
PRESIDENT'S REPORT

While the 2012-2013 school year has been relatively "normal" in comparison to last year, it has nonetheless been busy and has thereby presented the VSTA with a variety of challenges. After a full year of job action, a significant amount of time and energy was expended throughout the fall and winter on re-establishing our presence and voice on an array of district committees. Members of the Executive, in addition to the IHTOs, worked diligently to ensure that both the trustees and senior management heard our concerns and recommendations in relation to district policies and practices. This was not always a straightforward and/or comfortable process, particularly in relation to contentious topics such as the district calendar, layoffs, and the VBE operating budget for 2013-14.

Much of our advocacy work has centered on budgetary concerns and the legacy of a decade of reduced staffing, services, and resources. The VSB's preliminary budget projects a shortfall of \$7.91 million, thereby totalling approximately \$100 million in cumulative funding shortfalls since 2002-2003. That teachers and students continue to struggle with deteriorating working/learning conditions is substantiated by data compiled by the BCTF. For example, from 2001-02 to 2010-11, Vancouver has experienced a 27% reduction in special education teachers, 18% in teacher-librarians, and 60% in ELL/ESL teachers. For the fourth year in a row, the VBE has issued *potential for layoff notices*, this time to approximately 360 teachers (with approximate seniority of 3 years, 7 months). Additionally, the 2013-2014 preliminary budget also proposes a reduction of 8.42 FTE in enrolling teachers and the elimination of 3FTE peer to peer mentors (a confidential service that provides direct support to hundreds of teachers). The VSTA continues to actively oppose all reductions and has repeatedly recommended that this Board minimize the cuts to K-12 classrooms. The district will receive \$5.7 million from the provincial Learning Improvement Fund (to address class size/composition concerns), a woefully inadequate sum when compared to the \$330 million per year that was taken out of public education by Bills 27/28! There has been no remedy thus far from the landmark April 13, 2011, Supreme Court decision which ruled that the BC Liberals contract-stripping legislation violated teachers' charter rights to free collective bargaining ; therefore, the BCTF will be back in court this fall (before Justice Griffin) to deal with the "repercussions" case and the challenge to the constitutionality of Bill 22.

As part of our ongoing advocacy, VSTA members participated in the BCTF's Year of Provincial Action and continued to voice concerns about the BC Education Plan. Teachers, faced with an accelerating pace of social, educational, and technological change, worked collectively to draw attention to our values for public education. The Better Schools for BC campaign focused on monthly themes which highlighted teachers' concerns about class size/composition guarantees, authentic student assessment, the need for a child poverty reduction plan, respect for diversity, lack of support for children with special needs, increased investment in public education, and free scope collective bargaining. Many thanks to all of you for your ongoing support of this advocacy campaign, for drawing attention to the need for significantly improved levels of funding for public education.

Teachers are also back at the bargaining table, ever hopeful that we will see improvements to our salary, benefits, and working conditions. Unfortunately, there is very little progress to report at this time. Local updates will be provided, and I invite you to visit the members' only portal on the BCTF website for provincial information (although no provincial bargaining will occur between the dropping of the Election Writ and the election).

Before closing, I would also like to thank all of our teachers who have been working on the upcoming provincial election. Undoubtedly, the election is critical for teachers and public education, and it is equally important that teachers make their voice heard on May 14 (or at an advance poll). Please take the time to reflect on the Liberal government's record on teachers and public education over the past twelve years when deciding how to cast your ballot.

As a proud member of the VSTA, I look forward to another school year, one that will hopefully bring improvements to the public education system, both here and across the province. In the meantime, I will continue to fulfill my role as President to the best of my ability, ever mindful of the importance of teachers' work in a socially just and equitable society.

Debbie Pawluk, President
Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

This year has been somewhat of a change from the last one, which saw job action, and many schools planning and sharing their own PD initiatives, separate from administrator involvement or direction. Over the past ten months our PD Committee has focused on continuing to support each other by networking and sharing ideas and resources. We have also spent time discussing the ever increasing bureaucracy involved in obtaining reimbursements for members who engage in self directed PD activities and have made recommendations about streamlining this process.

A great deal of interest has been shown in the Teacher Collaborative Inquiry Funds with almost all of our secondary schools applying for and receiving funding for a variety of innovative professional practical pursuits. A SURT was held in late November with all PD site chairs in attendance on Creating a Culture of Professionalism, which was reported to be both informative and energizing. Inquiry is becoming a popular approach to PD and is being promoted both by the local and the VSB. It is essential, however, that teachers voluntarily engage in Inquiry that suits their own self determined professional growth.

