

September 2010

SuperBulletin ~ School is now in session!

Dear Parents and Staff,

From the standpoint of the child, the great waste in school comes from his inability to utilize the experiences he gets outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself; while, on the other hand, he is unable to apply in daily life what he is learning at school.


John Dewey: "Waste in Education" The School and Society, 1899

Welcome back! I hope everyone has had a wonderful summer, recreating and relaxing with family and friends. The hot days of summer and the 'Back-to-school' sales, which started in July, are over and we can now refocus our attention on education! We restart school rejuvenated, refreshed and ready to renew our respective commitments to teaching and learning.

For students returning to school, this is a special occasion. It is a time to reacquaint with friends and make new ones. For some of our students, it is their first time in school. For parents of these little Kindergarteners, it is a very special moment. In a similar way, other students are just beginning grade 8 and will experience the initial uncertainties of timetables, lockers, and carrying around those hefty textbooks. For our grade 12 students, this is also a milestone to be remembered forever. It will mark their last experiences in high school before setting out on new pathways through post secondary education, entering the world of work and becoming active, contributing citizens.

For most of us, Labour Day signals a return to school. Hopefully, we all took a moment to reflect on this important day, which celebrates the many achievements of our workers. Perhaps this is what we seek with our colleagues, ourselves and for all of our students - the hard work, dedication and encouragement to succeed and do our personal best. This is our collective role – no matter what we do in our jobs. It is to work individually and as a team, to help one another and to ensure that our students are able to achieve their very best no matter what pathway they choose. I look forward to ensuring that we achieve our personal best this year.

The weather made a noticeable change this weekend. The lawn chairs were stored away to await the blossoming of a new spring. For me, as usual, that familiar feeling began to take hold several weeks ago... I know that most of us experience the same feeling. Something between anticipation, trepidation, curiosity, excitement, joy, hope and yes, some nerves! We all have these feelings. Perhaps varying in intensity and mixture, but they are there. Why do we sense this? I don't have an exact answer, but I do have thoughts about this. We are all looking ahead to the upcoming school year. We are all wondering what this year will bring. We think about the challenges and we think about



the changes before us. We look forward to seeing our colleagues and meeting our students. Some for the first time and some, like a reunion, familiar faces – pleased to be back together once again.

We will soon be immersed in the cyclical normality and routines of another school year. We will have forgotten those long, hazy, lazy days of summer. The memories of which will resurface every now and then, fondly recalled, when a picture, sound or scent rekindles those precious moments. For me, as with most of you, I am happy to be back. I know that I am among dedicated colleagues and friends with whom I am so fortunate to spend my working days. That sense of anticipation sitting deep within my core will slowly dissipate. Like the prelude to opening night, or the eternal wait before the whistle to start the big game sounds, these feelings will disappear. Once we are up and running, those senses will be replaced by the race and pace of the place called school, where, like returning snow geese, we meet every September on the day after Labour Day.

So... what will this year bring? Change looms on the horizon. It seems that we have been talking and reading about 21st century learning for a long time. We are after-all, ten percent into this next century. We have, however, dragged our feet and carry with us traditions, and practices more common to the previous century. It is time for change. It is time for us to step carefully forward and consider a place not for us, but for the generations to come.

Perhaps this temporal rhythm that beckons us back to our pattern each fall has had its day. The traditional four walls of school, the industrial model of school scheduling and the agrarian calendars of bygone years will be topics for further conversation this year – and I suspect will be the harbinger of more change to come. The locale we call school is changing. Students are able to achieve success and gain their education in many ways and in many places. They can utilize a plethora of resources, travel virtually to the far reaches of Earth and they can meet with their counterparts and call upon experts from around the globe – all within the comfort of their own learning space.

We are fast reaching a turning point requiring societal intervention. Universal access to free, quality education is being challenged because of inequitable access. If only we could provide *all* students with the personal, mobile operating devices – the tools necessary to take full advantage of the world out there. If only we would ensure open, wireless environments for students to fully utilize web 2.0 tools in appropriate and meaningful ways. Surely, if we are to graduate the very best students, if we are to produce innovative, creative graduates ready to compete on a global scale, then we must put in their hands the technology that will assist this endeavor. We cannot stop here though; we must also afford our teachers the same access along with high levels of training, development and support. The number one factor in a child's success in school is the teacher. It is incumbent on society to ensure that our teachers are well resourced and well supported in the important work that they do.

Vancouver School District has a remarkable record of scholastic success with high graduation rates... for most students – I specifically refer to the graduation rates of our Aboriginal students – still well below mean rates and still not acceptable. We offer amazing athletic opportunities, outstanding Fine Arts programs, and excellent career education experiences. However, evidence is mounting to show that our students are becoming less engaged in their schooling. Some, as we know, drop out of school. This disengagement may, in fact, be contributing to the lack of overall improvement in our graduation rates. If we are to attend to the needs of *all* of our students, we must address these concerns. The District supports choice through various programs and opportunities. We must continue to explore choice and seek innovative new experiences for our students – to personalize their learning and enable them to pursue their interests within the realm of possibility.

Today's students want to be part of the world. They want to be part of the solutions to today's problems. They want to be summoned to their unique vocation, vocation understood in that broad sense of using one's gifts and talents for the common good... Moreover, students come alive in community. Without supportive families and friends they wither. It is time to return Canadian education to its traditional and core purpose, to prepare the whole person to live a full life as a Canadian citizen and as a citizen of the world. Such an education embraces the communal, societal and environmental dimensions of human life. It is time to adopt strategies that support this goal.

Michael Dallaire, Vancouver Sun, July 28, 2008

I echo this sentiment, and join with our hard working teachers, support staff, school and district administration in sharing our collective commitment to ensuring the very best educational experience for the children in our care.

It is with this appreciation for the dedicated people we have in our school district working with our supportive parents on behalf of our students that I wish *everyone* a wonderful, successful and memorable school year.

Steve.

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<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjJg9NfTXos>

<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/education-nation-milton-chen>