

Work together, progressive school trustee candidates!

Now is the time to start thinking about 2008 trustee elections.

An ad hoc committee of people who care about maintaining a quality, accessible public education system are calling open prospective candidates for next year's school board trustee elections to **work together** -- and teachers are invited to join that call at:

www.publiceducationproject.blogspot.com/

Please take the time to visit the website, consider what is stated there, and add your name if you agree. You may not live in Vancouver yourself, but the outcome of these elections have a direct impact on your teaching life!

Have you signed your BCTF Statement of Principle on Assessment?



Staff Reps will be collecting these to bring to the Staff Rep Assembly on January 22. Please return yours by then.

Haven't seen it yet? Ask your Staff Rep, or email glen@vesta.ca

Garibaldi / Educational Facilities Review Update

On Wednesday, December 12 there was a joint meeting of VSB Committees II and III to consider whether **Garibaldi Annex** should be closed in June 2008.

There were numerous speakers from the neighborhood of Garibaldi, both parents of students at the school and other concerned parties. They spoke passionately about the needs of their children, their safety and the many ways the school is currently used by community groups. They expressed concerns about the removal of Garibaldi from the ongoing Facilities Review process. They spoke of the possibilities for the school to offer services and programs that are in demand in the district, such as French Immersion, Montessori programs, etc. as well as the idea of using the school as a "swing-space" for students whose nearby schools are being seismically upgraded.

In the end the trustees voted in favour of an amended motion which will close the school unless there is a proposal for reconfiguration presented by Spring Break that is acceptable to the board.

Meanwhile, District Management has named the region of the city which includes **Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth, Queen Elizabeth Annex, Jules Quesnel, University Hill Secondary & Elementary, and Lord Byng** as Phase I of the next stage of its Educational Facilities Review. *More information to come this month.*

From my notebook ...

Reflecting on December's notebook jottings brings forward a number of interesting issues. From funding clawbacks to school based budgets, many of those issues seem to be connected with money. According to the Ministry, school districts, including the VSB, will not know the impact of the Minister's clawback (and the rethinking of the clawback) of secondary funding until very late in December. This leaves a real shadow hovering over the whole district as all of us wait to see the extent of the deficit and its fall-out in both elementary and secondary schools. It also leaves questions about the VSB's budgeting. How will the VSB use the surplus it has socked away in its "rainy day" account, the Local Capital Reserve? Is now the right time to be implementing BCeSIS school by school? Or is it more prudent to limit BCeSIS technologies to the necessary HR-payroll-office functions rather than encompassing the supposed teaching functions?

By now your Preliminary Schools' Budget Reference Manual has arrived and has been looked at closely by your Finance or Budget or Resources Committee (Collective Agreement Art. 11.D). There is one major change in the school-based budgets and it represents a re-centralization of various funds. Aboriginal Education allocations, funds for Special Education district classes and over \$156,000.00 in Learning and Information Technology money will now be held at the district rather than at the school level. Another change is assigning the full cost of photocopy supplies to the school budget. Library resources and computer hardware will be reduced by 5% and educational resource supplies by 10%. It's important to be part of the discussions in your school about the spending of these ever-decreasing school funds. It is your way of knowing how curriculum areas are being supported, how the fine arts are funded or how field trip money (called Field Trip EOC funding) is being spent. In late January, your Final Schools' Budget Reference Manual will arrive. It

will recognize any changes in student enrollment and usually will have the 10% holdback included. The arrival of the budget book gives Staff Committee a second opportunity to comment on and plan for the school's spending priorities. Ask your Finance Committee for an update!

Still on the watching-the-spending theme, I continue to be intrigued by my work on the BCTF Finance Committee. A week ago the committee received the third quarter report for the Federation's investments. Now this was not a good news story as you can imagine the impact, even temporarily, of the dips in any real estate held in American portions of the portfolio. Listening carefully to the presentation I once again began to compare the business model with the public education model. The investment manager talked about how critical it is to keep certain stocks out of one's portfolio, that the selecting of stock is a funneling out of certain companies and the identification of any negative liabilities. It struck me that you don't keep any special needs stocks. There are no Teacher/Counsellors, Teacher/Psychologists, no SSSWs for stocks with difficulties or poorly performing stocks. Occasionally there may be a STIBS worker in the form of an international banker compensating for such difficult behaviour as the asset backed commercial paper ventures. But public schools have open access and inclusive classrooms. Teachers don't funnel out students or set out to deny access to the limited programs. Instead we welcome families and make room for differences. This is what makes us proven advocates for all our students. This is the basis of our democratic public education system -- a basis we must work together to maintain. Begin now to think about trustee elections. What can we do for children by being involved?

November 2008...It's not that far away!

Patricia Gudlaugson

1st Vice-President

TIME TO LEAVE THE CANADIAN TEACHERS' FEDERATION

VESTA MOTION TO THE
WINTER BCTF R.A.

At the BCTF Representative Assembly in February, VESTA will be bringing forward the following resolution:

That:

- a) the BCTF give notice to withdraw from the Canadian Teachers' Federation and, concomitantly, that the BCTF work with other teachers' unions within the Canadian Labour Congress to establish a representative teacher organization;
- b) the RA recommend to the 2008 AGM that all related policies and procedures in Section 6 of the Members' Guide be rescinded; and,
- c) the BCTF seek its own membership in Education International, independent of the Canadian Teachers' Federation.

For those not aware of the broader context around this issue, an immediate question might be: "Why would we do this? Why wouldn't we want to ally ourselves with as many organizations as possible?"

There are good reasons to make this change at this time.

