

President's Message



Trish Mugford, Phil Lee & Debbie Pawluk
BCTF Winter Rep Assembly, January 2015

AS MIGHT HAVE BEEN PREDICTED based on the municipal election results, there has been a noticeable change in both the overall tone and the working dynamics of the Vancouver

School Board. Having lost their majority on the Board, Vision Vancouver must now rely on (voting) support from the other trustees, both NPA and Green. And while it is true that all of the trustees have effectively worked together on a variety of important issues such as adult education program funding, the Kingsgate Mall site, and the provincial budget, situations have arisen where the trustees have not seen eye-to eye, starting with the trustees' choice of the VSB's Chairperson. Despite having received the lion's share of electoral votes, Patti Bacchus was not supported by Janet Fraser: the sole Green trustee. The result, of course, is that Chris Richardson was elected as the new Chairperson despite the fact that he gained fewer votes than any other trustee! That Trustee Fraser saw fit to not support Patti Bacchus, a determined advocate and leading provincial voice for increased funding for public education, absolutely defies logic: a sentiment that was loudly messaged by outraged voters and teachers alike. Furthermore, Janet Fraser also buttressed the NPA's amendment to Trustee Lombardi's motion on extending the moratorium on school closures until December, 2018, thereby leaving open the possibility of school closures in Vancouver. Needless to say, the NPA/Green alliance signifies a disturbing trend, particularly since the district will likely experience unprecedented financial challenges during the upcoming budget setting process.

Yet again, school districts across BC are anticipating significant challenges in setting their budgets for 2015-16 (even though this year's budget will not be released until February 17). A Freedom of Information request (by the B.C. Association of School Business Officials) reveals that school districts experienced approximately \$200 million in cost pressures last spring largely due to the downloading of costs by the Province: MSP rates, inflation, Hydro rates, WorkSafe BC rates, wages, transition from HST to GST/PST and so forth. And while the Vancouver projected funding shortfall for 2015/16 has been revised from a staggering \$27.64 million, it remains at a whopping \$18.35 million. Where these "savings" will be found is, of course, the BIG question. Will the itinerant band and strings program be eliminated? Will teachers be asked to pay

even more for on-site parking next year? Will even more non-enrolling positions be eliminated? Will District supports for students be even further reduced and/or jettisoned?

On a more optimistic note, members can take encouragement from two recent Supreme Court of Canada rulings, both of which may impact the BCTF's case which is currently before the BC Court of Appeal. In the *Mounted Police Association of Ontario v. Canada*, the court found that the government cannot enact laws or impose labour relations processes that substantially interfere with the possibility of having meaningful collective negotiations on workplace matters. The Court additionally asserted that the process of collective bargaining is not meaningful if it denies employees the power to pursue their goals. The Supreme Court of Canada also released its decision (on January 30) in the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour's case against the provincial government's essential services legislation. The decision clarifies that the right to strike is constitutionally protected: "The right to strike is an essential part of a meaningful collective bargaining process in our system of labour relations. The right to strike is not merely derivative of collective bargaining; it is an indispensable component of that right." Let's hope that these recent court decisions will strengthen our case and result in a favourable outcome for the BCTF.

I would also like to take this opportunity to encourage everyone to *cast your ballot* in the upcoming election for the BC Teachers' Council. Ballots will be mailed (mid-February) to your place of residence and must be received by the Teacher Regulation Branch (TRB) by 4:30 pm on March 20/15. Please note that while three (3) names will appear on the ballot (for Vancouver Coastal Zone), *the only BCTF endorsed teacher/candidate is John Hall*. Please vote as it is imperative that we have strong representatives on the Council who will actively advocate on behalf of teachers!

Before closing, I must also address the issue of the BCTF cheques (stemming from the recently negotiated \$105 million fund). While the majority of our members received their cheque (and 2014 T4 slip) prior to the winter break, some individuals are still waiting for their cheque and/or received the wrong

...see **President**, back page

VTF GENERAL MEETING

Tuesday, February 24, 2015

4pm at Tupper Auditorium

Agenda: SCHOOL CALENDAR 2015/16 & 2016/17

Please make every effort to attend this important meeting.



