

BC Teachers' Federation

# Teacher



Jan | Feb 2019

## Is disability a bad word?

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diversity  
disability  
special needs  
handicapable

*differently abled*  
ableism





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### Deadline:

May/June issue April 5, 2019

## **Teacher**

BC Teachers' Federation

Toll free 1-800-663-9163

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

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

Editor Susan Croll, [scroll@bctf.ca](mailto:scroll@bctf.ca)

Assistant editor/design Karen Steel

Copy editor Sarah Young

ISSN 0841-9574

### **Teacher Advisory Board**

Shelley Balfour

Haymen Leong

Jennifer Fox

Catherine Quanstrom

June James

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# Bargaining starts soon

After months of preparation, the BCTF bargaining team is in the final stages of work to begin negotiations for our new collective agreement. Preliminary talks are set to begin at the end of January and we expect to see the exchange of actual language and bargaining packages by the third week of February. We'll keep you up-to-date about the progress once bargaining gets under way.

YOU AND OUR ENTIRE UNION are well-represented by the provincial bargaining team. They have continued to work diligently since the bargaining conference last fall to make sure we get your priorities, like improvements to salary and class composition, front and centre when talks begin. We have a great team and I have a lot of confidence in their work and process.

I am also grateful to all our local associations and members who participated in processes to set the provincial objectives. Your local bargaining teams also have much important work ahead at their bargaining tables and your Federation is here to support you achieve your goals.

If you need a primer on how bargaining works, check out page 7 in this edition of *Teacher* for answers to frequently asked questions.

## New provincial budget will signal government's direction

On February 19, the provincial government will unveil its budget for the 2019–20 fiscal year. That budget will outline the funding for school districts for the next school year. The BCTF has presented to government as well as submitted briefs advocating for the funding boost public education needs to meet the needs of our students.

We'll be watching closely for a new budget that includes better funding for curriculum implementation, support for children with special needs, and the full cost of our collective agreement provisions.

## Stay tuned for BCTF's new ads

To support our efforts to achieve a solid collective agreement by June 30, 2019, and to show both the public and provincial government that public education needs funding improvements, the BCTF will advertise on TV, online, and in transit stations and shelters across BC this winter and spring.

The campaign will stretch over several months and elevate the value of teachers' work and the impact we have on our students.

Our kids and you as BC's teachers are worth it!



# Les négociations débutent bientôt

Après des mois de préparation, l'équipe de négociations de la FECB en est aux dernières étapes du travail afin d'entamer les négociations de notre nouvelle convention collective. Les discussions préliminaires devraient commencer à la fin du mois de janvier et nous nous attendons à des offres concrètes de négociations vers la troisième semaine de février. Nous vous tiendrons informé(e)s des progrès lorsque les négociations seront en cours.

VOUS-MÊME, AINSI QUE LE SYNDICAT, êtes bien représentés par l'équipe de négociations provinciale. Cette équipe continue de travailler assidûment depuis la conférence de négociations de l'automne dernier, afin de veiller à ce que vos priorités, telles que l'amélioration des salaires et de la composition des classes, soient mises à l'avant-plan dès le début des pourparlers. Nous avons une excellente équipe et j'ai pleinement confiance en leur travail et leurs façons de procéder.

Je suis également reconnaissant envers l'ensemble de nos associations locales et envers nos membres ayant participé au processus d'établissement des objectifs provinciaux. Les équipes de négociations locales ont aussi un important travail à faire à leurs tables de négociations locales respectives et votre fédération est là pour vous aider à atteindre vos objectifs.

Si vous voulez un aperçu du fonctionnement des négociations, allez à la page 7 de cette édition du magazine *Teacher*, vous y trouverez les réponses aux questions les plus fréquentes.

## Le nouveau budget provincial indiquera l'orientation du gouvernement

Le 19 février, le gouvernement provincial dévoilera son budget pour l'année fiscale 2019–20. Ce budget déterminera le financement des conseils scolaires pour la prochaine année. La FECB a présenté et soumis au gouvernement des dossiers défendant l'éducation publique dans l'obtention du financement nécessaire pour répondre aux besoins de nos élèves.

Nous veillerons de près à ce que le nouveau budget comprenne des plans concrets pour un meilleur financement dans l'implémentation du programme d'étude, un meilleur soutien aux élèves à besoins spéciaux et une couverture du coût total des dispositions de notre convention collective.

## Demeurez à l'affût des nouvelles publicités de la FECB

Afin de soutenir nos efforts pour conclure d'ici le 30 juin 2019 une convention collective solide et de montrer au public, ainsi qu'au gouvernement provincial, que l'éducation publique a besoin d'une amélioration du financement, la FECB diffusera cet hiver et ce printemps, des publicités à la télévision, sur internet et dans les stations de transport public à travers la Colombie-Britannique.

La campagne s'étendra sur plusieurs mois et rehaussera la valeur du travail des enseignant(e)s et l'impact que nous avons sur nos élèves.

Vous, en tant qu'enseignant(e)s de la Colombie-Britannique, ainsi que nos enfants, en valez la peine !

## Great programs remembered

SCHOOL DISTRICTS in British Columbia are facing substantial challenges in the coming years. Among them is the shift in curriculum and assessment. Unfortunately, more effort was needed to include teachers in preparing for these changes. There are examples where involving educators in policy changes can be positive. There was an era where teacher input was valued.

Four decades ago School District 68 Nanaimo-Ladysmith embarked on three largely teacher-driven policies that attempted to improve the quality of education. Action Nanaimo, Kodaly Music, and the Sunter language acquisition program were three unique policies, replete with teacher input that was endorsed by senior management in the district.

Action Nanaimo sought to have elementary-aged students have one-hour daily physical education class. This audacious program was initially promoted by a local women's group who wanted to improve girls' participation in physical education. It was piloted for one year (1976–77) and then gradually advanced to full participation amongst all schools in the district. The director was an educator and internationally recognized track and field coach, Glen DiGeorgio. The long-term goal was for the program to grow to include junior and senior high schools.

Most people in the province know the acclaimed jazz chanteuse Diana Krall. However, there are many more who graduated from Nanaimo District Senior Secondary program under the direction of Brian Stovall. The Kodaly program, based on the Hungarian model of music teaching, assisted in creating the musical talent this city has produced by introducing music to elementary students.

In the late 1970s Emily Sunter, an elementary school teacher, sought to improve language acquisition amongst young children, devising a program using shapes to assist students who were having trouble in the first few years of their schooling grasping English words and sounds. This program so impressed Harvard University that they

incorporated it into their graduate school of education as a course.

The key element of all three of these programs: teachers created the programs and research demonstrates that when teachers are involved in crafting policy it has a much greater chance of success.

### What happened?

All three programs were eliminated for essentially budgetary reasons. Action Nanaimo gained full policy status in the early 1980s. However, it was gutted due in part to the recession, a back-to-basic mantra of the Social Credit government in the early '80s; the same fate endured by the two other programs. The Kodaly music program was similarly terminated as well with priorities in budgeting and extra programs deemed first to go. Sunter's program was also eliminated for fiscal concerns.

Sadly, except for a few educational historians, past policies are rarely re-examined. Rather, they are shelved in archives and university libraries and rarely acknowledged. Recent policy shifts are more "top-down" with varying levels of success. Examining some of these past policies does provide some form of a road map for future policy decisions.

— **Brian Lennox**, Nanaimo teacher



Diana Krall

Rob Garland (Public domain)  
Wikimedia Commons

## Notice of BCTF AGM 2019

As required by *The Societies Act*, the following formal notice of the 2019 Annual General Meeting is made to all BCTF members pursuant to By-law 8.1 by publication in this edition of *Teacher*.

The 103rd Annual General Meeting of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation will be held at the Victoria Convention Centre in Victoria, BC beginning on Saturday, March 16, 2019 and continuing to Tuesday, March 19, 2019.

## BCTF financial statements

The audited financial statements of the BC Teachers' Federation are available online in the member portal: [bit.ly/1K0bfxl](http://bit.ly/1K0bfxl).

Luis Isidoro photo



Delegates to the BCTF Representative Assembly elected two Executive Committee members in November as two members recently stepped down. Karen Edwards from Tumbler Ridge, is the seventh Member-at-Large and Susan Trabant from Prince George, fills the racialized Member-at-Large position.

**Back row, L-R:** Karen Edwards, Robin Toszczak, Susan Trabant (racialized Member-at-Large), Shawn Gough, Marjorie Dumont (Aboriginal Member-at-Large), Carole Gordon.

