Introduction to British Columbia's Redesigned Curriculum

Education for the 21st Century

British Columbia has one of the best education systems in the world. Teachers are skilled, facilities are sound, and students are performing near the top of international assessments. Yet it is an education system modelled on the very different circumstances of an earlier century — when change was much more gradual than it is today. Conditions in the world are changing greatly and rapidly. Today's students will grow into a world that is very different from and more connected than that of generations before.

To maintain high achievement, British Columbia must transform its education system to one that better engages students in their own learning and fosters the skills and competencies students will need to succeed. One focus for this transformation is a curriculum that enables and supports increasingly personalized learning, through quality teaching and learning, flexibility and choice, and high standards.

To guide the transformation, the province conducted reviews of trends in national and international jurisdictions and invited authorities on curriculum and assessment design to advise on proposed changes. In addition, as part of the work on core competencies, several commissioned researchers summarized the literature in critical thinking, creative thinking, and social and personal responsibility. Reference information is available at **www.curriculum.gov.bc.ca**.

Student success through curriculum transformation

Today we live in a state of constant change. It is a technology-rich world, where communication is instant and information is immediately accessible. The way we interact with each other personally, socially, and at work has changed forever. Knowledge is growing at exponential rates in many domains, creating new information and possibilities. This is the world our students are entering.

British Columbia's curriculum is being redesigned to respond to this demanding world our students are entering. To develop new models, the Ministry consulted with experts in the field. They suggested that to prepare students for the future, the curriculum must be learner-centred and flexible and maintain a focus on literacy and numeracy, while supporting deeper learning through concept-based and competency-driven approaches.

The redesign of curriculum maintains a focus on sound foundations of literacy and numeracy while supporting the development of citizens who are competent thinkers and communicators, and who are personally and socially competent in all areas of their lives. British Columbia's redesigned curriculum honours the ways in which students think, learn, and grow, and prepares them for a successful lifetime of learning where ongoing change is constant.

The Educated Citizen

"A quality education system assists in the development of human potential and improves the well-being of each individual person in British Columbia society." These words, along with the description of the educated citizen, became educational policy following the report of the Royal Commission on Education (known as the Sullivan Commission), in 1988. They continue to have meaning today.

Achieving British Columbia's social and economic goals requires well-educated citizens who are able to think critically and creatively and adapt to change. Progress toward the achievement of these goals also depends on the province having citizens who accept the tolerant and multifaceted nature of Canadian society and who are motivated to participate actively in our democratic institutions.

To ensure the development of an educated society, government is responsible for providing all youth with the opportunity to obtain high-quality education. To that end, British Columbia's schools assist in developing citizens who:

- are thoughtful and able to learn and to think critically, and can communicate information from a broad knowledge base
- are creative, flexible, and self-motivated and have a positive self-image
- are capable of making independent decisions
- are skilled and able to contribute to society generally, including the world of work
- are productive, gain satisfaction through achievement, and strive for physical well-being
- are co-operative, principled, and respectful of others regardless of differences
- are aware of the rights of the individual and are prepared to exercise the responsibilities of the individual within the family, the community, Canada, and the world

The redesigned curriculum captures these qualities, both implicitly and explicitly, in the core and curricular competencies. The concept of the educated citizen will continue to guide educational decisions for years to come, ensuring that students across the province are supported and that future generations of British Columbians are empowered by their school experience.

Personalized learning

Personalized learning acknowledges that not all students learn successfully at the same rate, in the same learning environment, and in the same ways. It involves the provision of high-quality and engaging learning opportunities that meet the diverse needs of all students. Schools may provide flexible timing and pacing through a range of learning environments, with learning supports and services tailored to meet student needs.

Personalized learning focuses on enhancing student engagement in learning and giving students choices — more of a say in what and how they learn — leading to lifelong, self-directed learning. Students and teachers develop learning plans to build on student's interests, goals, and learning needs. Involving students in reflecting on their work and setting new goals based on their reflections allows them to take more control of their learning. Personalized learning also encompasses place-based learning, where learning experiences are adapted to the local environment or an individual context.

