

From the Service Management Council Chair

Welcome to the 2006-07 school year's initial BCeSIS newsletter. Newsletters will be distributed regularly, and I encourage you to contribute story ideas or tips that may be helpful to colleagues in other schools and districts.

In the aftermath of the unplanned system outage September 25-26, I want to acknowledge that last month was a challenging time for all of us involved with BCeSIS. A system of the magnitude and scope of BCeSIS clearly has more work ahead to get to where we all want to be.

With assistance from the Ministry of Education, the executive committee of the Service Management Council (SMC) continues to actively monitor BCeSIS performance and has taken steps to immediately determine the reasons for, and to address, September's technical challenges. Those short-term steps, including hardware enhancements, quickly resulted in some improvements in performance. And I assure you that the BCeSIS team will continue moving forward on an action plan to ensure system stability and functionality over the long term as well. In essence, we need to strive to create a "utility grade" student information service that is always on and always has sufficient power to effectively support the needs of its users.

We will also continue working to ensure that districts and schools are well-prepared when they decide to implement BCeSIS. Early, effective planning at all levels is an important component of making sure that BCeSIS is an effective, reliable shared information system.

Another important feature of a common system is that we are all partners working towards the same goals. As we move forward this year, I urge each of you to talk to your SMC representatives if you have ideas to share or any questions or concerns about how your implementation is proceeding. This type of on-the-ground knowledge and information-

sharing is key to learning from our collective experiences.

As all BCeSIS partners work towards our collective goal, I want to thank you, on behalf of all the executive, for your ongoing efforts and to wish you all the best in this and future school years.

Regards, Brian Kuhn
Chair, Service Management Council

Users wanted for BCeSIS working groups

Experienced BCeSIS users with a sound knowledge of education practices are needed to participate on two key BCeSIS working groups. Users should also have a good understanding of the needs of specific types of users, such as teachers, counsellors and school and district administrators.

Both the Operations and Standards Working Group (OSWG) and the Software Enhancement Working Group (SEWG) are standing committees of the BCeSIS Service Management Council. Members are being sought to provide their expertise and recommendations to the SMC executive and to assist with the implementation of common, standardized practices and processes and the continuous improvement of BCeSIS.

The working groups advise the SMC executive, which oversees BCeSIS, on critical BCeSIS strategies, procedures and practices.

Specifically, members of OSWG will:

- advise on standard "business" practices intended to help ensure BCeSIS's effectiveness in education settings;
- advise on operational procedures, security and privacy issues, system-wide reporting, system codes, and enterprise (provincial) level processes, such as year-end transition;
- provide input into BCeSIS training and communications programs.

Among other tasks, SEWG members will:

- advise on issues such as system integration and the need for, and development of, various software enhancements and reports;
- participate in acceptance testing;
- define and review business requirements and requests for changes related to BCeSIS software.

Up to eight representatives from schools and districts participating in BCeSIS are needed for each working group. Most committee work will be done by phone and through electronic forums.

SMC representatives have been asked to recommend suitable candidates. Teachers, counsellors, technologists and administrators who may wish to participate should advise their SMC representatives as soon as possible.

Nicola-Similkameen resources available for use

A series of resources has been developed to help BCeSIS users in the Nicola-Similkameen School District quickly access information about how to perform BCeSIS tasks which they might otherwise forget.

Developed by Nicola-Similkameen's district technology coordinator, Norm Walker, the "memory miner" resources provide tips for performing specific functions in Elementary Office, Secondary Office and Teacher Assistant.

Memory miners, Norm says, are designed so that users can print off the tips they're most interested in and "stick them up on a wall or bulletin board, or tuck them in their pocket or case and take them home if they know they're going to be working from home that night."

Each featured function is profiled on a single sheet in short, simple bullets and includes a reminder about where on BCeSIS the function is located. A range of topics are covered, including creating and

printing letters in BCeSIS, logging fee payments, transferring a student to a cross-enrolled school, noting work habits and creating comments on a report card, generating an interim report card, or setting up class seating plans.

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"They're meat-and-potatoes kinds of tips," says Norm, "basic refresher stuff, so that after you've done your training and get back to your desk, you can pick out those little prompts you might need to remember to perform a particular task or find your way to a particular screen.

