



# TACKBOARD

## President's Message

**"Failure is the opportunity to begin again more intelligently" Henry Ford**



A belated Happy New Year to all of you. The start-up for the VBE 2009 year was eventful to say the least. On Monday, January 5<sup>th</sup> everyone attempted to navigate the journey from home through the heavy snowfall of the day before, then struggled to get into schools through snow and ice

on side roads, walkways and school car parks which had not been cleared. We know that VBE staff were deployed throughout the Christmas period to help with clearing but it is clear that the problem was of a magnitude for which there was no viable plan. Schools began that morning with skeleton staffs as many teachers could not get into the city on time and many students were absent as well. It is reported from several schools that by 2<sup>nd</sup> period there was only one third of the student population in attendance. Many of you have questioned why the Board opened schools that day and I can assure you, the leadership of VSTA asked the same question. Shaun presented briefly to Committee II that week but we intend to bring a longer and more detailed brief around this issue to this committee in early February. Both the city of Vancouver and the Board need a better plan to address snow issues in Vancouver.

The other challenge for the Board and all schools was the **computer virus** which surfaced in the second week back and apparently infected all computers. Despite the strenuous efforts the part of IT staff, the situation exceeded the capacity of the department to maintain teaching and administrative systems. Two full weeks after the infection was discovered, teaching labs and teachers' computers at many sites were still shut down. This has had an effect of circumscribing the use of computer labs for teaching and learning, uploading of marks for interims in many schools has been impossible and interims have consequently not gone out or had to be done entirely by hand. VSTA is currently preparing (yet another) brief for Committee

II on this issue. We have spoken to and asked for feedback from all schools and it will be on the agenda for Council this week.

I am sorry to report that despite a clear presentation of our position, a compelling report on the projected traffic situation from the city and with support from Vancouver Association of Secondary School Administrators (VASSA) and HR, the Board at a Committee I meeting this week rejected VSTA's proposal to close secondary schools for the **2010 Olympics**. Child care (words which were actually used by several of the COPE and Vision Trustees) was far more important as a consideration than the realities of getting teachers in front of students and the possibility of meaningful teaching and learning taking place. They were warned by all of the groups named above that staffing schools would be extremely challenging and the potential of the "perfect storm" of snow, road closures for Olympics and SEMS/TOC issues was also cited as a real possibility. We are very disappointed by the seemingly dismissive way our concerns were dealt with by this new Board.

Finally there will be a VSTA General meeting on **February 18 at 4pm** at Tupper. We will be electing delegates for the 2009 BCTF AGM to be held from Saturday March 14<sup>th</sup> through Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup>. Every year we try to have a mix of experienced and new delegates. It's a great opportunity for members to see how policy and decisions which affect all members are made and the opportunities for (always) scintillating for debate, lively and welcoming hospitality rooms, dancing, music and a lovely room at the Hotel Vancouver are all good inducements to attend. There will be other things on the agenda for this meeting including a report about our meetings with the new Board and possibly a decision on our current Mid Contract Modification talks around new post and fill language. Please attend and make your voice heard around any of these issues.

*Anne*

## Learning Round Table data shows BC Liberals failing students–BCTF

After a meeting of the BC Liberal's Learning Round Table, it is clear that this government has no plan to help students in overcrowded classes. The government's own data shows students are worse off today than in 2005 when BC teachers first went on strike to improve learning conditions for students across the province, BC Teachers' Federation President Irene Lanzinger said today.

"Once again, the government is breaking their own legislation," said Lanzinger. "Even worse, Premier Gordon Campbell and Minister of Education Shirley Bond are once again breaking their promise to BC's students, parents, and teachers. There are more overcrowded classes now than in 2005-06 when the government first created the Learning Round Table and set limits in legislation. The data put forward by the minister shows her government has no plan and the round table continues to fail."

The data presented by the minister of education show 3,336 class-size violations with more than 30 students for the 2008-09 school year. That is up from 3,179 in 2007-08.

There are also 10,985 class-composition violations this year. That means there are close to 11,000 classes with four or more students with special needs. That number is up from 10,313 in 2007-08. In 2005-06, when BC teachers first went on strike, there were 10,942 violations.

"It has been more than three years since the strike and things are worse today for BC students," said Lanzinger. "The BC Liberal government promised action but they never provided the funding to get the job done. After years of delay and stalling, teachers had hoped that the minister would come to the round table with a plan, but all she brought with her was more evidence of her government's failure.

"If the round table is going to succeed and move forward, teachers expect to see some new commitments in the upcoming provincial budget."

## VBE BUDGET PROCESS 2009

The VBE will begin a consultative process to determine its budget priorities for the 2009-10 school year in mid-February. Listed below are some key budgetary dates where stakeholder groups like the VSTA will have an opportunity to make presentations to the trustees. The VSTA is the only body that represents teacher concerns to the board, and traditionally we have always developed our budget submission in consultation with our members. We encourage all teachers and school staff committees to discuss this issue and forward your budget priorities to the table officers at the VSTA. The budget will also form part of the discussion at our upcoming general meeting on February 18<sup>th</sup>. Please send any questions and recommendations to [shelley@vstaweb.ca](mailto:shelley@vstaweb.ca).

