



TACKBOARD



President's Message

"Get up, stand up, stand up for your rights" Bob Marley



Well colleagues we did it; together we helped make it happen! The Vancouver Board of Education now has 7 progressive trustees elected for the next three years. They are a mixture of the COPE/Vision candidates we endorsed: Patti Bacchus, Al Blakey, Jane Bouey, Ken Clement, Sharon Gregson, and

Allan Wong. The sad news is that Bill Bargeman, our Past President missed being elected by 67 votes only. Bill is philosophical and stoic about his loss and will be working behind the scenes with the COPE Education committee to help with policy and direction.

I want to thank all of you who worked on the campaign, organizing and rallying the troops for school visits, leafleting, talking to friends and family, coming to the Burma Shaves on the 14th and helping in the myriad ways that you did. I particularly want to thank our 2nd VP, Shelley Sullivan and Treena Goolieff (Hamber and VSTA Executive) for the incredible work they did in orchestrating our campaign. Their hard work and creative efforts were extraordinary and are greatly appreciated. We look forward to working with the new Board who will take office on December 8th.

To celebrate this victory and the end of Term I, we are hosting another great pub night on **November 28th** at the **Cottage Bistro** at 4468 Main Street. **Peter Hill (U Hill and VSTA Executive)** our intrepid entertainment guru has got two bands performing and VSTA will once again be providing complimentary appetizers. Come and join us from 2:30 to 5:30.

Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA). On December 9th and 10th the whole province will be taking a vote on the FSA issue. At the 2008 AGM a motion was passed that we take a vote on preparing, administering and marking the FSA test which currently all grade 4 and 7 students have to write. The question on the ballot will be as follows:

"Do you agree with the 2008 AGM decision that unless the Ministry of Education changes to a random

sampling with neither schools nor students identified, teachers will exercise their professional autonomy and will not prepare for, administer, or mark the provincial FSAs?"

On the face of it, this is not a secondary issue as it is grade 4 and 7 teachers. However, we all know how FSA results (and in Secondary, provincial exams in Grades 10, 11 and 12) are misused by the media and the Fraser Institute to rank our schools, and teachers see firsthand the effect this has on students, schools and communities. These rankings have been condemned by all educational partner organizations. The literature on standardized testing is pretty unequivocal. The overuse of standardized tests both in the UK and the US has resulted in decreased graduation rates and has not improved achievement. Equally, this proliferation of testing contributes to a narrowing of curriculum and weakening of teacher autonomy. Alfie Kohn, noted education researcher and author puts it this way: "Every hour spent on such exam preparation is an hour not spent helping students to become critical, creative, curious learners".

It is for these reasons that I am encouraging Vancouver secondary teachers to vote Yes on December 9th and 10th. A strong Yes vote will help convince the Minister of Education that we are serious about our call for an end to the ranking of schools, and that the BCTF is determined to see the administration of the FSAs conducted on a statistically valid randomized sampling basis. We should support our elementary colleagues in this fight.

Calendar Committee. Finally, I want to report that there will be a final meeting of the calendar committee in early December to discuss the issue of closing schools during the February 2010 Winter Olympics. The traffic report and projections from the city will be available for the committee to look at and a final decision will likely be made in December by the Board.

We look forward to seeing many of you at our celebratory pub night.

Anne

Newer Teachers Reception

Rescheduled

Due to circumstances, we have had to reschedule our Newer Teachers Reception. All *newer* teachers (up to 5 years experience) are invited to attend an informative reception at the VSTA office at 2915 Commercial Drive, on Tuesday, January 20th, from 4:00-6:00. Drop by, meet your colleagues, and learn about a variety of valuable services and resources that can support you in the early part of your career that are offered by the BCTF, VBE and VSTA. Speakers will include a variety of teacher-consultants from the VBE, the BCTF, and the VSTA Executive. This is a session not to be missed! Refreshments will be served. We look forward to meeting you all! Please RSVP to Kim at 604-873-5570 or email kim@vstaweb.ca.



Anne Guthrie Warman, VSTA President, and Bill Bargeman, VSTA Past President celebrating the COPE/Vision Victory for School Trustees (Nov. 15, 2008).



