

Learning Standards and Flexible Learning Environments

It is important to note that all current provincial curricula are still in place at this time. The following information relates to the renewing of provincial curriculum that is currently in process.

Required Learning Standards

The Ministry of Education sets the standards for grades K to 12 through the provincial curriculum. The provincial curriculum describes for teachers what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do. The required learning standards include curricular competencies and concepts and content for each area of learning. Once the renewing of curriculum is complete, the learning standards for each area of learning will comprise the legally required component of the provincial curriculum. It is important to note that although the learning standards are described within an area of learning, there is no requirement for teachers to organize classrooms, courses, or schools by these areas of learning.

In effect, the Ministry of Education defines the “what” to teach but not the “how” to organize or teach it. That is, the Ministry defines what must be taught. Teachers decide the “how” — how they actually organize learning and teach in the classroom – in order to create the learning environments in which learning takes place. The classroom-learning environment includes such aspects as the instructional methods and approaches, assessment techniques and strategies, as well as the selection of learning resources.

Districts and schools also make decisions about the types of learning environments they want, based on the learning culture they wish to establish. These environments include such aspects as scheduling, timetables, course structures, and school organizations. Districts and schools are encouraged to combine learning standards in various ways to create cross-curricular units, modules, mini-courses, and courses tailored to the learners in their communities.

Renewed Provincial Curriculum

Conditions in the world are changing greatly. Today we live in a technology-rich, personalized world, where communication is instant and information is immediately accessible. How we communicate today has forever changed the way we interact with each other personally, socially, and in the world of work. Knowledge is growing at exponential proportions in many domains and, in the process, creating new information. At the same time, the world is becoming increasingly interconnected and globalized. This is the world our students will be entering. Provincial curriculum is being renewed to support the development of educated citizens in the 21st century and beyond. Advice from consultations suggested that to prepare students for the future, renewed curriculum must be learner-centred, flexible, and maintain the focus on literacy and numeracy, while attending to the deeper learning which is concept-based and competency-driven.

- **Learners at the centre:** BC's renewed provincial curriculum places learners at the centre of the learning landscape, and encourages motivation, curiosity and active engagement. Renewed provincial curriculum is inclusive of all learners – it addresses the needs of diverse learners in various contexts, allows for personalization and creative approaches, and enables students to take increased responsibility for their learning.
- **Flexible:** A goal of the renewed provincial curriculum is to provide teachers and schools with greater opportunity to exercise professional judgment in creating flexible learning environments and in using creative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment. Such approaches take into account the place and cultures of the students as well as the great variety of technology available to them.
- **Focus on basics and high standards:** Students will continue to learn literacy and numeracy foundations, while renewed provincial curriculum provides more freedom to pursue individual interests and passions. The learning standards are written at a high conceptual level, and are linked to “big ideas” to inspire and drive teaching for deeper understanding. Conceptual learning is transferrable within and across disciplines, and can be applied to real-life situations.
- **Concept-based and competency-driven:** The BC curriculum is concept-based and competency-driven to provide appropriate curricula for 21st century learners. The provincial curriculum is designed to ensure that students will develop core competencies in the key areas of communication, thinking, and personal and social responsibility. These competencies are essential for success in school, in careers, and in life.

Flexible Learning Environments

BC participants in consultations, researchers and world-leading authorities agree that flexible learning environments provide the best situations for learners to learn. That is, students learn best in environments where learning is personalized to meet their interests, learning needs and aspirations.

Renewed provincial curriculum does not dictate the type of learning environment teachers must create. However, the renewed curriculum should enable and support the development of learning environments that foster creativity and the interests and needs of the learners. Renewed provincial curriculum supports the development of such learning environments in the following ways:

- **Fewer learning standards:** Renewed provincial curriculum is flexible to enable educators to create the most appropriate learning environment for their students and community. Educators are encouraged to consider creative and flexible ways to unlock the learning potential of students in their charge. Research in behavioural science and neuroscience supports the view that learning results from the interaction of motivation, emotion, and cognition. That is, many aspects of a child are involved in the learning – learning is not just a cognitive activity. The structure of renewed provincial curriculum provides the space for flexibility so that teachers can more readily address the passions, range of interests, and abilities of the learners at hand.

