

Respect for learners and teachers . . . What a capital idea!

FROM MY NOTEBOOK . . .

It's been a little over two years since last I wrote this column — and my green VESTA notebook has gone lots of places with me in that time!

It returned to the classroom for two years and kept notes of different school-based meetings. It went to the BCTF AGM in June and held my reminders and my speech for Member-at-Large on the BCTF Executive Committee. It's gone to Summer Conference and my first BCTF Executive Committee meetings.

Most recently, I've taken my trusty green book out to other locals. On the BCTF Executive, I have been assigned as the contact for locals in the Vancouver Island North zone and I met with the representatives of the nine locals at the Zone Meeting held in Nanaimo.

Also, at the request of a local, I attended a Princeton teachers' General Meeting. It's been very interesting to listen to the concerns of the teachers in small locals on the Island or in Princeton. Often you hear in the BCTF that the differences between big and small locals, urban and rural locals are huge. Well my notebook jottings tell it differently.

Where have you heard these comments before: *no replacements for SEAs? loss of wages on a school snow closure day? no TOC for workshop coverage? 4 or more students with special needs in a classroom and no additional support? limited resources especially for new IRPs? more and more disruptions to teaching time?*

Teachers, at VESTA meetings or in Princeton, from Nanaimo or Alberni, are saying the same things and mainly they are saying, "Bill 33 has not improved teaching or learning for my students, for my colleagues or for me."

They are beginning to ask, "What do we do to make things better for teachers and students?" It's a conversation starter for all of us.

In my notebook I've also recorded snippets of impressive data talk at my first BCTF Finance Committee meeting where five companies were making investment management presentations to gain the ethical investment portfolio of our Salary Indemnity Fund. Here's a sampling of the comments: *"These numbers are numbers with arithmetic assumptions". "Gas is in a bear market." "We are value managers looking for yields."*

One comment jumped out at me: *"Every asset has its business plan and that is to squeeze out the extra percentage points."* All this talk about money, economy, return yields moving up the capitalization scale sent my thoughts directly to FSA bafflegab.

For me FSA is the ultimate exemplar of the business model of education fueled by the privatization initiatives of the government leading directly to the loss of public education. FSA ignores the social justice issues teachers face when assessing the whole child. FSA focuses on narrow statistics extrapolated to levels of empirical evidence of learning — or not learning. This ranking of schools and of children within schools flies in the face of social responsibility in the classroom.

If the Minister of Education were truly searching for her highest asset return, her ministry would develop a real investment strategy.

The strategy would include at least ten basis points: resources, texts and books for all children, clean healthy schools, increased Teacher-Librarian time, early identification and early intervention for young learners, support for music and fine arts in every classroom, class size limits reflective of student needs . . . and finally, respect for teachers and learners together, for the teaching and learning that goes on every day in our classrooms. What a capital idea!

Patricia Gudlaugson
1st Vice-President



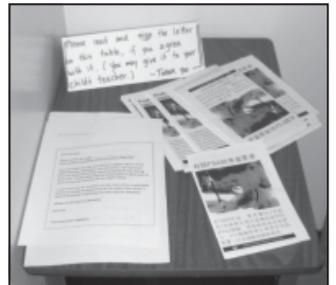
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GARIBALDI ANNEX AWAITS CLOSURE DECISION

As you have likely heard in the media, Garibaldi Annex is now "officially" being considered for closure, effective 2008 June 30.

After a community meeting with parents and the public on November 28, and a Committee II/III meeting on December 12, the Vancouver Board of Education will make its final decision on closure of Garibaldi Annex on December 18.

Concerns have been raised about the process being employed to make this decision - in particular the tight timelines, which will leave the mostly ESL school community scrambling to give meaningful input. Questions too have been raised about what will happen with the "surplus land," given that the provincial ministers of labour and education announced in September that surplus school land will first be considered for use by the provincial government at "fair market value."



Members are reminded that the employer has declared that teacher materials about the FSA cannot go home via students.

The matter has been grieved, and will be going to arbitration in the new year. VESTA views this as a matter of freedom of expression.

What is not in dispute is adult-to-adult dissemination of information about the FSA. Information tables (such as the one above), face-to-face conversations, posters on bulletin boards, and discussion at PAC meetings are all effective methods which are not being disputed.

Did You Know?

BC is miserly in funding education

- Increase in education funding from 1999–2005: 5%
- Average increase, all provinces: 13%
- Increase in provincial GDP for the period: 33%
- Education funding decrease, as a percentage of GDP: 16%
- Resulting shortfall: \$980 million in the 2005 budget
- Amount needed to rehire all teachers lost since 2001: \$250 million
- Increase in student/educator ratio in this period: from 17:2 to 17:5
- BC's place in the student/educator ratio comparison: 10th

Big support for increased education funding

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A September BC-wide poll sponsored by CUPE finds that 87% support the provincial government increasing funding for public education in BC, with 68% strongly supporting an increase. In the K–12 area, 79% want a special government funding initiative to help keep public schools open, with close to 50% of those saying it is a high priority.

