



President's Message



CHANGE, an inevitable constant in our daily lives, best characterizes many of the developments that have taken place this fall. As we look forward to the transition from fall to winter, we also await a variety of significant changes at the local and provincial levels.

Without doubt, the outcome of the November 15 municipal election will potentially *change* the district's direction on all matters related to education. Since 2008, the School Board has been dominated by Vision Vancouver trustees and chaired by Patti Bacchus, a tenacious advocate for increased funding for public education and improvements to working/learning conditions for teachers and students. When all the votes were tabulated, however, three incumbent Vision trustees—Ken Clement, Cherie Payne, and Rob Wynen—were not re-elected, thereby being replaced by one Green trustee and four NPA members. That Ken (the city's first Aboriginal elected official), Cherie and Rob were not reinstated is, in my opinion, a great loss, particularly as they worked tirelessly to champion the importance of public education for all students. At this point, we look forward to working with the incoming trustees, both incumbents and newcomers, to ensure that the VSB remains a flagship district. The inaugural meeting of the new Board will take place on December 8th at which time the trustees will elect the Chairperson. The hope, now, is that the newly elected Board will commit to a progressive agenda for the next four years, one that looks to the government and not private and/or corporate donors and sponsors to adequately fund public education.

Another noteworthy *change* involves the resignation of Dr. Steve Cardwell, the VSB's Superintendent of Schools. After five years with the district, Dr. Cardwell announced that he will leave the district (on December 31) to take a position at UBC in the Faculty of Education. However, due to the time constraints and complexities of the recruitment process, Dr. Cardwell has agreed to delay his departure (at the Board's request) by approximately two months in order to provide the district with stability until a suitable replacement is secured. Having Steve at the helm while the novice trustees orientate themselves to the culture of the district and the work of the Board will surely assist with the transition.

Change in leadership has also taken place at the BC

Federation of Labour. After 15 years as the President and official "face" of the union movement, Jim Sinclair has officially stepped down. Working people across the province have been well served by Jim, a tireless devotee of teachers and the entire labour movement. Teachers unquestionably owe Jim a debt of gratitude for his unflappable leadership and support of the BCTF during our recent job action. The good news in all this is that former BCTF and VSTA President Irene Lanzinger made history by being the first woman elected (by a mere 57 votes!) to lead the 500,000 member BC Fed. It is also worth noting that Irene is the first teacher to ever be elected president of a provincial labour federation anywhere in Canada. On behalf of the VSTA delegation and the entire membership, I would like to congratulate Irene on her most notable victory!

Closer to home is a major *change* in district practice related to employee wellness (first reported in the December, 2013, Tackboard). As many of you have ascertained by now, the VSB has formally launched its *Attendance Support Program*, the third module in its comprehensive Employee Wellness Support Initiative. According to the employer's documents, the program "is designed solely to support employees who struggle with non-culpable absences and to promote employee wellness and engagement at work." Furthermore,

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VSTA GENERAL MEETING

Tuesday, January 27, 2015

4pm at Tupper Auditorium

Agenda: ELECTION OF DELEGATES TO BCTF AGM

Call for Delegates to the BCTF AGM

The BCTF Annual General Meeting is scheduled from Saturday, March 14, to Tuesday, March 17, at the Victoria Conference Centre. If you are interested in participating, please attend the VSTA General Meeting at Tupper on Tuesday, January 27. See your staff rep or www.vsta.ca for the delegate nomination form. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor of our general meeting.

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

A personal reflection on Job Action



Two months has passed since our return to the classroom and it has taken nearly all this time to recover from the intensity of the stand we took to defend public education. Although I believe the actions we took were necessary, upon our return to school I couldn't help feeling deeply saddened that our efforts appeared to be in vain. I returned to large classes, a frenetic pace to catch up before we even started, I missed the wonderful excitement of the 'fresh start' of fall not to mention the elation of wrapping up the school year in June. The reality that I was swallowing was that in this age of concession bargaining it is unfortunate at best and criminal at worst that teachers have to accept the removal of concessions as a notable win. In fact, although I didn't feel it until now, we really did win.

- Numerous concessions came off the table very late in this round of bargaining:
- The attack on our sick leave (capping days and clawing back accumulated days) was let go of by BCPSEA despite their pursuit of this since 1995.
- Attempts to change our hours of work was bargained off.
- Changes to Evaluations (including 1x and you are out) was bargained off.
- E80 came off late in the final night (E81 came off in June).
- Calendar concessions were only removed 45 minutes before signing a deal.