Intrepid LEC trio tired but exhilarated. Treena Goolieff (EH/Exec), Shelley Sullivan (2nd VP) and Glen Hansman (VESTA President).

BCeSIS

Reminder: Training for BCeSIS is well under way in the pilot schools. Teachers are reminded that this training is *in-service* that should be provided by the Board during instructional hours. No teacher should be required to do this training on a lunch hour, during a prep, or during pro-d. If these situations are occurring in your schools, make sure you inform your staff rep or phone the VSTA office to report the situation. Already we've had BCeSIS training imposed on one school's pro-d day. When the VSTA brought this to the attention of the Board, the lost pro-d day was replaced with a supplementary pro-d day in lieu of the one that was lost to BCeSIS training.



Jwould like to extend a huge "Thank You!" to all VSTA members who voted for and supported me in the Vancouver School Board election. As most of you know I narrowly lost my bid by 67 of roughly 46,000 votes cast. Without the personal, physical and financial support from you all, it would not have been this close. The support of so many teachers who contributed funds, phoned, leafleted on street corners, took lawn signs and urged their friends to vote inspired and energized me throughout the campaign.

Nonetheless the election was a tremendous victory for COPE and the progressive alliance with Vision. Progressives now control city council, school board and parks board and Vancouver can begin to move forward to deal with homelessness, coordinated advocacy for greater education funding and greater openness and citizen involvement. On school board we can also expect the development of needs budgets, more timely and open consultation, and improved labour relations. While my election would have been the icing on the cake, we won the cake.

I look forward to working with COPE and the broader progressive education community as we help this new board deal with the difficult and complex issues they will be facing over the next three years.

Bill Bargeman

Celebrate!!

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 28TH

2:00 – 5:30 pm

Cottage Bistro

4468 Main Street (at 29th)

- Complimentary Appetizers ▪
- No Host Bar ▪

Friends and Colleagues lets celebrate...
The VSTA welcomes teachers to join us
for an afternoon of great music and
great company.

Lets celebrate the municipal election
results and the end of Term 1.



Music performed by:
Two Squared and Class Discipline

FSA VOTE December 9th and 10

On December 9th and 10th, teachers across the province will be voting on whether to engage in a collective action against the Foundation Skills Assessment exams given to students in grades 4 and 7.

With the assistance of our staff reps, the VSTA will be holding the secret-ballot vote in all secondary schools over the two days. Elementary teachers will also be voting at our secondary schools.

Watch for more information coming to schools via staff reps. More information about the FSA is available at the following link: <http://www.bctf.ca/fsa.aspx>.

Education Leave Application Deadline Fast Approaching

Thinking of upgrading your qualifications? Did you know that teachers on a continuing contract who have been with the Board for at least 5 consecutive years can apply for paid education leave? The Collective Agreement allows for several types of education leave of varying lengths, including up to one year of paid leave at 60% of the employee's annual salary. The pay rate for leaves of 10 days or less is at 100% of salary. Application deadlines, terms, and conditions can be found in Article G.21.9.h of the Collective Agreement (p.106). Teachers intending to apply for an education leave of one school year must apply in writing to the Associate Superintendent-Human Resources by December 15 for a leave commencing in September 2009. Application forms are available from the VBE or may be downloaded from the VSTA website at www.vstaweb.ca.

Teachers Win Freedom of Expression Arbitration! (adapted from VESTA News)

Sometimes teachers in British Columbia must speak up, even when others in the system try to pressure us not to do so. We've had our right to communicate on public education issues argued in arbitration and even in the courts, and we've had that right affirmed time and time again. Now we've had another dispute settled in our favour! Recently VESTA had a dispute with the employer regarding the distribution of material opposing the Foundation Skills Assessment exams for grades 4 and 7 students. VESTA sent home letters via students informing parents about VESTA's opposition to the exams and providing information on how parents could withdraw their children from these exams.

