

School board seeks better ways to engage students

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Education should reflect social change and the demands of today's evolving workforce, according to the 21st Century Learning Initiative, an international learning research group.

The idea has earned a gold star from the Saskatoon public school board. At a board meeting Tuesday, board members agreed to begin "collegiate renewal," which will look at ways to better equip students with the skills necessary in today's world.

"I think everyone's well aware that the world's changing very quickly," said George Rathwell, deputy director of education. "We need to adjust our teaching methodologies . . . and also have a look at how we deliver curriculum." The board points to some existing programs such as Evan Hardy's media school, the soccer and dance academies at Centennial Collegiate and the recently announced integrated training facility at Mount Royal Collegiate as examples of educational innovation.

John Abbott and Heather MacTaggart of the 21st Century Learning Initiative were in Saskatoon on Friday.

They talked to students at Bedford Road Collegiate about how their learning experience could be improved.

About 30 students brought up issues, including a need for more real world opportunities such as work experience programs.

Abbott, president of the learning initiative, said students want to learn in an active way, rather than absorbing and later regurgitating second-hand information.

"It's not that they are blaming their teachers. They're critical of the system the teachers have to operate within," said Abbott, who also visited the city last November.

Schools often resemble a factory where students come in empty, are filled with knowledge and are then released into the world, said MacTaggart, deputy director of the initiative. According to MacTaggart, the shift from an industrial society to a knowledge-based one means students require a different set of skills upon graduation.

"We need creative thinkers, problem solvers, communicators and collaborators," she said.

The school board says the opening of two new schools will result in smaller class sizes and more flexibility to create alternative learning opportunities.

Abbott began teaching in England in 1965. The 21st Century Learning Initiative, established in 1995, is an international non-profit foundation that facilitates new approaches to learning and works with school districts toward education reform.