Sources: CUPE BC's *Public Employee* (fall 2007),
www.bctf.ca, StatsCan

Rep Assembly

On November 2nd and 3rd, teachers from across the province met in Richmond to vote on BCTF policies and plans at the fall Representative Assembly. As a new Local Representative, I found my first RA quite interesting, and somewhat like a mini-Annual General Meeting. Some highlights that may interest Vancouver teachers include:

The new *Advantage Program* that BCTF members can sign up for on the BCTF website. Upon joining this plan teachers will find savings on many services and products.

Adoption of a plan for employment equity for Aboriginal teachers. This is a step towards recognizing that our First Nations students require more representation in our profession.

A report about the far-reaching TILMA agreement with Alberta that may cause problems for our teaching certification and further erode our public education system in BC.

A report on class size and composition that outlines how the BCTF is speaking for teachers on this important ongoing concern. Since Bill 33 has done little to alleviate the pressures on the classroom, provincial grievances on these matters will continue to forge ahead.

A decision was made by the RA to allow those teachers who signed up for the Teachers' Congress to attend even though that body will not be representative, and those attending will be picked off a list by the whim of the government.

An action plan was adopted outlining how the BCTF plans to respond to the endless pursuit of data by unacceptable and unjustified testing. Teachers in Vancouver who have done such great work educating parents about the FSA will continue be supported by VESTA and the BCTF. More information about the plan will be forthcoming to the next Staff Rep Assembly.

Your LRs will continue to advocate for Vancouver elementary teachers at the next RA in February. We look forward to hearing from teachers on concerns or issues you may want to bring to a future RA or AGM.

BCTF GOES TO GORDO & SHIRLEY'S "TEACHERS CONGRESS."

WHY?

The Representative Assembly decided to amend the previous BCTF strategy around the Teachers' Congress, on the recommendation of the BCTF Executive Committee. VESTA did not support this decision on principle, and will be bringing related resolutions to the 2008 BCTF AGM.

Here's what one of VESTA's LRs had to say at the microphones:

Dear Colleagues,

I was the delegate from my local that was elected last year to take part in the Teachers' Forum that ran parallel to Gordon Campbell's unelected and undemocratic Teachers' Congress. While many of us at that forum voiced our frustrations at not being able to tell the Premier about the particular situations in our classrooms, we made a strong principled, strategic, and political stand in not being across the street.

This is all about who speaks for the public school teachers of British Columbia. Twenty years ago we had a premier who tried to take away the BCTF as that voice in a very dramatic action. Today we have a different premier with a different strategy. There will be no acknowledgement at the upcoming Teachers' Congress that a private school teacher speaks only for herself or himself and a Vancouver Elementary endorsed teacher speaks on behalf of three thousand members.

We took a strong stand last year in not attending the Premier's private party that was by invitation only. Let's take the most practical approach possible and stick with the principle that delegates who represent teachers are always selected by our own members, and not selected from some list by the whim of a premier or employer. We would be setting a very dangerous precedent.

Thank you.

**Chris Harris
Local Rep to
the BCTF**



VESTA news

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

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Printed by Broadway Printers

The countdown begins . . .

ONE YEAR TO AN IMPROVED SCHOOL BOARD

In twelve months it will be time for Vancouver voters to elect another school board. When the current NPA-dominated school board took over in 2005, new board chair Ken Denike acknowledged that the outgoing board had done much to improve labour relations within the school district. Teachers agree that we enjoyed a productive and healthy relationship with the COPE and Green Party trustees from 2002-2005. That thoughtful and caring school board helped to repair a dysfunctional relationship between management, trustees, and the various employee groups.

Sadly, the current school board has not taken a similar approach, and has done virtually no advocacy with the provincial government on the critical issues facing Vancouver schools.

Instead, it has chosen to significantly cut the number of teachers, especially non-enrolling teachers. Most of the NPA trustees have chosen to ignore the needs of vulnerable students by trying to “rubber-stamp” reports on class size and composition.

Compare that to the previous COPE and Green Party majority school board, which:

- reduced class sizes in Grades 4 to 7 beyond the School Act by putting a cap on grade 4 and reducing the district average to 28 for other intermediate grades.
- introduced a consultative budget process that welcomed parents’ and teachers’ voices at the table.
- helped win back \$159 million in provincial funding for public schools.
- stopped \$3 million in provincial cuts to inner-city schools and our most vulnerable children.
- restored multicultural workers cut by the previous NPA board.
- expanded access to all-day kindergarten in a number of schools.
- took real steps to address bullying, racism, homophobia in Vancouver schools.
- advocated for restored services for Special Needs students
- passed a comprehensive policy addressing corporate involvement in schools
- welcomed and sought out teacher input in decision-making at all levels in the VSB organization.

Vancouver’s teachers need a school board that will work together with its employee groups and parents to demand

adequate funding from the provincial government, insist on sufficient resources for all students, and work to lessen the bureaucratic “accountability” agenda which detracts from student learning.

VESTA’S AD-HOC ELECTION COMMITTEE

VESTA’s Executive Committee recently passed a motion to set up an Ad-Hoc Election Committee for next fall’s municipal elections.

Although it’s said that a week is a long time in politics, twelve months can go by quite quickly. With a focus on school board elections, we want to mobilize teachers and educate others, question candidates on all important topics, and otherwise ensure that our issues are front-and-centre during the campaign.