**Front row, L-R:** Jody Polukoshko, Rae Figursky, Glen Hansman (President), Teri Mooring (First Vice-President), Clint Johnston (Second Vice-President), Kip Wood.

# Shift the discourse to stop “fixing” teachers

By **Raegan Sawka**, teacher and President, Prince Rupert District Teachers’ Union

It’s 2:15 p.m., and I’m running late for my son’s IEP meeting. As I rush in I hear the school-based team wrap up a discussion about a student who waited until Grade 5 to receive an assessment for a significant learning disability. We quickly move on to my child’s meeting, celebrate his successes, and share a progress report and ideas for next year. As I follow my son’s teacher back to her classroom she laments how heartbreaking it is to see students, referred since early primary, finally get assessed in Grade 5.

CLEARLY THIS CHILD has weighed on her mind. She expresses disappointment about the recent decrease in our contract time for the school psychologist due to financial constraints. My son’s teacher is not alone in her worries. I hear many colleagues share stories about students in middle and secondary school not yet functionally literate and in need of increased support.

As Local President, I probed into the matter because it is affecting the mental well-being of our members. At a board meeting we were told special education designations were just labels, and with the response to intervention (RTI) model, assessments are far less important. Yet our learning services teachers explained how heart-wrenching it is to have mountains of referrals but to be limited to a couple of assessments each year. The information a school psychologist provides can determine appropriate supports and accommodations.

After a year of research and networking across the province, I learned that the Ministry of Education is looking to expand the overall number of special education categories, yet at the same time remove targeted funding for designations. Jurisdictions in North America, and around the world, have implemented

similar changes. Most did as a cost-saving measure by downloading accommodation planning to the classroom teacher under the guise of the 21st Century personalized learning framework.

The shift has been ushered in alongside the wider dialogue of the “social construct model” of viewing disabilities, essentially encouraging attitudinal shifts without any critical analysis of the systemic barriers that perpetuate ableism. Ministry staff have stated teachers must learn to move away from language such as “needs” and “disability” and embrace new terms like “diverse learners.” On the topic of resources to address diversity, the Ministry staff response was if teachers can just learn to think inclusively that in itself is the resource. The assumption is that the barriers to students achieving their potential are the discriminatory attitudes of educators. This did not match my experience in BC since the early 1980s, where BCTF members have advocated tirelessly for properly funded and resourced inclusion in our schools.

Since March 2018, we’ve been writing letters and meeting with educational stakeholders around the province, our boards of education, MLAs, cabinet ministers, and our Premier to question the proposed changes and the chronic underfunding of inclusive education. The response is often surprise and we are told to speak to the Minister of Education or our local district leadership.

As advocates, we seem stuck spinning our wheels. Many colleagues are frustrated and saddened because we believed our restored language was going to drive much-needed funding back into the system. Some are

“The information a school psychologist provides can determine appropriate supports and accommodations.”



Photos submitted by author



Raegan Sawka and her sons.

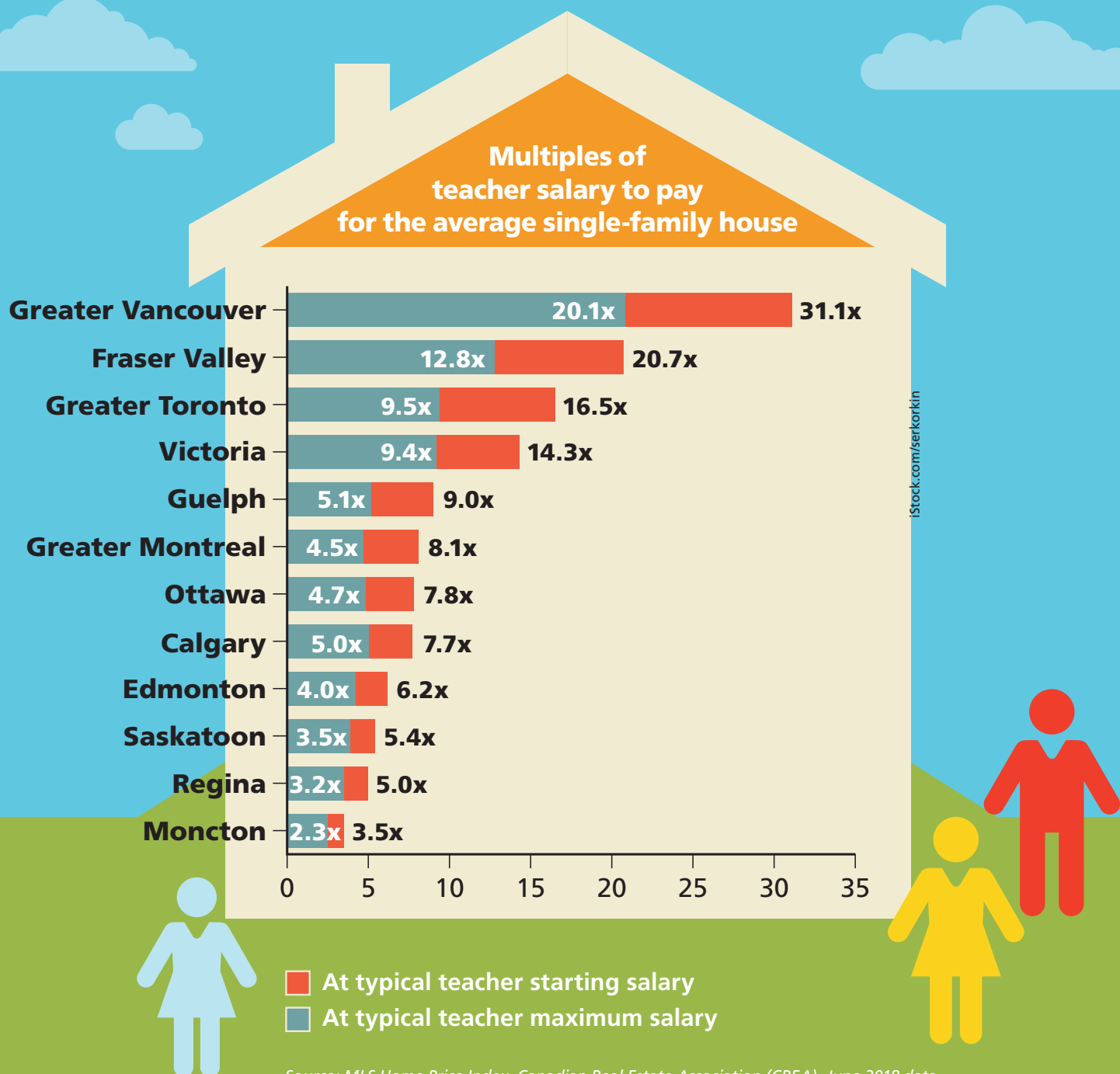
facing classrooms more complex than ever before and burning themselves out trying to address the gaps for learners. This was not our experience prior to the contract stripping of 2002—when BC schools were funded significantly higher than today, both as a proportion of GDP and the overall provincial public services budget.

Regardless, I’m encouraged by discussions during recent BCTF meetings on our political resolve in upholding rights to negotiated classroom conditions, specialist ratios, and student access to identification and accommodation of a disability as required. With the collective voices of our 43,000 members, we can shift the inclusion discourse from teacher-fixing and teacher-blaming to upholding equitable access to fully funded education in BC. ■

# Teaching in BC

## *High housing costs, low pay*

Housing costs in Vancouver, Victoria, Abbotsford, Kelowna, and, increasingly, many smaller BC towns are unaffordable. It's not just single-family houses, the high price goes for condos too. Rent is also more expensive in BC than elsewhere. Teachers in BC not only earn among the least in Canada, our cost of living is among the highest. That's just not right.



# Bargaining our next collective agreement

## *How the process works*

By Rich Overgaard, BCTF staff, and Susan Croll, Teacher editor

### **Q How are provincial bargaining objectives set?**

**A** LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS and the Executive Committee (EC) send resolutions to the Bargaining Conference. Delegates from every local attend the Bargaining Conference. They discuss objectives and priorities and then vote on them. This year's Bargaining Conference took place on October 26 and 27.

### **Q What is the difference between local and provincial bargaining?**

**A** SOME ITEMS, like salary, class size and composition, paid leaves, benefits, and hours of work are negotiated at the provincial table between the BCTF and the BC Public School Employers' Association. Other items, like the school calendar, post and fill, layoff and recall, and staff committee language are negotiated locally between individual teachers' associations and school districts.

### **Q Who does the negotiating?**

**A** THE BCTF provincial bargaining team consists of seven members. Team members were featured in the November/December 2018 edition of *Teacher* magazine. The BCTF Executive Committee oversees the work of the bargaining team. Similarly, locals have their own bargaining teams. They negotiate with their respective school districts.

