

## Together, Vancouver trustees and stakeholders speak out against cuts to funding

### Vancouver trustees and stakeholders send letter to education minister protesting funding cuts

Vancouver Board of Education trustees, VESTA and the other employee unions, principals and vice principals, and parents have come together to jointly convey their deep concerns about recent funding changes that are making it increasingly difficult for Vancouver schools to meet the learning needs of all students.

The school district's main stakeholders have penned a letter to Education Minister Margaret MacDiarmid asking her to reverse the damaging cuts and restore funding to public schools.

"Our public education system is a proven success yet we believe it is at risk of deterioration due to the chronic and increasing financial pressure from provincial underfunding," the three-page letter reads. "We can not continue to cut corners and make do with less without affecting our ability to provide optimal learning conditions for students."

Since 2002/03, the Vancouver School Board has had to deal with more than \$40 million in accumulated budget shortfalls. Looking ahead, the district knows its operating costs will continue to rise over the coming years, and it is important that those costs are fully funded, otherwise, the district could face a \$25-million shortfall next year. These estimated costs for 2010/11 include:

- Increases for salary increments, employee benefit costs and inflation for goods and services, totalling approximately \$5 million.
- \$4.8 million for the teacher salary increase in the current collective agreement, which becomes effective on July 1, 2010.
- \$2.8 million for the increase in employer contributions to the Teachers' Pension Plan, which includes teachers, principals, vice principals, the superintendent and associate superintendents, and other professionals.

- \$210,000 for the coming budget year for increased MSP premiums.
- \$1 million in HST payments if the district is not given access to rebates.
- Impact of enrolment decline will result in loss of \$1.3 million.
- Uncertainty about the future of AFG funding compromises already scarce funds in the Local Capital Reserve.
- Additional unfunded costs related to BCeSIS of \$150,000 and carbon offsets of at least \$300,000.

It is for these reasons that the district's stakeholders are calling on government to reinvest in Vancouver's public schools.

The total list of signatories is as follows:

- **Patti Bacchus**, Chairperson of the Vancouver Board of Education;
- **Julianne Doctor**, President, District Parents Advisory Council;
- **Chris Harris**, President, VESTA;
- **Anne Guthrie Warman**, President, VSTA;
- **Rosemary Love**, President, Vancouver Elementary Principals' and Vice Principals' Association;
- **Iona Wishaw**, President, Vancouver Association of Secondary School Administrators;
- **Paul Faoro**, President, CUPE 15;
- **Brent Boyd**, President, CUPE 407;
- **Tim Chester**, IUOE 963; and
- **Doug Oates**, Trade Union representative.



### Save Our Paramedics!

Through years of underfunding and neglect, the British Columbia Ambulance Service (BCAS) has gone from a world leader in pre-hospital emergency care, to a system in peril.

As BC Paramedics wages have fallen behind other emergency services in BC, the system now faces difficulties recruiting and retaining these valued professionals.

In all but the metropolitan areas of BC, most paramedics are working for an unreasonable rate of \$2/hr. The average Paramedic must work at this rate for an average of 5 years before gaining full time status, and thus a full hourly wage.

This increasing shortage of ambulances, paramedics and related infrastructure stress the system resulting in longer response times, paramedic burnout and ultimately jeopardizes the ability to provide the world class ambulance services that British Columbian's deserve.

Learn the issues and get involved now by visiting [www.saveourparamedics.com](http://www.saveourparamedics.com) to help stop the bleeding of our ambulance service!

### Support the HandyDART drivers!

On October 2008, MVT—a subsidiary of California-based MV Transportation Inc.—was awarded a \$113-million contract to run the HandyDART system in Metro Vancouver for three years. Within 10 months of MVT's takeover of the system on January 1, however, the HandyDART operators went on strike. HandyDART's Vancouver founder, Tim Louis, told the *Georgia Straight* that he found it "utterly dreadful" that MVT is in a labour dispute with Local 1724 of the Amalgamated Transit Union, which represents HandyDART workers. Assessing the impact of the work stoppage on people's lives, the former Coalition of Progressive Electors city councillor and park board commissioner recalled the 2001 transit strike.

ATU Local 1724 vice president Tim Johnston told the *Straight* that HandyDART workers have always supported Louis's vision of having several nonprofit societies running the service. Now TransLink has brought about the amalgamation of the regional nonprofits into a private "one-service provider," he noted. HandyDART workers are the lowest paid in the Vancouver transit system.

The union's "main issues are definitely pension," Johnston said. "They are trying to eliminate our pension. They are trying to eliminate, or reduce, our benefits....There are several other issues, but they are insignificant compared to these major ones."

ATU Local 1724 represents over 500 drivers, office and maintenance workers providing HandyDART service in the Metro Vancouver area. "Our workers have a deep bond with our clients," representatives of the union have stated, "but cannot afford to accept a contract that would gut the meager gains we have negotiated over close to three decades. It took us almost two decades to get a pension plan that would allow us to retire with dignity; MVT is attempting to eliminate that. Our workers stand to have our current health benefits eroded in order to increase MVT profit margin. Workers are under threat that their jobs will be exported by contracting out. We were forced to take this action to protect our livelihood and the future quality of the HandyDART service. ATU local 1724 workers have been forced to strike for the first time in almost three decades!"

ATU Local 1724 urges the public to contact the TransLink board of directors (board@translink.ca or phone 604-453-4500), Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), TransLink, Mayor, and Council. Donations to ATU Local 1724 can be made by sending a cheque to: ATU Local 1724, 4333 Ledger Ave, Burnaby, BC, V5G 3T3



### Inside:

Full-day kindergarten update, page 2

Quick updates of all kinds, page 3

Interview with Board chair, Patti Bacchus, page 4

Salary Indemnity Plan Q&A, page 6

# FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN UPDATE

A process has been put in place for the implementation of full-day kindergarten (FDK) next school year. All school boards were required to submit a two year implementation plan to the Ministry. Vancouver's submission included all schools that currently offer FDK as priorities.

The BCTF and the BC School Trustees Association have been having discussions on the implementation of FDK, which is to begin next school year.

