

The background of the cover is a photograph of a man and a woman standing in a garden. The man, on the left, is wearing a dark blue sweater and holding a wooden-handled tool with a blue head. The woman, on the right, is wearing a light blue patterned sweater and holding a pitchfork. They are both smiling. In the background, there are green plants, a fence, and a building under a clear blue sky.

BC Teachers' Federation

# Teacher.

Jan/Feb 2022

## Learning about food

**Sardis Secondary School Farm** pages 20–23

**Food justice** pages 18–19

**Resisting Eurocentric ideals in food studies** pages 14–15

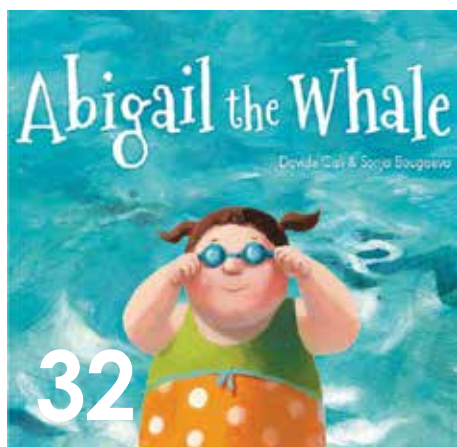


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# THIS IS YOUR MAGAZINE



## Contact us

**BC Teachers' Federation**

**Toll free** 1-800-663-9163

**Email** [teachermag@bctf.ca](mailto:teachermag@bctf.ca)

**Web** [bctf.ca](http://bctf.ca)

**Editor** Sunjum Jhaj, [sjhaj@bctf.ca](mailto:sjhaj@bctf.ca)

**Assistant Editor/Designer** Sarah Young

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Do you enjoy writing? Have a story to tell? Know of a project at your school or in your local you want to share with colleagues? Then consider writing for *Teacher*, the flagship publication of the BCTF! Submission guidelines are available at [bctf.ca](http://bctf.ca).

We also welcome letters to the editor. Send your letter to [teachermag@bctf.ca](mailto:teachermag@bctf.ca).

*Teacher* reserves the right to edit or condense any contribution considered for publication. We are unable to publish all submissions we receive.

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# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Teri Mooring, BCTF President



## New hope for a new year

I hope you all enjoyed some very well-deserved rest over the winter break, and perhaps even some long-overdue visits with friends and family now that all but our very youngest are eligible to be vaccinated. However, I also recognize that many members have been affected by fires, floods, and mudslides this year. My heart goes out to everyone coping with the devastating impacts of these disasters.

During this difficult time, I am so grateful to colleagues throughout the province for doing their part to keep our schools and communities safe—not only by getting vaccinated, but also by working with students and families to create mask-positive classrooms and recognize our shared responsibility to protect one another.

The roll out of vaccinations among the 5–11 age group is now underway, which brings hope and a sense of relief for those of you who work in elementary schools. Still, concerns remain regarding barriers to accessing community vaccine clinics among this demographic, and we are once again advocating for in-school clinics to be offered as part of the province's vaccination campaign. Uptake of vaccines among the 12–17 age group, unfortunately, remains relatively low in some regions of the province, and work is ongoing to facilitate access to vaccinations for all students.

Lastly, I'd like to bring your attention to bargaining. Local bargaining is already underway, and we are readying ourselves for provincial bargaining. The bargaining team will be preparing language based on the priorities set by the bargaining conference in January. It is crucial that we have your current contact information to ensure our bargaining updates are successfully delivered in the weeks and months ahead. This will also allow you to access bargaining-related information behind the BCTF website portal. If you haven't already done so, please visit [bctf.ca](http://bctf.ca) and log in with your preferred personal email account.

I am so proud of the grit and tenacity teachers throughout BC continue to demonstrate as you work diligently to keep your schools safe and students engaged amidst a global pandemic. I hope you are just as proud of yourselves!

Sending hope and gratitude to each and every one of you.

In solidarity,

**Teri Mooring**  
BCTF President



# MESSAGE DE LA PRÉSIDENTE

## Nouvel espoir pour une nouvelle année

J'espère que vous avez tous et toutes profité d'un repos bien mérité et peut-être même des visites attendues depuis longtemps chez vos ami(e)s et votre famille durant la pause hivernale alors que tous et toutes, sauf les plus jeunes, sont admissibles à la vaccination. Cependant, je reconnais aussi que de nombreux(-euses) membres ont été touché(e)s par les incendies, les inondations et les coulées de boue cette année. Je suis de tout cœur avec tous ceux et celles qui subissent les effets dévastateurs de ces catastrophes.

En cette période difficile, je suis très reconnaissante envers mes collègues qui font leur part à travers la province pour assurer la sécurité de nos écoles et de nos communautés, non seulement en se faisant vacciner, mais aussi en travaillant avec les élèves et les familles pour créer des salles de classes positives face au port du masque et qui reconnaissent notre responsabilité commune de se protéger les un(e)s les autres.

Le déploiement de la vaccination chez les 5 à 11 ans est en cours, ce qui apporte espoir et soulagement à ceux et celles d'entre vous qui travaillez dans les écoles élémentaires. Cependant, des préoccupations demeurent concernant les obstacles liés à l'accès aux cliniques de vaccination communautaires au sein de ce groupe démographique et nous plaidons encore une fois pour que des cliniques en milieu scolaire soient offertes dans le cadre de la campagne de vaccination de la province. L'utilisation des vaccins chez les jeunes de 12 à 17 ans demeure malheureusement relativement faible dans certaines régions de la province et des travaux sont en cours pour faciliter l'accès aux vaccins pour tous(toutes) les élèves.

Enfin, j'aimerais attirer votre attention sur la négociation. Votre négociation locale est déjà en cours et nous nous préparons à la négociation provinciale. L'équipe de négociation préparera le libellé en fonction des priorités établies par la Conférence de négociation de Janvier. Il est essentiel que nous ayons vos coordonnées actuelles pour nous assurer que nos mises à jour sur la négociation vous soient livrées avec succès dans les semaines et les mois à venir. Cela vous permettra également d'accéder aux renseignements sur les négociations qui se trouvent sur le portail Web de la FECB. Si vous ne l'avez pas déjà fait, veuillez [bctf.ca](http://bctf.ca) et ouvrir une session avec votre compte de courriel personnel préféré.

Je suis très fière du courage et de la ténacité dont font preuve les enseignant(e)s à travers la Colombie-Britannique alors que vous travaillez avec diligence pour assurer la sécurité de vos écoles et l'engagement des élèves dans le contexte d'une pandémie mondiale. J'espère que vous êtes également fiers(-ières) de vous!

J'envoie de l'espoir et de la gratitude à chacun(e) d'entre vous.

Solidairement,



**Teri Mooring**  
Présidente de la FECB

## Canadian Teachers' Federation's National Campaign for Public Education

**PUBLIC EDUCATION** is essential in our communities. Throughout the pandemic, we saw just how important public education systems are in keeping students safe and healthy, and preparing them for the future.

A recent Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) survey found 90% of those polled consider public education one of our most important public institutions. Yet, we continually see inadequate funding for public education and teachers carrying unsustainable burdens to meet their students' needs.

The CTF is launching a new campaign to address the inequities and instabilities in public education systems across Canada. Quality public education plays a key role in repairing the cracks in our social systems brought to light by the pandemic.

The CTF is calling on the federal government to create a national education advisory table to strengthen public education across Canada. The table will include teachers,

academics, and members of the public, and will work with provinces and territories to tackle key issues, such as:

- ▶ Establishing national guidelines for public education.
- ▶ Developing national standards for emergency preparedness.
- ▶ Implementing legislation to stop the privatization of public education.
- ▶ Protecting and promoting the French language in minority settings.
- ▶ Co-ordinating national programs aimed at poverty alleviation, antiracism, and truth and reconciliation.

To learn more about this campaign's priorities, and to find out how you can encourage the provincial government to take action, visit [www.voteeducation.ca](http://www.voteeducation.ca).

INVESTING IN  
PUBLICLY FUNDED  
PUBLIC EDUCATION

TODAY WILL BENEFIT  
EVERYONE TOMORROW.

# Professional autonomy: *A look at our collective agreements*

By **Daniel Shiu** (he/him), BCTF staff, Professional and Social Issues Division

## **DURING OUR TEACHING CAREERS,**

we have most likely heard or even have used the phrase, "professional autonomy." We feel protected by it and use it to defend or justify our decisions as professionals. According to Pitt and Phelan, autonomy refers to "thinking for oneself in uncertain and complex situations in which judgment is more important than routine."<sup>1</sup> It is relational, socially constructed, and essential in creating, developing, and being a professional. Paradoxically, "the autonomy of a profession depends upon the autonomy of each of its members," and therefore "professionals have to become autonomous before there can be autonomy."<sup>2</sup> So, what does professional autonomy really mean for teachers? What autonomy do teachers really have in the classroom? The short answer: it depends on your local collective agreement. But here is a longer answer.

Of the 60 collective agreements in the province, 2 do not include professional autonomy language provisions. The rest mainly guarantee teachers' professional autonomy in terms of planning, presentation (i.e., methods of instruction), and evaluation of course materials. One district specifically states that teachers' instructional methodology shall not be mandated. However, within this freedom, teachers are limited by legislation (i.e., Ministry of Education), regulation (i.e., BC Teachers' Council), as well as policies and procedures (i.e., boards of education and administrative officers). As all teachers are to abide by the BC Teachers' Council's nine professional standards, the *School Act*, and ministerial orders, virtually all the collective agreements restrict individual professional autonomy within the bounds of the approved provincial or local curricula and practices consistent with "effective" or "generally accepted" educational methodology. This common stipulation, however, may fuel practical and interpretive ambiguity: what is

considered "effective" or "generally accepted" educational methodology? Who determines this? How is it measured? What are the potential consequences if these criteria are not satisfactorily met?

Educational change is fundamentally part of the profession, whether it is curricula, pedagogy, resource, assessment, or even technology, and therefore, educational values, philosophies, and practices are not static. Teachers only have to open an outdated textbook and corresponding teacher's resource book, a syllabus from a methodology course from their teacher education program, or an integrated resource package and its prescribed learning outcomes to see vast changes over time. Even resources used in the recent past have come into question. Understanding now that content or trigger warnings may be insufficient, teachers are taking greater caution in evaluating and presenting resources they once used, continue to use, or will use in the classroom in order to avoid the optics of misevaluating, misrepresenting, or misusing them. Although teachers have the autonomy to select the materials for their classes, school districts ultimately have the authority to approve or remove teaching materials from their learning resource services.

Despite this commonality in the collective agreements, not all of them contain the same restrictions. In one district, teachers must uphold the tenets of that city's Code of Professional Relationships; while in another, teachers' personal, political, racial, and religious biases must be excluded from any learning activities. Yet, in another collective agreement, teachers are permitted to express ideas and use materials if they do not conflict with the course of study, district policy, or district program. One can see the potential for grievances on both sides in interpreting, implementing,

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*"Defining teacher professional autonomy appears easy on the surface; a closer look at the varying collective agreements and possible interpretations suggests otherwise."*

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and enforcing these terms. Even though teachers strive to be "objective" with their opinions and views in the classroom, the art of teaching and the field of education are subjective. Teachers are passionate about teaching and, in turn, are impassioned by what they teach. They have the professional autonomy in deciding how to deliver the core and curricular competencies and corresponding content to students. However, these particular provisions permit school boards and administrators the right to challenge teachers' pedagogical decisions and practices if they do not align with the collective agreement language.

Regarding assessment, eight districts explicitly provide professional autonomy language, where teachers have the right to determine student evaluation, grading practices, and techniques, including pass/fail provisions for each student. With the recent elimination of the high- and medium-stakes provincial exams, teachers feel greater flexibility and freedom with the curriculum



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and with their assessment practices, as they no longer have to “teach to the test.” Yet, there are limits. In a commonly cited decision, arbitrator Dorsey (2009) clarified the limitations of teacher professional autonomy within the public education system when a Grade 3 teacher was disciplined for refusing to administer the district reading assessment. In his ruling, Dorsey states that “teachers do not have unfettered discretion to comply with or refuse to comply with employer policies or directions on all matters that relate to teachers’ duties and responsibilities.”<sup>3</sup> Here, school board and administrative directives do not infringe on teachers’ individual professional autonomy. However, with the proposed new reporting order, professional autonomy provisions in collective agreements protecting evaluation or assessment of students may be challenged, re-interpreted, or potentially overridden.