### **Q How long does bargaining take?**

**A** BARGAINING IS likely to begin at the end of January 2019. The BCTF aims to secure a negotiated agreement before our current agreement expires at the end of June.

### **Q What do members vote on and when do we get to vote?**

**A** WHEN THE BARGAINING team reaches a tentative deal, they bring their recommendation to the BCTF Executive Committee. The EC considers the recommendation and, if they agree with the recommendation, organize a membership vote for ratification. Every member has the right to vote on the recommendation.

You also get to vote on whether any kind of job action should happen via a province-wide vote. Job action cannot occur until after the current collective agreement expires, which is June 30, 2019.

### **Q Where can I get up-to-date bargaining information?**

**A** REGULAR BARGAINING updates will be posted on the MyBCTF portal. Read the *BCTF News* for bargaining information too. Not receiving the *BCTF News*? Contact [chuarddelamarre@bctf.ca](mailto:chuarddelamarre@bctf.ca). Don't know how to access the portal? Contact [bctf.ca/portalhelp.aspx](http://bctf.ca/portalhelp.aspx). ■



Catherine Quanstrom photos

# Like a gladiator: Entering the bargaining arena

By **Connie Merz**, Cranbrook teacher and local bargaining co-chair



Picture a gladiator in an arena having to fight for their life against a pack of wild beasts. As a rookie local bargaining co-chair, I felt a lot like that.

LAST YEAR, I really enjoyed working with my Cranbrook District Teachers' Association Local President Shelley Balfour and Local Vice-President Larry Dureski. I discovered how much work is involved to make a local function well. When the opportunity to get into the thick of things arose, I took on the challenge. The next thing I knew, I was our local bargaining chair. I was motivated to get involved after the 2014 strike. I felt it was time to use my skills and to provide my colleagues with positive change and hope.

When I attended my first BCTF bargaining training session, I really felt like I was that gladiator thrown into an arena. But with more bargaining training opportunities, I am more knowledgeable—thanks to Shelley and the BCTF. I also attended a Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) collective bargaining training in January 2018 and met other union gladiators from western Canada.

Through two days of classes and three days of role-playing, we wrote, debated, revised, and bargained contract language. And I was greeted with a bonus—I got to meet and work with other BCTF local bargaining chairs. Further BCTF training in February, April, May, and October focused on writing contract language, developing negotiating skills, and understanding the role of the local bargaining team.

These trainings helped solidify my confidence. I feel I have learned the skills to help negotiate a stronger local agreement. I look forward to working with Tara Elliot, the local bargaining chair from the Fernie District Teachers' Association, as co-chair of the bargaining team. (The Southeast Kootenay School District #5 is the employer for both BCTF locals, hence the bargaining

co-chairs.) We expect provincial bargaining to open this winter, with local bargaining to begin soon after.

After my extensive training and support from my local, I find the arena is not that big, and the beasts not that ferocious. I've gained a wealth of experience as both local representative and bargaining chair at BCTF Representative Assemblies, Annual General Meetings, and zone meetings. I learn about important issues for our local at executive meetings and those of my school district. Our members need significant wage increases. Improvements in post-and-fill language is also a priority, along with a host of other items. Regardless of the size, growl, and bite of the opposing beasts, I am confident that both our provincial and local

bargaining teams will make the needed gains all teachers justly deserve. ■



istock.com/ChrisGorgio

*Photos left: Delegates at the BCTF Bargaining Conference voted on the bargaining objectives that the BCTF will take forward when negotiations begin.*

# Teachers tackle how to make meaningful inclusion work

By **Neesha Blajberg**, district learning support teacher, New Westminster

**Twenty-four teachers participated in the BCTF Summit on Meaningful Inclusion in October for the same reasons: to discuss our concerns about the continued erosion of services for students with special needs and to tackle how full inclusion needs to be adequately funded to work.**

While teachers from around the province participated, a few of us also represented the BCTF on two Ministry of Education committees. We knew from direct experience that the Ministry is reviewing current funding policies on inclusion. We also knew they were considering new policies that could significantly affect expectations, conditions, and teaching practices. After a full day of discussion, here are our findings.

## Strengths and weaknesses of the current funding model

We recognize that identification helps students, their parents, and school staff determine and address strengths and needs. With the right supports in place, students can develop the skills they need as they transition into adulthood. Though paperwork and preparing for an audit can be onerous, this work ensures that districts are somewhat accountable for the funding they receive for students with special needs.

As we discussed the challenges of the present system, we realized that many of our challenges are due to chronic historic and current underfunding: a lack of targeted funding for students with high incident designations, unidentified students, long waitlists for assessments both in and out of

the education system, and little to no in-service for teachers.

These challenges are heightened by the increasing difficulty of accessing outside agencies that have also experienced cuts in funding. Additionally, heavy workloads for teachers, the lack of consultation with teachers at all levels of the system, and time spent on advocating and competing for scarce resources, add up to a high level of stress for teachers.

## Minister promises to respect court win

Having heard rumours that the Ministry might be moving to block funding based on prevalence rates, we discussed the potential strengths and challenges of such a system. However, by the time this edition of *Teacher* is published, the BCTF expects Rob Fleming, Minister of Education, will have released the findings of the panel reviewing funding models. The BCTF lobbied government hard to make sure that any changes to funding would not affect either our Supreme Court win in 2016 or our collective agreement.

On November 27, 2018, the BCTF received a letter from Minister Fleming. He wrote, "I am committed to ongoing engagement with you and your members on the

recommendations of the report. I want to be clear that our government completely respects and honours the Supreme Court of Canada's decision. Our government would never strip away your contract language like the old government did. I am committed to further discussions on how we best support students with special needs, other vulnerable learners, and all students prior to any final decisions on a new funding model."

Regardless of the findings of the review panel, we believe that the BCTF must continue to call for fully funded public education for all students, including those students with special needs and disabilities.

## Our recommendations to the BCTF

- Continue to advocate for more funding, more resources, more training for teachers.
- Ensure that all teachers are engaged in this conversation.
- Include other key stakeholders (parents, trustees, administrators) in the conversation.
- Maintain the emphasis on conditions in our collective agreements.
- Build historical awareness and share stories about what works and what doesn't.
- Ensure that inclusion is considered in other key education policy issues (assessment, reporting, curriculum).
- Discuss the ableism within our own structures and systems. ■

# A day in the life of a Prince Rupert primary teacher

By primary teachers at Pineridge Elementary School, Prince Rupert

**I arrive at school early and am immediately pulled into the office for an impromptu meeting regarding a student. Now I'm late for my supervision shift.**

THE BELL RINGS... and we are off!

Depending on the dynamics of the class that morning, I am always prepared to switch out my day plan. Two of my students live in foster homes. Their moods often include tears depending on whether family visits have taken place. One student has ADHD. He often requires redirection in the 10–15 second range—meaning up to 240 interruptions in an hour-long lesson.

I suspect one student has a learning disability. She works diligently, never misses a day, and is as co-operative and motivated as any teacher could hope for in a student. She is in Grade 3 now, and almost two years behind in her reading.

I think about all these things as I try to teach the kids about balance and co-ordination. Two of my students have difficulty walking on uneven surfaces, and on a recent visit to the local pond I realized neither had ever been in that environment before.

We return to our classroom and it is time for reading. We split into six different groups, each specifically targeting a reading level. My novel readers are often left to work independently. I try to make up for this during the week, looking for materials that will keep up with their love of reading,

open their spirits to new possibilities, and promote deep and critical thought.

Recess rolls around and I'm back outside for my supervision day. We live in a rainforest, and still most of the students are underdressed for the weather. When the class reassembles, a few complain about being wet and we find socks for one, because his are missing.

We work on paragraph writing until lunch. We read and discuss a picture book on the great auk. We watch a short video on the smart board. We pull out our paragraph hamburger frames and get to work. Some students finish quickly. I challenge them to write another paragraph on what they still wonder about the great auk.

Before we know it, lunch time has arrived. After a rushed 45 minutes, we are back in the classroom. Students take out their doodle books and get ready for our read aloud: author Peter Brown's book *The Wild Robot*. When we finish 20 minutes later, we build a shelter for the book's characters.

We fill our afternoons with hands-on activities like going outside to tend plants and learn about bees. At 2:45 p.m. we pack up and get ready for home.

Two students take the bus to get home. Sometimes the bus returns with one student

on board as no one answered the door when he was dropped off.