- BCTF and BCSTA reps shared the serious concern that the government is intent on moving ahead on FDK without the necessary funding, without the ability to offer FDK to all students in facilities with the necessary equipment, resources, and materials.
- BCSTA reported that of the \$40 million designated for FDK in the first year, \$9 million is set aside for private schools.
- BCSTA and BCTF reps shared the view that the programs must be developmentally appropriate with play-based learning and adequate resources for that to be the case.
- BCTF promoted the workshop developed by the primary teachers PSA, in collaboration with the Federation.
- Reps from both BCTF and BCSTA expressed concern that the highly successful Kindergarten aboriginal programs currently in place not be weakened as a result of government's FDK initiative. More information is expected before the winter break.

## IS YOUR SCHOOL COLD?

The issue of temperature in classrooms comes up twice a year: in the spring when we are all dying of heat and in the winter when we are all freezing in our classrooms. The best approach is to bring concerns about school temperature to your workplace Joint Health & Safety Committee. The WCB regulations do not give firm limits on school temperature, but there is an expectation for the employer to act when reasonable concerns are identified by the Joint Health & Safety Committee.

Expect updates and follow-through when a problem is identified. Questions? Email [karin@vesta.ca](mailto:karin@vesta.ca)

## INFORMATION ABOUT STAFFING FOR 2010-2011 SCHOOL YEAR

Information about next year's staffing was shared at the December General Meeting, and the first part of the processes that will be enacted will begin early in the new year. If you were not able to attend the General Meeting, and if no one else from your worksite was there, the information will be shared again at January's meeting.

Questions? Call the VESTA office.

## Standing up for Public Programs

The Economy was the central theme at the BC Federation of Labour Convention this year. The global recession and governments' responses to it have once again ensured that the largest risk will be to the most vulnerable members of our society. While the banks have picked themselves up and are rewarding their CEOs with enormous bonuses, the unemployment rate has risen significantly and we are seeing painful cuts to public services, not the least in education.

One has to wonder whether it was really about the recession or whether it was just another opportunity to reduce public programs and move services into the for profit private sector. The approach seems to be that governments will spend to stimulate the economy and no sooner is the money out the door—in fact before the money's out the door and employment can be addressed or tax revenues can recover, the politicians start crying about the deficit and use it as an excuse to further damage public services.

The recession also presents a good opportunity for the government and its business cronies to use the economy as an excuse to depress expectations of public sector workers in the upcoming round of bargaining. There's high unemployment they'll tell us, tax revenues are down and we can't incur a further deficit so there will be nothing on the table for salaries, benefits or working conditions. For teachers, the need to address our pension provisions will undoubtedly get the same response.

The mainstream media will send out those messages in a steady stream in the year ahead and we should arm ourselves with information that counters that propaganda. At the convention presentations were made by economists that held some very interesting information and counters the too easily accepted wisdom that when the economy is in trouble—you have to cut public services.

In fact the public sector is one of the main contributors to BC's prosperity. Our current provincial spending is around 15% of GDP down from a more usual level of 18-19% in previous decades. That's less than a fifth of the GDP and because it is only a fifth of the GDP, the economists that presented to us pointed out that when the GDP goes down as it does in a recession it doesn't necessarily follow that public spending should be cut. In fact it may make more sense to maintain or increase that spending to tide over those who are hurt most by a recession.

A paper presented at the BC Federation of Labour Convention contributes BC's health, prosperity and intelligence directly to our history of strong public programs. The report, prepared by Will McMartin and Iglia Ivanova, and entitled *BC's Public Sector at the Dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Re-Investing in a Strong and Dynamic Public Sector to Benefit All British Columbians* points out that British Columbians have collectively and deliberately invested in our public sector in the 138 years since British Columbia entered Confederation: "...why did we—and our predecessors—do so? The answer is to be found in looking at those who use our public assets, often on a daily basis:

- Our public schools annually provide a free education to more than 548,000 British Columbians;
  - Our universities, colleges and institutes deliver an advanced education and specialized training to about 200,000 full-time BC students every year;
  - Our hospitals and other health facilities annually provide care to approximately 3.6 million BC patients;
  - Our transportation systems—roads and highways, tunnels, bridges and public transit facilitate the movement of two million registered passenger vehicles and 670,000 commercial vehicles (and millions of commuters) plus the export of \$38 billion of goods internationally and \$13.5 billion of goods interprovincially; and
  - Our hydro-electricity generation and transmission system each year provides power to 1.6 million residential homes and more than 192,000 commercial/industrial users in British Columbia, and earns \$1.5 billion in annual power exports;
- ...The good news is, it worked! Our publicly owned assets and public sector workers have manifestly made an invaluable contribution to our individual and collective health, prosperity and, notably, British Columbia's standing in the world."

The paper concludes by urging all of us to work to an end to the downward spiral of public spending and to start again to invest in ourselves.

To do that I think that we must all become familiar with the economic and social arguments for rebuilding the public sector and for our part the school system. Part of the action plan adopted by the Convention was to produce education materials to promote a progressive economic and social agenda.

We will have an important opportunity to do this as teachers start preparing for the next round of bargaining. It is when we are in negotiations for a new collective agreement that the government and the public pay the most attention to us and the positions we are taking. It isn't how we would wish it, but the right to withdraw services is always the heavy hand that gets us attention and respect. We can use that attention to promote a strong public school system in British Columbia, and we need to start now.

