

BC's EDUCATION PLAN ENGAGEMENT



what you've said...

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BRITISH
COLUMBIA

Ministry of
Education

BC's Education Plan Engagement: *what you've said* (October 2011 - July 2012)

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Disclaimer

This document contains a synthesis of the top themes from the *BC's Education Plan* discussion forum from October 2011 – July 2012. These themes represent the views and opinions of the people who have contributed to the *Plan*. Every effort has been made to categorize and synthesize these comments in a neutral and impartial manner.

The views expressed by respondents in this report should not necessarily be considered to be representative of the views of the majority of British Columbians; rather, they are a reflection of the opinions of those people who have commented on the *BC's Education Plan* discussion forum so far.

Introduction

On October 28, 2011, the Ministry of Education officially launched *BC's Education Plan*. This marked the beginning of an ambitious effort to engage British Columbians in an important conversation on **education change**. Since that day, people from all parts of the province and all walks of life have weighed in on how we might make our already great education system even better.

This report contains a list of the major themes and ideas that have emerged from the online portion of that conversation. We've received **nearly 5000 comments on our discussion forum** so far, and we've read and analyzed every one of them.

Above all else, these comments confirm how passionate educators, students, parents, government and others are about K-12 education in B.C. Clearly, we're all committed to keeping our education system **among the best in the world**.

The past nine months of this engagement process have been an amazing and eye-opening experience for us. We know that discussing a **vision for the future of our education system** in the middle of a strained labour situation was challenging. Despite the timing, it was important to hear your voices.



BC's Education Plan is a vision for what the future of education should look like in B.C., and your invitation has been to help shape it with specific examples and to share ideas on how to make the plan real - to take it from ideas to action. We also know this is just a start. We've heard from some of you and would like to hear more.

How this report is *organized*

We've organized all the comments into themes and topics, and then provided a syntheses of the comments.

Themes

All of the comments that have been approved and posted to our website fit in one of these themes:

- Curriculum
- Quality Teaching and Learning
- Parents, Communities, and Schools
- Technology in Schools
- Administrative Issues