Teachers are very welcome in political campaigns because of the many skills they bring: organizational skills, expertise in communication, and strong writing and research abilities. Teachers also often bring community and other connections, and their voices are generally well-respected. The committee will have opportunities for anyone who wishes to be involved. Your involvement will depend on the type of work you find interesting and the needs of our campaign.

Possible tasks for the committee include identifying and mobilizing voters, attending/coordinating panels and all-candidates meetings, writing/designing campaign literature and advertising, preparing candidate profiles, providing liaison with the political campaigns, and undertaking website updates and “e-campaigns.”

Please contact the VESTA Office if you are interested in joining the ad-hoc committee or helping out in some other way with the campaign. (Look for a notice going out to schools soon about the date of the first meeting.)

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PROBLEMATIC PROCESS AROUND ADOPTION OF SUPERINTENDENT’S REPORT ON SCHOOL ORGANIZATION

At its meeting of 2007 October 15, the Vancouver Board of Education trustees received the Superintendent’s report on the organization of schools. The trustees had only received the report that day.

This report is a requirement of Section 76.3 of the School Act, which states:

(7) On or before October 15 of the school year to which the report relates, the board must, at a public meeting of the board,

- (a) accept the report, or*
- (b) instruct the superintendent of schools to revise the report.*

76.3.(7) above presents trustees with two options. However, despite over 1200 classes in excess of the size and/or composition numbers in the School Act, a motion was made to choose option (a) – that is, to accept the superintendent’s report. After deliberation, the vote was taken. Four trustees voted in favour, four against, and one abstention. The chairperson ruled that the motion was defeated.

An objection was raised by one trustee, and a recess was called to check the by-laws.

When the meeting resumed, the NPA trustees relied upon an “interpretation” of by-law 1.III.6. to advance the acceptance of the Superintendent’s report. This by-law states that:

Any trustee who fails to vote or abstains from voting shall be considered to have voted on the prevailing side of the question.

The “prevailing side” was interpreted by the NPA as meaning the four who voted in favour of the motion. So, the report was considered “adopted” and sent to the Ministry as such.

What was not discussed at the 2007 October 15 meeting, though, was VSB by-law 1.III.5.(d), which clearly states that:

In the event of an equality of votes, the motion shall be deemed to be negatived.

The wording of 1.III.5.(d). does not lend to “interpretation.” A 4-4 tie vote means that the motion to accept the Superintendent’s report was negatived, and that the “prevailing side” is the 4 trustees who voted against the acceptance of the report.

Thus, the Superintendent’s report has not actually been adopted, and therefore the VSB is not in compliance with either option presented in Section 76.3.(7).

VESTA is gravely concerned about the dubious use of democratic process in this instance, and is asking that the Vancouver Board of Education

- **comply with Section 76.3 of the School Act**
- **review its rules of order by-laws**
- **publicly acknowledge that the by-laws were not adhered to**

The Superintendent’s report lists over 1200 classes which went over the size or composition numbers in the School Act. They are all, in the VSB’s opinion, “appropriate for student learning.”

THESE TRUSTEES VOTED IN FAVOUR OF ACCEPTING THE REPORT: Shirley Wong (NPA), Don Lee (NPA), Clarence Hansen (NPA), and Ken Denike (NPA).

THESE TRUSTEES VOTED AGAINST: Allan Wong (COPE), Sharon Gregson (COPE), Eleanor Gregory (NPA), and Allen Blakey (COPE).

THIS TRUSTEE ABSTAINED: Carol Gibson (NPA).

PLEASE . . . LET THE PARENTS AND TEACHERS AT YOUR SCHOOL KNOW WHICH CHOICE YOUR LIAISON TRUSTEE MADE.

Bill 33: Proven to be unimproved?

It is sometimes hard to remember that only five years ago teachers and students in Vancouver had a clear and strong model to use in supporting the inclusion of Special Needs students in classrooms. Before this language was stripped from the VTF/VSB Collective Agreement by the provincial government (in violation of international labour law) a class with a *third* Special Needs student was given a 0.5 FTE teacher or Special Education Assistant, as they were called then. As well, no class could have more than one student with an A, C, G, or H designation. Such classes were considered to be "exceptional circumstances" and therefore significant assistance was provided for the students in those classes.

Returning (reluctantly) to the present day, we find that not only are classes with 4, 5, 6, 8 or even 12 students no longer "exceptional", but that under the provisions of Bill 33 students in these classes are not entitled to anything beyond a meeting to consult the teacher involved. Such consultations must be "meaningful" but are too often simply exercises in justifying why little or no help can be offered. Where additional help has been given, it has sometimes been at the expense of other classes.

Class composition is not an abstract concept, but a relevant fact of every teacher's daily life. Vancouver teachers have consistently urged improvements in this area, despite governments intent on building surpluses and school boards with few resources and fewer solutions. We have always understood that the number of students in the class and their particular needs is about both improving our working conditions and improving learning opportunities for our students.

The VSB began this year with almost 80 regular program elementary classes with four or more Ministry-designated Special Needs students. By comparison, in 2006-2007 there were 25 such classes in September and by June there were over 100.