Key features of redesigned curriculum

At the heart of British Columbia's redesigned curriculum are the Core Competencies, essential learning and literacy and numeracy foundations. All three features contribute to deeper learning.

The Core Competencies

Core Competencies underpin the curricular competencies in all areas of learning. They are directly related to the educated citizen and as such are what we value for all students in the system.

Information on the Core Competencies, including profiles and illustrations, are available **www.curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies**.

Essential learning

The curriculum for each subject area includes the essential learning for students, which represent society's aspirations for BC's educated citizen. The redesigned curriculum develops around key content, concepts, skills and big ideas that foster the higher-order thinking demanded in today's world.

Literacy and numeracy foundations

Literacy is the ability to understand, critically analyze, and create a variety of forms of communication, including oral, written, visual, digital, and multimedia, in order to accomplish one's goals.

Numeracy is the ability to understand and apply mathematical concepts, processes, and skills to solve problems in a variety of contexts.

Literacy and numeracy are fundamental to all learning. While they are commonly associated with language learning and mathematics, literacy and numeracy are applied in all areas of learning.

Curriculum model

All areas of learning are based on a "Know-Do-Understand" model to support a concept-based competency-driven approach to learning.

Three elements, the Content (Know), Curricular Competencies (Do), and Big Ideas (Understand) all work together to support deeper learning.

British Columbia's curriculum design enables a personalized, flexible and innovative approach at all levels of the education system.

All areas of learning have been redesigned using this model.

Content (Know)

The Content learning standards — the "Know" of the Know-Do-Understand model of learning — detail the essential topics and knowledge at each grade level.

Curricular Competencies (Do)

The Curricular Competencies are the skills, strategies, and processes that students develop over time. They reflect the "Do" in the Know-Do-Understand model of learning. While Curricular Competencies are more subject-specific, they are connected to the Core Competencies.

Big Ideas (Understand)

The Big Ideas consist of generalizations and principles and the key concepts important in an area of learning. They reflect the "Understand" component of the Know-Do-Understand model of learning.

The big ideas represent what students will understand at the completion of the curriculum for their grade. They are intended to endure beyond a single grade and contribute to future understanding.

Any of the elements may include elaborations. Elaborations are provided where necessary to clarify some words or statements and may include examples, key questions, definitions or be used to describe breadth and depth for content. Elaborations are presented as "mouse-over" links on the website.

Concept-based, competency-driven curriculum

British Columbia's redesigned curriculum brings together two features that most educators agree are essential for 21st-century learning: a concept-based approach to learning and a focus on the development of competencies, to foster deeper, more transferable learning. These approaches complement each other because of their common focus on active engagement of students. Deeper learning is better achieved through "doing" than through passive listening or reading. Similarly, both concept-based learning and the development of competencies engage students in authentic tasks that connect learning to the real world.

Concept-based learning

A concept-based curriculum uses concepts to define standards of knowledge and skills associated with a given area of learning. It is focused on the key concepts, principles, and generalizations that are used to organize knowledge and solve problems within and across disciplines.

A concept-based curriculum:

- is built around higher-order standards and key ideas, allowing a more in-depth exploration of topics to gain deeper understanding
- balances the study of factual information with the development of conceptual understanding and disciplinary skills
- offers opportunities for the transfer of learning
- is not a list of topics to cover in isolation from one another

A concept-based curriculum allows for connections between big ideas — for example, through exploration of the concept of reoccurring patterns and comparison of how patterns appear in literature, geographical features, and the evolution of species.

Competency-driven learning

"Competency" and "competencies" are defined in different ways in different contexts. The terms have their own meanings when used by business and industry, where they generally refer to the skills needed to perform a given job. In the context of education, the terms refer to the ability of students to perform a task as expected within a specific discipline or area of learning. That ability represents a combination of skills, processes, behaviours, and habits of mind. Students are competent in an area of learning to the extent that they understand and can apply knowledge to new contexts.

