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President's Newsletter

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Back at the Local Bargaining Table

For the first time in over 15 years, the STA is heading back to the local bargaining table with our local board. As it stands now, the STA negotiating team (Mike Ewan, Sean Hayes, Donnie Peterson and Amanda Wilson... supported by John Vucko and Philip Jungen from the Bargaining Committee) will be meeting with representatives from the Saanich Board of Education to discuss items currently designated for local tables. It is our hope that the BCTF and BCPSEA will be able to negotiate an expanded "local matters" list which will include more items that are meaningful to the STA and Saanich Board, and with our recently ratified local priorities, we will be well positioned to try to find local solutions to local issues at long last.

The Bargaining Committee plans to keep you all updated on the progress of both the local and provincial bargaining tables in the weeks and months ahead with regular Bargaining Bulletins. Keep your eyes on your email inbox and our website (<http://saanichteachers.com/>) for these important updates.

BCTF Annual General Meeting

You wouldn't know it from our recent weather, but Spring Break is just around the corner, and for 10 Saanich teachers, that means a trip to the BCTF AGM. This year's delegates are:

Donnie Peterson (Local Representative) – SIDES
Mike Ewan (Local Representative) – Claremont
Sean Hayes – STA President
Amanda Wilson – Parkland
Mark Skanks – Claremont
Patsy McCarter – SIDES
Anne Stewart – Lochside
Sara Jolivet – TOC
Pat Stevens – Lochside
Shannon Toronitz – Brentwood

With this year's AGM in Victoria, any of you can pop by to see the wheels of BCTF democracy in motion (not to mention a plenary from none other than **Sir Ken Robinson!**). Have a look at the latest issue of *Teacher* magazine for an AGM agenda.

Spring Staffing 2011

As we head into the staffing time of year, here are a few reminders:

- ⇒ the rules that govern the staffing process can be found in our **Staffing Process Letter of Understanding** (we hope to renegotiate this LOU at the local negotiating table, but in the absence of a new version, we will be operating under the rules in our current letter).
- ⇒ the “Mobility Request” section on the Position Request Forms means nothing. **Teachers interested in mobility must apply for mobility jobs** (Round 1 jobs) as they get posted in the spring.
- ⇒ school administrators are compelled by **Article E.15.1** in the Collective Agreement to consult “*with the Staff Committee... prior to May 15... for the purpose of discussing the timetable and staff assignments for the next school year.*” Generally, however, this doesn’t happen unless the teachers in a school make it happen. **Does your school have a Staff Committee? Is your administrator consulting with your school staff about next year’s assignments?**

SD63 Budget Setting Process

You will likely all know by now that the district has just finished holding a series of Budget Technical Working Group meetings. These groups were charged with examining the way in which Saanich spends its money in a variety of categories (Regular Instruction, Special Education, District and School Administration, etc.). These groups have prepared reports that will now be fed through to the district Budget Advisory Committee, which will ultimately make recommendations to the trustees about potential budget cut/revenue generation options.

The Saanich Board will also be looking for feedback from other members of the Saanich community, and invites all interested parties to attend one of the following meetings:

April 12 **School Communities Meeting (Bayside Middle School @ 3:30-5:00pm)**
April 19 **Public Budget Meeting (Bayside Middle School @ 7:00pm)**

Recent years have seen teacher turn-out to these events to be surprising low considering the negative impact budget cuts have had on our working lives. Please make sure teachers’ voices are well represented as the Board struggles with cutting at least another \$1.9 million.

Group RRSPs

Interested in socking away some money for retirement? Here’s an option you might not have heard about. Since 1993, Assante Wealth Management has had a relationship with the Saanich district (as contemplated by Article B.5) allowing teachers to have regular deductions from their pay cheques. These monthly deductions can be invested in a wide range of investment options designed to suit the risk tolerance of each participating teacher. The advantage of this program is that the money is “source deducted” from pre-tax income, meaning ~\$65 would be deducted for an investment of \$100 (instead of deducting \$100 and waiting to get \$35 back at tax time)... which is a pretty neat trick.

Call Bernie or Dionne at Assante Wealth Management (250-383-9266) if you are interested in learning more about this Group RRSP program.

Spring Break 2012... 1 week or 2?

