

# Annual Reports 2021

## President's Report – Treena Goolieff



Advocacy, and relaying member concerns to the Employer defined the In-House Table Officer work this year. The pandemic created new challenges for teachers, the VSTA responded to mitigate increased workload and to ensure the expectations of Employer's and site-base administrative were reasonable. At the end of last year planning for 2020-21 was fully underway

but late in July these preparations were made moot when the Ministry of Education and the Public Health Officer made announcements. Their plan would ensure students and teachers could safely return to schools and relied on a cohort system and a number of Health and Safety protocols. The VSTA responded immediately and our advocacy staved off the unnecessary stress to our members that would have been caused by a full re-tumbling of classes. Instead, the VSTA and the VSB maintained teacher schedules and student course selections and applied a unique low-density class model which was contingent on the continuation of learning during remote segments of the course.

This new way of teaching would pose challenges for many but it ensured small class size across all classes 8-12; these universally small classes were seen no where else in the province. With the implementation of remote learning came our efforts to define Employer expectations of teachers during this time and resulted in a joint agreement outlining reasonable expectation for our members. Teachers continued to be challenged over the year, and the VSTA worked to ensure the provision of sufficient turn around time during the expedited assessment timelines and secured more time during term and quarter turn around.

Vancouver Secondary Teachers have been afforded the most secure and safest classrooms in the province and, although our pressure was key to this outcome, so was the desire of the Employer to support our members' needs and to ensure safe classes for students.

On top of the structural changes to manage the transition to a 10-week intensified course, the Quarter system compromised our part-time members whose work reality was completely altered and for some, the change untenable. The provision of medical accommodations also posed road blocks for members and we continue to be dissatisfied that not more of them were medically accommodated. The Employer's shortcoming has left a number of teachers on unpaid leave.

More schedule change came with the re-examination of the initial Quarter system structure that included a two-week remote portion. The initial decision of a two-week rotation was implemented to limit the number of students with whom teachers came in contact. Although generally appreciated, the pedagogical challenge to keep students engaged while working remotely for two weeks proved too great and the Employer responded by moving to a one-week rotation in Quarter Two.

Further schedule changes came as a small group of vocal and organized parents lobbied the school district and the MLAs to raise concerns their grade 8 and 9s were not receiving face to face time comparable to surrounding districts. We discussed with the Employer the reality our low-density classes had been accepted by the Ministry and changing the schedule again at the whim of a few vocal parents was illogical, especially in light of the growing COVID-19 case numbers. The small parent lobby swayed MLAs and forced yet another change on our colleagues.

The stress caused by Q4 adjustments have been partially mitigated by the roll out of the K-12 Vaccination Program. Now well underway, soon all teachers both contract and TTOCs will receive their first vaccination.

The degree of change this year has been dizzying and due to the ever-changing landscape the VSTA moved to a more frequent communication - *The VSTA Connect*. Our goal has been to provide this update weekly to our members.

Change is coming again, and the VSTA is working with the Employer to prepare for the move to a semester schedule for 2021-22. As with the Quarter system change, we remain concerned of the inequitable impact that will be experienced by part-time members. The semester system also raises concerns regarding prep-time and the provision of medical accommodations.

Although COVID took much our attention, I must highlight the incredible work of our Executive Committee members, all of whom generously offered their time in the spirit of creating a stronger collective. 2020-21 marked the first year of our Equity Member-at-Large positions. In an effort to make our union more inclusive, decisions by previous AGMs created two Member-at-Large positions: Teacher of Colour and 2SLGBTQ+. As part of this equity work a VSTA BIPOC Ad Hoc Committee was struck. This Ad Hoc Committee has been meeting regularly since September and has been very well attended. Sparked by the Social and Environmental Justice Committee, there will be an Issues Session this Spring for

# Annual Reports 2021

members who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, with a report back from SEJ to EC and recommendations regarding what the VSTA can do to support our 2SLGBTQ+ members in their work. The November 2020 General Meeting made a decision to oppose the continuation of the School Liaison Officer Program. The theme of inclusion continued with new by-laws that will facilitate more engagement from our TTOC colleagues. I ask that you take a close look at the EC Committee Reports; our Chairs accomplished so much despite the challenges the pandemic posed. Their dedication to our collective is to be commended.

