



## Return to process - not panic!

**W**ho is responsible for the panic response to the larger than expected decline in student enrollment in Vancouver schools?

On Friday, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, right before a sunny weekend, principals from every school in district were called into a meeting to be told that there were 1160 students that hadn't materialized in September, massively exceeding the decline of 250 students that had been projected for the 2006-2007 VSB budget. That's close to 1000 students.

Why the big drop? The *Vancouver Sun* reported that the other school districts in the Lower Mainland were not experiencing such large declines or increases, nor had their projections been wildly off.

If that's the case, then how could such an erroneous projection be made in Vancouver?

Merely two days previously at the Committee IV meeting, VSB Human Resources was to give the district's staffing and enrollment numbers. None were presented, however, and the explanation given was that every time the numbers were calculated by the system, wildly different results emerged. There was little indication given at that time that there might be a significant decline in enrollment.

Fast-forward to Friday morning, when after another day of number crunching, VSB management came up with the number 1160. Reactive mode kicks in and a plan is made without consulting anyone else.

By that afternoon, principals are told that there will be changes impacting a third of schools in the district. "Which schools?" one might

reasonably ask. No answers were available at the time.

What was decided by management, and shared with elected trustees only by conference call on the Friday morning, was that the solution to addressing the financial shortfall resulting from the larger than expected decline in enrollment was to surplus 70.7 FTE in teaching staff – a straightforward mathematical equation: *a decline of X students equals a cut of Y direct service to students based on per student funding.*

Principals were told to reassure their staffs that there would be no layoffs (a curious suggestion since the *VSB-VTF Collective Agreement*

doesn't allow layoffs at this time of the year), and that the 70.7 FTE surplus teachers would become permanent TOCs with guaranteed pay and priority call out as of

October 1<sup>st</sup>.

The same day, before trustees or anyone else had face-to-face input on this decision, VSB management put its decision about surplussing and declining enrollment up on the district's webpage, and school staffs found out from their principal (or from the CTV news!) that their jobs *might* be in jeopardy. Have a nice weekend!

"No doubt this error in calculation is a serious problem," says VESTA President Mary McDermott. "But the VSB shouldn't rush to take direct services away from students. Taking staff away from schools means students who need extra help do not get those services, makes classes larger, and means more students

with special needs are crammed into classes without the support they are entitled to. Where does this comply with Bill 33?"

Another approach would be to look at the district as a whole. "In an emergency situation, we should consider postponing programs that are the furthest away from students," says Mary McDermott, "rather than eliminating direct services to students. There are alternatives within the financial reach and existing infrastructure of the Vancouver School Board to avoid impact on students. There are also better processes for dealing with emergencies involving staffing.

"The VSB needs a long-term plan to address the issue of declining student enrollment. Careful, educationally sound decision-making and process would everyone involved should be the path taken, not reactive panic driven by

numbers and with input from few. Of course a continuing decline in student enrollment in the district could mean a decline in teaching positions – but it should also mean a proportionate decline in administration, infrastructure, and assets."

In the past when faced with the prospect of layoffs, surplussing, or serious decline in enrollment, VSB management met with trustees, administrators, the unions, and parents to brainstorm different options. This planning, problem-solving session happened *before* a final decision was made, and *before*

cuts were announced to schools and posted on the VSB website.

"Enrollment may or may not continue to fall in Vancouver. But there needs to be a plan, one with full participation of all parties. The VSB should not make important decisions in a panic.

"The VSB also has to comply with Bill 33's requirements on class size and class composition," she continues. "The entire point of Bill 33 was to bring in additional resources to classrooms – especially where there are more than three students with special needs designations. If the VSB is not complying, some

serious questions will need to be asked, despite the decline in enrollment.

"The VSB has money and assets – probably more than any other school district in the province. An auditor would find it surprising to note the number

of retired principals and other employees who do not show up in budgets. Is this not work that teachers could do? How many district projects and non-school properties are being maintained while classes have more than three students with special needs designations?"

So much for a stable, quiet September.

**Glen Hansman, VESTA**  
**Jack MacDermot, VESTA**

### NEW TEACHER INDUCTION

Are you a VESTA member in your first few years of teaching?  
Have you not been inducted into VESTA yet?  
A special event is being prepared for you and your Staff Rep.

NOVEMBER 1st 2006  
Plaza 500 Hotel, 4 p.m.