Now that the BCTF has, after a membership vote, become a full member of the Canadian Labour Congress, we have the opportunity of a new venue to work with teacher unions in other parts of the country to jointly defend public education, improve working conditions for teachers, and enhance the learning conditions for students. We are now able to do this within the broader labour movement, which is to our advantage.

Given this new opportunity, it is time for the BCTF to leave the Canadian Teachers' Federation. The CTF is not, and has never been, a *teacher-driven* organization – nor has it proven to be an effective forum for us to achieve our objectives as an organization. The BCTF has tried repeatedly to achieve, within the CTF, an agenda for change and has not been successful.

The BCTF's energies and resources would be better spent working with teacher unions within the Canadian Labour Congress (all of whom are *teacher-only* unions – not teacher unions dominated by principals and vice-principals) to re-energize our efforts defending public education on the national scene.

This resolution also asks that the policies and procedures related to the CTF be rescinded and removed from the *Members' Guide*. As the majority of these were approved by annual general meetings from the 1960s onwards, the 2008 AGM would need to do the rescinding.

Additionally, this resolution asks that the BCTF pursue an independent membership with Education International, which we have belonged to up until this point as a member of the Canadian Teachers' Federation. Our understanding is that Education International by-laws have now changed, and the BCTF would be able to continue participating in the good work occurring in that venue if we were to join separately from the CTF.

Glen Hansman
President

**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](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/toctalk)

REMINDER OF STAFF REP ASSEMBLY DECISION: WE NO LONGER "REQUEST" SPECIFIC TOCS

In 2006 December, at the behest of Vancouver TOCs and after deliberations at worksites that fall, the Staff Rep Assembly voted in favour of the following policy:

That VESTA eliminate the practice of contract teachers calling out, selecting, or expressing a preference for particular TOCs to fill a teacher absence.

The primary rationale for this change is simple: *the need for objectivity*. This is derived from several considerations:

Professionalism

TOCs are required to have the same professional qualifications as contract teachers and are hired as teachers on that basis and in the same manner. For contract teachers to express a preference among TOCs undermines our professionalism.

BCTF Code of Ethics

Provision #5 of the BCTF Code of Ethics declares it inappropriate for members to openly critique the teaching performance and related work of a colleague. Contract teachers rightly expect not to have their teaching performance openly ranked or evaluated by their peers. The selection of one TOC over another implies that a contract teacher has evaluated the performance of the TOC.

Solidarity

Divisions, competition, and power inequalities among the members of any union undermine the effectiveness of the union to achieve its goals. By allowing a system

where contract teachers express a preference for TOCs, an informal but nevertheless powerful employer-employee relationship is created. In addition, the need for TOCs to "sell themselves" creates competition between TOCs. This undermines our both our solidarity and the dignity of our profession.

Workplace Rights

Contract teachers have fought for, and rightly demand, due process. In appointments to teaching positions, contract teachers rightly expect a clear objectivity based on seniority. This removes favoritism and nepotism in a process where the teacher's livelihood is at stake. This transparency, due process, and accountability are great assurances for contract teachers. When a contract teacher calls out, selects, or expresses a preference for a TOC there is no transparency, no accountability, and no due process available to the TOC.

Social Justice

In a "preferential/request-based" system those TOCs that have the time, money and assertiveness to market themselves receive the most callouts. This puts those who are less aggressive, without transportation or able to bear additional child care costs at a distinct disadvantage and runs counter to the BCTF and VESTA principles of Social Justice.

Consistency

TOCs now accumulate seniority under the new language ratified last year by teachers and the employer. What we're still working towards is a longstanding VESTA and BCTF bargaining objective – that is, seniority-based callout along with seniority credit for days worked. What we have not yet achieved but continue to demand from our employer we should practice ourselves. Seniority-based callout will assist TOCs whose goal is to become contract teachers.

Glen Hansman
President

HARASSMENT AWARENESS TRAINING COMING FOR ALL TEACHERS

COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT MELDING UPDATE

Glen Hansman (VESTA), Shaun van der Hoop (VSTA), and George Taylor (BCTF – Field Service) will be working with Nancy Stair and Lynda Blundell (Vancouver Board of Education) and Jacquie Griffiths (BCPSEA) to complete the melding of documents into a full 2006-2011 Collective Agreement over the next couple of months.

Article 7.K.5. of the VSB/VTF Collective Agreement requires that: *The employer, in consultation with the Union, shall be responsible for developing and implementing an ongoing harassment and sexual harassment awareness program for all employees.*

Six VTF members and six representatives from VSB management will be working together to carry out the first rounds of training in 2008. More details will be announced when they become available.

VESTA news

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BC Federation Of Labour 2007 Convention

People working on farms without health and safety protection and without any guarantees of overtime, vacation pay, or minimum wage.

Foreign workers often lured under false pretences, then paid well below the minimum wage (\$5/hr or less), forced to pay for their housing out of this, or sleeping on the floors of the buildings they are helping construct.

Hospital workers facing overwhelming workloads, working 60-70 hours per week, often with very little time to spend with their families.

A significant and growing segment of the population who are employed full-time, and yet homeless.

Shamefully this is not a historical description or one of a Third World country, but of our own province today.

Lots of expensive taxpayer-funded advertising tells us that BC is "the greatest place on Earth." These stories and those of many other working people in our province tell us that the slogan is simply a lie.

Along with nearly 800 union members from around B.C., VESTA once again had a full delegation at the BC Federation of Labour



RESOURCE TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS Implementation Update

In late 2006, VESTA staff reps passed a couple dozen of recommendations to the VSB pertaining to various concerns about Resource service in Vancouver schools. As you may recall, the recommendations centred around the following three themes:

That the VSB establish consistent qualification requirements for resource positions, and provide for on-going training for teachers new to resource positions.