I clean up, draft tomorrow's day plan, and head out the door. I may come back to school tonight or I may work from home getting ready for tomorrow. Not enough time exists to prepare for the needs and demands of teaching today. ■

*The staff at Pineridge Elementary in Prince Rupert have worked together for a long time. Despite standing with our colleagues across the province for the past 16 years fighting for the restoration of student rights and our working conditions, life at our school has never been more challenging than it is today.*

*Fifteen percent of our students have special education designations. Thirty percent of Grade 3–5 students are reading more than two grade levels below their peers. We have students waiting far too long for psychoeducational assessments and for assessments from the Northern Health Authority Autism and Complex Developmental Behaviour Conditions Networks. Students wait so long that as teachers we rarely receive the recommendations, support, or resources needed to best teach our students.*



BCTF file photo

**Everyone**  
*welcome*

- ▶ Work with the BCTF to conduct research and surveys, such as the recent survey on working and learning conditions for Kindergarten teachers.
- ▶ Participate in Ministry committees and put forward the perspectives of primary teachers.
- ▶ Attend BCTF professional development events and lead workshops.
- ▶ Advise the BCTF on issues concerning primary teachers.

Please consider joining the BC Primary Teachers' Association. We are a forward-thinking group of primary teachers steeped in good ideas and practices. Find out more about us at [www.bcpta.ca/wordpress](http://www.bcpta.ca/wordpress).

# Get to know BCPTA

## *A specialist association for primary teachers*

*By BC Primary Teachers' Association Executive members*

Teaching in the primary years is a mix of privilege, magic, and exhaustion. We lay the foundation for all that comes after Grade 3, and at times the weight of that pressure feels like it is too much to bear. The current state of education funding and policy direction in BC is increasing that pressure and teachers feel the impact daily.

AS PRIMARY TEACHERS and as executive members of the BC Primary Teachers' Association (BCPTA), we understand that inclusion translates directly to a safe place for everyone in our schools—including teachers. Not everyone in education circles understands this. The narrative from the Ministry of Education right now, supported by some for-profit educational consultants, places teachers as adversaries to student success. This narrative is harmful to teachers and to our students.

It is important for us to advocate for conditions in our communities to reduce stress levels on students, and it is also important for government to reduce the stress levels on teachers. Perhaps, the most effective means of doing this is shutting down their own narrative that an "attitudinal shift" of teachers is the only barrier to student success.

Our expectations cannot look the same for all children, and some children should be given remediation in the belief that they can learn with time, extra support, and different strategies. Inclusion is a process for all, but to ensure success, funding for special needs

must remain connected to designations and be improved to match the reality and cost of services required for educational staffing and resources to support our students.

BC still spends \$1,000 less per student than the Canadian average. This is not okay and never will be. We believe in holding high expectations for all learners and recognize our role as advocates for our students' future dreams.

In 1957, primary teachers across our province came together to form the first provincial specialist association, the BCPTA. We are proud to carry on their legacy of advocacy and support for primary teachers and their students.

### Here's what we do:

- ▶ Hold an annual flagship conference for primary teachers.
- ▶ Publish the *BCPTA Newsletter*—which is really a journal—three times a year, chock-full of teaching ideas and activities.
- ▶ Advocate for better funding and resources for our students.
- ▶ Push for interim funding for students awaiting assessments.

### What's vital in the early years

Below is our abbreviated version of our statement we sent to the Ministry Funding Review Panel.

- ▶ Learning is developmental.
- ▶ Children grow like rings on a tree, and not all children reach benchmarks at the same time and at the same rate.
- ▶ Teaching enhances and supports children's development. Scaffolding is key to learning. The "I do, we do, you do" model is foundational to learning.
- ▶ Early identification and intervention for children experiencing learning difficulties is critical.
- ▶ Extra staffing and support for students should not wait until a formal diagnosis is reached.
- ▶ Current special education funding is not adequate in meeting the needs of designated students.
- ▶ Every child has a right to be safe at school to learn in a safe environment, but not necessarily in the same room, at the same time, all the time.
- ▶ We believe in high expectations for all learners. This may not look the same for all children.
- ▶ Teachers, parents, and children work as a team in a child's education.
- ▶ Individual education plans should be as diverse as the learners they represent and as the educators who help create them. ■

# Teachers' Pension Plan

## *Surplus means lower contributions in 2019*

By Victor Choy, BCTF staff

Since January 1, 2018, service in the Teachers' Pension Plan is now calculated differently than it was in the past to include a larger lifetime pension and equity for all plan members, regardless of whether you work as a part-time or full-time TTOC. Prior to this change, the Teachers' Pension Plan was rooted in a design from 1966 that had the pension calculation integrated into the Canadian Pension Plan. Since our member demographics have changed, and life expectancy of members and retirees has increased, it was time to adjust the pension benefit to fit the realities of the current membership.

JUST AS WE STARTED with the new pension plan in 2018, the Pension Board of Trustees informed the two Pension Plan Partners (BCTF and BC Government) that there would likely be a surplus due to very strong investment returns pending formal confirmation with pension authorities. Partners decided to have the BCTF reach out to members by holding eight regional sessions in the spring of 2018 (Burnaby, Cranbrook, Dawson Creek, Kelowna, Langley, Prince George, Smithers, and Victoria) and present how

the surplus would be used to improve the pension buildup rate, the pension payment calculation method, and the funding of the retirees' Inflation Adjustment Account. This was done as per the text of the revised plan, as signed-off by the plan partners a couple of years ago.

As well, the pension trustees decided to reduce contribution rates. Starting January 1, 2019, Teachers' Pension Plan

(TPP) contribution rates for members and employers will be reduced. Members will now contribute per paycheck 11.17% (previously 12.92%) and employers will contribute 11.30% (previously 13.23%). For example, for every \$1,000 of salary, members will pay \$17.50 less in TPP contributions and employers will pay \$19.30 less in TPP contributions.

**Visit the new Teachers' Pension Plan website at [tpp.pensionsbc.ca](http://tpp.pensionsbc.ca) for more information and to check your pension account. ■**



# How locals select members for district committees

By George Serra, BCTF staff

Why is it so important for your local union office to choose which members will sit on district committees? Article A.5 Committee Membership is collectively bargained provincial language and therefore included in every collective agreement across the province. Sometimes, teachers who are extremely passionate about an issue do not understand why they may have not been selected by their local union to represent teachers on a committee, despite (at times) the support from their principal. When your school district decides to form a committee to investigate a specific topic (e.g., reporting/assessment, technology, inclusionary practices, etc.), you can be sure that they have already completed their background work, including which teachers they prefer on the committee.

YOU CAN IMAGINE how excited the employer would be if they could handpick teachers who are using strategies that the district believes follows best practice. On the flip side, the union is always mindful that teachers who sit on these committees are there to represent all members.

Therefore, it is critical that any district committee analyzing and possibly making recommendations on any issue is replete with members who share the same representative responsibility. That is not to say that a teacher who is passionate about a specific topic cannot keep the bigger picture a priority, but it can be challenging.

Professional autonomy remains one of our union's strongest principles. Any initiatives, changes, or practices that a district committee recommends must respect classroom teachers and professional autonomy. What may be an easy pedagogical shift for some may be a stressful change for others. When members sit on district committees they must take this view into account when discussing matters that could possibly affect how teachers currently teach.

Just as the employer chooses their representatives carefully—and the union often gives the district input about who from management should be on a district

committee—the ultimate decision remains with the employer. Knowing that, it is imperative that the union select members who will represent all teachers.

The union also considers a member's teaching assignment when selecting members for district committees. Often, a district committee discusses practices directly related to the classroom, so it is important—and representative—that classroom teachers compose the majority of members on a committee. Everyone has an opinion about how to improve the system, but classroom teachers remain the critical component of any change.

If you are interested in representing your colleagues on district committees, contact your local union office to discuss the criteria that your local uses in selecting district committee members.

The Provincial Collective Agreement can be downloaded from <https://is.gd/xZRbaQ>. ■



# Solidarity deepens at *Tri-National education conference*

By Kip Wood, Nanaimo teacher and BCTF Executive Committee Member-at-Large

Concepción Martínez de los Santos opens the pages of a handwritten book that tells the story of her life in two languages: Spanish and Náhuatl, the language of the ancient Aztecs and many modern Indigenous Mexicans. “Our mother tongue is beautiful, and we value it and teach it with pride,” writes Conchita, as she is known.

In November, Victoria teacher and BCTF Executive Committee member Robin Tosczak met Conchita at the four-room Kindergarten where she works in the mountains near Orizaba in the state of Veracruz, Mexico. There the BCTF and CoDevelopment Canada support a pilot program in community-based Indigenous education, transforming their formerly Spanish-centric school into an Indigenous-focused one.

