



Bill 33: Heading in the right direction

I want to congratulate staff committees and principals in elementary schools who worked very hard to comply with the new Bill 33 legislation.

All classes in elementary schools comply with class size limits, and the vast majority of elementary classes have no more than three Ministry designated students in classes. This is very good news for students.

It was our advocacy and our civil disobedience last October which brought back some sanity to the problem caused by stripping class size and composition language from our

Collective Agreement five years ago.

I would like to add that the Vancouver School Board played their part too. In many ways the Vancouver School Board was ahead of the legislation. Through the Class size/Class composition Committee, the VSB had already tried to address these issues by adopting class size limits and the weighting formula. So Vancouver was better placed to be able to comply with the law. So I say thank you to the Vancouver School Board for trying to rectify the problem well before

the Government passed Bill 33.

Unfortunately there remain some problems ahead this year. More students with additional needs will be identified. Bill 33 is in force every day of the school year. The school board is saying they have no money to provide additional support to those classes with more than three students with identified special needs. That is a huge problem. We need to sit down with VSB management and trustees to problem-solve the issue before these situations arise. The superintendent told the school board meeting on

16th October that he will call a meeting of partner groups to discuss the issues around Bill 33. VESTA eagerly awaits that meeting.

Is Bill 33 perfect? By no means. Will we need to do more work? Yes. But we need to take a moment to congratulate one another. For the first time since 2001 there is a recognition throughout the province, that class size and class composition does make a difference to the learning situation for students. We did that. Thanks to all of us.

Mary McDermott
President

SUPPORTING VESTA'S ADULT EDUCATORS

On October 17, the VESTA General Meeting passed the following motion:

That VESTA seek appropriate additional support and solidarity from the BCTF Executive, the BCTF Rep Assembly, VSTA, other BCTF locals, and the Vancouver District Labour Council should VESTA adult educators not receive the SIP allowance, harmonization to their salary grid, on-scale TOC rights, and any other general increase by 2006 November 13.

VESTA adult educators are still waiting for several money items, including some general increases gained by every other BCTF member. Outstanding items include:

- payment of the bonus
- SIP allowance
- harmonization to salary grid
- on-scale TOC rights

Dear Adult Educator Staff Reps:

We, the teachers at Nightingale Elementary, have recently learned that some of the victories gained in this last round of bargaining have not been extended to include you, our colleagues that are adult educators. We are very disheartened by the stance taken by BCPSEA.

It is our understanding that you have a collective agreement until 2008 with the VSB, and that you do not bargain matters directly pertaining to salary. However, you do have a clause which states your entitlement to any raises gained provincially. We are shocked and appalled that BCPSEA should deny you the signing bonus, pay raise and the SIP allowance that the rest of the teachers in the province are entitled to.

We know that you work with adults that have had many challenges in their lives and your job is not an easy one. You provide these students with a second chance to complete a grade 12 education and this enables us to sleep a little easier at night knowing that there are caring educators out there willing to work with our most at risk students when for some reason or another we were not able to get the job done.

We appreciate all the hard work you do and thank you for the support you showed us last fall when we went out on strike. We know it was not easy for you to give up two weeks pay to demonstrate your solidarity with us. The teachers at Nightingale want to ensure you that we are behind you 100 percent.

VESTA will be meeting again on November 15 to discuss what further measures to take should this matter not be resolved by then.

Yours truly,
Nightingale teachers in solidarity with Adult Educators

THE VESTA ADULT EDUCATORS FULLY SUPPORTED THE PROVINCE-WIDE STRIKE LAST FALL, EVEN THOUGH THEY HAD A LOCALLY NEGOTIATED CONTRACT NOT DUE TO EXPIRE UNTIL 2008. K-7 TEACHERS ARE READY TO SHOW THEIR SOLIDARITY WITH THEIR ADULT ED COLLEAGUES.

The 1983 Solidarity Strike

When teachers marching behind the B.C. Teachers' Federation banner started out on last Saturday's huge Solidarity march, there were outbursts of spontaneous and genuine applause from members of other unions and groups assembled along the parade route. Clearly teachers are held in admiration and respect by other groups in Solidarity.

That moment in time, recollected in a letter I wrote to members shortly before the November Solidarity strike, signified a turning point for teachers. We never looked back after the transformative events of the summer and fall of 1983.

What had brought us to this point? Only a year earlier teachers had turned down a province wide referendum proposing a call for legislation to give teachers the right to strike in a bargaining dispute. Within days of the defeat of the referendum, the Bennett government announced its public sector restraint program. This program initiated the years of education cutbacks that were to follow and put public sector salary increases under the control of a commissioner. Then came Bennett's twenty six bills attacking labour (see the article on the next page for full details).

We decided not to tolerate the decimation of our profession and the crippling of the survivors. We found common cause with the labour, community and social action groups and citizens who made up the Solidarity Coalition. We handed out pamphlets on streetcorners, wrote letters, spoke on talk shows, protested peacefully in the thousands that summer and fall culminating in the march of 60,000 on October 15 through the streets of downtown Vancouver, past the Hotel Vancouver where the Social Credit convention was being held. The spirit of community was energizing. But it failed to move the Social Credit government looking out of their hotel windows at the extraordinary event unfolding in the street. Carole Kaye, VESTA's 1st Vice President and I did spot Brian Smith, Attorney-General and former Education Minister, in the crowd at a streetcorner near the hotel. Carole waved and shouted out 'Glad to see you out supporting the

teachers, Brian! Well, it did make him smile.

A reporter commented to me that our 60% vote wasn't very compelling. It was true that many teachers struggled with their decision. Some worried about the legality of the withdrawal of service. Jack Heinrich, the Minister of Education, took the vote to be an indication of ambivalence and lack of resolve and sent a letter to every teacher in the province threatening to lift their certificates if they went out. This galvanized teachers rather than intimidated them. I told the reporter that 90% of teachers stayed out of their classrooms because they were deeply angry about this legislation. We had no history of any provincial strike of more than one day, we were under heavy intimidation but we were taking this stand together anyway. And that was compelling.

