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President's Newsletter

December, 2010

Category 5+ and Category 6 (again)

In my September newsletter, I reminded you all to email Joan Axford (and Paul Standing) if you thought you might qualify for a salary category change (based on completion of new coursework over the summer). Article B.28.1 allows for this to happen again in the New Year. So, if you have been working on courses this year and you now believe you qualify for a change in certification, **you have until January 15th to write Joan and Paul.** Any such increase will be effective January 1st (and you will have until April 30th to provide the evidence of the completed coursework). Don't miss out on your New Year's raise!

Bill 27 and 28 Supreme Court Challenge Update

I have been doing my best to keep you all up to date on the B.C. Supreme Court Challenge of Bills 27 and 28: the 2002 legislation that stripped our contracts of all our class size, class composition, and non-enrolling ratio language. Our two weeks in court have come and gone, and we must now wait for a ruling from Madam Justice Griffin. The BCTF did an excellent job of posting updates on their website as the case unfolded in court. I strongly encourage you all to click on the following link so you can get a flavour for the arguments that were made.

<http://www.bctf.ca/FeatureCollection.aspx>

If you don't have the time (or stomach) to read it all, here are some of my favourite arguments put forth **by government** in defense of the legislation:

- Constrained funding for education meant boards needed increased "flexibility." The legislation is obviously working as intended because there now are many more classes enrolling more than 30 students than before it was passed. As well, there are now some 12,000 classes integrating four or more students with special needs. That would not have been permissible prior to the legislation.
- The legislation has had no appreciable impact on staffing/service levels.
- The legislation was necessary because class size and related matters should not be left as "bargaining chips" to be traded away at the bargaining table (by us!)
- Class size/composition and staffing ratios are not, strictly speaking, "employment" matters. Rather, they are matters of public policy and thus within the unfettered discretion of government.

Do You Know Where I Can Find...?

You probably won't be surprised to hear that I get a lot of questions from teachers, and while I always enjoy a chance to chat with the "rank and file," there are a few resources I would like to make you aware of that might save us both a phone call or email.

- ✧ **The Collective Agreement** – answers to at least 50% of the questions I get can be found in this wonderful document. Your Staff Rep should have a copy, plus you can find an electronic version in the STA folder on Zimbra ("Briefcase" tab... "District_Forms" folder).
- ✧ **The Staffing LOU** – this Letter of Understanding spells out our staffing rules and regulations. You can find a copy in the STA folder on Zimbra.
- ✧ **The District Policy Manual** – these are the policies that guide much of what our Board does. Policies include: Field Trip Policy, Assessment/Evaluation and Reporting Policy, Written Reports on Teachers Policy, Teacher LOAs Requiring Board Approval Policy, Complaints Related to a Member of the Management Team Policy, and many others. It can be found on the District website under "Quick Links."
- ✧ **"My Account" on the Teachers' Pension Plan website** (tpp.pensionsbc.ca) – you will need your username and password from your most recent Member's Benefit Statement. With this, you can login to your account and use a pension estimator, sign up for a seminar, review your personal retirement information, and much more.
- ✧ **"CARESnet" on the Pacific Blue Cross website** (www.pbchbs.com/corp/members) - you will need your Employee Benefit Summary card to access your profile, where you can view your claims (past and current), download a claim form, and see **exactly** what medical and dental coverage you have.

BCTF New Teachers' and Student Teachers' Conference 2011

- When: February 25-26, 2011 (registration through the [BCTF website](#) starting December 20th)
- Where: Radisson Hotel Vancouver Airport, 8181 Cambie Road, Richmond
- Who: New teachers, Teachers-on-Call, and Student Teachers
- What: Workshops, resources, PSA information, networking...
- How: Excellent use of Pro D funds. Don't forget that TOCs have access to **\$250** worth of professional development funding if they get 10 callouts this year. Contact Audrey Hayes (ahayes@sd63.bc.ca) for more information.

BCTF Facebook Group

For you hipster social media types, you should be aware that the BCTF has an ever-growing Facebook group that they would like you to join (www.facebook.com/BCTeachersFederation). It is a great place to get updates about BCTF news, events, and find opportunities to discuss current issues in education.

To TOC or Not To TOC...