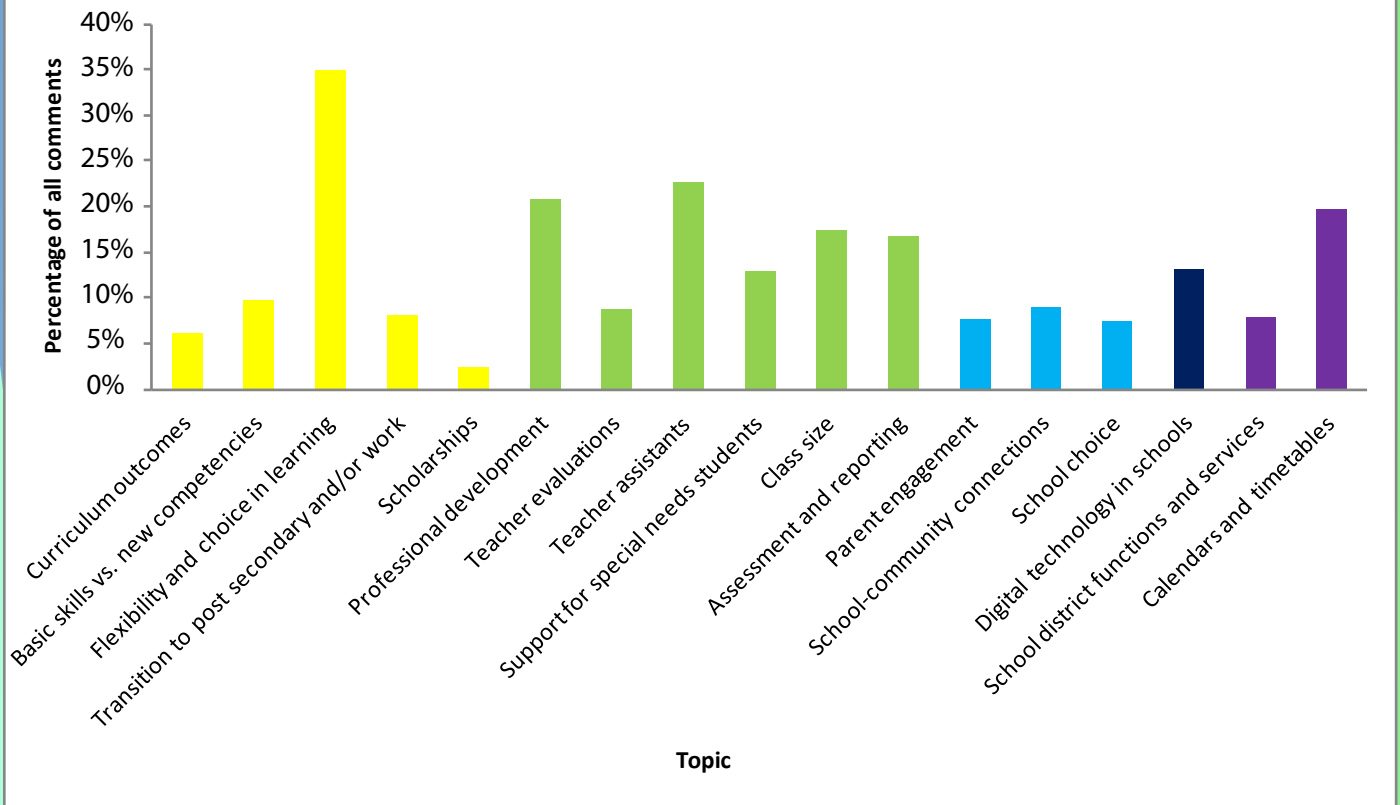
Topics

Approved comments are categorized under specific topics related to the themes. Many comments fit in more than one topic but we've categorized them under the topic where they fit best.

Syntheses of comments

Under each topic you will find a bulleted list. These are our unfiltered summaries, or syntheses, of what you've told us in your comments about that topic.

Percentage of commenters that mention each topic



We invite you to read this report to see for yourself what the people of British Columbia have had to say about K-12 education transformation in B.C. We also encourage you to tell your friends, family and networks about BC’s Education Plan and to invite them to submit their own comments. The more people we can engage in a conversation about the future of K-12 education in B.C. the better our system will be.

- The BC’s Education Plan Team



What you've *said*

In this section you will find the **top themes and topics** that have emerged on the *BC's Education Plan* online discussion forum, plus a **synthesis** of what you've said.

Theme 1: Curriculum

1. Curriculum outcomes

- Reduce the number of curriculum outcomes per subject to a more manageable number. This will:

- o allow teachers to cover the most important content and teach the most important skills in greater depth than they have time to do now.
- o give teachers more time to address specific deficiencies in student learning.
- o ensure students have more time in the curriculum to pursue their individual interests and passions.

- adopt a more holistic approach to curriculum.

Rather than identifying learning outcomes that are to be achieved in each course, identify what is to be achieved across all subjects in an entire grade.



2. Basic skills vs. new competencies

- Teach the competencies students will need in order to succeed in a rapidly changing world.

These competencies include:

- o Social responsibility
- o Global and cultural understanding
- o Environmental stewardship
- o Healthy living
- o Ethics
- o Civic responsibility
- o Collaboration and teamwork
- o Creativity
- o Innovation
- o Critical thinking
- o Problem solving
- o Digital literacy

- Ensure that the teaching of these competencies doesn't come at the expense of important foundational skills. i.e., reading, writing and numeracy.