**Christina Schut**  
Local Representative to the BCTF

### CONTACT US

**Chris Harris**  
President  
[chris@vesta.ca](mailto:chris@vesta.ca)

**Dan Graves**  
First Vice-President  
[dan@vesta.ca](mailto:dan@vesta.ca)

**Jody Polukoshko**  
Grievance Officer &  
Second Vice-President  
[jody@vesta.ca](mailto:jody@vesta.ca)

**Glen Hansman**  
Third Vice-President  
[glen@vesta.ca](mailto:glen@vesta.ca)

**Donna Brack**  
Additional office contact  
[donna@vesta.ca](mailto:donna@vesta.ca)

**Lisa Holman-Fiffe**  
AE Sublocal President  
[lisa@vesta.ca](mailto:lisa@vesta.ca)

**Karin Bernauer**  
Health & Safety Chairperson,  
Salary Indemnity & Rehabilitation  
Support  
[karin@vesta.ca](mailto:karin@vesta.ca)

### VESTA News

Published by the  
**Vancouver Elementary School  
Teachers' Association,  
Local 391 of the British Columbia  
Teachers' Federation**

**VESTA**  
2915 Commercial Drive  
Vancouver, B.C. V5N 4C8  
Phone: 604-873-8378  
Fax: 604-873-2652  
[www.vesta.ca](http://www.vesta.ca)

**Editor  
& layout**  
Glen Hansman

**Proofreaders**  
Dan Graves  
Chris Harris  
Karin Bernauer



Articles herein reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily the policies of the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association. No reprints without permission.  
**Printed by Thunderbird Press**

## BC Federation of Labour endorses BCTF resolution on funding, bargaining and FSAs

The BC Federation of Labour convention unanimously endorsed the BCTF resolution calling for restoration of public education funding, legislation allowing full scope bargaining, including class size and composition, and support for parents to withdraw their children from FSA tests.

*What they said:*

- "I have always trusted the integrity of teachers in BC; I still do and will always. FSA tests are wrong!" Jeff Parker, Co-Chair, BCFed Young Worker Committee, CUPE 378
- "We value the work of our teachers and trust them to assess students' learning. Our children are not pawns in a game to rank schools." Miriam Martin, Health Sciences Association
- "To succeed in school, our children (especially our special needs children) require smaller classes, more teachers and teaching assistants—NOT FSA testing." Judy Darcy, Hospital Employees' Union
- "In my experience with the FSA they are a complete waste of our limited education resources." Ken Robinson, President, Hospital Employees' Union
- "Education is what makes people better citizens, not simply knowing how to add, subtract, and divide and take a test." Barry O'Neill, President, CUPE BC

## Free Global Education teaching resources

BC teachers have created global education units that can fit into many subject areas and grade levels, and are tied to BC curriculum outcomes. These are free—just download them and use them at <http://bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx?id=6214>

These resources were developed with the financial support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the BCTF.

## BCTF Assistance Society

The BCTF Assistance Society provides emergency financial aid to those who are, or have been, active members of the BCTF and to their spouses. Assistance is given in the form of loans or non-repayable grants. Find out more here: <http://bctf.ca/SalaryAndBenefits.aspx?id=4776>

## What to do if you are hurt at work

1. As soon as practicable after the injury occurs or occupational disease is contracted, report to the employer. The worker must complete a "Workers' Report of Injury or Occupational Disease to Employer" (Form 6A which is available online at [www.worksafebc.com](http://www.worksafebc.com)) and submit to the employer. While you're at it, please forward a copy to the VESTA office.
2. Attend an appointment with an appropriate health care professional as soon as possible. Advise the health care professional that the injury/disease is workplace related.

3. Although there is one year in which to file a claim, the WCB Regulation specifies that as soon as is practicable after an injury occurs or an occupational disease is contracted it must be reported to the employer. Unnecessary delays in reporting have often resulted in denial of claims.
4. Call Teleclaim – 1-888-967-5377. Ask the operator to send you a copy of the report once it is completed.
5. As soon as a decision letter is received from WCB contact the BCTF advocate, Patti McLaughlin, at 604-871-1890, or 1-800-663-9163 local 1890, or email [pmclaughlin@bctf.ca](mailto:pmclaughlin@bctf.ca)

## History of PD days

Professional development days represent a hard-won recognition of our needs and responsibilities as teachers. For many years, the BCTF made representations to our employers and the Ministry of Education to recognize the importance of teachers having the time and resources necessary to engage in professional development.

In 1972, PD days (non-instructional days) were **added** to the school calendar *at the request of the teaching profession* after years of advocacy from the BCTF. The inclusion increased the number of days of work for teachers with no loss of instructional days for students. PD days in the school calendar recognized that teachers needed time during the school year to hone their skills, improve practice, and stay current with changes related to teaching and learning.

During local bargaining most locals of the BCTF were successful in achieving provisions regarding PD days. In general, the contractual provisions provide for school and/or local PD committees to determine and plan the activities for PD days. A related provision of local agreements provides most local PD committees with control over the allocation of PD funding for teachers.

There are still improvements that need to be made, though. As a union of professionals, we must use a strategy that includes bargaining, advocacy, professional influence, and communications to support teacher professional development.

## New Teachers' Conference 2010

The 2010 conference will take place on March 26 and 27, 2010 at the Radisson hotel in Richmond. Conference registration will be available online at [www.bctf.ca](http://www.bctf.ca) starting mid-January 2010. Need financial help attending? VESTA budgets some money every year to help TTOCs with attending professional development activities – including the New Teachers' Conference. Contact [glen@vesta.ca](mailto:glen@vesta.ca) if you are a TTOC and you'd like to access some of these funds. Funds are available on a first come, first served basis.

## Dodging questions about codes of conduct

In 2008, when Premier Gordon Campbell announced Feb. 27 as Anti-Bullying Day in B.C., his government stated in a news release: *Last spring, the Province passed legislation requiring all B.C. schools have codes of conduct for their students that meet provincial standards. This step fulfills a platform commitment to institute "zero tolerance" of bullying in B.C. schools.*

A simple, clear statement referring to the Provincial Standards for Codes of Conduct Order, dated Oct. 17, 2007. But these standards have not been enforced province wide. While the Vancouver Board of Education came in full compliance late last school year, with all of its schools with a code of conduct in place that adhered to the requirements of the Order, things have been spotty elsewhere. In late November, NDP MLA Spencer Herbert asked for evidence of compliance during education estimates.

Here is part of that exchange from Hansard:

**S. Herbert:** "What evidence does the ministry have that every school district is in compliance?"

**Hon. M. Stilwell:** "As I said, this is a board responsibility to comply. However, in 2007-08 the superintendent of achievement canvassed and met with each district superintendent to confirm that the districts were working to comply and have codes of conduct. We have no evidence that that is not the case. We follow up on any complaint from a parent or board district, and in fact, if you have information that this is not the case, we'll be happy to follow up."

Interestingly, VESTA offered the Ministry of Education copies of such evidence last school year, but there was no response to the offer. Pressed further for evidence by MLA Herbert in November's debate, Minister Stilwell added: "I would just conclude by saying that I want to emphasize that this is a board responsibility under the act, and we expect them to meet their responsibilities."

