

DRAFT PROGRAM GUIDE FOR GRADUATION TRANSITIONS

A brief to the

Minister of Education

from the

British Columbia Teachers' Federation

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President



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Draft Program Guide for Graduation Transitions Brief 2007 British Columbia Teachers' Federation

http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Publications/Briefs_Position_papers/GraduationTransitionBrief2007.pdf

Preamble

The BC Teachers' Federation is the union of professionals that represents 41,000 teachers in the public education system in British Columbia. The Federation is committed to success for every student in a strong and stable public education system.

The BCTF is pleased that the ministry has recognized the problems with the graduation portfolio. The Federation welcomes the ministry's announcement that a grad portfolio is no longer required for Grade 12 graduation and its announced changes to the graduation requirements policy on February 1, 2007.

The announcement stated that students would be required to complete the following three standards:

- 80 hours of physical activity (in addition to PE 10)
- 30 hours of work or community experience
- a transition plan.

Teachers have been waiting to find out what the ministry envisions for a "transition plan."

The ministry further announced that students would earn four credits for these standards through one of the following options:

- their existing portfolio (however the portfolio is structured at their school), OR
- a ministry-authorized course (Program Guide to be developed for September 2007), OR
- a BAA (locally developed) course, OR
- independent self-directed learning, OR
- some combination of the above, as determined by the school or board.

The *Draft Program Guide for Graduation Transitions* sets out the ministry-authorized course. Inevitably, it also sets direction for existing portfolios, BAA courses, and independent self-directed learning so the quality of the guide is very important.

Timelines for response and implementation

The timeline for response to the draft was very short. The guide was posted to the ministry web site late in the day on April 10, 2007, and the response deadline is April 23, 2007. The ministry spent two months developing the draft and is leaving itself two months to revise and publish the document; teachers were given only eight working days to review the draft, discuss it with colleagues, and respond. Despite our best efforts, many secondary teachers will not hear about the draft guide until after the response deadline.

There is a danger that the lack of a comprehensive field review will result in implementation problems of the sort that plagued the grad portfolio initiative.

The BCTF requested an extension to the timeline for response but has not received a reply. The Federation is therefore submitting a response based on the limited number of responses received from teachers to date.

Recommendation 1: The Federation recommends that the ministry extend the response deadline to May 18, 2007.

Physical activity requirement

The Federation supports a requirement that students get regular physical activity. Teachers understand the importance of physical education and activity in students' educational programs but are frustrated by the lack of facilities. Many schools do not have the facilities necessary for the existing PE classes—one high school has six PE classes in each block but only five spaces to offer PE even with two classes per gym, and another crowded into the weight room, so students take every sixth class outdoors regardless of the weather. This makes no more sense than taking every sixth social studies class outside. The physical activity requirement simply moves the focus of responsibility for facilities and funding from the school to the family. If the government is committed to physical education and activity for students, it must provide the capital funding for facilities.

Recommendation 2: The Federation recommends that the government provide capital funding for physical education facilities in schools.

The Federation notes that there is nothing in the physical activity requirement that prevents students from accumulating the 80 hours in Grade 10 while taking PE 10, then engaging in no physical activity in Grades 11 and 12. This alters the original intention of the requirement.

Recommendation 3: The Federation recommends that students be required to do 80 hours of physical activity in Grades 11–12.

The *FITT Principle* is applied to exercise to gauge the quality of your program. Adhering to the principle will achieve improvement.

- Frequency (how often) three times is a minimum per week to maintain fitness level
- Intensity (how hard) getting the heart rate into your target zone
- Time (how long) at least 15–20 minutes in zone
- Type (how different) engaging in a variety of activities that develop endurance, flexibility, and strength.

Students who meet the requirement for 80 hours of physical activity by enrolling in PE 11 or 12 are more likely to get a program that meets the *FITT Principle*. The Federation urges the ministry and the government to build school facilities that make this option available to all students.

Recommendation 4: The Federation recommends that the ministry engage in capital projects to increase the physical education facilities in schools.