Where does this leave us and where do we go from here? The BCTF fully supports professional autonomy, not

just pertaining to course materials, pedagogy, assessment, and professional development. One of its policy goals is to ensure “through the development of democratic processes, professional autonomy for teachers and protection from capricious or malicious action, unjust regulations and the abuse of authority.”<sup>4</sup> It also considers the professional autonomy of teachers in the implementation of educational change, whether it is related to policy, practice, or curriculum. Furthermore, in its educational policy on assessment, evaluation, and reporting, the BCTF “supports the professional autonomy of the member in assessing, evaluating and reporting the progress of students.”<sup>5</sup> Strengthening and protecting local teacher autonomy language in collective agreements is perhaps needed. Defining teacher professional autonomy appears easy on the surface; a closer look at the varying collective agreements and possible interpretations suggests otherwise. It also raises more questions than answers. At this time, professional autonomy is a provincial

issue, and therefore can only be bargained provincially. The Professional Issues Advisory Committee of the BCTF is working toward a document to provide guidelines based on the values, practices, responsibilities, and conditions needed for professional autonomy. For teachers, professional autonomy is critically fundamental to the service of their profession, which is and will always be guided by the best interests of their students. ●

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1 Alice Pitt and Anne Phelan, “Paradoxes of Autonomy in Professional Life: A Research Problem,” *Changing English*, Vol. 15, No. 2, June 2008, p. 189–190.

2 Ibid., p.190.

3 British Columbia Public School Employers’ Association, *Arbitration Award: Professional Autonomy*, 2009: [www.bcpsea.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/documents/20101228\\_112513947\\_ai2009-35.pdf](http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/documents/20101228_112513947_ai2009-35.pdf)

4 British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, *Members’ Guide to the BCTF 2021–2022*, p. 70: [bctf.ca/docs/default-source/publications/print-publications/2021-22-members-guide.pdf](http://bctf.ca/docs/default-source/publications/print-publications/2021-22-members-guide.pdf)

5 Ibid., p. 42.



# *Encouraging digital wellness*

**By Carol Todd**, teacher, Coquitlam

*Carol Todd is the Co-ordinator for Supportive Technologies and Digital Literacy (with a focus on digital citizenship and awareness) in School District 43 (Coquitlam). Carol is also a global advocate for antibullying, digital safety, mental health, cyber-abuse prevention, and gender-based exploitation prevention. On October 10, 2012, Carol's daughter Amanda died by suicide after relentless exploitation online and cyber-bullying. Carol has committed herself to being the voice that Amanda never had and continuing the important conversation that Amanda started with her now widely viewed video detailing her experiences and feelings. Carol's overall goal is to encourage everyone to have continued conversations that foster positive mental health and digital wellness.*

**WHEN SPEAKING** to educators, parents, and kids in classrooms, I often hear a lot of questions about how to approach the topic of digital awareness. They want to know more about the issues with social media, cyber-bullying, self-worth, self-image, consent, privacy, and screen time. The list goes on. But along with information about the issues, they want solutions. What can they do? What are the most trusted resources? How do they prioritize digital well-being in their everyday lives?

Based on my personal experiences and what I've learned from all the amazing adults, youth, and children I've spoken to in the nine years since Amanda's passing, I narrowed down the action items to the five most important. Of course, this list isn't exhaustive. But to me, doing these five things on an ongoing basis can help to improve your digital health significantly.

## **Stay educated**

When it comes to cyber-awareness and digital health and well-being, knowledge really is power. Educated adults can better navigate their own digital lives and model healthy behaviours for the kids in their lives. They are also better equipped to have hard, uncomfortable conversations.

It's important to identify reputable sources of information (like those included in the resources list when you scan the QR code on the next page). Visit these sites often. Sign up for the newsletters. Subscribing to Google Alerts with applicable key words including cyber-safety, digital wellness, and cyber-bullying is also a great way to stay up to date. You don't need to read everything. Pick and choose what you read, but at least you're accessing this type of news regularly. The context is changing every single day, so it's important to be familiar with the latest news.

With your students (and with your own children), introduce times to read news articles and talk about "real vs. not real" news. Review how to look at facts and determine if they are plausible. Doing activities or taking online safety quizzes are great, productive uses of screen time.





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## Have open conversations

It can be scary to talk about the darker side of the internet, but these conversations are vital. If you feel uncomfortable talking to children about sexual health literacy and personal safety issues common in the digital world, I recommend practising the conversations with other adults.

Allow yourself to be honest and vulnerable with the kids in your life. Explain to them that these topics can be hard to talk about, but stress the importance of muddling through the discomfort together. Today, we have to normalize these types of conversations.

With kids, I also stress the importance of having a circle of safe adults in their lives. Sometimes kids find it hard to talk to their parents about difficult topics. This could be due to cultural, language, or religious reasons. It could also be due to the relationship dynamic that exists between the child and their parents. And sometimes parents just refuse to talk about these topics or struggle to be calm communicators and listeners. It's essential kids have other safe adults in their lives they can openly talk to.

## Set boundaries

"No" can be a really hard thing to say, even if everything inside you wants to say it. We have a lot of concerns around the word no. For instance, if we say no, maybe people will like or love us less. We may feel bad, or guilty, or worry that we're making too big of a deal about something.

For kids, it can be hard to determine what is and isn't okay. Setting boundaries for something that is unknown or unfamiliar is especially hard. I try to help students understand how their bodies react to certain feelings. I ask kids, "If you are online and someone is asking you questions, how does it make you feel? Does your stomach get tight? Does your chest get heavy?" These are sensations they can identify. Then I help them associate and name feelings that are typical of those sensations, such as anxiety, worry, concern, or fear. By understanding and validating their feelings, they can learn to trust themselves in identifying what is and is not okay. Practising this with a safe adult gives kids the experience they need to honour themselves with boundaries.

## Share your experiences

If Amanda knew that she wasn't alone, she would probably be alive today. Nobody is alone. Kids need to know there is always someone out there who can help them with whatever problem or situation they are having.

The same is true for adults. If you are having any negative experiences online or offline, it's important to connect with people who can support you without judgment and can hold space and listen. Keeping negative emotions or experiences in only strengthens the shame and spirals the bad feelings. Even though at first it may feel hard or embarrassing to open up, in the end, it's a positive thing to ask for help if you are struggling.

## Take action

Develop a personal digital wellness action plan. What are my goals? How am I going to achieve them? Who is going to help me? Where do I go if I'm stuck? Digital wellness aligns with physical and mental wellness. So, it's important to include things like eating well, sleep, physical activity, and finding balance for screen time in your action plan. Being digitally well is a lifestyle choice. It's an ongoing awareness. It's a value system that starts when kids are really young and gets reinforced consistently throughout life.

Digital technology is all around us and it's not going away. This generation of kids is growing up surrounded by it. It's all they know. And it's okay, too, that sometimes kids know more than us about how the digital world works. Even in our digitally connected world, there is still room for board games, outdoor activities, and conversations around the dinner table. Adults must model healthy behaviours and habits. Kids learn from what they see. Showing them how digital wellness comes alive with awareness, boundaries, and open conversations will go a long way to helping them understand and take care of their own digital health. 9

## RESOURCES

Visit [linktr.ee/DigitalWellnessResources](http://linktr.ee/DigitalWellnessResources) or scan the QR code for digital wellness resources for educators.



# TIME FOR HEALTH



By **Chad Oatway**, teacher and coach, New Westminster

**EXPLORING HEALTH TODAY** can be confusing and frustrating, and trying to teach health in a meaningful way can be overwhelming. Exercise, sport, sleep, nutrition, sex... are we mentally healthy? These are thoughts that might come to mind when thinking about physical and health education (PHE).

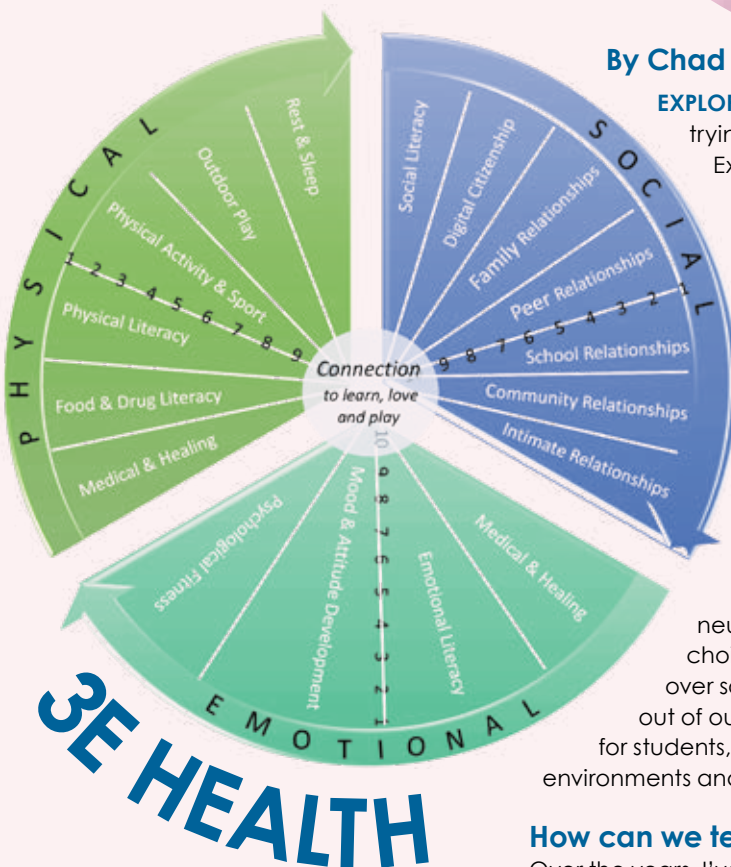
## What is health?

Everything around us and in us is connected; this is the root of health. The interrelated components that make up the foundation of our health are social, emotional, and physical in nature. The 3E Health graphic (pictured left) summarizes ways of socially, emotionally, and physically empowering health. Curricular connections to these components in school create conditions for health and ultimately learning.

These components are influenced by four factors of human health: 1) genetics, 2) the internal self-regulation of our organs, neurons, and cells, 3) the environments we live in, and 4) our lifestyle choices. Depending on our circumstances, we may have control over some of these factors of human health, but others are completely out of our control. None of us have any control over our genetics. And for students, there are many inequities that can affect their control over their environments and lifestyle choices.

## How can we teach health?

Over the years, I've learned that teaching health is not as much about knowledge and resources, but rather making time for social, emotional, and physical activities that nurture health in the classroom and our personal lives. How do we make or take time to teach meaningful health with busy classroom schedules and personal lives? The good news is, everything we already do and every subject we teach is potentially a health class.



# 1.

## Reduce stress

School can mean safety, challenge, reward, and belonging to some, yet for others school may bring unhealthy stressors to light in the form of insecurities, shame, trauma, and/or inequities that exist in individuals and society. It is heartbreaking

when students are unable to succeed or thrive in class.

When I watched students struggling to succeed in my PHE, foods and nutrition, career education, and leadership classes, I did not see a lack of ability in these students, but rather a lack of health. Students are often avoiding stressors in their social, emotional, and physical health, which translates into learning challenges in the classroom.

Chronic unhealthy stress ultimately affects the body's internal self-regulation for health. Lack of control, uncertainty, and lack of information are three of the leading causes of chronic stress. So how do we reduce this unhealthy stress in our students? In my classroom, I work on creating a supportive environment socially, emotionally, and physically by first creating a democratic classroom that allows students to have ownership and control over how we make decisions as a class. Next, our classroom routines and expectations are clear and consistent, which provides students with certainty and information. We don't want learning to be a surprise or forced. We want to foster healthy levels of stress and challenge that provide personal insight toward health.

# 2.

## Build self-awareness

We can't always control the factors that affect our health, but we can build self-awareness and understanding of how health factors affect us.

Building self-awareness into our students' lives is hard, as this means sometimes taking individuals to difficult places, but this is the starting point for building healthier students.

My approach for self-awareness begins with three expectations: 1) to do and use positive language, 2) to be and share positive energy, and 3) to feel positive growth. Homework, tests, projects, presentations, fitness, play, and health are the "to do" part that creates emotional experiences where we "use" positive language with ourselves and our peers. The second expectation asks students to reflect on what type of person they would like "to be" and how they can "share" that person with respect, honesty, and confidence in the classroom. And finally, we expect "to feel" positive physical and mental growth when we overcome challenges. It's important to acknowledge that the outcomes of these expectations are not always positive. Being ready for push back, conflict, disappointment, and failure is important and expected, but can build stronger self-awareness. The process of health is ultimately a circular journey, so whatever the outcome, we repeat and try again!