Thoughts of budget pressures inevitably lead people to want to discuss the relative merits of a two-week spring break. While many teachers see this option as a “win-win” (save budget money *and* have extra time off), it is important for teachers to recognize some of the potential negatives that the Board has to consider when contemplating such a move. These include:

- ⇒ loss of meaningful instructional time as entire days are replaced by minutes added to each day
- ⇒ loss of an additional week’s employment opportunity for TOCs
- ⇒ unbalanced semesters in secondary schools (including pay inequity for teachers who only have contracts for semester 1 or semester 2)
- ⇒ potential significant loss of hours for CUPE employees
- ⇒ challenges for working parents who must find additional childcare
- ⇒ potential negative effects of an additional week out of school for vulnerable children

Of course, all budget cuts have a long list of cons and a relatively short list of pros, which makes these decisions all the more difficult for trustees. It is therefore important that all partner groups, including teachers, understand the full impact of a decision such as this. Please keep all positive *and* negative aspects of school closures in mind when you are discussing this issue.

Gutstein on the FSA

Most of us know better than to put any stock in the annual ranking of BC schools published by the Fraser Institute. The problem is, much of the public still does (for instance, my own mother called me last year to see how excited I was that Lochside, where my daughters go to school, was so highly ranked).

In an attempt to educate people as to the spurious nature of these rankings, SFU professor Donald Gutstein has recently published an analysis of how these scores are actually tabulated. A quick read of his *Eight Distortions and Other Problems in the Fraser Institute’s Report Card* clearly explains how these rankings are actually egregious manipulations of the FSA data designed to allow the Fraser Institute to perpetuate its own pro-privatization fiction. A few notable points include:

- ⇒ 25% of a school’s score comes from the number of students “not meeting expectations” on the FSA, meaning these low scores are counted twice (the actual FSA scores for all students are already counted for close to 50% of the score)
- ⇒ the number of students who don’t write the FSA is counted as a negative (a direct attack at school/communities where parents choose not to have their children participate)
- ⇒ grade 7 FSA results are attributed back to the school where each child attended grade 4 (suggesting that the intervening years of education has meant nothing)
- ⇒ 20% of the scores comes from gender gap results on the FSA. In single gender schools (a.k.a. elite private schools), an extra 10% is instead given to the percentage of non-writers (usually nil in private schools) and low achievers (also under-represented in private schools)
- ⇒ no effort is made to take socioeconomic circumstances into consideration, despite the fact numerous studies have found these to be the greatest predictors of differences between schools

Great stuff to share with parents (and mothers) who just don’t get it. You can find the entire article linked through our website (<http://saanichteachers.com/>). Have a look.

Know Your Collective Agreement

Don Peterson (STA 1st VP) and I were talking about this section of the President's Newsletter, and Don suggested trying something different. Instead of giving you important collective agreement articles and their translations, why not try to get you to do some of the work? After all, Confucius said, "*Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Let me do and I understand.*" So, grab a Collective Agreement (available on our website and in the STA folder on Zimbra), and see if you can find the answers to the following scenarios (answers will be in the next newsletter for those of you who prefer to be "tell me, show me" people).

Camera Crook

Your principal asks you to use your personally owned digital camera to take some picture of the science fair for the school website. Unfortunately, when you return to your class after lunch, you find that your camera has been stolen from your locked desk. What should you do? Will the school replace it?

Staff Meeting Skippers

To the surprise of the staff, the principal starts taking attendance at monthly staff meetings. Worse yet, a list of attendees gets included in a circulated set of summary notes from the meeting (making it obvious who was "unavailable" to attend). What's more, the principal suggests that any teacher who did not make it to the meeting has an obligation to read the summary. Can he or she do any of this?

Paper Waster

You get so fired up by this collective agreement scavenger hunt that you decide to print the entire Collective Agreement using the office printer. The vice principal sees you doing this and reprimands you for wasting school district paper. She tells you that if you want a copy of the Collective Agreement, the union needs to provide it. Is she right?

File Fiddling

You are in your principal's office one day, and you notice a 3-inch thick file with your name on it. You ask her what it is, and she tells you it is your personnel file. You ask if you can have a look at it. At first she tells you absolutely not, but when you insist that you have a right to see it, she says to come back tomorrow to have a look at the "stuff you are allowed to see." What are your rights?

Spring Break Stipend

The Superintendent has requested that your entire department work three days over spring break to develop on a Personalized Learning plan for next year. He says this work is voluntary, but that he is willing to give teachers \$50 per day in their Pro D accounts if they participate. A few teachers request three days in lieu later in the year instead, but this request is denied. Are there any rules on this?

All teachers who email all of the relevant collective agreement articles to sally@saanichteachers.com will be included in a draw to win one of three \$10 iTunes Gift cards. Happy hunting.