



President's Message



Jim Iker (BCTF 1st VP) & Debbie Pawluk
School Union Rep Training, Oct. 23, 2012

As was mentioned in October's Tackboard, the provincial government under the direction of Education Minister Don McRae has initiated a review of the teacher bargaining process, a process (I feel the need to stress) that the BCTF actually requested two years prior to the

last round of bargaining commenced. Teachers in BC welcome consultation on the bargaining process, but also expect *real* results once it is completed. What teachers are trying to address at the bargaining table is the legacy of a decade of cuts which has resulted in untenable working conditions, loss of programs and services, and salaries approaching the worst in the country. For example, in its brief to the Select Standing Committee on Finance, the BCTF noted that British Columbia scores well below Canadian averages for several key education funding indicators. Listed here are a few facts for your consideration:

- BC had the worst student-educator ratio (SER) in Canada in 2009-10, the most recent year for which the statistics are available. For BC to meet the Canadian average SER, we would need 5800 more FTE teachers at a cost of about \$500 million.
- In 2001, spending on K-12 education as a percentage of GDP was higher in BC than the Canadian average. During the global recession of 2002, K-12 spending as a percentage of GDP increased in the rest of Canada, while it remained stagnant in BC. For BC to meet the Canadian average in terms of K-12 funding as a percentage of GDP would require \$609 million.
- Despite declining enrolment, the number of students with special needs increased by 1560 in the last decade. Nonetheless, more than 750 special education teachers have been cut.
- The number of English Language Learners in public schools has grown by more than 1800 students, but there are 340 fewer ELL teachers.
- Teacher-Librarians have been decreased by 30% since 2001. Counsellors have been decreased by 11%.
- The number of Aboriginal students has grown substantially, but the number of Aboriginal teachers has declined.

Teachers expect the government to actually listen to our concerns regarding the working and learning conditions in this province. We can only hope that the consultation will be genuine and that the Liberals have learned from their mistakes throughout the past decade, most notably their (repeated) legislative interference in the collective bargaining process and substantive underfunding of public education.

To further advocate for quality public education, BC teachers are working with parents and the public across the province on a variety of concerns, ranging from class size/composition issues to school closures to support for children with special needs. Individuals have been taking action, for example, by lobbying MLAs and school trustees, writing letters to editors, calling in to talk radio stations, holding community forums, and participating in protest demonstrations and other creative strategies. I encourage all VSTA members to partake in this struggle by becoming actively involved in the *BCTF's Year of Provincial Action* (2012 AGM decision). If you have not done so yet, familiarize yourself with the BCTF's "Better Schools for BC" publication, a foundation document that articulates our vision and values for public education, as well as practical strategies for improvement. The plan highlights a particular issue for each month of the school year along with supporting actions to further highlight the concern. Whereas child poverty was the focus for November, respecting and valuing diversity is the theme for December. As part of our commitment to our members, the VSTA table officers will continue to prepare and distribute materials on an ongoing basis to draw your attention to the monthly themes, all of which are critical to a high quality public education system.

I leave you this month with best wishes for a happy and healthy winter break. Relax, kick back, and enjoy your well-deserved time with family and friends. All the best for the holiday season from everyone at the VSTA office!



Take care,

Debbie

VSTA GENERAL MEETING

Tuesday, January 29, 2013
4pm at Tupper Auditorium

All teachers are encouraged to attend to
elect delegates to the BCTF AGM.

Letters of Expectation Grievance Resolve

The Vancouver Teachers' Federation and the Vancouver Board of Education resolution on the issue of *letters of expectation* includes the following points:

1. The parties agree that letters of expectation are to identify or clarify expected behaviour in the performance of job duties and are not for the purpose of discipline. **They are not part of an employee's disciplinary record.**
2. Before a meeting which may result in a letter of expectation, Principals/Vice Principals will advise employees that they may choose to have union representation at that meeting.
3. Principals/Vice-Principals will copy the union representative who attends the meeting on the letter of expectation issued to the employer.
4. Letters of expectation will be removed from an employee's school file, on request of the employee, after a period of 3 years.

In relation to the second point, the VSTA is strongly advising teachers to *always take a staff rep* along when meeting with an administrator regarding a "concern." Additionally, the VSTA is asking staff reps to always forward their copy of the letter of expectation to the VTF office.

If three years have passed since a letter of expectation was issued to you by an administrator, the VTF is recommending that you ask your principal to remove it from your school file immediately, as per the grievance resolve.

If three years have yet to pass since a letter of expectation was issued to you by your administrator, remember to request the removal of the letter of expectation from your school file when three years have passed.