# 3.

## Get moving

Movement has made humans who we are. Before cars, trains, and planes, humans travelled and settled almost every corner of the world in social groups to find food and safety—all of which happened by moving our

bodies. Now, in our domesticated society with limited time, PHE is where most movement happens in our schools, and for some students, it's the only place this happens. It's important to include movement in all curricular areas, so students can practise health throughout the day. For example, thinking critically and creatively with a friend during a walk and talk can build communication skills, and personal and social awareness, while diving deeper into any subject area.

As PHE educators we also need to find ways to teach nutrition, rest and sleep, medical and healing practices, physiology, sexual health, and mental health in our schools. But the question is, do we forgo movement to teach it in a colonial way (seated, quiet, and stationary)? Or can we look at finding ways to teach health through physical movement using behaviour education?

Behaviour education focuses on using personal insight to learn about the social, emotional, and physical effects of different actions and reactions. The best way to teach behaviour education is through play. Play helps children and adolescents learn critical social, emotional, and physical skills. Teaching health through play and physical movement creates experiences that facilitate social and emotional connections, personal challenges, growth from failure, and strategies to resolve social disputes, leading to healthy growth.

# 4.

## Make time for health every day

Can we take time to get outside for play, dance, sport, gardening, or just a walk? Can we take time to shop, prepare, cook, and eat with friends and family? Do we take time for rest and sleep? Do we make time to support our neighbors and volunteer in our communities?

Do we take time to care for ourselves and our planet? Making time for health in our busy schools and busy lives is not easy, but we all need to do this.

I recognize that I am speaking from a place of social, emotional, and physical privilege when it comes to health, but with that I need to find time for health to support myself and my community. As citizens we need to challenge government, corporations, businesses, and school boards to give back time for health, because this time is for the health of our children and students. Physical and health education is one area to make time for health in schools, but we all need to find time for health in our classrooms, schools, and busy lives, which is where the ultimate power and pathway for health lies. 9





# Fostering positive

By Katie Bartel, registered dietitian, New Westminster

**MY SON** was about a month or two into his Kindergarten adventure when he stopped eating his once-loved power cookies.

These homemade cookies were loaded with seeds and whole grains and topped with a sizable chunk of chocolate. They were tasty. They were filling. They were a nutrient-dense food that I knew my child would readily eat. Until, he didn't.

When I asked my son why he no longer ate them, he said, "Because, Mommy, they're not healthy."

This new understanding of food for him stemmed from being stopped mid-bite and told he had to eat the "healthy" foods in his lunch before the "treats."

## *We already know how to eat*

Did you know that we are all born with an innate sense of knowing how to eat? That's right.

Before our parents told us what we could or couldn't eat, and before schools started teaching us the Canada Food Guide, and before we were exposed to the widespread diet culture in media, we knew how to eat in a way that was perfect for our bodies.

We started eating when we were hungry. We stopped eating when we were full. We ate as much as we needed.

We provided our bodies the necessary nutrients to grow in a way that they were supposed to grow, specific to us.

But the moment that we are exposed to food rules, guidelines, and restrictions, our bodies and brains become confused, and that natural ability starts to get chipped away.

When we encourage children to eat beyond their fullness, that affects their natural satiety cues.

When we suggest children focus solely on the task of eating, and not the company around them, that can take away the enjoyment of food.

When we classify foods as healthy vs. non-healthy, or suggest eating more of one food than another, that puts food into a category of good vs. bad. By telling children if they finish their vegetables they can have dessert, we imply to the child that desserts taste better than vegetables. Labelling food as "junk food" or "candy" or "treats" puts those foods on a pedestal. Even though these nutrition recommendations are likely well-intentioned, they can actually do more harm than good. They

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*"When we classify foods as healthy vs. non-healthy, or suggest eating more of one food than another, that puts food into a category of good vs. bad."*

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can impair a child's relationship with food, and they can be the early start toward disordered eating. If we call all foods by their actual names—apples, broccoli, chocolate, chicken, bread, lollipops—we equalize them and help create a more balanced appreciation of food.

Food is more than just nutrition. Food is culture. Food is social. Food is family. Food is memories. Food is comfort. And no one should feel guilty eating any kind of food.

## *Changing the message*

Ellyn Satter's *Division of Responsibility* is considered the gold standard for feeding children.

The division of responsibility states that a parent is responsible for choosing the food, the time, and the location of meals, and the child is responsible for determining how much they eat and whether they eat.

In the absence of parents, the "when and where" becomes the teacher's responsibility. And the "how much" should continue to be the child's responsibility.

Children are not going to starve themselves: if they are hungry, they will eat.

Let's promote balanced eating with nutrition education, instead of restrictive and rules-oriented eating. Let's allow children the space to decide what foods they choose to eat. If they undereat and are hungry later on, they'll learn to eat more the next time. Likewise, if they overeat one specific type of food and develop a stomach ache, that is also a lesson learned in their exploration of nutrition.

When we're teaching nutrition let's focus on the nutrients that various foods will provide and the benefits to daily living that they will allow. But let's also go beyond nutrition and explore the other benefits food provides. Let's allow children the opportunity to develop their own relationship with food without the polarizing messages.

Just as the education curriculum changes, so too does the nutrition curriculum.

# relationships with food

## Tips for success

We need to recognize that parents often overpack their child's lunches for fear the child might become hungry midday—believe me, I am that parent.

We also need to recognize that young children's stomachs are much smaller than those of adults. That's one of the reasons why we have recess: so students have multiple opportunities to eat and refresh if they choose.

Food is one of the first areas where children start exhibiting their independence with decision-making. They may eat a lot some days, while other days not very much at all. They may love a specific food one day, and completely ignore it another day. This is their way of exploring eating. And we, as adults, need to encourage that.

Pressuring a child to eat more or less than they want can backfire and lead to negative nutrition outcomes.

Rather than focus on how much or how little they're eating at mealtimes, let's focus more on providing them experiences with food. Here are some ideas:

- Creating gardens in the classroom and learning about the foods they're planting and the growth process.
- Baking breads or culturing cheeses and learning about the history and varieties of these foods.
- Going on field trips to dairy or chicken farms to give them an understanding of where their food comes from.
- Having taste tests in the classroom and tying it into a lesson plan related to history, social studies, or even math.
- Bringing farmers, bakers, or other food producers in as guest lecturers with food-related activities to work through.

These are just a few examples. Nutrition can be incorporated into nearly any lesson plan. The more experiences children have with food, while learning about the origins of food, the more likely they are to try different foods.

And that is half the battle in getting them to expand their nutrition knowledge and food acceptance. 🍎

## RESOURCES

Visit [linktr.ee/KatieNutritionalResources](http://linktr.ee/KatieNutritionalResources) or scan the QR code for nutritional resources.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Katie Bartel is a registered dietitian, self-proclaimed ice-cream-aholic, and mom of a comic book and skateboard loving nine-year-old boy. To learn more, visit her website at [www.katiebartel.ca](http://www.katiebartel.ca).



## Katie's power cookies

### Ingredients

(yields approx. 30 cookies)

1 1/2 cups whole wheat flour  
1/2 tsp salt  
1 tsp baking soda  
1/2 tsp cinnamon  
1 tbsp flaxseed  
1 3/4 cups rolled oat flakes (quick cooking)  
1/2 cup sunflower seeds (shelled)  
1/2 cup pumpkin seeds (shelled)  
1/2 cup hemp hearts  
1/2 cup raisins  
1/3 cup olive oil  
1/4 molasses  
1 cup milk, soy milk, or almond milk  
3/4 cup dark chocolate chips or dark chocolate medallions

### Directions

Preheat oven to 350° F. Spray two large cookie sheets with non-stick cooking spray. In a large bowl combine flour, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon, and mix well. Add the oats, raisins, and seeds.

In another bowl mix oil, molasses, and milk. Beat until well-blended. Add the wet mixture to the dry, and mix well. Mix in chocolate chips or place 1/2 a chocolate medallion on top of each cookie once they are portioned out on the sheets.

Use a cookie scoop to form cookies and place them on the prepared cookie sheets.

Bake in preheated oven until cookies are golden brown on the edges and tops are set, about 20 minutes. Cool on racks.

1 cookie ~ 15g carbs and 4g protein





# Resisting Eurocentric standards and ideals in food studies

A conversation with **Megan Brevner** (she/her), **Martina Seo** (she/her), and **Joe Tong** (he/they), members of Teachers of Home Economics Specialization Association (THESA)



**SIMPLY PUT**, home economics was relevant before the COVID-19 pandemic—before the surge of sourdough bread-making and before sewing machines flew off the shelves for folks to sew masks and find their crafty sides. If you speak with any home economics teacher they can assert that they're proud of what they teach because they develop skills for life: preparing meals for ourselves, learning to mend and alter textile items to reduce fabric waste, and thinking critically about the choices we make as consumers, designers, and creators. However, one glaring issue remains in home economics classes and is an emerging discussion in our community: the Eurocentrism of foods courses.

Below, we use three questions to discuss how identity and culture is addressed in food studies courses. We also share our experiences of learning and unlearning approaches to food studies that develop equitable and liberatory practices.

## How do you share your own identity in your food studies courses?

**Megan:** In my classroom and teaching I use my personal identity as an example of one form of identity. I also highlight, celebrate, and encourage students' personal identities. This happens implicitly and explicitly through various assignments, projects, and recipes. Students are regularly encouraged to share their own identity and personalize their learning by choosing customized recipes and projects, and demonstrating their learning in ways that suit their personal needs and identities.

**Martina:** My parents moved to North Vancouver from Seoul, South Korea in 1970. Like many immigrant children in Canada, I had the "lunchbox moment." I was bullied for bringing Korean food for lunch in elementary school, so much so that I asked my mom to only send sandwiches and hot dogs to school for lunch. Now, I am so happy to represent Korean Canadian culture in my classroom. I try to encourage students to bring in their own recipes from their cultures. I also invite my students' parents and members from the Squamish Nation to come and share their food stories.

**Joe:** I find that I will share my identities in my classroom whether I try to or not. Growing up in Vancouver, I saw people who looked like me rejected for who they were: sometimes it was about food, sometimes it was for their dialects, mannerisms, or possessions. I didn't see my family, food, or culture represented authentically in my schooling; it often seemed like our cultures only existed as events to celebrate or a unit to study, rather than multidimensional stories and perspectives that were connected to everything we learned. I consistently ask my students to interact with the stories we share in our classroom by using their own perspectives to find connections, differences, and questions.

## How was food and culture addressed when you were a student?

**Megan:** My high school home economics class was more traditional. Our classes reflected Eurocentric values around things like table-setting and following specific recipes and methods. In class we had to follow everything exactly the way the teacher demonstrated and were marked for our appearance and product standards. Today in home economics, I teach differently. My focus is on the process and personalization, and creativity is encouraged. Students are encouraged to choose and customize recipes and challenge themselves, focusing on process over product.

iStock.com/PeopleImages



**Martina:** Growing up, I would have to say that home economics was a place where I could create. I learned how to make cookies, crepes, Chinese chow mein, fried rice, and tuna casseroles. I still have the recipes from 30 years ago. I believe food is culture, and it brings people together. A barrier that existed when I was a student, and is still present in my classes today, is that some students are averse to foods they are not familiar with. That being said, most students are keen to learn about different cultural foods because of globalization. Cultural awareness and acceptance of different cooking methods and ingredients would help introduce students to new flavours, dishes, and cooking practices.

**Joe:** My high school experience in food studies was a reason why I became a home economics teacher. My teachers brought in their own experiences and created opportunities for us to view, experience, and sometimes visit places to witness stories first-hand and try foods that may be new to us. They found authentic recipes and methods for us to explore in our classes and sourced ingredients from relevant stores, rather than settling for westernized versions of authentic ingredients. However, when I became a home economics teacher, I realized this approach to food and culture is not the status quo. Cultures that are othered in society may also be othered in food studies courses: separating anything other than Eurocentric recipes into a different unit or labelling them as "international," "ethnic," or "diverse," is problematic and reflects the white supremacy that exists in home economics.

