

President's Message



Seasons greetings from
Rory, Sylvia & Debbie

THE MONTH OF NOVEMBER

was fraught with a flurry of activity and controversy, much of it directly related to the government's ongoing underfunding of K-12 public education funding. Of extreme significance are the findings and recommendations of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. The Committee -- comprised of MLAs, the majority of who are Liberal --

conducted public hearings this fall across the province, the result being a report that makes several hard-hitting recommendations on education, including education funding. The report concludes:

"Sufficient evidence was presented to the Committee indicating that the K-12 system is experiencing cost pressures as a result of inflation and aging school facilities. The Committee therefore recommends that enough funding be provided to schools to meet rising costs and capital needs while ensuring strong educational outcomes for BC students."

Other recommendations worth mentioning include the following:

- Provide sufficient funding for the K-12 system to enable BC students to become top performers nationally; and address cost increases for school districts (e.g. rising BC Hydro rates).
- Develop a comprehensive capital plan for educational facilities that takes into account increased maintenance and aging school facility upgrades; and continue the seismic upgrading program.
- Review the increasing demands on school district budgets and ensure that funding is appropriately directed to meet the growing support required for students with special needs.
- Redesign programming and direct funding to establish and strengthen trades and technology courses in K-12; and provide modest start-up and operational funding as incentives for K-12 technology education programming, similar to the ACE-IT program.

It must be noted that the recommendations fly in the face of the Liberals' "highest funding ever" mantra, despite the fact that the Committee is a government-dominated group. The entire budget consultation report can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/ku639oo>.

[ku639oo](http://tinyurl.com/ku639oo).

Advocacy for increased levels of funding has also taken place at the local level. In an open letter to the Premier and Cabinet, Chairperson Patti Bacchus (on behalf of the VBE) endorsed the recommendations of the Select Standing Committee and urged the government *"to reinvest in our world-class public education system so that we can meet the learning needs of all students."* Furthermore, a jointly signed letter (P. Bacchus/VBE, DPAC, VDSC, VSTA, VESTA, VEPVA, VASSA, CUPE Locals 15 and 407, IUOE Local 963) was sent to Ministers Fassbender and de Jong, as well as Premier Clark, urging the government *"to give serious consideration to increasing the per-student grants for 2014-15 to prevent further cuts to staffing, programs and learning resources...."* This letter was written in response to the government's insistence that local School Boards fund the latest CUPE settlement. Sadly and all too predictably, the government has not responded favorably: the most current example being Minister Fassbender's recent comment on CBC that the VSB should look at closing schools in order to cover rising hydro expenses!

I would also like to briefly comment on the VSB's *Employee Wellness and Attendance* support initiative. Working under the banner of creating a healthy work environment and supporting employee wellness, the VSB is developing an "attendance support program." While creating a healthy work environment is an admirable goal, there is no doubt that reducing costs related to absenteeism and sick leave is the underlying motivation for this initiative. The district has developed a three-part model, the components being (i) disability management, (ii) wellness support, and (iii) attendance support. As is clearly detailed in VBE documents, attendance support will promote and monitor regular attendance. Furthermore, it will include a *"robust data collection system"* and an *"analyst to produce and distribute regular, accurate reports on employee attendance."* Simply put, the intent is to track absences and irregular attendance. To once again quote the VSB, *"this is an obvious place to explore opportunities for gaining cost efficiencies and*

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VSTA GENERAL MEETING

Tuesday, January 28, 2014
4:00 pm at Tupper Auditorium

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

Sadly....B.C. is #1 Again!

Once again, the latest figures from Statistics Canada (2011) show that BC is the worst province in Canada when it comes to major measures of child poverty. There is no doubt that the negative effects of poverty cost our society much more than dealing with the issue directly. There are multiple calls from a variety of groups (Firstcall, BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, CCPA) for the government to develop and adopt a comprehensive poverty reduction plan that addresses the full range of issues (such as welfare rates, social housing, access to child care, food security, etc.) and goes beyond rhetoric with clear targets and timelines. And yet, within Canada, BC has remained at the back of the pack for well over a decade. It is also important to note that economic growth in and of itself does not make a society more equal. A well-defined program to reduce poverty and fairly re-distribute resources to those in need does more to provide equity for the disadvantaged in society.

"Like slavery and apartheid, poverty is not natural. It is man-made and it can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings. Overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice.

