

BCPTA Special Needs Project

Our school year is moving along. We have completed the first reports and holiday festivities are behind us. I always love the second term in my classroom, when I get to see the flowers of our efforts unfold. Blossoms of reading, writing and mathematics spring forth and behaviour skills show brighter colours. For most children this is a time of wonder and pride as they see their own progress. For some children, however, there are far more challenges than accomplishments. At our recent AGM members from around the province brought the issue of the lack of support for special needs students in regular classrooms to our attention. They spoke about their frustrations and concerns with great passion and it was decided that your organization, the BCPTA, would begin work to make improvements.

My experience, as a bargaining chair, tells me that when we want to make gains for our members we must bring the concern into view and try to get as much support for the idea, as possible. Just asking usually doesn't work. At this point, I think that most British Columbians have no idea of the struggles that students and teachers face in classrooms today. We need to give them a window into our world. To do this we would like to begin with a DEAR DIARY project. We are asking teachers to send us entries that give a glimpse into teaching and learning in their classroom. You could speak to your own personal thoughts, outline an event, talk about an issue or problem, make a wish etc. In the words of the Vinyl Café host Stuart MacLean "they should be short and they should be true" and the rest is up to you.

If we can amass a large number of these entries we can begin to use them in several ways. As a branch of the BCTF we can make them available to our representatives at the Round Table to share. The BCTF Executive on one of their meetings with the Premier or Education Minister Bond could share several of them. [Imagine Irene, Susan and Jim carrying boxes of our concerns into the legislative offices and reading so they could hear even just a small sample.] We have an election coming up and your words could become fuel for advertising campaigns or presented at All Candidates Meetings. Bargaining for a new contract is also not far off and your stories would be useful at the table, if special needs Students' issues becomes one of our objectives. The uses are many. Remember the class size campaign. When the public became aware, things started to happen. I believe that when the public becomes aware of the enormity of this problem, they will not allow things to continue as they are. We just need to gather the evidence so that we can get the word out to administration, government, parents and the general public giving them the information that things are not as they should be in many of our classrooms on a day to day basis and learning is being compromised for large numbers of students, not just the Special Needs students. When the decision was made to put Special Needs students in regular classes, teachers supported the move as we were told that adequate resources would be in place to make the placements successful. We do not believe that, in many cases, this has happened as yet. We need to draw back the curtain to give a view to the number of students who are not making the progress they need to if British Columbia is to continue to be the "Best Place on Earth."

We do, however, need to protect the students' and teachers' privacy. When you write your stories, please use XXX, A or other characters in place of students' names and, if it concerns you that your position might suffer because of speaking out, sign your name as "a teacher from....(the Kootneys, Peace River, North Island, Vancouver etc.) We will also strip your e-mails of identifying addresses etc. before we add them to the stack.

My experience is that if we work together we can accomplish great things. It is my New Year's resolution this year to encourage teachers from all around the province to bring light to your concerns and begin to make inroads into the problems that were expressed by the teachers at our meeting in October. It is my hope that you will write any stories that you have and encourage your colleagues to do the same. Pieces that could begin to shed light on what is happening behind our doors and make evident some of the things that make a difference to students learning. Think about sitting down as you might with your own personal diary and writing something about your own experiences then share that. Let's dig out the pencil and put our fingers on the keyboards to make a difference for kids! Send your Dear Diary contributions to: Julie Zoney, BCPTA web contact for this project: jbz@shaw.ca or Lori Boychuk, BCPTA president-elect: loriboy@telus.net /Lori Boychuk, Box 696, Burns Lake, BC, V0J 1E0.