At the beginning of the strike the VSB sought and gained an injunction against us in an attempt to prevent the protest. We were enjoined against picketing and counselling each other to withdraw our services. Ironically, we were not enjoined against absenting ourselves from school, only against counselling each other to do so! We had been advised by the BCTF to obey the injunction. The phone message went out to all members advising them of the latest news. While we sat in the office late in the evening of November 7 wondering what we were going to do about the schools, I walked 3 members of the BCGEU with the torn out pages of the phone book listings of all the schools in their hands. By 6:00 AM the first morning of the strike the schools were surrounded by BCGEU and VMREU (now CUPE) pickets.

An injunction server ran from school to school trying to find a teacher, but there wasn't one in sight. After two days he gave up. Cross picketing kept most of our schools closed. Many Vancouver teachers picketed colleges, government buildings and other non-VSB sites. A group of teachers were picketing a liquor store when one man drove by and leaning out of his car window yelled, 'When are you guys going to get back to selling beer?'

The Vancouver injunction also prohibited iwatching, hindering or besetting a school. One teacher phoned the info line and asked 'Can I stand across the street with my eyes closed?'

On Sunday, November 13 we met together in Joint General Meetings with VSTA in 4 shifts at the York Theatre on Commercial Drive. The purpose of the meetings was to shore people up and for us all to encourage each other to keep going in all the things we were enjoined against doing. The notes of my speech that day read, 'I do not want to counsel, watch or beset you today, so instead I will confine my remarks to the benefits of good, healthy outdoor exercise and I do not mean anything other than hiking and hill climbing. I am speaking to you from near the top of the hill. Once you have charged the hill, and are near the crest, the only way to avoid slippery slides and nasty falls is to go up and over the top.'

That night Jack Munro and Bill Bennett came to a verbal agreement



called the Kelowna Accord that ended the strike.

The Solidarity action had managed to stay the worst effect of the government's neo-conservative revolution. Many pieces of legislation died on the order paper. One of the terms ending the strike was the assurance that teachers and school boards could negotiate seniority, severance and recall provisions that were arbitrable. That very important gain exists now with little modification as Article 14 of the Collective Agreement. Many teachers were unhappy about the way the strike ended. The 2005 BCTF AGM adopted VESTA's Resolution to ensure that members vote to go out on strike as well as to end a strike.

You can see from this history that nothing has ever been given to us, and teachers, individually and collectively, have been very courageous and focussed over the years. It's hard not to be disappointed sometimes when we don't get all we hoped for in bargaining and our gains seem to be so incremental compared to the emotion and effort that go into them. But looking at our history anyone can see how far we've come over the decades. We can only lose this if we are politically weak and therefore expendable.

Over the next five years the funding of Bill 33 and other education policies must be our priority. Do teachers have the fortitude, the wisdom, the love, the passion, the anger and the hope to regain the initiative? Looking at our history and from what I've seen over the past 34 years, I'd say yes.

Susan Davis
Susan Davis was VESTA President 1983-1985. She is now retired, and is a VESTA Honourary Life Member



If Bennett has done nothing else in office he has managed through years of practiced abuse to take a benign bunch of professionals and weld them into a sometimes seething lot who will hit the bricks, not for more money or a shorter work week but for the most unlikely cause of improving education. This is the equivalent of auto workers going on strike so that Ford will produce better cars.

- Allen Garr, The Province, November 15, 1983.



VESTA news

Published by the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association, a local of The British Columbia Teachers' Federation



VESTA
2915 Commercial Drive
Vancouver, B.C. V5N 4C8
Phone: 604-873-8378
Fax: 604-873-2652
www.vesta.ca

Editor, Layout,
Glen Hansman
Proofreaders
Lorna MacDonald
David Anderson
Barbara Kay

Editorial Advisory Committee
Mary McDermott
Barb Parrott
Barbara Kay

Articles herein reflect the views of the authors and not necessarily the policies of the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association. No reprints without permission.
Printed by Broadway Printers.

Are you willing to go to jail?

Jail? Who, me? I was a good girl from Vancouver. Good home, good marks in school, good member of the Future Teachers Club. Not a goody two-shoes . . . But going to jail was not even close to my thoughts. At least, not until I was 37. Letis review.

Selected History

The summer of 1983 was tense. Premier Bill Bennett, faced with a recession and a growing deficit, decided to address his fiscal challenges by imposing restraint on the public sector. (Actually, restraint was his word. To restrain means to hold in place, but Bennett used it to mean slash and axe.) The 26 bills announced by the Social Credit government on July 7th were designed to restrict the bargaining rights of working people, and bring about cuts to social programs including education, human rights, tenants' rights and women's rights. Centralization of public spending in the hands of the provincial government was paramount.

Always striving for social justice, I was caught up in the 1983 Solidarity movement just like my colleagues and friends.

As the public debate heated up, the BCTF proudly joined **Operation Solidarity**. The federation and its locals were not unions then, under the Labour Code, but we acted like unions with all the others. The fledgling Solidarity movement grew stronger as the government rhetoric grew louder.

It just so happened that I was a Member-at-Large on the BCTF Executive Committee at that time. (Incredibly, there were 4 VESTA members on the 11-person EC that year - Al Blakey, Alan Crawford, Kitty O'Callaghan and me.)