Nelson Mandela, 2005

This is an issue that is particularly compelling for all teachers in our district. Despite consistent underfunding, the education system has progressively borne more and more of the burden in supporting students and families struggling with poverty in Vancouver.

Just this past March, the VSB approached another review cycle of the Inner City School Program that has been a 25 year long District initiated project. Faced with the recognition that poverty and its impacts on students is no longer restricted to the "Inner City", the Board has engaged with stakeholder groups in a broad re-visioning of the Inner City Schools Project with a view

to exploring the increased incidence and complexity of poverty experienced within our schools.

Education is one of the foundational tools in our democracy, but it must go hand-in-hand with measures that will ensure that students come to school clothed, healthy, safe, and ready to learn.

Reminder

Teachers are not participating in School Planning Councils

Legislation establishing school planning councils came into effect July 1, 2002 and was amended in 2003 to include secondary schools. At the March 2006 Annual General Meeting of the BC Teachers' Federation delegates voted to withdraw from participating in School Planning Councils. SPCs are part of the ministry of education's bureaucratic accountability agenda requiring relentless data collection and testing of students in an effort to measure student achievement. Instead, teachers are encouraged to increase our active involvement at the school level with parents through parent advisory councils (PACs). Teachers and parents have always worked together to plan school improvements that provide optimal learning conditions so all students can achieve their full potential. Teachers are committed to working with parents, PACs and DPACs so students may benefit from an enriching and challenging learning environment.



John Silver (JO/VT), Rory Brown (VSTA), Terry Stanway (VT), Stephanie Koropatnick (DLS) at Executive Planning Session 2013

Did you know?

In the 1870's workers could be charged for conspiracy and illegally "combining" their labour. The issue of union security and our basic rights to freedom of association, democratic representation in the workplace and free collective bargaining was a hard-fought multi-stage battle waged by generations of working men and women. It came to a head in the period immediately following the Second World War. An arbitration decision by Justice Ivan Rand in 1946, following a strike at the Ford motor plant in Windsor, Ontario, handed down a decision that put forward the basic principle that all who benefited from a union must pay dues. This ruling was quickly bargained into many collective agreements in a variety of industries across the country. Following a wave of labour militancy and strikes in the mid-1960's, a federal Task Force on Labour Relations recommended that the Rand Formula become law. Some provinces delayed this implementation and it took until 1984 for it to be extended to the federal jurisdiction.



"I consider it entirely equitable then that all employees should be required to shoulder their portion of the burden of expense for administering the law of their employment, the union contract; that they must take the burden along with the benefit." Justice Rand, January 29, 1946

CURRICULUM

Draft Curriculum and Member Feedback

Curriculum Update

As you are aware, the Ministry of Education has released the draft curriculum in four “learning areas.” At the moment the drafts extend up to grade 9 in the curricular areas of Science, Social Studies, Math, and English Language Arts. They can be accessed at <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/>. It is expected that Visual Arts and PE curricula will be posted shortly, and French curriculum drafts should be available early in the new year.

While the ministry states there is no definite date for implementation, we encourage teachers to respond to the Ministry of Education’s web-based questionnaire at https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/review_process.pdf.

The BCTF has developed several resources to support teachers in discussing the new curriculum drafts and their implementation:

1. A curriculum discussion forum to enable teachers to share and discuss information and perspectives in a collegial and professional manner. It is necessary to log

into the member portal to participate in the forum. bctf.ca/myBCTF/DiscussionBoard.aspx?tid=31067&g=topics&f=86529.

2. The BCTF curriculum webpage is located at bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=5646.
3. The BCTF Wiki to support teachers by providing resources and information about curriculum development. Early curriculum drafts are also shared on the Wiki. bctfcurriculumreps.pbworks.com/w/page/64685086/FrontPage

As you know, these curricular changes will have significant impacts province wide. Keeping ourselves well informed and working together means we can support one another as we explore the new curriculum drafts and related issues.

As members review the draft curriculum consideration needs to be given to questions to guide member feedback, especially with a critical eye to considering how the proposed changes could impact teachers’ professional autonomy and working conditions.

Some thoughts from a variety of curricular areas:

There are positive aspects to the proposed curriculum at the grade 8 and 9 level. It is clear that there remains a proposed scope and sequence for junior mathematics and a reduction of content expectations for junior sciences is welcome. Language Arts is essentially about the core skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. As teachers already use a variety of materials, assignments and strategies to provide feedback to students, it is not clear what is actually changing. Until teachers can see what is proposed for the senior grades it will be difficult to respond meaningfully to the grade 8 and 9 proposals.