Last spring the Board briefly showed that it understood the need to try to help the students in these classes by adding 25.6 FTE staffing when provincial money was released. Unfortunately the 2007-2008 VSB budget eliminated **nearly twice that much** FTE of incremental staff and therefore **significantly less help** for classes is available from already over-burdened "LAC/ ESL/ Resource/ Special Needs teachers."

Can this legislation be salvaged or should it simply be written off? Should positive aspects of this legislation such as firm limits on class size and teacher consent be extended to include all grades and to include class composition? Or is the underlying problem that the limits and associated regulations are legislated by the provincial government rather than existing as freely negotiated working conditions?

One of the provisions of Bill 33 was that there must be a review of its provisions and outcomes before the end of 2007-2008. This provides teachers with an opportunity to point out the numerous weaknesses of the legislation. On a related note, the BCTF is gathering information for use in provincial grievances around the unacceptable applications of this law.

Class size and composition limits that allow classes of 37 or more in secondary schools, or classes of 12 or more IEP students in an elementary school can not be considered anything less than dismal failures. There remain long waitlists for Psycho-Educational

and/or Speech and Language assessments, unaddressed by any legislation. Those who crafted this legislation should have spent more time getting input from those who teach these students.

It was heartening to see that on October 15th VSB trustees did not achieve a majority to approve the Superintendent's Report, with a tied 4-4 vote. Kudos to the COPE trustees and to NPA trustee Eleanor Gregory who voted against accepting this report, and to NPA trustee Carol Gibson, who abstained. This report is required by the government, and tried to defend the indefensible, that classes such as those discussed above are "appropriate for student learning."

We have provided below some specific advice for those who are or will be affected by the provisions of Bill 33/ *Section 76 of the School Act*. Any support inferior to the provisions in the pre-stripped Collective Agreement should not be considered an acceptable resolution. Advocating for additional teaching staff is in the best interests of all of the students in the class and should always be the first option requested.

Member contributions on this topic are encouraged. Personal experiences are some of the most powerful persuaders, so please share them with us.

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If you are a teacher of a regular program class with more than three designated students (excluding gifted students) you:
-must be consulted by your principal at a meeting within 15 days of the 4th Special

Needs student being identified.

-should ask your VESTA Senior Staff Rep to be present to keep notes at the meeting and to send to VESTA the form detailing why the violation is taking place and what alternatives have been identified to help the students in the class.
-should not feel pressured to accept inadequate assistance. "There are no resources available" is not an acceptable response. Principals should help advocate for additional resources, not put up roadblocks.
-should understand that since this is a consultation meeting the signing of the form by the Staff Rep is simply to confirm that the meeting took place. It is NOT an indication of consent by anyone to solutions discussed.
-must avoid "solutions" that negatively affect other classes. The purpose of Bill 33 should be to provide additional support, not remove service or resources from other students.
-should advocate at all times for resolutions that address the needs of all of the students in your class.

New WorkSafe Regulations

In July WorkSafe BC introduced new rules applying to young or new workers. Although new regulations often have little effect on teachers these particular changes to the *Occupational Health and Safety Regulation* will have impact on some VESTA members. The new legislation provides a single list of employer requirements for health and safety orientation and training of workers.

Two relevant sections of Regulation 3.23 are reprinted here:

Guidelines Part 3 - Young or New Workers

G3.23 Young or new worker orientation and training

1) An employer must ensure that before a young or new worker begins work in a workplace, the young or new worker is given health and safety orientation and training specific to that young or new worker's workplace.

(2) The following topics must be included in the young or new worker's orientation and training:

(a) the name and contact information for the young or new worker's supervisor;

(b) the employer's and young or new worker's rights and responsibilities under the *Workers Compensation Act* and this Regulation including the reporting of unsafe conditions and the right to refuse to perform unsafe work;

(c) workplace health and safety rules;

(d) hazards to which the young or new worker may be exposed, including risks from robbery, assault or confrontation;

(e) working alone or in isolation;

(f) violence in the workplace;

(g) personal protective equipment;

(h) location of first aid facilities and means of summoning first aid and reporting illnesses and injuries;

(i) emergency procedures;

(j) instruction and demonstration of the young or new worker's work task or work process;

(k) the employer's health and safety program, if required under section 3.1 of this Regulation;

(l) WHMIS information requirements set out in Part 5, as applicable to the young or new worker's workplace;

(m) contact information for the occupational health and safety committee or the worker health and safety representative, as applicable to the workplace.

Generic instruction and orientation, coupled with site-specific information can be particularly useful where a worker is performing the same work under different circumstances. Examples include circumstances where workers are performing casual or temporary work (such as teachers-on-call).

WorkSafeBC maintains a Young Worker portal on its web site, which can be accessed at: <http://www2.worksafebc.com/Topics/YoungWorker/Home.asp>. The portal provides a range of materials and helpful links, including a checklist for training and orientation, a program on rights and responsibilities, and information on typical accidents young workers have experienced.

VESTA is working to ensure that this training is done. It's important that Teachers on Call are given relevant information both verbally and in written form before they start their teaching day.

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EDUCATION CLAWBACKS

I'm very pleased this morning to have a little bit of time to speak to the issue of the recent announcement of some clawbacks in educational funding for school trustees and school districts across British Columbia.

