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President's Newsletter

February, 2012

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 8th, 3:45pm at the DRC)**. BCTF Member-At-Large Denise Moffatt will be joining us to discuss the BCTF Executive Committee's perspective on the complicated provincial picture, and we will be sure to leave plenty of time on the agenda for questions.

We will also be electing our delegates to this year's BCTF AGM (March 17-20th at the Vancouver Hyatt Hotel). At present, we still do not have enough interested teachers to fill all 10 Saanich spots. Delegates are fully compensated for hotel costs, mileage, and meals, and childcare is provided for those with little ones to look after over the break. It has often been said that each teacher should go to at least one AGM in his or her career, and you would be hard pressed to pick a year that would be more interesting. Contact the STA office for more details or to add your name to the list.

BCTF Advertising Campaign

You might have noticed that the mainstream media is not exactly teacher/union friendly. As unpleasant as it is to endure this seemingly endless teacher bashing, we should all take some comfort in the fact that our polling results show that this anti-teacher media message is not reflective of the majority of people's opinions about the importance of work that we do, or about the need for government to properly invest in public education.

In an attempt to "push back" against the right-wing media machine, the BCTF Communications Department is rolling out an extensive media campaign starting this week (media outlets are apparently more than willing to cash our cheques). This campaign will feature newspaper ads, internet "pre-roll" ads (try watching a few videos on the CTV website and you will run into one), and two 30 second TV spots – all with extensive saturation. Click on the following link to get a sneak peek.

<http://www.bctf.ca/bargainingAndContracts.aspx?id=25078>

I also encourage you all to help us get a little more "earned media." Write a letter to the editor, comment on Janet Steffenhagen's *Report Card* blog or use Twitter and Facebook to spread pro-teacher messages. The public is on our side... they just might not know it yet.

BC's Education Plan

By now, most of you are aware that the Ministry of Education has unveiled a new plan for public education in British Columbia. There are certainly elements of the plan that are appealing to teachers (fewer PLOs for example), but if you spend a little time digging through the document you soon find it to be big on platitudes and grandiose ideas, but short on details. Do a little more digging, and you will find elements of the plan that should be of great concern to teachers (a government presentation at the bargaining table identified our collective agreements as an “impediment” to the plan – their justification for the concessions being sought by BCPSEA).

The BCTF has served notice to the ministry that, as an organization, we are unable to engage in discussions about the plan until more pressing issues (bargaining, Bills 27/28) are dealt with. That is not to say, however, that individual teachers should not be sharing their thoughts with the ministry. **Please visit the BC Education Plan site, and share your perspective with the ministry** (have a look at <http://engage.bcedplan.ca/2011/12/question-wrap-up/comment-page-2/#comment-1951> if you want some inspiration). Here are a few thoughts to get you started:

- **The plan calls for administrative control over teacher professional development, and suggests that Pro D should be tied to teacher evaluations and district/ministry goals.**
- **The plan suggests that electronic devices such as smart phones and tablets should become integral elements of our classrooms, with no mention of who will/should provide these devices.**
- **The plan talks about the need to “personalize learning” while still espousing the need for broad-spectrum, standardized testing.**
- **The plan talks about respecting teachers and raising the stature of the profession. This seems to be diametrically opposed to the messages we are getting from government at the moment (the new Teachers’ Council, the bargaining table, the Bill 27/28 table).**
- **The plan does not promise any new money for public education.**

To read about the plan and provide the Ministry of Education with your feedback, visit:

<http://www.bcedplan.ca/welcome.php>

To see the relationship between the plan and the bargaining table, login to *MyBCTF* and paste in:

<https://bctf.ca/myBCTF/content.aspx?id=24406>

FSA – Part 2

In my January newsletter, I mentioned that the BCTF was not involved in a formal FSA campaign this year, leaving the choice of whether to send home withdrawal forms to parents up to individual teachers (which many have done). It is significant to note that, unlike previous years (when exclusion requests from parents were accepted without question) the new Saanich Board has directed principals to contact parents in an attempt to ascertain what “extenuating circumstances” are involved in each exemption request. It is also important to note that philosophical concerns about the FSA are not being accepted as reasonable grounds for an exemption.

As a result, I am advising teachers to do their best to make parents aware of this new Board direction, and to ensure that each parent wanting an exemption for their child is able to articulate “acceptable” extenuating circumstances (student anxiety, for example).

Recess Decision

Speaking of the new Board, you will have no doubt have heard by now that a motion was passed at the January Board meeting to move elementary recess to the end of the instructional day, effective April 2nd. This decision was made in an attempt to alleviate the pressure that administration/excluded staff have been experiencing as they try to cover three supervision sessions per day. Implementation of this decision was delayed by two months to allow sufficient time for the district to develop a plan that will account for student safety and other potential concerns (and, perhaps optimistically, to allow more time for the provincial parties to reach a negotiated settlement).