The audacity of hope

The members of the EC all had something important in common. Barack Obama (U.S. Senator from Illinois) calls it the audacity of hope. What a beautiful phrase! You pretty much have to have the audacity of hope to be a teacher, otherwise why bother teaching the 3Rs to the little darlings if you think there is no better future? So we were willing to take bold risks in the hope that damage of the bills could be mitigated. We had to be, in light of the rights that were being trampled. The EC believed that BCTF members all over the province would agree when they returned from summer holidays, attended local general meetings, became familiar with the impact of the bills, and made democratic decisions on what actions to take.

The EC discussed the distinct possibility that each of us would be sent to jail for advocating mass civil disobedience. No one wanted to go to jail, of course. But we had two facts firmly lodged in our heads. One was that Yvon Charbonneau, the president of the Quebec francophone teachers' union CEQ, had recently spent 6 months in jail for his union's actions. He had a desk and a phone in his cell. He said that the experience wasn't like living at the Ritz, but he got caught up with his paperwork! The second fact was that members of the BCGEU, our

biggest ally in Operation Solidarity, staffed the jails. In the unlikely event that we ended up in the pokey, we needn't be afraid of the guards.

We each decided that the struggle was worth it.

A BCTF lawyer suggested that each member of the EC individually consider putting all our property in someone else's name just in case it was seized. I'm such a good procrastinator that I never got around to it! I don't know if the others did.

I didn't need police protection like BCTF president Larry Kuehn and his family did from death threats and bomb threats. They even had to evacuate their house twice. But I suspected, as all EC members did, that my phone was tapped, my mail was monitored, and my actions were watched. There was unofficial confirmation from a reliable RCMP source that there were files on all members of the EC, and other Operation Solidarity leaders, in Ottawa. We even wondered if there was a mole in the BCTF office. (If you know, please call me!)

Strike Vote

When all efforts to rectify the problems caused by the 26 bills by meaningful discussions failed, it was time to take the next step: the strike vote.

We had struck once before in modern times. If you are as old as I am, you will recall the province-wide one-day pensions strike on March 19, 1971. As hard as the decision to strike was to make, it was obvious that teachers must demonstrate to the government and the public that retired teachers were unable to get by on their meager pensions. We struck not for higher pay for ourselves, but for decent treatment for others. Eventually, pension reform ensued.

The 1983 meetings to discuss the issues and potential for a strike of all the public sector unions, and potentially all the private sector unions too, were packed, and sometimes fractious. The VESTA members of the BCTF EC were vocal in our local, as usual. So, of course, were the members of the VESTA EC. One thing we knew was that an expert is a person from out of town. BCTF 1st Vice-President Patrick Clarke (Kelowna) and Member-at-Large Paddy Boyle (West Van) answered every doubt and fear raised at hugely-attended VESTA/VSTA joint general meetings in October and early November. (The members of the Vancouver Schools Administrators' Association [VSAA], although BCTF members until 1987, declined to attend those meetings. That is another story.)

Teachers got the picture.

If Bill 3 was passed any teacher could be fired for no reason except that it pleased the employer to do so. Under Bill 6 the Minister retained full power to determine the total amount of a board budget. (Previously local school boards had the right to set the mill rate and

raise taxes to support board budgets.) Under Bill 11, there were to be no limits to wage adjustments up or down. Ability to pay was to be the paramount consideration in salary negotiations between local teachers and local boards, yet the government determined the board budget.

Although under threat by the Minister of having their certificates lifted if they walked off the job, teachers voted to give the BCTF EC the authority to call them out on strike, indefinitely.

Travelling the province

I wasn't in Vancouver for the three day Solidarity strike. My BCTF EC assignment was to visit as many locals as possible in Central Mainland and North Central BC zones with BCTF Bargaining Division staff member (and former VESTA president) Steve Norman. Steve and I became the experts from out of town! We walked the picket lines in the sleet and wind at schools that local presidents suggested might need a little help. We shivered in the dark on the sidewalk wondering what compelled some teachers to go into school before the arrival of the 6:00 a.m. picket shift. (Note to Vancouver teachers: in most other districts teachers have their own keys to the school and can go in any time. But that is another story too!)

Communication before e-mail

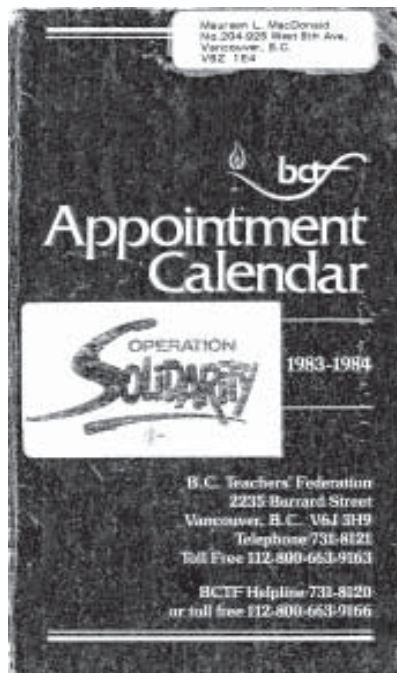
In 1983 there were no cell phones or personal computers, but we had the latest communication device, the 3M WhisperWriter. It was the size of a portable typewriter. (Oh dear, that might not mean anything to some readers!) There was a modem into which to place the receiver of a telephone. By dialing a certain number you could get on line and type a message to anyone else who was on the Envoy network. The very cutting edge of technology! It was so exciting to receive yards and yards of paper (in those pre-metric days), and to read about how our picket lines were

holding around the province despite the skinny majority who had voted YES for strike. It was disappointing to learn that some members crossed the lines. We cheered when reports of schools with 100% of staff on the lines were reported.

The next day, Friday, November 11th, was Remembrance Day, a statutory holiday. BCTF EC members and staff gathered at the old BCTF office at 6th & Burrard where we holed up for the weekend.

