



## President's Message



Debbie and Jody Polukosko,  
VTF Bargaining Team Spokesperson

**LET ME BEGIN BY THANKING** all of my colleagues who attended our AGM on May 15<sup>th</sup> at Tupper Secondary. As is mandated by our constitution and by-laws, the business of the meeting included approving the association's operating budget for 2013-14, adopting the audited financial statements for the year ended July 31, 2012, and electing next year's Executive Committee. Attendees were further

treated to a provincial update by Joanna Larson, a member of the BCTF Executive and the President of the Prince Rupert Teachers' Union. In addition to welcoming the newly elected members, I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank all those individuals who have successfully completed their elected terms. Despite holding down full time teaching positions, they have volunteered countless hours of their personal time in support of the membership, oftentimes at the expense of their families. There is no question that the ability of the table officers to advocate effectively for VSTA members is largely dependent upon the dedication, hard work, and good judgement of the Executive Committee. On behalf of all of your secondary colleagues, thank you so very much! I would also like to extend a special "shout-out" to Shaun van der Hoop, the VSTA's 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President and resident expert on such topics as Bill 33 and the grievance process. As many of you know from personal experience, Shaun has worked tirelessly to support the membership, including playing a key role in the job action in 2005 and again in 2012. Sitting at his desk by 7:45 most mornings, Shaun has literally provided (telephone) advice to hundreds upon hundreds of ever grateful teachers. That the membership will miss Shaun is irrefutable; perhaps no one will feel his absence more keenly than me! Joining Sylvia Metzner and I in the VSTA office will be Rory Brown (Vancouver Technical), an experienced Executive member and long term Staff Rep.

At the district level, both the union and the employer continue to grapple with the effects of chronic underfunding coupled with a (projected) decrease in student enrollment for 2013/14, particularly at the secondary level. On May 3, layoff notices were distributed to 225 teachers totalling approximately 180 FTE and significant numbers of teachers are being surplus-

from their current continuing positions. In response to the seemingly never ending challenge of doing more with less, the Board of Trustees passed a motion directing staff to prepare a "restoration or statement of needs with regard to the 2013/14 operating budget" to identify the additional funding it would take for the VBE to restore an equivalent level of service that was in place a decade ago. School districts receive more than 90% of their funding from the Province; therefore, shortfalls are directly attributable to cost increases (salary increments, inflation, benefits, etc.) which are not funded by the Province. The restoration budget projected that the 2013/14 operating budget would need to be around \$533 million for the district to deliver the same level of service as existed prior to the 2002/03 budget cuts, a staggering \$41 million difference! Given these numbers, is it any wonder that teachers are feeling stretched and exhausted??

On a going forward basis, it is likely (and expected) that many of the current challenges related to public education will persist and/or be exacerbated. Given the outcome of the provincial election and the track record of the BC Liberals over the last decade, it is prudent to assume that teachers can anticipate continued underfunding of public education, erosion of services, and further assaults on our bargaining and labour rights. The only certainty at this point is that we can expect more of the same for the next four years, including a reprisal of the government's White Paper: Christy Clark's vision for a 10 year "deal" with teachers! For a more detailed overview and analysis of the proposal, please refer to the VSTA Issue Alert #9 and the BCTF Members' Only Portal.

Now that the election is over, provincial bargaining has resumed with the assistance of facilitator Mark Brown. By all accounts, the tone at the table is respectful and both parties (BCTF and BCPSEA) have tabled their full packages with the goal of reaching a negotiated settlement before June 30, 2013. Albeit government representatives have been at the table throughout the four month process, the Premier's 10-year scheme has never been brought forward (at that venue). The hope is that the government will not disrupt negotiations and disregard its basic obligation to bargain in good faith under the guise of securing "labour peace," a goal that is of course supported by teachers.

In closing, I encourage all of you to pace yourself as you work through the final few weeks of the school year. On behalf of Sylvia, Shaun, and myself, have a restful summer and enjoy your well-deserved break.

Take care,

*Debbie*

## School Union Team Elections

As per established practice, elections for members of the VSTA School Union Team take place in the spring, or in the case of a school that expects significant staff changes, in the following September. Elections should take place at a Staff Organization Meeting and contested positions must be determined by secret ballot. Even if only one person is nominated or has volunteered for a position, it is important that s/he be openly acclaimed by the meeting.