### What efforts have you made to decolonize your curriculum?

**Megan:** To decolonize my curriculum I have interlaced Indigenous perspectives and principles of learning into units and course themes. I embrace students' backgrounds and create opportunities for them to bring their unique perspectives into the classroom by sharing their methods of cooking from their cultures. The biggest barrier was learning how to do this respectfully and appropriately, and not have it feel like tokenism. It can be challenging to teach about a culture or food you are not familiar with. I like to encourage my students to share their expertise, and I make sure they know that I am not the expert. I am a facilitator of their exploration of food and culture. We have lots to learn from everyone in our school community. Most importantly, I found I needed to allow time for students to reflect on their learning.

**Martina:** I didn't even realize how colonized home economics was until I attended the THESA Decolonization of Home Economics workshop last year. I've realized that in food studies we may normalize Eurocentric foods and we think of anything else as "exotic," when in reality our diverse student bodies may not share the same experiences. I often provide opportunities for students or caregivers to visit and share with us how to make their own traditional foods and stories. At the end of the day, I would like to represent my student body and be inclusive to all cultures.

**Joe:** As a queer person of colour teaching in a cis-het, white, female-dominated profession, my existence is an act of resistance in itself. Throughout my career I have worked consistently to resist Eurocentrism in education and release the need to validate my experiences and ways of doing (that are inherently different from dominant views). The days of Martha Stewart as the ideal are long gone. Bringing in the perspectives and existing knowledge of our student communities is far more important than upholding Eurocentric ideals and standards that are found in food studies. I approach decolonization as an act of radical love for our students. It's important to critique our own practices and engage in uncomfortable conversations with ourselves and our students. I believe we can motivate ourselves to change our practices by asking questions such as, "Whose knowledge and stories are normalized? Who is represented and who isn't? Who is telling the story, and should they be telling the story?" 🐾



### ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Megan Brevner (M.Ed) is a home economics teacher and department head for communicating student learning in Surrey. Martina Seo (M.Ed.) is a home economics teacher in West Vancouver. Joe Tong (M.Ed.) is a home economics teacher in Richmond and sessional instructor at the University of British Columbia, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy.



# Leave the logs behind: Inclusive approaches to learning about food

By Jen Arbo (she/her), parent, New Westminster

**EARLIER THIS SCHOOL YEAR**, my child brought home a photocopied sheet to track both the amount of sleep they got each night as well as their food intake for a week-long period. Mine is a diligent student, so each day they carefully tracked how much sleep they had and what food went into their body. No context was included on the log, simply a list of foods and checkboxes indicating hours of sleep.

While great for math, statistics, or measurement lessons, food logging isn't the most effective way to learn about food. In fact, food logs could have unintended consequences and long-term implications related to food security, shame, and disordered eating. Food logs are comparative, are assessed by someone who isn't a health professional, and have few learning outcomes that will help children navigate the world. As well, food logs do not consider cultural preferences and have little correlation to an individual's unique scenario based on activity levels and overall health.

The Canada Food Guide gives us current, science-based approaches to healthy eating, but children and families who are living in poverty often don't have the ability to choose, for example, whole grains over processed grains. According to Food Banks Canada, 1.1 million Canadians accessed food banks in March 2019, with two out of every five food bank clients being children or youth. The COVID-19 pandemic only exacerbated those numbers, with some food banks reporting a 50% increase in demand. While community groups and school districts offer some support for hungry kids, students logging their food only reinforces the gaps they're experiencing—gaps that are beyond their control.

Inclusive and culturally appropriate approaches to learning about nutrition in schools need not be onerous on educators. Here are some ideas to make the lessons on food a bit spicier.





### Look at the big picture

Logs are granular; they are a snapshot of a moment in time and don't show the big picture. The week my child logged their food, there was a welcome back picnic at school and a family get-together. Both times we had burgers, hot dogs, pop, and chips. Taken on their own, these food choices aren't necessarily the most nutrient dense; but in the big picture, these meals were fun, social activities with food as the common theme that brought us together. After 18 months of living through a global pandemic, having some laughs over sugary sodas and fatty foods was much more important than a log that failed to consider regular eating patterns.

### Get them excited about food

Students, especially the young ones, are curious scientists who have questions about how the world around them works. Logging food is a performative chore. Instead, approach lessons about healthy eating by seeking answers to questions they might already have. How do nutrients actually fuel the body? What is a carb? How is their favourite snack actually made? What do they wonder? As a group, classes can explore the answers and brainstorm solutions.

For older students, exercises related to critical thinking, reading nutrition and ingredient labels, and understanding how misinformation is used to market food are valuable as they approach

their adult lives. Science has evolved, and certain aspects, such as metrics used to measure health or body weight, are being refuted by experts as more research is uncovered.

Arming students with the tools necessary to think of their own unique bodies as they come across information will assist them in the long term. This act of checking in with their bodies will help with understanding fullness cues, and can help them understand factors that make them reach for specific food items.

### Understanding diversity

We've probably all heard the expression "eat the rainbow." This refers to the idea that humans should strive to eat as many varied fruits and vegetables as possible, trying new flavours, textures, and colours. But "the rainbow" should really extend beyond produce: diverse diets in general ensure your body gets access to a variety of nutrients from a variety of sources.

Understanding diversity in human diets is also a great topic for students to explore. Access to culturally appropriate foods is an important part of "food sovereignty," which extends the concept of food security. While "food security" refers to ensuring access to enough food, "food sovereignty" is the right to healthy and culturally appropriate food, produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods. With students learning more

and more about life from a global perspective, studying these concepts will support them and help them understand food production around the world.

### Encourage eating together!

While the pandemic may have limited in-class celebrations where students bring foods from home to share, it doesn't stop students from planning dishes and full menus they could eat together with their families or daydream the meal they'd serve their idols or heroes if they ever had the chance. What does their parent love to eat? What ingredients would they need to prepare it? What is their favourite Olympian's favourite snack? What is the latest pop star's pre-concert meal? What would their favourite comic book or video game character eat for lunch? There is so much fun to be had in dreaming up those perfect celebration meals.

Ultimately, lessons about food and healthy eating need to cultivate a sense of playfulness and endless possibility in order to stick. Looking outside a standard food log can really add the zest you might need to make sure all students feel included and excited to dig in about food. 🍴

### RESOURCES

Scan the QR code or visit [linktr.ee/LeaveLogsBehind](https://linktr.ee/LeaveLogsBehind) for links to food and nutrition resources.



iStock.com/fcafotodigital



A close-up photograph of a person's hand holding a green and yellow striped squash. The person is wearing a blue long-sleeved shirt and a light blue face mask. The background is a blurred field of tall grass or crops.

# JUST FOOD

An open-access educational resource for integrating agriculture, food systems, and anti-oppression into K–12 curriculum

Joshua Berson Photography

**By Meryn Corkery** (she/her), **Colin Dring** (he/him), **Joyce Liao** (she/her), and **Will Valley** (he/him),  
Centre for Sustainable Food Systems, Faculty of Land and Food Systems, UBC

**IN OUR ROLES** as educators in post-secondary institutions, we frequently use a simple introductory activity with undergraduate students: we ask them to describe their ideal food system. They often articulate a field-to-fork journey with themes that touch upon the following:

- ▶ Agricultural production models that feed the world and regenerate biodiversity and ecosystems.
- ▶ Efficient, safe, and low-carbon distribution systems.
- ▶ Ethical and zero-waste processing.
- ▶ Affordable, culturally appropriate food assets.
- ▶ Time to shop, eat, cook, and grow food.
- ▶ Opportunities to share and celebrate through communal eating, free fridges, and other mutual-aid efforts.

Terms such as sustainable, organic, local, family-run, fair-trade, and clean are frequently used. However, terms like

equity, justice, anti-oppressive, or decolonial are mostly absent. Our students rarely venture into areas that tend to lurk in the shadows of modern, industrial, capitalist food systems.

We follow the activity with discussion questions meant to explore and unpack the hidden side of food systems, such as the following:

- ▶ Who is doing the work in this ideal food system? Is it migrant labour imported from other countries?
- ▶ Is the distribution of prominent, prestigious, and powerful jobs in the food system skewed significantly toward one gender?
- ▶ Who determines how and what just and sustainable food futures look like?
- ▶ Is your ideal food system built upon unceded, stolen land of Indigenous Peoples?

Our student-led group developed the Just Food Educational Resource to give educators the tools to dive into these types of questions with their learners. The resource is structured into seven modules, plus a facilitator's guide. The facilitator's guide helps build the foundations for collectively examining implicit biases, complicities, and traumas, as well as exploring the values, beliefs, and assumptions that underlie individuals' experiences and understandings of food systems in relation to others.

The introductory module lays the foundation of understanding food justice as "the struggle against racism, exploitation, and oppression taking place within the food system that addresses inequality's root causes both within and beyond the food chain."<sup>1</sup> The remaining six modules explore different components of food justice and their intersectionality as a way of exploring food system inequities: Agriculture as a Colonial Project; Diasporic Foodways; Migrant Labour; Local Food Movement; Food Systems Governance; and Gender, Equity, and Food Security.

The food system is not immune to the social, political, environmental, and interpersonal forces that shape society more broadly. Globally, women work almost an hour more per day than men and take on disproportionately more unpaid tasks than men, including housework and cooking.<sup>2</sup> In Canada, our agricultural system is powered by 58,800 temporary foreign workers who grow much of the local food Canadians eat (20% of the total labour force),<sup>3</sup> but are not granted permanent residency on arrival and are afforded lower standards of living and reduced access to basic services. Locally, in Vancouver (but in other communities as well), learner populations are diverse. Forty-four percent of learners speak a language other than English at home, and 140 languages are represented in the learner population.<sup>4</sup> This underscores the importance of highlighting the cultural diversity of foods to authentically hold up our students' lived experiences.

If these factors significantly shape, influence, and permeate our current food systems, then why are topics of labour inequities, racism, sexism, and colonialism not more prominent in our students' imaginations?

Food studies in K–12 educational settings in BC is often limited to a small subset of the applied design, skills, and technologies curricula, when really food can be integrated to teach a wide variety of social, political, and environmental issues in alignment with the BC curriculum. These are fundamental issues that learners will need to be prepared to address as educated citizens, and will only become more pertinent throughout their lifetime. Anti-oppressive and justice-oriented food systems education provides numerous opportunities for experiential, inquiry-based outdoor learning and competency development.

While the Just Food modules were primarily developed for use in a post-secondary context, all of the content and themes are relevant to secondary learners as well. The modules align with core competency development, especially personal and social competencies as learners explore their own social identities and place themselves within larger social and political systems throughout the modules. For example, the Migrant Labour module aligns with social studies curricular outcomes associated with understanding how migration shaped Canada, historically and through ongoing processes. The Diasporic Foodways module builds off of understandings of culture and food present in Social Studies 11 and Culinary Arts 11. Other modules feature content links to Urban Studies, Political Studies, Food Studies, Human Geography, Social Justice, and BC First Peoples 12.

Many organizations are already linking anti-oppressive and justice-oriented food systems education to the BC curriculum. Get in touch with local food literacy and land-based learning organizations, such as Fresh Roots or the Environmental Youth Alliance, to learn more. Or reach out to a provincial organization, like Farm to School BC, to be connected with organizations in your region. Build off of the modules in the Just Food Educational Resource, or better yet, have your learners create their own food justice module about a topic they are passionate about. Form a cohort of like-minded educators engaging in this work to discuss what issues, emotions, and responses arise, both in yourself and in your learners. This is a call-in to use the power of food to connect your community of learners to the world around them. And while doing so, equity, anti-oppression, and justice must be kept at the forefront so that we do not unintentionally reproduce the harms of past and present as we collectively work toward a better future. 🍌

## RESOURCES

Visit [www.justfood.landfood.ubc.ca](http://www.justfood.landfood.ubc.ca) for the Just Food Educational Resource. Additional resources mentioned in this article can be found at [linktr.ee/JustFoodResources](http://linktr.ee/JustFoodResources) or by scanning the QR code.



1 Hislop D 2014 Reaping Equity across the USA: FJ Organizations Observed at the National Scale Master's Thesis (University of California–Davis)

2 [www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/06/its-official-women-work-nearly-an-hour-longer-than-men-every-day](http://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/06/its-official-women-work-nearly-an-hour-longer-than-men-every-day)

3 [www.honeycouncil.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/1.-AG-TFW-Arrivals-Provincial-Analysis-Aug-2-2020-BIL.pdf](http://www.honeycouncil.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/1.-AG-TFW-Arrivals-Provincial-Analysis-Aug-2-2020-BIL.pdf)

4 [www.vsb.bc.ca/District/Pages/Default.aspx](http://www.vsb.bc.ca/District/Pages/Default.aspx)





# *Growing an appetite for science and agriculture*

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*By Sunjum Jhaj (she/her),  
Editor, Teacher magazine*

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**FOR DECADES**, Sardis Secondary School in Chilliwack has fostered students' interest in farming through a hands-on agriculture program.

