



TACKBOARD



President's Message



Ros Kellett and Debbie Pawluk
VSTA AGM, May 15, 2012.

THAT THIS UNPRECEDENTED school year is quickly approaching an end was signified by the occurrence of our recent AGM, held on May 15th at Tupper Secondary. Teachers from across the district assembled to review and approve the VSTA's financial status which included approving both the operating budget for 2012/13 and the audited financial statements for the year ended July, 2011. A housekeeping

resolution allowing for the VSTA's Constitution and By-Laws to be updated and filed (with the Society Act) was also part of the business of the meeting. In working through this process, I discovered that our Constitution was first printed in 1938, 74 years ago! Additionally, the 2012/13 Executive Committee was elected, a committed group of individuals who are prepared to volunteer their time in support of their colleagues (including the table officers) and the profession. I look forward to working with all of the committee members as we continue to advocate for quality public education. Certainly, whenever I have felt disheartened by the events of this past year I have refocused my energy on my good fortune in being part of this incredible group of individuals. Furthermore, I would like to take this opportunity to extend the VSTA's deep appreciation to Ros Kellett for her many years of exemplary service to the association. Since first joining the Executive in 1997, Ros has worked tirelessly in a variety of roles, including chairing the Social & Eco-Justice and Working/Learning Conditions Committees. We wish Ros all the best knowing that she will have more time to spend with her family and friends!

On the local front, the VSB's operating budget for 2012/13 was adopted on April 30. As has become the norm due to chronic underfunding, cost savings (\$4.68 million) were incorporated into the budget to address (and balance) the projected shortfall. Consequently, 19 FTE elementary teachers were eliminated in the budget document and layoff notices were once again issued, this year to 227 teachers. Fortunately, the 19 FTE was subsequently reinstated with money from the newly created Learning Improvement Fund (LIF). The government has committed \$30 million provincially (for 2012/13) to the LIF, a woefully inadequate sum when compared to the \$330 million per year that was stripped from public education by Bills 27/28. To suggest that \$5 million (the VTF's

share of the LIF) will adequately address the class size/composition issues in a district as large as Vancouver is nothing less than absurd.

To balance the budget, the trustees also voted to alter next year's local school calendar and reduced the number of school closure days from 10 to 5 (November 9 and March 25-28) for a projected cost savings of \$500,000. Unfortunately, in making this decision the Board did not consider VTF's advice regarding the possible reinstatement of the modified day, nor engage us in consultation about the bell schedule for next year. Teachers, once again, will be adjusting their daily planning and complementary practice to accommodate the employer. At first glance, many members were encouraged by the reduction of school closure days, naturally assuming that this would lead to greater opportunities for daily work for our teachers on call. However, let me be clear that this is not the case as the Board passed a subsequent motion to approve moving to common non-instructional days in 2012/13, a plan that has been consistently opposed by the VTF. By adopting this plan, the Board has effectively eliminated the possibility of daily call out on each of the 6 days in question, a reality that will have a financially negative impact on every TOC in the district!

The Board's decision to mandate the timing of our non-instructional days echoes the government's avowed commitment to redefine education in BC and to remove any perceived barriers to the Education Plan. In addition to Bill 22 which imposes the employer's concession demands regarding seniority, post and fill, layoff and recall, and evaluation and dismissal, Bill 36 (see article) proposes even more changes to the School Act, including broadening the MOE's powers to control professional development. An example of this intent recently occurred when Minister Abbott stated in the legislature (on May 7th) that "We're looking at establishing a safe schools co-ordinator for every school district, and we're considering—we haven't made a decision yet—designating one of the six provincial teacher professional development days to anti-bullying." That our contractual rights specific to teacher autonomy and professional development are under siege is clearly evidenced by this assertion.

In closing, I urge all my VSTA colleagues to look at the larger picture and to consider the longer term as we work collectively to seek improvements to teaching and learning conditions in this province. For, even as I write this, the BCPSEA is at the Labour Relations Board in an attempt to redefine and expand our "work" to include extra-curricular/voluntary activities:

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE cont'd, back

Vancouver Teachers speaking out

Teachers have engaged in weekly street corner protests every Thursday in opposition to Bill 22. We also staged a Mark In at Kingsgate Mall on May 24th.



Some serious food for thought...