Resources are a major concern no matter what the content area. Re-organized content will not remove the need for resources, but will lead to a need for different resources than are currently in place in most secondary schools. No matter how much increased flexibility in selecting materials is introduced there will remain a need for materials. For example, increased Aboriginal content in English is welcome, but the resources need to be there to make this a reality. Currently, the technological infrastructure is not in place in Vancouver to free our teachers from the day to day, month to month reality of requiring resources to teach our classes of up to 210 students in a typical secondary teaching load.

The proposed focus on Assessment for Learning is an area Vancouver teachers have been exploring for several years. It is very much a process oriented investigation requiring time for teachers to learn, collaborate, and reflect, as well as time to introduce changes in classroom practice. Assessment forms a part of every teacher’s professional practice, therefore it must be fostered in a supportive environment with rich professional development opportunities rather than through a top-down model of implementation. It is crucial to recognize the central role of teacher autonomy throughout this process.



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improving our practices.” At this point, the employer is exploring data collection options/systems that would encompass all 14 employee groups. Given the K-12 funding crisis of the past decade and the resultant deterioration of teachers’ working and students’ learning conditions, it is extremely troubling and disheartening to know that members’ use of sick days is perceived as a potential source of cost savings.

Doom and gloom aside, I leave you this month with our best wishes for a happy and healthy winter break. The New Year will inevitably bring further (and perhaps unanticipated) challenges: provincial bargaining, district finances, and teacher wellness and attendance to name just a few. Of course, we also await Madam Justice Griffin’s ruling on the government’s failure to redress the collective agreement rights teachers lost in 2002 and the constitutionality of Bill 22. In the meantime, enjoy your well-deserved break and relish your time with friends and family. Happy Holidays!

Take care,

Debbie



Executive Committee Vacancies

The following positions are now open on the VSTA Executive for the 2013-14 school year:

- **Social & Eco-Justice Committee Chair**
- **Member-at-Large (2 positions)**

Please consider these positions and forward your name to the VSTA office if interested. An election will be held at the VSTA Council meeting on January 30th, 2014 to fill these positions. For more information, please call the VSTA office at 604.873.5570.



April 10-11, 2014

Teacher Mentorship BC presents...

Teacher Mentorship: A Provincial Conversation

Bringing together BC educators to support beginning teachers

April 10 4-8:30pm Registration & Dinner—Provincial Panel
April 11 8-3pm Plenary Workshop with Lois Zachary



Feature Presenter: Lois J. Zachary

Lois J. Zachary is internationally recognized for her work on mentoring and has been cited as “one of the top 100 minds in leadership” today. Her best-selling books include *The Mentor’s Guide* (2nd Ed. 2012) as well as *Creating a Mentor Culture* (2005).

Upcoming Pension Seminars

YOUR PENSION, YOUR FUTURE. This free seminar is aimed towards new- and mid-career plan members. Join us as we explain your pension benefits and help you understand how decisions you make today can impact your future pension income, no matter how far into the future it may be.

Seminar Dates and Locations

JAN 29	Vancouver	6-7:30 PM
MAR 25	Richmond	6-7:30 PM

THINKING ABOUT RETIRING. If you are within 5 years of retirement, then this free seminar is for you. Thinking about retiring and starting your pension may raise many questions for you. We can help you with this period of change.

Spring Seminar Dates and Locations

JAN 14	Langley	MAR 4	Vancouver
JAN 16	Burnaby	MAR 26	Langley
JAN 21	Delta	APR 10	Langley
JAN 23	Surrey	APR 15	Burnaby
FEB 1	Vancouver**	APR 23	Delta
FEB 15	N. Vancouver**	MAY 6	Vancouver
FEB 18	Richmond	MAY 8	Surrey
FEB 27	Coquitlam		

Sessions are 6-8 PM unless otherwise indicated

** 9-11 AM; 12:30-2:30 PM

Pre-registration is required.

Dates and location are subject to change. To view the most current schedule and register online, visit tpp.pensionsbc.ca.



**BCTF Conference for New Teachers,
Student Teachers, and New TTCs**

Nurturing the Love of Teaching

February 28–March 1, 2014

Radisson Hotel, 8181 Cambie Road, Richmond

Registration opens January 2014

**Wishing you a happy and
restful holiday!**

Debbie, Sylvia, Rory,
Kim & Mo

