



May 12, 2014

The Honorable Peter Fassbender
Minister of Education,
PO Box 9045, Stn. Prov. Govt.
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2
Via email: educ.minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Honourable Mr. Fassbender,

On behalf of BC Nature, a Federation of Naturalists in BC, with over 51 nature clubs comprised of over 5400 members from throughout our province, I am writing to express our deep concerns regarding the proposed changes to the Science and Socials curriculum of BC, and the lack of adequate response from you and your ministry.

We understand that for some time, BC educators have indicated there are too many prescribed learning outcomes in existing Integrated Resource Packages. The Ministry of Education has responded with a redesigned curriculum and assessment based on core competencies, and what the developers call "Big Ideas." While the emphasis on "Big Ideas" to replace specific learning objectives has merit as an approach to teaching, as it has the capacity to capture and illuminate context and integrate subjects in a deeper and broader way, we have some major concerns with the way your Ministry proposes to apply them.

Our concerns are outlined below.

- The current "Big Ideas" proposed by the new curriculum document fail to include concepts such as the environment, nature, ecology, ecosystems, stewardship or interdependence. Gone is the term, "Life Sciences." Gone too, are the age-appropriate studies of animals, adaptations, behaviours, food chains, the study of weather and its impact on humans, and any direct reference to Aboriginal concepts of environmental stewardship. Nature education "Big Ideas" do not exist at all in grades 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8. As they are currently stated, the "Big Ideas" are not big at all; they are de-contextualized, vague abstractions that are developmentally inappropriate and prescribe more learning time be spent on energy education and mining than on nature.
- This diminishment of education is very serious. Ecological literacy is a critical goal for all students and citizens, and is one of the most important knowledge sets for our future, yet it is all but erased from the "Big Ideas" in the new curriculum documents.
- In social studies the changes are also worrying. Presently, from Kindergarten to Grade 7 students study how to care for the environment, characteristics of the environment, responsibility for the environment, Aboriginal relationships with the land, and sustainable resource harvesting. However, in the proposed socials

curriculum the concept of responsibility for the environment is virtually erased. Instead of a year-by-year, development of environmental stewardship and awareness, students are merely asked to investigate the relationship between a community and its environment.

This loss of a scope and sequence, of the type of continuum of direct experience that is necessary to develop appreciation, knowledge and care for the environment is a devastating, retrograde development for our children and for the future of our province.

We live in a time when the demands of adapting to climate change require that all people become active participants in developing a vision for our communities and finding ways to take positive steps towards sustainability of the natural environment, on which human society depends for its survival. The proposed curriculum fragments and confounds concepts of environmental education and is not sufficient to contribute to the development of citizens who understand the issues and are able and willing to participate in civic discourse.

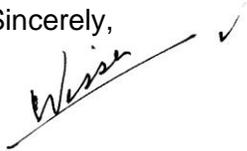
It seems the ministry is out of touch with the values and culture of our province. A BC Nature partner, Young Naturalist Clubs, have grown into the largest such organization in Canada because of the interest in nature education. At a time when there is a growing number of parents demanding learning that develops environmental knowledge, and hands-on experience, and when school districts are creating nature classes that are rapidly filled, this curriculum document seems to not only not recognize the commonly held current values, but to actually be going backwards to a time when the public was unaware of a need to *"Know Nature and Keep it Worth Knowing."*

With respect, it is not sufficient for your Ministry to say that there are curriculum elaborations, and concepts about the environment within the curriculum, and that teachers will have the autonomy to develop nature topics.

We vigorously encourage you to change the direction of this mis-guided curriculum transformation, so that environmental education is prescribed for all children in all grade levels in both science and social studies, as it is now.

We thank you for your attention and look forward to hearing from you that our recommended changes have been made.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kees Visser', with a checkmark at the end of the line.

Kees Visser,
President, BC Nature (Federation of BC Naturalists)

Gary Holman, MLA, Saanich North - gary.holman.mla@leg.bc.ca

Andrew Weaver, MLA, Oak Bay Gordon Head - andrew.weaver.mla@leg.bc.ca

Rob Fleming, MLA, Victoria – Swan Lake; NDP Education Critic - rob.fleming.mla@leg.bc.ca

Lana Popham, MLA Saanich, South - lane.popham.mla@leg.bc.ca

Elizabeth May, MP, Saanich, Gulf Islands - Elizabeth.May@parl.gc.ca

Jane Thornthwaite – MLA – North Vancouver Seymour - Jane.Thornthwaite.MLA@leg.bc.ca