Contact [vilmam@vesta.ca](mailto:vilmam@vesta.ca) to RSVP

# Resisting the Accountability Agenda

## What we WILL do:

- √ Continue to set teacher-driven goals based on our professional judgment
- √ Continue to engage in real dialogue about important issues with parents at PAC meetings and/or parent-teacher conferences
- √ Continue to engage in meaningful Professional Development based on professional needs and interests of teachers
- √ Focus our energies on our students and on effecting positive change in education
- √ Return the focus to student-centred teaching and learning
- √ Encourage our students' parents to withdraw their children from the Foundation Skills Assessment
- √ Attend the sixth non-instructional day given by the Ministry for administrative purposes

## What we WILL NOT do:

- ⊗ Further government-driven, top-down School Growth Plans
- ⊗ Engage in narrowly-focused dialogue about data through School Planning Councils
- ⊗ Sacrifice Professional Development days to generate data and write School Growth Plans, link our Professional Development to these School Growth Plans, or allow administrators to determine the content of our Professional Development
- ⊗ Expend our energies to support government-imposed structures that negatively impact our schools
- ⊗ Support the shift toward data-driven accountability contracts
- ⊗ Spend valuable instructional time preparing our students for the FSA, or participate in the marking or development of the FSA
- ⊗ Spend *our* non-instructional or personal time preparing data for this day

### Major decision on the accountability agenda from the 2006 BCTF Annual General Meeting:

- 9.A.10: That in support of increasing the focus on teaching and learning in public schools, BCTF members:
- a. participate in educational change that will produce a positive outcome for student learning.
  - b. increase their active involvement at the school level with parents through parents advisory councils.
  - c. express to parents and trustees our educational and professional concerns with FSA testing and standardsized tests.
  - d. withdraw from participation in the formulation of all accountability contracts and school growth plans.
  - e. withdraw from participation on School Planning Councils.

**VESTA was ahead of the game on this, as the Staff Rep Assembly decided in November 2002 . . .**

24.C.2: That VESTA members not participate in School Planning Councils.

**You have your union's encouragement and support in saying *no* to the accountability agenda.**

## New VSB Report Card Formats

The VSB trustees have approved *two* new report card formats for Vancouver schools, replacing any other formats in use. Individual classroom teachers have the choice between either the anecdotal *or* grid formats -- regardless of format other teachers in the school have chosen.

**VESTA acknowledges the joint traditional territory of the Musqueam, Tsleil Waututh, Squamish, and Sto:lo Nations.**

### VESTA news

Published by the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association, a local of The British Columbia Teachers' Federation



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# FAQ on Part-time Teachers

## Working part-time? Working multiple positions at the same school? Working two or three different positions at different schools?

## Make sure you are being paid for the time that you work, and are working your actual FTE.

The clearest way to work out the number of your working days is to start with VESTA's adapted calendar that shows working days for the 2006-2007 school year. Your staff rep has a copy.

There will be 194 days in this school year ñ 194 days of work, if you were working full time. The VSB hires and pays each teacher according to a precise Full-Time Equivalent (FTE). Multiply your FTE by 194 to see the number of days you must work.

Once you have your FTE converted into days, note the days you are scheduled to work and see if it comes to the correct amount. Depending on your regular days you may **owe time**, or you may have **time owed to you**.

**For example, if you work 0.2 FTE, that amounts to 38.8 days you must work this year (0.2 FTE x 194 total school days = 38.8 days to work).**

**In this example, if your regular work day is every Monday, you will owe 3.8 days to your school or job-share partner because there are only 35 Mondays that teachers work this year.**

By contrast, if your regular work day is every Wednesday, you will be owed 1.2 days ñ and therefore can remove 1.2 days from your schedule.

Each teacher's 90 minutes of prep is also prorated by FTE.

### Complications

In Vancouver, where the majority of schools work on a modified schedule of some sort, not all days are created equal ñ so consider this when scheduling with a job-share partner and figuring out the number of days you must work, since day length will often vary from one school to the next, and within one school from one day to the next.

In a regular five-day week, including recess, there are 1500 minutes of instruction for students. This means that every 0.01 FTE equals 15 minutes and that adds up to one hour every month which becomes one day every five months . . . a bit more than two days for the year.

### Extreme Complications

Some teachers work part-time in more than one school and have to be vigilant their FTE works properly. Add in the mix of schools with modified days and see the potential for working more than 194 days because of extra minutes over the course of a year.

It may be that a resource teacher is missing from one site because she owes days at another site; or a teaching partner is working on a day other than the one usually scheduled while the usual partner is working at another site or at home.

For these reasons, it is important to make calculations at the beginning of the year so that an equitable schedule can be arranged well ahead of time. Partner teachers need to work this out together so both understand and agree to fairness. Non-enrolling teachers have more flexibility but need to ensure that colleagues know about any adjustments to irregular schedule well ahead of time. If you need assistance, approach your Staff Rep ñ and bring a calculator!

## WHAT IF MY JOB STARTS PART-WAY THROUGH THE YEAR

Get out that calendar again. Count the number of days left in the school year from the first day in your new assignment, and multiply that number by your FTE to find out how many days you must work.

## WHAT ABOUT STATUTORY HOLIDAYS?

The School Act governs teachers to work a set number of days which make up the school year. Therefore teachers do not receive statutory holidays, or statutory holiday pay, as other workers do. In 2005/06 there were 193 school days; this year and next year there will be 194.