On a personal note, I must also thank our Staff Reps as the IHTOs could not support all of our members without you.

Thank you for your tireless service to our membership. Thank you to Alyssa Reid, who was elected in perhaps the most challenging year to take office but she excelled - the VSTA could not be better served. Terry Stanway has been with me in the office since the beginning, and his dedication to the membership is unprecedented, I continue to learn from him daily. Thank you to Past-President Katharine Shipley who generously offered advice, guidance and support to all three In-House Table Officers during this stressful and complex year. Finally, to Kim Pereira and Maureen Louie thank you for keeping the Association on track despite the upheaval caused by the pandemic. Let's hope 2021-22 can be a little quieter.

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## Health & Safety Committee – Michael-Don Borason



After the most unprecedented year of our history, it goes without saying that school life and Health & Safety has been a journey full of challenges and change. Many of us find it hard to remember how we used to do things, and equally difficult to envision how things will look like in the coming future. While we as a collective have done a good job in doing our best to keep our school sites as safe as possible, the existing anxiety and fear of what we do and do not know about this virus has without question have pushed our resolve and ability to adapt to our limits. You are not alone...I have witnessed first-hand after delivering 20+ workshops to colleagues all over BC that educators everywhere share your concerns.

However, we have experienced some positives during this pandemic in Health & Safety. One result is how our Joint Health & Safety Committees (JOH&S) at our school sites have been more firmly established and reinforced. School staff are much more aware of these committees and the importance of their work and have communicated with their reps more than ever. It may have taken a global pandemic for folks to realize the significance of our JOH&S Committees, but I have faith going forward that these Health & Safety Reps will not

only continue to support and maintain our ever-evolving COVID-19 safety guidelines, but also their advocacy for workers' health & safety rights in our workplace with more confidence and knowledge.

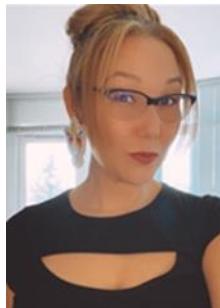
Having to cancel our initiative last year, we were able to have our BC Day of Mourning Project occur at our school sites this year, albeit in a smaller-scale and less interactive as it has been in the past. It has been difficult year for many of our families who have lost jobs during the pandemic, forcing more of our students to find employment and contribute to the home. With more young workers out in the field, their understanding of their rights as workers is more vital than ever. As well, our JOH&S Committees have modified their emergency procedures at their sites that include distancing guidelines but not at the expense of safe and expeditious evacuations. The upcoming Big One at 2 will be another test of those procedures, despite it being a scaled-down version of our usual drill.

It is our hope that at this point of the pandemic with the current provincial vaccination program and specifically the roll-out for VSB school staff, that we will reach our goal of normalcy sooner than later. Until then, please continue to look after yourselves and one another, and thank you all for your efforts this past year in doing so.

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# Annual Reports 2021

## Indigenous Education Committee – Spirit Lavallee



I raise my hands and acknowledge the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm, Sḵwxwú7mesh & Tsleil Wahtuth Peoples, for hosting us on their territory where we can serve our students in learning and support our members in our work in education.

This year the Indigenous Education Committee began slowly but had lots of roots planted. This time provided me with many learning experiences & mentoring. I had the opportunity to participate and connect with different aspects of the VSTA Executive, the VSB district principal for Indigenous Education, BCTF Zone meetings, and finally gathering a small cohort of Indigenous educators.

VSTA Executive interactions were varied, I learned how the VSTA works, and how I can include my voice. This also helped me determine expectations and potential that the committee could represent for Indigenous educators and how we could advocate for Indigenous students and curricula. The VSTA also proposed to the VSB more Indigenous enhancement teacher support at each school. Thank you, Terry, for that foresight and including my voice.

I had several opportunities to meet with Chas Desjarlais, the district principal for Indigenous education. I was able to discern how this committee would be different than her Indigenous allies and leads group. How we can work together to improve students' experiences and ensure best practice in the curriculum of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing. We also discussed how we could move forward in the work for the coming year. Both her dept and this committee seem to be in a transition period, the possibilities are encouraging.