Reality show

The action moved to Bill Bennett's living room in Kelowna. On TV we watched a fuzzy picture through the window via long telephoto lens. It was the beginning of reality shows and was as exciting as those dumb CNN shows where nothing happens for long periods of time. The premier and Jack Munro, president of the IWA who had stepped in at the last moment to replace a sick Art Kube, president of the BC Federation of Labour, eventually hammered out a deal that meant that the IWA and all the other private sector unions that were to join the public sector unions on strike on Monday, November 14th never had to prove whether they were really ready for what would have amounted to being a general strike.



Suspend means end

Larry Kuehn was in Kelowna with the other Operation Solidarity union presidents. It was just after 10:00 pm on November 13th when Larry phoned the BCTF office and told the 10 remaining EC members to phone the presidents of the locals in their zones with the following message: *The strike is suspended. No further information available at this time. Please arrange for all members to return to work as soon as possible. Further details will be released as available.* I cried as I choked out that message to my locals. I was not the only one who used many hankies that night.

We got the right to bargain an exemption to Bill 3 and have an orderly seniority lay-off provision in our local contracts a good thing. We proved that we could pull off an indefinite strike, to the big surprise of many media pundits and some of our own members. We were proud to be teachers. But we were most upset at the way the strike was ended.

Recent History

What happened 22 years later in October 2005? Were you as a BCTF member willing to go to jail for defending your beliefs in the urgent need for face-to-face bargaining for improvements in learning conditions for all students? I guess you were willing, because you withdrew services for two weeks in a strike that was deemed illegal by the LRB, and you did not fold under government pressure or when the BCTF was ordered not to give strike pay to members. Surveys of public opinion told the government that the vast majority of people supported teachers. The government sat up and took notice that we meant business.

Lessons learned

- Individual teachers act in collective ways even if they did not vote for the cause.
- Behind every significant achievement of rights for teachers and better learning conditions for students has been the threat and the ability to withdraw our services.
- Pertinacious teachers stick together.
- Progress is incremental. The audacity of hope is crucial for progress to be made.
- Members vote to go on strike and they must vote to come off strike, not just be told it is over. Incredibly, some members actually do not believe in that right. After several years of hard lobbying, VESTA managed to get the BCTF to adopt this procedure at the 2005 AGM: *144.12-3. A strike shall not be deemed to be over until decided by members through a ratification or other member vote.*
- The interconnectedness of everything to everything else.
- The most fun of being on strike is the camaraderie on the picket lines. The talking, walking, eating and singing bond people into friends for life. My colleagues from the 1983 Carnarvon staff still meet regularly for lunch!

Maureen L. MacDonald last taught at Elsie Roy School. She retired in June 2005. She was on the BCTF EC from 1980 to 1984 and was VESTA President from 1985 to 1988. She is proud to be an Honourary Life Member of VESTA.

Not much has really changed: unpacking

Classroom teachers have the individual choice to use either the anecdotal format or the new grid format.

It's your choice:

or

The grid format is optional

HOW THE CHANGES CAME ABOUT

Last Year Sue Aucoin and I represented VESTA on the VSB Report Card committee headed by VSB Associate Superintendent Valerie Overgaard. The committee's task was to examine the new report card requirements from the Ministry of Education that were to take effect this school year.

It was not a committee I particularly relished. Over the years I have been made very aware of the stress and anxiety caused to teachers when writing report cards. And I am all too conscious that teachers are sick of the constant demands for change at the whim of every new Minister of Education. I was therefore much relieved to hear Val say that our mission was to find out what the new requirements were and to see how these new demands could be incorporated into the VSB's current practice with as little need for change as possible.

I am very proud to say that this was achieved.

The vast majority of teachers need to make very little change to the way in which they do report cards. The purpose of this two-page spread is to show you how *little* is changed. Most teachers and principals have realized this.

Unfortunately some people, including a handful of principals, have not fully understood this. From the many phone calls we have received, there is a myth out there that everyone must now adopt the grid format. **This is not true.** Every individual teacher can choose to continue with the anecdotal type of reporting. The grid form is there because some teachers had voluntarily developed a grid format and asked for this choice. VESTA, as strong believers in professional autonomy, agreed teachers should be given a choice. So... you can choose anecdotal or grid.

One question that has come up a few times in the past couple of weeks has been: **WHY ARE WE HAVING TO GO TO WORKSHOPS AFTER SCHOOL?!**

You don't. You can choose to continue to use the format you have been using. You can even handwrite your report cards.

THE REPORT CARD COMMITTEE'S RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE GRID FORMAT:

As we worked on agreeing to approve a grid format, we had some samples which gave members of the committee cause for concern.

In some cases individual statements were taken from the ministry's prescribed learning outcomes. This is not the way we teach, and it should not be the way we report. So the committee agreed to include a grid format *as long as statements were global in nature.* (Some examples of global statements are included in the black box to the right.)

Mary McDermott
President

PRIMARY REQUIREMENTS

| SUBJECT AREA | PERFORMANCE SCALE REQUIRED? | WRITTEN CO REQUIRED? |
|---|-----------------------------|----------------------|
| Language Arts - Reading - Writing - Speaking & Listening | Yes – every report | Yes – every report |
| Mathematics | Yes – every report | Yes – every report |
| Social Responsibility | Optional | Yes – every report |
| Health & Career Ed / PP | Optional | Yes – every report |
| Physical Education | Optional | Yes – every report |
| Social Studies | Twice in the year | Twice in the year |
| Science | Twice in the year | Twice in the year |
| Fine Arts - Drama - Music - Dance Visual Arts | Optional | Once in the year |

INTERMEDIATE REQUIREMENTS

| SUBJECT AREA | LETTER GRADE REQUIRED? | WRITTEN CO REQUIRED? |
|-------------------------|------------------------|--|
| Language Arts | Yes – every report | Yes – every report |
| Mathematics | Yes – every report | Yes – every report |
| Social Studies | Yes – every report | Once in the year |
| Science | Yes – every report | Once in the year |
| Fine Arts | Yes – every report | Once in the year |
| French (grades 5-7) | Yes – every report | Once in the year |
| Physical Education | Yes – every report | Once in the year |
| Health & Career Ed / PP | Yes – every report | Once in the year |
| Social Responsibility | No | Every report. C of introductory or part of goals supports if this requiring further attention. |

the report card formats

PERFORMANCE SCALES

For use on anecdotal and grid formats, showing progress in relation to learning outcomes

Kindergarten three-step performance scale:

Approaching Expectations
Meeting Expectations
Exceeding Expectations.