During my visit in early November to the Sardis Secondary School Farm, several students shared their personal connections to farming with me. Some lived or worked (often lived and worked) on family farms and had career ambitions focused on agriculture, others found a passion for growing food because of the school's agriculture program. As more than one student mentioned, "Chilliwack is a proud farming community."

Two of their teachers, Joe Massie and Tania Toth (pictured right), have deep roots in the farming community. Both grew up on family farms and have woven their agriculture knowledge into their practice as science teachers.

Tania and Joe inherited a greenhouse set up by their predecessors at the school. At that time, the greenhouse was predominantly used to grow plants for the school's annual Mother's Day plant sale.

"The plant sale has been a long-standing tradition at Sardis Secondary," said Joe.





*"You can tell how passionate these teachers are about what they're teaching. They really bring a spark to the classroom every day. The best parts of the course are being able to give back to the community and learning how to grow food and being happy with where it's come from."*

*– Chloe D., Grade 11*

Students plant and tend to their crops in the greenhouse for months leading up to Mother's Day. On the day of the plant sale, the students host members of the community and share their plant knowledge with their customers.

Over time Joe worked to modernize the greenhouse with improved irrigation and hanging baskets. As the greenhouse improved, so too did the plants. The plants available at the Mother's Day sale are now industry-standard plants and hundreds of community members turn up each year to buy what the students have grown.

With new modernizations in place, the students are also able to grow veggies in the greenhouse. This allows the students to practise and learn about agriculture skills throughout the entire year: first with a flowering crop, then with a vegetable crop.

"Every time we do something new, there's a big learning curve," said Tania. "We leaned heavily on community partners to learn how to grow greenhouse veggies."

Bob Long, the previous principal at Sardis Secondary, knew of a five-acre piece of land owned by the Chilliwack School District that was on an Agricultural Land

Reserve. At the time, the land was sitting empty. Bob had an initial idea to use the land for the school's agriculture program.

"After the 2009 Mother's Day plant sale, which was a huge success and left me fired up and excited, I went home and wrote a rough proposal with all sorts of things we could do with the empty land," said Joe.

Joe and Tania worked together to write a formal proposal to expand the school agriculture program to include an off-site school farm. It took two years of meetings, grant applications, and fundraising before the school farm became a reality.

"Growth takes time because everything needs fundraising," said Tania.

The local community in Chilliwack has played a big role in getting the Sardis Secondary School Farm up and running. Community members, local businesses, and community farmers have generously donated money for essential farm equipment and structures, seeds for planting, and their time to share knowledge and skills with the students.

"A lot of people have propped us up along the way," said Tania. "We couldn't

have done this without all the support from the community, as well as support from the school, the district, and district maintenance staff."

When the farm was finally operational with a well for irrigation, the students were able to get their hands dirty and work on the land.

Planting in the spring and harvesting in the fall are wonderful learning opportunities for students; however, the farm needs ongoing maintenance over the summer months when school is not in session. For years, Joe and Tania volunteered their time through the summer to care for the farm and tend to the crops alongside students.

Each principal Tania and Joe have worked with at Sardis Secondary has supported the farm in some way. Diego Testa, their second school principal, was instrumental in securing paid summer teaching positions to compensate Joe and Tania for their work with students on the farm over the summer months. And Dan Heilser, their third and current school principal, continues to advocate for the farm on the district level.

"It's a lesson in communication and relationship building," said Joe. "The relationships are what allow us to grow." →



*“I really like being outside and being hands-on with our food. It’s a way of life and it’s important for everybody to know a little bit about farming and agriculture.” – Adri G., Grade 12*

When Joe and Tania set out to create the school farm, they had three big ideas in mind for the farm: first, to connect secondary, middle, and elementary classrooms in a meaningful way that fosters mentorship and relationship-building; second, to educate students about agricultural practices in BC and create opportunities for students to develop skills and career goals; and third, to increase place-based learning.

During my visit to the Sardis school farm, it was easy to see they've accomplished all three goals, as well as many other objectives they've laid out for the farm.

Today, the farm has secondary, middle, and elementary school programs. Programs for all three school levels run during the school year and during the summer. Students are responsible for all the farm work including, planting, harvesting, irrigation, weeding, and pest management. There are opportunities for students from different grades and schools to interact, work co-operatively, and mentor each other.

As more classes join the program, the farm has expanded to create unique and inclusive learning opportunities. For example, Sarah Balsillie, an elementary teacher at Promontory Elementary, has started a beekeeping operation for the elementary students who now produce honey at the farm each year. And the elementary garden has been expanded to include a garden bed that is wheelchair accessible.

Learning on the farm extends beyond sustainable agriculture to include topics such as food justice, food security, human impacts on the environment, and climate change. The students working and learning on the farm have directly experienced the effects of climate change several times throughout the program.

First, the summer heat dome and forest fire smoke made it difficult for students to spend a full day on the farm. Then November's atmospheric river flooded several communities across the province. The extreme weather in the Fraser Valley

resulted in flooded homes, closed roads, and devastating effects on crops and livestock. Farmers face threats induced by climate change every day.

The Sardis Secondary School Farm was luckier than many Fraser Valley farms and is expected to be fully operational again by spring. When the farm reopens, Tania and Joe will once again start working toward some big goals for the farm's future. A classroom building on the farm to do theory work, an orchard with fruit and nut trees, and developing ongoing relationships to secure products and maintain the farm's health are all goals for the future of the farm. As with everything else on the farm, these goals will be accomplished through community partnerships, fundraisers, and grants.

“It brings me joy to see the students learning about sustainable food production in a place that so many people have worked to create for them,” said Tania. “I’m grateful to be part of such a learning environment.” 🍎

*“I love coming to the farm.  
And my family loves it when I bring food home.”  
– Michael S., Grade 7*

## Photos

All photos taken at the Sardis Secondary School Farm in Chilliwack by Joshua Berson Photography.



## What do they do with the food from the farm?

The Sardis Secondary School Farm has an ongoing community supported agriculture program where community members can sign up to receive a weekly basket of fresh seasonal produce throughout the summer months, when students are harvesting crops.

The school farm has also partnered with a local business that agreed to provide plants and seeds for the farm to grow food for the Bowls of Hope program. Bowls of Hope provides 850 kids in Chilliwack schools with a free, warm lunch every day.

And of course, some of the food is eaten and taken home by students enrolled in the program.

Donna Frost, the culinary arts teacher at Sardis Secondary, has worked with Joe and Tania to introduce a farm-to-table program for the agriculture students. Students get to prepare and cook the food they worked so hard to plant and harvest.

"I was interested in learning about the farm, and I noticed the kids got to take some food home, but they didn't know how to cook it," said Donna. "So I thought it was a good opportunity for the kids to learn some cooking skills."

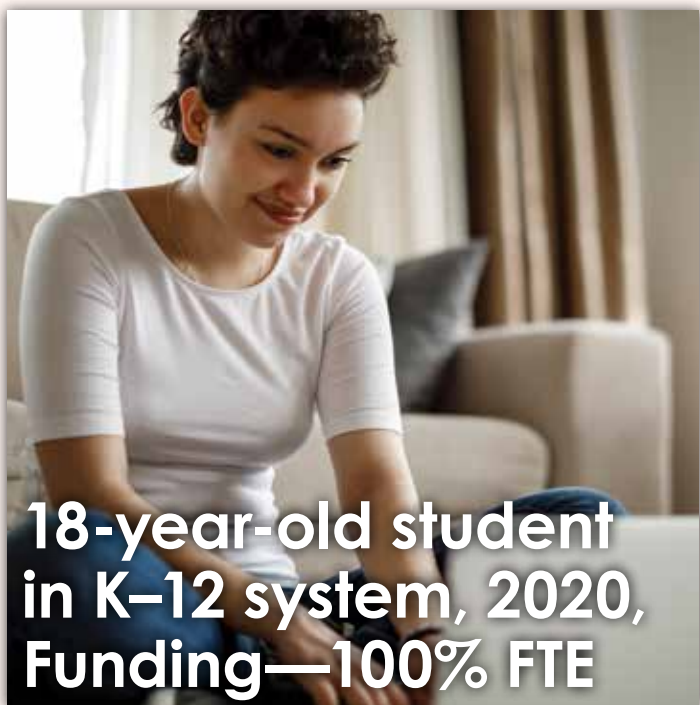
Students have used farm produce to make salsas, shish kebabs, salads, eggplant parmesan, and more. Oftentimes picky eaters are willing to try foods they normally wouldn't because they were involved in growing and cooking it. As they prepare the meals, the students also learn about nutrition, the value of fresh ingredients, and the importance of buying local produce.

Throughout the fall, the school farm donates food to Sardis Secondary's culinary arts program. The culinary arts program prepares and serves food in the school cafeteria for all students to enjoy.

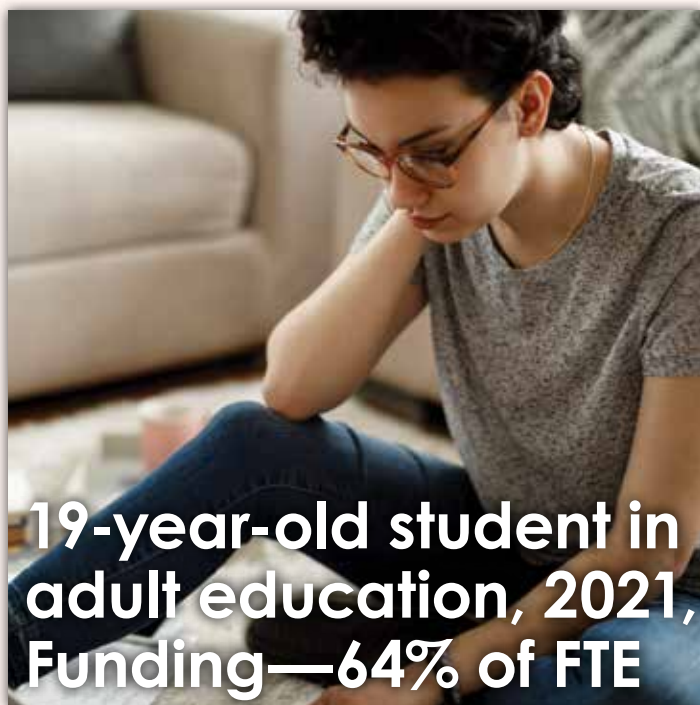
"When you have good quality food to start with, you don't have to do a lot of it to make something delicious," said Donna.







**18-year-old student  
in K–12 system, 2020,  
Funding—100% FTE**



**19-year-old student in  
adult education, 2021,  
Funding—64% of FTE**

### By the BCTF Adult Education Advisory Committee

**HANNAH MISSED** most of her Grade 11 year because of illness and struggled with school when she returned. Despite staying one extra year in high school, she was not able to complete her grad requirements. While in high school, Hannah had access to the following support services:

- education psychologist
- speech pathologist
- support teacher
- youth and family worker
- counsellor
- drug and alcohol counsellor
- career counsellor
- childcare worker
- Indigenous education support worker
- ESL support
- education assistant
- support rooms and time
- her course teachers
- smaller classes.

**THE NEXT YEAR**, Hannah, now 19, entered her local adult education centre to complete her high school requirements. At the adult education centre, Hannah has access to:

- her course teachers...

**What a difference  
a year makes.**

**ADULT EDUCATION** is an important part of public education. It's also one of the most privatized. As funding and support for public adult education decreases, private institutions are capitalizing on the existing gap. However, many of the students we serve come from marginalized backgrounds and need access to quality, public education to work toward their goals for brighter futures. Our adult education students include the following:

- Adults returning to school to graduate.
- Graduated adults needing prerequisites or whose prerequisites have expired.
- Adults with childcare and work scheduling challenges.
- Adults new to Canada who look to the school community as a safe and welcoming place; for many, school is their first community.
- Parents wanting to return to school and support their families.
- Parents needing to improve their employment options to better support their families.
- Incarcerated students.
- Marginalized students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, often affected by intergenerational poverty and racism.