## WHAT DOES THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT SAY ON PART-TIME TEACHERS?

**Article 1.K.2.(c)** defines the existence of part-time continuing teachers, and grants them the same benefits as full-time teachers. Achieving this status was a significant gain during 1980s local bargaining. Before that change, hundreds of part-time teachers were temporary year after year. These were mainly mothers having to be rehired because in those days there were no parenthood leaves.

**Article 2.** establishes that salary is prorated to FTE.

**Articles 2.J.1. and 2.K.3.** explain how teaching experience elsewhere is counted when teachers are hired by the VSB.

**Article 2.L.2.** establishes that part-time teachers receive their annual experience increment when they either work 60% or when they accumulate 60%. Everyone's increment date is in September. No teacher can be on contract for less than 20%.

**Article 3.C.** regulates appointment processes. Rights are better for teachers initially hired at 100% who reduce their time permanently or year-

by-year than they are for those initially hired part-time. Teachers retain the right to their original hired percentage, but they must declare in writing by March 31<sup>st</sup> their intent to increase their time the following year. Acquiring additional work depends on availability at current site and on postings at other schools (see also

### Article 7.A.4.(b).

Partners sharing an assignment can substitute for each other at her/his salary rate. This is to be arranged via your school office, not SEMS.

Pension can be purchased for the missing FTE if the teacher pays both portions of the contribution. Visit [www.bctf.ca/pensions](http://www.bctf.ca/pensions) for details.

**Article 7.A.7. and 8.** acknowledge the importance of part-time partnerships by declaring their right to transfer as a team. Seniority is determined by averaging.

**Article 9.I.2.** clarifies that instructional time is prorated to FTE; **Article 9.I.7.** confirms that prep time is prorated as well.

**Article 11.E.** confirms that attendance at school Pro-D days, staff development activities, and any staff meetings is at the discretion of the teacher, contiguous with their instructional assignments.

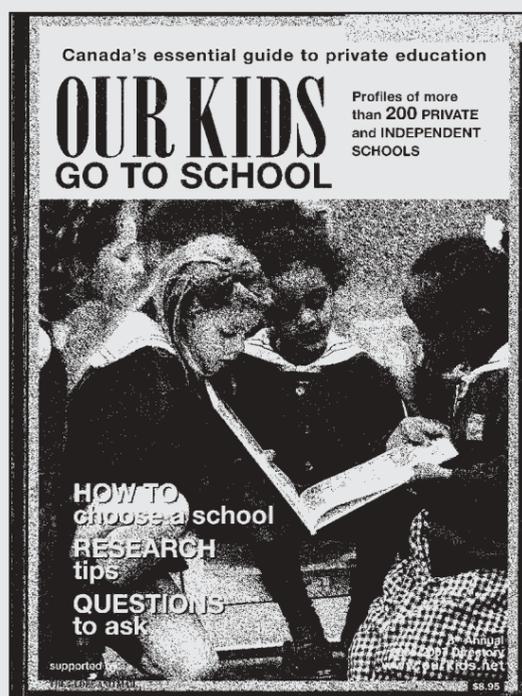
**Article 14.C.** describes how seniority is accumulated with specific mention of part-time service.

**Article 14.F.6.** guarantees that laid off teachers can take part-time assignments and retain their recall rights to the original FTE.

All other contract rights are the same no matter what your FTE.

**Barbara Kay**  
2nd Vice-President

## Smaller classes are #1 in private school pluses!



Number one on a list of 'private school pluses,' according to *Our Kids Go to School* guide, is ñ you guessed it ñ **smaller classes**. This guide came out in *The Globe and Mail* a few weeks ago.

So, those that can afford to pay get smaller classes and other 'pluses' for their children, while everyone else just has to make do with consent and consult ñ la Bill 33.

How small are these smaller classes in Lower Mainland private schools?

Name of School	Class Size	Cost per year
Crofton House School	18	\$13,000
St. John's School	13-22	\$9,950-\$12,665
Stratford Hall	15-20	\$8,800-\$11,700
Bodwell High School	18	\$7,200
Brentwood College School	20	\$17,000
Brockton Prep School	18	\$7,500-\$10,500
Choice School	14	\$9,750
Collingwood	20-22	\$10,435-\$19,985
Greybrook Academy	12	\$7,500-\$9,000

Most private schools in BC also receive public funding from the Ministry of Education, so tax dollars do go towards supporting these smaller classes in private school settings.

At least *Our Kids Go to School* is kind enough to point out that trying to rank schools, using whatever parameters, is questionable.!

# No "Opt-Out" of Provincial Curriculum

## Clarifying Alternative Delivery

A significant part of this year's settlement reached in *Corren and Corren v. BC (Ministry of Education)*, which had been before the BC Human Rights Tribunal for a number of years, addresses the confusion around the Ministry of Education's Alternative Delivery Policy and its sensitive content in the prescribed learning outcomes.