Grades 1-3 four-step performance scale:

Not Yet Meeting Expectations
Approaching Expectations
Meeting Expectations
Exceeding Expectations.

Intermediate grade performance scale:

Not required. If you choose to use the optional grid format, feel free to delete the optional performance scales.

SOME GUIDELINES ON WRITTEN COMMENTS agreed upon by VESTA and the VSB

Use global statements in common language in order to communicate clearly to parents and to address a child's overall progress in general terms across the term (*see examples*). A long list of statements is not required.

Do not use prescribed outcome language. The language used in the IRPs is intended for educators, and often includes jargon. The unit of learning identified in learning outcomes is usually too reduced to be meaningful for a term's reporting. Rather, reporting should be based on more comprehensive criteria (*see examples*).

Provide supportive and positive comments where possible, but note where a student is having difficulties.

Examples of Written Comments

Feel free to use these samples of global statements supplied by the VSB, Queen Mary Elementary School, and the ministry. No need to use them all, though! A couple of written comments per subject is plenty.

Language Arts

Demonstrates an ability to listen and communicate ideas orally.
Demonstrates an interest in reading.
Demonstrates an ability to communicate through writing and illustrations.
Demonstrates an awareness of the conventions of print.
Demonstrates an understanding of fictional and informational text.
Reads grade level text fluently.
Demonstrates an ability to organize and communicate ideas using the correct conventions.

Mathematics

Demonstrates an understanding of the concepts and skills taught.
Is not yet meeting expectations for mathematics this term.
Shows an ability to apply concepts and skills.
Is fairly effective at using strategies to solve math problems.
Is excellent at writing and solving simple algebraic problems.
Demonstrates an ability to effectively use computational skills.

Social Studies

Demonstrates an understanding and ability to apply the concepts taught.
Is exceeding expectations for social studies this term.
Shows ability to locate and organize information in a variety of ways.
Shows an awareness of differences among families.
Demonstrates the ability to analyze, apply and present information.

Science

Shows an understanding of the concepts taught.
Demonstrates curiosity and interest in scientific inquiry.
Shows the ability to analyze, apply and present scientific knowledge.
Is approaching expectations for science this term.

Fine Arts

Demonstrates an interest and appreciation of the arts.
Shows an ability to communicate ideas and feelings through the arts.
Demonstrates creativity and originality in drama.
Demonstrates an interest in music, and an understanding of concepts taught.

French

Demonstrates an understanding of concepts and vocabulary taught.
Is meeting expectations for French this term.

Physical Education

Demonstrates an ability to move safely and follow instructions.
Participates cooperatively and demonstrates an understanding of fair play.
Demonstrates a variety of skills.
Had some difficulty demonstrating control and skill in gymnastics.

Health & Career Education (formerly Personal Planning)

Demonstrates an understanding of the concepts taught.
Demonstrates the ability to make appropriate choices.
Recognizes discrimination and bullying in many forms.
Demonstrates a knowledge of body changes associated with puberty.
Shows an understanding of healthy relationships.
Demonstrates the ability to make appropriate choices.

BOTH PRIMARY AND INTERMEDIATE

Every report, using written statements: an introductory comment that includes a personal statement about the student; comments about work habits; and, comments about support for learning where the student is having difficulties.

There is no reason to go to workshops to learn how to do the new report card - because the only real changes are in the frequency of reporting on individual subjects, as listed above (plus the use of performance scale language for primary teachers).

The grid report card is entirely optional and has not been mandated by the province or the VSB.

WHAT ABOUT PARENT-TEACHER CONFERENCES? ARE THEY MANDATORY?

Two 'informal reports' are mandatory. The form they come in is not. Under the Ministry of Education's Student Reporting Policy, school boards must provide at least five reports during the school year describing students' progress - three of which must be formal written reports, and two of which can be informal.

'Schools and teachers,' the policy states, 'determine how they will informally communicate with parents.' This does not have to be limited to parent-teacher conferences.

According to Ministry policy, informal reports may include:

telephone calls, the use of journals, student-led conferences, parent-teacher conferences, or other means of informally reporting.

The role of Senior Teacher

The role of senior teacher / teacher-in-charge is enshrined in our Collective Agreement, and has certain responsibilities - as well as protections for the person involved. Here are the details . . .

The *VS*B / *V*T*F* *Collective Agreement* speaks to the role of Senior Teacher and Teacher-in-Charge. The two parts (see below) need to be read together as they overlap in meaning and responsibility. (Head Teacher is an old term that is no longer in existence as these individuals are now vice-principals of annexes.)

The *CA* does not specify how the person is selected to be appointed therefore we rely on *VESTA* policies and practices. It is our best practice to discuss the matter in a *VESTA* meeting ahead of time so that the *VESTA* members can present only one volunteer for the Senior Teacher role in a subsequent Staff Committee meeting. The expectation garnered from the *CA* wording for a one (1) year period is that it will not automatically be the same individual automatically appointed on an ongoing basis by the principal or vice-principal.

In fact, *VESTA*'s policy on this matter was decided by the membership in 1988. Our policy reads: *That the Senior Teacher position be for one (1) year and be rotated among those interested as determined by Staff Committee decision* (1988 May 17 *VESTA* / *VSTA* Joint General Meeting).