The picture in Vancouver Schools

Since 2006, the VSTA has collected data on classes that do not meet the class size and composition requirements of the contract language stripped from Collective Agreements in 2002 by the BC Liberal government under then Premier Gordon Campbell and Education Minister Christy Clark. Many VSTA members working in 2015 were not members of the BCTF when this language was torn illegally from agreements in 2002. Limits on the number of students in English (28), Home Economics (28), Tech. Ed. (24), ELL classes (20, 25), reductions in class size for multi-grade classrooms (-2) and a cap on special education designated students per class (3) all contributed to a remarkably different landscape for teachers and students than now. In addition to eliminating the above limits, Bills 27 and 28 eliminated ratios for non-enrolling specialists like teacher-librarians, special education teachers and teacher-counsellors. Since 2001, British Columbia students have lost the service of over 300 teacher-librarians, more than 150 teacher-counsellors and over 800 special education teachers. BC continues to rank far below the national average in both student – educator ratio and per student funding. In fact, between 2006-07 and 2012-13, *BC was the only province in Canada where the percentage change in educators actually dipped below zero to -3.7%*. Here’s a snapshot over time of classes in Vancouver that have 4 or more special education designated students enrolled (a breach of pre-2002 language).

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Totals	795	1014	1088	1118	1041	1000	1072	986	934

Extended Health Benefits Where are we now?



In January, over two days of voting, the Vancouver Teachers Federation (Secondary and Elementary teachers combined) voted to retain our current local Extended Health Benefits Plan. This was a decisive vote that means there will be no changes in our current Extended Health Benefits coverage. However, during our last round of bargaining the BCTF was able to negotiate improvements to the Provincial Standardized Extended Health Benefits Plan which will be phased in through the course of the agreement. As the VTF has the potential to join the plan throughout the course of the agreement, members may wish to familiarize themselves with details of these improvements to the provincial plan which are posted on the BCTF members’ portal under the link entitled *Improvements in Benefits*. At the January 14th VTF General Meeting, a motion was passed to put a process in place for a yearly review of the provincial plan by the two Executive Committees (VSTA and VESTA). This process will include a yearly vote by the membership on whether to retain our current plan or to move to the provincial EHB plan.

The Dental plan, however, has seen improvements. These apply to all teachers around the province, including Vancouver teachers. Details of the phased in changes to the Provincial EHB Plan and the Dental Plan Improvements can be found through the BCTF members’ portal under *Improvements in Benefits*.

THANKS to everyone who put their name forward.

VSTA DELEGATION for the **2015 BCTF AGM** is:

Tanya Baron (CT), Michael-Don Borason (VT), Rory Brown (VSTA), Cindy Dudra (KG), Leanne Hagglund (VASS), Omar Kassis (VASS), Stephanie Koropatnick (DLS), Alita Krickan (CT), Sara McGarry (TTOC), Jolene Mergens (GLAD), Sylvia Metzner (VSTA), Duane Mugford (EH), Lisa Pacheco (GLAD), Petr Pospisil (KITS), Lindsay Reynolds (KLN), Katharine Shipley (VT), John Silver (JO), Terry Stanway (VT), Tobey Steeves (KITS), with Chas Desjarlais (DLS) and Nigel Reedman (VT) elected as alternates, Phil Lee (VT), Trish Mugford (MAGEE) and Debbie Pawluk (VSTA) will be attending as your Local Representatives.

Why am I getting regular emails from the Vancouver Secondary Teachers’ Association?



The VSTA continues to work to improve communication with members. During our most recent round of contract negotiations it was readily apparent that we needed a means to get urgent information out to all members in as timely a manner as possible and could not always rely on the school based processes being in place. To that end, we are using a new product called **“Campaigner”** that allows us to quickly send communication out to all members who have provided us with their non-employer email address. So, when you hear that a “Campaigner” has been sent out or you receive an email message with the header Vancouver Secondary Teachers’ Association, open it. It’s important information for you!

Public Education Funding Is thinking finally beginning to shift?



No matter how government tries to shift the conversation, class size and class composition issues and the funding of public education are inextricably linked. A new set of pressures is gathering to form a backdrop that indicates a shift in the conversation. Consider the following three factors and the impact they may have on public funding of education in BC.

1. Each fall the BCTF, along with a number of other progressive organizations concerned with the financing of our public institutions, calls on government to fully fund its provincial obligations.

A written submission to the BC Legislative Assembly's *Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services* is dutifully submitted and we await the report of that Committee and ultimately the incorporation of its recommendations into the Provincial Budget in the following February.

This year was no different and the Federation submitted a brief that made the following five broad recommendations:

- increase funding for the K–12 public education system to at least the Canadian average
- increase funding to meet the needs of students with special needs
- fully fund all aspects of the collective agreement, as well as inflation and downloaded costs
- provide adequate funding to support ministry-directed program and curriculum changes
- provide capital funding to school districts for additional schools in rapidly growing communities, and to complete seismic upgrades.

What is of note is that for the last two years the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services Report has made recommendations that call for improved funding of Public Education. Our own Vancouver School Board (both current and recent past) has recognized this and has written letters to Christy Clark, the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Finance asking them to heed the recommendations of the report.