“We were honoured to visit the school,” said Robin. “We shared speeches and food, enjoyed live music and traditional dances by the students. Conchita and other teachers invited us into their classrooms to see the Náhuatl materials they created. Conchita wrote and illustrated her bilingual book to ensure her family history is preserved and

to inspire her young students to hold their culture tight.”

Robin and I were two of 15 BCTF members who attended the 13th conference of the Tri-National Coalition for the Defense of Public Education in Veracruz. The Canadian delegation also included representatives from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation and CUPE. They were joined by teachers from Mexico, the United States, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, and, for the first time, the UK.

The Tri-National Coalition was founded in Olympia, Washington, in 1993, sparked by the need to develop common strategies to counter the impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on public education. Under NAFTA, the neoliberal

agenda of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and US government were imposed on Mexico. Resistance to neoliberalism’s dictates—lower taxes, deregulation of economic activity, and privatization of state-owned enterprises and public services like public education—has guided the work of the Tri-National Coalition ever since.

The conference was opened by Cuitláhuac García Jiménez, governor-elect of Veracruz, from the *Juntos Haremos Historia* coalition. The name means “together we will make history,” and indeed that is what they did. The progressive coalition that included now-President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) and the Labor Party managed to defeat the long rule of the right-wing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in national elections held July 1. García Jiménez’s presence at the Tri-National Conference signaled a new potential for co-operation between governments and teacher unions in Mexico, where the repression has been harsh.



Photos p.14-15 by Steve Stewart



**Left, p. 14:** Náhuatl Kindergarten students near Orizaba, Veracruz, where the BCTF and CoDevelopment Canada support a pilot program in community-based Indigenous education.

**Above, left:** Victoria teacher Robin Toszak (right) with Mexican preschool teacher Concepción Martínez de los Santos.

**Above, right:** Kip Wood, second from left, back row. All members of the BCTF delegation gave presentations at the Tri-National conference. Julia McRae, Violette Baillargeon, and other Surrey teachers also visited an encampment where members of the migrant caravan were receiving legal, medical, and food aid from Mexican supporters. Thousands of refugees from Central America are walking north through Mexico seeking sanctuary in the United States.

Delegates learned that, while the level of hardship experienced by teachers differs greatly in Canada, the USA, and Mexico, the privatization schemes we face are the same. Curriculum changes that ignore local cultures and Indigenous peoples, narrow measures of success like standardized tests, underfunding, and onerous accountability measures are some of the common experiences.

I visited a secondary school where the teachers talked about their abysmal pay and the fact that government provides absolutely no learning resources. Teachers and parents must fundraise for all resources and activities. To make matters worse, funds received from the Parent-Teacher Association are taxable!

I noted that school conditions were totally unsatisfactory. The concrete building looked grim and the common sports area, smaller than a basketball court, was surrounded by high walls. It seemed more like a prison than a school.

Indeed, Mexican teachers are all too familiar with prison conditions. Delegates from across the country described repression and violence. Teachers have been killed for protesting and for their union activism, while others have been taken as political prisoners. But despite the hardship, Mexican teachers insist that morale has not decreased!

One teacher told me that he and his colleagues are determined their students will be change-makers. "Through our teaching, we politicize our students," he said. "If we don't teach students to be critically reflective, then nothing will change, and corruption will continue in our country."

I asked students about what they hoped for the future of their school. "Space and resources," said one. "We need support from the municipality," another replied. I found the modesty and simplicity of their responses to be heartbreaking.

At about 2.5% of GDP, K-12 per-pupil funding in British Columbia is among the lowest in Canada and the US. By contrast, Mexico funds public education at 5.24% of GDP. Nonetheless, Mexican teachers are facing deteriorating conditions, more precarious work, and declining salaries, all resulting in what one leader described as "social fatigue."

Teachers in Puerto Rico told another heartbreaking story. When Hurricane Maria struck on September 20, 2017, communities were devastated. In the aftermath, corporations and government sought to privatize the country, and in particular the public school system. But with the help of California and BC teachers and others, schools have been rebuilt. Now the significant challenge is to get them staffed and reopened!

Of about 1,100 schools in Puerto Rico, more than 400 have not reopened. With the loss of schools, resources, operational funding, and pension benefits, teachers are desperate for change. One colleague told me they are preparing for an "indefinite strike."

Teachers from Los Angeles and Chicago are also preparing for job action. The Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU) and the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) have each been able to recruit over 1,000 new members. The CTU organized teachers from 34 privately run, but publicly funded charter schools. Because contract talks are not progressing, the CTU authorized the first strike by charter school teachers in US history, in November.

The UTLA representatives talked about the commodification of education and the normalization of poverty. "Government is broke on purpose," said one teacher. As early as February, the UTLA may be leading the largest teacher strike in US history.

Inspiration also came from our American colleagues because of rank-and-file organization and protest. US labour news in the spring of 2018 was all about the teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, and Arizona, whose direct action led to important increases in teacher pay and funding for public education. What was clear at the Tri-National Conference is that the work is only beginning.

BCTF delegates left Orizaba inspired and feeling stronger because of the ongoing international solidarity with teachers in the Tri-National Coalition.

**La lucha sigue! The struggle continues! ■**

# Let's talk about language

## *Is disability a bad word?*

By Leah Kelley, Chilliwack teacher and doctoral candidate, Faculty of Education, SFU

In my work as an educator and an activist, I have long wondered why it is so difficult for us to use the word “disability.” The word “special” and the notion of “special needs” are examples of the elaborate linguistic workarounds we have adopted to talk about disability. Historically speaking, the word special was intended to improve the language used to refer to “disability,” replacing more problematic words like “handicapped” and the “R” word, which in their time were designed as replacements for other problematic terms such as “stupid,” “idiot,” “moron,” and “imbecile.” Recently, other euphemistic terms like “differently abled” or “handicapable” have come into use. Although intended to push back against stigma, these terms are also problematic, since they remain connected to underlying biases. As many educators now realize, designating disabled people as special has done little to change these underlying biases of “ableism.”

SIMILAR TO THE DEFINITION of racism, ableism refers to discrimination and social prejudice against people with disabilities. Such discrimination can be specific and overt toward a particular person or group. Ableism also exists hidden in structures and perceptions that are largely unexamined in our schools and communities resulting in more systemically widespread barriers, including our language. For instance, the way disability is discussed, or excluded from conversations, often reinforces negative stereotypes, shaping attitudes that can limit access and opportunity for students with disabilities, including nurturing a positive identity, developing self-understanding, and the cultivation of advocacy skills.

### Language is shifting but the conversation remains the same

In British Columbia, we may be transitioning away from the language of special education toward that of diversity. Arguably, this shift is a well-intentioned attempt toward inclusivity and to avoid the language of stigma and discrimination. Framing disability as one aspect of diversity may appear to move in a positive direction. But we must ask the question: is it possible that this shift in language might actually make things more difficult for students with disabilities? And if so, how and why?

Suggesting that students with disability are simply a part of a wider diversity of learners may be true, but we must examine the implications of doing so, ensuring that space and language to explicitly talk about disability happens. We must resist subsuming disability into the broader category of diversity, so that we do not inadvertently make it more difficult to discuss and address the specific issues faced by disabled people.

When I use the term disabled, I sometimes see people politely work to hide a raised eyebrow. I sense unspoken shock that I am insensitive enough to actually say “that word.” Perhaps this reaction is tied

to assumptions that equate disability with tragedy, that disabled people are less than, and that to use the word is an insult. I am curious about what might be possible if the term disability were uncoupled from pity and stigma, and the opportunities that might then be created to examine why discussing disability—even saying the word—makes people so uncomfortable.

Students with disabilities continue to experience exclusion and discrimination that is different from members of other marginalized groups. What might be possible if/when the shift to the language of diversity and diverse learners is accompanied with an attitude of inquiry to understand the lived experience of disability-related stigma? How do we ensure that the experiences of students with disabilities are not disregarded, disappeared, or erased, and that the same stigma and barriers are not perpetuated—simply rebranded with a new name? How might we create opportunities to better prepare our students for their futures by including disability history and the disability rights movement in social justice curriculum?

Discussing and answering these questions would be a move toward justice. When disability and the stories and perspectives of disabled people are included in the context of human rights and social justice discussions, our understanding deepens and creates space to consider accessibility, accommodations, fairness, and bias—making our school communities better and more inclusive for everyone.

### #NotSpecialNeeds #SayTheWord

Many of the disabled adults I know actually prefer the word “disabled” over the euphemisms designed to avoid the term.

