

President's Message

"Tis the set of the sail that decides the goal, not the storm of life."

Ella Wheeler Wilcox



WHILE THE RAINY DAYS OF WINTER may well be over, storm clouds continue to gather over the Vancouver School Board and the future of public education in this province. Yet again, our Board is faced with the onerous task of making far too many budgetary *choices* (a euphemism for *cuts*) as a direct result of the provincial government's

chronic underfunding and downloading of costs. Balancing the 2014/15 budget requires the Board to find \$12.34 million, to pare even deeper into the bone. Even a cursory read of the preliminary budget proposals exposes the desperate times in which we find ourselves. Examples of the "desperation" include the proposed elimination of the elementary band/strings program, a variety of consultants, area counsellors, a psychologist, and all 3 peer-to-peer mentors. Furthermore, it is recommended to close school for 3 additional days in November and to charge employees a monthly fee to park on school property. Why is the integrity and quality of public education being compromised by Premier Clark? Why is the government underfunding BC's education system by \$1000.00 less per student than the national average (only PEI is worse)? How can the government justify the fact that we have the worst student-educator ratio in the country? Members are encouraged to take a stand against the ongoing erosion by finding their voice and exercising their power of free speech. Consider writing a letter to your local newspaper or sending an email to the Premier, Minister Fassbender, and/or your neighbourhood MLA. Let's work collectively to pressure the BC Liberals to raise the level of funding for public education with the hope that many of the more egregious budget proposals will be eliminated by the time the final budget is approved on April 30. Please refer to our website to see the full text of the VSTA's written response to the preliminary budget proposals.

On a positive note, the VTF has been informed that as perplexing as it may seem, teacher lay-offs will not occur this spring. According to Human Resources, this decision was made in recognition of the fact that the layoff process does not target only one level of the system. Basically, while district layoffs would impact both elementary and secondary, enrollment is increasing in elementary while simultaneously decreasing in secondary. A layoff would result in significant disruption for elementary teachers who would inevitably be rehired to accommodate the enrollment increase. The down

side for the VSTA is that several of our schools may simply have too many teachers which will result in *Transfer Because of Surplus Staffing*. As per Article E.26 of the Collective Agreement, surplus staffing is based on District seniority and any employee being transferred must be informed no later than June 01. Moreover, employees who are transferred pursuant to Article E.26 are not subject to a further transfer because of surplus staffing for three school years. Continuing contract teachers who find themselves without a school/site-based position will become permanent teachers on call and will continue to receive their full salary and benefits. Please be assured that we are working diligently to monitor the unfolding situation and will forward more detailed information at the first opportunity.

Unfortunately (but not surprisingly), there has been virtually no progress at the provincial bargaining table. Despite our strong YES vote (89%), BCPSEA is holding fast to the idea of a ten year term and nothing reasonable has been tabled on our more significant items of concern such as salary and class size/composition. The full list of BCPSEA's proposals is available on the *BCTF Members' Portal*. Most importantly, at 2:00 pm on April 17th, **the BCTF served 72 hour strike notice** (upon receipt of the Labour Relations Board's essential service designation), thereby paving the way for *stage one* of our job action to commence on Wednesday, April 23. How long we will engage in this or any subsequent stage of job action is dependent upon

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VSTA Annual General Meeting

Tuesday, May 13, 2014

4pm at Tupper Auditorium

Members will receive financial reports ended July 31, 2013 and July 31, 2012, vote to approve the Association's operating budget for 2014-15, and elect the VSTA Executive Committee for 2014-15.

Door prizes will be presented at the end of the meeting, followed by a social hour in the staffroom. We look forward to seeing you at the meeting!

Please Note:

The VSTA audited financial statements are available at vsta.ca along with the full AGM package including the proposed budget for 2014-15, list of candidates running for election and their candidate statements.

PRESIDENT, from front page

progress at the bargaining table. The VSTA office will continue to update members as the situation unfolds. Please visit both the VSTA and BCTF websites on a regular basis.

I would also like to encourage all members to attend our Annual General Meeting on May 13th. This is an excellent opportunity for individuals to get informed and to participate in the election of next year's Executive Committee. A complete list of candidates (and their statements) will be posted on our website and forwarded to schools. Of course, we will also approve the VSTA budget and conclude with a "social" afterwards. Folks in attendance will have a chance at winning one of the many door prizes being offered. Sylvia, Rory and I hope to see many of you then!

Take care,

Debbie

Early Retirement Incentive Plan (ERIP)

All teachers planning to retire this year must notify the board in writing by 2014 May 31. Those teachers who are committed to retiring early and qualify for the Early Retirement Incentive Plan must also submit a letter of intention to retire to Human Resources by May 31. ERIP information is posted in all schools. Contact the VSTA if you have any further questions.