On fair processes

During our recent round of contract negotiations and job action the Essential Services legislation imposed by the Liberal government has required the BCTF to follow an LRB process involving an arduous and often times virtually incomprehensible set of rules. We have complied, in the expectation in part that at least it was a set of rules to be applied equally to both parties in the process. The LRB has within its recognized mandate the expertise and resources to support the resolution of labour disputes including options with respect to mediation and arbitration. It is deeply disturbing that our government would then deliberately choose to supersede LRB jurisdiction through a clause in Bill 22 that stipulates the role of the Minister of Education in appointing a mediator. In his ruling of May 2nd on whether the LRB has jurisdiction to put Dr. Jago's appointment aside, Mr. Fleming states "the legislature has clearly chosen to establish a statutory mediation process which differs in significant respects from mediation as it would occur under the (Labour) Code." ~ Sylvia Metzner

On freedom of speech

A decade long battle by the B.C. Liberals and their school board allies to ban political expression in schools has come to an absurd conclusion in Prince Rupert. ("Dr. Seuss quote too political," April 26).

School district administration in 2002 tried to suppress teachers from posting material on school bulletin boards and from communicating to parents at interviews. This material

focused on loss of funding and increased pressures on classrooms. The matter eventually was heard by the B.C. Appeal Court, which ruled that the directions were unconstitutional and breached the fundamental freedom of expression rights.

Madame Justice Huddart stated in the majority decision "... teachers cannot be 'silent members of society' in light of the importance of a 'free and robust public discussion of public issues' to democratic society (at 466-67). The school boards cannot prevent teachers from expressing opinions just because they step onto school grounds. School grounds are public property where political expression must be valued and given its place."

During the current dispute, teachers across B.C. have faced increased threats of disciplinary action for sporting buttons as benign as "Proud to be a Teacher" or for protesting cuts to public education to Minister Abbott during his school visits.

Huddart also noted that justifying as reasonable the breach of basic expression rights has to be "subjected to a 'searching degree of scrutiny'" and not taken lightly. It is unlikely that the actions taken by school board administration under the watch of the B.C. Liberals has met that standard. Also unlikely is that attitudes will change while the B.C. Liberals continue to demonstrate the willingness to ignore constitutional rights.

It must be stressed, though, how perilous it is for a democratic society to permit governments in a parliamentary system to act contrary to "declared and received laws ... interpreted by known authorized judges." (John Locke).

Letter to the editor by David Komljenovic
(Kamloops-Thompson Teacher and BCTF Executive)

Bill 36 - Yet another education related Bill

The BC Liberals have introduced yet another piece of legislation that could have a profound effect on public education with little or no meaningful consultation with stakeholder groups. Bill 36, the School Amendment Act, purports to remove barriers to personalized learning and allow greater flexibility and choice in terms of where, when, and how students learn. The government strives to offer greater “flexibility and choice” while actually providing the means for boards to reduce costs without offering anything really new or innovative. Education researchers in Canada and internationally have documented growing social inequality and segregation in public schools as a result of more choice programs, which mostly help privileged students whose parents are able to exercise choices.

More online distributed learning for all ages

The Bill extends the ability to take a mix of online and traditional school courses to students as young as kindergarten age. Several specialist teacher associations have already raised concerns about the increased emphasis on online courses. The reality is that many students need a teacher present to keep them motivated and on task and have trouble completing online courses. Students who have difficulty reading require support and guidance for personalized learning. Increased screen time means less time interacting with the physical world. Education is all about positive relationships and people working together in classrooms. Putting more and younger children in front of computer screens will not enhance their education in any way.

Elimination of the standard school calendar

The Bill introduces extensive changes to the school calendar language in the School Act enabling school boards to eliminate the traditional school calendar. Most troubling is that the definitions for both what constitutes the day of instruction and the prescribed minimum hours of instruction for classes are altered. It remains to be seen to what extent the flexibility introduced by these changes will impact families and the school communities they rely on. There is no conclusive evidence of the benefits of year-round schooling for all students and to date little appetite expressed by teachers or parents.

More fees to be charged for IB

Under Bill 36 boards may charge fees relating to the direct costs of providing an international baccalaureate program or special academy so that they may provide programs that reflect the unique needs of their communities. While there is provision that such fees are subject to financial hardship provisions in practice fees serve as a barrier to students and families based on socio-economic status rather than interest or merit. It is deeply disturbing that this legislation is introduced despite the Supreme Court of BC having previously made clear that public education is to be provided free of charge in accordance with the principle of universal accessibility and in the face of the reality that BC continues to have the highest child poverty rate in the country.