Competencies are often narrowly equated with skills, but in a 21st-century educational context, competencies represent a much broader and more adaptable achievement than a simple set of skills. The redesigned curriculum defines competencies at two levels: *Core Competencies* develop across the curriculum, and *Curricular Competencies* are explicit statements of what is expected at each grade level in each area of learning.

Redesigned curriculum in action

When planning, it is important to begin with a broad understanding of the curriculum being used.

- The rationale and goals provide the context for the area of learning and make clear its contribution to the development of educated citizens.
- The rationale and goals provide a broad instructional and assessment context for the area of learning.
- The introduction to each area of learning provides specifics about features, structure, and important considerations of the curriculum.

The curriculum for each area of learning is displayed in two ways—in HTML format on the website and in PDF or Word formats.
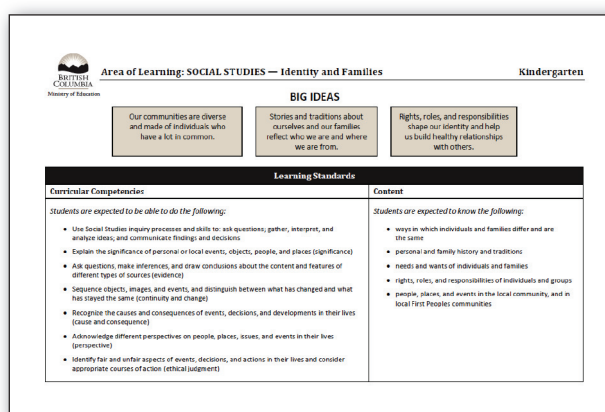
The curriculum website will continue to evolve in ways that support planning for learning. At this point, several features are available such as:

- A search engine to allow teachers to search for key words or select key elements from specific grades or areas of learning. See: **www.curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/search**

- The results of the search can be exported into a Word document for further manipulation
- PDF or Word versions of the curriculum can be printed
- Some resources for planning are included now and will be further expanded in the future.

This flexibility supports teachers to combine the learning standards in various ways. Teachers are encouraged to create courses, modules, thematic units or learning experiences that go beyond learning area borders to focus on students' needs and interests or local contexts. The curriculum design and the website features provide the flexibility to serve the unique needs of classrooms, students, and teachers.

Flexible learning environments

Learning can take place anywhere, not just in classrooms. Many schools and teachers create learning environments that explore the use of time and space in creative ways. The integration of areas of learning and technology also have opened the door for teachers and schools to approach the use of time and space in creative ways – ways that adapt to the students' needs and interests.

Although the learning standards are described within areas of learning, there is no requirement for teachers to organize classrooms, schools or instruction in this manner. In effect, the Ministry of Education defines the "what" to teach but not the "how" to organize the time, space or methods to teach it.

The focus on personalization and the flexible structure of the curriculum support the configuration of combined grade classrooms. Classes of students of more than one grade provide opportunities for teachers to develop a mindset that sees all the students as a group of learners with a range of needs and interests. Multi-grade programs should find a comfortable fit with the curriculum.

ICT-enabled learning environments

Students need opportunities to develop the competencies required to use current and emerging technologies effectively in all aspects of their learning and life. Technology can facilitate collaboration between students, educators, parents, and classrooms while also providing schools with rich online resources. Today's technology enables classrooms, communities, and experts around the world to share digitally in a learning experience, wherever they may be.

Inquiry and question-based approaches

Through demonstration of the core and curricular competencies, students are bound to form questions that provide teachers with insight into their thinking. Questions generated by both students and teachers are critical to encouraging a sense of wonder and curiosity among students. This dialogue can take place through many question-based approaches, including, but not limited to:

- inquiry
- project-based learning
- problem-based learning
- self-assessment

- research skills
- scientific methods

Collaboration with community

Learning can often be enriched through collaborations involving members of the community. Parents or guardians and others in the community may bring expertise and perspective from their own lives and experiences to enhance students' learning. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate these experiences into their students' learning when possible and appropriate.

