10.16 - Dec '08

Ron Broda
President, BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils

Keven Elder
Superintendent, School District 63 (Saanich)
Vice-President, BC School Superintendents' Association

A Dialogue with Ron and Keven

District and Provincial Issues

Tuesday, November 18, 2008

Hosted by Claremont Parent Advisory Council

1. **Parent Advisory Councils (PACs), District Parent Advisory Council and BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils**
   PACs, DPACs and BCCPAC are independently interdependent. We have different spheres of influence that are both distinct and frequently overlap to varying degrees on different issues. Some issues can and must only be resolved at the individual classroom and school level. Some issues are best handled at the district level while others require attention at the provincial level. We can only be truly effective if we are all aware of each others' activities and work collaboratively on the issues that we can.

2. **Funding – When is More Not Enough?**
   The fact is that government has maintained education funding levels during times of declining enrolment (an effective increase on a per pupil basis) and have provided additional funds to cover the cost of provincially negotiated salary increases for teachers. This leads to the question of whether or not the effective increase is enough. It can be argued that our research-based understanding about learning, instruction, assessment, serving vulnerable children, and more, has created need that outstrips resources. And this during a time when there is justifiably more pressure to improve results, particularly in terms of early learning, graduation rates and First Nations success. We also have additional costs associated with new, partially funded mandates including early learning, community literacy and comprehensive health. How do we find the balance, provincially and locally, between the fiscal realities and the societal imperatives?

3. **SPC's: Forget the "C"! It's all about the plan!**
   Meaningful conversations focussed on improving student success. School Plans are nothing more than an individualized strategic school plan developed to assure that the most important need(s) of students of that school are met first. It is a plan that clearly identifies where those students are, where they need to be, where the school community reasonably expects that it can get them to with a plan to get them there. It is meant to be inclusive and reflective of ALL the voices in that school community. It's about keeping "the main thing" the main thing!

   "In the absence of clearly-defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily trivia until ultimately we become enslaved by it." *-- Robert Heinlein*

4. **Early Learning – Good idea, but how and by whom?**
   We are awaiting the results from a provincial feasibility study into all-day kindergarten and having the K-12 system provide education and wrap-around care services for four and three year olds. Across the province the answers have tended to suggest that these are good ideas, but questions of expertise, jurisdiction, funding and space have dominated the discussions. Overall, the question is one of "doing the right thing" rather than just "doing the thing right."

5. **Leadership development and succession, it is critical for sustainable and effective PACs and maintaining effective respectful relationships in our education community**
   Have you noticed that there are a lot of new principals, vice-principals and district staff? Guess what? Parents leave positions of leadership too. In order to maintain the high level of meaningful parent involvement that we now enjoy, we need to strategically plan our own leadership succession. We need parent leaders capable of building the respectful and trusting relationships with other members of the public education team in order for us to be truly influential. The only true power is the ability to effectively influence.

6. **Graduation - Rates and Relevance**
   Our 6-year Dogwood rate (percentage of students who graduate within six years of starting grade 8) continues to hover around 80% for the province and our district. This begs two questions. First, for those who graduate, how well do we match their experiences to their needs and learning styles, and based on that, how relevant is their experience in setting them up for future success? And, second, for those who don't graduate "on time", why not, where are they now, and what are we doing to keep them connected? Perhaps more important is a third question - how can our First Nations completion rate be so much lower? The system is devoting considerable energy to resolving these challenges and answering these questions, but what might we be missing?

7. **Class size and composition. What do the numbers really tell us? What about the stories behind the numbers?**
   There has been a lot of talk about class size numbers and the number of students with IEPs. Is that the real issue? According to Ministry statistics there is a large category in these number combinations - classes that contain NO students with IEPs. What is the story here? Is it partly a ProD issue? Are we underutilizing existing resources?

8. **Provincial Synergy - Getting on the same page**
   It seems that we all, regardless of political leaning or connection to education, share some common beliefs, including that children ought to be well educated and cared for in a partnership between school and home. Another truism is that a responsive, relevant and resourced public education system is a foundation for a healthy, sustainable and self-sufficient society. How can we work from those common beliefs toward commonly-desired ends in a way that minimizes acrimony and maximizes collaboration?

9. **PAC funding and allocations**
   To what extent should PACs fund raise? It's not only OK to spend PAC funds on parent education, it's essential!!

   Okay, now my pet peeve. In my humble opinion PACs are not meant to primarily be a fund raising arm for the school. Many are. Each PAC is entitled to decide for themselves what their priorities are or ought to be. Sometimes purposeful fund raising is both necessary and appropriate. But what about the "A" in PAC? Many PACs are reluctant or even refuse to spend money on developing themselves to be better more effective leaders. You don't know what you don't know. Invest in yourselves to be better informed, more effective leaders to influence the change necessary to truly create the best possible public education system for ALL out children.

10. **Technology - A Lever or an Intrusion**
    Communication technologies are ubiquitous and pervasive. Texting, blogging, social networking, wiki-worlds, on-line learning, web-based work environments, and more, have changed the way we think, communicate, do business and educate. In Saanich we are developing a comprehensive technology plan to ensure that these realities of life become realities of schooling, and that it happens in a strategic and appropriate way that doesn't have high-tech supersede high-touch. Where is the balance? And how do we embrace an all-in-one in-pocket communication device (cell phone becomes multi-media, interactive computer)?