That the VSB establish an on-going mentoring program to assist teachers new to resource positions, and to encourage collaboration and positive working relations.

That the VSB establish a district goal targeting the support for the education of ESL learners and students with special needs and to make organizational changes to support this goal.

Since adopting these recommendations, VESTA has been meeting with representatives of VSB Human Resources and VSB Learning Services to discuss possible implementation of these recommendations. Discussions continue.

Convention, held in Vancouver from November 26th to 28th. It was a three-day policy convention, which is held every second year, alternating with a five-day constitutional convention.

This year's **B.C. Federation of Labour** Policy Convention was organized around the overall theme of "Changing times, transforming our unions."

Some highlights of the convention:
 -BC Fed president Jim Sinclair presented some challenges and some opportunities for BC's labour movement. Although there is a slight decline in union membership percentage in the workforce, polls tell us that if all workers wanting to join a union could do so there would be hundreds of thousands more union members in Canada. Sinclair also talked about the Fed's determination to advocate for a decent living wage for the 250,000 mostly non-unionized workers in BC who earn less than \$10 an hour. It's clear that the labour movement's concern for workers' rights goes beyond our own members.

-Past BCTF President Jinny Sims spoke on the Education Committee Report which detailed the continuing government changes to education in BC, including a more centralized model for post-secondary institutions. Other topics included the impact of Bills 20, 21, and 22 on local school board autonomy, privatization, school fees, the "achievement" agenda, and the FSAs with their Fraser Institute rankings. The real issue, of course, is chronic underfunding.

-Did you know that 8000 forest workers were on strike this summer? This large labour disruption received far less media attention than the Vancouver civic strike, but affected many communities.

-Grant Depatie's parents thanked the Fed for its many efforts in getting "Grant's Law" passed to protect those working at night.



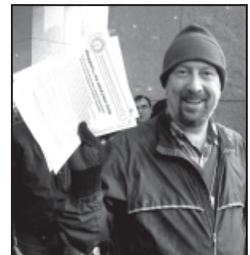
Among several motions that passed on Monday were those that called for:

- the defeat of federal Bill 33 to deregulate parts of Canada Post.
- a reversal of cuts to non-profit women's groups, and the Court Challenges program.
- the promoting of wood manufacturing plants in BC instead of exporting raw logs.
- a stop to the clawback of education funds in mid-year, and a public review to examine education funding in BC.
- restoring Employment Standards Act protection for farmworkers.
- restoration of funding and improvements to home support in the health care system.
- a formal boycott of Sears Canada, given the union-busting tactics being used on their appliance repair technicians, who are members of IBEW.
- protection of the rights of temporary foreign workers.
- no Free Trade deal with Colombia.
- promoting alternative energy.
- a task force on the lifting of mandatory retirement age and its implications for workers.
- better health care delivery for aboriginal communities
- immediate withdrawal from the undemocratic Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA) with Alberta.

Day Two of the convention offered workshops in three key areas:
 -the challenge of global warming
 -organizing to meet the challenge of the global economy in BC communities.
 -mobilizing union members to participate in the democratic process at all levels of government.
 During lunch hour on Tuesday many delegates took some time to gather signatures on the "\$10 Now" campaign at various sites downtown.

Thanks again to our delegation:

Lorraine Baker (Mackenzie), Jeannette Blanchard (Carleton), Donna Brack, (Gathering Place), John Cortens (Roberts), Jolayne Fournier, (Roberts), Glen Hansman (VESTA Office), Janek Kuchmistrz (Roberts Ed Centre), Jack MacDermot (Kingsford-Smith), Jane MacEwan (Roberts Annex), Suzie Mah (VLN-Van Home), Anastasia Mirras (Teacher-Counsellor), Jody Polukoshko (VESTA Office) and Les Rowe (Retired)



Bill 33 Quiz: No Fun with Numbers

1. "Bill 33" is:
 - a) a user name on a dating website.
 - b) what you get after two coffees and two pastries in Yaletown.
 - c) the finest education bill in B.C. since Vander Zalm.
 - d) provincial legislation that allows unacceptable class size and class composition numbers.
2. The provisions in Bill 33 are now found:
 - a) to be responsible for "those useless consultation meetings."
 - b) in Section 76 of the *School Act*.
 - c) to help our forest industry by creating much more paperwork for everyone.
 - d) to allow principals and superintendents to state that classes of 37, or classes with 12 IEP students are "appropriate for student learning."
 - e) all of the above
3. Suggestions for the upcoming review of Bill 33 might include:
 - a) some very "unprofessional" language from those affected.
 - b) that the "consultation process" be replaced with consent for all classes.
 - c) that all education policy changes in B.C. should have input from teachers.
 - d) that ultimately all working and learning conditions issues be returned to teachers' collective bargaining rights, in accordance with international labour law.
 - e) any or all of the above.
4. Teachers can help "fix" (or get rid of) Bill 33 by:
 - a) insisting at consultation and staff committee meetings that principals and vice-principals advocate for additional resources, rather than provide excuses.
 - b) advocating for a return to the class size and composition limits and resolutions in our pre-stripped collective agreement.
 - c) encouraging parents to write letters to trustees, MLAs, and the Minister of Education demanding proper funding for class size and composition provisions.
 - d) working to help elect a government that respects teachers and their rights.
 - e) all of the above

Two Reports on Child Care Models

When Canada participated in a 2004 OECD study on childcare, it was ranked 14th out of 21 countries for the services it provided. The only bright light in the Canadian system was Quebec. Canada's childcare system was characterized by the authors of this study as being a "fragile creation" which "relies to a great extent on the voluntary work of women and survives with inadequate public financial support". The advice offered to the Canadian government was to consider funding a publicly managed service for children aged 1-6 years and that this plan should aim to "bring provincial regulations and pedagogical regimes into line with current knowledge".