These students deserve access to necessary supports and equity in funding. And adult educators deserve access to the same collective agreement rights as their K–12 colleagues with equitable working conditions, equitable benefits, and job security. 9

iStock.com/damircudic



# An inequitable note: The adult education asterisk

By asterisk educators, Surrey

**WE ARE ASTERISK EDUCATORS.** We looked on in envy as our colleagues shared their excitement about their experiences on the province-wide professional development day in October.

There are no such days for us because we are asterisk educators.\*

We have the same qualifications and teach the same courses as our K-12 colleagues, but even when we work full-time plus an extra two nights each week, we will never make the salary they do. Asterisk educators working full-time, five days per week, earn 800 hours per year; if they also work two nights each week, they'll earn 960 hours per year. For my colleagues who work in K-12, 1,000 earning hours is considered normal.

We are not paid on statutory holidays. We do not have paid prep time. We are second-class members of our profession.

We sometimes wonder if the unjust and inequitable treatment we receive is related to the students we serve.

Asterisk educators have students who come from society's margins. People recovering from addictions, homelessness, and who have been incarcerated. People who have fallen through the giant holes in our social safety net come to us seeking a bridge to a better future.

Students, many school-aged, also come to us after having fallen through the cracks in the underfunded elementary and secondary school system. They may have cognitive, emotional, or physical disabilities, or unstable mental health.

Some of our students have language or learning challenges and are sent to us after they age-out of regular high schools.

Some of our students are refugees or newcomers who arrive in Canada in their teenage years and do not have the time to learn English well enough to transition into the regular English classes in a secondary school.

Without us, the asterisk (adult) educators, many of these students would be headed for a cycle of poverty and minimum wage jobs. Through education, students can become literate participants in our democracy, and walk on a pathway to a more equitable future.

Why would a government that campaigned on a platform of progressive politics and a commitment to poverty reduction not do all that it can to end the inequitable working conditions of adult education teachers and the inequitable learning conditions of adult students? Why are our students funded at 64% of what other K-12 students are funded?

Right now, the average age of asterisk educators is 65. It wasn't always this way,

but these days many of us have come out of retirement to teach again. Any new asterisk educator doesn't stay for long; they often move on to the regular K-12 system where they can make more money, get the same prep time and professional development that our colleagues get, and be freed from the asterisk.

Isn't it long past time that all adult education teachers become asterisk-free?

Our union has begun a new bargaining round with the government. For each bargaining round over the past 20 years, we asterisk educators have campaigned for redress.

We do so again.

We are asking our asterisk-free colleagues to support us in our quest for equity. When the next contract is signed, we would like to have the same rights.

We'd like to be asterisk-free. 9

**\*In the Surrey teachers' collective agreement, there is the following note:**  
**Any article or clause in this Agreement which does NOT apply to adult education teachers is preceded by an asterisk (\*).**

## **\*F.21.6 DISTRICT PRO-D ACTIVITIES**

Notwithstanding the foregoing, by mutual agreement the parties may designate one (1) of the four (4) non-instructional days (to which reference is made in Article F.21.2) for district or jointly organized professional development activities.

## **\*F.21.2 SCHOOL NON-INSTRUCTIONAL DAYS**

At least four (4) non-instructional days will be approved by the Board for school-planned and teacher-directed professional development activities. Board approval will not be unreasonably withheld or denied.

## **\*F.21.3 STA CONVENTION DAY**

One (1) non-instructional day will be granted for the Surrey Teachers' Association convention.

# Disparity within the ranks affects students and teachers

By **Danika Cottingham** (she/her) and **Nicole Hamilton** (she/her),  
online learning teachers, Courtenay

From the Government of BC website, on the new online learning model:<sup>1</sup>

*Regardless of whether they're in the classroom or learning remotely, all students will:*

- *Have equitable and consistent access to curriculum*
- *Have opportunities to form personal connections with educators*
- *Use flexible timetable and course options to meet their needs*
- *Learn in a way that best meets their personal learning needs*

**MOST PEOPLE** can agree that the above is not just an ideal, but that it should be the norm in educational practice today. Now, imagine being a teacher working in a classroom where the above is expected, but where there are no limits on class size and composition, so the realities of your job are reduced to pure survival and attempting to do your best, all while knowing it isn't enough. Suppose that, on any given day as you arrive at your school, you are tasked with welcoming another new student to your class, and another, and another. That is a reality for online teachers around the province.

Our collective agreement currently has no language for the online learning (OL) environment, and the consequences of this are evident: unrealistic and unsustainable workload for teachers and an educational experience that is not as personalized as it should be for learners.

Last year, the average secondary OL teacher was responsible for over 670 students in a 10-month period—that's the size of some entire schools!

As online teachers, we know OL has been an important part of public education in BC for decades, and we have served students and families who either by circumstance or by choice are completing school requirements online. Online learning has gained momentum in recent years, because of a growing demand for quality alternative education opportunities for BC students. Additionally, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, enrollment in online learning has reached an all-time high. Some families are just now learning about this option, while others have developed trust in a system they previously saw as inferior to classroom education.



## Consider the following:

### Limitless class sizes create unsustainable workloads for OL teachers

OL teachers endeavour to create meaningful learning experiences for each of our students; we know that building relationships is at the heart of student success. Every teacher will tell you that this is challenging and rewarding work, but for OL teachers, the task is made even more difficult because of the high number of ever-changing students we are responsible for. Our class roster is ever-changing because of the continuous enrollment and asynchronous delivery model we function within.

We strive to connect with every student and provide individualized attention so all students can thrive and learn, but there are not enough hours in the day to connect with hundreds of students—many OL secondary teachers have over 260 students at any given time in the year.

### The absence of class-size language creates a dangerous dynamic in BC's public school system

As students switch from in-person to online learning, the availability of face-to-face FTE is affected.

With no limits on class sizes, students can be added to already-existing OL teacher workloads with no additional staffing time funded, as is currently the case in many districts.

### OL teachers need your support

Unionism is founded upon principles of solidarity, with fair and equitable treatment for all members. As we enter a new round of bargaining, we ask our colleagues to stand in solidarity to achieve what is ultimately in our collective best interest: limits for class size and composition in *all* classrooms, and for all teachers, so that all BC students have equitable opportunities to access the individualized and quality learning environments they need and deserve. 9

Stay tuned for part two of our online learning series:  
"The not-so-secret life of an online secondary teacher"

### EDITOR'S NOTE

Online learning (OL) was previously referred to as distributed learning (DL).



# Bringing skilled trades and technologies into the classroom

By **James Maxwell** (he/him), Director of Competitions, Skills Canada BC and  
**Jennifer Fox** (she/her), teacher and BC representative for National Skills Public Speaking Competition

**CANADA IS FACING** a shortage of trained tradespersons and technologists. How many students in your school are thinking about whether to be a welder, machinist, medical laboratory technologist, or radiology technologist? These are examples of possible future shortfalls in trades and technology careers. How many students are even aware of all the possible careers that may fit their skills and interests? How many people know the basic difference between a trade and a technology? Skills Canada BC is here to help classroom teachers.

Skills Canada BC is a non-profit in operation since 1994. Skills BC leads and co-ordinates youth engagement in trades and technology careers, primarily by arranging Olympic-style competitions on a regional level in BC. There are 13 Skills BC Regions across the province, with competitions every February or March. Regional competitions lead to a provincial competition, provincial competitions lead to Skills Canada national competitions, and every two years Team Canada competes at World Skills.

Skills BC is also involved in creating and distributing trades and technology awareness materials and resources.

The Inspire! portal contains resources for classroom teachers to address trades and technology education. These include videos, the Inspire Classroom Presentation (which is a PowerPoint linked to a set of toolboxes that feature two hands-on trades awareness activities), and online activities and challenges. Examples of past online challenges include Woodworking Challenge, Fruit and Veggie Art Challenge, and Paper Airplane Challenge.

Competitions are organized by grade level with a Junior Skills category (Grades 6–9), Secondary Skills (Grades 10–12), and Post-Secondary Skills.

The competition documents for Junior Skills are also relevant for the BC applied design, skills, and technology curriculum. Many secondary competition skills can be addressed from inside the classroom: for example, auto technology, welding, animation, TV/video, cabinetmaking, cooking, and baking, to name just a few. Some competitions would require an extracurricular focus, including public speaking, workplace safety, and job search. Documents that describe each competition are available at [www.skillscanada.bc.ca](http://www.skillscanada.bc.ca).

A successful Women in Trades conference, first held in the Peace Region, is planned to be added to as many regions this year as possible.



## How can you and/or your class get involved?

- Sign up for weekly emails to stay up to date on competitions and resources. You can sign up by clicking on "Newsletters" under the "Resources" tab at [www.skillscanada.bc.ca](http://www.skillscanada.bc.ca).
- Check the competitions documents page on our web-page to see if there are events you and your students are interested in.
- Find out if the competition you're interested in is hosted in your region. If it isn't, consider talking to the regional co-ordinator to see if it can be added. Maybe even gather a few other teachers to work together or offer to be the tech chair and run the new competition in your region.
- Bring your class to a regional competition to participate or watch (if COVID-19 protocols and school district policies allow). Events are often open to the public and have included try-a-trade events for middle school groups.
- Check the Inspire! portal for resources to use in the classroom.
- Register competitors for a competition in your region.
- Volunteer to be a judge in your regional competition.

The staff at Skills BC are happy to work with you, share information, or answer any questions. It is our partnership with educators that make this program a success. 🍌

## Skills Canada alum on Top Chef Canada

Siobhan Detkavich, based in Kelowna, is the youngest and first female Indigenous chef to compete on Top Chef Canada (in its ninth season, which aired this year). The 21-year-old Detkavich also competed in Skills Canada while in high school, and placed bronze—something she says opened doors for her as a chef.



# Honouring Our Elders Portrait Legacy Project

By **Perry Rath** (he/him), art teacher and settler on Cas Yikh House Territory, Gidimt'en Clan, Witsuwit'en Nation

**AT SMITHERS SECONDARY SCHOOL (SSS)** we have a biennial project that has created an incredible legacy in our school and town. The Honouring Our Elders Portrait Legacy Project uses art to make strong connections between cultures, generations, students, and the community. These relationships are built over several months, as students paint large 4 - by 4-foot portraits of one Witsuwit'en Elder and one non-Indigenous elder. The artworks are then unveiled in a ceremony witnessed by family members, close friends, and other students. Within this context, the power of art-making has healed and bridged rifts in our community, and has engaged reconciliation. It has touched many lives over its 15 years, and has grown into an established program.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** Outside of the Office of the Wet'suwet'en, the spelling Witsuwit'en is used in the community. This spelling is in keeping with a writing system approved by the hereditary chiefs and Witsuwit'en Language and Culture Authority in 1993.<sup>1</sup>



The project began in 2005 with conversations among our district Indigenous principal Birdy Markert, in-school asset workers Millie Gunanoot and Melanie Morin, and myself. It aimed to bridge cultures and generations artistically—to connect us and promote learning from one another, particularly from Elders in our community who have contributed so much as wise counsels, positive role models, and active citizens. Today, more than ever, it seems as if the contributions of those who have come before go unacknowledged. Perhaps this lack of connection is due in part to the emphasis on “future” and “technological” progress, and not enough on traditional knowledge sharing.

We could see many students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, struggling with various aspects of growing up: coming of age, finding their purpose, making sense of the world and their impact on it, and why they should care. From our educational reading and our experience with youth, we were aware of the importance of younger generations bonding with Elders, receiving trusted guidance, or having a steady figure to understand where they come from—this connection can provide a crucial foundation for growth and learning.

Our search for eligible Elders is thorough. Each time we start a new cycle of the project, we research our community and find a range of tremendous individuals who have lived inspirational lives. Our mission is to honour Elders still alive, so that they may feel the palpable gratitude from the community. A selection committee chooses one Elder from the Witsuwit'en Nation (rotating between the five clans) and one from the non-Indigenous community.

The student painters typically do not know the Elders when they begin the project. Over time, through the intimate process of painting, they develop a relationship and wish to learn more about the person behind the portrait. From the families, we start to hear the stories emerge.

As artists, the students are honoured to be adding to the artistic and cultural legacy of our school and community; creating a tribute to important local people becomes a significant historical contribution.

It can be a daunting task to paint such a large and public portrait, and students challenge themselves in ways they would not have imagined. As their teacher and mentor, I get to be closely involved in the painters' processes. It is amazing to see them develop, to see what ignites in them as they meet this task with authenticity and dignity. The depth of personal dedication and artistic growth is impressive. The student artists also find that they learn about organizational aspects, such as project management, self-pacing, and motivation.