The Federation also notes that the prescribed learning outcome for the 80 hours of physical activity has eliminated the intensity level of “moderate to vigorous” that was contained in the requirement when it was part of the grad portfolio.

Deleting one component of the *FITT Principle* drastically affects the overall health outcome.

A moderate to vigorous level of activity involves an increased heart rate, deeper breathing, feeling warmer, etc. These are the physiological responses that need to be present in order to obtain health benefits.

Recommendation 5: The Federation recommends that a “moderate to vigorous” intensity level be specified in the physical activity requirement.

Work experience/community service requirement

The Federation questions the need for a work experience/community service requirement. Many teachers have noted that the overwhelming majority of students already work or engage in voluntary community service so it is not necessary to make it a graduation requirement, and have teachers and students spend time documenting it. Furthermore, parents and students have pointed out that making voluntary community service compulsory defeats the purpose.

However, if this is to remain a requirement, the Federation wonders why the relevant sections of the ministry’s *Program Guide for Ministry-Authorized Work Experience Courses* have not been referenced in this draft guide.

Recommendation 6: The Federation recommends that the *Program Guide for Ministry-Authorized Work Experience Courses* be referenced in this guide.

Format of the guide

The three requirements are neither a course nor a curriculum. The guide sets out prescribed learning outcomes and suggested achievement indicators for each of the three areas as if these grad requirements were a regular course. Although these requirements, taken together, will be treated like a course for credit and transcript purposes, it is unlikely they will be taught as a course in most secondary schools.

It is difficult to imagine that a school will offer a grad-transitions course in the timetable when students are expected to meet two of the three requirements outside the course, and at least one of the requirements outside the school.

This is not really a course; it is simply three requirements that must be met in order to graduate. Writing it up as if it’s a course results in a forced fit.

Prescribed learning outcomes in provincial curricula generally describe the expected learning. In this case, the outcomes define activities and tasks. For example:

- Engage in at least 80 hours of regular physical activity...
- Develop a healthy living plan...
- Participate in 30 hours of work experience and/or community service.
- Present their transition plan.

Such activities and tasks fall under “Suggested Instructional Strategies” in the curriculum documents for other courses.

The use of the IRP model for this guide adds an unnecessary level of complexity and perhaps confusion. The forced fit also erodes the use of the IRP structure for course curricula.

Recommendation 7: The Federation recommends that the ministry use a more appropriate format than the IRP model for this guide.

Expansion back toward portfolio

Only the prescribed learning outcomes are mandatory but there is a danger that the more detailed and lengthy list of suggested achievement indicators will become the requirements for students.

The guide preserves many more aspects of the grad portfolio requirement than were mentioned in the minister’s earlier announcement. The writers of the guide seem to have tried to preserve as many aspects of the former grad portfolio as possible. The requirements outlined in this guide go well beyond the minister’s announcement.

The relatively simple requirement to do 80 hours of physical activity has been renamed *Personal Health* and now includes a requirement to develop a healthy living plan appropriate to their lifestyle that describes:

- sound nutritional habits.
- regular exercise routines.
- emotional health management.
- positive health decisions.

The transition plan incorporates many of the requirements of the former graduation portfolio. The transition plan now includes the following requirements in addition to the development of the plan itself:

- transition activities that support their career, life, and learning goals.
- identification and communication of skills that can be transferred to life after school.
- identification and communication of costs and funding sources associated with education, career, and life options after graduation.

The suggested achievement indicators that accompany these outcomes expand the scope even further.

Lastly, there is a prescribed learning outcome that specifically requires students to present selected components of their transition plan to members of the school and/or community. There was nothing in the minister’s announcement that suggested the problematic presentation aspect of the grad portfolio was being preserved as a graduation requirement.

Recommendation 8: The Federation recommends that there be no requirements in the *Draft Program Guide for Graduation Transitions* that go beyond the February 1, 2007 announcement.

The Federation would welcome an opportunity to discuss these issues with you directly.