At the time the study was conducted, 20% of Canadian children were in regulated daycare. This contrasted rather starkly with Denmark where regulated daycare was being provided for 78% of its children. Since 2004 the federal government cancelled the expected federal investments in childcare and the BC government (alone among Canadian provincial governments) responded with further cuts. Presently morale among childcare workers is extremely low and they are leaving their jobs in droves, thus reducing the number of available daycare spaces.

Since then, and against OECD recommendations, Canadian ministries at federal and provincial levels have gone backwards, so that the situation is worse now than in 2004. The exception to this drastic state of affairs is again the province of Quebec.

In November 2007 the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) published a report on how a community-based, publicly funded comprehensive child care system might work in British Columbia.

One of the main claims made in the report is that nobody in B.C. has a plan on how to develop, deliver and sustain a comprehensive child care system. The report states that the essential building blocks of this type of childcare system are to develop public policy to ensure service, stable capital and operating funds, as well as principles that promote quality, access and safety. Accountable governing bodies would make decisions about the service.

Examples of governance in the report were the models for childcare in Denmark, New Zealand and Quebec. It also looked at the BC School Board model as well as the model for Community Living British Columbia. The key fact gleaned from a study of these systems is that public policy and public funding are essential for good governance of childcare in this province. Other important tenets are that governance mandates evolve over time, structures should support diverse services, and that community control can be exercised in different ways.

These observations mirror the OECD vision, which states that childcare centres are more effective when they function "as a community hub of interconnected services for families and act as a frontline mechanism for child well-being, screening and prevention."

As teachers we know first-hand the value in screening children prior to entering kindergarten. If children with special needs have attended a child care centre or a pre-school there is a much better chance that they will have been referred to other professionals and may already have services in place.

While governance may be community-based, the job of government is to have legislation in place that ensures access to non-profit child care, to provide adequate and stable budgets, and to establish standards for equity, quality, access and inclusion. The CCCABC report calls for the appropriate ministry in B.C. to show leadership in this field by demonstrating that it is an effective child care champion. The ministry could show its leadership by demonstrating respect for the true needs of parents and the expertise and knowledge of child care workers. Accessible, affordable child care should be one of the cornerstones of a progressive society.

Privatized Child care in Canada: It is not as Simple as A-B-C

Advocates on both sides of the public vs. private child care debate agree on some key issues. They both claim to want children in the care of capable workers and in facilities that are safe. Both want a system that encourages the overall social and intellectual development of the children in its care. Both want government money. Beyond this, the two sides diverge.

The reason for this is the requirement that commercial child care centres make profits. Some ways for them to make profits are:

- charging higher user fees
- lobbying for greater government subsidy of user fees
- paying low wages
- providing limited services
- encouraging lax regulations

Advocates for a non-profit child care system emphasize the need for:

- universal access
- child care workers to be required to hold qualifications from recognized colleges
- good wages and working conditions for employees
- safe, well-equipped centres
- a fully-funded system that eliminates user fees

The rallying cry for promoters of the for-profit child care system is choice. They claim that a system of government subsidies for parents allows families to select the best child care situation for their children. In reality this choice extends only to those who have enough money to ensure their children are cared for to their personal satisfaction.

For the vast majority of Canadians there is little choice. They are faced with poor access in rural and low income areas, very limited access for children with special needs, and long waiting lists at established centres. The private system with its profit-driven philosophy exists mainly to provide increasing wealth for the corporation, not to provide service to the children in its care. By keeping wages low, profit margins increase, but at the expense of a stable workforce. For-profit child care centres tend to be situated in well-populated communities to assure a profit through operations and possible resale of the business. Equity of accessibility and stability in the workplace are not priorities. Children with special needs are more costly to service and are often excluded.

A good case study is the ABC Learning Centres Company of Australia, now linked to the Busy Beaver Learning Centres Company in Canada.

The ABC Learning Centres Company has been in existence for 17 years. Since merging with its largest Australian competitors in 2004 it is now the world's largest child care company with approximately 2,500 for-profit centres world-wide. Last year, profits were in

excess of \$140 million dollars, yet the corporation received 40% of its funding from the Australian government! ABC Learning Centres Company also owns a private training college for child care workers. The students from the college work for the company, receiving a training wage of just over A\$12.00. This assures the company of a ready supply of low-wage workers.

Before ABC Learning Centres took hold in Australia 85% of the child care centres were non-profit. However, by 2007 this figure had been reduced to 30%. A major reason for this decline is a "shift from finding service providers through operating grants to funding consumers through fee subsidies."

The rise of for-profit child care centres in Australia has been paralleled by inflated costs to the families for childcare. In the past 17 years, fees for child care have increased by 123% - greater than the increase in gasoline prices for the same period. Family incomes went up by only 62%. In some areas of Sydney, child care fees are more than A\$100 a day, only 20-30% of which is subsidized.

While government spending in the area has almost quadrupled since 1990, profits made by the corporation have been ploughed into an expansion of its business in the United States, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

It is interesting to note that the ABC Learning Centres Company spends around 50% of its income on wages whereas non-profit centres spend on average 80-89% of their income on wages.

The Australian media has recently become concerned about the quality of service offered by for-profit centres. There have been articles on the failure to maintain proper records, substandard nutrition and breaches of basic hygiene. A report released in June 2006 revealed that 21% of ABC Learning Centres employees would not send their own children to the centres. A similar survey showed that only 4% of workers in the non-profit centres felt the same.

ABC centres tend to be in good supply in affluent communities and not readily available to children living in low-income and rural areas. Children with special needs are also underserved.