We read and hear a lot about good intentions for our public education system — very important goals that we would like to believe we share: to raise the graduation rates in British Columbia; to catch and lift those one in five kids who currently don't graduate; to improve the outcomes for the 1/5 of kids who

are graduating with low literacy, who are going on to diminished fortunes as adults when they leave school; the need to address the one in four not developmentally ready when they come to school — large challenges there; to diagnose the over one in

ten who have learning or behavioral disabilities in a timely manner, and then to provide teaching supports throughout their school career; and also the very important goal, very pertinent at this time when we're discussing a first treaty in British Columbia, to improve outcomes for aboriginal students who graduate in startlingly low numbers.

One of the key things in meeting any of these objectives — and the government likes to say this when it is out talking in communities — is to create stability and predictability for educational funding, and that that is a key to success. Yet we see government adding new challenges to the educational system virtually on a yearly basis.

Last year, of course, we saw the accountability contracts rolled over into achievement contracts and a new pressure placed on school districts — again, without any additional resources. We saw the creation of a responsibility to develop

and implement district-wide literacy plans not only for kids in schools but for adult learners as well. We've seen in the recent past a notional cap on enrolment of no more than three special needs kids per class — again, no new resources put in play in order to meet that objective.

Most of these new responsibilities are being created without any kind of templates or best practices — just increased responsibilities with new enforcement structures dropped onto school districts, like the new über-superintendents who, so far, are failing to show that they are a good investment in B.C.

Of course, the rubber hits the road at the school district level. That's where the challenges are faced. That's where courses are delivered. That's where real choice occurs, and that's where students' futures unfold.

School districts, as we know, are struggling with the ongoing fiscal crunch of declining enrolments. They have fixed costs for the delivery of programs in bricks-and-mortar schools. There are fewer kids enrolling on an annual basis because of demographic changes, and there's a preoccupation with downsizing, which is wrenching for the system.

School districts, of course, are trying to plan ahead. The official party line is to encourage them to plan on a three-year horizon. You know they're trying to do that, setting aside some amounts of money in a current year to engineer new programs or program changes in a subsequent year. They need to be able to do that in order to maintain choice and diversity, to remain competitive with very well-funded private schools and to meet the broad goals of improving outcomes for high-risk kids.

Predictability and stability are the most important things for school districts to know where they're standing, what their resources are and that they can implement the plan they have agreed to based on an agreed formula.

Let's look at October 2007. The money was the money, the year was set, the hard choices had been made, and the program was in the field. Then presto, an e-mail from a bean-counter arrives, and without so much as a "By the way, are you sitting down? This is significant," it moved from per-pupil-based funding to course-based funding. And it did that in the middle of the text as if it were just the same as any other thing a bean-counter might announce.

"By the way, it's not for next year. We're not changing it for next year. It's immediate. It's retroactive — not next year, now." To add injury to insult, it says in the course of the letter: "We've just discovered you've been overbilling us — double-billing us — for administrative costs."

This strains credulity, of course, because it's the government's funding formula and it's been in place since 2002. So if anybody was overbilling anybody, it was obviously by design — no notice, no period of adjustment, no courtesy of informing, and the implication that this was a minor change.

In fact, the political spin put on it has been: "We haven't changed anything at all, really. The same amount of money for education is still there. In effect, this will be revenue-neutral. We're just correcting a little problem that's been occurring that we just can't tolerate any longer."

What's the real problem being corrected here? The real problem is that there's a \$50 million deficit in the minister's budget — in her budget, not school districts'. So what's being done once again? We're going to raid the school district larder rather than face the wrath of Treasury Board.

Never mind that it's going to come at the expense of the most needy; that it will remove funding for extra supports for kids in alternate

schools, for first nations kids; or even that it will mean no fewer spare blocks, one of the tools that was used to try and meet class-size requirements as a result of Bill 33 being implemented without any additional money.

courses, that overhead costs are inflexible per-course funding — whether taking four or eight courses — and that at-risk and special needs kids require special supports.

We need predictability in school funding, not constant change that doesn't address an educational outcome.

It's not a small problem, and it's not a small change. The whole basis of calculating funding for grades 10, 11 and 12 is being changed unilaterally.

Before, half an FTE for getting a kid enrolled and the other half for that kid taking four courses. Now you've got to take eight courses to generate the same amount of money for a school. Per-pupil funding will not recognize that many kids take fewer than eight

We need predictability in school funding, not constant change and in particular not change that doesn't address an educational outcome.

David Cubberley
NDP Education Critic
2007 November 5
Private Members' Statement in the Legislative Assembly



Stability and predictability are the most important things for school districts to know where they're standing, what their resources are and that they can implement the plan they have agreed to based on an agreed formula.

SCHOOL CODES OF CONDUCT MUST NOW BE LINKED TO BC HUMAN RIGHTS CODE

New Ministerial Orders (276/07) require that Boards of Education ensure a new element is included in all school codes of conduct — that is, statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the BC Human Rights Code.

Specifically, Board must ensure that school codes of conduct contain:

"one or more statements that address the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the BC Human Rights Code in respect of discriminatory publication and discrimination in accommodation, service and facility in the school environment."

This change makes explicit that race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation and age **must** be considered in discussions of school climate, safety, and inclusion.