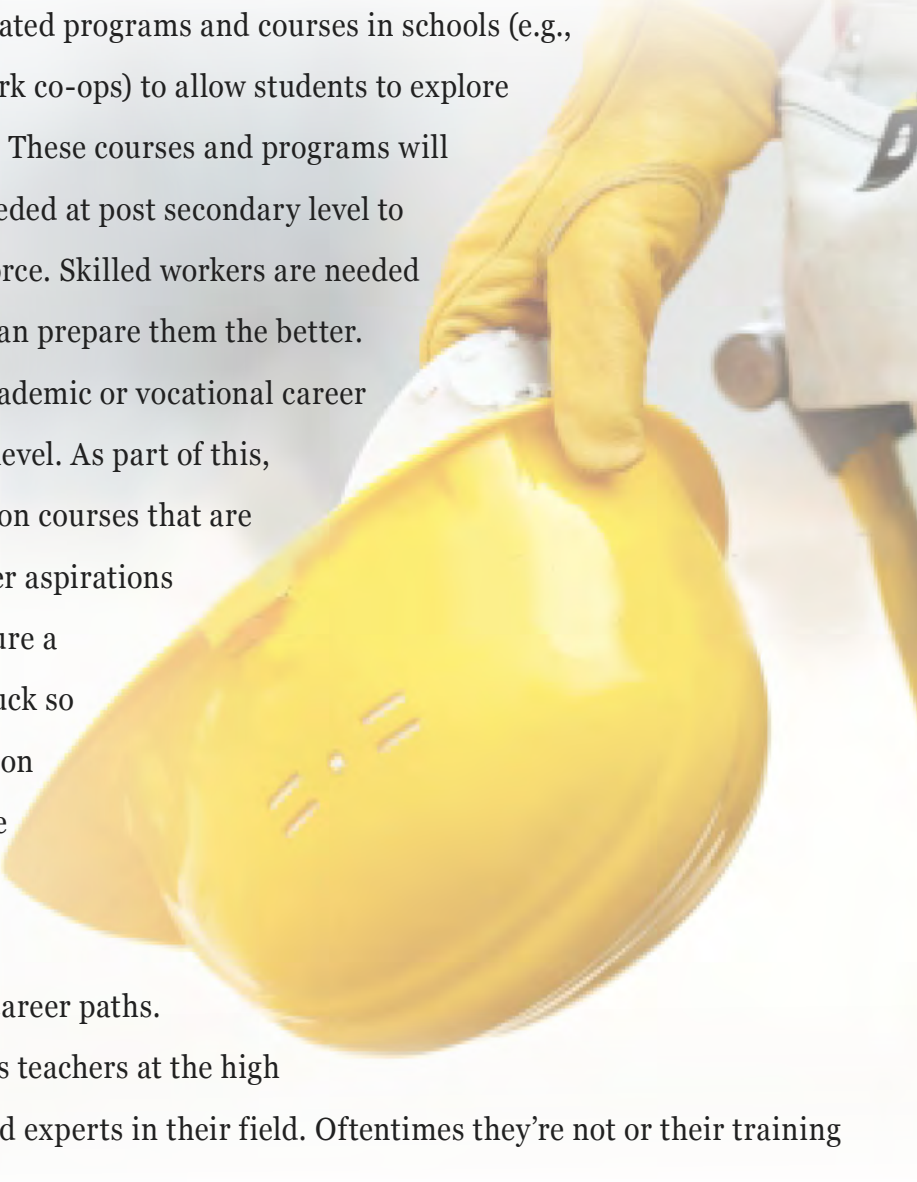
3. Flexibility and choice in learning

- Provide students with greater say in what, where, when, and how they learn. This will:
 - o increase student motivation, as students can choose topics, assignment presentation methods, etc. that are more interesting and meaningful to them.
 - o increase student motivation to learn.
 - o build independence and decision making skills.
 - o give students the ability to choose courses and course work that prepares them for possible career paths.
 - o improve student achievement rates.
- Introduce choice gradually, as students don't automatically have the wisdom, maturity or foresight to make good choices about what to learn.
- Provide: (a) more planning time; and/or (b) more teacher assistants; and/or (c) smaller class sizes to make personalized learning truly possible.
- Recognize that not all parents are equally involved in their children's education or are committed to flexibility and choice.
- Recognize that some schools are unable to support flexibility and choice to the same degree as others (i.e., unequal access to facilities, experts in community to help teach, etc.). Provide additional resources to those schools so the teachers and students have the same opportunities as teachers and students in other schools.
- Reconcile personalized learning with standardized testing. Balance the push to provide students with flexibility and choice in their learning with the need to compare them against each other for post-secondary entrance.