What has happened in Australia is beginning to take hold in Canada. The future of our childcare services could be bleak. ABC Learning Centres is already in Ontario and Alberta under the name 123 Baby Beaver Learning Centres. The federal government has done nothing to assure that child care does not become a commodity, and the only provincial governments to explicitly commit to using new funds for a regulated non-profit system are Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

When the *raison d'être* of a child care business is profit, it

compromises the well-being of children in its care, since profit must be sacrificed to maintain economic gain.

As child care companies become more economically powerful, they become more influential forces and work to undermine progressive change for the greater profit.

Lobbying of the Australian government by the ABC Learning Centres Company to oppose an increase in wages for childcare workers saved the company A\$285,000 a year. For this miniscule financial expense the wealthy company actively pays poorer wages for its employees than other child care workers. In turn, will encourage further cuts in the workforce.

Our children and childcare professionals deserve better. What companies such as ABC Learning Centres have to do is to deserve a child care system that strives to meet the needs of all children and provides employees with a long career. Children should be viewed as clients; children should not be discriminated against because of where they live or their needs are. It is essential we strive in Canada to provide universal non-profit child care offered by fully qualified childcare professionals. Our child care should reflect the belief that every child should have the opportunity to achieve his or her full potential.

There are many groups in Canada working to achieve this. You can learn more about them by contacting:

- Coalition of Childcare Advocates of B.C. at www.cccabc.bc.ca 709-5661
- "CODE BLUE for child care" the Child Care Advocacy of Canada at www.childcareadvocacy.org

The information for this article derived from:

- "Lessons from Down Under" Canada working to achieve this. You can learn more about them by contacting:
- Coalition of Childcare Advocates of B.C. at www.cccabc.bc.ca 709-5661
- "CODE BLUE for child care" the Child Care Advocacy of Canada at www.childcareadvocacy.org
- "Hindsight for Australia - for Canada" produced by BLUE for child care and the Child Care Advocates of Canada
- "Big Pond: Multinational Corporation Prepares to Invade Canada" produced by CU



DAYCARES

Daycares are funded by a combination of federal transfer payments, money from the provincial budget, and parent fees. Since 2002, the BC government has been reducing its contribution. The only increases have been as a result of federal transfers. In 2005, the daycare community's hopes were raised when the Early Learning and Child Care Agreement was signed, and hopes were raised for the long awaited arrival of universal child care.

In March, 2007, the federal government cancelled the 2005 Early Learning and Child Care Agreement, which resulted in a loss of \$455 million to B.C. over three years. Instead, the Child Care Spaces Initiative will provide only \$99 million over three years. The federal government's taxable payment of \$100 per month directly to families is a farcical contribution. At VSOCC Centres the infant and toddler fees are over \$1,000 per month. Even the lowest fees, which are for after school care, cost \$355 per month, per child. That's hardly providing universal access!

No federal transfers for child care are yet confirmed for the 2008/2009 budget. If funding isn't restored, BC's total child care program budget will be 21% less than in 2001/2002.

Child Care Operating Funding Program (CCOF) has provided British Columbia Daycares with a monthly grant based on the number of children enrolled. Recently the grant has been reduced by about \$2 a day per child. Daycare centres were left with three choices: raise fees, reduce salaries, or close. The Major Capital Grants Program was also cancelled, and funding to the Childcare Resource and Referral Programs was also drastically reduced.

It has been pointed out by Child Care Advocates that the B.C. government has a surplus of over \$4 billion, which could have covered the federal shortfall. Instead, it is now being considered that the child-to-adult ratio be changed so that long waiting lists for daycare can be reduced. Daycares now have waiting lists so long that they are insisting that parents at least be pregnant when they sign up!

As always, there is a small sliver of hope: Bill C303 has recently passed its second reading in the House of Commons. Introduced by MP Denise Savoie (NDP-Victoria), Bill C303 is "an Act to establish criteria and conditions in respect of funding for early learning and child care programs in order to ensure the quality, accessibility, universality, and accountability of those programs, and to appoint a council to advise the Ministry of Human Resources and Skills Development on matters relating to early learning and child care." It has gone to committee, and the third reading is expected in February, (election time?).

So once again it is an opportune time to support child care advocates, to deluge the governments, both provincial and federal, with a tidal wave of demand for universal child care! Perhaps this time they'll listen to our message.

Strong Locals Make a Strong BCTF

It is the leadership of the locals that has always enabled the BCTF to make the best gains for teachers and for education. When one local wins a provision other locals can build on that win and eventually it will become a provision which includes the majority of locals in the province. Provincial bargaining has lessened our focus on maintaining strong locals who can show leadership and make the gains that teachers and students need, yet it is no less important today than it ever was.

Without an emphasis on strong locals the involvement of members will shrink and the BCTF will be less able to meet the needs of its members.

Back before teachers were placed under the Labour Code, the School Act limited bargaining to salary and bonuses. We didn't have the right to strike; instead, if we had not reached agreement with our School Board by October 31 we went to arbitration and a settlement was determined by a third party.

During those years teachers didn't do at all badly when it came to salary and benefits, but that just wasn't enough. Teaching approaches were changing and the school population was growing. It was increasingly clear that working and learning conditions

Provincial bargaining has undermined the ability of locals to address local concerns and has left bargaining committees and working and learning committees, where they still exist, with few effective tools.

were important if the new approaches were going to meet the needs of our students, and address the job satisfaction of our members. The BCTF started a number of campaigns around working and learning conditions and locals began to work towards achieving improvements in teaching conditions.

Some locals managed to include provisions such as maternity leave and preparation time into contracts despite the limits to the scope of bargaining. Vancouver was the first to negotiate a side agreement called a Working and Learning Conditions contract and other locals followed with Learning and Working Conditions contracts of their own, each negotiated individually with their Boards. The gains were made local by local.

