

Ministry of Education Response to BCCPAC April 2011 Annual General Meeting Resolutions

Resolution 2011.4 Teaching Reading

Be it resolved that BCCPAC work with the Ministry of Education, the BC College of Teachers and education partner groups to promote regular professional development opportunities to support the implementation of effective literacy practices including early identification of barriers to reading.

Ministry Response

Current research suggests the development of early literacy skills is critical to long-term success, both academically and socially. This research, combined with information from Ministry of Education and districts sources, shows a need to concentrate on early literacy skills, particularly in the primary grades.

The Ministry is currently exploring how early assessment, personalized learning and focussed early literacy training for students and professional learning for educators can help improve literacy practices and ensure all children develop the literacy skills necessary for success.

We have seen great results from districts and teachers who are looking carefully at students' knowledge and abilities as they enter Kindergarten, then tailoring programs to ensure that each child has the basic literacy skills they need. Over the next two years, we would like to work with districts and our other partners to ensure every Kindergarten child in the province is assessed early in their first year of schooling in order to support their development and teachers' planning of instruction.

Resolution 2011.5 Special Education Training as Part of Teacher Certification

Be it resolved that that BCCPAC urge the Ministry of Universities, Innovation and Corporate Initiatives Division, and the British Columbia College of Teachers, to require wide-ranging teacher training in special education needs. All teaching positions should require comprehensive training in special education to qualify for graduation and to receive certification. Continued professional development in special education should be a mandatory requirement to maintain certification. This would ensure classroom teachers are equipped with current up-to-date information and strategies in order to support the diverse learning needs of students and to help identify students that should be referred to specialists for further service and/or assessment.

Ministry Response

We need teachers who are able to support the learning needs of all students. In recent years, teachers, administrators and families have all expressed dissatisfaction with the number of classroom teachers who lack specialized training to identify and support the diverse learning needs of students.

The BC College of Teachers is responsible for teacher certification. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation oversees professional development and, through the joint BCSTA-BCTF Teacher Qualification Service, the assessment of teacher qualifications to establish pay scales. Faculties of education at BC public post-secondary institutions create the curricula and graduation standards for graduating teachers.

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Currently, specialized training to identify and support the diverse learning needs of students is not required for certification of new teachers or as a mandatory qualification for continued certification. The Ministry of Education will invite the BC College of Teachers and the BC Teachers Federation to begin discussions with the Ministry with respect to comprehensive specialized training.

Resolution 2011.6 Develop an Early Care and Learning Strategy

Be it resolved that BCCPAC lobby the Ministry of Education to develop an integrated approach for the provision of early care and learning in BC in consultation with all education partner groups including early childhood educators.

Ministry Response

The ministries of Education and Children and Family Development, in partnership with the ministries of Health and Advanced Education, are committed to working together on an integrated approach to any changes in early learning and care for pre-school age children.

In 2007/08 the ministries consulted a broad range of stakeholders, including early childhood educators, on a framework for early learning and the feasibility of expanding programs for young children. Subsequently, full day kindergarten has been introduced and will be available to all five-year-olds in the Province by September 2011. StrongStart early learning programs are also available for children and their families and further expansion is planned during this school year.

Resolution 2011.8 Lunch Period Routine

Be it resolved that in order to optimize learning and health outcomes for all BC students, the BCCPAC strongly urge the Ministry of Education in partnership with the Ministry of Health to research and provide guidelines on the pedagogical and health outcomes of students with regard to the eating period of the lunch routine along with time for hand-washing, preparation and clean-up.

Ministry Response

Good lunch-period routines are an important part of ensuring overall student health.

With our partners, the Ministry has provided a number of resources that cover this topic, including the [Making it Happen: Healthy Eating at School](#) website, developed to provide schools with the information and resources they need to implement healthy school nutrition policies and practices; the [Backgrounder on Food at School](#) provides an overview on creating healthy eating environments; the [Play First Lunch Toolkit](#), designed to assist schools in rescheduling lunchtime and playtime as a means to improved student behaviour and reduced food wastage; and the [School Meal and School Nutrition Program Handbook](#), which supports schools in providing healthy food and beverages at school to vulnerable students.