Meet your new employer . . . sort of . . .

As of July 1, 2007, "school boards" officially became "boards of education". The legal name of the corporate entity now takes the form of "The Board of Education of School District No. 39 (Vancouver)".

Reference to "VSB" will be retained on items such as our logo, brochures, posters, signage, etc. (No, it's not "VBOE".)

In your correspondence you may continue to refer to the "Vancouver School Board" but please note that it is more appropriately referred to as the "**Vancouver Board of Education**."

Pension info

Financial Health

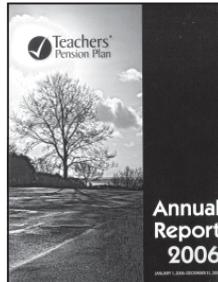
The Teachers' Pension Plan is financially sound. The fund holds a diversified portfolio of debt and equity investments that offer consistent and steady performance over the long term.

Every three years an independent actuary assesses the financial health of the plan and the adequacy of the contribution rates for funding the plan. At the most recent actuarial valuation as at December 31, 2005, the Basic Account had an unfunded liability for basic pension benefits of \$904 million. The funded portion of the liability is more than 94% of total liabilities for basic pension benefits. An unfunded liability means that there is a shortfall between benefits promised and assets available to pay for these benefits, whereas a surplus means

there are more than enough funds to meet the basic benefits.

On the recommendation of the actuary, the board determined that an increase in contribution rates was necessary for the pension plan to maintain its financial viability. Consequently, plan member and employer contributions will each increase by 1.61% of salaries effective July 1, 2007, to pay down this unfunded liability over the ensuing 15 year period. (See "Contributions" section for contribution rate information.)

The next valuation will be as at December 31, 2008.



Look for copies of the Annual Report for the Teachers' Pension Plan at your school. Full information about the status of the plan is contained within.

CONGRATULATIONS TO BEGBIE . . . FOR NOT ACCEPTING THE FRASER INSTITUTE'S AWARD

Dear Editor:

I would like to congratulate the staff members of Sir Matthew Begbie Elementary School for declining the invitation to attend the Fraser Institute's annual awards ceremony to accept the recent so-called Garfield Weston Award for Excellence accorded their school.

In an eloquent letter to the Institute, this school provides several reasons for rejecting this dubious honour and among this staff's reasons were the following pointed remarks: "we feel that giving cash rewards based on a single set of tests fails to acknowledge the challenges faced by some school communities and discriminates against schools that would benefit most from more funding."

Sadly, you will not learn about this rejection and the previous refusals by other schools (and some principals), from the members of the local Can West newspaper chain (*The Vancouver Sun and The Province*). Both of these newspapers annually, and unabashedly, publish 15 page supplements of the Fraser Institute's flawed listings of BC's public and private schools.

The commercialization (hey, they sell newspapers) by the Can West chain of these contextless lists will, no doubt, continue unabated, despite being slammed as "biased, inaccurate and misleading" in background notes prepared by provincial bureaucrats for the minister of education.

Bravo Begbie staff for your principled stand!

Sincerely,
Noel Herron
Former Vancouver principal and school trustee

P.S. Significantly, there is no reference to Begbie's refusal in the Vancouver Sun article about the FI's award. Should we be surprised?

She's done! After years of VESTA meetings, BCTF AGMs, retreats, and other union events, Anastasia Mirras has finished her needlework project. That can only mean one thing . . . that she'll also be retiring this year.

TOC talk

Welcome to **TOCtalk**, brought to you by your TOC committee members. The TOCtalk online forum at yahoo.com allows TOCs to share their concerns, ideas and experiences. We hope that you can join this forum and attend our regular TOC committee meetings on the last Wednesday of every month at the VESTA office. Snacks will be provided at these meetings.

Please contact Vilma at vilmam@vesta.ca if you wish to be added to the TOC email list. The times and locations of these TOC meetings are also on the TOC posters located in every Vancouver elementary school staffroom. Look there for any information pertaining to TOCs.

Upcoming Events:
The next **TOC meeting** is on Wednesday November 28th and the Tax Workshop is on Tuesday November 27th.

Did You Know?
An EOC called in to an assignment for the entire school day in a school on a modified day shall be paid for a full day.



Are you a TOC in Vancouver?
Join TOC Talk:
VESTA's Yahoo Group for members employed as teachers-on-call
Visit www.vesta.ca to join
or go directly to
groups.yahoo.com/group/toctalk

NEW TEACHERS' AND STUDENT TEACHERS CONFERENCE

Partnering for Success:
Teachers helping teachers



FEBRUARY 29 to
MARCH 1, 2008

Executive Airport
Plaza Hotel
7311 Westminster Hwy
Richmond, BC V6X 1A3



Hosted by the
BC Teachers' Federation

Conference registration information/booklets will be available in schools and on the BCTF web site bctf.ca/NewTeachersConference2008.aspx in January 2008

Network with other new teachers
Visit resource fair
Meet with the BCTF Executive
Collect valuable classroom materials

For conference information contact
Mohamed Chelali
604-871-1844 or 1-800-663-9163

