

Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association

Staff Representative REFERENCE MANUAL



VANCOUVER SECONDARY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION (VSTA)

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VSTA STAFF REP REFERENCE MANUAL

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1. BENEFITS OF BEING A STAFF REP

When we asked people why they became a Staff Rep, and why they continue to be one, here are some of the responses we got:

- I feel empowered
- I like helping colleagues
- It's a moral obligation
- It evens the playing field with admin
- I've become an advocate for colleagues and for teachers
- It's about being a part of something bigger
- It's like participatory democracy – we are the union and we have to make it work
- I like the collegial interaction with my peers at school – it's a change from being with students
- It gives me time to think about the profession and the role of teachers
- It reaffirms our value as public school teachers

[SC1]



2. INTRODUCTION AND JOB DESCRIPTION

Thank you for taking on the role of Staff Representative at your school. This is a voluntary position that has both challenges and rewards and that can be a meaningful one for you as you provide support and service to both your colleagues and our union.

Being a Staff Rep can mean wearing many hats; it's hard to completely describe on paper, but here are some of the key elements:

- Keep staff updated on both Union and District initiatives by disseminating information and holding regular staff organization meetings to promote discussion & union involvement. You can also leave a copy of Council minutes in a binder in the Staff Room to keep staff up to date
- Meeting with Staff Reps from across the district at monthly Council meetings
- Being aware of issues of conflict on staff and supporting members in resolving them as best you can
- Ensuring that Staff Committee functions well and is effective & that decisions are made collaboratively at the school level
- Resolving issues with Administration
- Representing **ALL** staff
- Defending the Collective Agreement
- Upholding the BCTF Code of Ethics
- Being the “face of the union” in the school
- Reporting concerns to the VSTA Table Officers
- Advocating for members when dealing with administrators
- Meeting regularly with other School Union Team members to discuss issues
- Keep up to date personal email and phone list of members (to disseminate info and job action)

There can be challenges linked with all of these descriptors. It is essential to respect your boundaries with colleagues and to maintain a respectful tone. You won't always have all the answers so it's important to check in with the VSTA office if you are unsure of a policy, a procedure or an interpretation of the Collective Agreement.

3. STAFF REPS WEAR TWO HATS



FIVE SIMPLE TRUTHS

1. The staff rep is the **peer of the principal in matters related to the interpretation and application of the Collective Agreement in the school.**
2. The **rights and responsibilities** of the staff are firmly grounded in the **Collective Agreement, in statute (Labour Relations Code, Teaching Profession Act, Employment Standards Act, Workers' Compensation Act, Industrial Health and Safety Regulations) and in arbitration jurisprudence (case law, court decisions.)**
3. The **Collective Agreement was not imposed by the union on the employer**, but represents the mutually agreed to terms and conditions of employment for teachers in the district.
4. The union has a **legal obligation to fairly represent the members** of the bargaining unit.
5. The **grievance procedure** represents the **most appropriate and least disruptive way** of resolving disputes between employees and employer.

4. ROLE OF STAFF REP (BCTF MEMBER'S GUIDE) 25.H.04

That the BCTF encourage locals to adopt and promote the following description of the role and function of staff representatives:

1. Staff Representatives—School Level

a. Communicate:

- i. Attend local staff representatives meetings to provide liaison between the local and the school staff.
- ii. Hold school meetings to report on local/BCTF activities and concerns.
- iii. Post policies and all relevant information regarding local and BCTF activities.

b. Advocate:

Serve as the school advocate for all staff members regarding:

- i. Services and benefits.
- ii. Contractual rights and responsibilities.
- iii. Grievance procedure.
- iv. Local and BCTF policy.

c. Organize/Lead:

- i. Ensure that elections for school-based positions are held annually.
- ii. Carry out duties and responsibilities assigned by the local.
- iii. Translate school concerns into local action/policy.
- iv. Ensure that democratic structures (e.g., staff committees) are in place so that staff members can be involved in decisions that affect them.
- v. Be a member of the school staff committee.
- vi. Increase the school staff's participation in the bargaining process (e.g., setting objectives, action to support objectives).
- vii. Ensure that staff/professional development be promoted so that the real needs of school staffs can be assessed and addressed.

2. Staff Representatives—Local Level (VSTA responsibility)

- a. That locals ensure that each school in the district elects at least one staff representative by September 30 of each year.
- b. That locals ensure that the role and function of staff representatives be included in local constitutions or policies.
- c. That locals ensure that regularly scheduled meetings of staff representatives be held each year.
- d. That, each year, locals provide for ongoing training of staff representatives.
- e. That locals be encouraged to provide release time for staff representative training.

