



News Release

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Education program proving successful in improving student graduation rates and post-secondary education

An innovative program designed to increase post-secondary education among some Surrey district students is proving successful, according to an October 2008 study report.

The report evaluated students going through the SPARK (Students, Preparation, Access, Reaching goals and Knowledge) program, a unique community collaboration started in 2003 to encourage students in high school to remain in school and pursue a post-secondary education. The program is designed to assist students who may have been at risk of dropping out, are economically or culturally challenged, or may be the first in their families to attend a post-secondary institution.

The study found more than 90 per cent of the 41 SPARK program participants in the 2004 and 2005 years have graduated from high school and more than 80 per cent of the total participants have carried on into post-secondary education. District-wide in the last school year, 82 per cent of students graduated within six years of entering Grade 8 and 69 per cent of students planned to pursue post-secondary education.

"Our board has a record of supporting and promoting innovation in helping our students realize their potential," says Surrey Board of Education chair Laurae McNally. "It's very gratifying to see the SPARK program find such success in achieving that important goal."

The SPARK program is an innovative four-way partnership among Kwantlen Polytechnic University, SPARK Education Foundation, Surrey School District and the provincial government. Initiated in 2003 by South Asian community leaders, the program provides students counseling, academic and financial support. Students must commit to maintaining regular school attendance, achieving a certain grade point average and participating in special events.

"It has been a very rewarding experience to see the community, education institutions and the province come together and design a program that enables non-traditional students to access post-secondary education. We have learned that barriers to higher education can be overcome," says Arvinder Bubber, Kwantlen Polytechnic University chancellor.

"We know society benefits when its citizens have post-secondary education. Education creates possibilities," says Amarjit Samra, SPARK Foundation president.

SPARK is currently offered in two Surrey secondary schools; Tamanawis and Princess Margaret. Frank Hurt secondary will be offering the SPARK program in January 2009. Students in the program take three or four fully-sponsored courses at Kwantlen while in the spring semester of their Grade 11 year. Coursework includes Career & Academic Success and English classes.

For more information on SPARK, visit www.kwantlen.bc.ca/sld/spark.html .

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