It is important that everyone (including *TOCs*) knows who the Senior Teacher and Teacher-in-Charge. It is recommended that a series of Teachers-in-Charge be named in the event that several people are absent (this has happened in real time). All staff need to be clear on the procedures if an emergency or unexpected event occurs.

It is expected that a *TOC* will always be provided for the Senior Teacher or Teacher-in-Charge any time that the principal or vice-principal is absent for more than a very brief period of time. As vice-principals have a teaching component that work needs to be planned for the *TOC* by the vice-principal.

It is clear that a Senior Teacher or Teacher-in-Charge does not have any administrative responsibilities when principal or vice-principal is *in* the school.

***VS*B / *V*T*F* *Collective Agreement* (excerpt)**

Article 1.K.2.

(e) Senior Teacher - a teacher appointed by the Board for a one (1) year period to act for the Principal of a school or the Vice-Principal of a primary annex when the Principal or Vice-Principal is absent from the school. Such an appointment shall be made in each annex. Such an appointment shall be made in a main school only where there is not a Vice-Principal. A Senior Teacher shall have no administrative responsibilities assigned to him/her when an Administrative Officer is in the school.

Article 2.E.5. Senior Teacher

(a) In addition to the basic salary a Senior Teacher shall receive an annual allowance of five hundred dollars (\$500) (\$510 effective 2000 April 01).

(b) In primary annexes a Senior Teacher shall be named for the school year to act for the Vice-Principal when he/she is absent from the school. In addition to the basic salary this Senior Teacher shall receive an annual allowance of two hundred and fifty dollars (\$250) (\$255 effective 2000 April 01).

Article 7.O. Teacher-in-Charge

1. When all Administrative Officers are absent from an elementary school or annex, and in each elementary school or annex which has a Senior Teacher he/she is also absent, the Administrative Officer shall designate an employee to act as Teacher-in-Charge and shall inform the staff of the identity of that person.

2. The Teacher-in-Charge shall strive to ensure that the safety of the students and the security of the school are maintained and shall deal with emergent matters.

3. A Teacher-in-Charge shall have no administrative responsibilities when an Administrative Officer is present at the school.

4. While acting as Teacher-in-Charge, the teacher is covered by all terms and conditions of this Agreement.

5. When deemed necessary by the Administrative Officer and after consultation with the Teacher-in-Charge, the Teacher-in-Charge shall be relieved of regular teaching duties and may be provided with an Employee on Call.

Barbara Kay
Glen Hansman
VESTA in-house

IN BRIEF

CONTRACT IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

The bonus

Questions arising over eligibility for the signing incentive have been submitted to mediator Irene Holden for her decision. Members on long-term disability last year have thus far been denied their full bonus. A resolution one way or another is expected soon.

Portability of seniority and sick leave

Also submitted to Holden.

Preparation time

Questions regarding the provision of elementary preparation time, including time in lieu for statutory holidays and pro-d, were submitted to Holden. Resolution on this matter expected soon. *VESTA* has also filed a grievance on this matter.

Seniority for *TOCs*

Seniority issues for *TOCs* have to be sorted out at the local bargaining table. Vince Ready has said that seniority has to be meaningful for *TOCs*.

SIGNING BONUS DEDUCTIONS

All statutory deductions were taken off the signing bonus by the *VS*B unless individuals had already hit the maximum contributions for CPP and EI. † The signing bonus is paid now, but counts as income for the 2005/2006 school year when they were working. † Retired teachers will recoup most of these deductions when they do their income tax.

WANT HAPPENED TO THAT JOB?

Email vilmam@vesta.ca or fax 604-873-2652 the following information:

- posting #
- location or district position name
- date of posting
- your category (B,C,E,F)
- your seniority (approximate)
- your contact info for a reply

VESTA can tell you the category of the successful applicant, and the seniority of the successful applicant

NATIONAL MEDIA EDUCATION WEEK November 20-24

Resources on media awareness:

1. The Canadian Teachers' Federation has partnered with the Media Awareness Network to create a website to provide teachers, parents and librarians with media education resources and activity ideas. Go to www.mediaeducationweek.ca

2. *Talk Media* is a new media literacy blog on Mnet's award-winning website: www.media-awareness.ca

3. *Media Education: Make it Happen!* On Mnet website is a series of downloadable resources to help educators understand and facilitate media literacy in their classrooms.



Team *VESTA* at the 2006 Run for the Cure

STAFF REP ASSEMBLY
November 14
at Tupper Secondary School Cafeteria
Make sure your worksite is represented!

Health & Safety Updates

Universal Precautions

Everyone should have been trained at the school's first meeting of the school year, but that probably did not happen, so. When dealing with any kind of bodily fluid, the universal precaution is to ALWAYS use gloves. Each and every teacher (and actually every employee who may come into contact with students or adults, including supervision aides) needs to be given and have ready access to gloves. These are paid for by our employer. The gloves are used for one incident only. As you take the glove off, pull from the area around the wrist and turn the glove inside out as you pull it off.



New student registration or transfer between schools

We have the right to know if a student entering our school has a violent background. Ensure that the previous school has been phoned for any pertinent information before the student actually shows up in your class. The process is inconsistent from one school to the next in handling mid-year student placement into new classes. This issue is being looked at by the Health & Safety Committee.

TOC's and Emergency procedures

Most schools give the arriving TOC's information about Fire Drill and other Emergency procedures. Check to see what information is handed out to TOC's at your school.

Health & Safety Board in the Staffroom

The minutes of the last 3 months of meetings of the school's Joint H&S Committee must be posted somewhere, usually in an area of the Staffroom devoted to H&S issues. This is a requirement of the WCB.