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Resolution 2011.9 Adequate Funding and Staffing for School Library Programs

Be it resolved that BCCPAC insist that the Ministry of Education ensure that all public school libraries be adequately funded to provide equitable access to school library programs that meet the learning needs of all students. This should include time for the teacher and teacher-librarian to plan and teach units collaboratively, for students to access the library for research, as well as whole-class instruction, under the guidance of a teacher-librarian, and for regular opportunities each week for all students to work with the teacher-librarian to use library resources and to choose books for personal reading.

Ministry Response

Boards of education operate schools and decide how best to address the needs of students within their local communities, including decisions on school library services, staffing, and instructional approaches. Districts organize their libraries in a variety of ways, according to their own objectives and goals; some relying on volunteers, librarian aides or teacher-librarians to maintain the collection and ensure students have access to library materials.

Teacher prep time is part of negotiated settlements between government and the teachers union and teacher assignments are made by boards of education. Parent advisory councils should work with their local boards of education to make changes they feel are necessary in this area.

Looking ahead, the Ministry is continuing to explore how to support a more integrated and seamless library system that includes public, school and post-secondary libraries.

Resolution 2011.10 Updating Financial Reporting Policies

Be it resolved that BCCPAC urge the Ministry of Education to make an amendment under Part 8 Division 2 to the School Act to update the requirements of school districts in the area of financial reporting from only requiring an annual report (audited financial statements) and an annual budget (an estimate of the district's debt service or deficit for the next fiscal year) to also require monthly financial reporting be completed by management and to be provided to each district's board of education. The monthly financial reporting shall at a minimum reflect the following:

- The current month actual to budgeted expenditures and revenues
- The current year to date actual to budgeted comparatives of expenditures and revenues
- The prior year to date actual and in future years compared to the prior year to date budget

In addition to the monthly reporting, management will within 90 days of completion of a substantial capital project prepare a comparative income statement of the budgeted and actual expenditures of the project.

This information should be made available at a public board meeting on a quarterly basis as to the status of the projected budget to date as compared to the annual budget.

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Ministry Response

All school districts must operate within, and account for, the funding they receive from government. Under British Columbia's *School Act*, school districts are required to prepare two operating budgets for each school year—a preliminary budget based on estimated enrolment and funding, and a final budget based on actual enrolment and funding. As well, school districts prepare financial statements that must be audited by an independent auditor and submitted to the Ministry by September 30 of each year. In addition, quarterly financial reporting is required of all school districts. We believe this process is working well and are not considering changes to it.

With regard to school district reporting at the completion of a capital project, every approved capital project is subject to a Capital Project Agreement, signed by the Board Chair and the Minister of Education. Within 6 months of a project being completed, the Board must submit a "Scope and Cost Review" detailing the costs of the project and any changes to original plans that occurred during construction. The Ministry will make this information publicly available no more than 90 days after we receive it.

Resolution 2011.11 Updating Audit Committee Policies

Be it resolved that BCCPAC urge the Ministry of Education to make an amendment to the School Act to include the requirements of school districts to form and maintain an audit committee under Division 8, Part 8 of the School Act. The role and expectations of such committee will be as follows:

An Audit Committee shall:

- Review the audited financial statements of the board and recommend approval of the audited financial statements where appropriate.
- Oversee the internal financial control structures to ensure districts assets are safeguarded and ensure auditor recommendations are implemented and followed through where appropriate
- Independently review results with external auditor and follow up on the implementation of the auditor's letter of recommendation.
- Approve and review the appointment of the auditor and the nature and extent of other services provided by the auditor in relation to auditor independence

Monitor the development of and changes to accounting principles and practices and financial reporting standards, and their impact on the school district's financial reporting.

Meetings:

- The Audit Committee shall, meet at least four times a year and as often as necessary to adequately fulfill their responsibilities
- The Audit Committee shall report at public meetings as required.

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Audit Committee Composition:

- The Audit Committee shall be comprised of no less than one trustee other than the Board Chair who will be appointed annually, and at least two qualified persons from the general public and approved by the board.
- The Committee Chair shall be one of the trustee members, appointed by the Chair of the Board of Education.
- Any Trustee of the district may attend an Audit Committee meeting upon request.