It is particularly helpful to co-operate and engage with experts from the community when learning about culture-specific contexts to avoid offence or misrepresentation or appropriation of culture. Cultural appropriation includes use of cultural motifs, themes, "voices," images, knowledge, stories, songs, drama, and so on without permission or without appropriate context or in a way that may misrepresent the real experience of the people from whose culture they are drawn.

Collaboration with community members exemplifies many of the First Peoples Principles of Learning and nurtures cross-generational and relational learning.

When working with members of the community, teachers are encouraged to:

- become familiar with school and board/authority policies for involving guest instructors in the classroom (e.g., reference checks)
- arrange for a meeting to discuss appropriate learning expectations and to decide which areas of the curriculum are to be addressed
- ensure that age-appropriate material is used
- prepare students for the experience (e.g., discuss the expectations for process and etiquette, provide relevant background information)
- determine the needs of the presenters (e.g., space, technology, materials)
- debrief with students and guests

Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge

British Columbia has long had the goal of improving school success for all Aboriginal students. Achieving this goal will require that the voice of Aboriginal people be heard in all aspects of the education system; the presence of Aboriginal languages, cultures, and histories be increased in provincial curricula; and leadership and informed practice be provided.

At the same time, Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge are a part of the historical and contemporary foundation of British Columbia and Canada. British Columbia's education transformation therefore incorporates the Aboriginal voice and perspective by having Aboriginal expertise at all levels, ensuring that Aboriginal content is a part of the learning journey for *all* students, and ensuring that the best information guides the work. An important goal in integrating Aboriginal perspectives into curricula is to ensure that all learners have opportunities to understand and respect their own cultural heritage as well as that of others.

Over the past decade, British Columbia's curriculum has integrated Aboriginal content into specific courses. The redesigned curriculum builds on what has been learned and extends Aboriginal perspectives into the entire learning journey, rather than into specific courses or grade

levels. This means that from Kindergarten to graduation, students will experience Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge as part of what they are learning. And because Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge are embedded in the curriculum, they will naturally influence the ways in which students will be assessed.

The **First Peoples Principles of Learning** provided a crucial lens for teacher teams when drafting curricula, and all curriculum teams included Aboriginal representation. The teams put great effort into embedding Aboriginal knowledge and worldviews in curriculum in authentic and meaningful ways. Curriculum material was reviewed by Ministry staff as well as by Aboriginal teachers and other experts.

References to Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge are both explicit and implicit in the redesigned curriculum and are evident in the rationale statements, goals, learning standards, and some of the elaborations. Rich instructional samples to inspire teaching and learning will be collected and shared online to provide examples of relevant teaching units and place-based learning. In all of the areas of learning, teachers are encouraged to teach in ways that respect the place in which the students are — to teach from within the school and its surrounding community.

Program considerations

Valuing diversity

British Columbia's schools include young people of varied backgrounds, interests, and abilities. The Kindergarten to grade 12 school system focuses on meeting the needs of all students. When selecting specific topics, activities, and resources to support the implementation of the curriculum, teachers are encouraged to ensure that these choices support inclusion, equity, and accessibility for all students. In particular, teachers should ensure that classroom instruction, assessment, and resources reflect sensitivity to diversity and incorporate positive role portrayals, relevant issues, and themes such as inclusion, respect, and acceptance. This includes diversity in family compositions and gender orientation.

The school system strives to create and maintain conditions that foster success for all students. These conditions include:

- equitable access to and equitable participation in quality education for all students
- school cultures that value diversity and respond to the diverse social and academic needs of individual students
- school cultures that promote understanding of others and respect for all
- school environments that are safe and welcoming
- policies and practices that promote fair and equitable treatment
- processes that give a voice to all members of the school community

Honouring diversity within the school system is based on the principle that if our differences are acknowledged and utilized in a positive way, it is of benefit to the quality of our learning and working environments. More information is available at **www.bced.gov.bc.ca/diversity**.