"Sensitive content" is a vague descriptor with the potential to encapsulate a whole range of issues – not just provincially-mandated curriculum in sexual health, diverse family models, or child abuse prevention. A lot depends upon the community one teaches in. Well-meaning administrators and teachers across British Columbia have been known to excuse students from curriculum in music, physical education, social studies, art, science and every other subject just to avoid conflict with parents, and because of uncertainty about what the School Act and Ministry of Education had to say on this practice.

A few years ago in *Chamberlain v. Surrey School District* book-banning case, the Supreme Court of Canada's Chief Justice McLachlin wrote: "Learning about tolerance is . . . learning that other people's entitlement to respect from us does not depend on whether their views accord with our own. Children cannot learn this unless they are exposed to views that differ from those they are taught at home."

It is this tension between views at school differing from those that students are taught at home that have placed teachers in an untenable situation of having to determine what might or might not be "sensitive content" whilst doing their job of teaching the prescribed learning outcomes as set out by the Ministry of Education.

### The Ministry's Letter

Can students be unilaterally excused from parts of the provincial curriculum? The simple answer is no.

As part of this year's settlement in *Corren and Corren v. BC (Ministry of Education)*, a letter clarifying the true nature and limited reach of the Alternative Delivery Policy has gone out from the Ministry of Education to all school boards in British Columbia, the BC School Trustees Association, the BC School Superintendents Association, the BC Principals and Vice-Principals

Association, the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, and the BCTF.

The Ministry of Education's letter clarifies that:

- *there is no provision in the law or ministry policy for parents in public schools to excuse their children from any of the prescribed learning outcomes in the IRPs;*
- *schools or school districts do not have the authority to omit addressing or assessing any part of the prescribed learning outcomes.*

In other words, mandated provincial curriculum is just that – mandated, for all students and all schools.

### Alternative Delivery

What is available to families are certain provisions under the Alternative Delivery Policy which apply *only* to the prescribed learning outcomes in the Health curriculum organizer in the following IRPs: *Health & Career Education K-7* (which is replacing the old *Personal Planning K-7* IRP), *Health & Career Education 8 & 9*, and *Planning 10*.

For the Health curriculum organizers in these three IRPs, families who wish to address the Health curriculum organizers by means other than instruction by a teacher in a regular classroom setting may do so. The Alternative Delivery Policy provides the students involved, with the consent of their parents or guardians and in consultation with their school, the opportunity to arrange agreed-upon alternative means for addressing these learning outcomes. This might include home instruction with an agreed-upon package from the school, registration in a Distributed Learning course, self-directed studies, or other means suggested by the school, parents, or student involved.

This does not excuse students from having to meet the learning outcomes in the Health curriculum organizers. The Ministry of Education expects that these students will be able to demonstrate to the school that they have learned the prescribed learning outcomes, and that the school will handle this assessment. *The policy does not apply to any other curriculum organizer in the above-mentioned IRPs, nor does it apply to any*

*other British Columbia provincial curriculum.*

There is no provision for students to receive alternative delivery for any other segment of the provincial curriculum other than in the Health curriculum organizers discussed above – and even then students have an obligation to demonstrate their knowledge of these curriculum organizers and schools have an obligation to assess this knowledge.

### An Example

For example, the topic of "healthy eating" falls under the Health curriculum organizer for grade 4 *Health & Career Education*. A child's mothers indicate to the school that for personal reasons they would like their son to receive alternative delivery of the "healthy eating" prescribed learning outcome. The mothers consult with the school about the range of topics

**Teachers should not have to apologize or feel undue stress for teaching the curriculum or for promoting inclusive classrooms.**

covered under that prescribed learning outcome, borrow some resources from the school, and the student receives instruction at home from his mothers on the topic of "healthy eating."

Afterwards, the child is assessed by his teacher to make sure he has learned the prescribed learning outcome on "healthy eating." Perhaps the same assessment used with the rest of the boy's class could be used, or he could demonstrate his knowledge to the school by some other means.

By way of contrast, content in the Career curriculum organizer in *Health & Career Education K-7* is not covered by the Alternative Delivery Policy, nor is any other elementary IRP – and therefore, the scenario described above would not apply.

### Strictly Secular

It is certain that this will be problematic for some families, especially in matters pertaining to a model of diversity reflective of broader Canadian society and the scope of the BC Human Rights Act.

We must remember, however, that s. 76 of the BC School Act states:

76. (1) *All schools and Provincial schools must be conducted on strictly secular and non-sectarian principles.*

(2) *The highest morality must be inculcated, but no religious dogma or creed is to be*

*taught in a school or Provincial school.*

British Columbia courts and the Supreme Court of Canada have concluded that where religious belief conflicts with the school system's emphasis on inclusion, school districts' and teachers' legal obligation is to side with the system's core value of non-discrimination. This was a major crux of the outcome in the recent *Kempling v. British Columbia College of Teachers*.

Upcoming changes to the IRPs resulting from the Corren settlement will be geared towards making the curriculum more inclusive and representative of the constituencies our schools serve, as per the BC Human Rights Act, and will go through the usual public review process utilized by the Ministry of Education.