All of this begs the question: If this law was worth creating - and is indeed being boasted about - then why is it not worth enforcing?

Implementation of the Ministerial Order related to codes of conduct is the subject of a BCTF provincial grievance at this time.

## HEALTHY SCHOOLS ACTIVITY GRANTY

Grant funds are available to VSB elementary teachers who wish to plan, support, implement or conduct a Healthy School Activity. The funds may be used for supplies, planning time (TTOC costs), equipment, or supplies (including consumables for a food program) necessary for teachers to have the opportunity to create or expand upon a Healthy School Activity. These activities should be teacher-led, 'hands on', and student centred. Up to \$400.00 of funding is available to single classroom activities; Up to \$1000 of funding is available for a multi-class or school-wide activity. Funds are intended to be used in the 2009/2010 school year. Principals have been provided with the

application form, and VESTA faxed the application form to Staff Reps at the beginning of January as well.

## Update on Charter challenge to class size / class composition strips to the Collective Agreement

In December, lawyers for BCTF and Government appeared in BC Supreme Court before Chief Justice Robert J. Bauman for a case management meeting regarding the BCTF Charter Challenge to Bill 27. Bill 27 *Education Services Collective Agreement Act* and Bill 28 *Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act*, were BC Liberal legislation carried in 2002 that imposed a collective agreement, stripped that agreement of crucial learning and working conditions provisions, and severely restricted the scope of teacher bargaining.

The purpose of December's appearance was to determine the schedule for exchange of documents, written argument and reply. As well, court dates to actually hear the case were established.

Court dates are scheduled in June 2010. It is anticipated that the case can be heard in the five days currently scheduled.

VESTA hopes that this Charter challenge will produce positive outcomes for teachers.

## Join the Poverty Olympics 2010

The Poverty Olympics 2010 organizers are seeking participation by BCTF locals in the Lower Mainland. They are looking for groups or individuals to commit to carrying the torch to highlight the issues of poverty and homelessness. The third annual Poverty Olympics is scheduled February 7, 2010, at the Japanese Language School (487 Alexander Street, Vancouver) from 1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m. For more information, contact Trish Garner at [info@povertyolympics.ca](mailto:info@povertyolympics.ca) and visit <http://povertyolympics.ca/> for more background. See the new mascot, Creepy the Cockroach, who now joins mascots: Itchy the Bedbug, and Chewy the Rat.

## WANTED: VESTA delegates to the 2010 BCTF AGM

Nomination forms have been distributed for members to put their name forward to become a VESTA delegate to the 2010 BCTF Annual General Meeting, which takes place over the first few days of the March Break. The AGM is always a great experience — both for learning about the issues facing teachers around the province, and for making contacts. The AGM sets the general direction for the BCTF for the year to come. And, as we head into a bargaining year, it is important that VESTA have a strong presence there. Think about coming with us!

Contact [donna@vesta.ca](mailto:donna@vesta.ca) for more info, or email [rossannet@vesta.ca](mailto:rossannet@vesta.ca) to get an electronic version of the nomination form.

# Interview with Patti Bacchus, Chairperson of the Vancouver Board of Education

Thanks for agreeing to participate in this interview, and congratulations on being elected as Chairperson of the Vancouver Board of Education for a second year. Teachers have appreciated the public education advocacy work that you and the Board have done over the past 12 months since the trustee elections in November 2008. What is your personal take on the importance of the Vancouver Board of Education working with local stakeholders to address the underfunding issue and to stress the importance of public education?

Thank you. It's a real privilege to represent a group that is so passionately committed to public education.

Public education is something we do very well in this country in general, and in Vancouver specifically. It's a real success story and our school system has enabled generations of students to acquire the skills and knowledge they need to find their own success and to be engaged citizens. But I think the system is at risk, so it's absolutely critical for groups and individuals to come together to defend our school system from the steady erosion caused by underfunding and lack of political commitment from the provincial government.

No one group can do that alone — we need to engage each other in conversations about what is happening and then we need to look for ways to most effectively take our messages to the public and the provincial government. Speaking together or sharing the same message reinforces the importance, truth and urgency of what we're saying.

**I know that you have been invited to speak at Rotary Clubs, the University Women's Club, and other organizations, and that you've used those opportunities to stress the importance of public education to the business community and to those who do not have children in the system. What has the reception been at these events?**

The non-parent public is such an important and receptive audience to reach, and I find groups like the ones you've mentioned are already supportive of education and the role it plays in creating a healthy and just society. They're often pleasantly surprised at the good news about how well our schools are still doing, as so much of the media coverage they hear is about the underfunding issues, to the point that some are starting to think the system is broken. They're happy to hear our schools are still doing very well, but I also tell them the kind of pressure they're under and what we have to lose. When I point out the income gap between those who graduate and those who don't, and the social and economic costs of failing to meet the needs of all students, I see a lot of head nodding. They understand that the key to preventing poverty, homelessness, addictions and crime is a strong, fully funded public education system. The message that is so important to get out is that education is the best "stimulus" investment we can make — it's not an expense to trim in hard economic times.

**The upcoming Vancouver Board of Education budget-setting process for the 2010-2011 school year is going to be really difficult. Funding from the province hasn't kept up with inflation, various grants have been cut entirely, and more costs have been downloaded onto the school district. The situation has been worsening in that respect over the past decade. You came into the role**

**of trustee after having been involved in a variety of parent-led public education advocacy groups — and part of those groups' work was calling attention to the erosion of support to all students, particularly students with special needs. Some of that work you did in conjunction with VESTA and a variety of teachers at the school level. How important is it for parents and teachers to work together at the school level to advocate to MLAs and others for improved services for students? What, in your experience, has been effective for conversations to happen between teachers and parents on these issues?**

We are looking at a potentially huge gap for next year between what "out costs" will be and what the province funds us. Many costs going up next year so just to do exactly what we're doing this year will require millions more in funding. So far the message I'm hearing from the province is that funding will not increase — at least not nearly enough to cover our costs, so we may be left trying to balance a budget with insufficient funding. This has been the case for too many years in our district and boards have already cut to the bone. With over \$40 million in cuts since 2002-03, making more reductions will further damage the system and make it far more difficult to meet the needs of children.