“When I use the term disabled, I sometimes see people politely work to hide a raised eyebrow.”

Below: the author's son



Photo submitted by author

“Disability is a part of an identity we claim with pride. Disability is a natural part of the full range of human experience.”

Some people are confused by this, because it is counter-intuitive to the discourse and master narrative. However, for me, my family members, and others in the disability community, we understand that we are a part of a broader group with a particular history. Disability is a part of an identity we claim with pride. Yes, we experience difficulties, but we acknowledge that disability is a natural part of the full range of human experience, and we have our own stories. As someone who identifies as neurodivergent, is the parent of an autistic son, and with many years experience as an

integration and inclusion teacher, I'm well aware of the significance of language.

A shift away from the notion of special also creates an opportunity to move the discussion toward the idea that the needs of all students are actually the same: the need to have access to education, to belong, to be safe, cared for, respected, honoured, heard and supported to be self-determining.

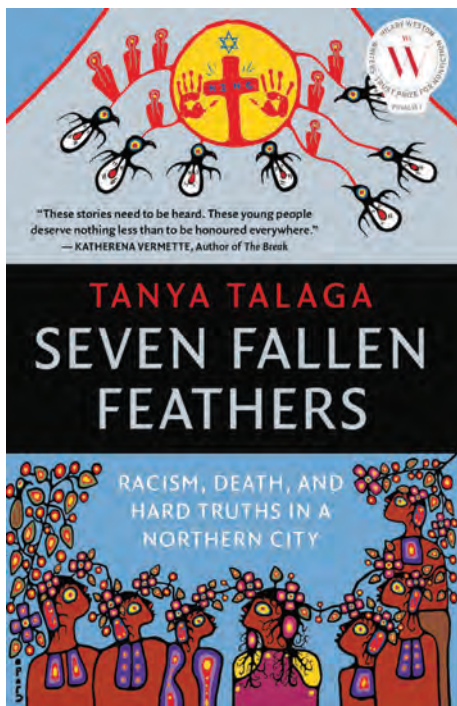
The Ministry of Education is considering categorization and the framing of disability—here lies an opportunity to move in a different direction. It is a profound act of solidarity to interrogate how systems and attitudes have been shaped by avoiding the word disability. What might be possible when there is space in our classrooms to talk about disability, as a normal part of human experience—an identity uncoupled from shame? Let's have the difficult conversations and examine our attitudes about disability, and re-imagine inclusion in our classrooms, schools, communities—and in our lives.

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**Leah Kelley is a teacher in Chilliwack, and a doctoral candidate at Simon Fraser University. Read Leah's blog, 30 Days of Autism, at <https://30daysofautism.blog>, which explores education, social justice, advocacy and self-determination, parenting an autistic son, and navigating the world as a neurodivergent person. ■**





***Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death, and Hard Truths in a Northern City***  
by Tanya Talaga  
Published by House of Anansi

**Editor's note:** Tanya Talaga delivered the prestigious CBC Massey Lectures in November 2018. Her lectures, titled *All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward*, explore the legacy of cultural genocide against Indigenous peoples. You can listen to Talaga's lectures at <https://lis.gd/uSncX5>.

# Seven Fallen Feathers

## A book I almost didn't read

Review by Catherine Quanstrom, President, Bulkley Valley Teachers' Union

I say "almost," but really, I didn't want to read the story of how seven teens from remote Ontario reserve villages came full of trepidation and hope to Thunder Bay to attend high school, only to have their short lives end near the banks of the Kaministiquia River.

HEARING TANYA TALAGA speak to the BC Teachers' Federation Annual General Meeting last year changed my mind. Her compelling account of the journey to find truth amidst tragedy convinced me that this would help me, a non-Indigenous settler, gain further understanding of the two solitudes of Indigenous-settler relations in Canada.

Public education is one means of levelling the privilege playing field, but if you live in a remote reserve in Canada, especially a fly-in community hours from a larger centre, chances are you only benefit from public education until Grade 8. After that, you may have to travel far from home if you hope to complete high school and gain that magic ticket to trade school or university.

*Seven Fallen Feathers* is Talaga's account of her journalistic investigation into the deaths of seven students who made that journey from reserve communities to Thunder Bay. The city didn't roll out the red carpet for recent arrivals from any of the Indigenous communities dotting the Canadian Shield of Northern Ontario. As Talaga observes, "The white face of prosperity built its own society while the red face powerlessly stood and watched."

Yet the students were excited. Life in an isolated community can feel stifling to teens, who are acutely aware of a bigger world to be explored. The staff of Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School in Thunder Bay did their best to keep watch over the children. In many cases the students were boarded with family friends or relatives. The students came from caring families who wrestled with the idea of sending their children away. So what went wrong? As Talaga shows through interviews with social workers, caregivers, school staff, administrators, aunts, uncles, cousins, siblings, and parents—the city never welcomed the new arrivals.

Racist taunts. Thrown garbage. Confrontations with bullies and gangs. It is one thing for Indigenous adults to experience the everyday hostility directed toward them, but it is another level of trauma for teens who don't have a family nearby for comfort and protection. As teens often do, these students turned to peers for support. Some also turned to drugs and alcohol, displaying at-risk behaviour.

But why did it lead to the deaths of seven children? When did the alarms bells start to go off—if at all? Short of an outright indictment, Talaga reveals how the Thunder Bay Police conducted bloodless, and in most cases, brief investigations into the seven deaths that took place between 2000 and 2011.

Were all the deaths suicide or accidental? Talaga approaches the question from several directions in her relentless pursuit for answers. She desires to provide closure to families who sent their children south hoping their kids, because of education, would gain greater control over their futures. Instead, mothers, fathers, grandparents, and siblings found themselves making the trek to Thunder Bay to bring their dead children home.

Comprehensively covered, compassionately investigated, scrupulously documented, *Seven Fallen Feathers* offers a painful yet essential window into the lives of Indigenous families grappling with more loss, more pain, and few answers. This book is a call to arms—these children are all our children. They were too young, too inexperienced, too fragile to grapple with the hate and hostility of a racist community. Thunder Bay is forever stained by these seven deaths, but the negative attitudes toward Indigenous people that Talaga reveals are still problematic throughout Canada. We need to do better. ■

# *Socratic Circles*

## Express thinking through conversation

Review by **Jennifer Fox**, teacher-librarian, Dawson Creek

With the emphasis on critical thinking in the new curriculum I find it exciting to try new ways of supporting student independence. *Socratic Circles* is not about the process of telling by students or teacher, but about students sharing and asking about information. Teachers can assess students in real time, in the middle or end of a project, find out what students know, do not understand, and what might help. Students who share information more comfortably through conversation find this Socratic method empowering. Even better, students begin to naturally consider information critically and ask questions.

THE AUTHOR OFFERS a prescribed, detailed, and easy-to-follow method for student-led conversations about learning. Laid out in eight chapters, with an appendix, further reading, and references sections, each chapter starts with a dialogue transcription, has subheadings, bold-titled short-reading sections, and a conclusion. Using a conversational tone, Copeland gives the following support to teachers:

- background information
- step-by-step instructions
- criteria
- specific examples
- forms
- sample conversations
- visuals
- followup activities
- suggestions for texts model.

If you take the time to follow Copeland's structured method, Socratic circles become much easier and you can even adapt them to outcomes.

The Socratic model is easily adaptable to all curriculum. As a teacher-librarian, I use it with my classes as a way to close our collaboration projects. I have a colleague who uses circles in her math classroom. In the beginning of the year, she finds the circles help create community and a safe space. Once that's achieved, students use circles to work on mathematical reasoning.

The greatest challenge for teachers is stepping away after giving students instructions and then taking on the role of timekeeper. It is sometimes painful as students find their way, with many silent moments. But then the magic happens, and it comes together. Most students feel empowered and more confident, even those who seem uninvolved are actively listening. Ask those who did not speak what they learned. You will be surprised at their answers. As Copeland writes in his conclusion, "... students find value and merit in their own voices and ideas; ...they are equal collaborators in the creation of knowledge and meaning."