Teachers should not have to apologize or feel undue stress for teaching the curriculum or for promoting inclusive classrooms. Hopefully, the Ministry of Education's clarification of the Alternative Delivery Policy will trickle down into individual classrooms, and be adhered to by school administrators and school board management, so that the uncertainty around the mandatory nature of all curriculum will be resolved.

**Glen Hansman**  
VESTA 3rd Vice-President

## Corren-Ministry Settlement

The settlement reached in this BC Human Rights Act case will bring some major changes providing for making the K-12 curriculum inclusive of all in the *BC Human Rights Act*. While Vancouver schools have already been doing some great work in this area, schools in BC receiving public funding may benefit from a quick synopsis of the settlement:

### Alternative Delivery Policy (see also VESTA 2018-19)

- Revisions to considerations of program delivery
- Amendment to policy and explanatory letter

### Curriculum Revisions

- Internal review process involving IRP review to be inclusive and respecting diversity with respect to *orientation and other grounds of discrimination*
- over-arching concern for social justice
- Amplification of external review process to include organizations or groups with expertise in addressing homophobia, and other issues of inclusion in curriculum
- Amendment to curriculum review schedule

### New Curriculum

- Development of a Social Justice IRP for

# Towards FSA-free schools

The Ministry of Education expects all students to write the Foundation Skills Assessment, but cannot require them to.\*

While teachers do not have the authority to exempt students themselves, school principals must honour requests from parents for their children not to participate in the FSA.

Copies of a sample FSA opt-out form has been distributed to your school in multiple languages. These can be shared with parents at a time convenient to you. A good time to do this would be at

- Meet-the-Teacher Night
- Parent-Teacher Conferences
- PAC Meetings
- before or after school when parents are present

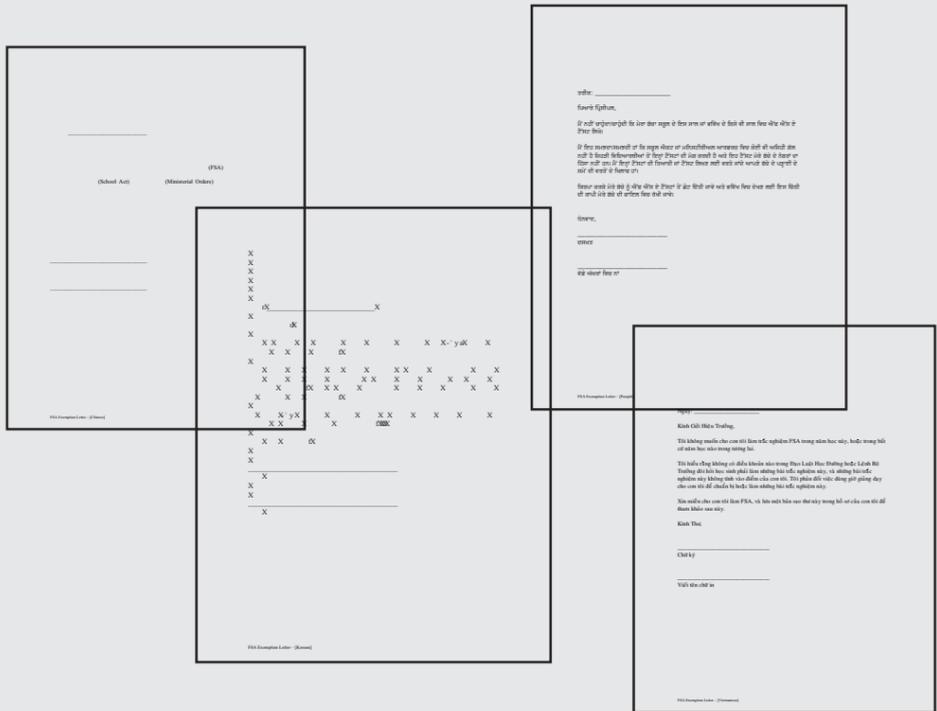
While your present Grade 4 and 7 students will be writing the FSA this year, it might also be worthwhile for your staff to distribute these letters to the parents of Grade 3 and 6 students as well so that the abstention letter can be kept in their file for the following year.

Or, perhaps speak to parents at all grade levels so that your school can be completely FSA-free!

BC teachers have the right, confirmed in the courts, to speak out on educational issues. Exercise those rights by letting parents know about the inappropriateness of the FSA, and the loss of instructional time involved.

If your staff has any creative ideas about de-FSAing your school, please come to the next General Meeting to share your brainwaves!

\* See [www.bced.gov.bc.ca](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca) for the Ministry's FSA instructions to administrators, which openly contemplate parents exempting their children from writing the test.



Dear Principal,

I do not want my child, \_\_\_\_\_, to write the FSA test this school year, or in any future school year.

I understand that there is nothing in the School Act or Ministerial Orders that requires students to write these tests, and that the tests are not part of my child's mark. I object to my child's instructional time being used to prepare for or write these tests.

