

MEDIA RELEASE

BCSTA celebrates Education Week 2017

[VANCOUVER, B.C. – March 10, 2017] The B.C. Ministry of Education has designated March 6-10, 2017 as Education Week. In response to this announcement, the B.C. School Trustees Association is highlighting several success stories that celebrate K-12 public education in the province. The stories are as follows:

- **Student refugees make a new start in Abbotsford schools**
- **Bulkley Valley School District sees success with new B.C. curriculum**
- **PISA results rank BC students amongst the best in the world**
- **Partnership between schools and college help students transition to post-secondary**

BCSTA wishes to thank everyone, from students and parents to teachers, principals, trustees and all school staff, for contributing to the vision of improving public education in B.C. BCSTA encourages communities to join in the celebration of Education Week 2017 and to continue promoting public education as the number one issue in the upcoming provincial election. #bcnedkey

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Student refugees make a new start in Abbotsford schools

Author: Kevin Godden, Superintendent of Schools, School District 34 (Abbotsford)

Twenty-five Syrian families came to Abbotsford as of February 22, 2016. Twenty-two of the families arrived as Government Sponsored Refugees (GARS) and three families came as Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRS). In total, there were 116 children and 59 parents; 96 were school-aged children (k-12) with 10 pre-k's who registered for kindergarten in September, 2016. The families were processed in terms of documentation, health screening and immunization and other pertinent information. Several new families arrived in the fall of 2016 and Abbotsford expects more in 2017.

The Abbotsford School District designed a detailed plan for the successful integration of these students and families to minimize further stress and anxiety. School registrations was done at a local hotel and parent information and orientation sessions were held to welcome the newcomers and inform them of

the school system. These presentations were conducted with images and pictures with the assistance of Arabic translators, so that parents could get a brief overview of the school system.

A three-day orientation session was held for the students. They were placed in groups of 10 and district teachers began language assessments and introduced students to basic routines through easy and fun art and craft activities.

Because these students came with difficult experiences, trauma and displacement, the district decided to gently ease their transition into schools. As a result, five new sheltered immersion classes were created in schools at each level: one secondary class, one middle school class and three elementary classes. Before commencing academic work, the initial focus was on the students' well-being, sense of safety and belonging, understanding of routines, learning how schools work and district behavioral expectations.

Students received intensive language training from March to June. The teachers of these short-term classes received special training on working with refugee children. As the students became more comfortable, they began to join the regular students for recess and lunch, then school assemblies, events and even courses. Ongoing training was provided to classroom teachers, specialist teachers, vice-principals and principals on cultural competency and awareness and what supports were appropriate for this particular group. Parent training was simultaneously provided about the school system and its expectations. Additionally, all school district counsellors attended a full day training session with a specialist from the Vancouver Association for the Survivors of Torture (VAST) in Vancouver, so that they would approach needs for this group in an informed and sensitive manner.

Almost all of the Syrian refugee students were enrolled in summer school and transportation was provided by the district. In the fall, all the newcomer students were enrolled in their catchment area schools and fully integrated into regular classes.

In response to the newest additions to the classroom, an unidentified Abbotsford School District Grade 4 teacher stated the following. "The three Syrian girls in my class have made a real positive impact on the rest of my students. My class have become more understanding and aware of other cultures. They have learned to respect their differences while realizing that even though they may dress differently, eat different food than them and speak a different language, they are not all that different from them. My students have become compassionate about their situation and realize to be thankful for the safety and stable life they have in Canada. My 3 Syrian girls are all important members of our class community."

Schools are reporting that students are adjusting well and learning with great enthusiasm. Challenges exist; these newcomers still need support in many aspects. However, the staff in all departments of the Abbotsford School District, Abbotsford Community Services, Settlement Workers and Arabic translators have pulled together to provide comprehensive wrap around services for these families.

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Bulkley Valley School District sees success with new B.C. curriculum

The Bulkley Valley School District's redesigned curriculum was initially rolled out with grades K-9 in school year 2015/2016, with the goal of providing students with current, relevant skills that reflect the ever-changing demands of our society.

Part of B.C.'s new curriculum put an increased focus on trades and skill based opportunities for students. An example of this new form of learning can be seen in "Maker Days," where students are encouraged to build and create. Fast becoming a valued cornerstone of the new curriculum, the results have been successful in terms of both engagement, and the development of abilities and skills in students.

Recently, a school in the community of Houston, B.C. found great success with a competition based on wooden pallets. Students were provided with surplus pallets, along with instruction to deconstruct pallets and repurpose the materials into new items. Students were quoted as saying "it's the most fun I have ever had in school", and educators share the enthusiasm.

"Engagement is through the roof," said Board Chair Les Kearns. "There are great connections being made, and the learning outcomes are positive."

Subplots also abound in the implementation of the updated curriculum, with encouraging stories arising in unexpected ways. An example of such a story occurred during the facilitation of a woodworking program with students. A learner in the sessions had the opportunity to become a leader and share his knowledge, as he had previously completed many woodworking projects with his father at home. The boy was able to leverage his personal experience and share his knowledge with his peers, and gain experience as a sharer of knowledge.