To be eligible, an employee must:

- be on a continuing appointment
- be retiring with a pension
- have a minimum of ten (10) FTE years' service with the Vancouver Board of Education
- be at the maximum of their scale
- have been in active service for the previous four (4) years (from September 2009), during which there may be a maximum of one year leave not including leaves under Article G.21.30., and/or leaves granted due to disability (within the meaning of The British Columbia Human Rights Code)
- be a minimum age of 55, and a maximum age of 64 as of June 30th in the year of retirement
- submit his/her request to retire, in writing, on or before 2014 May 31 for a retirement date of 2014 June 30.



Post and Fill

This year we will be returning to the Post and Fill process as outlined in Article E.21 of the Collective Agreement. Teachers will apply for postings as category A, B, C, D, E, or F as appropriate. All postings will occur in one round in June.

Some key dates to note:

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|----------|--|
| MAY 2 | Staffing entitlements provided to Principals |
| JUNE 1 | Last date for Board to inform teachers they are surplus to the needs of their school |
| JUNE 3-9 | STP Posting Period: all continuing and temporary positions |
| JUNE 16 | Date by which HR may begin placement of all unassigned continuing contract teachers |

DAY OF MOURNING

APRIL 28, 2014

for Workers Killed and Injured on the Job

Stop the Killing. Enforce the Law.

Please join the BC Federation of Labour and the New Westminster and Vancouver District Labour Councils for a ceremony honouring workers killed or injured on the job.

New Westminster Quay
960 Quayside Drive (on the boardwalk)
11:45 a.m.—Metro Vancouver Firefighters' Band
12:00 noon—Ceremony



Factor 90 or 65 yrs of age? Don't Wait

You can save the long-term fee (approx. 1.2%) from the date you reach age 64 or Factor '88'.

Members are no longer entitled to long-term benefits under the Salary Indemnity Plan once they hit Factor 90 (age plus contributory service) or age 65. As the BCTF does not have access to your personal pension information, it is up to you to apply to withdraw from LTD.

How and when to apply

A member who has attained age 64, or has reached factor '88' or is in receipt of a retirement pension under a registered pension plan, may **voluntarily** withdraw from the long-term portion of the Salary Indemnity Plan. In making application for withdrawal, you should ensure that in the event of serious illness or accident you have sufficient accumulated sick leave which, when combined with 120 days of benefit from SIP short-term, will protect your salary to the end of the month in which you reach factor "90" or the end of the month you attain age 65, whichever comes first.

Applications are available online at: bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SalaryBenefits/SIP/LT-withdrawalForm.pdf or call the BCTF Income Security Division at 604-871-1921.

To Premier Clark and Education Minister Fassbender:

I am writing to express my extreme disappointment and frustration with your government's continued opposition to properly funding public education. Your constant refrain of "more funding than ever" is so transparently false that even people who rarely involve themselves in the education debate understand the real truth: Your government has not only made egregious cuts to education but you have been squandering tax payers' money on a losing battle in court with teachers. Why don't you let us know how much of our money you are spending on that front? It is a strategy that garners no respect either financially, legally or morally.

Local governments, whole communities, parents, teachers and students are speaking out and our voices are being heard everywhere except the premier's office. Perhaps you should reconsider your priorities in light of the job you were elected to do. Stop the harmful rhetoric and start rebuilding the relationships that really matter – yours with all British Columbians.

I include the words of our own trustees for you to consider:

Since 2002-03, \$47 million in education services have been cut in the Vancouver school district because provincial government funding increases have not kept pace with rising costs. Most of these costs are provincially determined and downloaded to district operating costs, for example: provincially negotiated salary increases; pension plan contributions; MSP premiums; carbon emission reporting; and carbon-offset purchase requirements.

When these costs are not fully funded, staffing, programs and services must be reduced, further eroding a vibrant education system that offers innovative and amazing opportunities for our students.

Public education is a fundamental human right and a strong public school system is critical to preserving the ideals of a democratic society. We have a collective responsibility, therefore, to uphold the mandate of public education and ensure it is strong and viable. It is through advocacy and demonstrated success that we can preserve and improve our public education system and ensure all individuals have access to its resources and opportunities.

As trustees, we are calling on government to protect public education so that our children can be equipped with the 21st Century knowledge and skills necessary to ensure the future health, prosperity and economic success of this province.

In delivering the government's Throne Speech in February 2009, Lt. Governor Steven Point said: "Education is the best economic development and health promotion program ever invented. In tight economic times, it is only smart to maintain and expand educational investments."

We urge the provincial government to live up to its campaign commitment to fund the real costs of public education.

It is time for this government to heed the rising voices of the voters they serve.

Trish Mugford teaches at Magee Secondary



MANDATORY GROUP LIFE INSURANCE: a Reminder of Options to change Coverage

Under Article B.29:4 of the Collective Agreement, teachers are enrolled in life insurance upon hiring as a mandatory portion of the benefits package. At the time of initial hiring, they may choose the minimum coverage amount of \$5000 or opt for the higher amount on a sliding scale:

Under age 45 – 300% of salary
45 but under age 55 – 250% of salary
55 but over age 60 – 200% of salary
60 or over – 150% of salary

Teachers may change their coverage from the minimum to the higher amount or back to the minimum from the higher amount at any time during their employment with the board.