“Offering students a personalized approach to learning will allow students the chance to **pursue their individual interests and passions**. If a student is motivated and engaged in their learning, they are much more likely to succeed.” - Ms. E., student

4. Transition to post secondary and/or work

- Work with other ministries and with employers to determine what skills students need when they enter the workforce. Revise curricula to ensure students have a head start on those skills when they leave school.

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- Provide more trades-related programs and courses in schools (e.g., apprenticeships and work co-ops) to allow students to explore areas of career interest. These courses and programs will also reduce the time needed at post secondary level to get ready for the workforce. Skilled workers are needed now, so the sooner we can prepare them the better.
 - Stream students into academic or vocational career paths at the secondary level. As part of this, allow students to focus on courses that are applicable to their career aspirations and to skip others. Ensure a balance needs to be struck so students don't miss out on key skills that may force them to go back for additional courses if they change career paths.
 - Make certain that trades teachers at the high school level are qualified experts in their field. Oftentimes they're not or their training is out of date.
 - Address the stigma associated with the trades. Many people still view these professions as less worthy than white collar vocations like medicine and law.
 - Provide incentives to industry to take on work experience students (e.g., tax breaks, grants).

5. Scholarships

- Award scholarships based on students' results on mandatory Grade 12 provincial exams.
- Continue to award scholarships based on a mixture of academic success and community involvement.

Theme 2: Quality Teaching and Learning

1. Professional development

- Continue to support the ongoing training and professional development of teachers and teaching assistants.
- Grant teachers more autonomy to choose their professional development experiences.
- Group all the Pro-D days together at one time, perhaps mid or late summer, to minimize the inconvenience for parents of having the days spread out through the year. (Many teachers, though, prefer the current system.)
- Provide more release time for staff (especially whole departments) to work together to plan and develop lesson materials.
- Provide teachers with paid time away from the classroom to observe teachers in other classrooms (perhaps even in other schools) in order to learn new teaching techniques and styles.
- Introduce an apprenticeship model where teachers in training are paired with a master teacher for a year or more. This will allow the new teacher time to gradually adopt a full teaching load.
- Provide mentorship opportunities for new teachers to learn from master teachers. Grant master teachers more release time in order to help out.

“Only individual teachers know what development they currently need, and only they should decide how their professional development days should be used.” - Kim, teacher

2. Teacher evaluations

- Evaluate teachers on a regular basis to ensure they meet the high standards of the profession. Allow exemplary “master” teachers to perform these evaluations, as they’re likely to be more qualified to evaluate their peers than administrators are.

- Base the frequency of evaluations on the teacher’s performance. The better the evaluation, the longer the interval before the next one.
- Allow parents to formally evaluate their children’s teachers at year’s end.
- Create a standard method of teacher evaluation for all schools and districts.
- Ensure that administrators are evaluated as well. They, too, need to be accountable for their performance.

3. Teacher assistants

- Hire more teaching assistants, as they play a valuable role in the classroom.
- Ensure a standard level of training exists for all teaching assistants.
- Provide teachers and teaching assistants with more time outside the classroom to collaborate and plan lessons.
- Ensure teaching assistants are deployed effectively in the schools. Sometimes they follow the same student(s) throughout the day but sometimes they don’t, and that can be a problem.
- Provide more money to hire additional teachers (particularly specialists) and not just teaching assistants. Professionally trained teachers are best prepared to help students.

4. Support for special needs students

- Place more emphasis on special needs instruction in teacher training programs. Many new teachers are poorly trained in helping students with challenges.
- Reduce class sizes so special needs students get the support they need. Reduce the number of special needs students per class as well.
- Re-evaluate whether special needs students should be integrated into the regular classroom. Many parents and teachers have suggested that special needs students aren’t getting the attention and support they need in mainstream classes, and neither are the other students. Perhaps it’s time that separate special needs classes be re-introduced, or streaming by ability, need, or learning style be considered.
- Reduce the wait times for getting student assessments and/or diagnoses. Ideally these will take place before students enter the K-12 system.

