have opportunities to be involved in real life projects and that creativity needed to move beyond a focus in the fine arts. Creativity in business and scientific research were specifically mentioned.

## Personal Responsibility

Personal responsibility should have a focus on goal setting, follow through and self evaluation. It was felt a portfolio would be the best way to showcase all of these, with a focus on responsibilities in school, home and community. It was felt that financial literacy should be linked to personal responsibility.

## Social Responsibility

A lot of ideas were given in this area, focusing on meaningful involvement within the home, school and community. Volunteer work, involvement in community groups, collaboration in team sports, leadership camp, community services. Community connected programs that are student driven were mentioned by many individuals.

## Question # 4

**How could student learning be communicated to:**

- a) Students**
- b) Parents/Guardians**
- c) Post secondary Institutions/Employers**

There was a general consensus that the current system of reporting could use some improvement. While the use of grades and percentages is understood by students, parents, and post secondary, it was felt they simply do not provide enough information on exactly what the student knows and is able to do, what they need to work on and how the learning could be supported at home. There was strong support for more meaningful comments and general consensus that percentages were a questionable mechanism, and were mainly used for universities to screen large numbers of applicants. There was good support for replacing letter grades with skill progression reports.

There were several overall trends that were related to reporting to all three groups:

- 1) All participants liked the concept of changing the focus from “reporting” to “communicating”. They felt the current system, in which reports are a huge, time consuming event, was often not effective in giving meaningful and timely information. They felt that a variety of strategies could be used to accomplish

this, such as regular email communication, wikis, programs that allow parents on-line access to assessment tasks and different types of conferencing. They felt this process would support the improvement of learning more than a summative report .

- 2) Most participants felt that all students should develop a portfolio that would contain a wide variety of information – writing samples, teacher feedback, self assessment, videos of performance and other artifacts that the student felt were important. It was clearly felt by many that the portfolio was the clear choice for a communication system which could demonstrate student progress in the core competencies, such as critical thinking, communication and personal responsibility.
- 3) There was strong support for a commitment to reporting on the cross-curricular competencies, with a rubric or performance standard for each one, along with teacher comments and student self assessment. There was a clear desire for some type of developmental progression, similar to what is there for swimming lessons. It was felt there should be very clear definitions and descriptions of the skills for students and parents.
- 4) There was a feeling among many that there should be more emphasis put on reporting such things as attendance, work habits, working up to potential, and documentation of such things as community and volunteer involvement and reference letters.
- 5) Students felt that different forms of social media, such as Facebook, might be used to help communicate learning.

#### **For the specific groups:**

- 1) Students – it was felt that students should be more actively involved in the communication of learning through parent/teacher/student conferencing and electronic forms of communication. Summative reports, when given, should have more meaningful comments and teacher feedback that include how the student can improve learning. Reports should include how they are doing at the cross-curricular competencies, and there should a shift away from letter grades to some type of skill/competency progressions.
- 2) Parents – as with students, parents should be more active participants in this process, through conferencing, and the opportunities for ongoing communication, such as conferencing. Parents clearly want to see such things as attendance, work habits and skill progressions.

- 3) Post secondary – while it is recognized that universities use percentages to select students, and that may be the only possible way to process thousands of applicants, many people felt the current transcripts do not provide enough information to the institution. It was felt that portfolios would provide more meaningful information, as many people feel that marks in high school courses are not the best indication of suitability for many post secondary institutions. Interviews were also suggested, but again it was noted that for most university programs, this might not be practical, given the number of applicants.

It should be noted that a great deal of education would be needed with all groups on changes in our reporting systems, given that the tradition of letter grades, percentages and formal, summative report cards is an ingrained part of school culture in BC.

### **Question #5:**

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

This question sparked some very interesting debate, with the responses falling within two broad perspectives.

- 1) Eliminate the Award System -- many participants questioned the value of our awards system, and wondered why we provide a very small percentage of our graduates with financial rewards. The overall feeling of this group was that the awards themselves should be eliminated, and the funds used to reduce tuition, or to provide all graduates with some type of tuition rebate.
- 2) Maintain the Award System with Some Changes – many participants felt it was important to award excellence, but that the definition of excellence needed to be examined. It was noted that, of the three current provincial awards, two of them (provincial scholarships and Passport to Education) were determined mainly by marks (while the Passport to Education does call for an expanded set of criteria, most educators in attendance said their schools selected the recipients mainly on grades). Participants felt that there should be more emphasis on citizenship, work ethic and volunteer or community serviced. It was felt more awards could be directed toward the trades, as an incentive, and that all learning pathways should recognized as being of equal value when scholarship recipients were selected. It was felt by students that they should be involved in the development of awards criteria and possibly in the selection of recipients.