... that is, indeed, the question. I have been contacted recently by TOCs and non-enrolling teachers alike, all asking the same question: **what are the rules around engaging a TOC if you are a non-enrolling teacher?**

Certainly there is a message out there, coming predominantly from administrators, that non-enrolling teachers cannot engage a TOC for short-term absences (i.e. a day or two). While I understand some of the issues that have led to this argument (there are very few qualified specialist TOCs; the specialized nature of these jobs makes it difficult for TOCs to do meaningful work; we are broke), the STA is of the opinion that all teachers do important work, and we do not subscribe to the position that TOCs should never be brought in for short-term non-enrolling absences. Instead, we believe that there are many situations where it is completely appropriate – in fact necessary – to engage a TOC for short-term absences of this nature. Non-enrolling teachers should not be afraid to engage their principal in a conversation about the need to bring in a TOC for absences of even a day or two. In some instances, this sort of replacement might not be practical or even useful, but in others it might be totally appropriate. At the end of the day, it is my hope that we will be able to find some commonsense middle ground on this issue. If nothing else, I would like non-enrolling teachers to feel comfortable having this conversation, and ultimately to feel comfortable engaging a TOC if they think that is appropriate.

SIDES Qualification Course

It is almost impossible not to speculate what the brave, new world of “personalized learning” might look like, but most people agree that distributed learning (DL) will play a significant role in the future of education. In Saanich, we have a DL school that continues to grow - bucking our own declining enrolment trend and requiring the hiring of more and more teachers. This has led many teachers to wonder what it takes to work at a place like SIDES.

Luckily, we have had the foresight to address this issue. **Starting in the New Year, the Board is planning on offering a training program that any teacher can take if they want to become qualified to work at SIDES.** Not only will this program give teachers a taste of what teaching in a distributed learning environment will look like, it will preempt any potential arguments about who is, or is not, qualified to work at SIDES. So, stay tuned for the official rollout of this program, and sign up if you think DL might be a good fit for you.

Make a Future... Free of Charge

Some of you might have used the BCPSEA “Make a Future” website in the past to apply for teaching jobs in other parts of the province. Until now, applicants were charged \$10 for using this service, but as a result of a mediation and a consent award involving the BCTF and BCPSEA, the fee charged to apply for teaching positions in B.C. school districts through this website will be discontinued as of February 1, 2011.

BCTF Resources

I recently gave a series of guest lectures at UVic to student teachers, and part of my presentation included a list of the services and resources offered by the BCTF. The list is long (the one below is by no means exhaustive), and I thought it would be a good idea to remind **you** where your hard earned union dues go. Visit the [BCTF website](#) if you want to learn more about any of the services or programs listed below.

Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs) – the BCTF is home to 33 PSAs. These are groups of teachers organized by specialty/interest that put on conferences, publish newsletters, and maintain email lists for teacher collaboration and communication.

Internal Mediation Service (IMS) - IMS is a team of volunteer BCTF members, trained and experienced as mediators, who work with teachers and others to help resolve workplace conflicts.

Health and Wellness Program – formally known as the Rehab Program, this service assigns professional health and wellness consultants to teachers who are off work or struggling to maintain their assignment.

Salary Indemnity Plan – this plan covers teachers who have exhausted their sick leave and are not able to return to work. The short-term component of the plan is available for 120 days, and pays 50% of salary (deduction and tax free). After that, teachers will convert to the Long Term Disability plan, which is managed by Great West Life. Teachers who are disabled from the occupation of teaching can receive LTD for up to one year. Thereafter, teachers must be disabled from **any** occupation (that would pay them 60% of their pre-disability teacher income) to remain in the plan.

Assistance Society - the BCTF Assistance Society provides emergency financial aid to those who are, or have been, active members of the BCTF and to their spouses. Assistance is given in the form of loans or non-repayable grants.

BCTF Advantage – this member affinity program offers special deals and discounts for BCTF members at a variety of businesses.

Teaching Resources – the BCTF offers a variety of teaching resources, including social justice resources, peace and global education resources, an extensive video library, and much more.

Well, that's it for the first decade of the 21st century. 2011 promises to be a busy year for all of us (except for the 13 of you counting the sleeps to retirement like my kids are counting the sleeps until Santa comes). On the horizon: more Bill 33 consultations, MLA recall campaigns, a new Premier, possible education legislation, a Supreme Court ruling, and of course, a new round of bargaining. I hope you are all able to take a little time to rest and relax over the break with friends and family... you have earned it, and you will need it.

See you all in 2011 (at the February General Meeting if nowhere else). Wishing you all the best for a wonderful holiday season.