WCB

(WorkSafeBC) forms

The legal name is WCB but the user-friendly name has been changed to WorkSafeBC. Each school office

should have copies of forms that need to be filled out in case of **injury** or for a **violent incident**. The WCB forms are also available on their website: www.worksafebc.com/forms

- *If an employee is injured, then a WorkSafeBC Form 6A needs to be filled out. It is filled out by the employee who has been injured. The employee should keep a copy for themselves, send a copy to the VESTA office and give the original to the Administrator (not the secretary).*
- *If a violent incident occurs, then a VSB Violent Incident Report needs to be filled out.*

Both forms are to be investigated at the school level and reviewed by the school's Joint H&S Committee members at the monthly meetings.

Staff reps should be aware of where these forms are in the school, and distribute a sample to every VESTA member at the school. Discussing this issue at your next Staff Committee Meeting would be a good idea.

Everyone is encouraged to fill out these forms, even for minor incidents or near misses. It is



important to track what is happening to our members so that steps can be taken, if possible, in the area of prevention. *It against the law for someone to deter you from filling out these forms when you have been injured or felt unsafe.*

These forms are summarized every month by the VSB Health & Safety department and are reviewed and discussed at the monthly District H&S meeting that all union groups have representation at.

Monthly Staff Committee meetings

At your school's regularly scheduled Staff Committee meetings, Health & Safety should be on every agenda. This will give the whole school staff the

opportunity to be aware of any concerns and what is being done to address them. This is also an opportunity to take a section of the VSB Staff Guidelines Emergency Procedures Flipbook and go through it with the staff. (That's the yellow and orange flipbook that should be hanging in each classroom and work area.)



Right to Know

The staff should be informed of any work taking place on the school ground.

Sometimes the

schedule of work being done is known in advance and this information can be placed into the staff bulletin or whatever form of communication is used on a daily basis.

Sometimes maintenance staff will arrive without prior notification. If a VESTA member has particular health concerns, then let the Administrator know so that that member can be informed as soon as possible.



Health & Safety Log

Every worksite should have a Health & Safety log that all employees have access to. Any concerns should be listed on the log. The school's Joint H&S Committee will then go through the items at their monthly meetings. If the issue is an emergency or needs to be dealt with immediately, then speak with the Administrator or Building Engineer immediately and then place in on the log for follow-up.

Health & Safety Meeting Minutes

The minutes of the school's Joint H&S Committee meetings should be posted in an area clearly identified for such a purpose. It is requested that a copy of those minutes be forwarded to the VESTA office. This allows for trends to be tracked and concerns can then be worked through at the District level.

VESTA Health & Safety Binders

Thank you to those H&S Reps that brought their VESTA H&S binder to the training days. If you still have your binder at your school, please discard all the contents and bring the empty binder to any meeting at the

VESTA office, Staff Rep Assembly or General Meeting.

H&S motions on Emergencies

The following two motions were carried by the September 19th Staff Rep Assembly:

- *THAT VESTA members decline volunteering for the search and rescue team until annual training and specialized earthquake equipment, including respirators are provided.*
- *THAT any participation on an emergency team be strictly voluntary after members have been advised of potential dangers such as asbestos exposure.*

We will be pursuing this matter with the VSB.

At its May 11th meeting, the VESTA Executive decided: *That the Board be informed that in the event of an emergency, members staying after instructional time do so on a strictly voluntary basis.* The

VSB has also been asked to expeditiously develop an emergency preparedness evacuation plan and to provide funding for it.

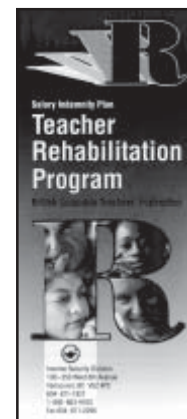
BCTF SIP Teacher Rehabilitation Program

This is a joint program run locally between VESTA and VSB. The program is there to assist teachers who are or who become disabled to maintain or to return to their teaching positions as early as possible by funding an early intervention rehabilitation program offered on a voluntary basis.

Any teacher can self refer to the program by phoning the BCTF at 604-871-2283.

The VESTA H&S site is being updated, and rehab forms will be made available on the site.

Karin Bernauer
Health & Safety Committee Chair
karin@vesta.ca



PRO-D COMMITTEE MEETINGS

November 28
January 16
February 21

4:00 - 5:30 at VESTA

ÿ Promote Sustainability Education ÿ Get Involved Sustainability Working Group

Information and Discussion Meeting

Wednesday, 2006 November 15
4:30 p.m. at the VESTA office, Room C

Share resources

Build green teachers network

Link to guest speakers

Find out how local teachers are integrating sustainability education in their classrooms. Join the discussion. To register, contact Holly

Broadland at hollybroadland@yahoo.ca

ON "NO-HOMEWORK" CLASSROOMS

As a parent and as a teacher, I have never really believed that homework is a good thing. As a parent I have always felt that my children spend enough of their day with teachers telling them what to do at school.

When they come home I want them to be free to interact with me, with their dad, with their siblings and their friends. I don't want leftover work, particularly something that they didn't feel motivated to do at school and so certainly don't feel motivated to do at home, left for me to try to make them struggle through when they are tired or, worse, interested in something more fun and exciting that we have going on at home. I don't want provincial learning outcomes that I didn't design or that may not even be relevant to my child's particular learning needs, directing or interfering with my child's home life.

As a teacher, I strongly believe that my job is to engage the students and teach them how to learn. To do that it is important to start where the students are at and to follow their interests and their abilities.