Another important connection was participating in the BCTF Zone meetings. I was able to network and seek guidance with the BCTF Aboriginal Education Committee. In this forum I was able to get feedback about our roles, and to hear how

other Indigenous Education committees are set up. In particular, topics highlighted were the same that our small group came up with including meaningful land acknowledgements, working with allies, supporting integration of Indigenous content and supporting our colleagues with the curriculum, as well as Equity Scans for our district in recruiting and retaining more Indigenous educators in our schools.

Finally, I invited self-identified Indigenous teachers to meet with me in a focus group style discussion and feedback. A small group of interested teachers first met in person, then 3 other times over Zoom. There were no long-term commitment expectations, I merely wanted to start with giving them space to have their voices heard. With their input I'd like to ensure that the committee is established and developed with a strong foundation representative of all our voices. In addition to the topics shared at the BCTF Zone meetings we discussed the racism in our district, a different format for meeting that is less colonial and, time for terms of reference to be established organically. These will become more apparent as we establish a mandate and goals. One of which is the importance of this committee being reserved only for self-identified First Nations, Metis and Inuit, with appointed meetings for working with allies in the future. A few items we prioritized to work on first is requesting the VSB to collect, track and report data on how many Indigenous teachers are employed in the district, and to conduct exit interviews with those teachers if they decide to leave the VSB. The other item is to begin developing workshops on cultural sensitivity and meaningful acknowledgements for our colleagues.

I want to thank Mo who was particularly helpful in all aspects. While all the IHTO's were supportive and helpful in familiarizing me with the role, Alyssa specifically was my point of contact for all questions and feedback. I raise my hands for their support.

# Annual Reports 2021

## Professional Development Committee – Kathryn Walks



The 2020-2021 school year brought tremendous challenges to our roles, but the professional development committee continued to meet and engage with members in new ways which meant the pro-d chairs from all schools were able to attend almost every meeting. Between meetings, the committee members continued to share resources using a Teams chats group

and discuss union business through VSTA email. Using these tools has meant we are able to answer each other's questions and respond quickly to emerging issues and opportunities. It has been most helpful when supporting representatives new to the role of professional development chair. In fact, since the professional development committee has such a history of working cooperatively and respectfully to advocate for the professional needs of all our members, we passed a motion unanimously that "affirms respect for all members by engaging in lively discussion that aims to inform and enlighten while maintaining and building professional relationships and collective agency." At our meetings we reaffirm our commitment to abide by the VSTA Sponsored Meetings Policy, the BCTF Commitment to Solidarity, and section E.2 of the Collective Agreement which enhances engagement by reassuring members that their voices are welcomed and respected.

This year at the District Professional Committee, made up of representatives for VTF and the four representatives of the Board, including the Director of Instruction, we have been

meeting twice a month to approve applications for Temporary Supplemental Pro-D and Collaborative Inquiry funds. Although opportunities are more limited than in previous years, groups of teachers have been finding ways to get together virtually to pursue professional learning and collaborate with colleagues.

Much of the work of the committee has involved discussions on improving and updating the Joint VTF/VSB Professional Development Handbook. Together with representatives from VESTA, we have put in numerous hours over months developing language to strengthen the VTF position on professional development. The goal is to have a draft for members to approve by the end of the school year, ready for implementation in September. Our joint VTF vision is to eliminate and coercive language and to reaffirm teacher autonomy and professionalism in all facets of professional development. One of the achievements has been for the VSB to switch to using clear language about in-service days and Ministry mandated days, that are organized and facilitated by management. There has been much progress in management using precise language to better communicate the nature of these non-instructional days as separate from professional development days. In addition, management is committed to reinstating the professional development planning sessions that have been cancelled due to a lack of available coverage. We will continue to advocate for these important sessions.

Finally, it is with optimism that we look towards 2021-2022 with hopes of renewal and expanded opportunities to actively engage in meaningful collegial conversations, collective endeavors and professional development.

## Social & Environmental Justice Committee – Gabrielle Egan



This year, the Social and Environmental Justice Committee engaged in deeply meaningful work, through dialogue, group learning, and most importantly, action. At our first meeting in September, we discussed the importance of the Commitment to Solidarity, SEJ's goals and future initiatives, and the committee's desire to be involved in bargaining and policy

change. This meeting allowed committee members to get to know one another, as well as to establish group norms and practices.