- Reduce the amount of paperwork that teachers and families must fill out in order to apply for special needs assessment.
- Reconsider the requirements for claiming special needs funding, getting the appropriate resources and support workers, and maintaining Individual Education Plans.
- Provide more funding for K-12 special education so school districts can deliver the resources and/or services that are needed.
- Ensure that students who present with learning disabilities (such as ADHD, LD, SLD, etc.) are identified and provided the supports and services that will enable them to succeed in their educational program and achieve their potential.

5. Class size

- Reduce class sizes so:
 - o teachers can better personalize learning for every student.
 - o students get the attention they need and deserve.
 - o teachers' workloads remain manageable.
 - o students aren't overwhelmed by noise and other distractions.

6. Assessment and reporting

- Provide parents with more frequent and in-progress (formative) assessment of their children's progress at school. Finding out at report card time how their kids are doing is often too late to intervene if assistance would help. (While a good idea, many teachers have suggested that this may not be practical. Teachers are already extremely busy, so more reporting would be a burden.)
- Introduce or make greater use of online portfolios and/or class websites to showcase student work on an ongoing basis. (As above, though, many teachers are worried that this will add to their already heavy workloads.)
- Develop marking schemes and rubrics that allow teachers to accurately and consistently compare and assess a wide variety of student presentations.
- Look closely at standardized testing to see if it makes sense as we move more towards a personalized learning model.

Theme 3: *Parents,* *Communities, and Schools*

1. Parent engagement

- Help parents better understand the move to personalized learning and what role they can play in helping co-construct or support their children’s learning experiences. Many parents recognize that this is a new way to teach and learn and that they must play a role in supporting this change.
- Recognize that the more flexible the learning environment and the more choices the child is provided, the more important the parent’s role becomes.
- Invite parents into the school and classroom on a regular basis. Let them know they’re welcome.
- Find other times and ways for parents and teachers to meet. More accommodation needs to be made for work schedules and other commitments.
- Provide parents with more information at the start of the year about what their children will be learning. Continue this information sharing throughout the year.
- Provide parents with clear measures of what their children are supposed to know and be able to do, and report frequently on how they’re doing against those measures.

“The knowledge that parents bring to the table needs to be valued, listened to and enacted on if need be. Parents need to have as many opportunities as possible to share their thoughts and feelings, to provide input, to have a voice in decisions which impact their children.”

- Lori, parent

“There needs to be a stronger community integrated approach to education, drawing from a wider pool of expertise that can work with teachers on a continuous basis – to inform, collaborate and problem solve. With so little support, teachers are forced to solve difficult issues including student diversity, alone. This is not fair to the teacher, the child or the community.” - Christina, student

2. School-community connections

- Provide more opportunities for students to go into the community to learn hands on skills, gain work experience, and earn wages.
- Encourage community members, such as retirees and experts from various fields, to come into the schools to teach and/or mentor students using more “real world” experiences.
- Make greater use of the services and expertise

