

First Conference Connects BCeSIS Users

Nearly 260 people from around the province attended the BCeSIS Users Conference in Richmond May 15-16. Attendees represented a range of interests, with participants including principals, teachers, secretaries, counselors, Level 1 support staff, and others.

The conference quickly took on the atmosphere of a reunion, with many people at long last being able to put faces to the names and voices they've become familiar with from BCeSIS conference calls, web training sessions, or other forums. But, in addition to making 'live' connections, a great deal of work was also carried out and useful information was exchanged.

Most sessions were structured as panel discussions, with district and ministry representatives sharing their knowledge and perspectives and encouraging questions and discussion with attendees.

Sessions included various aspects of project management, technical support and data management, and practical approaches to training. Use of Teacher Assistant – including Grade Book, Report Cards and Reports, and Attendance – was well-explored, as was use of Scheduler.

“Several people mentioned to me that they really appreciated the opportunity to share ideas and to learn from the experiences of colleagues in other districts,” noted Andrew Macauley, a BCeSIS Provincial Team member. “And quite a few planned to continue drawing on those experiences – there were lots of email addresses and phone numbers being exchanged, so that people can stay in touch as their districts and schools move forward with implementing BCeSIS.”

At the suggestion of some conference participants, consideration is being given to making the conference an annual affair, perhaps supplemented by smaller, regional events throughout the province.

Though they haven't all been tested by provincial team specialists, the tips in this newsletter are provided in the interest of sharing information about district experiences and practices.

BCeSIS Tips

These tips were shared by participants at the recent BCeSIS users conference:

Setting up Master Timetables involves lots of data and the work that's been done on a timetable won't be input until the "refresh" tab has been hit. But "refresh" won't instantaneously process large amounts of data – it can take a considerable amount of time.

Dick Wowchuk, of Merritt, strongly recommends, “Do not hit the refresh button again. Give the process time to work. Hitting refresh twice results in everything being input twice. Then you have to individually review each course to see if it's right. It may take a while for stuff to automatically populate into a master timetable. But it takes less time than it takes for you to review it and fix it if stuff gets put in more than once. Be patient.”

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To support smooth use of BCeSIS features, North Vancouver (SD 44) placed a trainer in each school that was using BCeSIS for the first couple of weeks in September. The additional support was especially valuable when it came to sorting out timetabling issues, and providing staff with the help and informed reminders they needed to recall details of their BCeSIS training.

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Staff from one school reminded colleagues that passwords should not be “cut and pasted” onto websites (or elsewhere, such as BCeSIS). Observant and technologically astute students may quickly notice the teacher's practice and then be able to replicate it, requiring only a few clicks to access gradebooks and other areas of class computers.

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Last year, School District 42 (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows) took a group approach to Kindergarten registrations. Staff brought their Kindergarten registrations to a central location so they could do their registrations at the same time and 'pick each other's brains.' District reps say they may use a similar approach to help ensure solid training in, and smooth implementation of, other BCeSIS tasks.

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Brad Smith (a vice-principal in SD 28-Quesnel) uses Teacher Assist's Attendance function to sort data and look for “patterns” in students' absences (for example,

whether certain days or periods are missed more frequently than others). The information can be printed in an Attendance Summary report and, if necessary, discussed with the student or parents. Reports can also be saved as a PDF file and emailed to parents when appropriate.

Training Review Underway

Just over a year ago, the BCeSIS training program was established, with an emphasis on using a train the trainer model.

Now that a number of districts have implemented BCeSIS and utilized this training model, it is a good time to evaluate how to build on the successes and overcome any challenges that have been encountered over the past year.

To that end, a 1.5-day training strategy assessment workshop will be held in Richmond June 14-15.

This assessment workshop is part of a broader review of BCeSIS implementation that has been undertaken at the direction of the Service Management Council Executive Committee.

One outcome of the review, which was announced in a March 31, 2006 update from the Service Management Council Executive, will be a revised training strategy that reflects the lessons learned from early implementation. The training assessment workshop will assist in the development of that revised training strategy.

The workshop will provide an opportunity for districts that have delivered end-user training to share feedback on their experiences. It will also offer a forum for suggestions on how the training program can best support users as districts move forward to the next phases of BCeSIS implementation.

To ensure a range of perspectives when contemplating possible refinements to the BCeSIS training program, trainers from a cross-

section of districts (small, large, urban and rural) will attend the workshop.

Correct Data Reports Needed

Difference Reports that were sent to districts in February must be corrected and returned to the ministry as soon as possible. This process is essential to confirm important data – such as correct names, birthdates, and gender – is accurately ‘attached’ to students. Errors mean that students will be incorrectly entered in BCeSIS and may even appear twice, which requires district staff to devote time to manually verifying and correcting data.

“We are making progress with duplicates,” says Kathy Cordner, data manager for the Ministry of Education. “In February, non-BCeSIS schools had more than 500 duplicates across the province compared to BCeSIS schools who reported approximately 70 duplicates. BCeSIS is definitely reducing the amount of work needed to clean up duplicates.”

But Cordner notes the work can be further reduced if care is taken when entering data, particularly information about student identities. Taking a second to double-check that middle and first names haven’t been transposed, for example, and that a student’s gender has been checked off (BCeSIS defaults to “female” if the gender field is left blank), can save considerable work and frustration down the line.