Letters of Discipline and Personnel Files (Article E.31)

Unlike a letter of expectation, a letter of discipline/reprimand is part of an employee's disciplinary record and is written in response to behaviour which is deemed to be of a culpable nature. A letter of discipline clearly states the specific nature of the culpable behaviour, performance, or incident and also includes consequences for any future failure to meet the standard. The letter of discipline is, in essence, the first step in progressive discipline for the member in question.

All VSB employees have a District personnel file maintained at the District office which contains all documents and material relevant to employment. When an employee receives a letter of discipline, a copy is simultaneously placed in the District personnel file. Furthermore, "the employee shall receive a copy of any material of a negative or adverse nature that is placed in the District personnel file" (Article E.31.5). *Members are reminded that after five (5) years an employee may request in writing that the letter of reprimand and related materials be removed from the District personnel file, provided no further disciplinary action has occurred during that time.* Please contact the office if you have any further questions or if you require assistance in having a letter of discipline/reprimand removed from your personnel file.

Increase to Teachers' Pension Plan Contributions



The Teachers' Plan is a pre-funded plan, which means each generation pays for its own benefits. An independent actuary assesses the plan's financial health every three years to ensure the plan's long-term sustainability. As a result of the most recent independent actuarial valuation of the Teacher's Pension Plan (TPP) on December 31, 2011, the Teachers' Pension Board of Trustees approved a contribution increase to address the projected unfunded liability.

Effective July 1, 2013, both member and employer contribution rates for our pension plan will increase by 1.3 per cent of salary.

Important: Complete purchases of service before July 1, 2013 to save

Purchase of service costs are based on salary and contribution rates. On July 1, 2013, when contribution rates increase, **purchase of service costs will also increase.** In order to ensure that your request is processed using the current (2010) contribution rates, your application needs to be completed in advance of the deadline. The purchase of service application from the employer must be received by the Teachers' Pension Plan by June 30, 2013. For more information about purchasing service and general information about the plan, please see the plan's website at tpp.pensionsbc.ca.

BCTF'S Year of Action: **NOVEMBER** *focused on* **Child Poverty**

Reading and the Profound Impact of Poverty



IN THIS THE BCTF'S YEAR OF ACTION, November was the month to focus on Child Poverty. Arguably the pre-eminent voice for the profound effects of poverty on reading, and thus, on student achievement, is Dr. Stephen Krashen, professor emeritus, University of Southern California.

Several years ago, I attended a conference in Berkeley at which

Krashen was a keynote speaker. He is best known for such simple yet obvious truths as, Reading improves with reading, Reading anything improves reading, or Reading improves with access to books! In his words,

Study after study shows that poverty is a powerful predictor of educational achievement. In fact, the effect of poverty is so strong that it sometimes explains everything. No other predictors count.

Why is poverty such a strong predictor? Here are just a few reasons

- Children of poverty are more likely to suffer from "food insecurity," which means slower language development and behavioral problems.
- High-poverty families are more likely to [have less access to quality] medical care, and more childhood illness and absenteeism, which of course negatively impacts school achievement.
- Children of poverty are more likely to live in high-pollution areas, with more exposure to mercury, lead, PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and smog, all of which impact health and learning, and often behavior as well.

AND THE FACTOR THAT CONCERNS US:

- Children of poverty have very little access to books at home and in their communities, with less access to good public libraries and bookstores.
- Children of poverty too often attend schools with poorly supported libraries. Studies confirm that less access to books means lower reading achievement, which makes sense in view of findings that show that self-selected reading is a powerful predictor of reading achievement.

Additional research shows that children in high-poverty areas generally are more likely to experience a decline in reading ability over the summer due to the diminished access to books and the joy of reading.

Referencing a study he and other researchers undertook of the PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), a test given internationally to 10-year olds in their own language (Krashen, Lee, and McQuillan, 2010), Krashen continues:

Poverty was a strong predictor. High poverty = low scores.

Opportunity to do free reading in school meant higher scores, but the effect was modest.

Access to a school library of more than 500 books was a very strong predictor, nearly as strong as poverty.

While many studies have provided evidence that libraries count, that better libraries mean better reading (Keith Curry Lance, Jeff McQuillan, and more), the PIRLS result pushes this much farther, suggesting that school libraries can be an important part of the cure for THE major problem in education, poverty.

Are we doing our part to combat the effects of poverty on learning? Is it true that kids aren't reading anymore? Quite simply, it isn't. How can we know this? Vancouver school libraries circulated 1.6 million items last year (VSB MLST, June 2012), making the VSB the 11th largest circulating library system in the province, ahead of many nearby public library systems open 12 months a year.