Current efforts to change the provincial government's

direction on accountability and achievement is a good example of the need for locals to be working locally with their trustees and parents. Vancouver teachers have worked very successfully with parents to undermine the reliability of the FSA results by encouraging parents to exempt their children from writing the tests. Our overall FSA participation rates are the lowest in the province. A debate at the last Representative Assembly of the BCTF revealed that other locals were not ready to progress to the actions that were being proposed. There wasn't yet a critical mass of locals who had made enough gains and felt that they had enough support in their communities to take the next step.

There are a lot of reasons why the BCTF should ensure that its locals are strong, vibrant and autonomous. Gains in professional, social and economic conditions for members are most possible when each local is working within the culture and practices of their districts. When bargaining was done locally there was no question that locals had to be strong if the necessary gains were to be achieved. Provincial bargaining has undermined the ability of locals to address local-specific concerns and has left bargaining committees and working and learning committees, where they still exist, with few effective tools. In many respects we're back to what we used to call begging, not bargaining.

Without an emphasis on strong locals the involvement of members will shrink and the BCTF will be less able to meet the needs of its members. Locals provide access and agency for members to participate and provide opportunities for leadership in the many areas that locals involve themselves in. It is from the leadership of active and vibrant locals that the BCTF draws its own leadership both, political and staff.

**Christina Schut
TOC and VESTA Local Rep
to the BCTF**

Some frequently asked questions

How do I apply for a leave? What types of leaves am I entitled to?

First, it is important to know what type of leave you are requesting. For example, information about sick leave allowances is found in Article 6.B. Information regarding all other types of leaves is found in Article 10 of the VSB/VTF Collective Agreement, which you can find online at www.vesta.ca if you don't presently have a copy. Contact VESTA if you are uncertain what leave best suits your situation.

How do I apply for an upgrade in my teaching category, such as 6PA/PB+15?

All applications for upgrading must be directed to the Teacher Qualification Service. Go to the TQS website at www.tqs.bc.ca for information or call TQS at 604-736-5484. Application forms and procedures are available from their website.

What are the rules around the purchase of pensionable service for personal leaves of absence?

Since March 31, 2007, the time window for the purchase of pensionable service for leaves of absence has been set at five years by the Teachers' Pension Plan. This means that when a teacher takes any leave of absence without pay or with partial pay, including maternity and parental leaves, s/he has only five years from the end of the leave to purchase the service for that leave. Members can find additional information on the purchase of leaves of absence from the TPP website, www.tpp.pensionsbc.ca. Go to Teachers' Pension Plan and find Purchase of Service under Tools. The Tools also include a Purchase Cost Estimator.

Where do I find information about my pension and upcoming pension seminars?

Information regarding teachers' pensions is available on both the BCTF and Teachers' Pension Plan websites: www.bctf.bc.ca and www.tpp.pensionsbc.ca. Teachers can access their personal account which details their history of pensionable service through My Account at the TPP website. The TPP website also provides information and registration materials for teachers' pension plan seminars. Questions can also be directed to the staff at the BCTF Income Security Division.

What is the BCTF SIP?

The BCTF operates its own Salary Indemnity Plan, providing both short-term and long-term benefits to members disabled from employment as a result of illness or accident. The BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan is a mandatory benefit to which all members contribute.

Short term

Benefits begin on the first teaching day following the termination of sick leave.

The benefit is 50% of salary, with the basic benefit never less than the Employment Insurance benefits. Claimants receive full pensionable service credit.

The maximum number of teaching days for which benefits are paid in respect of a single illness or accident is 120.

No benefits are paid in July or August (unless you are in Adult Ed).

Long term

Long-term is administered for the BCTF by Great-West Life Assurance Company.

Specific details are available in the Members' Guide to the BCTF, the BCTF Income Security Office, and the website, www.bctf.bc.ca. Applications for the Salary Indemnity Plan (SIP), Short-Term and Long-Term, must be made to the BCTF Income Security Division. Telephone 604-871-1921 to find out more details.

Does the VSB have an employee assistance program? If so, how do I access it?

All VSB employees and their immediate family members have access to the Employee Assistance Program, a confidential and voluntary service that provides practical support. There is no cost to use your EAP. You can contact your EAP toll-free at 1-800-268-5211 (24 hours a day, seven days a week).

When can I request my job-share partner as a TOC?

This situation is covered in Article 3.C.5., which reads as follows:

"During the absence of either employee sharing an assignment, the partner shall have the right to assume the duties of the absent employee. Remuneration for these duties shall be based on the scale rate for the employee assuming the replacement."

That means that when your teaching partner is absent, you get first rights to cover that absence. Your principal has to do that manually. Often, a partner who is ill will call you up, you show up to work, and then the principal takes care of the paperwork. It doesn't all have to be sorted out ahead of time.

For non-jobshare requests, VESTA members decided at a Staff Rep Assembly last year that requests would not be made. (See article on page 2.)

VSB Assessment Survey

In January, Learning Services / VSB will be distributing a survey for teachers with regard to assessment practices and beliefs. This survey has long been in the works at the VSB Assessment Committee. Thank you to VESTA's long-time rep on that committee, Shelly Steer (Kitchener), who has put in a lot of effort on behalf of VESTA. Questions? Please email glen@vesta.ca

VSB Behaviour Support Inquiry

Learning Services / VSB will be conducting an inquiry over the next few months with regard to the range of student behaviour supports which are available in the district. VESTA will have reps on the steering committee for this inquiry. If you would like to participate, or have something to say on the subject, please email glen@vesta.ca



PAY EQUITY: A Labour Issue, A Social Justice Issue

During the Civic workers strike this past summer, Library Workers raised awareness about pay equity as a major issue in their bargaining campaign. Months later, how do library workers describe the struggle for pay equity in the context of Collective Bargaining?