Often, when it works, children eagerly jump on the learning and sometimes even continue to work at home, not because it is required but because they are interested in the learning, may have better resources, and more quiet time to do so at home. When it doesn't work, rather than sending the student home, punished with the burden of work he/she didn't succeed at, to struggle through at home, I would much rather have that child who is not yet caught up in the wonder of learning in the classroom, have time to run, play, snuggle with a parent or caregiver, explore with friends or even have quiet time, so that

he/she can come back the next day refreshed and more ready to try again. Homework isn't consistent with what I believe about learning.

This year my teaching partner and I decided to implement a no-homework policy in our grade 4/5 classroom.

This year my teaching partner and I decided to implement a no-homework policy in our grade 4/5 classroom. To date, one and one-half months into the school year, we agree that it is a success. As one would expect, the students for the most part are delighted. That isn't to say that we

haven't had a few keen young ones that have said "but can't I do this at home?" If you really want to, we always reply. "But what about the parents?" One of our colleagues asked.

Well, there was that. The Vancouver School Board suggests a limit of 30 minutes for intermediate grades but doesn't require teachers to assign a minimum amount. We expected perhaps some argument about how the children needed to learn how to do homework. Believe me, I would argue, they will have lots of other opportunities to learn before they get to university, but in preparation for the Meet the Teachers night we wrote up our plan in our overview and approached it head on.

To our delight, the response from parents has been very supportive.

To our delight, the response from parents has been very supportive. One mother, pleased that we are prepared to let her child work on a computer at school as much as possible began to explain that the computer time should help take care of things at school but she wasn't sure about how he would

manage the homework now that he was in grade 4.

"Well, we won't be assigning any," I calmly reassured her, at which point her whole body shifted as I swear I watched a giant weight rise up off of her shoulders.

"Really?" she queried. I assured her that neither myself nor my teaching partner really believed it was beneficial at this age. "Oh, that will be such a relief," she sighed.

In my mind I think she was speaking for any parent who has ever tried to help keep a child up to speed, diligently reading the child's agenda, if/when the child has remembered to write the daily homework in it, threatening to take away privileges if the homework isn't done first, chastising for forgetting, writing apology notes for those inevitable nights when homework just couldn't be squeezed in, and generally feeling guilty about not being the perfect parent.

In writing this I am very aware that I teach in a west side school where students are seen to have enriched family lives with parents offering all sorts of beneficial learning opportunities in the home. Perhaps homework is not so important in homes with lots of books, computers, and well read or educated parents to keep children up to speed.

What about homes where children aren't so fortunate, including those west side homes where that may be the case? Won't these children just fall behind? In answer to that I hold to my belief that teaching is about educating children *how to learn* and then helping to engage and motivate them.

When we are truly rising to that challenge children willingly and naturally take that learning out of the classroom. No one can stop them. When we don't or aren't yet inspiring in that way, 30 minutes or more of homework is more likely to interfere, not to inspire that learning to begin to happen.

Betty Gilgoff
Bayview Community School

TOctalk

Teachers-on-Call - Have you joined the TOctalk Yahoo list-serv yet? Stay in the loop and participate in the discussion by registering at groups.yahoo.com/group/toctalk

TOC COMMITTEE MEETING

Thursday, November 16

4 - 5:30 p.m.

at VESTA, 2915 Commercial Drive

Come with your questions and concerns

ON THE ALFIE KOHN PRO-D

Reflections from various teachers at the October Alfie Kohn event.

The day gave me time to reflect and discuss ideas with colleagues. Time to talk and think, for once!

I found these ideas affirming because I have always distrusted testing. I would do away with grades before grade 7. I taught grade 4 for many years until the pressures (re: achievement, measurement) got in the way of teaching. I believe that homework should be reading for pleasure or curiosity (which is the same thing, really). I am a resource teacher now, and I am learning how to assess children in order to get services for them. There is much to learn!

Today gave me the courage to continue doing authentic assessment, and to think outside the assessment box.

How can we utilize what we have heard here to combat what's going on in our schools without getting fired?

I appreciated Alfie's humour. I'm so happy that so many teachers heard this message. Thank you for the opportunity to hear him.

It confirms my belief in authentic assessment, not meaningless school-wide writes or not 15 minute reading assessments per child.

I never believed in relying on assessments to drive my teaching, so he confirmed my practice.

I disagree with his "research" on homework, and feel that homework for the sake of homework is useless . . . but he did not discuss the "pro" side of homework. Helping parents support their child could be extremely successful because many parents do not know "what to do" at home.

We need to communicate to parents to empower them.

"What did you sacrifice from my child's education to get those results?" "Learning is messy." It is a

moral issue to participate in tests like these. As a result of this session, I will get rid of my once a week homework assignment that I'm really doing to please parents, and ask parents to devote that time to reading *and* activity. Thank you! I really appreciated the truth in the presentation.

I appreciated how the presentation made me think twice - no, 13 times! - about how I teach and what I need to do to ensure that all my students are receiving the education they deserve and the respect they deserve.

It was broad-ranging, but succinct. We were not bogged down by a whole day of passive listening, but engaged for the time period by a wonderful presenter. Thank you VESTA! It was invaluable to hear Dr. Kohn.

I really appreciated the info about competition. It was very reinforcing as a parent and teacher, giving me a different point of view.

I appreciated the speaker's knowledge, clarity - the presentation was riveting - and I was engaged 500% the whole time. It was informative - and it developed me professionally. This was the best pro-day I've attended.

He was preaching to the converted. Nothing new! No ideas were offered or teaching strategies for a better learning environment, or for a school that is more focused on learning as opposed to testing. I'm sorry to say that this was a waste of time - unless follow-up is done.

Fantastic! Thank you so much for bringing in a speaker of Alfie Kohn's caliber. Absolutely inspirational!

Teachers who are controlled become controlling. Accountability equals intolerance for disagreement. Standards should be as vague as possible. Measurable outcomes may be the least significant results of learning. The day was thought provoking!

Thanks VESTA! My whole staff thought that it was the best pro-day ever.