It's important for teachers and parents to be discussing what is important in our schools and why, and for us as a board to make sure information about how we're funded and what that pays for is available in formats that is easily accessible. I think if we focus on our shared priorities for a strong, supported system, as opposed to getting distracted by fighting for individual projects and programs, we make a more compelling argument.

As a parent (with two children in secondary school), I've found it really helpful to take the time to talk with teachers about what they're experiencing day to day, how their teaching conditions have changed over time and what they find most frustrating, and what would be most helpful. When I'm talking with them about my own children, I find it especially positive to ask how I can support them in helping my son or daughter. At the Board level, we're trying to ensure parent and employees are informed about our financial situation and we're currently looking at using our website to provide information about how we can individually and jointly advocate for education.

**Teachers in Vancouver also appreciated the position the present Board took on the Fraser Institute's use of FSA scores to rank schools, as well as respecting parents' choices around their children's participation in the FSA. Teachers' position is that assessment is important, and that we use a variety of tools to gauge students' learning and to guide our practice — the FSA, however, does not serve those purposes, and the Fraser Institute's only motive in ranking schools is to promote privatization and "shame and blame" public schools that are already under-resourced. With the FSA season beginning in January, what message do you have for teachers on the value of authentic assessment?**

I'm not an expert in assessment or teaching, but if I have a message it's more of a question to teachers, along the lines of "how can assessment support your teaching" and

"what does authentic assessment mean to you and how can we support that." I'd also like to hear teachers' ideas about how we can do a better job of communicating with the public about what's happening in our schools.

**What are you looking forward to in 2010 as a trustee and as the chairperson?**

The best part of this role is getting out into the schools and seeing the innovation, passion and creativity that goes on in classrooms despite the gloomy financial news. I know teaching is a difficult job and I don't see it getting any easier, but it does seem to attract incredibly optimistic people who see promise in every child. That is definitely a big motivator for me.

I'm also really looking forward to working with our new Superintendent, Steve Cardwell. Steve understands our challenges and our goals, and I believe he'll be able to bring people together and help us focus on what's most important. He has a lot of enthusiasm and appreciation for the work being done in this district, and I believe he has the vision to help us continue to strongly advocate for the resources we need. I think he'll also be able to help us define where we need to be focusing the resources we have to be most effective in meeting the needs of all students.

It's also a privilege to work alongside and among people who place such a high value on public education and have a deep understanding of its role in our society. Despite our challenges, working for something that plays such a critical role in the kind of society I'd like my children — and all children — to live in is a pretty wonderful thing to be able to do.

*Interview conducted by Glen Hansman, December 2009*



**"It's important for teachers and parents to be discussing what is important in our schools and why, and for us as a board to make sure information about how we're funded and what that pays for is available in formats that is easily accessible. I think if we focus on our shared priorities for a strong, supported system, as opposed to getting distracted by fighting for individual projects and programs, we make a more compelling argument."**

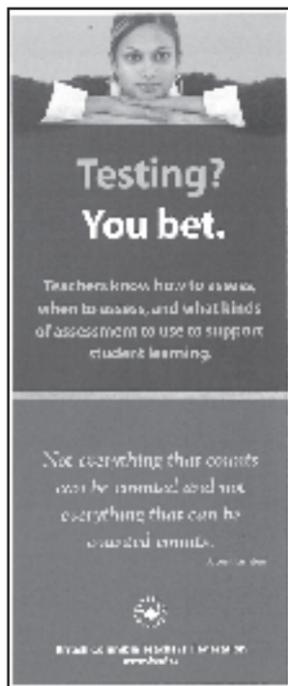
This b  
also a  
this ye  
use. V  
make  
copies  
teache  
grade  
distrib  
paren  
now a  
of Jun  
copies  
glen@

# Grade 4 and 7 teachers . . . .

Now is the time to get the word out to parents, and to encourage them to opt their children out of the FSA. Staff Reps were provided this year's FSA handout in November and December – but if you haven't distributed the handout to parents yet, please do it this week. Simply cut out the sample on this page, photocopy it, and distribute as per the advice below.

Are you a parent or grandparent of a grade 4 or 7 student? Then make sure you use this form too to opt your child out of participation in the FSA.

Brochure is available near for your VESTA will be available for members of any level to route to contacts between and the end of the year. Want to know more? Contact [glenn@vesta.ca](mailto:glenn@vesta.ca)



## What Parents Need to Know

**Dear Parents,**

The **Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)** is a set of annual provincial tests given to Grade 4 and 7 students in reading comprehension, writing, and numeracy. **These tests do not count toward your child's marks nor do the results actively support your child's learning.**

Choose the best answer:

a. test

b. teach

- FSA tests are expensive to develop and administer.
- FSA tests do not help students learn, or teachers teach.
- FSA tests take valuable time away from richer and more meaningful learning.
- FSA tests take valuable resources away from the classroom.
- Results are misused to rank schools and promote privatization.
- FSA data does not provide real help to students, parents, or schools.

Several schools in Vancouver only had a handful of students participate in the FSA last year because most parents of grades 4 and 7 students at those schools requested their child be exempted. For all these reasons, I am recommending that you write a letter to the principal or detach the following letter, and request that your child be exempted from the FSA.

Sincerely,

---

Please detach and use the letter to request that your Grade 4 or 7 child be withdrawn from the January and February 2010 FSA testing.

---

**Dear Principal,**

I understand that parents may request the principal to excuse a student in the event of a family emergency, lengthy illness, or other extenuating circumstances.

Please excuse my child, \_\_\_\_\_ from all three Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) tests for the following reason:

family emergency                       lengthy illness

other extenuating circumstances

Thank you for your co-operation.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/guardian signature

Members have the right (confirmed through court cases and arbitrations) to: 1) distribute materials on school property, 2) hand materials directly to parents, 3) discuss materials and your concerns with parents, 4) distribute materials home via students in a sealed envelope or folded & stapled, and 5) make materials visible on school property by displaying them on bulletin boards. VESTA has now uploaded multilingual material on our website for teachers to print-off and use as well. Questions? Email [glen@vesta.ca](mailto:glen@vesta.ca)

# Teacher Solidarity

## Panama Teachers Threaten Strike

Teachers' unions in Panama are threatening to go on strike in the new year against the government's neo-liberal education policies

Teachers were under sustained attack by government forces in the summer for campaigning for much needed repairs to school buildings. These problems have not been resolved - teachers are demanding improvement in school infrastructure, consideration of the problems faced by teachers in areas which are hard to get to and improvements in teacher training.