The following is a composite of excerpts from articles written by **Deb Thomas**, President of the Library Workers for the BCLA Reporter, September/October 2007 and **Tess Prendergast**, a Vancouver Childrens' Librarian and Parent of two students at Dickens Elementary, as part of a committee letter.

What is Pay Equity?

Deb: Fundamentally this issue is about fairness. Everyone – regardless of gender – should receive fair compensation for the work that they do. That this remains an issue for some of the largest public libraries in BC highlights the fact that this province lags behind other provinces such as Ontario where pay equity legislation in the late 1990s increased the salaries of library workers by, in some cases, up to 24%.

Tess: Pay equity comes with the unequivocal knowledge that one is being paid fairly when compared to others in similar sectors with similar educational backgrounds and similar job duties. That knowledge can only be gained when there is an acknowledgement that there are some historical inequities regarding human rights issues.

On Why Pay Equity is a Labour Issue

Deb: In all sectors, the fight for pay equity and fair wages continues to be hampered with decades-old conceptions about the value of "women's work" and "men's work" as well as, in recent years, the notion that public sector workers are overpaid and this work could be done more cheaply if it were contracted out. Maureen Bader, BC Director of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation was quoted in the Vancouver Courier saying, "There is no reason the government should be collecting garbage, running daycares, or operating gyms, libraries, pools and community centres. We have



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

A HISTORY OF BC TEACHER STRIKES

Teachers were not given the legal right to strike until 1988. However, that never stopped us...

- 1919**
 - in Victoria, the first teachers' strike in the British Empire
 - 178 teachers refused to work two days over a salary dispute
 - as a result, teachers gained a negotiated settlement
- 1920**
 - the BCTF convinced education officials of the desirability of arbitration provisions
- 1921**
 - 84 teachers went on strike when the New Westminster School Board chose to ignore an arbitrated settlement
 - after intense public pressure, the board was replaced in the next election and the arbitration award was partially paid
- 1929**
 - Vancouver teachers were the first group to receive a salary scale

- based upon certification and experience
- 1939**
 - Langley teachers went on strike when Langley School Board refused to honour arbitration settlement
 - government fired the school board, appointed a trustee who honoured the award and removed all discipline carried out by the board
- 1969**
 - Vancouver teachers attended a school board meeting en masse. Achieved first agreement in BC to include working conditions
- 1971**
 - one day pension strike
- 1974**
 - Surrey teachers took a day to go to Victoria to pressure government to reduce class size
- Early 1980s**
 - some more locals gained working conditions in agreements
 - many teachers gained duty-free lunch hour
- 1981**
 - one day strike to achieve indexing of pensions

- 1983**
 - Operation Solidarity strike (3 days)
 - Teachers gained seniority rights for layoffs
- 1985**
 - Langley teachers were on work-to-rule for 4 months to achieve their first Working and Learning Conditions Agreement
- 1987**
 - signed up over 99% of teachers to the BCTF when compulsory membership was eliminated by the provincial government
- 1988**
 - gained full bargaining rights (though this was subsequently changed to provincial bargaining instead of local bargaining)
- 1991 and 1993**
 - Vancouver strikes, 2 weeks and 3 weeks. Achieved best provisions in North America for students with special needs and students living in poverty (most which was

- subsequently stripped from our collective agreement in 2002 by the BC Liberals)
- 2005**
 - two week provincial strike in response to the government's imposition of another collective agreement – strike deemed illegal by the courts. The resulting settlement broke the zero mandate of government and set the stage for the upcoming round of public-sector bargaining. BCTF bargains new 2006-2011 collective agreement with BCPSEA the following spring.
- 2011**
 - ??? What will things look like after the Olympics ???

**Glen Hansman
President
(with help from many, many Past Presidents)**

Canadian examples of how contracting out has saved millions of dollars in other cities, and it can here too".

Pay equity has of course also been and remains an issue in school, government and academic libraries. It is also vital to remember that there is a disparity between wages in urban and rural settings for similar library positions. Community librarians, for example, who are the sole managers (and sometimes the only paid staff) in small libraries may be paid less per hour than a clerical position in an urban public library. While one reality does not diminish the importance of another, a campaign for fair wages for library workers must include everyone who works in libraries – whatever their position and wherever they work.

For library workers, there is an added complication, described by Anne Turner, Chair of the Fair Compensation Campaign Task Force of the California Library Association "Librarians and library workers are undervalued, and most people, whether members of the public, elected officials, faculty, corporate executives, or citizen board members, have little or no idea of the complexity of library work." She goes on to note that, in her own experience, [the value of] library work is often pulled back down when the "market rate is applied". This has been my experience too. So, while a piece-meal approach where each group of library workers has to negotiate with its employer to achieve fair compensation is not ideal, we can be hopeful that those showing leadership will encourage others to follow.

On Collectively Bargaining Social Justice Issues:

Tess: The public library workers believe that the time is now to address, investigate and correct

pay inequities and we believe so strongly that the time is now that we sat out on increasingly cold and wet picket lines to make our point. That we ultimately were not successful in getting pay equity language in our collective agreement has not weakened our resolve and we will keep hammering home this message until it sinks in. Brian Foley took the take that all we really wanted were pay raises, so he got them for us: well, for some of us anyway. So yes, I'm getting a raise in January 2008 which is above and beyond the overall increases of 17.5% over 5 years that was negotiated for everyone. But I didn't ask for this somewhat arbitrary pay hike. I would have been much happier for a few years of commitment to the philosophical ideas surrounding pay equity in my field and an acknowledgement that the right and just thing to do is to correct it.