For the Witsuwit'en Elders, we always include their clan crest somewhere in the painting. It is important that the connection to family clan be acknowledged.

As the painting nears completion, we begin the preparations for the unveiling ceremony. We have developed this

stage closely consulting with and led by the Witsuwit'en members of our team. This occasion can be very moving, as families and friends of the Elders gather, along with our students, to witness the presentations and hear the life stories of the Elders, outlining their societal contributions and the challenges they faced.

The pride and emotion brought out by the unveiling ceremony is uplifting. It provides the student artists with recognition for their work. It honours the esteemed Elders and their families for their accomplishments and provides a platform for close friends and relations to share stories about the Elders. Much like the traditional Witsuwit'en Feast governance system, which invites people to hold witness to important events, the unveiling ceremony enables our young people to hold witness to the lives of the Elders and learn about local histories often previously unknown to them. Certainly, the hope of those of us who organize this project is that the experience will help our students, both viewers and participants, elevate their own actions in the world and increase everyone's capacity for personal and social development. The ceremonies →



**Opposite:** Portrait of Mabel Forsythe painted by Megan Randall in 2017.

**Right:** Portrait of Rosemary Fox painted by Emerenne Saefkow in 2017.

include traditional drumming, song and dance, as well as a shared meal, with the structure and protocol of a Feast occasion. The Elders then interact with one another's families and the students. This project provides a way for people to connect directly and learn about each other's lives and experiences first-hand.

The ceremony contributes significantly to stability and continuity in our school and community. Over the years, we have seen the positive transformation experienced by each party: the Elders and families, the student artists, and the student witnesses. Families and participants continue to tell stories about the positive impact of the project. Family members have approached students years later to offer their gratitude for their handiwork.

For years to come, students will visit the school and see their grandparents, aunties, and uncles on the wall, looking out at them. I have collected many quotes from people over the years about the impact of this project. Here are two such contributions:

Mel Bazil, the grandson of Lucy Rose Verigin (Bazil), one of our 2015 portrait subjects, said, "I was treated so kindly at all the events. I witnessed other families listening and treating each other with solidarity. The Elder's portrait unveilings are events that are reminiscent of the times when people stopped what they were doing to look at each other and take the time to rejoice together."

Dezirae DaCosta, a 2009 student artist, reflected on the personal and community impact of the project:

*"...[the ceremony] was a coming together moment that has inspired me up until this day. At the Honouring the Elders Potlatch, I saw the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community standing side by side, participating with each other, eating a meal together in an expression of cross-cultural sharing that in my childhood was rare to see, as the legacy and current day realities of racism, violence, and colonization run deep in the North.*

*While it was personally gratifying to be recognized as an artist and be asked to participate (a fact that boosted my confidence and self-esteem during a particularly difficult time in my life), over time, I have realized that the most impactful part of the project on me was the example it set on how to go about making peace and justice. I believe the path forward for reconciliation and community healing is through restorative justice, coming together, making connections, and sharing.*

*Projects like the Elders Portrait Legacy Project taught me that change and healing come from acknowledging our commonalities, sharing space, honouring voices that have been oppressed, participating when appropriate, and most of all, engaging with others compassionately and collaboratively. I have seen it happen, I have been a part of it, and it has influenced me to this day.*

*I cannot explain fully how deeply the project impacted my beliefs in community, humanity, and the healing power of art. I also cannot acknowledge how much being asked to do the project helped me feel more confident in myself. For someone who felt like they didn't even belong in their own family or community in so many ways, being asked to be a part of such an important cross-community event made me feel like I mattered to my community for one of the first times in my life."*

We have done seven cycles of the project, occurring every two years. I think bringing this idea to life has been one of the best things I have been involved with. It has touched all of those involved in extraordinary ways. Our stories have become more and more interwoven. The core values of respect, understanding, integrity, relationship-building, and wisdom-sharing continue to be relevant. This is our commitment to an authentic life, to collective evolution, to mutuality, and to reconciliation. As Birdy aptly summarizes, "This is an amazing project that has brought many stories to life in our school, and I wish to see this grow every year and bring our youth to understand the past so they can build for their futures." 🐾

**Left:** Lindsey Pierce paints Antionette Austin's portrait. **Right:** Lindsey, Antionette, and co-organizer Millie Gunanoot at the 2019 unveiling.





# BC's low-wage poverty problem

By Karen Chong (she/her), BCTF staff, Professional and Social Issues Division

**WE ALL KNOW** that students who come to school clothed, fed, and with all their basic needs met before they walk through the door have the best opportunity for success. The students most at risk in our school communities are those who go without on a daily basis, because the systemic disadvantages of low wages and high living costs mean their families struggle to provide necessities. And those students may be more common in our classrooms than we realize.

A living wage is defined as the hourly amount needed to cover basic expenses for a family consisting of two full-time working parents with two young children. Government benefits and deductions are accounted for when calculating a "bare bones" budget including food, shelter, childcare fees, transportation, and other basic household expenses. The budget calculation does not include debt payments to credit cards and/or loans, nor savings for retirement or a child's future education.

The calculated living wages across southern BC are significantly higher than the current provincial minimum wage, most notably for Metro Vancouver at

\$20.52/hour and Victoria at \$20.46/hour. The \$15.20/hour minimum wage does not come close to meeting even the lowest calculated living wage of \$16.33/hour for the Nanaimo region in 2021. This considerable discrepancy has an extensive and detrimental effect on the well-being of our students and their families, and further perpetuates low-wage poverty in our province.

Throughout the province, the average rise of the living wage since 2019 is \$1.02. This increase is largely due to the rising cost of housing, utilities, telecommunications, and food prices. The living wage was not calculated in 2020 because of disruptions in employment and unpredictable expenses caused by the pandemic. It is notable that living-wage calculations would have been higher if it were not for the pandemic-related, government-mandated rent freeze restricting rent increases between April 1, 2020, and January 1, 2022.

The positive impacts of public policy changes enacted since 2018 are reflected in this year's calculation. Significant childcare investments, the elimination of MSP premiums, and the new BC Child Opportunity Benefit, along

with small changes to government taxes and transfers, were crucial in offsetting increasing expenses for families with young children. These policies were especially important throughout the pandemic, as food and home insecurity increased for low- to mid-income families.

For our most vulnerable students and their families, especially in these unprecedented times of environmental devastation during an ongoing pandemic, the good will of individual teachers or school communities is not enough to solve the issues of low-wage poverty. Teachers know very well the effect of poverty on students' health and ability to succeed in school. We are slowly making progress as more BC employers become living-wage employers, but we must continue to push the government for appropriate minimum wage, affordable housing, and further policy changes to eradicate low-wage poverty once and for all. 🍎

## MORE INFORMATION

For more information about Living Wage Employers of BC or to read the 2021 Living Wage Report, visit [www.livingwageforfamilies.ca](http://www.livingwageforfamilies.ca).

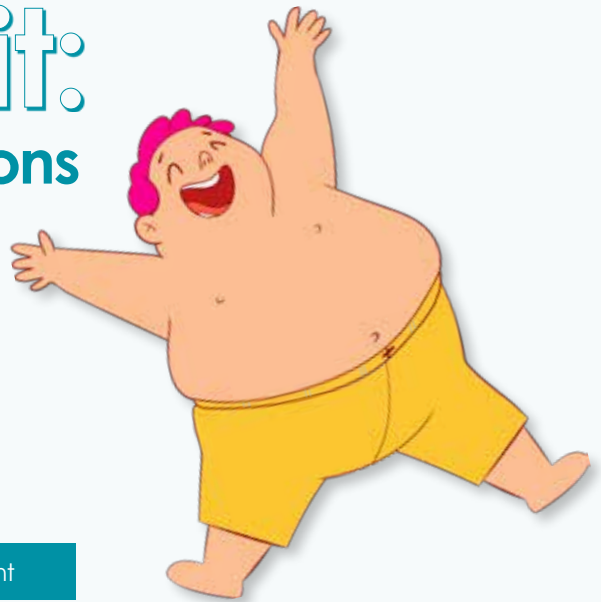


Courtesy of Living Wage Families of BC: [www.livingwageforfamilies.ca/living\\_wage2021](http://www.livingwageforfamilies.ca/living_wage2021)

# Where we all fit:

## Body-inclusive library collections

Content warning: themes of antifatness and fat-shaming



By Elaine Su (she/her), teacher-librarian and equity and diversity consultant

**IF YOU HAVE ANY PICTURE BOOKS** lying around near you, I invite you to open up a few right now. Take a look at the illustrations, including any scenes with a whole host of background characters, like a stroll through a park or a day at school. I invite you to pay attention to the characters you see, and in particular to the *bodies* you see. Because if the books you have are anything like the books on most children's bookshelves, I can guess what you likely won't see: fat bodies.

I preface this article with the acknowledgment that I am a thin person with all the accompanying privileges, and I am still very much learning about and unpacking antifatness both around me and internalized in me. I learn daily from fat activists like Marquisele Mercedes, Evette Dionne, Roxane Gay, and Angie Manfredi. One of the things I've learned is that using the word "fat" as a neutral descriptor the way thin, tall, and short are descriptors, is a powerful way to begin destigmatizing the word. As Hunter Shackelford wrote, "Fat is not an indication of value, health, beauty, or performance. ... Fatness does not have to be fixed, eradicated, shrunk, hidden, silenced, or shamed."

But looking at most of the books that surround our young students, you wouldn't know that.

Take a look at many of the so-called classics in children's literature, and you might start noticing that so often, fatness symbolizes negativity.

There are fat bullies, like Dudley Dursley, and Crabbe and Goyle, in the Harry Potter books, whose size and physical descriptions are wielded as indictments on their character. There are also fat victims, like Linda in Judy Blume's *Blubber*, whose body size becomes a code for weakness and helplessness.

Books equate fatness with greed, gluttony, villainy, and a whole score of other moral failings. Just consider the character Augustus Gloop in Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, described as a "great big greedy nincompoop" whose entire character arc is based on the understanding that he deserves what happens to him simply because he eats a lot. So seldom are fat characters centred in stories, relegated much more often to one-dimensional comic relief, where their fatness is frequently the butt of the jokes. Jokes where fat is code for lazy, greedy, infantile, or stupid are pervasive throughout children's books and the media we consume in general.

In all of these cases, a fat character's worth is tied to the way they look, and the message is clear: fat is bad.

The fact that these stereotypes and tropes are everywhere in kids books is bad enough. But it is made infinitely worse by the other fact that there is almost no positive representation to counter the negative.

The sheer absence of fat bodies in kids' books is a thunderous indictment of the

antifatness we live in. Even in otherwise very progressive stories where there is diversity of race, gender identity, and ability, the one glaring absence is diversity of body. There are whole neighbourhoods, whole schools, whole orchestras, whole families, without a single person who is not thin.

These are the seeds from which anti-fatness grows. These books tell fat kids that they are lesser than, that their bodies are signs of moral flaws, that they need to do better and work harder to be thin. They tell thin kids that they are the protagonists of stories, that they are the heroes, that they are better than their fat classmates.

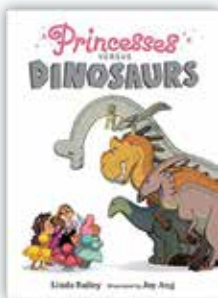
We need to do better. We need to tell stories with fat characters at the centre, where their fatness is not the point of the story or a moralizing plot device. Kids deserve to see people with a diversity of body size and shape in their books just as they do in real life. Our students need us to be comfortable having conversations about antifatness in culture and media, but they also need to be surrounded by positive examples of fat, diverse bodies living life and having adventures.

A great way to begin is by taking an audit of your own book collections. How many books do you offer your students with positive fat representation? And how many fall prey to harmful tropes and stereotypes? If you don't like the answers you get, perhaps begin by considering adding this list of picture books to your bookshelves. 🍌

[iStock.com/Kharlamova](https://iStock.com/Kharlamova)

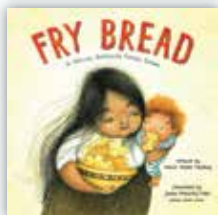


## Books with fat bodies on the page



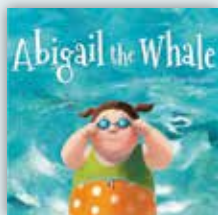
### **Princesses versus Dinosaurs** by Linda Bailey and Joy Ang

A hilarious showdown between two storybook titans. Just a fabulous representation of diversity across the board. Come for the excellent story, stay for a collection of princesses whose diversity of gender, race, and body are truly exemplary.