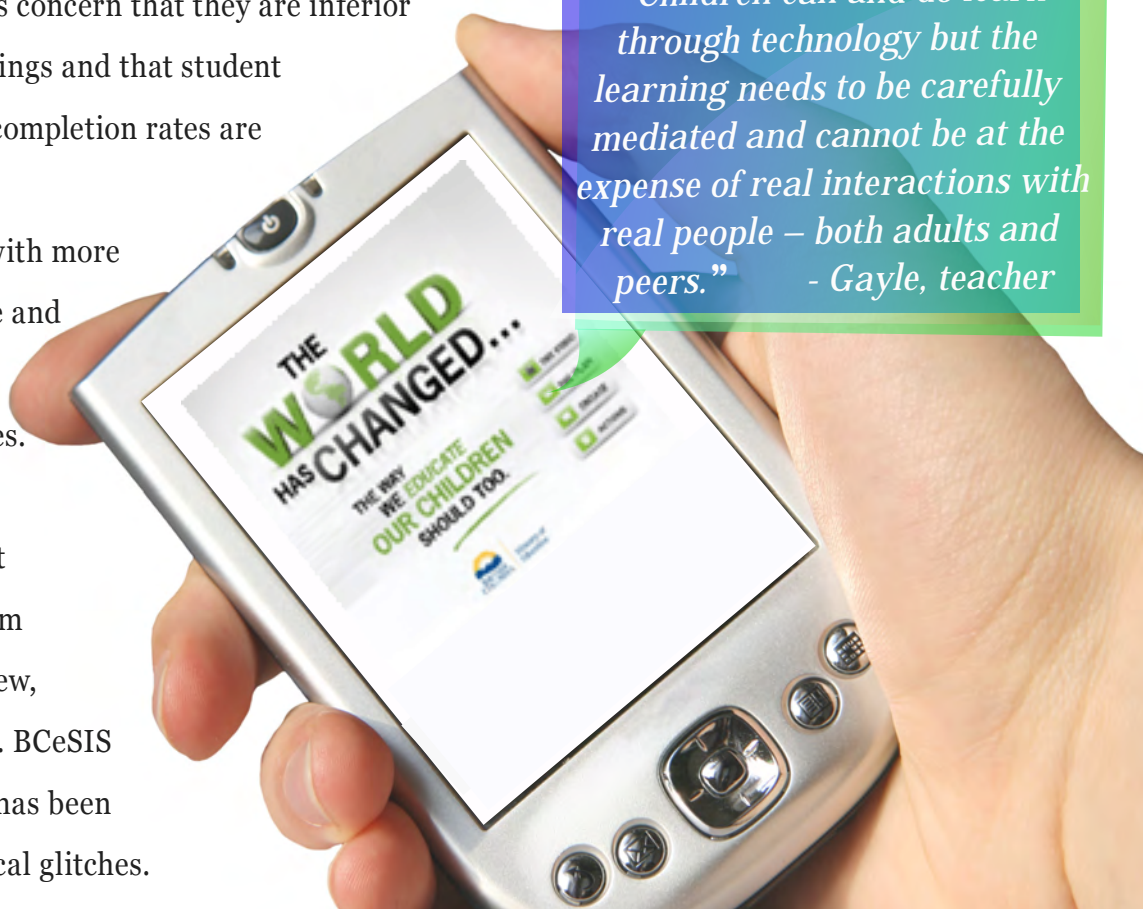
offered at community libraries. Invite community librarians into the schools to give book talks, explain how to use library databases, etc., and take field trips to these libraries to learn more.

3. School choice

- Reduce or eliminate funding for independent schools, because:
 - o every dollar the provincial government spends on them is one less dollar available for already underfunded public schools.
 - o independent schools often select their students rather than accepting anyone who would like to attend.
- Maintain funding for independent schools, because:
 - o they save us money, as they must cover their own capital costs (i.e., money for things like the construction of new facilities). If the independent school system was disbanded and these students were moved to the public school system a lot of money would have to be spent on new schools, equipment, etc. to accommodate them.
 - o they allow parents to send their children to schools that reflect their belief and value systems and the expertise of the faculty.
- Continue to allow students to choose where they will take their schooling – bricks and mortar schools, online distributed learning programs, or a combination of both. Allow students to take courses from more than one institution.

Theme 4: Digital Technologies *in Schools*

- Ensure schools teach students important technology skills, such as digital literacy, critical analysis of online content, and digital citizenship.
- Balance the teaching of digital technologies with the teaching of the 3 R's.
- Invest more money in updating Internet connections, computer systems, software, and other digital technologies in schools.
- Ensure all students have equal access to digital technologies at school. If a “Bring Your Own Device” policy is introduced then it's up to the government to provide money and/or create a system for lower -income families to rent/borrow/lease old tablets/laptops/phones, etc.
- Minimize the use of digital technologies in school, as they:
 - de-value the important role played by teachers.
 - isolate students from each other and from their teachers.
 - lead to decreased physical, emotional and mental health.
- Improve the quality of distributed learning courses and programs. There is concern that they are inferior to classroom offerings and that student achievement and completion rates are unacceptably low.
- Provide teachers with more training in the use and teaching of digital technologies.
- Replace the BC Electronic Student Information System (BCeSIS) with a new, more suitable tool. BCeSIS is out of date and has been plagued by technical glitches.