<b>Feb. 19 (Th)</b> location & times TBA	<b>AREA MEETINGS</b> Public, stakeholders, school based budget priorities
<b>Feb. 25 (W)</b> 5:30pm Room 120	<b>COMMITTEE III/V</b> Stakeholders present budget priorities to Trustees
<b>Mar. 13 (F)</b>	<b>Provincial Announcement re: Operating Grants for 09/10</b>
<b>Mar. 30 (M)</b> Room 110	<b>COMMITTEE III/V</b> Board presents preliminary budget
<b>Apr. 9 (Th)</b> 3:30pm Room 110	<b>COMMITTEE III/V</b> Stakeholders response to preliminary budget
<b>Apr.21 (M)</b> 5:30pm Room 110	<b>COMMITTEE III/V</b> Board presents <i>revised</i> preliminary budget
<b>Apr. 29 (W)</b> 5:30pm Room 400	<b>COMMITTEE III/V</b> Stakeholders response to revised preliminary budget
<b>Apr. 30 (Th)</b> 7pm Boardroom	<b>Public Release of Final Budget</b>

# FSA Update

In a province-wide vote in December, BC teachers voted overwhelmingly to protect the interests of their students by opposing the government's Foundation Skills Assessment test (FSA), written by students in grades 4 and 7. 85% of teachers voted YES, which means BCTF members will not prepare for, administer, or mark FSAs in February unless the government changes to a random sampling of students to assess how the system is doing overall. The successful FSA vote demonstrates that teachers are serious about our concerns, and asks the government respect our professional judgment and our call for an end to the unfair ranking of schools through the misuse of data collected via the FSA. There is a better way, and teachers have told the minister this many times.

Voter turn out amongst Vancouver Secondary Teachers was impressive, and we would like to thank our staff reps for the admirable job they did in organizing the vote. We also thank the many teachers who took the time to vote on this important issue on behalf of grade 4 and 7 colleagues.

Because of the success of the BCTF vote, several Boards around the province are re-examining the issues around the FSAs, and Vancouver's new Trustees are leading the way. The VBE trustees held a special public meeting and have issued a letter to parents outlining their options for withdrawing their children from the FSA. Boards in Cowichan and Coquitlam followed the VBE with similar letters. While some boards around the province are attempting to "encourage" teachers to administer the tests with pressure tactics such as letters of expectation, boards are making contingency plans to administer the tests without teachers. On Wednesday, January 28<sup>th</sup>, we received word from Irene Lanzinger that BCPSEA has filed a complaint with the LRB. The complaint will be heard on Friday, January 30<sup>th</sup>, and we will receive further direction from the BCTF at that time. In the event the LRB rules in favour of BCPSEA's arguments, all locals will be holding general meetings so that members can decide what the BCTF's response will be. Effecting change is a challenging process, but our own recent history has taught us again and again that if we demonstrate solidarity around a principled stand, such as the FSA, we can make a difference.

# VSTA General Meeting

Wednesday, February 18<sup>th</sup>  
4pm at Tupper Auditorium

All teachers are encouraged to attend our VSTA general meeting. Agenda items include:

- school closures during the 2010 Olympics update
- spring transfer and Post & Fill update
- election of delegates to the BCTF AGM
- discussion about our provincial election involvement

## Call for Delegates to the BCTF AGM

The BCTF Annual General Meeting is scheduled from Saturday, March 15, to Tuesday, March 18, at the Hyatt Regency Hotel in downtown Vancouver. If you are interested in participating in this professionally enriching event, please attend the VSTA General Meeting at Tupper on Monday, February 18, 2009, where the membership will elect or acclaim the 20 delegates who will represent the VSTA. Join the approximately 700 colleagues from around the province to enjoy social events, debate policy, and influence the direction of the BCTF. The AGM has been described as an event that every teacher "must do" at least once in a career! See your staff rep or download from <http://www.vstaweb.ca/forms.htm> for the delegate nomination form, and return it to the VSTA. Nominations will also be accepted from the floor of our general meeting on February 18.



Trenea Goolieff, VSTA Local Election Rep to BCTF  
Arthur Laing Bridge, January 24, 2009

## Newer Teachers' Reception

Newer teachers of up to 5 years experience were invited to attend an informative reception at the VSTA office on Wednesday, January 20<sup>th</sup>. Approximately fifty people attended this fun and informative event where ideas were exchanged and the variety of valuable services and resources offered by the BCTF, VBE and VSTA were shared. Speakers included a variety of teacher-consultants from the VBE, VSTA, and the BCTF. Teacher participants made some valuable professional connections and had an opportunity to have questions answered in a supportive atmosphere. After the presentations, participants were treated to a wonderful dinner where many prizes were awarded. Thank you to the many newer teachers who were able to attend this event and to the veteran staff reps who were there to offer their experienced leadership.



*Teaching from the heart  
and building for the future*

## New Teachers' and Student Teachers' Conference February 27-February 28, 2009

Radisson Hotel - 8181 Cambie Road, Richmond, BC

Hosted by the BC Teachers' Federation

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

\$70 Member teachers

\$35 Student teachers

\$150 Non-members

Online registration will be processed on  
a first-come, first-served basis.  
[bctf.ca/NewTeachersConference2009.aspx](http://bctf.ca/NewTeachersConference2009.aspx)

Newer Teachers' Reception