On October 15th, a consent award was reached between VESTA and the employer. This award states that " *the Employer concedes that its directive prohibiting teachers from sending material opposing the FSA test home to students was contrary to the Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms.* "

Consequently, the Employer will withdraw its April 2007 directive to principals which blocked teachers' freedom of expression rights, and will withdraw a letter of expectation given to a Vancouver Teacher because she distributed material (via students) opposing the FSA. It is now absolutely clear that teachers in Vancouver may distribute material opposing the FSA by a variety of means, including giving it directly to parents, distributing it on school property, posting it on bulletin boards, sharing it at PAC meetings, and distributing it via students. Congratulations, VESTA, on yet another win for teachers' rights to freedom of expression in schools!

Criminal Records Check

The government recently amended the Criminal Records Review Act to require criminal record checks every five years (CRC) for all current and new members of certain professional regulatory bodies. This requirement applies to professional members who work with children and all new and existing employees who work with children in organizations operated, funded or licensed by the provincial government.

As a result of this legislation, CRCs are required for all BC College of Teachers' certificate holders, including retirees and other non-practising members of the College. The criminal record review is administered by the College and conducted by the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. Criminal record checks have been carried out by the Ministry on applicants to the College since 1996.

The cyclical five-year review is being phased in over a five-year period. Beginning in 2008, and every year thereafter, approximately one-fifth of all certificate holders who have not had a criminal record check in the last five years will be affected.

Certificate holders whose official last name in the College database begins with A-E and who have not completed a criminal records check with the College in the last five years will be required to give their authorization for a CRC by **completing an online authorization on the College' website before November 30, 2008.**

The November 30, 2008 deadline **only** applies to members whose last name begins with A-E. If your surname is within this range, you will have received an individualized notice in early September. The College will pay for all applications through 2008; decisions regarding who will pay for the criminal record check in subsequent years have yet to be decided.

To complete your online application form, print a mail-in application form, or for more information, go to the BC College of Teachers website at www.bcct.ca.

Need a Shoulder?

Retired teacher and former staff rep and Council member, Elaine Barnes, is giving back to the organization she helped build. Elaine has offered to provide assistance, advice, and a kind shoulder for any teacher who may be feeling the need for some support. Elaine can just listen or help teachers to access the many support services available for our members. If you're feeling stressed, it may be time to reach out. Contact Elaine directly and confidentially through her email at elaine@vstaweb.ca.

Self-Directed Pro-D: Teacher Professional Responsibilities vs. Administrative Rights

New Self-Directed Pro-D Guidelines were passed by the VSTA Council last year. These guiding principles not only define self-directed Pro-D, but also provide suggestions and benefits of self-directed Pro-D, as well as useful strategies for self-directed planning and procedures. These guiding principles remind teachers of our professional responsibility to engage in activities that further our teaching expertise, to use our Pro-D time wisely and appropriately, and that we have professional autonomy over our Pro-D. Autonomy means that no one else, i.e. administrators, can tell teachers what we should be doing for professional development. These new guidelines have been sent to all secondary schools for distribution to teaching staff and are posted under Professional Development on the VSTA website.

Some Administrators who may not be familiar with the guidelines (which were developed collectively with the VBE) have been asking teachers to provide specific details about their self-directed Pro-D plans and have even gone so far as to attempt to approve or disapprove of their Pro-D plans.

The VSTA position is that teachers are not required to provide to administrators information about the type of activity they are engaged in. Rather, teachers are only obligated to advise administrators of their whereabouts on the Pro-D day. Teachers are also requested to inform the school's Pro-D committee of their self-directed Pro-D plans in written form, as this assists the committee with school-based Pro-D planning and enables the committee to organize opportunities for teachers who share common Pro-D goals to work together. Ask your Pro-D Committee Chair for your schools "Self-Directed Pro-D" form.

Pro D days are not to be confused with the one non-instructional *Administration Day* that administrator's are entitled to. Teachers are contractually obligated to attend the Administration Day; they have a right to attend a Pro D activity anywhere they wish, after having informed the Administration of the location of the activity.

Originally, Pro-D days were added to the school calendar at the request of the teachers to provide time during the year to refine, improve, and enhance our teaching expertise. They are *our* days, and our activities are part of our professional responsibilities and a cornerstone of our professional autonomy.