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President's Newsletter

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General Meeting Reminder

This is my last chance to appeal to you all to grab a few colleagues and make your way to the upcoming **STA General Meeting (February 9th, 3:45pm at the DRC)**. As I write this, we have had 240 responses to our most recent bargaining survey, and we will be bringing these results to this meeting for debate and ratification. Don't miss this final chance to tell the bargaining team what priorities are important to you.

We will also be electing our delegates to this year's BCTF AGM (March 19-22 at the Victoria Convention Centre). At present we still need four more names to fill our 10 spots. Delegates are entitled to stay at a downtown hotel (most stay at the Empress), and will be fully compensated for mileage and meals. Childcare is provided for those who have little ones to look after over the break. I have often said that teachers should go to the AGM at least once in their career. Please consider making this your year. Contact the STA office for more details.

BCPVPA Weighs in on the FSA

For the first time ever, the BC Principals and Vice Principals Association has added their collective voice to the growing din, calling for an end to the Foundations Skills Assessment in British Columbia. Many Boards of Education (including Saanich) have decided to respect parents' wishes to have their children excused from writing this year's test, and even one of the Liberal leadership candidates has gone on record against the tests. It certainly seems that teachers are no longer the only ones who see these tests as a waste of time and money at best, and advertisements for private schools at worst.

Once, again, my thanks goes out to grade 4 and 7 teachers who continue to find themselves in the middle of this complicated, often political, issue. With any luck, this year's FSA will be the last time we see these tests (in their current census administration format, at least) in British Columbia.

Are You Satisfied?

As tempting as it might be to give the government a piece of your mind, the BCTF is once again encouraging teachers to not participate in this year's teacher satisfaction survey. These surveys do not ask the sorts of questions that need to be asked, and are used by government to celebrate the rosy state of affairs in B.C. public schools. Find something else to do with your time (and anger).

New STA Website

Thanks to the hard work of your second vice president Amanda Wilson, the STA has a shiny, new website. While it is still a work-in-progress, it is our hope that teachers (and others) will find it to be a valuable and easy to use resource. The Saanich collective agreement, Pacific Blue Cross claims forms and past issues of these very newsletters are all just a click or two away. In the future, we hope to bring you bargaining updates, Pro D information, health and safety reminders, and more. If you can think of something you would like to see on our site, please let us know. Click on the following link, and have a look.

<http://saanichteachers.com/>

Policy Revisions

In my last two newsletters, I have suggested that the Board's Policy Manual is a document with which teachers should become more familiar. As part of the policy development and revision process, the Board is required to send any new policies and/or policies undergoing revision out for public consultation. This gives partner groups (including teachers) a chance to give the Board feedback before these policies become enshrined in the Policy Manual.

At present, the following policies are out for public consideration:

Policy 2500 (Purchasing)

Policy 3130 (Use of Technology and Information Systems)

Policy 4020 (Residency Entitlement to a Tuition Free Public Education System)

I have included copies of these draft policies on the STA website, and I encourage you to have a look at them. Policy 3130 will be of particular interest to many, as it has implications for the future of WiFi in our schools (a topic of great interest these days). Any feedback should be sent to Leigh Glancie by March 8th. The final drafts will go to the March 16th Board Meeting for consideration.

Class Size and Composition Numbers

The following link will take you to the government's own accounting of class size and composition in British Columbia. At this site, you can filter the data three ways: provincial level, district level, or school level.

Close examination yields some less-than-flattering results for Saanich: our grade 8-12 average class size (26.6) is the highest it has been in six years, and currently the fourth highest in the province. Our grade 4-7 average class size (26.9) is also well above the provincial average. Our class composition numbers are also the highest they have ever been (178 classes with 4 or more IEP students), and don't include second semester statistics (something the government has never seemed to care about). Great stuff for your letters to the editor or local MLAs!

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reporting/

Worklife of BC Teachers

Are teachers' jobs actually getting harder, or are we just a bunch of whiners? Do teachers really only work from 9 to 3 with summers off? Is class size and composition really a concern, or is it just a sound bite for when we are on strike?

Two BCTF researchers have attempted to answer these questions and more, and have produced an outstanding report entitled "*Worklife of BC Teachers in 2009*". The authors collected data from over 500 teachers using a survey conducted in the spring of 2009, and have summarized their findings in this report (released in October of this year). Below is a link to the study's executive summary (a very reasonable seven pages) that is well worth the time it takes to read. If you want to drill down into the data, the entire report (a whopping 225 pages) is available on the BCTF website.