For registration information contact
local 1806 or 1804

Learn about

Social justice topics
ESL/French immersion
Global education
Stress & time management
Working with ESL/Gifted/Special needs students
Assessing student learning
Sciences
Math
Technology
Fine arts
Physical education
Communication with parents
BCTF support services
Provincial specialists associations

Book Review
*Honouring
 the Child -
 Changing
 Ways of
 Teaching*

In 1958 when Pam Proctor started her teaching career in Vancouver, Elsie Roy, the Vancouver Primary Consultant ruled the primary staff with an eagle eye and a firm hand. Teachers were well supported by Miss Roy in covering the lessons and materials described in the curriculum. The lessons and the pace of teaching was uniform throughout the district and primary teachers were held to account for their progress through the curriculum. Pam Proctor easily mastered the teaching approaches that were the accepted practices of the day, and was soon identified by her superiors as someone who could provide leadership and support for her colleagues.

In 1964 Pam and some of her colleagues went on exchange to Britain and found themselves teaching in a very different structure with a very different philosophy than the one they worked within in Vancouver. It was a philosophy that held child's play at the centre of the educational program.

It was her experience within the British primary schools that put Pam Proctor on a path to changing her own practice to a child centred approach and developing the Open Area program at Charles Dickens Annex in Vancouver. Her book *Honouring the Child* is her account of a journey which would last for the rest of her teaching career.

Pam Proctor's story chronicles the major trends in education over the last 35 years. It revives those hopeful and idealistic years where the individual child and her or his needs became the centre of a teacher's planning for instruction.

Even for teachers who didn't manage to follow an entirely child-centred program, such as the one Pam and her colleagues established at Charles Dickens Annex, the entirely curriculum-focused approach began to be

challenged in a number of approaches such as open area schools, continuous progress, individualized reading programs, multi-aged grouping and in later years to whole language and today's balanced literacy programs.

Her year as a teacher in a British primary school in Leicester, England began for Pam Proctor an exploration that would see her return to England later to visit A.S Neill's Summerhill school and take further professional development in movement education.

It led her and her two colleagues to seek the support of the school board to establish an open area child-centred program at Charles Dickens Annex that closely followed the British approach. The establishment of the Charles Dickens Annex program generated interest, criticism, and constant challenge to its philosophy and structure.

The story follows the program and its evolution to where it exists today—not the same, but recognized as an alternate program in the Vancouver system.

I began teaching about 10 years after Pam Proctor did and so her story is familiar to me. I appreciate the influences that she and her contemporaries had on my teaching and my views on how we can best educate our students.

Throughout the story I am struck not only by the philosophy of child-centred teaching, but also (and perhaps especially) by the collegial and collaborative activities, supported by administration that encouraged Pam Proctor and her colleagues to realize the program that supported their beliefs.

Pam Proctor keeps abreast of her program as it is today. She mourns the loss of some aspects of the program, and is disheartened by the testing culture that seems to be taking over schools today.

Nonetheless I think it is fair to say that while the program that Pam and her colleagues developed may not have survived in its entirety its influence can be seen in primary classrooms everywhere in Vancouver.

**A Century of Pain:
 The Anniversary of
 the Vancouver
 Race Riots**

Friday September 7, 2007 marked the 100 year anniversary of the 1907 Vancouver Race Riots. On the evening of September 7, 1907, a mob of approximately 5,500 people leading an Asiatic Exclusion League parade, swept through the Chinese and Japanese sections of Vancouver, attacking Asian immigrants and smashing store windows with damages totalling \$35,000. This event led to the Asian Exclusion Act in 1923 and marked the beginning of the rise of racism in Canada.

A two-day conference titled, *The 1907 Race Riots and Beyond: A Century of Trans-Pacific Canada*, was held in Vancouver at the SFU Harbour Centre Campus on the anniversary of the event. The conference included panel discussions by academics, poets, historians, writers and video artists and a tour, aimed at walking the same parade path in peace and in memory of the horrific events 100 years ago. The conference ended with a *Reconciliation Dinner* that highlighted the struggles and successes of the various cultural groups affected by this day. VESTA was in attendance with an enthusiastic delegation. The table discussions included the importance of recognizing and teaching about the historical

inequities experienced by local cultural groups in order to prevent them from occurring again. The curricula must represent window frames for students to look through and learn about others' histories, experiences and realities, but must also represent mirrors that reflect students' own realities. As a result, students will learn about one another's lived experiences, interrogate their own privileges, biases and assumptions and examine and challenge knowledge and education.



If teaching does not hit upon some sort of crisis, if it does not encounter either the vulnerability or the explosiveness of (an explicit or implicit) critical and unpredictable dimension, it has perhaps not truly taught. (Felman & Laub, 1992, p. 53)

Angela Brown
 Learning Services

Want to teach about environmental sustainability, but don't know where to start?

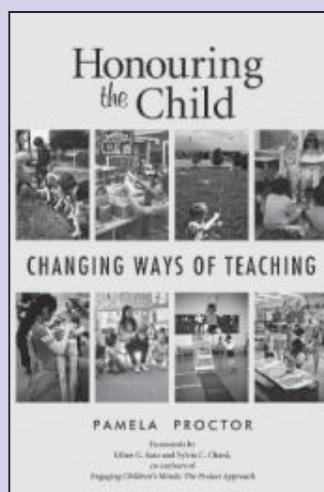
The VESTA Sustainability Committee invites you to come connect with other green teachers in the district to share ideas on how to teach about environmental sustainability. Come and learn new ideas, hear about workshops and resources that are available to you, and network with other like-minded teachers. Our next meeting will be on Wednesday December 12th at 4 pm at the VESTA office. Hope to see you there.

