



CERC
Canadian Educational
Resources Council

**Suggestions for Improving the Transparency of Curricular Processes in
British Columbia**

**A Brief for Presentation to:
B.C. Ministry of Education**

By

Canadian Educational Resource Council

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Introduction:

The Canadian Educational Resources Council (CERC) is the association of major Canadian educational publishers.

CERC members share an ongoing commitment to supporting effective practices in education, by developing high quality learning resources to support the classroom implementation of curriculum. We work with educators and other decision makers to understand what will be expected of students and we design materials that help students achieve those expectations.

Understandably, high quality learning resources require significant lead - time for planning and development: and education systems that are well-resourced tend to have resource selection/implementation processes which incorporate:

- Predictable curriculum renewal and implementation cycles;
- Well-articulated steps for the adoption process; and
- Realistic and detailed timeframes for resource development, review and implementation.

Context:

Some recent changes in British Columbia's educational policies and processes are likely to present new challenges for the learning resources industry in our efforts to ensure a continuing supply of high quality learning materials to meet the specific needs of British Columbia's schools.

These changes include the emergence of a very different role for the B.C. Ministry of Education's Curriculum Branch (with significant reductions in budget and staff complement), along with a commitment by the ministry to managing the process of curriculum development through a process of contracting out. These changes necessitate new approaches in order to ensure that the curricular needs of both students and teachers continue to be well served.

CERC is currently working with the ministries in British Columbia and Alberta to support a joint provincial initiative to improve learning materials distribution to B.C. schools. The ministries' stated objectives for this project include:

- “increasing awareness surrounding the importance of learning resources in the classroom;” and
- “creating predictability regarding future learning resource purchases.”

These are goals shared by CERC’s membership. In addition to connecting and co-operating with ministry initiatives toward those goals, CERC also recognizes that, in the new educational policy environment, it is important for our association to connect with those in the system who will play key roles in determining the types of learning materials required to implement future curriculum.

The emergence of a more decentralized curriculum leadership role in BC means that our association needs to establish relationships with a broader range of education stakeholders if we are to anticipate and serve the future needs of British Columbia students. Early in discussions with several of these groups, it was suggested that CERC convene a facilitated focus group – involving major associations and the ministry – to look at the changing learning resource environment in some detail and to explore possible directions which might help educational publishers serve BC schools in the future.

With the gracious assistance of the British Columbia School Trustees’ Association, who provided the venue of the BCSTA Boardroom, CERC arranged such a meeting on February 5, 2004 with the specific purpose of seeking input from the educational community on the best way for the educational publishing industry to approach the new realities in BC. Although invited ministry staff were unable to attend on this occasion, individuals from the School Superintendents’ Association, the Principals’ and Vice-Principals’ Association, Teachers’ Federation, School Districts Secretary-Treasurers’ Association, and Trustees Association participated and generously provided their best advice on the subject.

Advice Received from Stakeholder Focus Group:

The discussion on February 5 was consistently constructive, with participants offering suggestions that would enable the system to serve its students, teachers, administrators and Boards well, while respecting the Ministry's commitment to change past practices. It was taken as a "given" that curriculum development would be contracted to Districts or organizations as suggested by the Ministry.

Participants agreed that there was a continuing expectation that British Columbia students would be best served by learning resources produced in Canada that specifically reflected the province's curriculum. It was acknowledged that such learning resources require time to prepare. It was noted that their development would be greatly facilitated by a higher degree of transparency and predictability than currently exists in the processes for curriculum development and implementation.

Participants considered CERC's question: "what is the best way for learning resource developers to access, in a timely manner, reliable information about curriculum directions, implementation plans, etc. in order to have appropriate learning resources available when they are needed in British Columbia classrooms?" Using the current example of the newly proposed Civics 11 course, participants tested assumptions and suggestions for ensuring that courses developed via the new process could be resourced appropriately.

There emerged a sense that there appear to be gaps in British Columbia's current curriculum development/implementation process. To address these gaps, participants formulated several recommendations which, if implemented, would help ensure that new or revised courses could be resourced in a timely and effective manner. These recommendations are summarized below. CERC offers them to the ministry for consideration – as positive suggestions for improving processes which are intended to serve students and, indeed, the entire system.

Recommendations:

In order to achieve an appropriate degree of transparency/predictability in the plan for curriculum development and implementation in British Columbia:

1) That, for future curriculum, the Ministry should publish a realistic schedule listing the deadlines for:

- *draft outcomes and integrated resource package (IRP);*
- *final IRP including final outcomes; and*
- *mandatory implementation requirement.*

Rationale:

All parties believe providing a specified plan for curriculum renewal will improve everything from budgeting to resourcing within districts. Having access to such a timeline assists districts in planning and budgeting for implementation and assists the industry with its processes for potential learning resource creation.

2) That there should be significant Ministry commitment to the published plan.

Rationale:

While it is recognized that some degree of flexibility is needed with respect to published deadline dates, it is important to ensure that these are realistic and credible. There is some concern, for example, that the current Civics course design process is already behind schedule. Dates for identifying final outcomes are unknown, yet an implementation date of September 2005 has been announced. Publishers will require approximately 18 months to develop a resource for such a course once final outcomes are available. In the case of Civics 11, then, it appears that an implementation crisis could result from the lack of a transparent plan and the lack of commitment to that plan.

3) The Ministry should articulate their expectations for curriculum development, implementation, and resourcing, including the roles and responsibilities for the tasks to be undertaken to ensure successful implementation.

Rationale:

At present there appears to be no common understanding as to who will do what to ensure successful implementation of new curriculum. This affects Districts who need to budget appropriately and plan effective and efficient implementation activities. It also affects the industry that produces not only student resources but also teacher guides. All parties would benefit from a more clearly delineated description of responsibilities and expectations for the implementation function.

4) *That for each proposed curricular change the Ministry should post on the web in a timely manner each of the following:*

- a) the overall plan for curricular revisions;*
- b) the framework for each revision including the size of the revision;*
- c) the draft outcomes; and*
- d) the final outcomes.*

Rationale;

The entire system would be better served by having transparency and system-wide knowledge of the plans for curricular revision and the timelines on which it is to be undertaken. Publishing this information on the web as soon as it is available would facilitate all related processes including budgeting, planning, resourcing, and implementation both within and beyond the system.