### **Issues, Concerns and Observations**

A variety of issues were identified that emerged as broad themes throughout all 5 questions.

- 1) Flexibility – all forum participants expressed support for increased degrees of flexibility in our system. It was clear they did not see flexibility as more traditional course choices, but instead identified shifts in timetabling, scheduling, methods of engagement and expression and credentials for a variety of learning experiences.
- 2) Relevance of Curriculum – while there was strong general support for the work being done on the curriculum/assessment framework, especially for reducing the number of learning outcomes, many comments were made about the relevance of some of our curriculum. There were several questions raised about how the essential big ideas would be identified, and whether there would really be significant change. The Math curriculum in particular was questioned.
- 3) Parent and Stakeholder Education – in the conversations, it was quite clear that a great deal of conversation and dialogue would need to be held with all stakeholders to fully understand the rationale for changes and the impact on the system.
- 4) Communication with Post Secondary Institutions – many participants wondered how involved post secondary institutions are in this process. There was concern expressed that changes to graduation requirements may not reflect post secondary entrance requirements.
- 5) Political Will – while participants engaged fully and willingly in this process, and expressed general support for changes to graduation requirement, there were many who have been through this process before, and wonder if this process will generate the necessary changes.
- 6) Shift in Expectation of our Educators – the high degree of professionalism, skill and dedication of the educators in the BC School system was continually noted. However, it was also noted that many of the changes suggested will require our educators to shift their practice, especially in secondary schools. A shift in focus from content delivery to skill development will not be straightforward. It was noted that a significant amount of time and resources would be needed for professional development in order to facilitate this shift. It was also noted that there would need to be changes in the focus of teacher preparation programs to prepare coming generations of educators for this shift.

## **Recommendations**

While the conversations touched on many things, the writer will restrict the recommendations to those which directly impact graduation requirements.

- 1) **Shift the focus of graduation requirements from the completion of courses to the demonstration of competencies.** As stated earlier in this report, the vast majority of core or essential “things’ identified for student to be able to know and do on graduation were competencies such as functional literacy, creativity, personal responsibility, basic numeracy, communication, and critical thinking. While it might be argued that these skills have always been embedded into our curriculum, they have not been the focus, and have often been referred to as the “unintended” curriculum. The concept of the Educated Citizen, conversations with post secondary instructors and business leaders, and indeed global directions in education suggest that a shift is required in our system from one based on the short term acquisition of content to the long term mastery of these competencies. The development of competencies must become the intended curriculum in BC schools.
- 2) **Move the cross curricular competencies to the forefront of curriculum.** There was strong support for these competencies and for their integration into all curricula. However, many individuals expressed concern that, unless they are given a high priority, including being part of assessment and reporting/communicating student learning, then they would continue to take a back seat to content acquisition.
- 3) **Tie Credits to the Competencies.** While it is acknowledged that the credit system is known and understood by stakeholders in education, it is recommended that the demonstrations of the competencies should have credits or credentialing applied to them. While there are bodies of content that are very important for all students to know, the development of competencies will not be a priority until some level of credentialing is applied to them. These credits should become part of the official “transcript” of a student.
- 4) **Develop performance-standards-like developmental rubrics for the competencies.** In order to assess/report/communicate these competencies, there would need to be some type of developmental sequence developed.
- 5) **Make the development of a portfolio mandatory for graduation.** The most common form of tracking system for the competencies suggested by participants was an e-portfolio. The portfolio would contain many pieces of evidence of growth and reflection for the student, and would be individualized to showcase the passions and interests of the student, as well as the demonstrations of the competencies. While many districts use a portfolio approach to Grad Transitions 12, this is done in the final year of school. The portfolio should be K-12.
- 6) **Ensure that the work done on changes to the curriculum/assessment framework reflect the proposed graduation requirements.** The proposed

graduation requirements should form the base for all curriculum revision and changes to the reporting/communication process. The big ideas and curriculum organizers should reflect the most important things students need to learn, and it should be obvious to all the links between those ideas and the grad requirements.

- 7) **Make bold moves, instead of the tinkering seen in previous iterations of grad requirements.** The graduation requirements in BC have not changed significantly in many decades, and are really not much different than those of the 1970's. While many enabling policies were introduced in 2004, they have not been utilized, mainly due to the fact they were options, not expectations. In reality, other than isolated pockets of innovation, secondary school timetables and program offerings do not look much different than they were many years ago. Throughout the world, systems are responding to the call for a set of student outcomes that reflect the complex and ever-changing world they will be entering.