The VESTA Sustainability Committee is curious to find out what fantastic things are already going on in Vancouver schools. Please let us know of any great initiatives that are going on at your school. Please email Danièle Carrara at dcarrara@vsb.bc.ca to share your stories. Thanks!

I recommend *Honouring the Child* to all elementary teachers. It's an opportunity to think again about what an educational program should be.

More information about the book can be found at www.honouringthechild.com

Christina Schut,
 Local Rep to the BCTF



Employment equity for Aboriginal teachers

All of you will have received your VSB Equity Survey in the mail or at your worksite by now. This is an indication on the part of the VSB and the employee groups that equity is something that is important and necessary in all workforces. The *Employment Standards Act* was the driving force behind the wording and the method of the VSB survey.

As teachers, however, we must do more than simply count employees. We may be the first organized group of people that children come into contact with during their growing years. We represent, to children and families, an important and visible part of their community. As such, it is essential that we work to ensure that our teaching population is representative of the students we teach, and the communities we work in.

I believe that it is also essential that we work to understand the complicated workforce in which we participate, and how and where specific population groups work. Which groups or individuals leave teaching after only a few years and why? Which groups or individuals find it difficult to move within the system?

Most importantly, how can we begin to change this system so that the kind of equality of access and support we advocate for our students is also desired for our colleagues?

Such questions about equality and justice underpin the union movement.

We believe that population and workforce dynamics are complex. In the case of Aboriginal teachers, the factors are historical as well as contemporary. In 2006, the BCTF and the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) signed a Letter of

Understanding that commits both parties to working toward Employment Equity for Aboriginal Teachers. The objectives of the Letter of Understanding are that:

1) every local develop a strategic plan to achieve Employment Equity for Aboriginal teachers which includes:

- Work with members to develop awareness and member support
- The creation of local union/district policy on Employment Equity for Aboriginal teachers
- Elements to seek retention as well as hiring of Aboriginal teachers.

2) that each district seek dispensation from the Human Rights Tribunal to allow for preferential hiring of Aboriginal teachers

3) that each local identify a subcommittee or task force to implement the plan.

VESTA's Executive Committee created a task force to work on implementation of the Employment Equity Letter of Understanding, whose work will be guided by a plan developed by the BCTF Aboriginal Education Committee.

At the November Staff Rep Assembly, the Task Force Application form was distributed to Staff Representatives, along with the Letter of Understanding and the Implementation timelines. Please forward your CV to VESTA as soon as possible if you are interested in participating on this committee, and being part of this important work.

**Jody Polukoshko
Grievance Officer &
2nd Vice-President**

DATES TO WATCH OUT FOR

NOVEMBER

27
Gifted Education Workshop, 3:45

28
TOC Committee, 4:00

DECEMBER

6
Status of Women Committee, 4:00

6
VTF General Meeting, 4:00 at Tupper

10
AntiRacism Committee, 4:00

11
VESTA General Meeting, 4:00 at Tupper to approve resolutions to the 2008 BCTF AGM

12
Sustainability Committee, 4:00

14
Health & Safety Committee, 4:00

18
Aboriginal Education Committee, 4:00

19
TOC Committee Holiday Social, 4:00

ALL EVENTS AT VESTA OFFICE UNLESS NOTED

Thinking About Self-Directed Professional Development?

(Reprinted from VESTA news February, 2007)

Self-directed professional development provides a teacher with the opportunity to design professional activities that meet his/her professional needs. It calls on a teacher to exercise professional autonomy while being professionally responsible.

If you are thinking about self-directed PD for your next school professional development day, keep in mind the following guidelines and suggestions:

1. Using your professional judgment, decide what your needs are at this time. An activity that you might want to consider is a classroom visit to meet and discuss ideas with a teacher in your grade or subject area. Many teachers have indicated that visiting another teacher and classroom is a highly informative and meaningful activity.

2. You, not the PD Committee, are responsible for putting your plans in place by making phone calls, sending emails etc. If you're interested in meeting with a colleague in his/her classroom, for a self-directed activity, book the date with your teacher colleague at the school you wish to visit.

3. The next step is to provide your PD Committee (on which your administrator sits) with written information about your self-directed plan for the forthcoming PD day. Do this about two weeks in advance of the PD date so the PD Committee has a clear understanding of the scope of their planning for the rest of the staff on the PD day. Indicate clearly where you will be, and the date.

4. Keep your PD Committee informed of any changes to your plan since the principal/vice principal is responsible for knowing where staff is on PD days. There are many possibilities other than classroom visits for self-directed PD.

For further information and suggestions about self-directed PD, see the article on the Professional Development Committee website, at www.vesta.ca, under the heading of VESTA Committees and Sections or read Section E of the VSB/VTF Professional Development Handbook.

**Lorna MacDonald
VESTA PD Chairperson**



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