- **Flexible structure:** Renewed provincial curriculum provides learning standards that can be combined and integrated in various ways, to create courses or learning experiences that go beyond the borders of traditional learning areas to focus on students’ needs, interests, and/or the local context.
- **Support inquiry and problem-solving:** Renewed provincial curriculum supports and encourages student-driven, inquiry-based approaches to teaching and learning through placing an increased focus on concepts and content that address “real-world” issues and problems.

Relevant supporting material: to come

- Learners and Learning (Proposed)
- Supporting Literacy and Numeracy Foundations (Proposed)
- Supporting Competency-driven Learning (Proposed)
- Supporting Deeper (Concept-based) Learning (Proposed)
- Supporting Personalized Learning (Proposed)
- Technology in Support of Learning (Coming)

Key References

Erickson, H. (2007). *Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction for the Thinking Classroom*.

Annotation: *Provides proven curriculum design, with teaching methods that encourage students to learn concepts as well as content and skills, for deep understanding across all subject areas.*

Erickson, H. 3rd Edition (2008). *Stirring the Head, Heart and Soul: Redefining Curriculum, Instruction, and Concept-Based Learning*.

Annotation: *Curriculum design for quality instruction, providing practical structures, planning tools, and specific classroom examples of effective teaching strategies. Helps students analyze and synthesize information for a deep understanding of big ideas.*

Halbert, J. & Kaser, L. (2013). *Spirals of Inquiry for equity and quality*.

Annotation: *Handbook provides specific inquiry tools, research evidence and examples from practice in BC schools, to help shift thinking and practice. Created in association with the BC Principals and Vice-Principals’ Association.*

Hayes Jacobs, H. Ed. (2010). *Curriculum 21: Essential Education for a Changing World*.

Annotation: *Makes a powerful case for overhauling, updating, and injecting life into the K-12 curriculum, to transform schools into contemporary learning organizations. Includes the collective wisdom of 10 education thought leaders on content and assessment; program structures; technology; media literacy; globalization; sustainability; habits of mind.*

Marzano, R. Ed. (2010). *On Excellence in Teaching*.

Annotation: *Brings the ideas and recommendations of many internationally renowned leaders in education into one resource, for educators working to help students achieve ever-higher levels. Contributes a sound conceptual framework, and offer strategies for improving instruction.*

McTighe, J. & Wiggins, G. (2007). *Schooling by Design: Mission, Action and Achievement*.

Annotation: *An acclaimed framework for curriculum, instruction, and assessment that builds on the premise of "Understanding by Design". Presents a compelling argument for the reform of schooling as a whole.*

McTighe, J. & Wiggins, G. Expanded 2nd Edition (2005). *Understanding by Design*.

Annotation: *Guides educators across the K-16 spectrum in the design of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Explains the rationale of "backwards design", and explores such key ideas as "essential questions" and "transfer tasks".*

McTighe, J. & Wiggins, G. Expanded 2nd Edition (2013). *Essential Questions: Opening Doors to Student Understanding*.

Annotation: *Explains how posing "essential questions" helps teachers to target standards, as they organize curriculum content into coherent units that yield focussed and thoughtful learning. Builds on the premise of "Understanding by Design".*

OECD. (2012). *Nature of Learning Environments*. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/cei/50300814.pdf>

Tomlison, C. & McTighe, J. (2006). *Integrating Differentiated Instruction and Understanding by Design*.

Annotation: *Provides fresh perspectives on two challenges for educators: crafting powerful curriculum in a standards-dominated era, and ensuring academic success for the full spectrum of learners.*

Torp, L. & Sage, S. 2nd Edition (2002). *Problems as Possibilities: Problem-based learning for K-16 Education*.

Annotation: *Authors offer opportunities to learn about problem-based learning (PBL) from a variety of perspectives, including assessing education in and through PBL, with examples from elementary, secondary and university levels.*

Wassermann, S. 2nd Edition (2009). *Teaching for Thinking Today: Theory, Strategies, and Activities for the K-8 Classroom*.

Annotation: *Presents a theoretical framework for teaching of thinking connected to important educational goals and standards; describes teachers' questions that lead to students' understanding of "Big Ideas"; provides examples of how teachers can emphasize thinking skills in math, science, language arts and social studies in Primary, Intermediate and Middle schools, plus tools for evaluating student progress.*