The School Union Team consists of:

- One (1) Staff Rep for every 25 teachers or fraction thereof on staff
- One (1) Staff Rep for parent contact
- Professional Development Chairperson (who will also represent the school on the VSTA Pro-D Committee)
- Up to two (2) Reps to the VSTA Working and Learning Conditions/Bargaining Committee (who will also represent the school on the VSTA WLC/B Committee)
- One (1) Rep to the VSTA Health and Safety Committee (who will also represent the school on the VSTA Health and Safety Committee)
- One (1) Rep to the VSTA Social & Eco Justice Committee (who will also represent the school on the VSTA Social & Eco Justice Committee)
- One (1) Rep to the VSTA Technology Committee (who will also represent the school on the VSTA Technology Committee)
- Staff Committee Chairperson (unless a school's Staff Committee Constitution specifies that Staff Committee elects its own Chair. In either case, the Staff Committee Chairperson is a member of the School Union Team).

Members of the VSTA Executive (from the school) are also considered to be members of the School Union Team. Additionally, members of the School Union Team are reminded that VSTA provides a budget to the team of \$3.00 per member to facilitate meetings of the Team and/or Staff Organization meetings.

## Summer Interview Committees

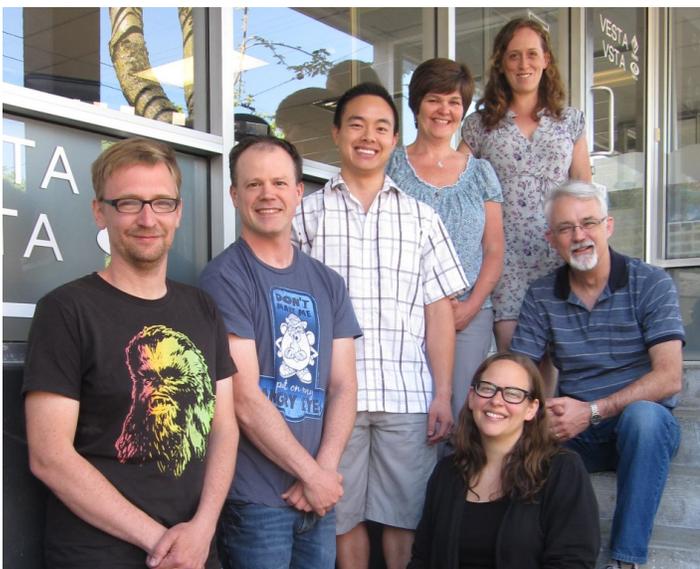
The summer posting period will run from **August 13th to 19th, with interviews commencing August 20th**. School interview committees will need to be convened to conduct these interviews. The VSTA position is that the school union representative on the interview committee *must* have attended the post-and-fill training provided at the April *School Union Rep Training* session. If none of your school's reps will be available for August interviews, please contact the VSTA office to arrange for a table officer to conduct the interviews. A limited amount of compensatory "time-in-lieu" will be made available by the VSTA for those staff reps who conduct August interviews.

## VSTA Annual General Meeting Report

The VSTA Annual General Meeting took place on Wednesday, May 15th, at the Tupper auditorium. Elected to the VSTA Executive Committee for 2013-2014:

President: **Debbie Pawluk**; 1st Vice-President: **Sylvia Metzner**; 2nd Vice-President: **Rory Brown (VT)**; Treasurer: **Terry Stanway (VT)**; Local Representatives: **Trish Mugford (MAGEE)**, **Debbie Pawluk**, **Christine Stewart (BRIT)**; Alternate LR: **Sylvia Metzner**; Members-at-Large: **Darren Gock (PW)**, **Leanne Hagglund (VASS-Aries)**, **Dan Hale (KLNy)**, **Chris Moon (TOC)**, **Nancy Palejko (PW)**, **John Silver (KLNy)**; *Standing Committee Chairs* - Professional Development: **Mary Filleul (DLS)**; W/LC & Bargaining: **Rory Brown (VT)**; Health & Safety: **Phil Lee (VT)**; Social & Eco-Justice: **vacant**; Technology: **vacant**; Teacher-on-Call Rep: **Tobey Steeves (MAGEE)**.