Costs for either the minimum or higher sliding scale coverage are born 50% by the employee and 50% by the employer. Typically, \$5000 life coverage has cost \$0.18 per pay period while multiple of

salary coverage may cost \$6-12 per pay period depending on age and salary. Currently, teachers with the minimum \$5000 coverage are in a premium/fee holiday due to overpayment of premiums. This fee holiday will end in June 2014. When the insurer receives a request to increase to the higher coverage amount, the employee is required to complete an "evidence of insurability" form which is sent to the insurer directly. The insurer adjudicates the request based on medical information provided on the form by the employee. The employer receives the approval or decline letter from Great West Life and communicates it to the employee. Any approved changes are immediately instituted by the employer. To enquire as to what coverage is currently in effect or to initiate a change in coverage, please contact Franco Sediego at fsediego@vsb.bc.ca.

Vancouver & District Labour Council & BC Federation of Labour

INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' DAY

MAYDAY

THURSDAY, MAY 1 - 2014

March

with Carnival Band
Gather - 5:00 pm
Commercial Dr. & 14th
(Clark Park Entrance)

Rally

and speakers
Rally - 6:15 pm
Grandview Park
(Commercial Dr. & Charles St.)

Speakers & Music

Irene Lanzinger, BC Federation of Labour
Teamsters Local 213 Member, locked-out at Ikea Richmond
Lillian Howard, Idle No More
The Gram Partisans

MC

Joey Hartman, VDLC

Always happy to hear from you!



Debbie, Sylvia,
Rory, Kim & Mo

BCTF Annual General Meeting

The BCTF AGM has come and gone again in a tightly scheduled blur of meeting sessions, guest speakers and collegial events. The VSTA had a committed and diverse delegation this year with a mix of returning and first time attendees. As usual, a host of important issues were discussed and decisions made. Despite an excellent campaign, our own Christine Stewart was not successful in her bid for the position of 2nd Vice-President. Here are a few highlights. Two motions were passed that will affect fees; one was to raise the membership fee to 1.79% of actual salary. This motion was passed in recognition of the enormous strain that 12 years of struggle against the current government has placed on the BCTF's bottom line and despite an Executive Committee recommendation to the contrary. Another was to raise the Salary Indemnity Plan fee to 1.67% of actual salary. This decision was made in accordance with actuarial advice and to ensure that services to members remain viable. In both cases the meeting delegates approved increases despite recommendations from the Executive for reductions in fees. A motion was passed to address concerns regarding government's plans to implement the new student information system and link it to the BC Services Card. The BCTF continued along the path to more socially responsible investing and it was interesting to note that BC's TPP is highly rated, in part because of our successful socially responsible investment strategy. We also had the opportunity to hear directly from our colleagues in the broader Americas. On the Sunday morning Maria de la Luz Arriaga Lemus of the Mexican section of the Tri-National Coalition in Defense of Public Education spoke of the parallels in the struggles we face to counter the neo-liberal agenda against public education. This was followed by an inspirational speech of perseverance in the face of extreme risk by Luis Alberto Grubert Ibarra, President of the Colombian Federation of Educators.

The BCTF AGM election results were as follows: Jim Iker, Glen Hansman and Teri Mooring were returned as Table Officers. Carole Gordon, Karen Langenmaier, Norm Sabourin and James Sanyshyn were elected as Members at Large joining Paul Steer, Teresa Grandinetti, David Komljenovic and Gail Chaddock-Costello who are continuing on the Executive.



Public education: the foundation of a successful society

I felt very proud to be a teacher as I listened intently to over 700 delegates from around the province discuss and debate the current issues affecting all of us in a respectful, democratic environment and with so much humour and humility. The AGM was a reflection of what is good in society: teachers. Teachers are tremendous in their resolve to continue the trek for a fair settlement with our current government. The AGM was a strong illustration of democracy, fairness and justice on many levels. I was impressed with the personal commitment, integrity and professionalism of my colleagues, the delegates, the voting and the people themselves.

It was also emotional. The stories I heard from educators in Mexico, Colum-

bia and in BC were powerful accounts of the need for fairness, equity and justice. The stories were incredibly moving and brought me to tears. My heart ached for many of our colleagues around the globe and in BC where we need more support for our students. I was moved by educators who spoke out about work safety, mental health and the needs of our students and society. It is disappointing to hear how students in BC public schools are being short changed. I heard someone say, "your working conditions are their learning conditions" and this really resonated with me.

As disturbing as conditions are, teachers are resilient people and I have a sense that we will come out of this current political situation victorious. The need for all teachers to stand together

during this next round of bargaining is critical. All was not sad though and it felt great to see that BC teachers are strong and committed to creating and maintaining a first class quality public education system that serves the needs of all children in society.

At the AGM I was impressed with the dedication, respectful communication, commitment and integrity our BCTF has demonstrated while trying to negotiate in good faith with our current government. The most powerful comment was what retired BCTF award recipient, educator Sheila Pither, stated as she gracefully accepted the award, "You don't get what you deserve, you get what you bargain for."

*Roxanne Bean teaches
at Gladstone Secondary*