

A Time to Celebrate and Share Learning

School goals can be brought to life as students, staff and parents join together to celebrate learning.

by Craig Mah

On June 7, 2013 Heritage Mountain Elementary completed its Learning Celebration. For me, it was the most rewarding event of the year. Two hundred parents joined us in our gym for four videos that showcased our progress in numeracy problem solving. The biggest payoff, personally, came at the end of the presentation when I showed two bar graphs, one showing baseline data from the fall, and one showing student progress after directed teaching in the spring. The parents gasped when they saw the difference in the charts. I am not kidding!

A Learning Celebration (LC) is an event that honours the work that students and staff have done towards your school goals. At Heritage Mountain Elementary, we have done LCs for the past three years. The greatest success of the event? The community is aware of our

Math problem solving has taught us that
math is: **Exciting!**



school goals and students are able to articulate what we are attempting to achieve.

The LC aligns with many of our school goals, such as innovative teaching strategies, assessment, communication, motivating students to learn, and staff participation. Schools communicate their goals in a variety of ways including newsletters, PAC meetings, bulletin boards, and the school action plan. An LC focuses all of these facets into a stream that leads to one event. It aligns school practices with

school vision.

Schools spend much time planning events that build culture, such as concerts or activity days. The LC consumes less teacher energy because their students are already working towards the school goal in their classrooms. The LC shares the process and successes of the school with the community. The LC's broader objective is to make the school goal relevant for the students, staff and parents.

Your school goal is brought to life by connecting it to a real life event. It is also a great way of communicating your school value to the community. It makes a connection.

I hope after reading the following steps and examples that you, too, will consider taking on the challenge of an LC at your school. Aligning the energy, passion, teaching and learning into a single event creates a rewarding process, both for students and staff.



Teacher involvement:

The ability to pull off a school wide learning celebration rests with the capacity of your staff. With agreement, your staff will be able to accomplish a wonderful and rewarding event. Teachers' creativity plays a large part in the success of the LC. The LC should not be an onerous task. All of the teaching and learning should be part of your's schools daily work and many of your teachers already invite parents into the classroom for a variety of reasons. Teachers want to do their best for the school. Without whole staff agreement, you can foster learning celebrations on a smaller scale. A principal can encourage learning celebrations at the classroom level or among several classrooms.

Professional Learning Community:

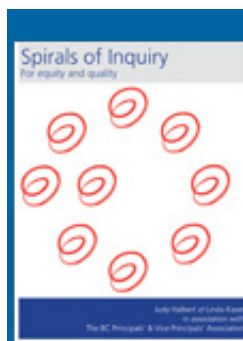
In the Coquitlam School District, principals and vice-principals have professional growth plans. These plans are revised and reviewed annually. For the past three years, my goals has been to develop my school as a Professional Learning Community (PLC). Part of the concept of a PLC is focused on teacher collaboration. We completed three cycles

of collaboration. The process is worthy of its own article but in short; the success of the LC is rooted in rich, professional staff collaboration — in planning, assessment and reflection. Our staff tapped into the districts Staff Development department to help guide the Teacher on Calls to free up the teachers. I also took classes into the gym so teachers would have time to collaborate. The last collaboration cycle focuses on the preparation for the LC. It is from this session that the teachers came up with the brilliant idea of creating video presentations.

The Anatomy of a Learning Celebration:

- Set the date as early as you can. Make sure everyone knows when this even will happen. By attaching a date to your school goal, you set

- the stage to making the goal real for students and staff.
- Be clear on the focus of your school goal.
- Focus more on the learning process, rather than students having to produce a final product.
- Provide time for your teachers to collaborate (at designated times, during staff meetings, etc.).
- Honour creativity. Encourage teachers to be the architects of the LC.
- Spread the word and build excitement for everyone (newsletters, email, Twitter, for instance).
- Inform the parents. Set the expectation that the purpose is to celebrate the learning of the students and that parents can provide wonderful, positive feedback. For one of our LCs, we prepared brochures that featured questions that parents could ask the students to foster richer conversations.
- Work out the details. Little details such as seating and parking can foil the best planned events.
- Invite community and district leaders.
- Show the data.
- Follow-up with an email or newsletter to thank them for attending. *(continues next page)*



Spirals of Inquiry by Judy Halbert and Linda Kaser, published in association with the BCPVPA, is \$20 per copy (including taxes). The shipping fee will be added (mailed or courier, depending on quantity). We invoice on shipment. Details: BCPVPA website. Proceeds are donated to the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network Provincial Fund, with those funds to be distributed to support inquiry-based learning initiatives.



Students then brought their work to the Publishing House where parent volunteers helped with editing, illustrations, and word processing as well as binding. All of the students' books were put on a display at our spring Writers' Fair. The students and parents were invited to the evening event. One teacher set up poetry readings. We created a slideshow that outlined the Writers' workshop process. Each child sat beside their book as parents and guests wandered through the gymnasium. The parents were provided with a brochure with questions that they could ask the authors.

Learning Celebrations

Health and Fitness Expo

Goal: *To increase students' knowledge of healthy living.*

At Coquitlam River Elementary, we celebrated our healthy living goal with an evening Health and Fitness Expo. Each class designed a workshop for the parents and the students taught a concept or skill to the parents. We began in the gym, with several presentations, including choir songs. The parents then went to their child's classroom for the workshop. The grade five classes set up a boot camp circuit for parents; the grade three class set up a jump rope station, a grade one class explained the food groups that can be found on a dinner plate.

Persuasive Writing Open House

Goal: *To increase students' ability to communicate persuasively using both oral and written language.*

After setting the stage with the parents in an assembly, the parents followed the students back to the classrooms where they were handed a brochure to guide them through the event. Our goal was persuasive writing and teachers decided how their students would demonstrate

their learning. A grade two classroom transformed into a movie theatre and showed their learning video on the SmartBoard. The grade five classes collaborated to have their students act out peer pressure sketches. A grade three class showed their writing portfolios. After 15 minutes, the parents moved to another classroom, even if they did not have a child in that room, to see other forms of persuasive writing. The teachers linked our LC with the Parent Appreciation event so refreshments were served.

Publisher's Fair


Goal: *To improve student writing.*

Instead of a science fair, Vanier Elementary put on a Writers' Fair. At the beginning of the year, each child had a goal to publish one book. Working with parents, we established an in-school publishing house. Throughout the year, each student went through the writers' workshop and published books.

Numeracy

Problem Solving Videos

Goal: *To improve our learners' ability to solve numeracy problems.*

Rather than an open house style LC, the staff created an assembly. The teachers came up with the idea of using video presentations. The primary and intermediate departments planned a large math activity in the gymnasium for all of the students to work on. The early learning department took all of its documentation and created a slideshow showing the developmental process of numeracy concepts in Kindergarten/Grade 1. The event was documented using an iPad and featured footage of the students working together as well as interviews of students as they reflected on the activity. We created movie trailers to build excitement for the event and the links to the trailers were emailed to the parents. The videos were shown at our LC. 

Craig Mah is Principal of Heritage Mountain Elementary in Port Moody. He adds that "another benefit of Learning Celebrations came when I completed our annual Action Plan for Learning. I found that I told the story of our staff's journey towards the LC." He can be reached at cmah@sd43.bc.ca

References for this article are available by emailing rwilliams@bcvpa.bc.ca