Following the regular business of the meeting, door prizes were awarded and members enjoyed a social hour in the staffroom. We wish to extend our thanks to outgoing members Moira Ekdahl, Govan Keng, Stephanie Lemmon, Brin MacIntyre, Susan McIntosh, Lisa Pacheco, and Shaun van der Hoop, and the rest of the 2012-13 Executive Committee for their dedication and countless hours of service over the past year. We welcome new members Leanne Hagglund, Dan Hale, Chris Moon, Nancy Palejko and Tobey Steeves and thank members returning to serve on the Executive in September.



VTF Bargaining Team: Rory Brown, Chris Harris, Darren Gock, Jill Barclay, Anna Chudnovsky, Shaun van der Hoop, Jody Polukoshko



**Voice of BC** has a series of

YouTube clips up now . . .

30 second snippets from Susan Lambert's terrific interview with Vaughn Palmer.

Here is the full playlist: <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLBz7U118IPivaC1wuxiHGy8MAJQZYHjG>

- The 10 year deal
- Local bargaining
- Funding
- Working alone provisions
- Social justice unionism
- Effect of tax cuts on education
- The myth of efficiencies
- Resource development

# Ten years is no deal

This January the Liberal government put forth a proposal for a 10 year contract settlement with BC teachers. There was no interest at the time expressed by either the BCTF or BCPSEA, the bargaining agent for the employers. Instead, bargaining opened this round framed by a precedent-setting, mutually agreed to framework which includes assistance from the outset of facilitator Mark Brown and has as its goal reaching a negotiated agreement before June 30, 2013.

The government now proposes to disrupt negotiations by altering the employer's mandate mid-stream and has re-introduced the plan for a 10 year agreement with teachers. While the prospect of pushing negotiations into the background is enticing at first glance, the promise of "peace" comes at a high price for teachers. It is very much a *trust* me approach to labour relations. *Trust* the government to determine a fair and respectful compensation package despite last round's rigid "net zero" mandate and the current mandate of "cooperative gains." *Trust* the government to listen at the policy table despite intractability on Bills 27 and 28 even in the face of a Supreme Court of BC decision. Recall that the ill-fated Bill 33 arose from the previously instituted Round Table. *Trust* that the restrictions to the right to strike provisions for teachers (all or nothing strikes and requirement for summer votes) are not an ill-disguised attempt to force our hand by setting up an unpalatable scenario should we dare exercise our *full* right to strike.

Another aspect to consider is the impracticality of a deal that would extend well beyond the current government's mandate. This past decade alone has seen incredible shifts in the educational and economic landscape of BC. There is no crystal ball to foresee the potential threats to, or opportunities for, public education that may emerge over 10 years that would warrant such an imposition on teacher's collective bargaining rights. The government already holds the power to legislate which has been exercised on multiple occasions in the past. Do we need to further shift the balance of power in favour of the employer/government or rather would labour peace more likely be achieved through the rebuilding of *trust*, the first step of which is respect?



## Teachers' right to freedom expression upheld

A recent BC Court of Appeal decision has re-affirmed teachers' right to freedom of expression in schools. In a 2009 arbitration, the employer had successfully argued that students must be sheltered from political messages in their schools. This decision was appealed by the BCTF and last month the BC Court of Appeal affirmed the right of teachers to post notices in schools and distribute letters to parents criticizing government over education policy. The ruling contained some of the strongest language for a defense of academic freedom for teachers and critical education methods:

"There was no evidence in this case of any actual or potential harm to students from being exposed to the materials about educational issues, nor any facts from which an inference of harm could be drawn. On the contrary, Canadian jurisprudence, including *Munroe*, stands for the principle that open communication and debate about public, political issues is a hallmark of the free and democratic society the Charter is designed to protect. Children live in this diverse and multi-cultural society, and exposing them to diverse societal views and opinions is an important part of their educational experience."

For a summary of the decision go to <https://bctf.ca/ProfessionalResponsibility.aspx?id=5194>



## Public Education Advocacy – what now?

A strong and vibrant public education system is one of the core foundations of our democracy in British Columbia. In Vancouver, teachers can be proud of our hard work to advocate for adequate funding and policy decisions that ensure working and learning conditions that support all learners. Throughout the recent election campaign, whether through member-to-member outreach or direct contact with the public in the streets and on their doorsteps, the message was clear: education issues resonate. Individuals looked to teachers to provide a perspective on services that the average citizen of the city values. As a result of our continued efforts to make public education an election issue, the hard work of our LECs in the schools

and the countless teachers who took the time to volunteer in local campaigns, Vancouver will be sending two additional opposition MLAs to Victoria to advocate for change.