Committee members prepared for our November meeting by engaging in individual learning on the history and impacts of policing in schools. The meeting focussed on a multitude of questions about Vancouver's SLO program: What is the purpose of the program and why was it implemented in the first place? What is the role of the school liaison officer? Why is the program continuing when we know that it is harmful to

# Annual Reports 2021

many Black and Indigenous youth within our school system? Ultimately, the meeting decided to pass a motion, which called for the immediate suspension of the SLO program in Vancouver. At the December GM, the meeting passed a motion “that the VSTA advocate for the suspension of the SLO program and that the VSB implement mental health supports, restorative justice programs, and community partnerships that support the safety and well-being of Black and Indigenous school community members.”

At our January meeting, we discussed the importance of services like the Leadership and Resiliency program in Vancouver schools and their impact on student mental health, feelings of safety, and personal growth. We launched sub-committees, which would further focus on alternatives to the SLO program that would support student safety, green initiatives in schools such as school bicycle programs, and policy changes that would support transgender teachers and students. We concluded this meeting by continuing an earlier conversation on how to make land acknowledgments meaningful, how to center Indigenous voices and experiences

by de-centring white supremacy culture, and the importance of not harming the lands we live on or the people whose lands we are living on.

At our March meeting, we began by discussing the importance of Black History Month and the celebration of Black changemakers and icons across the district. We then heard from a member who brought forward a motion proposing that the Executive Committee create a 2SLGBTQ+ Ad Hoc Committee open to all VSTA members who identify as 2SLGBTQ+. The rationale cited the importance of creating a safe space for 2SLGBTQ+ members to engage in their union and to connect with one another. The original motion was brought forward to the Executive Committee and went through a series of amendments. The EC unanimously passed “that the SEJ create an Issues Session for 2SLBTQ+ members and that SEJ members set the agenda, chair and report back to EC on June 10, 2021, with recommendations.” The committee looks forward to hosting the 2SLGBTQ+ Issue Session, along with the necessary action that will undoubtedly follow.

## Teachers Teaching-on-Call Committee - Lindsay Donaldson



No doubt about it, 2020-2021 continued to be a challenging year for teachers and especially for TTOCs. Many TTOCs did not return to the classroom this year, resulting in frequent TTOC shortages especially at the elementary level. Many VSTA TTOCs found themselves being called for elementary jobs where few students were wearing masks and classes were at full capacity. This added an extra layer of stress for secondary trained TTOCs. Fortunately, reports from VSTA TTOCs regarding class size, health and safety, and classroom management were as positive as could be at this time in Vancouver secondary schools. Thank you to the IHTOs and Michael-Don Borason for working so effectively with the VSB to make secondary schools as safe as possible during this unparalleled year.

Technology was a lengthy agenda topic at each meeting. Access to working and connected technology continues to be unpredictable at the school level despite motions and persistent advocacy from the VSTA and Technology Committee Chair Carl Janze. It is beneficial for IHTOs to hear specific examples of inadequate technology as

they regularly communicate concerns of TTOCs with district management. This will likely continue to be an important issue for next year as well.

Despite the challenges over the past year, I am proud to be leaving the TTOC Committee well structured and established. The VSTA By-Laws and Constitution have been updated significantly. The 2021-2022 TTOC Committee will be a robust committee of 18 members including one voting member on each of the VSTA Standing Committees and two voting members on Council. Thank you to Alyssa Reid for crafting the detailed by-laws that were overwhelmingly endorsed at each level. Terms of Reference have been adopted and will provide clarity on the role and scope of the committee. This is an exciting time for TTOCs to have their voices heard and to hear those of contract teachers.

Lastly, I would like to thank the IHTO's for all of their support again this year and fellow standing Committee Chairs, especially Michael-Don Borason Carl Janze, and Jesse Taylor, who were able to attend TTOC meetings at various times to hear concerns and voice their support directly to TTOCs. I'd also like to thank Kim for all of the work she does behind the scenes to ensure that TTOCs are kept as up-to-date as possible and for organizing the gift card draw for TTOC

# Annual Reports 2021

Appreciation Week. Thank you to Mo for creating the TTOC Appreciation Week cards and to Staff Reps for ensuring that TTOCs felt appreciated! Lastly, thank you to TTOCs for

providing an invaluable service to public education when teachers must be absent from their classes. We appreciate you!