"If you're on call, you might not use the system all that often. Or maybe you're a regular user, but there are certain things that only come around once or twice a year. The idea with memory miners is that there's just enough to jog your memory."

Each sheet also notes the name and page number of a larger resource manual where more detailed information can be found if necessary.

"I'm happy to share these," Norm says. "BCeSIS is a collective system. If we can share information when possible and put our minds together to get the most out of it and support each other, I think that's a good thing."

Norm also plans to develop new versions of the memory miner resources later this year to reflect new or updated information.

The memory miner resources have been posted to www.sd58.bc.ca/BCeSIS.htm. Norm will also distribute them to districts interested in using them, either in their current format or in PUB form so they can be modified. (Email nwalker@sd58.bc.ca or call Norm at 250-315-1112.)

Planning info critically needed

All school districts have been asked to provide the BCeSIS team with updated implementation plans, including dates and volumes for conversion and moving to production. This information is essential for ensuring that the system's capacity is adequate for the demands placed on it and to help ensure optimal performance for all users.

As implementation plans change, it is also critical that updated information be provided to the BCeSIS team.

Thank you to districts which submitted complete implementation plans over the summer. As requested by SMC Chair Brian Kuhn in an Aug. 29 email to SMC representatives, districts which have not yet sent in updated information are asked to do so as soon as possible. Send completed spreadsheets to nina.francisco@ca.fujitsu.com and eric.maitland@ca.fujitsu.com.

To update plans that have already been submitted, or for questions about implementation planning, please contact eric.maitland@ca.fujitsu.com

"Refined" conversion process supports better implementation

To help improve the stability and functionality of the BCeSIS system, enhanced procedures will soon be introduced for districts which are converting and loading data into BCeSIS.

As part of the new process, existing conversion process documents have been updated. The new documents clearly outline steps and procedures that reflect lessons learned over the past year.

Included in the updated documentation is a pre-implementation checklist that has to be completed and, with associated deliverables, submitted to the BCeSIS team before data conversion begins.

Also as part of the data conversion process, stage gates are being introduced – steps which must be completed before approval will be given to proceed to the next phase.

“This represents a refinement of the implementation process,” says Eric Maitland, the BCeSIS team's implementation manager, “and it makes sense, because it ultimately helps everyone on the system. BCeSIS is a shared system. If data is improperly converted, or if the timing and infrastructure is inadequately planned out, everyone is affected.”

Once the stage gates have been passed and the conversion process is finished, a new post-implementation sign-off will confirm that the data conversion meets technical standards and has been successfully completed.

The refined processes are the result of an extensive review of BCeSIS implementation and data conversion procedures. Another outcome of the review is the creation of a new document that defines the process for BCeSIS implementations which are done manually.

Revised documents will be made available on the Integrated Services website by the end of October.

Getting past password frustration

Protecting the privacy of personal information within BCeSIS is paramount.

But many district technical support staff have noticed that some BCeSIS users are often frustrated by changing and remembering passwords, partly because passwords are required for so many aspects of their personal and professional lives.

BCeSIS users can minimize frustrations by

familiarizing themselves with password protocols ahead of time.

Things to remember about BCeSIS passwords:

- Passwords must be between 8 and 14 characters long.
- Passwords should combine letters, numbers and special characters.
- The password system permits the use of only certain special characters: \$, _ and #.
- The first digit of a user password should be a letter (using a number or special character first may result in system issues).
- Passwords must be changed every 90 days
- Each new password must be significantly different from those used previously.

It can also be tricky to come up with memorable passwords that can't be easily guessed by unauthorized users.

Because of this, users in Nicola-Similkameen have been counselled to "reconfigure a combination of things you commonly use."

For example, explains Norm Walker, the district's technology coordinator, randomly pick a page from a reference book (make sure it's only one of several housed near your work area). Key in the first or second letters of the first or second words in the first paragraph (or use the first letter of each paragraph's first sentence) and add a symbol. The resulting chain of random characters is a password that is "pretty much impossible to guess."

When changing passwords, change your code's pattern. "Go to the same page or section of the reference book, but maybe use the third letter of the first word in each sentence, or whatever your code is," he says.

Random strings of letters and symbols may at first be hard to recall, and writing down passwords is a serious security risk. "So if you forget, you – and only you – can instead easily refer to the page in your "code" book. That's the beauty of it."