Supporting diverse learners

BC educators strive to ensure that all learners are supported to participate in school, to develop their individual potential, and to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes they need for a successful personal future and to contribute positively to society and to the economy. Curriculum used in British Columbia schools remains designed for the majority of students, with classroom teachers continually personalizing their instruction and assessment methods for students as appropriate.

Government policy supports the principles of inclusion of all students. Students with special and/or ELL needs can achieve the prescribed learning standards through the strategic use of personalized instruction and assessment methods.

Some students with special needs may require program adaptation or modification to facilitate their achievement of the learning standards in this curriculum.

Adapted programs

An adapted program addresses the learning standards of the prescribed curriculum by providing accommodations to selected students. These accommodations may include alternative formats for resources, instructional strategies, and assessment procedures.

Accommodations may also be made in areas such as skill sequence, pacing, methodology, materials, technology, equipment, services, and setting. Students on adapted programs are assessed using the learning standards and can receive full credit.

The following are examples of adaptations that may help students succeed:

- Digital/audio texts or peer helper to assist with assigned readings
- Access to assistive tools/technology (e.g., word processor, calculator, text to speech/voice to text software, magnifier, FM system etc.)
- Alternative ways of demonstrating learning standards
- Graphic organizers/strategy lists to assist students
- Extended time to complete assignments or tests
- Support to develop and practice study skills; for example, in a learning assistance class
- Pre-teaching key vocabulary or concepts; multiple exposure to materials
- Working on select learning standards from different grade levels

Modified programs

A modified program has learning standards that are substantially different from the prescribed curriculum and specifically selected to meet the student's special needs. A student on a modified program is assessed in relation to the goals and objectives established in the student's IEP.

The following are examples of strategies that may help students on modified programs:

- Specify personal support (by peers or educational assistants, for example)
- Set individualized goals that may consider learning standards but are developed to suit the student's special needs
- Modify activities by providing parallel ones for students with special needs

Inclusion

British Columbia promotes an inclusive education system in which students with special needs are fully participating members of a community of learners. Inclusion describes the principle that all students are entitled to equitable access to learning, achievement, and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs.

The practice of inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with full integration in regular classrooms, and goes beyond placement to include meaningful participation and the promotion of interaction with others.

Placement

A school board must ensure that a principal offers to consult with a parent or guardian of a child who has special needs regarding the student's placement in an educational program. A school board must provide a student who has special needs with an educational program in a classroom where the student is integrated with other students who do not have special needs, unless the educational needs of the student with special needs or other students indicate that the educational program for the student with special needs should be provided otherwise.

The emphasis on educating students with special needs in neighbourhood school classrooms with their age and grade peers, however, does not preclude the appropriate use of learning assistance rooms, self-contained classes, community-based programs, or specialized settings. Students with special needs may be placed in settings other than a neighbourhood school classroom with age and grade peers. This should only be done when the school board has made all reasonable efforts to integrate the student, and it is clear that a combination of education in such classes and supplementary support cannot meet the student's educational or social needs, or when there is clear evidence that partial or full placement in another setting is the only option after considering the student's educational needs or the educational needs of others.

Integration

Integration is one of the major strategies used to achieve inclusion. Students with special needs are included in educational settings with their peers who do not have special needs, and are provided with the necessary accommodations, determined on an individual basis, to enable them to be successful there. The principle of "placement in the most enabling learning environment" applies when decisions are made about the extent to which an individual student is placed in regular classrooms or is assigned to an alternate placement.

English Language Learning (ELL)/Apprentissage de la langue anglaise (ALS)

People from all parts of the globe contribute to the social, cultural, and linguistic fabric of British Columbia. This diversity is mirrored in our school populations, in both the contributions made and the unique needs that must be addressed. ELL/ALS students come from many linguistic and cultural backgrounds and have had a wide variety of life experiences — attributes that can significantly enrich the life of the school and help enhance learning for all students.