Please exempt my child from the FSA, and keep a copy of this letter in my child's file for future reference.

Regards,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent / Guardian

## Teachers' right to speak out has been affirmed!

In August 2005, the B.C. Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal brought forward by BCPSEA. The employers' association was trying to overturn a previous arbitrator's ruling affirming teachers' rights to share information with parents. The court declared, in the words of Madam Justice Huddart (Mr. Justice Donald concurring) in *BCPSEA v. BCTF*, 2005 BCCA 393:

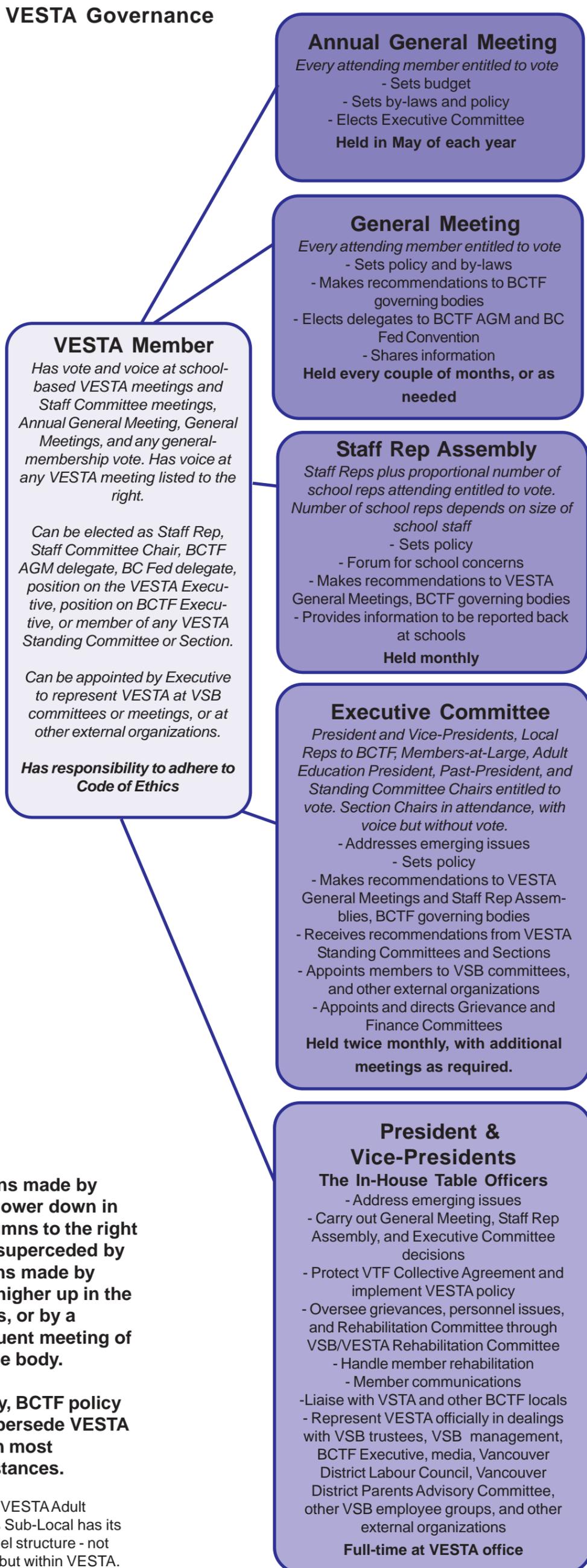
*Through the various materials the BCTF asked its members to distribute, teachers voiced their concerns about government policies on issues of particular importance to them. This is, of course, political expression of a kind deserving of a high level of constitutional protection . . .*

*The School Boards cannot prevent teachers from expressing opinions just because they step onto school grounds. School grounds are public property where political expression must be valued and given its place.†*

In February 2006, the Supreme Court of BC dismissed, with costs, BCPSEA's application for leave to appeal the BC Court of Appeal decision that upheld the award of Don Munroe regarding Freedom of Speech.

# A Rough Guide to VESTA Governance

## VESTA Governance



## Vancouver Teachers' Federation Governance



## BCTF Governance



Decisions made by bodies lower down in the columns to the right can be superseded by decisions made by bodies higher up in the columns, or by a subsequent meeting of the same body.

Similarly, BCTF policy may supersede VESTA policy in most circumstances.

Note: The VESTA Adult Educators Sub-Local has its own parallel structure - not separate, but within VESTA.

# When the teacher-librarian's away . . .



## Can other staff use the library circulation system when the teacher-librarian is away from the library?

The short answer is this:  
**When the teacher-librarian is not present in the library, library circulation is closed. Other teachers are not to perform the duties**

**of a teacher librarian unless they are a TOC assigned to cover a teacher-librarian's absence.**

There are many good reasons for this, as your school's teacher-librarian can tell you:

1. The teacher-librarian is the overseer of the library circulation. It is part of the librarian program. 2. Not using the library circulation when a teacher-librarian is not there makes it clear that there has been a loss of service to students. Replacing the teacher-librarian with a clerk, volunteer, or other teachers masks the cuts. 3. The teacher-librarian ensures the correctness of the circulation information. 4. The teacher-librarian ensures the security of the library -- the books, tech equipment, et cetera.