3. Staff Representatives—Provincial Level (BCTF Responsibility)

- a. That the BCTF, when communicating with individual schools, should normally do so through the elected staff representative(s).
- b. That the BCTF promote and provide a training program for staff representatives in locals.
- c. That the design and planning of all local staff representative training programs include consideration of the needs identified by the staff representatives participating in the training program.
- d. That staff representatives inform and advise school regarding BCTF policies. (May 86 RA, pp. 16–21)



5. CODE OF ETHICS

BCTF CODE OF ETHICS

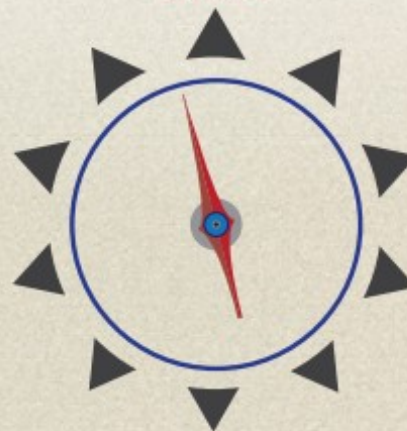


The Code of Ethics states general rules for all members of the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) for maintaining high standards of professional service and conduct toward students, colleagues, and the professional union. Members are advised to contact local union officers or appropriate BCTF staff for advice on how to proceed with issues related to the BCTF Code of Ethics.

1. The member speaks and acts toward students with respect and dignity, and deals judiciously with them, always mindful of their individual rights and sensibilities.
2. The member respects the confidential nature of information concerning students and may give it only to authorized persons or agencies directly concerned with their welfare. The member follows legal requirements in reporting child protection issues.
3. A privileged relationship exists between members and students. The member refrains from exploiting that relationship for material, ideological, or other advantage.
4. The member is willing to review with colleagues, students, and their parents/guardians the practices employed in discharging the member's professional duties.
5. The member directs any criticism of the teaching performance and related work of a colleague to that colleague in private. If the member believes that the issue(s) has not been addressed, they may, after privately informing the colleague in writing of their intent to do so, direct the criticism in confidence to appropriate individuals who can offer advice and assistance.*
It shall not be considered a breach of the Code of Ethics for a member to follow the legal requirements for reporting child protection issues.
6. The member acknowledges the authority and responsibilities of the BCTF and its locals and fulfills obligations arising from membership in their professional union.
7. The member adheres to the provisions of the collective agreement.
8. The member acts in a manner not prejudicial to job actions or other collective strategies of their professional union.
9. The member, as an individual or as a member of a group of members, does not make unauthorized representations to outside bodies in the name of the Federation or its locals.

2019 AGM

ETHICS



*See 31.B.12 of the Members' Guide to the BCTF.

6. SCHOOL COMMITTEE STRUCTURES AS PER THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

VSTA School Union Team Descriptions

The School Union Team consists of

- one Staff Representative for every 25 teachers or fraction thereof on staff
- one Health and Safety Rep
- one Local Election/Political Action Rep
- one Professional Development Rep
- one Social & Environmental Justice Rep
- one Technology Rep
- two Working/Learning Conditions & Bargaining Reps
- the Staff Committee Chairperson
- any member of the staff elected to the VSTA Executive.

The Staff Organization (all VSTA members on staff) shall meet to elect school reps to the School Union Team in June or early September. Active VSTA members may run for a position(s).

To the greatest extent possible, work together as a supportive team. Meet regularly to discuss issues arising at the school and information coming from Council meetings and VSTA and BCTF communications. Share routine duties, especially the distribution of VSTA and BCTF communication, among all team members on a rotational basis. While each rep has her or his particular responsibilities, be willing to assist others when needed. Depending on the school's Staff Committee constitution, some reps may also be a member of Staff Committee. At least one rep **must** be a member of Staff Committee. (Article 11.D.1)

Each School Union Team has a budget available to it of \$6.00 per teacher per school year.