The union says that the government is attacking the state education system as a smokescreen for introducing neo-liberal policies. If the union does not get any movement by the government it will call out its members on strike in early 2010.

## Sudanese Teachers Strike Again for Unpaid Salaries

Teachers in the Sudanese state of Central Equatoria have been forced to go out on strike again to try and get the money which is owed to them

This is the second time in six months that the teachers have been forced to strike in order to get the salary which is owed to them. (See previous post) The teachers have not been paid since September by the government of Southern Sudan.

The state Director in the Ministry of Education David Lowela said that the government had never promised to pay the teachers their salaries! He said that as teachers in 5 counties in Central Equatoria had not even been paid their September salaries they should all wait until everyone had had their September salaries before they could expect their October salaries - this is happening in December.

It is hard for teachers in OECD countries to imagine a situation where their salaries are not paid at all - yet this is a very common scenario in the Global South. Teachers are working against all the odds to try and provide an education to the children in their area with appalling conditions, vast classes and little - or, in this case, no salary. Often this is happening in countries like Sudan which have vast oil or other mineral reserves which are being siphoned off by western corporations.

Meanwhile the World Bank continues to demand that these countries cut their public sector budgets still further in response to the economic crisis created by western banks and neo-liberal economic policies.



## Algerian Teachers Prolong their Strike

Algerian teachers' leaders have been forced to prolong their strike after the government attempted to block it

Teachers are protesting about poor working conditions, low salaries and the increasing use of so-called contract teachers who suffer job insecurity and even lower salaries.

## French Teachers Strike over Neo-Liberal 'Reform'

The planned strike by members of the SNES/FSU union went ahead in December. Teachers were striking over a raft of 'reforms' which include only replacing half the teachers who retire. Teachers' leaders say that this will increase the workload of those teachers still in service. The government is planning to reduce the number of teachers by 16,000 next year and by 50,000 over the next three years.

In addition the government is increasing parental 'choice' and abolishing school catchment areas - a development which has had a devastating effect on schools in other European countries - in particular the UK.

Despite the fact that it is precisely this belief in choice and the free market which has brought the world economy to the point of ruin, neo-liberal governments like the Sarkozy administration in France are still pressing ahead with these changes. Cut backs in jobs are all part of the same project and the French action is mirrored in other countries - for example the mass public workers strike in Ireland last week.

Teachers in France were joined by postal workers protesting about what they see as the planned privatisation of postal services - a struggle which also has echoes in the UK.

For more, visit: [www.teachersolidarity.com](http://www.teachersolidarity.com) and [www.ei-ie.org](http://www.ei-ie.org)

# Salary Indemnity Plan Q&A

The BCTF operates a plan that provides both short- and long-term benefits to teachers who, due to illness or injury, are disabled from working\*. "The Salary Indemnity Plan is important," says Jody Polukoshko, one of VESTA's Vice Presidents, "because we can never anticipate when we're going to get a major illness that might put us in the position of running out of sick days from the employer. SIP is there to help teachers when sick leave can't be counted on."

The plan, in accordance with the regulations, applies to all active BCTF members with regular assignments. Here is some general information about the plan.

## Who contributes to the Salary Indemnity Fund?

Effective 2009-10, each teacher contributes 1.89% of salary earned. Of that, 0.55% supports the short-term portion of the plan, and 1.34% supports the long-term portion.

All teachers must contribute to the short-term portion of the plan. However, if a teacher has reached factor "88," has reached 64 years of age, or is in receipt of a registered pension, he/she may withdraw from the long-term portion of the plan.

## Who is eligible to collect benefits from these plans?

Under the short-term portion of the plan, a teacher may receive benefits from the plan, beginning the day after the last day of paid work or sick leave, if the teacher is prevented, by illness or injury, from performing his/her normal employment duties. A teacher may receive short-term disability benefits for 120 days, or, if he/she is working part-time, for up to 20 months.

Once into long-term disability, a teacher may receive benefits for up to one year, being disabled from his/her "own occupation." After that first year, the teacher must be suffering from a mental or physical disability that prevents the teacher from performing the duties of any gainful employment, and is designated as being disabled from "any occupations."

## Who pays the benefits?

Short-term claims are adjudicated and paid by the BC Teachers' Federation, while long-term claims are adjudicated and paid by Great-West Life. However, this is not an insured plan. Both short-term and long-term benefits are paid directly from members' Salary Indemnity Plan fees.

## How long can a teacher remain on benefits?

Once a teacher has been in receipt of benefits for 90 days, a medical specialist must support the claim. A teacher can continue to receive benefits from the plan so long as the on-going medical supports the claim.

## How many people are currently receiving benefits?

There are approximately 1,750 teachers currently receiving either short-term or long-term benefits from the plan.

## How do we know if we have enough money to pay these claims?

The Plan is subject to an actuarial evaluation each year. As a result, we always know the status of the funding of the plan and the Salary Indemnity Plan fee is reviewed annually.

## Could the plan run out of money and not be able to pay benefits to teachers currently on claim?

Currently, the fund has assets of approximately \$206 million, and liabilities of approximately \$163 million. There is sufficient money set aside to pay the benefits to all teachers who are currently on claim. The fund is invested and managed professionally, in accordance with BCTF policy, and the BCTF Finance Committee oversees the investment managers each quarter. The fund is diversified, and invested conservatively.

\*(If the illness or injury is work-related, a WCB claim must be initiated.)

## Education International launches Declaration on Schools as Safe Sanctuaries

Acid attacks on Afghan girls, drive-by shootings of Colombian teachers, assassination of Iraqi academics and students, arson of schools in Thailand: These are only a few examples of the increasing violent political and military attacks on education. Urging the world to protect and defend education, Education International (EI) has issued a formal Declaration that Schools Shall Be Safe Sanctuaries.

