



# BOARDS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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## BRIDGING GAP BETWEEN STUDENTS AND CAREERS

### A FORUM AT SD34 (ABBOTSFORD)'S RICK HANSEN SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Accepting and embracing change, flexibility, analytical skills, and collaboration are skills and attributes seen in today's workforce that will be important for the next generation to have – these were just some of the ideas and conclusions reached at a forum by over 100 representatives from the community, business, education and health sectors and the Rick Hansen Foundation on June 3rd, as part of the planning for the re-imagined [Rick Hansen Secondary School of Science and Business](#). As well, independent thinking, conflict resolution abilities, and digital literacy were identified as courses or concepts missing in high schools today, while mentoring and networking, communications styles, and appreciation of multiple access points within a professional field are some gaps between high school and the 21st century workplace.

The forum provided the opportunity for discussion on bridging the gap between education and the 21st century workplace. Rick Hansen Secondary is the first Science and Business School in BC, with a learning environment that will prepare graduates for professional careers and success in post-secondary studies. The forum was developed to help inform the district about best paths as they develop the school's offerings.

(See a [video of the forum](#).)

"This will be very exciting for our students as they prepare for future career pursuits," says Abbotsford Board of Education Chair Cindy Schafer. "We are adapting to the changing needs of students by creating a learning environment that will better prepare graduates for next steps towards professional careers and success in post-secondary studies. Our district Strategic Plan is supported through the flexibility and access to programs and services."

"This is just the type of catalyst for change that I believe will truly enhance student's prospects as they transition from their learning at high school into the world of work and careers and post-secondary studies" said Rick Hansen, CEO of the [Rick Hansen Foundation](#). "It's inspiring to see this innovation happening at a school that has already embodied so many values that are important to our education system, including inclusivity. I am certain this new school strategy will have a positive effect on the students who attend here."

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The new approach is two-fold. First, the emphasis of the programs will be toward the goal of professional careers in business, science and medicine as well as preparing students for success in university studies. Second, the daily approach to learning will be transformed.

"We're definitely talking about post-secondary and professional career aspirations here," explains David de Wit, school principal. "But

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to achieve this, we're approaching daily learning experiences from a very different angle."

This new way of classroom learning will be more reflective of life in the work world. It's centered around what educators call "project based learning".

"With this approach, students learn through experience," continues de Wit. "They learn by trying things, by solving problems presented to them. And they do so in teams and across multiple disciplines, which is more reflective of what they'll be faced with in their careers. It's very engaging for students, and very practical."

Will they learn the basics? "Of course," says deWit. "Graduates must have strong math and language skills. And it's also important to understand that even if you're focus of interest isn't science or business, Rick Hansen Secondary is a great place for you to thrive."

Beginning in September, grade 9 students will have a full immersion experience in the program. But the new approach to classroom learning, and the vital atmosphere at the school will impact Grade 10-12 students as well. Throughout the 2016-2018 years, as the (2015-16) grade 9 students progress, the entire cohort of students will be immersed in the full spectrum of science and business programming.

Students from within the Rick Hansen Secondary School catchment will be given first option to enroll. But enrollment in this unique program will not be exclusively limited to catchment students.

"We expect that as students experience this new program and dynamic way of learning that there will be a high level of interest," says de Wit. "Our aim is to make it available to as many students as we have room for in the coming years."



Bridging gap between students and careers at Rick Hansen SS