Provincially, the results were more complex, with the result that we now face the challenge of a government that has not supported public education but has a renewed mandate to govern. Unfortunately, although public education issues were minimally addressed in the public arena during the course of this provincial election, the Liberals have made it clear that they believe they have a mandate with respect to public education policy.

## Retiring This Year?

- Contact the Teachers' Pension Plan at 1-800-665-6770 for a Retirement Application Package. Send the completed application form to the TPP no later than the end of the month in which the pension is to start (preferably at least two months earlier) to ensure prompt pension payment.
- Contact VBE payroll to find out when your current health benefits end to ensure you have continuous coverage until the benefits associated with the Teachers' Pension Plan begin.
- Consider converting your current group life insurance to an individual life insurance policy.
- Join the BC Retired Teachers' Association (telephone 604-871-2260/2262 or 1-877-683-2243, or go to the website at [www.bctf.ca/rta](http://www.bctf.ca/rta)). Contact the BCRTA re: starting/continuing Medoc travel health insurance.
- Apply to the BCTF for Associate Membership.
- Contact the Teacher Regulation Branch of the Ministry of Education to see your options regarding maintaining your BC Teacher's certificate if you intend to teach after retirement. ([www.bcteacherregulation.ca](http://www.bcteacherregulation.ca))
- At age 60, if you are not working, consider applying for your Canada Pension Plan pension. For an application kit, visit the CPP web site at [www.sdc.gc.ca/en/isp/cpp/cpptoc.shtml](http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/isp/cpp/cpptoc.shtml).
- At age 65, apply for Old Age Security (OAS). For an application kit, visit the OAS web site at [www.sdc.gc.ca/en/isp/oas/oastoc.shtml](http://www.sdc.gc.ca/en/isp/oas/oastoc.shtml)

## VSTA Retirees' Dinner

Members retiring this June or who retired earlier this year are invited, along with one guest, to the annual VSTA Retirees' Dinner on **Tuesday, June 18th** at the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club. Also invited are VSTA staff reps, standing committee reps, and members of the Executive.

## VSTA Scholarship Winners

This year's field of candidates was outstanding, and it is unfortunate that we can offer only a limited number of awards. The recipients are as follows: \$1500 - **Laura Siracusa** (Gabe Siracusa-Magee); and \$1000 each for **Abigail Dixon** (Caroline Dixon-GLAD), **Andrew Latimer** (Brian Latimer-Magee), and **Adam Marshall** (Colleen Marshall-GLAD).

We congratulate all the candidates for their outstanding achievement and wish them the very best in their future endeavours.



## Ride, don't hide

**M**y name is Michael Schratter and I am bipolar. I also happen to be a VSB teacher, a part-time journalist, a husband, a brother, and a son. But for me it is the label of mental illness that carries the most weight. In my opinion, there isn't another affliction still so misunderstood, stigmatized, and ultimately feared. And it is this stigma, along with the prejudice so often encountered by those that have dealt with a mental health challenge, that is perhaps the greatest issue when it comes to recovery.

But enlightenment is always the answer to ignorance, for stigma has little power in the light of rationality. As a teacher and as a journalist I am a strong believer in education and storytelling, and the inter-play of those two powerful tools and how they create the perceptions we live in. It was this clarity that inspired Ride Don't Hide, the anti-mental illness stigma campaign that had me cycle around the planet through 33 countries on six continents over a 15 month period, all the while publishing a mental health awareness column written from the road.

The global campaign raised over \$100,000 for CMHA's youth mental health programs while creating a lot of mental health awareness.

The global ride is over, but the community rides have just begun. Shoppers Ride Don't Hide is occurring simultaneously in thirteen different BC communities on Sunday, June 23.

With 20% of Canadians deal with a mental health issue in any given year, we're all affected either directly or indirectly. Why not consider joining me and hundreds of others from around the Greater Vancouver region for your local Shoppers Ride Don't Hide. Whether for the 10km route, the 20km route, or the 60km, we've got something for you. Registration is only \$35, and it gets you breakfast, a Stormtech sport shirt, and a BQ lunch! Children participate for free when accompanied with an adult.

Please visit [www.ridedonhide.com](http://www.ridedonhide.com) and join your local community as we together erode the stigma one pedal at a time.