“Children can and do learn through technology but the learning needs to be carefully mediated and cannot be at the expense of real interactions with real people – both adults and peers.” - Gayle, teacher

Theme 5: *Administrative Issues*

1. School district functions and services

- Reduce the number of school districts in B.C. in order to:
 - save money on administration.
 - reduce bureaucracy and duplication of services.
 - provide students and staff in smaller, more rural, districts with more opportunities and resources.

Perhaps school district boundaries need to be redrawn such that we have fewer but larger school districts, all about the same size in terms of number of students so that students across B.C. have comparable learning opportunities, school districts have comparable efficiencies of scale, school districts can attract comparable human resources, etc. Fewer, but larger and equally sized school districts, would save us money on administration too... ”
- Richard, teacher

2. Calendars and timetables

- Start school later in the day to correspond with the schedules and sleeping patterns of students.
- Stagger the start times of schools so parents can drop each of their children off on time then make it to work on time.
- Stick with the traditional calendar (i.e., two month summer break) because:
 - summer time is fun time. The weather is good and people want to enjoy some time off.
 - businesses (e.g., summer camps, tourist destinations) rely on the long summer break for most of their customers.
 - secondary students rely on summer breaks to earn money for their post secondary education.
- Switch to a year-round school calendar to:
 - reduce the summer learning loss often experienced by disadvantaged students.
 - spread families’ childcare needs more evenly throughout the year.
 - give families more time to take vacations in the traditional off seasons, when it’s cheaper.
- Ensure that school holiday periods are harmonized across B.C.
- Don’t make any changes to school timetables and calendars until after the public has been consulted extensively. Make changes only if the majority of the people consulted agree with them.

Next Steps

In this report we've done our best to capture the key themes and suggestions you've made on our online discussion forum.

We recognize that transforming our education system involves more than just giving you a space to talk and then writing fancy reports. We must also **act on what you've told us**. And we're doing that. We're busy doing the work to make important education change a reality. For example, many of you have told us that you'd like to see fewer curriculum outcomes per subject and sets of outcomes that span different subjects. Our new Curriculum and Assessment Framework addresses ideas like these. You've also told us that reading success begins in the early grades and must be better supported. A Superintendent of Reading has been appointed to lead work, with educators and ministry staff, in this important area.

Many other initiatives that align with your comments are beginning to take place. In the next few weeks and months expect to hear more from us on **how your comments are influencing our work**. In the meantime, please see our Actions pages for details on the work we're doing on *BC's Education Plan*.

As a new school year approaches, opportunities to help shape our education system will continue. A lot of new things are in the works. For starters, we're rebuilding BC's Education Plan website based on feedback from you. We will provide you with more opportunities to contribute content and ideas. You've asked for space to have your own conversations, and we're working on that as well.



We will also be stepping up our efforts to connect with as many people as possible. Admittedly, we haven't heard from nearly enough people yet. **We need more input**, not only in sheer numbers of people but across a broader section of our provincial population.

We'll be working even harder than before to get the invitation out to as many people as possible. Engaging with us is much more than just contributing to our online discussion forum.

In the coming months, look for more opportunities to meet with us in person at different venues, to speak by phone, and to connect with each other to share your findings and ideas. Check out our face-to-face toolkits, EdCafe and EdChats, to host your own conversations. We will also be expanding our social media reach to include a Facebook page so we can highlight engagement opportunities and share the great stories we are hearing about.

It's important to remember that *BC's Education Plan* is a **vision for education transformation in BC**. It is not a prescriptive document or set of requirements for teachers and schools. As we move ahead with our engagement we will continue to emphasize this is a genuine forum to contribute, to share, and to shape the Plan. Our role is to provide you with the space to engage and to help make BC's K-12 education system even better.

We invite everyone to take part.