BC has all of the ingredients to be the best and strongest system in the world – an excellent work force, strong leadership, supportive parents and an economy which, on the global scale, is relatively strong. In order to do that, we must make a conscious choice to lead the world in innovation and change, rather than follow at a distance.

# Metro Region – Graduation Requirements Report

## Facilitator, Lynn Archer

### 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 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.

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.

## Responses to Questions

**Question 1:** 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)
  - Communication
  - Thinking: critical, creative, and reflective
  - 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)

### a) 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.

#### 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 is how learners make sense of their experiences and as a result are vital for students in all types of learning experiences.

### **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, and being involved in political and social communities. Participants also wanted students to know and care 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.

### **b) 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, and write clearly for a variety of purposes, and read with comprehension and purpose were 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

### **c) 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.

#### **d) 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 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.

#### **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 21<sup>st</sup> Century. It was also clear that participants want students 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.

**Question 2:** 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)
  - Core learning along with flexible pathways
  - Inquiry and project based learning
  - Teams of teachers with cohorts of students
- Community and field experiences (209 responses)
  - Volunteerism and community service
  - Mentorships and field experiences
- Career experiences (176 responses)
  - Work experience and co-op programs
  - Apprenticeships

#### **a) 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.

#### **b) 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.

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.

### **c) 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.

### **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.

**Question 3:** Research is underway with focus on the following five cross-curricular competencies:

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

How do you think students could demonstrate these?

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

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

**a) 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.

**b) 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.

**c) 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.

**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.

**Question 4:** How could student learning be communicated to:

- Students,
- Parents/guardians, and
- Post secondary institutions/employers?

There were approximately 1210 responses to question four that may be summarized into the following categories.

- Communication and performance standards (242 responses)
- Types of communication
  - Conferencing and interviews (355 responses)
  - On-line/digital (69 responses)
  - Portfolios (77 responses)
  - Percentages and letter grades (107 responses)
- Post secondary and employers (95 responses)

**a) 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.

**b) Types of communication**

Communicating well and often about student learning was clearly the focus for participants when discussing this question. They were also interested in discussing the various ways in which the communication may be done. 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 their learning process.

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.

Participants had mixed responses to the traditional form of reporting learning via report cards with letter grades and percentages. Most responses 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.

### **c) 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.

#### **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.

**Question 5:** 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
  - Scholarships for varied types of learning (334 responses)
  - Criteria to reflect context (216 responses)
  - Financial support (45 responses)
- Re-direct funding
  - Funds for K-12 education and post secondary institutions (44 responses)
  - No awards system (52 responses)

#### **a) 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.

#### **b) 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.

#### **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.

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.



# Grad Requirements Dialogue

Northern Region - Summary Report

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14 Northern districts were contacted and I spoke with each district about the process. I also walked them through the materials provided and made some suggestions as to content and structure. Each district decided how many meetings to hold in order to get a broad group of people involved in the conversation.

I estimate that there were over 500 people that contributed to the conversations in the north and they came from a broad range of community members. The meetings were led by local district staff members that I had spoken to. I led the staff and community sessions within my district and co-lead a BCCPAC session in Prince George. From both my personal perspective and from what I heard from around the region communities were very engaged in the dialogue and it was a valuable exercise.

## Methodology

Feedback and responses were sent in from 11 districts and all of their information has been recorded and reviewed. While the raw feedback from each district will be provided in a separate template, I will identify some commonalities to the responses in this report. I have grouped the similar or consistent responses into themes which I would equate to recommendations. Numbers of attendees and the breakdown of meetings held in each district will be included in the raw data package sent to the Ministry.

## Responses to Questions

Question 1: 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 many responses that identified the need to make sure students maintain a focus on the core educational functions and high standards.

i.e. literacy, numeracy and communication.

There was also a heavy emphasis on social responsibility, very much in line with the Educated Citizen. These included:

Critical thinking, Healthy living, Self regulation, Creativity, Democratic/  
Canadian values, Functioning in a diverse society, Ethics, Self motivation,  
Citizenship

In addition, there were some essential and core pieces that people felt should be part of what every graduate needs. Many responses were centered on individual values and skills:

Social skills, Public speaking/presenting, Time management, Risk taking-  
Growth mindset, Problem solving, Teamwork and Collaboration skills, Empathy  
and compassion, Interpersonal skills, Organizational skills, Resilience, Work  
ethic, Being responsible for their own education

There were many comments about financial literacy and real world experiences.

i.e. Entrepreneurship, Consumer education, Life skills in financial planning

Other categories that came up frequently:

Fluency using technology and computer skills  
Career and Trades exploration  
Environmental stewardship  
Increasing the amount students plan for life through Planning 10-12 and  
expanded grad transitions  
\* Authentic Community volunteerism and service learning (this came up in a  
variety of categories)

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

One overarching response was finding ways to increase students' ability to explore what they are interested in. Some specific ideas included:

- Exploration courses at gr.9/10 - or even start at gr.6 to 9
- One day a week exploration- pods based on interest
- Aid in student exploration of interests, passions and competencies
- Fieldtrips and offsite learning - funded
- Guest speakers/ career fairs
- Grad coaching

There was also an emphasis on real world experience.