Cordner adds, “Good data entry is critical. Information that is entered for a student in September can have consequences way beyond the beginning of the school year.”

“To reduce duplicates further, receiving schools should always double check that a leaving school has removed the incoming student from their records. If a student is moving between a non-BCeSIS and a BCeSIS school, then it’s absolutely essential to confirm -- or else there’ll be duplicates,” she cautions.

Reporting Tips from BCeSIS Users

Generating reports may never be a favourite part of the job for most teachers. But Peter Schmid, of School District 58 (Nicola Similkameen), has found that the Teacher Assist features on BCeSIS can make the task easier.

Schmid joined School District 20's Greg Luterbach and the Gulf Island District's Neill Armitage to talk with attendees at the May BCeSIS User's conference about their experiences using the Report features of TA.

Among their tips:

- Line up linear and semestered reporting report periods together.
- Think about your strategy around report card comments WELL ahead of time (Schmidt prefers typing individual comments, finding it less time-consuming than searching banked comments to find a "perfectly suitable one").
- Digitally save reports and other documents as PDFs so you can easily refer to them later, without having to read all of a student's report cards or your notes to find the points you want to follow up on or review.

Schmid, who teaches at a middle school with approximately 330 students, also passed on a lesson he learned through painful experience. When printing a Missing Assignment list, it may be important to leave a blank instead of typing in a "0."

"It depends on what decision you've made about how you want to handle missing assignments when you set up your 'set up options/ preferences.' This is where you choose whether to count blank marks as zeroes, which will influence how calculations are made in your grade book," he said.

"Further, if you add a zero to your grade book, TA assumes it is a grade given for an assignment and so will not count it as a missing assignment! Before we realized this, we didn't have a whole lot of fun sorting out our calculations," he explained, adding that, when setting up Preferences Pages, teachers should carefully choose between the two options that determine how to incorporate missing assignments into mark totals.

He also offered up some observations on BCeSIS's ability to generate hard copies of reports. "It's really convenient," he said. "You can print off a class list, or whatever, so if you're on a field trip, or out on the field in gym class, you can check off participation and things like that."

"And you have so many options and possible combinations, depending on which boxes you check off when you set up your report. You can generate a hard copy by specific category or even a combination of categories— say, tests and assignments – print off a list, and send it home with a student. There's an interim report right there, without any extra work for you. There's even space for comments, and a line for the parent's signature."

Process Underway to Add Foreign Names in BCeSIS

Adding immigrant students' names to BCeSIS can sometimes pose challenges, because of discrepancies in official documentation or differences between legal and preferred names.

In consultation with the federal government, the Ministry of Education has developed a policy regarding the registration of foreign students. When registering immigrant students, the name that should be input into BCeSIS is that which is found on the student's most recently issued documentation, whether that is a passport or a Canadian citizenship card. It is important to input the name exactly as it appears on the document, paying special attention to hyphenation and to the order of names.

Districts that rely solely on the information from a student's Canadian Visa may later need to go to the trouble of revising the data to reflect other, more recent documentation. Relying on a Canadian Visa instead of on the most recent documentation can also create problems if a student transfers from a school that has incorrectly entered the information to a school or district which adheres to the data standards – under these circumstances, it is possible that a student will be entered twice into the system.

For more information about this and other document guidelines, please refer to data entry guidelines at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/pen/schools/guidelines.htm>

Your BCeSIS Representatives:

For more information or questions about BCeSIS, contact your representative on the BCeSIS Service Management Council (SMC):

Ian Larsson

School District #54 (Bulkley Valley)
School District #57 (Prince George)
School District #62 (Sooke)
School District #69 (Qualicum)
School District #85 (Vancouver Island North)

Gregg Ferrie

School District #19 (Revelstoke)
School District #22 (Vernon)
School District #23 (Central Okanagan)
School District #67 (Okanagan Skaha)
School District #73 (Kamloops/Thompson)

Lynell Korella

School District #39 (Vancouver)
School District #61 (Greater Victoria)
School District #63 (Saanich)

Brian Kuhn (SMC Chair)

School District #33 (Chilliwack)
School District #36 (Surrey)
School District #37 (Delta)
School District #40 (New Westminster)
School District #41 (Burnaby)
School District #42 (Maple Ridge - Pitt Meadows)
School District #43 (Coquitlam)
School District #44 (North Vancouver)

Ernie Mannering

School District #28 (Quesnel)
School District #48 (Howe Sound)
School District #49 (Central Coast)
School District #81 (Fort Nelson)
School District #91 (Nechako Lakes)
School District #92 (Nisga'a)

Norm Walker

School District #47 (Powell River)
School District #52 (Prince Rupert)
School District #58 (Nicola - Similkameen)
School District #64 (Gulf Islands)
School District #74 (Gold Trail)
School District #78 (Fraser-Cascade)

Greg Krueger

School District #45 (West Vancouver)
School District #68 (Nanaimo - Ladysmith)
School District #79 (Cowichan Valley)
School District #84 (Vancouver Island West)

Doug Hogg

School District #05 (Southeast Kootenay)
School District #06 (Rocky Mountain)
School District #20 (Kootenay-Columbia)

Allan Garneau

Independent Schools