Refresher training brings benefits

Becky Rousseau of Rocky Mountain School District has two pieces of advice about implementing BCeSIS: go slow, and take some quick refresher training.

A secretary at Golden Secondary School in Golden, Becky also doubles as one of her school district's Level 1 BCeSIS support people. She often trains others in the use of BCeSIS. And some of the people she is supporting may be two or three hours away, because Rocky Mountain is a large district geographically.

"I can see how other people in my district could really use BCeSIS for other functions – accounting, transportation. It's very exciting and I can't wait to see us going forward and using BCeSIS full bore. At the same time, I really think our district was wise to phase things in," says Becky, noting all her district's secondary school secretaries have been trained in various BCeSIS administrative functions though only two secondary schools are on the system to date.

"Our goal is to get the elementary schools on for next fall. There's a lot to focus on, a lot of different aspects to the system, and that requires a lot of planning and learning new things. Moving forward in smaller steps makes it more manageable."

A key part of moving forward is training. "I'm not a teacher, so when I'm training people, I get worried that I might be going too quickly or overlooking important little details, forgetting things I haven't done for a while."

The solution? "Refresher training was a godsend.

"School start-up is a busy time of year. We don't have time to sit in a class and spend forever learning things," says Becky, who participated in a Start-up Activities web class toward the end of summer break. "With refresher training, I didn't have to. It was simple, sweet, to the point and only a couple of hours long. I relearned helpful things

like setting up 1701 programs and printing class lists. The very next day I was in my school comfortably showing people how to do those things,” says Becky.

“The great thing is that because BCeSIS is web-based, I can even show people in other schools what to do. When they call me, they put me on speakerphone, I can see what they’re doing, and we can instantly sort things out. Having sat down and refreshed your memory with a little course is a big help to feeling confident in that situation.”

Please contact chris.wilson@ca.fujitsu.com for information about upcoming training.

Review provides long-term direction for BCeSIS training

A review of BCeSIS training has concluded the BCeSIS training program should be “tweaked” and not overhauled. Work on refinements is already underway.

The review process began in June with a workshop attended by representatives from a cross-section of school districts and continued through the summer and early part of the fall. The review was part of a broader look at BCeSIS implementation. The review concluded that the BCeSIS training strategy should:

- broaden participation in the train-the-trainer program;
- more closely align training courses with school business cycles; and
- better align training opportunities with district implementation plans.

Many people who provided feedback emphasized the value of the BCeSIS train-the-trainer model but suggested that the initial training be expanded to include a greater variety of school and district representatives – not just technically inclined people but also those with experience in the non-technical aspects of classrooms or schools.

“The BCeSIS team has heard certain messages and will respond to them,” says BCeSIS implementation manager Eric Maitland, adding that the introduction of “just-in-time” training is one outcome from this feedback.

Just-in-time training is aligned with “business” cycles so that sessions in school start-up or 1701 reporting, for example, are held close to when these processes are actually occurring in schools and districts. Timely, focused learning can then be put to real use directly.

Many just-in-time (or refresher) courses will also provide Level 2 and Level 3 support staff with an opportunity to focus-test training materials, which will be revised as BCeSIS implementation and production moves into new business cycles.

“This will be an evolutionary process. New educational strategies and materials will be developed over time,” says Eric.

A phased-in approach allows the BCeSIS team to focus on activities which have been identified by the SMC executive as priorities and to also move forward with gradual improvements to the training program.

To better help districts, training will also be a key component in the BCeSIS implementation strategy. BCeSIS team members will help districts to assess their business requirements and to evaluate their individualized training needs.

“We’ll talk with districts about what they’re doing and about the level of technical knowledge in their schools. We’ll look at the volume and timing of training so we can plan, ahead of time, for training in specific functions to be available closer to when a district is actually implementing that part of the BCeSIS system,” explains Eric. “This is about asking, before a district starts: ‘how can we support you?’”

For more on BCeSIS’s revised training strategy, please contact eric.maitland@ca.fujitsu.com

Your BCeSIS representatives

For more information or questions about BCeSIS, contact your representative on the SMC Executive Committee:

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School District #78 (Fraser-Cascade)

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Questions about the SMC or BCeSIS governance should be sent to Andrew.Macauley@gov.bc.ca.