

President's Message

"How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard."

Thomas Meehan



BY NOW YOU WILL LIKELY KNOW that after much reflection I made the career altering decision to no longer

serve as president of the VSTA and further, to retire from teaching. While there are no words to adequately express the profound personal and professional satisfaction that both roles have afforded me, the timing is no doubt "right" for me and my family. I leave the office confident that the membership will be well served by the incoming executive committee and the in-house table officers: Rory Brown, Sylvia Metzner, and Katharine Shipley. All of these individuals are exemplary advocates both for public education and for the rights of teachers; and, they will most assuredly continue to speak out against the Liberal government's chronic underfunding of public education and the ensuing need for improvements to

working/learning conditions. Defending and ensuring full protection of teachers' collective agreement rights while pursuing the broader agenda of improving the public education system for *all* will continue to direct the work of the local office.

While my tenure in the office has been eye-opening (to say the least), enriching, and sometimes challenging, I have experienced no greater pleasure than in getting to know so many of you—my valued VSTA colleagues. (I can honestly say that I have had personal contact with hundreds of teachers.) The extensive knowledge and subsequent appreciation I have gained from learning about the exceptional work that takes place every day in and out of classrooms across this district cannot be overestimated. Sustained exposure to the diversity of our multi-faceted work has reinforced for me, time and time again, my personal belief that teachers are not only life-long learners but also exemplary advocates for BC's children and their basic right to a world-class, fully funded public education system. Experience has shown me that teachers continuously strive to ensure

"success for every student" (in whatever form that may take), this reality being a profound testimonial to our professional integrity and the importance of our collective "calling." Whether in times of extreme stress (such as layoff years or job action) or in the execution of routine day-to-day undertakings, your intelligence, compassion and overall level of professionalism consistently enabled me to serve proudly as the "public face" of the VSTA. For that (and so much more), I wish to thank each and every one of you!

As I face my impending departure from the VSTA and the profession, I can only hope that in some small way I have made a difference. In closing, I wish to remind you of these words from the Dalai Lama: *"It is our collective and individual responsibility...to preserve and tend to the world in which we live."* To that end, I remind you that working alongside our partner groups to oppose the neo—Liberal agenda is no longer an option but a necessity. Collectively, we are strong.

Take care,

Debbie

*Congratulations
to the
Graduating
Class of 2015*

VSTA Retirees' Dinner
June 16, 2015
Royal Vancouver Yacht Club



School Union Team Elections

As per established practice, elections for members of the VSTA School Union Team take place in the spring, or in the case of a school that expects significant staff changes, in the following September. Elections should take place at a Staff Organization Meeting. Uncontested positions should be acclaimed while contested positions must be determined by secret ballot.

The School Union Team consists of:

- 1 Staff Rep for every 25 teachers or fraction thereof on staff
- 1 Rep to the VSTA Professional Development Committee
- 2 Reps to the VSTA Working and Learning Conditions/Bargaining Committee
- 1 Rep to the VSTA Health and Safety Committee
- 1 Rep to the VSTA Social & Eco Justice Committee
- 1 Rep to the VSTA Technology Committee
- Staff Committee Chairperson as per your Staff Committee Constitution
- 1 Rep for PAC Liaison
- 1 Rep for Election/Political Action

Members of the VSTA Executive are also considered to be members of the School Union Team.

Committee Reps will also represent the school on the appropriate VSTA Standing Committee.

VSTA Annual General Meeting Report

The VSTA Annual General Meeting took place on May 12th, 2015 at the Tupper auditorium. Elected to the VSTA Executive Committee for 2015-2016:

President: **Rory Brown**; 1st Vice-President: **Sylvia Metzner**; 2nd Vice-President: **Katharine Shipley** (VT); Treasurer: **Terry Stanway** (VT); Local Representatives: **Rory Brown**, **Phil Lee** (VT), **Trish Mugford** (MAGEE); Alternate LR: **Treena Goolieff** (EH); Members-at-Large: **Brett Gabelman** (TEMP), **Treena Goolieff** (EH), **Leanne Hagglund** (VASS-Pinnacle), **Katie Leung** (DT), **Nancy Palejko** (PW), **John Silver** (JO), **Tobey Steeves** (KITS); *Standing Committee Chairs* - Professional Development: **Celeste Pante** (TEMP); W/LC & Bargaining: vacant; Health & Safety: **Brett Gabelman** (TEMP); Social & Eco-Justice: **Natalia Mayor** (MGEE); Technology: **Phoebe MacMillan** (TEMP); Teacher-on-Call Rep: vacant.

Following the regular business of the meeting, door prizes were awarded and members enjoyed a social hour. We wish to extend our thanks to outgoing members Debbie Pawluk, Michael-Don Borason, Peter McLennan, Petr Pospisil, and the rest of the 2014-15 Executive Committee for their dedication and countless hours of service over the past year.

Special Advisor's Report: Update

The Provincial Government Special Advisor, accounting firm Ernst and Young, reported its findings and recommendations on the VBE budget, Tuesday, June 9. The 223 page Report contains 52 findings and makes 59 recommendations for the Vancouver Board of Education. A joint Committee III/V meeting was held at the VSB Education Centre on Wednesday, June 10, to provide stakeholders with an opportunity for input. Despite the extremely brief time available to review the Report, the VSTA drew attention to its questionable credibility.

The Report contains a series of broad statements that are potentially misleading, contradictory and included pieces of rhetoric on education policy that is most familiar as statements propounded repeatedly by the Education Minister during our last round of collective bargaining. Below are a few highlights (or lowlights depending on your perspective) from the Report.

- EY found that Vancouver has 10,000 empty seats, a problem which could be resolved through the closure of 19 schools with the consequent reduction of 115 teachers.
- EY reported potential cost savings of \$37 million annually, with a further \$150 million in one time savings available. These figures to some extent rely on double counting or disregard the impact of competing decisions. They would also result in the permanent loss of school board property.
- To promote revenue generation it was suggested that schools market school-based memorabilia, bring automated teller machines into schools and open mini-convenience stores selling essentials to students.
- International Students are currently not counted in student use of space, leaving schools with full wings dedicated to these students appearing to be underutilized (see empty seats finding above).
- Conflicting scenarios are presented, counting the savings incurred through school closure while at the same time anticipating the revenue generated from leasing these "closed" schools.
- Savings proposals presented in the Report include initiatives that the Board is already in the process of implementing: some realized, some yet to be realized, as the changes proceed through implementation.
- Multiple groups, including union stakeholders, parents, and opposition MLAs, pointed out that the financial office of the VBE was not given the opportunity to verify the facts and figures relied upon (putting the accuracy of the finding in doubt).
- Capacity rationalization (school closures) leading to higher classes was dismissed by EY's own review of leading research (based on 2010 American based review) which found the impact of class size on student performance was generally inconclusive and that teacher quality is the single biggest influencer of a student's academic achievement.

While the Minister of Education withdrew its requirement that a revised budget be submitted, the Board is required to read and "take into consideration" the recommendations in the Special Advisor's Report. The Board will meet on June 29 to pass the final 2015/16 VBE budget.