The Declaration voices the collective demand by teachers and their unions worldwide that education should be protected in times of conflict, and schools should be respected as zones of peace where children, youth and adults can build healthy communities.

"In most countries of the world, teachers and students do not have to worry about whether they are going to be shot on their way to school or blown up when they get there," says EI General Secretary Fred van Leeuwen. "But increasingly in conflict countries and fragile states they are putting their lives at risk simply by turning up for lessons."

Attacks on education take many appalling forms: bombing and burning of schools; illegal detention, disappearance, torture and assassination of teachers and union officials; abduction for extortion or forced recruitment of child soldiers, or rape by armed forces.

"The scale and atrocity of these attacks are horrific, and they are increasing," said EI Deputy General Secretary Jan Eastman. "With this Declaration, EI is urging a series of steps to be taken at the international level to prevent these violations of fundamental human and trade union rights, and to ensure the safety and security of learners and teachers everywhere."

EI's Declaration contains seven articles, each articulating a call to action from the world community. They are:

- Reaffirm the commitment to the principle of the right to education in safety
- Take practical measures to ensure protection
- End impunity for attacks on students, teachers, academics, all other education personnel and education facilities
- Strengthen monitoring of attacks and efforts to end impunity
- Prioritize action and share expertise on resilience and recovery
- Make education an agent for peace
- Support campaigns of solidarity

The full text of the Declaration and a supporting guide can be found on the Education International web site at: [www.ei-ie.org/healthandsafety](http://www.ei-ie.org/healthandsafety)

## Gender Ideology

Last year I was a teacher-on-call in a class with a student-teacher who was responsible for gym that day. When class started, the teacher asked all the girls to run each of the lines on the gym floor, and she then she had the boys do the same activity. In giving feedback later, I asked her why she decided to divide the class this way, to which she replied that she just wanted to easily separate the students so they could quickly warm up. In other words, she was attempting to carry out an effective management strategy. I responded, "Would you have asked the Asian-Canadian students to run the lines first and then had the White kids do it?"

Separate-but-equal was an ideology deeply entrenched in the United States until the mid 60's. That American policy in some ways mirrors a similar racist ideology in Canada that made residential schools for Aboriginal people seem appropriate- that is, appropriate for the dominate group who were invested in maintaining racial purity. Today we easily appreciate that marking student bodies according to race and separating them in different spaces is totally unacceptable.

Unfortunately, nowadays an educational practice related to separate-but-equal is widespread and operating invisibly in schools in British Columbia. It is the similar practice wherein the bodies of our students are marked and separated because of an ideological and taken-for-granted belief in their difference. I am talking about the ubiquitous pedagogical practice of separating girls from boys within public school classrooms. Many of you readers will likely be sighing, "*Oh come on! What could possibly be wrong with separating girls and boys for certain things. It's perfectly harmless.*" However, this practice, far from being harmless, is an oppressive feature of most schools and has the potential effect of isolating and marginalizing the many students who do not easily conform to concrete gender expectations.

When institutions like schools actively engage in such processes as gendering, attaching cultural meaning to biological sex, they are engaged in a process that social scientists refer to as "constituting the subject". Within this process, an individual's (or subject's) sense of themselves becomes forged by an array of cultural processes that align in certain ways to produce an "effect", resulting for example in creating a racialized, disabled or classed subject, among others. Schools play a significant role in constituting the student-subject (creating various effects) in all sorts of ways- for instance with academic labels like "she's an "A" student" to less positive identifiers such as "he's designated." However of all the school processes that contribute to constituting the student-subjects, probably none are more pervasive than the cultural practice of gendering. A few of the many in schools include lineups, gendered gym activities, afterschool sports, dance activities, and the seemingly innocuous ones such as addressing the class with "boys and girls".

### This is different?

When I have made this argument in other spaces, some people have responded by acknowledging that, while race is one thing, gender is completely different. Boys and girls are different. People point to the huge amount of research out there backing up their claim on how girls' brains are wired differently from boys', ignoring the heaps of research that concludes that the supposed differences are minor at best. Genderists, people who believe that differences are genetic and exist regardless of cultural paradigms, also point out that even children themselves prefer to be grouped by sex without any influence from the teacher.

To me, the fact that students request being grouped this way is only evidence to how deeply entrenched our gender ideology is. In Kindergarten, I find that many of the kids have little hesitation of sitting/playing with the "other" sex, but even by that age they have a deeply indoctrinated belief in how boys and girls are different. Just today one kindergarten boy pointed at another boy's pink shirt and called him a girl. But by grade one the gender camps are firmly entrenched.

As educators we often just think these are the normal antics of children, without looking at the ways that our own cultural practices are actively constructing the great gender divide.

### What's the harm?

Marking bodies by biological sex and then mapping these bodies to gendered assumptions of how they should or will

behave inevitably leads to excluding the many students who do not fit those gender norms so readily. Even if I concede that some boys are more physically active than some girls, this does not mean I would carry out a pedagogical practice privileging those who fit my gendered expectations.. Moreover, a girl might seem "girly" in some ways and a "tom boy" in others. So dividing them by some assumption of their undeniable difference is surely then a division based on a difference that is shared by only some people of both sexes, not all people of one. The range of differences between girls and the range between boys should be enough to convince a teacher that dividing the two is an inappropriate pedagogic strategy.

I will go further and suggest that those who are supposedly better-served (those girls/boys who fit the gender norms) are actually being short-changed by such educational practices. If boys and girls are being separated because things would run "smoother" in the classroom, then they are being denied an opportunity to negotiate, compromise, create meanings and learn from interactive experiences with the gendered "Other".

While we teachers lament that girls start showing little interest in competitive sports as they get older or boys seem to be less interested in reading, we never stop to think that we inadvertently are participating in creating this gendered "reality" partly because we keep constituting them as different beings via our many gendered pedagogical practices. They never stood a chance to "be" otherwise.

### The "phobias"

These gendering practices are problematic for another reason. The main targets for homophobic and transphobic bullying are students who do not conform to strict gender norms. Whenever teachers participate in articulating a gender ideology by carrying out pedagogical practices that divide students by biological sex, they are encouraging their students to believe in the ideology's core tenants- that girls and boys are unique beyond their anatomical specificity.