Teacher-librarians want to meet staff's needs and students' needs within their available time.

Here is VESTA and BCTF policy on this issue, as brought forward by the membership:

### VESTA Policy:

10.9.d. That when a teacher-librarian or his/her Teacher On Call is not on duty in the library/resource centre during instructional time the circulation will be closed.

2002 Jun 11 Staff Rep Assembly, 2004 Dec 14 General Meeting

### BCTF Policy:

3.P.02 When a teacher librarian's services are not available in the library, teachers shall not assume the duties of that teacher librarian or utilize the services of a volunteer or any other person to do the work of the teacher librarian.

2005 Annual General Meeting

## Now you see it. And now you don't.

One thing NDP, Socred, and Liberal governments all agree on: Whoever gets to be Minister of Education gets to invent a new course and gets to make every kid in the province take it, like it or not.

**Brian Smith**, actually one of the better Education Ministers of the Socred era, decided nobody should graduate without a course called *Consumer Education 10* and made it compulsory. As soon as Smith moved to a new portfolio, this indispensable course got dropped.

One of his successors brought us *Continuous Progress* a.k.a. *The Year 2000* or something like that, and it got dropped after the NDP took over.

An NDP Minister of Education made everybody take CAP courses all the way through high school: *Career and Personal Planning*. Compulsory naturally, being vitally important. And scrapped by the Liberals. In spite of its vital importance, there were not a lot of complaints about it being scrapped.

One of the really great things about **Christy Clark** was that she was content to delight the adoring media with her announcements without actually doing anything about implementation. Compulsory gym classes for every student every day made great reading in the papers but nothing actually happened. Which saved a lot of money for the taxpayer. And a lot of trouble for the students and the system.

Memory fails here: was it Christy or **Tom Christensen** who decided no British Columbia student ought to graduate without doing a Personal Portfolio, a little two or three year project? Compulsory, of course. A lot of work for students, parents, and teachers, but what could be more trendy?

Well, that was last year. This is a new year. And the new word from the current Minister of Education, **Shirley Bond**, is: don't worry about the formerly trendy compulsory Personal Portfolio. It's gone. Well, non-compulsory at any rate: same thing.

As the Minister thoughtfully muses in rather awkward syntax: I don't want next year to find that there are a significant number of really capable students for a number of reasons who are not graduating because of the portfolio requirement. So that's why it will be optional in the coming academic year. . . . And then I want some time to be able to ask the question which I think is important, is the format appropriate? Are schools ready for this?

In the province of British Columbia it would be too much to expect Ministers of Education to ask such questions *prior* to imposing the next fad on a school system with something like 500,000 students.

From **Crazy BC** [www.haveyouhadenoughyet.com/crazybc.php](http://www.haveyouhadenoughyet.com/crazybc.php)

## Does homework hurt children?

According to Alfie Kohn, the research says it does **not** in many ways. He says:

*Overwhelmingly, the research shows no academic advantage to homework, particularly for younger children. In fact, for younger children there isn't even a correlation between the amount of homework done and any measure of academic achievement.*

*...I think in general homework isn't merely failing to help, it's actively hurting kids' disposition to learn.*

Here is the Vancouver School Board policy (IKB) on homework:

*Homework assignments shall contribute to the educational growth of the student, shall not require the use of resources not readily available to the student, and shall be designed so that **there is no formal homework in the primary grades.***

*At other instructional levels, the following guidelines have been established for maximum times that students must devote daily to homework:*

**intermediate grades:** no more than 30 minutes,  
**junior secondary grades:** no more than one hour,  
**senior secondary grades:** no more than two hours.

## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Under pressure to give more homework?  
Less homework?

What are your suggested alternatives to more tutors, more worksheets, and more busy work?

How can students ameliorate their **spoken** English outside of school?

Write [glen@vesta.ca](mailto:glen@vesta.ca) to have your comments printed next month.

## WANTED!



## Delegates to 50TH CONVENTION OF THE BC FEDERATION OF LABOUR

A PROUD HISTORY

November 27 to December 1, 2006  
Vancouver Convention and Exhibition Centre

Delegates to be elected at the October 17 VESTA General Meeting. Please attend this General Meeting if you have questions or if you wish to be nominated. Any VESTA member is welcome to put her/his name forward. Release time for the convention is provided.

## TEACHER RESOURCE RECYCLING GROUP

I have created a teacher resource recycling group on Yahoo. It's basically a group that you can browse and post if you have resources to share, or swap, or if there are resources you are in need of. Write to [teachcycle@yahoo.com](mailto:teachcycle@yahoo.com) to join or post your items.