Recently I read Heather O'Neill's *Lullaby for Little Criminals* (Harper Collins, 2006) and thought it a fine choice of a "read" to understand the complex social, economic, and personal issues that poverty invokes. A powerful story set in Montreal and focused on a 13-year-old girl who lives on the streets, it struck me that this book should be required reading for any teacher. You see, you just never know what a child faces between 3:00 pm when he or she leaves the school and 9:00 am when the next school day begins.

By Moira Ekdahl, VSB Teacher-Librarian Mentor

Fall School Union Rep Training - October 23, 2012



Magee: Trish Mugford, Holly Chalmers, Peter McLennan, Kelly Hawbolt. PW: Grace Lee, Darren Gock, Nancy Palejko, Kelley Grant, Scott Morgan, Templeton: Suman Bains, Eleanor Pang, Lori Cormack

Upcoming Pension Seminars

YOUR PENSION, YOUR FUTURE. If you are within five years of retirement, then you may wish to attend this free seminar.

Seminar Dates and Locations

JAN 17	Richmond	6-8 PM
JAN 19	Langley	9-11 AM, 12:30-2:30 PM
JAN 23	Surrey	6-8 PM
JAN 24	Delta	6-8 PM
FEB 2	Vancouver	9-11 AM, 12:30-2:30 PM
FEB 7	Burnaby	6-8 PM
FEB 21	Coquitlam	6-8 PM
MAR 6	Vancouver	6-8 PM

Pre-registration required. Dates are subject to change. For the full list of seminars or to register, go to tpp.pensionsbc.ca.

Justice, Not Charity

On Saturday, November 3rd, educators, parents and concerned community members gathered to begin moving beyond temporary charitable responses to poverty in our province towards sustainable changes that seek justice for all citizens of BC. Some key points were made during the course of the morning panel that helped focus the discussion. The conference opened with a summary of the scope of poverty in BC and its impact on families. It was made clear that charity doesn't address profound needs such as time with family, self-esteem, and a child's sense of a role in their community. The case was made that more aboriginal children and youth in BC are in care now (foster care or adopted) than ever were in residential schools. It was also pointed out that the legacy of 25 years of the Inner City School Project (which was the direct result of the leadership of inner city principals and teachers) has been improved education for all children in BC such as all-day Kindergarten and the creation of provincial Community Links funding.

The afternoon session dealt with the role parent fundraising now plays, filling funding gaps caused by government cutbacks, as well as with charitable donations and creeping privatization in schools. Anna Chudnovsky, an elementary teacher, eloquently focussed on the pressures children endure when accepting charity. Dan Hale, a secondary teacher, spoke about the many ways corporations have become ubiquitous in public schools.

Wishing you a happy and restful holiday!

**Debbie, Sylvia, Shaun,
Kim & Mo**



Report on the BCFED Convention



Shaun van der Hoop, Trish Mugford, Rory Brown & Sylvia Metzner at BCFED Convention

Representatives from unions across this province met at the end of November for the 55th Convention of the British Columbia Federation of Labour. This was an exciting year with close to 2,000

delegates participating to form the policy of the Federation and elect a President and Secretary-Treasurer. I'm happy to announce that after a healthy and vigorous debate of leadership issues, Jim Sinclair was re-elected as President of the BCFED and our own Irene Lanzinger (former VSTA and BCTF President) was re-elected to the position of Secretary-Treasurer. One highlight of the convention included a talk given by the entertaining and insightful Linda McQuaig, author and journalist, who provided insights into the need to tackle the tremendous imbalance in our society that results when some (the 1%) are disproportionately rewarded financially and thereby given undue weight in determining social policy for us all (the 99%). Motions were passed to continue to support a coordinated public sector bargaining strategy and a small fee increase for affiliated unions needed to allow the Federation to continue its support of unions and all labour in this province. A motion, which would have opposed pipelines for the transport of raw bitumen unless conditions of environmental safety and First Nations support were met, was not successful. The BCFED also introduced its campaign for the upcoming provincial election - WE VOTE for a better BC - which will focus on making public education, public health care, safe work, better wages, better pensions, apprenticeships, childcare and green jobs election issues.

Salary Indemnity Fund Reminder

If a VSTA member receives a continuing contract after the October 31st deadline, the member has the option of applying for membership either at that time or the following September. New application for membership to VSTA-SIF must be made within two months of continuing appointment with the VBE in order to qualify for membership during the current year. **As well, if a VSTA-SIF member has been laid off and then rehired from the recall list to a continuing contract, they can apply to be reinstated as an active member.** The rules as stated above will then apply. Reinstatement would not require the payment of the initiation fee but would require the payment of the regular yearly fee. If the recall period has lapsed then application would be as a new member.