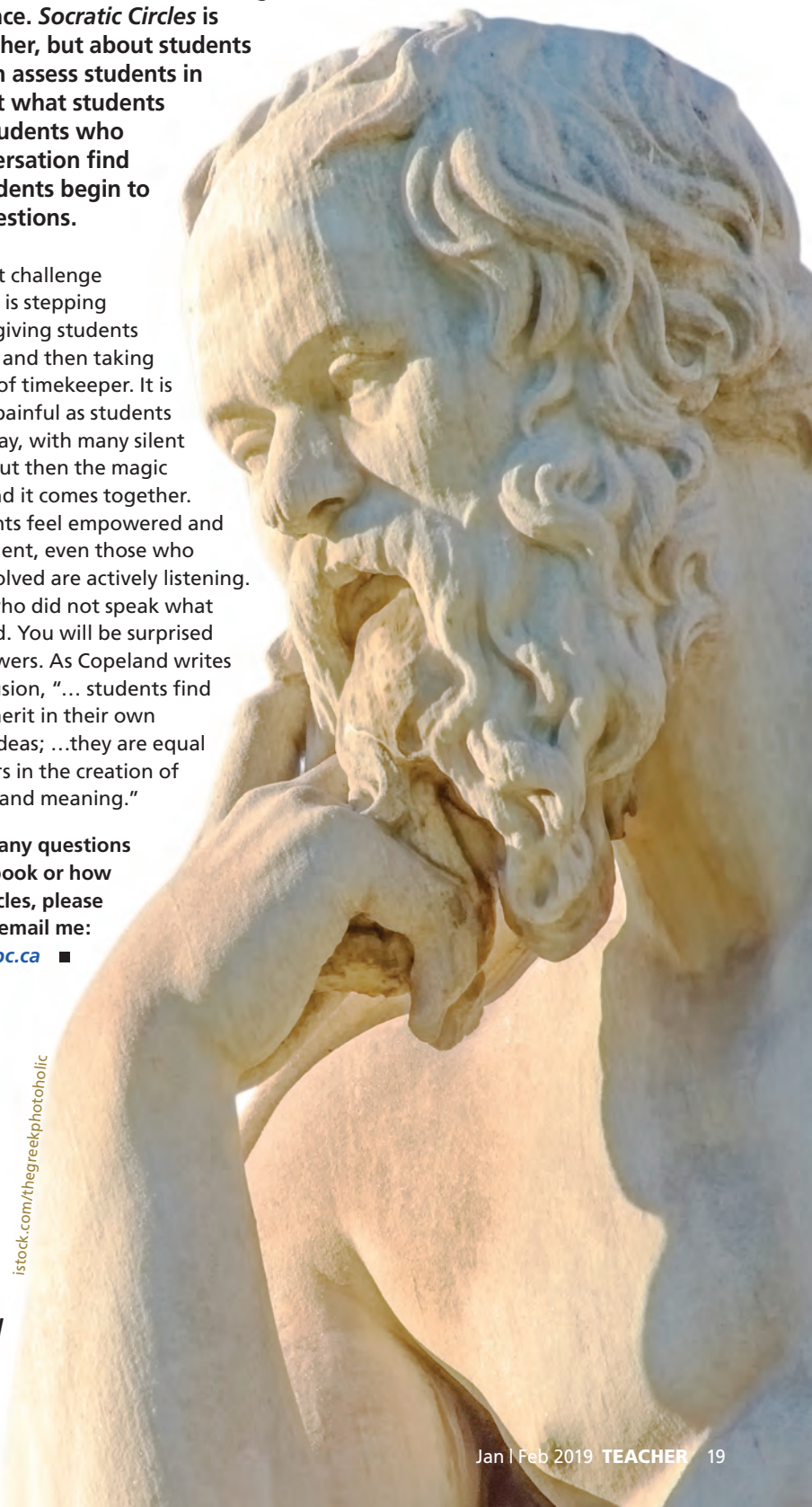
**If you have any questions about this book or how I use the circles, please feel free to email me:**

[jfox@sd59.bc.ca](mailto:jfox@sd59.bc.ca) ■

***Socratic Circles: Fostering critical and creative thinking in middle and high school***

by Matt Copeland  
Stenhouse Publishers

istock.com/thegreekphotoholic



# Resources to integrate *Indigenous content and perspectives*

Compiled by Susan Croll from the Strong Nations Publishing website

Many of you have asked us to include more resources in the magazine, especially resources about Aboriginal Education, Indigenous Ways of Knowing, and First Nations Principles of Learning.

THE BOOKS FEATURED on these two pages come from a website belonging to Strong Nations Publishing. Based in Nanaimo, they have a wealth of fiction, non-fiction, graphic novels, resources, and even gifts for teachers and all educators. We will feature more resources from other publishers in upcoming editions. Please send us reviews of resources you wish to share with colleagues and we will do our best to feature them as well.

Besides award-winning trade books, Strong Nations Publishing sells guided reading sets based on Aboriginal characters and content, the Canoe Kids series, From the Mountains to the Sea series, We Are All Connected series, book bundles, cultural awareness books, and much more. Many of their books are also available in French and many are written in Indigenous languages.

Here is a small sample of the books they offer.

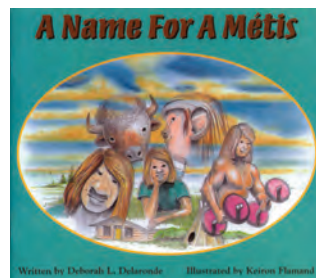
## YOUNGER READERS

***A Day with Yayah* (2017)**  
Author: Nicola I. Campbell  
Illustrator: Julie Flett



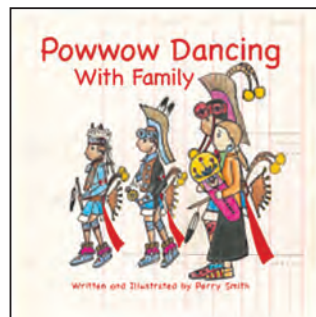
Set in the Okanagan, a First Nations family goes on an outing to forage for herbs and mushrooms. Grandmother passes down her knowledge of plant life to her young grandchildren.

***A Name for a Métis* (2007)**  
Author: Deborah L. Delaronde  
Illustrator: Keiron Flamand



What's in a name? A little boy might be known as Great Big Nose because he's so nosy, or Big Ears because he listens so carefully. Yet there's one name that might suit him better.

***Powwow Dancing with Family* (2018)**  
Author and Illustrator: Perry Smith



Drumming, singing, and dancing are all part of being at a powwow. Perry and his family travel all over North America to participate in these family and community gatherings. Join Perry's two boys as they share their treasured memories of being at powwows with their family and learning how to dance.

## TEEN READERS

***#Not Your Princess* (2017)**  
Various authors and illustrators

Indigenous women demand to be heard in this stunning anthology. Whether looking back to a troubled past or welcoming a hopeful future, the powerful voices of



Indigenous girls and women across North America resound in this book. In the same visual style as the bestselling *Dreaming in Indian*, *#NotYourPrincess* presents an eclectic collection of poems, essays, interviews, and art that combine to express the experience of being an Indigenous woman. Stories of abuse, intergenerational trauma, and stereotyping are countered by the voices of passionate women demanding change and realizing their dreams. Sometimes outraged, often reflective, but always strong, the women in this book will give teen readers insight into the lives of women who, for so long, have had their history hidden and modern lives made virtually invisible.

***100 Days of Cree* (2016)**  
Authors: Neal McLeod and Arok Wolvengrey



As an Elder once said, "Learn one Cree word a day for 100 days and emerge a different person."

In *100 Days of Cree*, Neal McLeod offers a portal into another way of understanding the

universe—and our place within it—while demonstrating why this funny, vibrant, and sometimes salacious language is “the sexiest of them all” (according to Tomson Highway).

Based on a series of Facebook posts, the 100 short chapters or “days” in the book present a chain of related words, some dealing with the traditional (the buffalo hunt, the seasons) and others cheekily capturing the detritus of modern life (from internet slang to Johnny Cash songs to Viagra).

The result is both an introduction to the most widely spoken Indigenous language in Canada and the opportunity to see the world, and ourselves, in another way.

### ***A Difficult Beauty* (2011)**

Author: David Groulx



David Groulx's latest collection offers his readers a handful of poems as sharp and brilliant as glass shards, offering glimpses of the anger, pain, and lost beauties of his ancestors. These poems cut deep with their clear-eyed honesty, their stripped away pain and suffering.

### ***A Feast for All Seasons* (2010)**

Author: Andrew George Jr.



Traditional North American Indigenous cuisine has existed for centuries, but its

central tenet of respecting nature and its bounty have never been as timely as they are now. Andrew George, of the Wet'suwet'en Nation in Canada, is a well-respected Aboriginal chef and instructor who has spent the last 25 years promoting the traditions of First Nations food. In *A Feast for All Seasons*, written with Robert Gairns, he has compiled Aboriginal recipes that feature ingredients from the land, sea, and sky, elements of an enduring cuisine that illustrate respect for the environment and its creatures, and acknowledgment of the spiritual power that food can have in our lives.