When students then display behaviour, desires or aspirations that challenge that ideology, they become the targets of homophobic or transphobic bullying. I do not want to cite the arsenal of convincing statistics from current research on the school experiences of students perceived to be LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered or questioning), but the rates of verbal and physical threats are highly elevated compared to their straight-perceived classmates. Also, these bullied students' perception of the school as a safe environment, as you can imagine, are tragically low.

As a teacher, you can't be in all places at all times to curb these elevated rates of gender-bullying, but you can make a real difference by interrupting the ideology that underpins such bullying- the ideology that girls and boys are, at the very core of their beings, different. This gender ideology leads to forms of gender divisions in school that are reminiscent of the separate but equal strategies of racial containment that have been thoroughly debunked.

It has no place in public school environments where students should be given the freedom to just "be" without teachers and others attaching our own constructed meanings to their bodies.

David Butler  
VESTA Pride Committee  
Chair



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### JANUARY 11 and 12

Half-day School Union Rep Training, with a focus on professional autonomy and assessment. Every worksite is asked to ensure that one person attends one of the half-day workshops.

### JANUARY 12 & 26

Executive Committee, 4 p.m. at VESTA

### JANUARY 14

Adult Educator Executive Committee, 4 p.m. at VESTA

### JANUARY 19

General Meeting and Staff Rep Assembly, 4 p.m. at Tupper

### JANUARY 22-23

BCTF Representative Assembly, in Victoria

### JANUARY 27

Health & Safety Committee, 4 p.m. at VESTA

### FEBRUARY 9

Executive Committee, 4 p.m. at VESTA

### FEBRUARY 24

Health & Safety Committee, 4 p.m. at VESTA

ALL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND AND SPEAK AT ANY OF THE ABOVE MEETINGS. STAFF REPS HAVE A VOTE AT THE STAFF REP ASSEMBLY, AND ANY MEMBER HAS A VOTE AT THE GENERAL MEETING.

Any member has a right to bring a motion to one of the governing bodies of VESTA. It is suggested that the motion be submitted to the VESTA office in advance so that it can be printed on the agenda and circulated to worksites. Usually, motions relate to issues facing teachers in Vancouver or BC schools, and other times motions are brought by individual members or Staff Reps that address issues in our broader community, provincially, nationally, or internationally. Members are entitled to do so under our by-laws — and, the meeting gets to decide what to do with the motion.

AS WE HEAD INTO BARGAINING AND INTO A SCHOOL BOARD BUDGET-SETTING PROCESS THAT WILL INVOLVE SOME DIFFICULT CHOICES, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THERE BE REPRESENTATION FROM EVERY WORKSITE AT ALL OF THE STAFF REP ASSEMBLIES AND GENERAL MEETINGS. DON'T FIND OUT ABOUT DECISIONS OR ISSUES AFTER THE FACT! BE THERE TO HEAR AND TO PARTICIPATE IN THE DECISION-MAKING.

# Violence Prevention & the Right To Know

**OH&SR 4.30** requires the employer to inform all workers of the nature and the extent of the risk of violence. The duty to inform includes a duty to provide information related to the risk of violence from persons who have a history of violent behaviour and whom workers are likely to encounter in the course of their work. This information must be provided to workers prior to their exposure to the risk. The employer must also instruct workers on: a) how to recognize the potential for violence; and, b) the procedures, policies, and work environment arrangements which have been developed, the appropriate responses to incidents of violence, including how to obtain assistance as well as the procedures for reporting, investigating, and documenting incidents of violence.

Members are often told that they cannot be informed about a student's violent history as it would violate the **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPOP)**, the **School Act**, or the **Youth Criminal Justice Act**. This is not correct. Members *are* entitled to know the nature and the extent of any risk of violence to which they are exposed. The Acts and OH&SR work in concert with the other legislation, or parallel to it.

Section 25 of FOIPOP provides that whether or not a request for access has been made, the school board must without delay disclose to the public, to an affected group of people, or to an applicant, information about a risk of significant harm to the environment or to the health and safety of the public or a group of people or when disclosure is for any other reason clearly in the public interest. Note that prior to releasing the information, the school board, if practicable, must notify the party to whom the information pertains and the Privacy Commissioner. Anyone who receives information under this section is bound by the same privacy laws. Additionally, Section 22(4) states that a disclosure of personal information is not an unreasonable invasion of a third person's privacy if there are compelling circumstances affecting anyone's health and safety.

Privacy provisions under the School Act are superseded by the provisions of FOIPOP. Section 125 of the Youth Criminal Justice Act allows the disclosure of information in court records and police records if the disclosure is necessary to ensure the safety of staff, students or other persons. Such information must be kept separate from other records of the student, must not be accessible to any person for whom the disclosure is not necessary and must be destroyed when it is no longer needed for the purpose for which it was disclosed.

There is no barrier to providing members with information that a particular student poses a safety risk. In fact, there is a duty for a school board with information about a student who poses a risk of violence to members to disclose the identity of the student, as well as the nature and extent of the risk of violence.

Members who are being denied information should involve a WorkSafeBC officer or file an application under FOIPOP for the information after seeking the advice of VESTA.

#### **Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act S.25** **Information must be disclosed.**

"Whether or not a request for access is made, the head of a public body must, without delay, disclose to the public, to an affected group of people, or to an applicant, information about a risk of significant harm to the environment or to the health and safety of the public or a group of people."

#### **Youth Criminal Justice Act Section 125** **Disclosure of Information in a Record**

"Court records and police records relating to a young offender may be released to school representatives if the disclosure is necessary "to ensure the safety of staff, students or other persons..."

#### **VESTA's objectives**

To promote the welfare of members;

To raise, by united effort, the status of the teaching profession;

To promote the interests of education;

To co-operate with other bodies in the advancement of the foregoing objectives;

To represent the Association's members and to regulate relations with their employer through collective bargaining of terms and conditions of employment.

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

**Letter to the editor?**

**Article you'd like published?**

**Send it to [glen@vesta.ca](mailto:glen@vesta.ca) for consideration**