2. January 2014 saw a momentous decision by the Supreme Court of BC to uphold our Charter case against Bill 22, which continued to deny our free collective bargaining rights and the full restoration of the collective agreement language that was stripped in 2002. To quote Madam Justice Griffin, "In Bill -22 the government re-enacted legislation identical to that first branch of what was previously declared unconstitutional, namely, the deletion and prohibition of hundreds of collective agreement terms on working conditions." And of particular relevance during our negotiations was the statement that, "When legislation is struck down as unconstitutional, it means it was never valid, from the date of its enactment. This means that the legislatively deleted terms in the teachers' collective agreement have been restored retroactively and can also be the subject of future bargaining."

Despite being in the midst of contract negotiations with the 40,000 teachers governed by this language, the Provincial Government chose to appeal the Supreme Court decision and attempt to extinguish any rights to the restored CS and CC language through its bargaining agent BCPSEA (articles E-80 and E-81). The appeal was heard in the fall over the course of 4 days and a ruling is expected sometime this spring or early summer.

3. Throughout BC teachers' struggles with the provincial government, there has been a parallel situation playing out immediately south of the border. In 2012 the Washington Supreme Court found that constitutional provisions providing students with an appropriate education were not being met and must be restored. Government inaction was followed in 2014 with a contempt of court ruling that gives them one legislative session in 2015 to fix the problem or face extraordinary, court-imposed financial and other penalties. In addition, just this fall, Washington voters passed a state initiative lowering student to teacher ratios to 17-1 for K to 3 and 25-1 for grades 4-12. The estimated cost for this measure is \$2 billion a year to hire 7,400 new teachers and thousands more support staff in schools.

Regardless of whether they respond to the mounting pressure from the public, the mandated ruling of the courts or the dawning realization that just maybe the tide is turning on the neo-liberal agenda, it is clearly time for the provincial government to develop a long term and well-resourced plan to **restore funding to public education**.

PRESIDENT, *cont'd from cover*

amount (based on their 2013/14 FTE). Please be assured that the BCTF is working non-stop to process the cheques and to correct the errors, some of which resulted from inaccurate/incomplete employment data from the district. Not a day has passed without the VSTA being in communication with both the VSB and the BCTF in an effort to rectify the errors/oversights, most of which have been successfully resolved. Members are asked to contact the VSTA office if they have not received their cheque (by Feb. 10) as the BCTF has confirmed that cheques will not be processed for any teacher who has not been identified by February 13 as "waiting." Please accept my thanks for your patience and professionalism as we work our way through this extremely onerous and time-consuming process.

As always, you are encouraged to pace yourselves and to focus on maintaining a healthy work-life balance: a challenging but necessary juggling act. The dark days of winter will soon be behind us, a truism that is signified by the sprouting daffodil and crocus bulbs in my flower garden!



Take care,

Debbie

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 (5:00-6:30 PM)

FEB 10	Richmond	Executive Airport
MAR 26	Burnaby	Holiday Inn Metrotown
APR 22	Vancouver	Holiday Inn—VCR CTR

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 (6:00-8:00 PM)

MAR 5	Surrey	Comfort Inn & Suites
MAR 26	Vancouver	Holiday Inn—VCR CTR
APR 1	Delta	Delta Town & Country Inn
APR 7	Langley	Holiday Inn Express
APR 23	Burnaby	Shadbolt Centre for Arts
MAY 6	Vancouver	BCIT Downtown Campus
MAY 7	Langley	Holiday Inn Express Hotel

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



Always happy to hear from you!

Debbie, Rory, Sylvia, Kim & Mo

FIGHT FOR 15

Count me in



What's it about?

The HEU famously uses the slogan, "Work should lift you out of poverty, not keep you there," as part of their Living Wage Campaign. In BC, it has been two and a half years since minimum wage workers have received a raise and there is no guaranteed system of regular reviews to ensure that it is raised. The current minimum wage is \$10.25 an hour despite our province having one of the highest costs of living in Canada. This is reality for 120,400 workers in BC, including the 47% over the age of 25 and the 63% who are women.

So, what can you do? The BCFED has organized a "Fight for 15" campaign which has been endorsed by the BCTF. The focus is for individuals to count themselves in by signing a petition calling for a \$15 per hour minimum wage in BC. For more information, to sign the petition and to check out future events go to www.fightfor15bc.ca.

Vancouver & District Labour Council
Women's Committee invites you to

CELEBRATING WOMEN: on the march

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2015

Friday, March 6

5:15 pm - Doors

6:15 pm - Dinner

Fraserview Hall

8240 Fraser Street
south of Marine Drive



Tickets \$45/ \$30 low income (tables of 8)
Primarily a women's event but open to all
ASL interpretation provided

For tickets or childcare assistance contact Keziah at the VDLC office
604-254-0763 or office@vdlc.ca