As the strike wore on, the looming threat of legislation was

worse than what we achieved through bargaining. Further to this, arbitration, although hopeful, was equally risky. What we stood to gain would likely have been limited by government intervention in the arbitration process (as they have done before) enabling an arbitrator to rule only on select issues that would stand to benefit them and omit our concerns.

However, it was a key moment in our campaign when we took a 99.4% YES vote for binding arbitration. This was effective and applied pressure at a crucial point. Government's response made them look unreasonable as they said no to bargaining, no to mediation and no to arbitration. Pressure was building to secure a deal as opinion polls demonstrated overwhelming support for teachers.

In the end, the bargaining team was left knowing what teachers deserve was not there, but wondering what would be there if we waited? It was an exceptionally difficult moment for the bargaining team, the entire momentum could have been lost had we not signed at that moment with the aid of Vince Ready.

The resultant maintenance of our current conditions was a win. Concessions would have been our reality had teachers not pushed so hard. A further win was public support and their general understanding of our issues and those that challenge public education. This was demonstrated through public polling, traditional media and most powerfully through social media. Teachers took over the narrative on social media to tell our stories and inform the public of our concerns.

Finally, we won and we live to fight another day. This work is not done and we must prepare to push again.

Treena Goolieff teaches at Hamber Secondary

VSTA SIF fees are now Overdue

Members who have not paid their 2014-15 VSTA-SIF fees yet are advised to do so **promptly** as the payment of fees is required to maintain membership in the Fund and to qualify for benefits. Members paying the fee after receiving a reminder notice in January 2015 will be required to pay an additional **\$20 late fee** which was approved at the 2014 VSTA Annual General Meeting and is listed on the SIF brochure.

If you are unsure about your payment of the current fee please contact Kim at the VSTA office, kim@vsta.ca or call 604-873-5570. Fees are payable to VSTA-SIF by cheque or bank draft. (Continuing Member fee: \$40, Associate Member fee: \$45)

Note: This is the **optional** top up plan offered by the VSTA, and not be confused with the BCTF's Salary Indemnity Plan.

Municipal Election

Vancouver teachers will be facing a newly configured Board of School Trustees following the November municipal election. Three Vision Trustees are returning, Patti Bacchus, Mike Lombardi and Allan Wong, along with a new member to their team, Joy Alexander. The VSTA would like to extend their thanks to outgoing Trustees Ken Clement, Cheri Payne and Rob Wynen for all their hard work supporting the needs of students and teachers over the last three years. The VSTA welcomes all members of the incoming School Board.



BC Federation of Labour Convention



Irene Lanzinger and Jim Sinclair

The BC Federation of Labour has just wrapped up a week long convention at Canada Place that a record number of delegates attended, reaching a peak of over 2200 on Thursday, November 27th. Delegates were engaged throughout the week hearing reports on Education, Health and Safety, Women's Rights, and Political Action and debating resolutions covering everything from stable education funding, responsible pension investment and temporary foreign worker policy to resisting CETA. One hugely significant resolution regarding ethical pension investments was passed, due in no small part to the ground work done by BCTF representatives to the BCFED and BCTF delegates attending the convention. The Federation will now encourage affiliates with pension investments in bcIMC to advocate collectively for socially environmentally responsible changes to its investment practices and call on affiliates to develop consultation

processes on social and environmental investment issues.

However, the focal point was the election of a new President and Secretary Treasurer to the FED. Following a vigorous campaign on the issues of union renewal, organizing and social justice and in a closely contested race, Irene Lanzinger was elected President. Many of you will recall that Irene served as VSTA President from 1997-2000 and as BCTF President from 2007 to 2010.



Retired VSTA teachers: Steve Garrod, Susan Gallpen, Marcy Toms, Lee Rachar and Shaun van der Hoop

Letters of Expectation Grievance Resolve

The Vancouver Teachers' Federation and the Vancouver Board of Education resolution on the issue of *letters of expectation* includes the following points:

1. The parties agree that letters of expectation are to identify or clarify expected behaviour in the performance of job duties and are not for the purpose of discipline. **They are not part of an employee's disciplinary record.**
2. Before a meeting which may result in a letter of expectation, Principals/Vice Principals will advise employees that they may choose to have union representation at that meeting.
3. Principals/Vice-Principals will copy the union representative who attends the meeting on the letter of expectation issued to the employer.
4. Letters of expectation will be removed from an employee's school file, on request of the employee, after a period of 3 years.

In relation to the second point, the VSTA is strongly advising teachers to *always take a staff rep* along when meeting with an administrator regarding a "concern." Additionally, the VSTA is asking staff reps to always forward their copy of the letter of expectation to the VTF office.