I have found these findings extremely useful in my conversations with parents, trustees, MLAs and even other teachers. You might want to sock away a few pearls for the next time someone asks you what it is like to be a teacher these days. Here are some of my favourites:

- ⇒ full-time teachers work an average of 47.8 hours per week. One in ten work 60 or more hours per week!
- ⇒ marking and prep alone adds an average of 11 hours per week to teachers' classroom hours
- ⇒ the majority of teachers report regularly working on school-related tasks before and after school and on weekends (95.4%), during recess and lunch breaks (87.6%), and on the weekends (76.9%)
- ⇒ teachers early in their career take an average of 0-3 weeks off in the summer months (average is 5.7 weeks)
- ⇒ only one in five teachers report having any energy left at the end of a teaching day
- ⇒ one in three teachers report that work interferes with family or personal life
- ⇒ two-thirds of teachers report that their stress levels and workload have increased in the last five years
- ⇒ significant sources of stress include: disruptive student behaviour, class composition issues, level of support for grey area students, attitude of government, class size, and assessment
- ⇒ three-quarters of special education teachers report that their workload is higher than it was five years ago
- ⇒ one in five teachers is considering leaving the profession for reasons other than retirement
- ⇒ one in five part-time teachers have reduced their assignment as a strategy to cope with stress and workload
- ⇒ half of the teachers on leave indicated that workload issues contributed to their decision to take leave

Don't feel bad if these findings actual make you feel a bit better. Misery really does love company.

<http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/WorklifeWorkload/2009/ExecutiveSummary.pdf>

Thinking About Retiring?

This is just a reminder that any teacher within five years of retirement should plan on attending one of the upcoming Retirement Seminars being offered by the Teachers' Pension Plan. The last two seminars of the year are coming up later this month (9:00am - 11:00am and again at 12:30pm - 2:30 pm on February 26th) at the Coast Victoria Harbourside Hotel. Pre-register at: tpp.pensionsbc.ca.

Know Your Collective Agreement

Different parts of the collective agreement can be used by teachers who find themselves, for one reason or another, unable to continue working full-time (or at all). Don't forget that if the issue is *medical* in nature (including psycho-emotional), teachers should be accessing *medical* leave (and not subsidizing their health with personal leaves). Here are a few of the options for non-medical situations:

Article

C.15.1 A full-time teacher may, without prejudice to that appointment, request a part-time appointment. The teacher shall specify the fraction of time and the period for which the part-time assignment is requested, at the time of making the request. The Board shall not unreasonably deny such requests.

C.15.2 A teacher, who receives a part-time appointment under section C.15.1, shall be entitled to return to a full time assignment, similar to the one previously occupied, at the start of the school year immediately following expiration of the part-time appointment. The teacher may return to a full time assignment at an earlier date, or may extend the period of part-time appointment, upon the approval of the Board.

B.31.3 Teachers who transfer from a full time assignment to a part-time assignment under Article C.15.1 may, for pension purposes, request and shall be granted a leave of absence from the full time position, so as to be eligible to purchase pensionable service in accordance with the Pension (Teachers) Act.

Long Term Personal Leave

G.27.1 A teacher shall be granted full or part-time leave without pay for a period of ten (10) school months. Upon request, such leave shall be extended for an additional ten (10) school months. Part-time leave shall be extended for additional ten (10) month periods upon request. In the case of a full time Long Term Personal Leave, the Board may upon request extend the leave in exceptional circumstances beyond a twenty (20) month period.

G.27.2 An application shall normally be submitted not later than twenty (20) school days prior to the start of the leave.

G.27.3 Teachers returning from Long Term Personal Leave shall notify the board at least twenty (20) school days in advance of such return to work except in respect to leave expiring June 30 where notice shall be given by April 30.

Translation

Although this is not found in the Leaves (G) section of the collective agreement, this is how most teachers voluntarily become part-time (to job share, for instance). Notice that it does not necessarily have to be for a full year, or even a full semester, but that the Board has the right to deny unreasonable requests.

Translation

Most teachers take this type of "leave" right through until the end of the year. A teacher who requests (and is approved for) part-time work for a shorter time can return to full-time mid year, but the Board might be reluctant to approve these types of requests. Notice that there is no guarantee that a teacher will return to their actual assignment when they return to full-time.

Translation

This article is found in a completely different part of the agreement, and I suspect rarely, if ever, happens. **Teachers who are voluntarily part-time should formally request a leave from the other part of their job and consider purchasing pensionable service for the leave time.**

Translation

This is the leave that most teachers access when they want to take an entire year off. In this case, "part-time leave" refers to a full leave from a part-time job (as opposed to a partial leave from a larger job as is dealt with in C.15 above). Notice that a long term personal leave must be for a full school year (although occasional teachers have been allowed to return early) and that the Board has no rights to deny these requests for the first 2 years (for full-time leaves). A third year is possible, but rarely granted.

Although it is not mentioned in this article, it should be noted that **teachers continue to accumulate seniority for up to two years while on any Board approved leave.**