The deal that was struck between our employer and the VPL falls very very short of our goal to attain pay equity language in our contract. We were, after several long and exhausting months of tireless bargaining by our bargaining committee and creative picketing by hundreds of members, only able to secure a commitment to a "classification" committee, wherein, unionized library staff will be able to discuss concerns around "classification". This kind of language has no teeth whatsoever and we know that. The jobs within the library are already "classified" by levels Library Assistants 1 to 7 for example. We already have a mechanism in place to look at internal classification issues which serves our needs when one's job requires re-classification. This is not pay equity.

**Jody Polukoshko
Grievance Officer / Vice-
President on behalf of the Status
of Women Committee**

Not keeping up with inflation . . .

A history of Vancouver teachers' salary increases

Teachers made a few gains at the end of the 80s, when an officially-labeled "catch-up" was awarded after years of Bill Bennett's "restraint program" kept teachers further and further behind inflation.

Since then, teachers have fallen behind again. The past twelve years in particular have seen teacher salaries pale beside the riding cost of living Vancouver and increases to teacher salaries in other provinces.

Over the period of time shown on this chart, Vancouver's average consumer price index increase each year was about 3.1% — more than the average teacher salary increase.

Next provincial election, will we get a new set of MLAs that will recognize this problem?

YEAR	% Vancouver salary increase	Context
83-83	3.0	
83-84	0.0	Public Sector Restraintment Act
84-85	0.0	(see above)
85-86	1.2	
86-87	1.8	
87-88	3.1	
88-89	8.1	
89-90	7.4	Local strike settlement
90-91	7.1	(see above)
91-92	7.1	(see above)
92-93	0.0	
93-94	2.0	Strike settlement/arbitration
94-95	2.0	(see above)
95-96	1.0	(see above)
96-97	0.0	
97-98	1.0	
98-99	0.0	
99-00	2.0	
00-01	0.0	
01-02	2.5	Legislated, along with strips to class size / class composition and other workload language from Collective Agreement
02-03	2.5	(see above)
03-04	2.5	(see above)
04-05	0.0	BC government policy of no increases to public sector workers
05-06	0.0	(see above)
06-07	2.5 (+harmonization for some categories on grid, and on-scale rights for TOCs)	Bargained settlement, plus harmonization and TOC pay award as per Vince Ready's recommendations ending 2005 provincial strike.
07-08	2.5	(see above)
08-09	2.5 (+harmonization for some steps)	(see above)
09-10	2.5	(see above)
10-11	2.0	(see above)
11-12	?	Post-Olympics.

Supporting parents' choices with regard to the FSA



Here are responses to the main questions asked following Superintendent Chris Kelly's letter to grade 4 and 7 teachers last month.

What has changed?

Nothing in the *School Act* nor in the *Ministerial Orders* has changed with regard to parents' option to withdraw their children from the FSA. In fact, the wording is the same as in 2004 when the VSB itself sent a letter home to all grade 4 and 7 parents advising them of that option.

What has changed is the pressure on boards of education to comply with the government's current agenda. Vancouver is an obvious target for that pressure because you and the other VESTA members at your school have done a fantastic job over the past six years in sharing your professional concerns with parents about the FSA and other externally-mandated assessments.

What has also changed is the timing of the FSA, and that the results will go home to families before the end of the school year.

Do I need to include a reference to the FSA on my students' report cards?

No. Mr. Kelly's letter refers to a designation of "Has Not Yet Demonstrated Meeting Expectations" for students who do not participate in the FSA. *This does not go on a student's report card.* It is merely a more intimidating way for the Ministry to indicate on its documentation that a student has not participated in the FSA. It has always done so in one way or another. (As has the Fraser Institute, which deducted points from schools' "scores" last year based upon how many students did not write the FSA.)

Does this mean parents can't exempt students from the FSA at all?

Mr. Kelly's letter states that the sample opt-out letters "will not automatically excuse students" (my emphasis). VESTA does not interpret this comment to mean that these letters *won't* suffice to excuse students – only that some principals may feel that additional consultation is in order. That is your principal's choice.

It is difficult to fathom why a principal would not respect a parent's discretion as to whether their child will or will not participate in the FSA.

What should teachers at my school do now?

An already scheduled half-day "FSA Awareness Session" for Grade 4 and 7 teachers will be occurring in early January at the VESTA office. We look forward to seeing someone from every elementary school at that session so the latest information can be given directly. We're also looking forward this year to seeing the lowest FSA participation rates ever!

In the meantime, you and the other VESTA members at your school are encouraged to continue all the discussions you have been having with parents and the public on these issues. *We still continue to believe that the strategy to success in this is to share our professional concerns, our resources, and our concerns with parents – and to continue to work cooperatively with them by respecting their choices with regard to the FSA.*

Continue to give parents the sample opt-out letter. Continue to encourage them to use it, or to make one of their own.

If you have further questions on this subject, please have your school's representative bring those questions to the "FSA Awareness Session" this month.

**Glen Hansman
President**

DATES TO WATCH OUT FOR

JANUARY

various dates
Meetings for schools and communities involved in Phase I of the VSB's Educational Facilities Review

14
Adult Educators Executive, 1-4 PM

15
FSA Workshops, 9:00-10:00 and 1:00-2:00

15
Executive Committee, 4:00

17
Technology Section, 4:00

22
VESTA General Meeting and Staff Rep Assembly, 4:00 at Tupper

23
Pro-D Committee, 4:00

24
Health & Safety Committee, 4:00

28
Status of Women Committee, 4:00

29
Executive Committee, 4:00

30
Gifted Education Workshop, 4 PM

ALL EVENTS AT VESTA OFFICE UNLESS NOTED