If three years have passed since a letter of expectation was issued to you by an administrator, the VTF is recommending that you ask your principal to remove it from your school file immediately, as per the grievance resolve.

If three years have yet to pass since a letter of expectation was issued to you by your administrator, remember to request the removal of the letter of expectation from your school file when three years have passed.

Letters of Discipline and Personnel Files (Article E.31)

Unlike a letter of expectation, a letter of discipline/reprimand is part of an employee's disciplinary record and is written in response to behaviour which is deemed to be of a culpable nature. A letter of discipline clearly states the specific nature of the culpable behaviour, performance, or incident and also includes consequences for any future failure to meet the standard. The letter of discipline is, in essence, the first step in progressive discipline for the member in question.

All VSB employees have a District personnel file maintained at the District office which contains all documents and material relevant to employment. When an employee receives a letter of discipline, a copy is simultaneously placed in the District personnel file. Furthermore, "the employee shall receive a copy of any material of a negative or adverse nature that is placed in the District personnel file" (Article E.31.5). ***Members are reminded that after five (5) years an employee may request in writing that the letter of reprimand and related materials be removed from the District personnel file, provided no further disciplinary action has occurred during that time.*** Please contact the office if you have any further questions or if you require assistance in having a letter of discipline/reprimand removed from your personnel file.

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"non-culpable absences occur when an employee, through no fault of their own, is unable to attend work and is therefore having difficulty fulfilling his or her employment responsibilities." (Absences caused by disabilities, injury, or illness are examples of non-culpable absenteeism). Needless to say, the VSTA is adamantly opposed to this so-called "support" program and has been, and will continue to be, an outspoken critic of this district-wide initiative. Contrary to the employer's claim that this program is intended to "support" struggling employees, the VSTA contends that the primary intent is to reduce absenteeism and sick leave use with the goal of "gaining cost efficiencies" and "management capacities." The Union further asserts that the program is based on deficit-model thinking. It does not address the systemic factors in schools and society that impact employees' physical and mental well-being: class size/composition, lack of resources, child poverty, and etcetera. **All VSTA members are strongly advised** to not attend any one-on-one meetings (related to attendance and wellness) and/or to not engage in any type of *informal or formal support session* with a supervisor/administrator **without a Union Staff Rep**. It is critical that VSTA members engage the support of their school/site-based Staff Rep to ensure that appropriate boundaries are respected and adhered to by their administrator. Principals are not health care professionals, nor are they experts in the field of employee wellness and work place accommodations.

Further *change* will also soon be upon us as we transition from the crispness of fall to a west coast winter and from first to second reporting period. While classes started weeks later this year (due to job action), it has been a challenging first term nonetheless as teachers diligently worked to meet the learning needs of their students within a truncated timeframe. Pace yourself during these last few weeks before the winter break and try to maintain some semblance of a healthy work-life balance. On behalf of all of us in the VSTA office, enjoy your well-deserved respite and savour your time with friends and family. Happy Holidays!

Debbie



- Online resource of teaching materials, lessons, and research relevant to K-12 BC curriculum.
- Allows users to download, upload, and share resources.
- Search by subject, grade, resource type, title, description, language, and more.

Visit teachbc.bctf.ca

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 20	Surrey	Comfort Inn & Suites	6-7:30 PM
FEB 10	Richmond	Executive Airport	5-6:30 PM
MAR 26	Burnaby	Holiday Inn Metrotown	6-7:30 PM
APR 22	Vancouver	Holiday Inn Vcr Ctr	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.

Seminar Dates and Locations

JAN 13	Burnaby	MAR 24	Coquitlam
JAN 15	Coquitlam	MAR 26	Vancouver
JAN 20	Delta	APR 1	Delta
JAN 22	Langley	APR 7	Langley
JAN 31	Vancouver**	APR 23	Burnaby
FEB 26	Richmond	MAY 6	Vancouver
FEB 28	N. Vancouver**	MAY 7	Langley
MAR 5	Surrey		

Sessions are 6-8 PM

** 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.



VSTA Executive

FRONT: Petr Pospisil, Trish Mugford, Rory Brown, Debbie Pawluk, Sylvia Metzner, Terry Stanway.

BACK: Phil Lee, Nancy Palejko, Leanne Hagglund, Phoebe MacMillan, Celeste Pante, Treena Gooieff, Tobey Steeves, Katharine Shipley, John Silver.

CAMERA SHY: Michael-Don Borason, Brett Gabelman, Peter McLennan.

