

GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS REVIEW: SUMMARY OF MISCELLANEOUS SUBMISSIONS TO THE MINISTRY

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.