## Technology Committee – Carl Janze



While 2020-2021 continued to be a year of change, our Technology Committee has met virtually five times this year; a lot of changes have been discussed and concerns brought to VSB IT.

- Motion to have the appropriate technology available in each school to support our TTOC colleagues in being able to deliver lessons as prepared
- Moving the discussion forward with the District around resources and software to ease the implementation of Standard Based Grading
- Ensuring that the District is aware of the lack of communication around and lag between technology removal and replacement

- The lack of clarity around the “Digital Tool Approval” process

In January, we were introduced to the new District Secondary Technology Mentors, who have the role supporting all aspects of technology use for Teaching and Learning. To further that relationship, they are welcomed as a guest to Technology meetings.

Finally, we are continuing discussions and reporting on shared site-based issues such as Teams use and expectations, and the maintenance and upgrading of computer labs.

In closing, I must commend my colleagues on their efforts this year in support of Teaching and Learning. It has been a pleasure to work with all of them on the Tech Committee, and I look forward to continuing this important work next year (hopefully with a return to in-person meetings).

## Working/Learning Conditions & Bargaining Committee – Jesse Taylor



The pandemic-related challenges to the basic structures of our workplaces brought health and safety issues directly into the orbit of our working and learning conditions, and these concerns (rightfully) threatened to take up all the oxygen in the room. Our committee hit the ground running in September, discussing and addressing the availability of accommodations for

teachers who were unable to return to the workplace due to the risks and impacts of Covid-19. We took up the challenge of advocating for sustainability in the reporting schedules in the quarter system, as well as engaging in deep conversations regarding the merits and impacts on working conditions of the various course rotations that have been implemented this year.

As the school year progressed, the WLC/B Committee confronted the confusion associated with the VCH contact tracing procedures, and we continuously revisited the ongoing (and often unwelcome) changes to school schedules, including the increasingly difficult teaching conditions for our VLN colleagues, as students moved from “in-person” school sites to fully remote learning options. Our committee also contributed to the VSTA’s response to the Ministry of Education letter regarding demands for changes to contact time in quarter 4. Our focus in that response was to highlight that our members were already meeting the requirements laid out by the ministry, and that further changes would have a largely harmful impact on the mental and physical wellbeing of teachers across our district.

While the pandemic has been the proximal cause to many of the major issues the committee has addressed this year, it has not been our sole focus. As you are almost certainly

# Annual Reports 2021

aware, we are entering the final year of our collective agreement, which expires at the end of June 2022. This means that we are once again into the bargaining cycle, and that work has already begun, setting us up to enter local bargaining in November 2021. In addition, as Committee Chair I have been largely responsible for the work of melding our current collective agreement language with the previous agreement (with direction from and the assistance of the BCTF). This round, the work has been particularly challenging as it is the first time that the restored language is being re-incorporated into the collective agreement, but we hope to have a final draft ready for September 2021.

This year was my first year as Chair of the WLC/B Committee, but I had served as a school-based WLC/B rep for many years. Perhaps the most important value I aspired to maintain for the committee as Chair was to continue the work of my predecessors, Treena Goolieff and Scott McKeen, in ensuring that this committee was one where diversity of opinion is welcome, and that it is a venue for difficult

discussions to be had without judgment. In this vein, members of the committee brought forward various topics for discussion at our meetings, including examining the impact that the loss of the SLO program would have on the working conditions in our schools (particularly, the negative impact on our counsellors), how the pandemic has exacerbated the already difficult working conditions for overworked, high-turnover, “burnout” teaching positions in special programs in the district, and the difficulties arising in schools with inclusion pilot programs. I am proud of the fact that the feedback that I have received from Reps on the WLC/B Committee is that they feel comfortable knowing that issues they bring to the Committee will be given a place on the agenda, and that in any discussion, their viewpoints are respected, regardless of their position on the issue at hand.

Despite the uniquely difficult conditions of the past year, I found chairing this committee to be an incredibly rewarding experience, and I hope members of our local will allow me to continue this work on their behalf in 2021-2022.

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