**Helen French, Renfrew Elementary**

# 2006-2007 VESTA Executive Committee

## Voting Positions on Executive

### President

Mary McDermott (VESTA Office)  
mary@vesta.ca

### 1st Vice-President

Barb Parrott (VESTA Office)  
barb@vesta.ca

### 2nd Vice-President

Barbara Kay (VESTA Office)  
barbara@vesta.ca

### 3rd Vice-President

Glen Hansman (VESTA Office /  
Learning Services)  
glen@vesta.ca

### Secretary-Treasurer

Anastasia Mirras (Area Counsellor)

### Adult Educators Sub-Local President

Janek Kuchmistrz (Roberts AE /  
VESTA)  
janek@vesta.ca

### Local Reps to the BCTF

Donna Brack (Gathering Place)  
Nancy Hawkins (Secord)  
Bill Hood (Maquinna)  
Jane MacEwan (Roberts Annex)  
Patricia Gudlaugson (Fleming) alt

### Members at Large

Chris Harris (Bruce)  
Gerry Kent (Kitchener)  
Christine McGrath-Agg (Champlain  
Heights Annex)  
Jody Polukoshko (Dickens Annex /  
Learning Services)  
Sharon Wyatt (Kingsford-Smith)

### Aboriginal Committee Chair

Frances Carlick (Britannia)

### Health & Safety Chair

Karin Bernauer (Carleton / VESTA)  
karin@vesta.ca

### Pride Committee Chair

Jessica Campbell (Quesnel)

### Professional Development Chair

Lorna MacDonald (Cook / VESTA)  
lorna@vesta.ca

### Working & Learning Conditions Committee / Bargaining Chair

Jack MacDermot (Kingsford-Smith /  
VESTA)  
jack@vesta.ca

VACANCIES: *Anti-Poverty Committee Chair, Anti-Racism Committee Chair, Status of Women Committee Chair, Teachers On Call Committee Chair, Member at Large*

## Other Positions on Executive

### Area Counsellors Section

Leslia MacKenzie (Kitchener)

### ESL Section

Verena Foxx (Learning Services)  
Myrme Ross (Hastings)

### Gifted Education Section

Daria Danylchuk (UBC)  
Teresa Mildren (Hudson)

### LATA

to be announced

### Teacher-Psychologists Section

rotating reps

### Speech-Language Pathologists Section

rotating reps

### Teacher-Librarians Section

Mary Locke (Gordon)

### Techology Section

Alan Zisman (Maquinna)

## Resource Team Task Force Update

A copy of the Resource Team Task Force Report has been given to all Staff Reps. The major themes are:

- Qualifications, In-Service, and Further Education
- District Organization
- School Organization

Please discuss the Executive Recommendations as a school staff so that your Staff Rep can ask your staff's questions, move your staff's amendments, and voting knowing of your staff's opinions at the **Oct 17th Staff Rep Assembly**.

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR

VESTA is pleased to present

# Dr. Alfie Kohn

Friday, October 20

VSBC District-wide

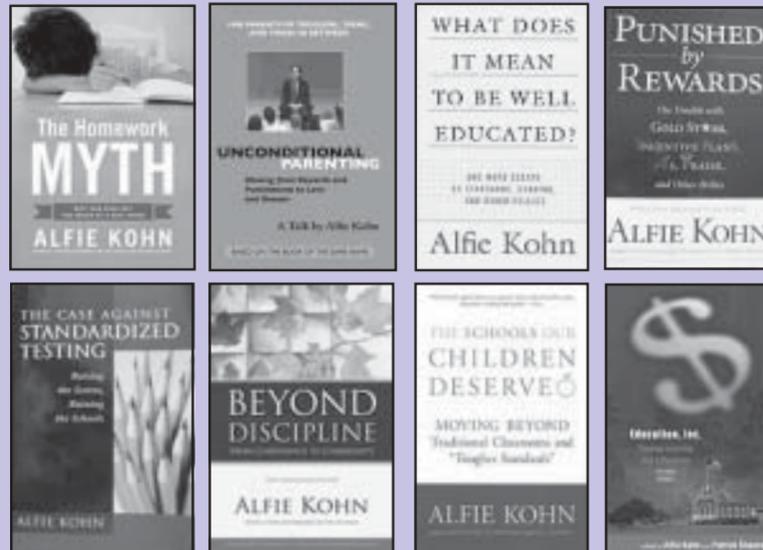
Professional Development Day

8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Hyatt Regency Hotel

Alfie Kohn writes and speaks widely on standardized testing, accountability, homework, human behaviour, and parenting. Kohn's criticisms of competition and rewards in schools have been widely discussed and debated, and he has been described in Time Magazine as perhaps the [U.S.'s] most outspoken critic of education's fixation on grades and test scores.

Contact [lorna@vesta.ca](mailto:lorna@vesta.ca) for more information or to register your school.



Next  
GENERAL MEETING &  
STAFF REP ASSEMBLY  
October 17th  
at Tupper Secondary School  
in Cafeteria