The committee may invite guests to any meeting for the purpose of gathering information or advise.

All Committee members shall commit to ethical conduct, proper use of authority, decorum and professional conduct.

Ministry Response

Boards of education are responsible for overseeing the operations of their districts. Boards are already required to appoint an auditor under section 158 of the *School Act*, but they may also form audit committees if they consider it necessary and a worthwhile use of public funds. Government is not currently considering a *School Act* amendment to require that boards form audit committees.

Resolution 2011.12 Funding for DPACs

Be it resolved that that BCCPAC request that the Ministry of Education provide new direct funding for DPACs on a base amount plus per-pupil basis, and recognize the increased costs for remote or rural districts.

Ministry Response

As you are aware from recent correspondence from the Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development, that ministry oversees the distribution of community gaming grants, from which DPACs currently receive annual funding. In March, the Honourable Christy Clark, Premier, announced an additional increase of \$15 million to these gaming grants, which resulted in increased funding for all DPACs and PACs across the province. The Ministry of Education is not currently considering per-pupil direct funding to DPACs.

We agree that rural district DPACs may face increased costs due to travel, and may not always be well equipped to apply for funding through the gaming grant process. The Ministry of Community, Sport and Cultural Development is embarking on a review of all gaming grants, including PAC and DPAC grants. We encourage PACs and DPACs to make written submissions to the review committee. More information on submissions to the Gaming Grant Review can be found at:

<http://www.communitygaminggrantreview.gov.bc.ca/submissions/>

Resolutions – Sent to committee

Resolution 2011.3 Wi-Fi in Classrooms

Be it resolved that BCCPAC call on Boards of Education to cease to install Wi-Fi and other wireless networks in schools where other networking technology is feasible

Ministry Response:

While student health and wellness is a shared responsibility of the health and education sectors, the effects of exposure to wireless technology and electromagnetic fields is a public health matter that falls under the purview of the Ministry of Health.

Further to a review of the current scientific literature on wireless internet (Wi-Fi) in November 2010, BC's Provincial Health Officer advised that there is "...[a] lack of evidence of any adverse health effects related to Wi-Fi and the fact that Wi-Fi exposure constitutes only a small fraction of total Radio Frequency [RF] exposure." The overwhelming body of scientific research from leading International, Canadian and BC public health officials has consistently found no evidence that Wi-Fi is unsafe at exposure levels below current Canadian guidelines.

Despite the lack of evidence of adverse health effects, the Provincial Health Officer has provided some simple (albeit unproven) suggestions for schools who wish to consider measures for reducing student exposure to Wi-Fi:

- Limiting Wi-Fi use to certain times or locations within the school
- Turning off Wi-Fi when not in use
- Disconnecting Wi-Fi in rooms that do not use computers
- Ensuring user manuals for smart-phones and smart tablets are read and recommendations are followed.

This information was disseminated to all district superintendents in November 2010. The Provincial Health Officer also maintains updated information on the safety of radio frequency signals on his website. <http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/pho/issues.html>

Resolution 2011.7 Lower Full Day Kindergarten Class Size Limits

Be it resolved that BCCPAC strongly urge the Ministry of Education to immediately change the current Class Size section in the school act (76.1) affecting class size for Kindergarten students to the following:

Class size

76.1 (1) A board must ensure that the average size of its classes, in the aggregate, does not exceed:

- a) for kindergarten, 12 students,
- b) for grades 1 to 3, 21 students,
- c) for grades 4 to 7, 28 students, and
- d) for grades 8 to 12, 30 students.

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(2) Despite subsection (1), a board must ensure that the size of any primary grades class in any school in its school district does not exceed

(a) for kindergarten, 16 students and

(b) for grades 1 to 3, 24 students.

Ministry Response

Government is in discussion with the BCTF as a result of the current court decision following Bill 28 (2002). The court found that portions of this Bill violated the charter rights of BCTF members and struck down some sections. Section 76.1 cited in your resolution is one of these sections. Government has one year in which to resolve this and is doing so in a considered manner. Under these circumstances, government will not act on this resolution at this time.