Other areas of focus include coding and robotics, with student engagement being so high that courses cannot be offered with enough frequency to satiate demand. Engagement opportunities such as this did not exist in the previous curriculum, and boards of education are pleased with the results.

In leading up to these learning initiatives, teachers are encouraged to collaborate. Co-planning and co-teaching classes, with lessons first being exhibited and observed by peers for feedback, is the norm. The results of this approach have created powerful demonstrations where students are afforded the opportunity to view their teachers as learners as well, resulting in a lasting impression of what is to be a lifelong learner.

Feedback from educators, boards, and parents has been positive in the school district, with genuine appreciation for the opportunity to teach children transferable skills being apparent. These efforts render into increased engagement from teachers, echoing the positive attitudes and interest seen in their students.

"Bringing in the experts, putting that work into practice and making use of our own in-house experts is just the beginning," added Kearns in speaking about educating students with practical skills. "There is long way to go, but this is limitless in its potential."

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PISA results rank BC students amongst the best in the world

On December 2016, grade 10 students in B.C. ranked amongst the best in the word in math, reading and science with the Programme for International Student Assessment. The announcement served to draw attention to our excellent education system.

PISA assesses the abilities and performance of students, and in the case of the most recent results, surveyed over half a million 15 year old students in 2015 across 72 countries, including all 10 Canadian

provinces. The tests, lasting two hours, contain criteria that is internationally agreed upon. Subjects of measure include science, math, reading, collaborative problem solving and financial literacy. Tests are conducted every three years, with PISA results being considered amongst the most thorough and accurate in the world regarding student abilities.

The highest average score in reading went to B.C., and only Singapore produced learners capable of surpassing the competency of B.C.'s students in science. In math, our students were edged out slightly by five jurisdictions, while another 12 performed at the same level, and a further 64 produced results below that of B.C. students.

"We can point with pride to the PISA results, knowing that they recognize the incredible talent and abilities of B.C. students," said BCSTA President Teresa Rezansoff. "Having their achievements recognized at the international level is a remarkable success story for everyone involved in their learning journey."

B.C. students saw an overall improvement in these areas over the last round of testing executed in 2012, where they received second place in reading, third in science, and 10th in math. Canada, as a whole, has scored high in reading throughout PISA's 15 years of testing.

In a statement released on the Government of British Columbia's website, Mike Bernier, B.C.'s Minister of Education weighed in on the results. "Our students are the best readers in the world and their outcomes put them at the head of the class globally. These results come thanks to hard work by the students, the skills and efforts of our teachers, and from the strength of our education system," said Bernier. "It's doubly rewarding to see the strong results are also an improvement from the already strong results three years ago."

The PISA results also served to highlight that B.C. students have relatively minor gaps between high and low performing students. This limited variance between student scores stresses the strength of B.C.'s impartial education system, and how it is capable of providing fair opportunity for all students to succeed.

While PISA is only one, somewhat narrow, measurement of student and school success, the very positive results help demonstrate that B.C. and the rest of Canada are on the right track in terms of education programs.

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Partnership between schools and college helps students transition to post-secondary

Author: Rob Law, Teacher, Gateway Program, School District 23 (Central Okanagan)

The Gateway Program is a partnership between Central Okanagan School District and Okanagan College. For students in general, the pursuit of graduation and the transition to post-secondary education can often be difficult. For vulnerable students who deal with myriad obstacles, this transition can seem insurmountable. The Gateway Program strives to provide vulnerable students with the necessary supports to successfully transition to college and ultimately sustainable careers in the trade sector.

The Gateway initiative encompasses three progressive stages, with each providing the skills for success in the next. Students begin by taking a five-week Pre-Gateway Program at Central School. Pre-Gateway focuses on readiness skills such as team building and compassion for others.

Those students who are successful in completing the Pre-Gateway Program move on to stage two, attending Okanagan College for an extended 10-week period where they explore a variety of trades from carpentry to metal work to culinary arts. Stage two also includes a five-day co-op work experience component which also allows students to network with potential employers.

In stage three, students select a specific trade and enter the Dual Credit Foundation Studies Program for an extended 20-40 weeks, depending on the trade selection.

Vulnerable youth require a tremendous support network if they are to be successful transitioning to college life. The support staff at Central Programs and Services, including learning assistance teachers, resource teachers and counselors, work closely with their colleagues at Okanagan College to ensure that required learning adaptations and mental health supports are in place for our students.

Over the past four years, we have seen increasing success with students enrolling in the Gateway Program with more students accessing a dual credit apprenticeship course and completing their foundation year in a variety of trade areas.

"Helping students prepare for life after school is one of the goals of public education," said Board Chair Moyra Baxter. "The support system that teachers and counselors in the Gateway program create for each student is key to achieving that goal, encouraging students to make the best of their talents and interests and to pursue their dreams."

Additional information on the program can be found [here](#).

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