Many concerns have been raised this year in the wake of recent BCPSEA's trial balloons around attempting to take control of Professional Development. Our committee has been united in its resistance to any erosion in teachers' professional autonomy around PD. We look forward to another year of collaborative dialogue in leading, designing and participating in dynamic professional learning.

Mary Filleul, Chairperson
VSTA Pro-D Committee

SOCIAL & ECO-JUSTICE COMMITTEE REPORT

This was my first year as Social Eco-Justice Chair and it was shortened by the commencement of my maternity leave in January 2013. Lee Bensted (Tupper) was elected by the Committee at the January 2013 as Interim Chair for the remainder of the 2012-13 school year.

The committee met regularly over the year. The committee goals for 2012-13 were to enhance the networks, understand and share current school social justice projects/courses/initiatives already are underway at school, extend the offerings of Social Justice 12, and encourage schools to decrease their dependence of one-use plastic water bottles.

This year meetings were used as an opportunity to gather. In May in the lead up to the provincial election SEJ committee members gathered with other VSTA teachers at a rally to hold signs, engage people in conversations about the election and promote education as a vote determining issue.

Through advocating done by individual school SEJ reps, direct lobbying by the SEJ Chair and committee of the Sustainability Coordinator at the VSB and some serendipitous timing more schools now are moving away from one-use water bottles and are following a VSB board initiative of "Trust the Tap", this program aims to increase school awareness that Vancouver tap water is of high quality, safe and free.

There are challenges that have become evident as schools attempt to move away from one-use water bottles to the use of tap water. Many schools cannot effectively, efficiently or literally access water to drink at schools. Some fountains in schools are in disrepair, have very low flow or do not function at all. In order to improve access to tap water, increasingly schools are installing water bottle refill dispensers. These machines support the use of tap water rather than the purchase of one-use plastic water bottles by dispensing water quickly into re-fillable containers. Water bottle refill stations are also seen as an effective solution to decrease dependency on water bottles because in many schools students have absolutely no water source as fountains do not function and bathroom faucets dispense only warm water. However, even with cold flowing faucets, bathrooms are not an ideal drinking water source. Another challenge has been the real concern that due to the age of many of the pipes in schools the soldering connecting these pipes may have lead or other heavy metals which in turn create a real possibility of water contamination. The VSB "Trust the Tap" initiative has provided grant

money to enable schools to have their water tested to clarify concerns of water contamination due to suspicious pipes. For these challenges above, the direct banning of one-use plastic water bottles has to be thoughtful reconsidered until solutions for these problems have been solved.

Through the work of this committee, influence by the VSB sustainability coordinator and independent school run initiatives all schools are moving along the continuum towards awareness of the harm of one-use water bottles to our environment and ourselves, and/or the elimination, sale or distribution of this product.

The SEJ committee was also used as a vehicle to link central actions of the VSB on issues of sustainability. Conversations about school gardens, recycling, and school bike programs were discussed and encouraged. The committee and email contact lists were used to inform SEJ representatives of SEJ events, initiatives and actions going on locally and in broader venues.

September: SEJ goals and Actions were set for year

October: Creation of Social Justice Courses and Initiatives Charts to be circulated and information collected from schools to gather information about the SEJ programs, courses and initiatives already underway in schools.

November: Presentation from VSB Sustainability Coordinator Kevin Millsip, outlined his role at the VSB and how his work coincides with the interests of the committee. This position overlooks the area of Bike Advisory and Transportation and Food and Waste. Among other things, he discussed projects around school gardens, composting, reclaiming school board land to be dedicated to gardens.

December: Social Justice 12 teachers and prospective SJ 12 teachers gathered for a networking session at the VSTA office to discuss the course and strategies to employ to ensure SJ 12 is supported within schools in an effort to see it be offered in more schools. This was a success day and teachers were immensely appreciative of the opportunity to work together on SJ 12 initiatives.

In January, Lee Bensted from Tupper effectively stepped into the position of Chair for the remainder of the year as I left on a maternity leave. The committee continued to meet in January, February, April and finally in May. These meetings were focused on information sharing and promoting the upcoming Sustainability Conference to be held at Killarney Secondary in May. Upon registration to this conference, schools will be eligible to receive a grant for sustainability projects in their schools.

Treena Goolieff, Chairperson
VSTA Social & Eco-Justice Committee