

BC LEADS ... BECAUSE BC CARES

British Columbia consistently ranks as one of the highest-performing education systems in the world — but the real story isn't in the numbers. It is in what is happening on the ground, in school districts all around our province. It is in Vernon's leadership growth structures, Chilliwack's truth & reconciliation work, New Westminster's culturally responsive schools, Sechelt's collaborative networks, Haida Gwaii's culture-infused learning, Powell River's deep community connections, Nisga'a's pride in cultural identity, and Kamloops' thriving professional learning communities. From small coastal schools to bustling urban centres, our success is built on leaders who put equity, excellence, and relationships first. BC leads: not just because we perform, but because we care.

Why BC Continues to Lead: Lessons from the Road

If you have been following my journey through the 2024-2025 school year, you will know that I had the great privilege of landing in 28 different districts throughout this province. Armed with a spreadsheet created with the intention of gathering evidence about systemic structures such as leadership development programs, inclusive education delivery models, relationships and structures in Indigenous Education departments, maintenance, transportation, district culture, PAC influence, and more, I have guided my visits with the question: *"What makes BC a high-performing system?"*

A few years ago, while working on my doctorate, I came across a 2018 report written by Andreas Schleicher, Director for Education and Skills at

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the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Schleicher included a focus on Canada's education systems, and captured something many of us know instinctively: British Columbia is a high-performing public education system. My intention was to look closely and figure out *why*, as the numbers alone don't tell the whole story.

In my travels to school districts across BC, I've seen first-hand what fuels those statistics. Behind every data point is a leader, a teacher, a student, a family, and a community that values education, and recognizes that all families want the same things for their children. They want to know their children feel a sense of belonging in schools, that they have opportunities to learn and grow, and that they will be empowered to cross the stage with dignity, purpose, and options. They will have a jumping-off point for a dynamic future.

This is no short order. In my travels, these are just some of the things I have observed – there are exciting projects and thoughtful innovations taking place in every community, and I will continue to share those stories in the year ahead.

Equity and Excellence in Action

In Vernon, I saw intentional investments in structures that allow Principals and Vice-Principals to lead with both vision and focus. Professional learning is tied directly to improving outcomes, and there is a shared language about leadership growth. The district's commitment to supporting the whole child — not just the test score — is evident in every conversation.

In Chilliwack, the deep, ongoing work in Indigenous learning and truth and reconciliation is not a separate initiative — it is woven into the daily life of schools. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders in Chilliwack have built strong relationships that are authentic, sustained, and grounded in mutual respect. Students see themselves reflected in the curriculum and the culture.

In Surrey, I connected with a vibrant and collaborative group of leaders who bring vision, innovation, and a strong commitment to equity and student success in one of BC's most diverse and rapidly growing districts.

The Power of Context and Culture

In New Westminster, I met school leaders who embrace culturally responsive leadership as a cornerstone of their work. They understand that a high-performing system isn't one that ignores differences, but one that recognizes diversity as a strength to be leveraged. Newcomer families are welcomed with intention, and support systems extend beyond the school walls.

On the Sechelt Peninsula, I joined a group of leaders who model collaboration in the face of complexity. Their geography demands creativity, yet instead of seeing distance as a barrier, they have built strong networks of shared leadership and problem-solving that ripple through their schools.

Innovation in Remote and Rural Settings

My visit to Haida Gwaii was a powerful reminder that excellence can take many forms. Graduation ceremonies there celebrate cohorts as small as eight students, each one honoured, known, and celebrated by their community. The integration of local culture into learning is not an add-on; it is a foundation. Students learn science, history, and identity in ways that connect directly to the land and people.

In Nisga'a territory, I witnessed how the power of identity shapes learning. Students are immersed in their language, history, and traditions from an early age, and they carry that pride into every part of their education. Knowing who they are — and being surrounded by a community that affirms it — builds confidence, resilience, and a deep sense of purpose. Here, cultural pride is not separate from academic success; rather, it fuels it.

"The numbers tell one part of the story.

Activities in our schools relate the rest."



In qathet, leadership is rooted in community connection. Schools are hubs of learning, culture, and care; these are places where students are known deeply, and where Principals and Vice-Principals navigate both the opportunities and challenges of smaller, interconnected communities.

Leadership as the Engine

In Kamloops, I saw the power of a district-wide commitment to professional learning communities. Leaders there prioritize time to work together, examine evidence, and innovate for the local context. The message is clear: leadership matters, and when leaders are supported, students thrive.

In Prince George, I met with a resilient and dedicated leadership team that stewards education across a vast and geographically diverse district, ensuring as leaders that every student – rural and urban – has access to opportunity, connection, and success.

These visits have reinforced my understanding that BC's performance is not the product of a single policy, program, or test. It is the result of leadership at every level — from classrooms to boardrooms — that is committed to equity, excellence, and continuous improvement.

The Road Ahead

We cannot take our standing for granted. Leadership burnout, mental health needs, equity challenges in rural and remote communities, and the pressures of succession planning are all real. If we want BC to remain a high-performing system, we must continue to invest in leadership development, foster collaborative networks, and ensure that every community — no matter how large or small — has the resources and capacity to support its learners.

As Schleicher illustrated, our strength lies in both our achievement and our equity. I have seen it for myself, in the quick turnaround to resume school operations in Campbell River after a devastating fire, in a Chilliwack student-led assembly that brought to life the experiences of both immigrant and Indigenous students, in the songs of the students in Nisga'a New Ayansh, and the artwork of the students in Haida Gwaii, and in the collaborative leadership development program in Kamloops.

The numbers tell one part of the story.

Activities in our schools relate the rest.

And the overarching theme is that BC leads, because BC cares.

Reference

Schleicher, A. (2018). World Class: How to build a 21st-century school system (Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education). OECD Publishing.