January Paycheques

I've had a few enquires here at the office from teachers who have noticed that their take-home pay for January is lower than for previous months (if you didn't notice, you need to pay closer attention to your pay!). Careful examination will reveal that the difference is a result of the reintroduction of E.I. and C.P.P. deductions – deductions that most teachers stop paying for the final few months of the calendar year (once maximum yearly deduction levels have been reached).

If you need any other help understanding your monthly pay statement, you might want to refer back to the October President's Newsletter. All newsletters (along with all Job Action Bulletins, Pro D information, Health and Safety information, and much more) can be found on the STA website (www.saanichteachers.com).

Tapestry Conference 2012

The Greater Victoria, Sooke and Saanich Teachers' Associations are jointly hosting a fantastic Pro D opportunity called **Tapestry 2012** on February 17th at Esquimalt Secondary School. Saanich teachers are entitled to a reduced registration fee (\$50 for contract teachers, \$30 for TOCs), and will certainly get great value for their precious Pro D funds. With dozens of workshops spanning all levels and disciplines to choose from, there should be something for everyone. Registration closes on February 12th, and all workshops are offered on a first come, first served basis. For more information, visit:

<http://tapestryconference.weebly.com/>

Blank Report Cards Again?

It appears that the Ministry of Education has gotten the message that sending home blank reports cards to parents is not a great public relations move. After receiving significant amounts of negative press (and thousands of mailed blank report cards), the Ministry of Education has announced that schools will **not** be required to send home blank report cards at the end of semester one.

Know Your (soon to be stripped?) Collective Agreement

With BCPSEA tabling significant concessions at the bargaining table, I thought it would be a useful exercise to highlight *some* of the actual language they want to remove, and point out what our professional lives might look like if we lose this fight.

Current Article

E.14.3 Where the necessary qualifications of two or more teachers in Article E.14.2 (Filling Vacancies) are equal, the teacher with the greatest seniority shall have preference.

E.14.4 For the purpose of this Article necessary qualifications means:

- a. academic preparation, certification and training for the position*
- b. experience*
- c. past teaching performance*

E.13.1 In this Article vacancy means a newly created position or an existing position to which a teacher is not assigned and which the Board considers necessary to fill. All teachers in the district are eligible to apply for all vacancies.

E.13.3 Except in July and August all vacancies known in advance to be of twenty school days duration or longer shall be posted in all schools and the School Board Office for a period of seven calendar days. Copies of all postings shall be forwarded at the time of the posting to the Association.

E.16.2 A teacher may be transferred when circumstances warrant and the Association and the teacher in question agree.

E.16.3 A teacher may be transferred as a result of fluctuating student enrollment within the District.

E.16.4 Where the conditions of Article E.16.2 cannot be met, and where unique and/or special circumstances exist, the Board may initiate a transfer for educationally sound reasons.

C.14.11 The Board may dismiss for cause a teacher who has received three consecutive less than satisfactory reports, pursuant to Article E.19 (Teacher Evaluation) in a period of not less than 12 calendar months nor more than 24 months, exclusive of leaves of absence.

BCPSEA Concession

BCPSEA wants to remove this language and replace it with a list that includes: “*employee experience related to the position; performance; qualifications; suitability to the position or school as determined by the principal.*”

Seniority is only to be used as a tie breaker, but there will never be a tie, as it will always be possible to argue that teacher X is “more suitable” than teacher Y. And don’t forget, your definition of suitable doesn’t matter... it will be up to the principal to decide if you are suitable.

BCPSEA is also demanding language that says any teacher can be *laid off* if they are considered “unsuitable.”

Our current rules say that all vacancies must be posted, and that all teachers are able to apply for all vacancies. BCPSEA’s concession says: “*Interim positions are positions that become available during the school year or positions that are temporary in nature. All interim positions may be reallocated or filled directly by the employer without posting.*”

This means that **no mid-year or temporary jobs will be posted...** they will simply be given away by the principal.

Our current rules for when/how a teacher can be transferred are fairly complicated, but the reasons are generally as described in these three articles (teacher agrees; declining enrolment; educationally sound reasons), and seniority is a central part of the process.

BCPSEA’s concession says an employee can be transferred “*for educational, financial or other administrative reasons.*” Just think about that. You can be a 20-year teacher and be forced to move schools at any time for any **educational, financial or administrative reason!**

Our current rules say that teachers can be fired for performance, but only after three less-than-satisfactory evaluations, with a chance to improve in between each.

BCPSEA’s concession allows for teachers to be fired after a **single instance of a “failure to demonstrate competence.”**