### **Fry Bread** by Kevin Noble Maillard and Juana Martinez-Neal

A love letter to the family dinner table and the gift of breaking bread with loved ones. An #OwnVoices book by an author from the Seminole Nation. Absolutely vital to see diverse bodies enjoying food with a complete absence of shaming and judgment.



### **Abigail the Whale** by Davide Cali and Sonja Bougaeva

Fantastic story about Abigail, who turns a taunt of "Abigail the Whale" on its head by channeling a whale (and other animals) in her successful quest to be an amazing swimmer. A lovely story that does the rare thing of showing a fat character as beautifully sporty, agile, talented, and graceful.



### **I Really Want to Win** by Simon Philip and Lucia Gaggiotti

A terrific book to teach about perseverance and the unique gifts we each have. Perfect for those all-important "winning is not everything" conversations we have. A great example of a fat character excelling at sports and dance with confidence and flawless pizzazz.



### **Our Little Kitchen** by Jillian Tamaki

A warm, heartfelt celebration of food and community. An example of background spreads and crowds done right, with a richly diverse cast of characters. An excellent segue into

conversations about how food nourishes our bodies but also our hearts, families, and communities.



### **All of Us** by Kathryn Erskine and Alexandra Boiger

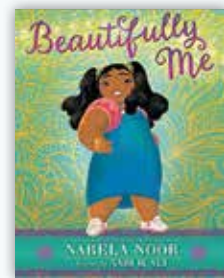
A gentle book about kindness and making space for everyone. This is one of the few books I've seen with good representation of masculine-presenting fat characters. A really sweet book

about acceptance, and one that is filled with joy and hope on every page.

## Books about fat positivity and normalizing body diversity

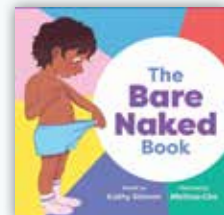
### **Beautifully Me** by Nabela Noor and Nabi H. Ali

A poignant and well-written story about self-love and the ways that adults, sometimes unwittingly, teach their kids antifatness. A good read for families and classes as we learn to give more care to our own and each other's bodies.



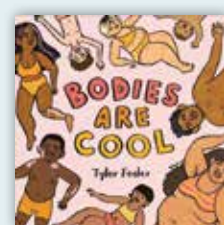
### **The Bare Naked Book** (new edition) by Kathy Stinson and Melissa Cho

The new edition of this 1986 celebration of the human body is excellent. The much-improved illustrations by Melissa Cho and the amended wording around gender make this one of my favourite books for body positivity. Exemplary diversity of body, race, gender, age, and ability, with representation of vitiligo, stretch marks, tattoos, and lots more variation of appearance seldom seen in illustrations.



### **Bodies are Cool** by Tyler Feder

Like *The Bare Naked Book*, just phenomenal representation of diverse community. This one is also great for older students as there is so much richness in the lyrical text. Lots of vocabulary and detail to go along with the excellent illustrations.



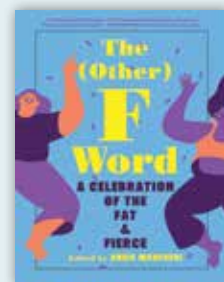
### **Her Body Can** by Katie Crenshaw and Ady Meschke

A truly lovely poem of self-love and body normativity. Page after page of all the things that this girl can do, defying all the worst stereotypes of fat bodies. Such a gentle and powerful ode to loving our own bodies, however they look and feel.



### **The (Other) F Word: A Celebration of the Fat and Fierce** by Angie Manfredi

A magnificent collection for young adult and middle-grade readers. Art, poetry, essays, fashion tips, all centring the love, acceptance, and celebration of fat bodies.



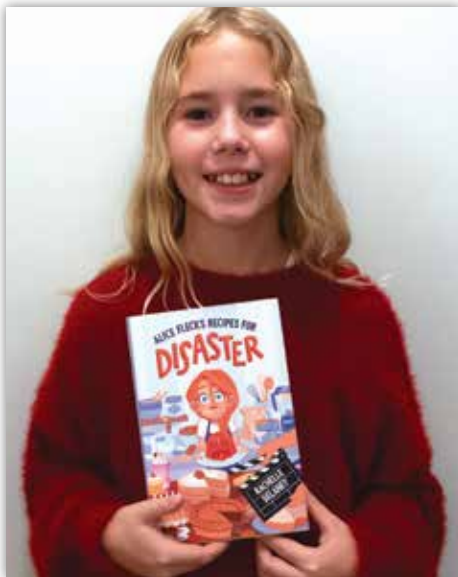
## FURTHER READING

To read about why I've used the term "antifatness," the racist history of antifatness, and concern trolling (a common response to body-normative and fat-positive conversations) visit [linktr.ee/LearnAboutAntifatness](https://linktr.ee/LearnAboutAntifatness) or scan the QR code.



# BOOK REVIEWS

## An intriguing mystery and feel-good family story



BCTF staff photo

By **Léonie H.**, Grade 5 student, Vancouver

**Alice Fleck's Recipes for Disaster** published by Puffin Canada, 2022

**Alice Fleck's Recipes for Disaster** by Rachelle Delaney is an interesting page-turner because there is some suspense and a whodunit vibe, not in a murder mystery way but in a sabotage way.

Here is an idea of the story: Alice (12 years old) and her dad love cooking together, but then her dad gets a girlfriend who Alice doesn't like much. She studies Victorian history and invites them to a Victorian-style festival to be a part of their favorite cooking show. They go, but everything changes: the name, the host, the judge. And as if that wasn't enough, there is a saboteur messing up

the contestants' work. Will Alice and her new friends she met at the festival find out what is happening?

There is a heart-touching relationship between Alice and her dad. It's also interesting when Alice moves a little away from her dad and more toward her new friends. It was fun (and also made me angry at the judge who is really rude) reading about the cooking competition. Also, I learned about some food facts.

P.S. I definitely recommend your book, Rachelle Delaney! 🐾

## A quality read for all educators

By **Steve Brügger** (he/him), teacher, Surrey

**In Teachers We Trust: The Finnish Way to World-Class Schools**, published by Norton Professional Books, 2021

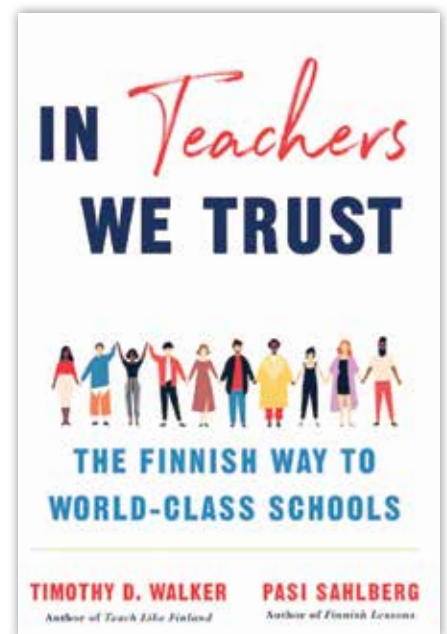
**PASI SAHLBERG**, the Finnish educator who brought us the insightful and engaging book *Finnish Lessons 2.0* in 2013, is back with an American teacher and writer, Timothy D. Walker, as collaborator and co-author. In this new book, *In Teachers We Trust: The Finnish Way to World-Class Schools*, they share seven key principles for building a culture of trust in schools.

At first glance, it may seem like this book is geared more toward our American counterparts. However, as Anthony Hargreaves suggests in his foreword, "Canada is a bit more American than it likes to think." There are many implications, connections, and take-aways to be had for Canadian educators and administrators.

The book is easy to read, with many insightful anecdotes from a variety of professional educators from Finland and

elsewhere. The chapters are a good length and finish with "For Conversation and Reflection" sections for those thinking about possible book study groups or actions to implement. There are many great ideas about teaching, learning, and reflecting throughout. One example is the section where the authors discuss differences between notebooks and graphic organizers:

*"Regularly employing ... graphic organizers is appealing. The well-structured handouts can make instructional time more efficient, while serving as clear evidence of student learning. But my thinking began to change soon after I moved to Finland: I started to see them more as crutches for students and teachers. ... As I observed the way that my colleagues were demanding that their students take notes and diligently document their work, I started*



*to appreciate the skill of keeping a notebook. It pushes students to take more responsibility for their work."*

In summary, I would be dishonest if I said I was completely engrossed with every single page of this book. However, I would say that for 90% of it I was, and that makes it a worthwhile educational read, in my opinion. 🐾





# The burden of past decisions

By Kip Wood (he/him), teacher, Nanaimo

**JUSTICE MINISTER** David Lametti introduced Bill C-22 in the House of Commons in February 2021. The aim of the bill is to repeal 14 mandatory minimum sentences in the *Criminal Code* and 6 mandatory minimums in the *Controlled Drug and Substances Act*. Currently there are more than 70 mandatory minimums in the two statutes above. According to the federal government website, Bill C-22, which has not yet been enacted, is “to address the over-incarceration rate of Indigenous peoples, as well as Black and marginalized Canadians.”

A year after the introduction of Bill C-22, the government has a problem: the burden of past decisions. If Bill C-22 is enacted, the government risks being attacked by opposition members who favour punitive measures. While the words “tough on crime” imply that a government is committed to reducing crime rates, repealing these “tough” policies makes a government appear “soft on crime,” a position that does not inspire confidence. It was politically easy to bring in mandatory sentencing; it will be politically difficult to end the practice.

Past decisions on tax policy are also difficult for governments. Reducing taxes is popular and easy to do; raising taxes subsequently is not popular, and governments can pay a political price for doing so.

Our provincial government is in a difficult position because we are now a low-tax province. For taxable incomes up to \$146,000 (about 98% of income earners), BC has the lowest tax rate of the 10 provinces. This situation was not arrived at by gradual means, but rather by a single decision by government 20 years ago.

In March of 2021, I filed my tax return and looked at my tax assessments from the past three decades. I noticed that I am paying less in taxes, as a percentage of total income, than ever before in my career. Comparing assessments, I found the following:

- My overall income tax rate fell from 28% in the decade leading up to 2001 to 15% in the two decades that followed.
- Federal taxes and provincial taxes both decreased over this period.
- Provincial taxes were reduced more than federal taxes, which means that now a greater percentage—almost three-fourths—of my tax dollars are going to Ottawa.

The shifts above were influenced mainly by a single political decision in Victoria that occurred in 2001: a 25% “across the

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“BC has the lowest tax rate of the ten provinces. This situation was not arrived at by gradual means, but rather by a single decision by government 20 years ago.”

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board” cut to provincial income tax rates. With tax revenues plummeting, the government decided to reduce spending “across the board.” Teachers know this history well. It was the beginning of the cutback years that lasted until 2017.

Last year, the current provincial government made the most significant change to provincial income tax since 2001 by putting in a new tax bracket. Starting in the 2020 tax year, any income above \$220,000 will be taxed at 20.5%. This measure was a positive step; however, an income level of \$220,000 applies to barely 1% of income earners, and the revenue generated by this additional tax bracket increased provincial revenues by less than 1% (see the government’s Budget and Fiscal Plan, 2021).

Political decisions over the past 50 years or so have made the income tax system, provincially and federally, less progressive. In other words, the highest incomes are taxed at rates closer to those applied to lower incomes. Those decisions were abrupt and, politically speaking, difficult to undo. It’s easier for governments to reduce tax rates than it is to raise them.

Setting tax rates in the future depends largely on decisions in the past that have significantly reduced the taxes we pay. Now, as governments set priorities—pandemic recovery, climate mitigation, affordable housing, health care—important questions must be considered:

- Are we stuck in a low-tax society where the needs of people are neglected?
- In a low-tax society, do we stop believing in collective solutions?
- Do we stop believing that the purpose of government is to improve the lives of people?

Will the burden of past decisions on crime be insurmountable for Trudeau’s minority government? Will Bill C-22 simply fall off the legislative agenda? And in a post-pandemic world, will the burden of past taxation decisions be too difficult for governments hoping to be re-elected? Or will governments have the courage to collect tax revenues that match the needs of society? 🍷

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**Above:** Smithers Secondary student Megan Randall unveiled her portrait of Elder Mabel Forsythe at a ceremony where Mabel was honoured for her contributions to the community. Read more about the Honouring Our Elders Portrait Legacy Project on pages 28–30.

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