Roles and Responsibilities:

Staff Representatives

- willingness to advocate on behalf of your colleagues
- attend monthly VSTA Council meetings
- effective two-way communication between members and the VSTA and BCTF
- *basic* familiarity of teachers' Collective Agreement rights
- *basic* familiarity of benefits and services available to teachers
- *initial* representation of members with school administration

Health & Safety Rep

- willingness to advocate on behalf of your colleagues
- attend regular VSTA Health and Safety Committee meetings
- participate in the school's health and safety committee
- effective two-way communication between members and VSTA and BCTF about health and safety issues
- *basic* familiarity with WCB and School Board health and safety regulations and procedures
- *initial* representation of members with school administration around health and safety issues

Local Election/Political Action Contact

- willingness to advocate on behalf of your colleagues
- attend VSTA Local Election/Political Action Committee meetings as called
- effective two-way communication between members and VSTA and BCTF about collective political actions and election strategies
- work with interested staff members around political action

Professional Development Rep

- willingness to advocate on behalf of your colleagues
- attend regular VSTA Professional Development Committee meetings
- chair the school's Professional Development Committee
- effective two-way communication between members and VSTA and BCTF about professional development issues

Social & Environmental Justice Rep

- willingness to advocate on behalf of your colleagues
- attend regular VSTA Social & Environmental Justice Committee meetings
- effective two-way communication between members and VSTA and BCTF about social justice issues
- work with interested staff members around social and environmental justice issues

Technology Rep

- willingness to advocate on behalf of your colleagues
- attend regular VSTA Technology Committee meetings
- effective two-way communication between members and VSTA and BCTF about equity and social justice issues

Working/Learning Conditions & Bargaining Rep

- willingness to advocate on behalf of your colleagues
- attend regular VSTA W/LC&B Committee meetings
- effective two-way communication between members and the VSTA and BCTF about working and learning conditions issues
- collection of data on teachers' working and learning conditions including class sizes and school staffing
- report annually to school's Staff Committee about issues arising from working and learning conditions surveys and data collection
- assist with communicating to the public changes in working and learning conditions

Staff Committee Chairperson

- willingness to advocate on behalf of your colleagues
 - chair the school's Staff Organization and Staff Committee
 - establish, jointly with the principal/vice-principal, each Staff Committee meeting's agenda
-

7. QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

**Don't hesitate to call the office for answers to any of these questions.
We always welcome your call.**

- The VSTA website is also an excellent source of information
<http://vsta.ca/>
- You can download a PDF version of the Collective Agreement from the VSTA website
<http://vsta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/2013-2019-Final.pdf>
<https://vsta.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/00-Provincial-Collective-Agreement-2019-2022.pdf>
- You can download a PDF version of the BCTF Member's Guide from the BCTF website
<https://bctf.ca/MembersGuide/>

Please find below the relevant location of various types of leaves in the Collective Agreement.

i. **Leaves**

All language regarding leaves is in article G of the Collective Agreement. To apply for a leave, you can email leaves@vsb.bc.ca to request a leave. It is important to read the language regarding the kind of leave you want to take to make sure that you abide by the deadline dates.

List of leaves from the 2013-2019 Collective Agreement Index:

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- ii. **Sick leave.** When a teacher has exhausted their sick leave, they can apply for Salary Indemnity (Short Term) through the BCTF. See below (section 10) under BCTF Health and Wellness Program.
- iii. **Payroll enquiries.** All members should regularly check their pay advice to make sure it is accurate. Contact employeeservices@vsb.bc.ca or call 604-713-5201.

8. WHAT TO DO WHEN A COLLEAGUE IS CALLED INTO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

If an administrator wants to see a teacher for a potential discipline issue, they should always have a staff rep of their choice with them. Your role is:

- To listen to what the administrator has to say
- To take notes
- To keep your colleague out of harm's way – while they should respond to the administrator's questions, you may wish to help them stay focussed on the issue at hand and not wander off into other territory
- To ask clarifying questions
- If the member receives a Letter or Expectation, we would like a copy of it.
- Let the VSTA office know if you sense the potential for a larger issue or if you have questions

9. POST AND FILL RESPONSIBILITIES

- Writing up job posting with admin
- Making sure they are published in job postings
- Organize interview committee
- Observe the interview process & make sure the Code of Ethics is adhered to

10. SUPPORTS AVAILABLE TO VSTA MEMBERS

- a. Health and Wellness is an emerging area of concern for the teaching profession. The CMHA reports that 20% of all Canadians will struggle with mental health at least once in their lifetime. The BCTF reports that 46% of our members on leave are struggling with mental health. Although discussions around mental illness have become more common, there is still stigma attached to the notion that we might be suffering from mental health issues. Even if we ourselves are not facing a mental illness, all of us are, or will be, directly affected by those who do. Teachers in particular would appear to be facing

higher than average cases of anxiety and depression, in part due to greater challenges in our working conditions. We have listed supports available to us below:

- i. *Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP)* – paid for by the employer. Confidential and voluntary, this program offers short term counselling, resources for parenting and care giving, financial counselling, addictions support and health and wellness support. Phone (24/7) 1-800-387-4765. <https://www.workhealthlife.com/>
 - ii. *BCTF Health and Wellness Program* – We all pay into the BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan (SIP) to provide short- and long-term disability coverage. Through the Health & Wellness Program, the BCTF assists members who are unable to maintain, or return to, their teaching positions due to a medical illness or disability by funding an early intervention rehabilitation program. This is a voluntary program that can happen by self-referral, referral through the VSTA office, referral by the employer or by the BCTF SIP. <https://bctf.ca/wellness/>
 - iii. *Starling Minds* – Starling is an online program that provides education and a mental health toolkit to manage stress and prevent depression and/or anxiety. Using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy tools, the online modules help you manage your own depression and/or anxiety as well as your understanding about what is triggering your depression and/or anxiety. This is free and voluntary and has had very positive feedback from teachers who have engaged with it. <https://bctf.ca/SalaryAndBenefits.aspx?id=38267>
 - iv. *The Well Teacher* – One of BCTF's Health and Wellness Program's Rehab Consultants, Wade Repta (OT, Vice President at humanworks consulting group) has published a comprehensive book on health and wellness designed for educators based on his 20 years of experience working with public school teachers in BC. Some of the chapters cover topics such mental health, physical health, classroom ergonomics, return to work, and many more. Staff reps can ask their site to order a few copies for their staff through various funds such as Pro D. <http://www.humanworks.ca/thewellteacher/>
- b. The BCTF has developed the following workshop for teachers. It can be requested for your school by your Pro-D chair and is free of charge:
- i. **Staying Well at Teaching**
Teaching is complex. High public expectations, class composition, educational cutbacks, and increased accountability affect schools, teachers, and students. BCTF surveys identify increased workload and stress as significant concerns for teachers. This workshop helps teachers stay well. Setting boundaries around workload, self

care and smart choices, and destressing are key themes. All focus on building shared solutions to both the demands of the work and the isolation of teaching. Participants will reconnect with colleagues, laugh, and tell stories as they assess their work life balance and explore staying well and creating a healthy workplace. Skilled teacher facilitators will design the session to suit the needs of each school staff.

- c. For further study and exploration, the Mental Health Commission of Canada has created a Mental Health First Aid program.

<https://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/English/resources/mental-health-first-aid>

- d. If you know of someone who is struggling in the classroom, there are supports for them. Both are confidential and voluntary.

- i. **Teaching Supports**

BCTF Peer Support Service - If you have ever hit a tough patch in your teaching career, you may have wondered where to turn to for help and coaching. Who can you call? Where are the resources? When is it safe to admit you could use some colleague support? Who can actually help with the classroom practice questions you have? The Federation has such a service to support teachers with their teaching practice. This Peer Support Service (PSS) is designed to provide direct, individual assistance to active teachers who are experiencing difficulty with their teaching practice, and may be on plans of assistance or personally concerned. <https://bctf.ca/ProfessionalDevelopment.aspx?id=36999>

- ii. **Teaching Resources**

- a) The BCTF has a number of resources available to enrich teaching across the curriculum. See Teach BC at <http://teachbc.bctf.ca/> for a searchable database of unit and lesson plans. These are resources created by the BCTF and/or teaching colleagues in BC. You can search by grade level or subject area.
- b) The Vancouver School Board subscribes to the Critical Thinking Consortium, a not-for-profit organization based in Vancouver. Once you've created your account (for free), you can search by grade level, subject area or skill area for lessons and units across the curriculum. There is a growing collection of resources in French as well. <http://tc2.ca/>

11. BCTF INTERNAL MEDIATION SERVICES (IMS)

- Is a work-related dispute getting worse and you don't know what to do?
- Are you feeling stressed because of a break down in a work relationship?
- Are you less effective as a teacher because of a workplace conflict?

The BCTF Internal Mediation Service (IMS) may be able to help. All you have to do is ask!

BCTF members are entitled to access the confidential services of trained teacher-mediators who provide effective processes through the BCTF Internal Mediation Service. Their mandate is to aid in resolving disputes between members and others.

<https://www.bctf.ca/ProfessionalDevelopment.aspx?id=31876>