Employment Insurance Seminar for TOCs - Tuesday, June 14th

4:00-6:00pm at the VSTA Office

The BCTF workshop will provide teachers teaching on call with resources and information to enable them to successfully apply for employment insurance for the summer months. Please RSVP to Kim (kim@vstaweb.ca) or call the office directly at 604-873-5570. Refreshments and snacks will be provided.

Central Drop Off for Job Applications

The VTF and VBE will each have a central drop off to receive applications. All teachers applying for positions *may* deliver their application directly to schools or to the central drop off.

VTF Central Drop Off - 7:30 AM - 6:00 PM

Posting Period 3 Wednesday, June 13

Posting Period 4 Wednesday, June 20

VSTA Annual General Meeting

The VSTA Annual General Meeting took place on Tuesday, May 15th, at the Tupper auditorium. The General Meeting approved the association’s operating budget, passed a motion to update our By-Laws as set out in the 26th printing of the Constitution and By-Laws, and elected the following VSTA Executive Committee for 2012-13:

President: [Debbie Pawluk](#); 1st Vice-President: [Sylvia Metzner](#); 2nd Vice-President: [Shaun van der Hoop](#); Treasurer: [Terry Stanway \(VT\)](#); Local Representatives: [Treena Goolieff \(EH\)](#), [Lisa Pacheco \(GLAD\)](#), [Debbie Pawluk](#); Alternate LR: [Sylvia Metzner](#); Members-at-Large: [Govan Keng \(GLAD\)](#), [Stephanie Lemmon \(EH\)](#), [Brin MacIntyre \(CT\)](#), [Susan McIntosh \(GLAD\)](#), [Raza Mirani \(GLAD\)](#), [Trish Mugford \(MAGEE\)](#), [John Silver \(KLNy\)](#), [Christine Stewart \(VT\)](#); *Standing Committee Chairs* - Professional Development: [Mary Filleul \(DLS\)](#); W/LC & Bargaining: [Rory Brown \(VT\)](#); Health & Safety: [Vic Choy \(WC\)](#); Social & Eco-Justice: [Treena Goolieff \(EH\)](#), Technology: [Moira Ekdahl \(JO/DLS\)](#); Teacher-on-Call Rep: [Young Cheng \(PG\)](#).

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 member Ros Kellett and the rest of the 2011-12 Executive Committee for their dedication and countless hours of service over the past year. We welcome new members Rory Brown and Stephanie Lemmon and thank members returning to serve on the Executive in September.

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 19th** at the Royal Vancouver Yacht Club. Also invited are VSTA staff reps, standing committee reps, and members of the Executive. Invitations will be sent to schools in early June.



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 - **Tessica Truong** (Katanya Kwon-WRE); and \$1000 for each **Patrick Mavety** (Diane Mavety-CT),

Courtney Lum (William Lum-VT), and **Chad Wong** (Shirley Wong-WRE). We congratulate all the candidates for their outstanding achievement and wish them the very best in their future endeavours.



CoDev/FOMCA Visit at VTF Offices in April

A group of 5 Central American teachers representing their respective teachers' organizations joined us at the VTF office in April to talk about CoDev programs such as the BCTF co-sponsored project around non-sexist pedagogy. The conversation also covered pedagogies of resistance and it was striking how similar the ideology behind the attacks on public education is throughout the Americas. Two comments stood out for me. First, a Mexican colleague pointed out that she found the proposed sanctions in Bill 22 unimaginable and that in Central America they are still able to pursue action without this degree of financial repression. The second was from a Honduran colleague who reflected that the biggest mistake they had made in recent struggles was for the teachers' organizations to allow themselves to become divided. She went on to point out that we need to remain connected to our greatest allies, the students and parents.



Wishing you a relaxing summer!

Debbie, Sylvia, Shaun, Kim & Mo

Retiring This Year?

CHECK LIST

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). 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)

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.

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

Contact the BCTF Income Security Staff if you have questions related to any of the above. Phone: 604-871-1921; toll-free 1-800-663-9163, ext. 1921.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE cont'd , from front

during the day, at lunch/recess, and after school. Additionally, Mr Jago is busy preparing his sham mediator's report within the context of the government's "net-zero" mandate. Now is the time for all members to unite in support of our profession and to actively oppose Bill 22 and the neo-Liberal agenda. Let us be united in our resolve to protect and improve public education, the great equalizer in a socially just society.

Debbie