English Language Learning (ELL)/Apprentissage de la langue anglaise (ALS) services enable students whose primary language or languages of the home is/are other than English to achieve the expected learning outcomes of the provincial curriculum and to develop their individual potential within British Columbia's school system.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated Instruction (DI) is a flexible approach to teaching in which a teacher plans and carries out varied approaches to address content, learning processes, learning style, practical procedures, presentation strategies, and assessment tools. It results in a more personal, proactive learning environment, inclusive of a wide variety of learners.

When teachers differentiate instruction, they provide students with the structures to maximize strengths, work around weaknesses, and experience timely remediation. This enables students to take advantage of effective learning strategies as they begin to understand their own personal learning styles, interests, and needs and engage with their learning. As a result, student motivation increases.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is a framework of instructional approaches that recognizes and accommodates varied learning styles. It provides learning activities that expand students' opportunities for acquiring information and demonstrating learning, as well as for enhancing social participation and inclusion.

The driver for universal design is the philosophy of proactively addressing needs. Universal Design for Learning is integrated into regular instructional planning as a mechanism to make diversity the norm. It provides support for all students and motivates through the element of choice.

Response to Intervention

Response to Intervention (RTI) is a framework for formative assessment that involves collecting data on a regular basis to make instructional decisions in a multi-tier model. RTI is based on the principle of prevention and early intervention. By using ongoing assessment to inform teaching practice and allocate instructional resources, teachers are able to provide appropriate, evidence-based interventions.

Central elements of all RTI models include early screening of all students to identify those at risk for academic difficulties, implementing research-based interventions matched to student need and increasing intensity of intervention when needed. RTI also involves continuous monitoring and recording of student progress during interventions to guide decisions for both the student (e.g., further assessment, individualized planning) and the teacher (e.g., using small-group or one-to-one learning contexts, topics for professional development).

Although RTI originates from special education, it is intended for use with all students in general education.

Personal safety

To ensure a safe learning environment, teachers may consider the following questions before, during, and after instruction:

- Are students aware of established rules and procedures for safety?
- Do students fully understand the instructions?
- Is the activity suitable to each student's interest, confidence, and ability?
- Has the instruction been sequenced progressively to ensure safety?

- Are students being properly supervised?
- Are facilities, equipment, and technologies suitable and in good repair?

Some areas of learning make use of specific safety guides and manuals. These should be employed to ensure that students and teachers can enjoy safe learning activities at all times.

In addition to physical safety, teachers should consider the emotional safety of students when planning instruction. This includes, but is not limited to:

- being sensitive to individual students
- being prepared to respond to unique situations
- employing creative strategies to deal with rivalry, stress, fear of failure, performance anxiety, and so on

As well, teachers should be mindful of activities that may cause emotional or psychological stress for individual students (e.g., blindfolding, working in closed environments, solo performance, body contact, heterogeneous groupings), and be prepared to offer alternative strategies as needed.

Alternative Delivery policy

The **Alternative Delivery policy** outlines how students and their parents or guardians, in consultation with their local school authority, may choose means other than instruction by a teacher within the regular classroom setting for addressing the learning standards contained in the health component of the Physical and Health Education curriculum. The Alternative Delivery policy applies only to the health-related learning standards (Note: the policy will be revised in the 2015/16 school year).

The policy recognizes the family as the primary educator in the development of children's attitudes, standards, and values, but it still requires that all learning standards be addressed and assessed in the agreed-upon alternative manner of delivery.

It is important to note the significance of the term "alternative delivery" as it relates to the Alternative Delivery policy. The policy does not permit schools to omit any of the learning standards within the Physical and Health Education curriculum. Neither does it allow students to be excused from meeting any learning standards related to health. It is expected that students who arrange for alternative delivery will address the health-related learning standards and will be able to demonstrate their understanding of these learning standards.