- Trades stream but flexible to move to different streams
- Internships/job shadowing, Work experience
- Mentoring programs
- Co-op programs for HS- credited
- Credit for paid work experience
- Volunteer work
- Experienced based learning
- Incentive for business/ industry to participate

Providing flexible and different delivery modes was also a common theme. Some of the specific ideas were:

- More BAA courses outside of timetable
- Self paced, self directed
- Flexible scheduling, Web based learning
- Pathways for accelerated learning and early admission
- Standardize provincial calendar and timetable to provide distance ed - video conferencing between schools.
- Ability to do smaller chunks- reduced hours/ credits
- Outward bound type experience
- Leadership programs and activities
- Innovation/ creative pathway stream
- Different paths to grad
- Online portfolios
- Use technology to link with world
- "We day" type activities that target whole schools

### 3. How do you think students could demonstrate these competencies?

Common responses were centered on three big themes. I have also indicated some of the specifics that were suggested.

#### Presentations:

Be able to tell a story- articulate  
Presented in some way - to a meaningful audience  
Showcase evening  
Presentations of learning in front of a panel  
Debates

#### Larger project work:

Doing an innovating project  
Team/group work  
Cross curricular Interactive projects  
Projects in the community- authentic problem solving and service

#### Progressive assessment practice:

Peer/self assessment  
Exams need to change/ do away with  
Peer mentoring  
Flexible assessments- students choose how to demonstrate  
Teach others  
360 evaluations  
Problem solving  
Portfolio  
Action research  
Framework established for student-teacher-parent assessment  
Teaching teachers to facilitate discussions  
Technology- Journaling, blogging, video projects as presentation, ePortfolio

#### 4. How could student learning be communicated to a) students, b) parents c) post secondary institutions/ employers

There were not as many responses to this question but I believe there was recognition that current reporting needs to change. There was a consistent emphasis in the responses for more personal and ongoing contact with parents rather than written report cards.

Some of their suggestions are:

##### a / b) Students and parents

- Demonstration of learning to parents
- Student led conferences
- Regular email from teacher to parents
- Post assessments and reports where parents can view anytime they want- like an online gradebook for parents
- Class blog, digital portfolio accessible by parents
- More meaningful comments and connections - what have they learned, where can they improve, relevant feedback on skills
- More emphasis on effort and hard work
- More regular and meaningful reporting
- Reporting language need to be concise, clear and commonly understood
- Project rubric using the five competencies
- Formal reports which have project based competency based checklist
- Portfolios

##### c) Post Secondary

- Written report from teacher to university
- Essay personal profile- for post secondary

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

The overarching theme to the responses was a suggestion to move away from a grades based program when awarding scholarships. One comment made the point, “Awards are incongruent with true personalized learning”.

Some of the suggestions included:

- Panel including teachers and community people to evaluate projects, portfolios
- Criteria other than grades- citizenship, athletics, interview, competency scoring, work ethic, volunteerism
- Recognize the five competencies
- Exit interview with each student to celebrate success
- Schools should have more control to disperse the money
- More variety, less competition (grades based)
- Students nominated based on competency
- Ensure that each pathway gets recognition- vocational
- The passport model has some other factors other than grades- but where redeemed should be broad based
- District scholarships and awards- more personalized- add more of them
- Reward improvement
- Track the whole year not just final grade/test
- Recognizing achievement towards personal goals
- Should be moving towards intrinsic rewards

## Additional Feedback

### Concerns mentioned

Public perception about streaming

How are going to communicate and educate parents/ general public about changes?

What about the students who don't like Project Based Learning?

Need the standards and content in place to ensure quality

May change how teachers work with students- professional growth?

### Other Recommendations...

As districts submitted their responses, I had the chance to speak to many of the presenters. Almost all of them commented on how valuable the Grad conversations were. Many districts plan to use the Grad consultations as a starting off point (or a continuation of other discussions) to engage their communities in an ongoing way about change in education. The larger community dialogue about education was appreciated and there was a recognition that more of it needed to be occurring in our districts.

I believe that the larger message is also about communicating as widely as possible when large changes are proposed. Finding ways to inform (and involve) the general public- not just educators about why education is changing is one of the keys as we go forward.