The 120 recipes include delectable, make-at home dishes such as Salmon and Fiddlehead Stirfry, Stuffed Wild Duck, Barbecued Oysters, Pan-fried Rabbit with Wild Cranberry Glaze, Clam Fritters, and Wild Blueberry Cookies. The book also features recipes with exotic ingredients that provide a fascinating glimpse into the history of Indigenous cuisine: Moose Chili, Boiled Porcupine, Smoked Beaver Meat, and Braised Bear. This unique cookbook pays homage to an enduring food culture grounded in tradition and the power of nature that transcends the test of time.

## **SERIES AND COLLECTIONS**

### ***Strong Stories***



Texts in the *Strong Stories* focus on First Nation territories from across Canada and the United States. These stories reflect the belief that Indigenous stories are the roots of Indigenous people, lands, and cultures. It is from these stories that First Nations grow and become strong and proud.

New to the *Strong Stories* series are stories from the Dakelh, Métis, and Kwakwaka'wakw! Additionally, the popular Kanyen'kehà:ka *Strong Stories* have been translated into French as *Collection Les Kanyen'kehà:kas*.

### ***Strong Readers***



The *Strong Readers* are a guided/ levelled reading series chock-full of science, numeracy, social responsibility, language arts, and oral language teachings. Books are rich with text features and have beautiful illustrations and photographs.

## ***We Are All Connected***



*We Are All Connected* is a series that explores how we all live together in a shared balance. Each book explores a specific ecosystem with a focus on one animal and its adaptations for survival within that ecosystem. Indigenous interviewees, each living within the same area, have responded to strategic questions as to how their community interacts with their land, their traditional territory. Explore texts with inquiry in mind.

### ***Canoe Kids Project***



*Canoe Kids* is an eight-year project that will produce 24 volumes, commencing with the first edition released in January 2016. *Canoe Kids* is photojournalism-based with full-colour pictures and illustrations accompanied by poetry, art, recipes, stories, and editorial content that showcase cultures whose time stretches through prior millennia to the present. It aims to celebrate the similarities and differences amongst Indigenous cultures.

### ***From the Mountains to the Sea***



Each book in the series *From the Mountains to the Sea* supports outcomes in both science and social studies.

**Find more books and resources from Strong Nations Publishing at [www.strongnations.com](http://www.strongnations.com).** ■



# Love, joy, and burnout *in the Kindergarten classroom*

By Anne Hales, BCTF staff

Imagine Vancouver's Rogers Arena filled with only Kindergarten students. Do that twice and you might have just enough space for 39,000 or so kids who started Kindergarten in BC public schools in September. What exactly would you do with all these active and inquisitive beings? That challenge falls to a team of about 2,600 K/K-1 teachers who strive to create rich and inclusive learning environments for BC's newest learners every day.

TO FIND OUT what these dedicated and energetic early primary teachers are thinking and feeling about their work, the BCTF Research Department, in collaboration with the BC Primary Teachers' Association (BCPTA), invited K/K-1 teachers to share their experiences and perspectives through a comprehensive survey.

They spoke. We listened. With more than 1,300 survey responses received and many written comments, teachers clearly indicated that meeting their students' increasingly complex needs is taking them to the edge of their teaching skills and physical and emotional capacities. Yes, they speak of joys and rewards but are also vocal about difficulties. As good problem-solvers do, they provided wise recommendations for improving their working conditions and enhancing educational supports for their "little ones."

▶ Here's a snapshot of what they told us:

## **We love teaching Kindergarten!**

"I love being a K teacher. There is something magical about children first coming to school."

"Teaching Kindergarten is a great joy. It is a privilege to welcome children into school."

"I love my work with the children and I love each day that I teach."

## **We are waiting too long for specialized classroom supports.**

"As a Kindergarten teacher we are often the first worker in the school system to meet the children with challenges and while we do everything in our power to help them, without a diagnosis we often don't get any extra support."

"I would advocate for smaller classes and having a trained ECE specialist in every high-needs school Kindergarten class. I work in a low-income school...the gap continues to widen between the have-not schools and the wealthier socio-economic schools. We need access to psycho-ed assessment at an earlier age."

"I feel the biggest struggle my colleagues and I face is the inadequate support for the students who come into Kindergarten and are not able to function within the classroom environment...there is an understandably long process that must take place to determine whether support is necessary and available. This can leave the Kindergarten teacher with little to no support for the year."

## **We need proactive staffing and early interventions for ALL K/K-1 classes.**

"I believe we need to provide better staffing in Kindergarten classrooms so that we can truly meet students where they are as they enter school and celebrate all the

things they can and can't yet do. Over ten years I can say that students show increasing levels of need for support in behaviour, anxiety, fine motor control, and generally with self-regulation. I see more students seeking connection with their classroom adults, needing more conversation and simple together time than one adult in a class can possibly provide."

"A lovely red carpet of caring should be clearly rolled out to set everyone up for success. We need a contingency fund at the early childhood level that recognizes there always will be these students arriving unidentified, needing support, and we need access to support immediately."

### **Smaller class sizes? Of course!**

"In my professional view as a teacher with many years of experience, I believe that Kindergarten (and all other primary grades) classes are getting immensely more stressful and much more work, and that the needs of our early learners are becoming increasingly more intense every year. If we wish to maintain the quality and consistency of our Kindergarten and early learning teachers, we need to dramatically decrease both class size and composition in K to 3 classrooms as soon as possible."

"The return to our contract language has resulted in a drop in the number of students in my classroom by 1/4! I am unbelievably overjoyed by this!"

### **Child development is a complex, dynamic process. That makes K-1 splits challenging.**

"It is difficult to find the balance to meet the needs of the children when there is so little support for teachers in a K-1 classroom. There is limited resource support for these classrooms and the classroom teacher is left alone with many behaviour and learning challenges that

“A lovely red carpet of caring should be clearly rolled out to set everyone up for success.”

are undiagnosed...so children make limited progress in the most crucial years of learning."

"As much as I love my students, I do not think the K-1 combined age class should be an option. It takes away from both age groups. The Kindergarteners lose out on playtime, because Grade 1s need so much attention in respect to reading and math instructions. I would have a different day plan if I had a straight 1 or K."

"With Ks there full-day, it is challenging to teach Grade 1s reading and writing skills while supporting the Ks in a play-based learning program. The years I have taught K-1 I feel huge tension and never feel that I am doing either grade the service of teaching them."

### **Kids learn hard and play hard. And that takes a steady supply of classroom resources.**

"There needs to be funding to outfit Kindergarten rooms with adequate resources. I spend a lot of my own money trying to make my Kindergarten class a warm, exciting place to be."

"I entered a Kindergarten room this year with absolutely no supplies. If I hadn't brought boxes and boxes of my own supplies, books, and materials, the children in my classroom would have no centre activities, puzzles, or even LEGO."

### **Full Day K? Play-based learning? It's complicated.**

"Play-based learning is still a work in progress in my district and many teachers feel the pressure of previous curriculum expectations weighing on them as they try to embrace the new while still hanging on to the old. From vast amounts of research, we know that collaboration is a significant way to help teachers grow in their knowledge and skills with the support of colleagues. I think this would transform the way we teach and help us finally engage deeply in the curriculum and practice it as it is intended to be lived out."

### **We're tired, and worried how long we can continue in K/K-1.**

"I love my job, but I believe it will eventually burn me out as it is extremely mentally and emotionally exhausting."

"I love my work; however, the working and learning conditions make me feel irritable and I'm not the irritable type."

"It's astonishing how much personal time is devoted to communicating with parents about children's behaviour, needs, and concerns in the form of meetings, emails, and communication books regularly sent home."

"If I leave this job it will be because of the stress of repeatedly having kids enter K without support (that need and deserve it but aren't designated). The stress for me has skyrocketed...."

### **Show us some love, people!**

"People often think of Kindergarten as glorified baby-sitting and that we don't have to think, mark, or prep much. But nothing could be further from the truth. We do teach and have incredible patience. We always have our "A" game on. A student's experience in Kindergarten is their first in school. It must be positive, happy, and fun. There is a lot of pressure to be perfect!"

"More time to prep, collaborate with colleagues, and professional development opportunities would encourage and promote personal and professional well-being."

### **We still love Kindergarten teaching!**

"Despite all the challenges I still think it is the most rewarding grade to teach and I love seeing the eager faces every morning!"

"I love my job. It takes a lot of energy. I am grateful to the Kindergarten and K-1 teachers who have taught me along the way."

"Each day I just try and do my best and I love what I do!"

**To read more about the 2018  
Kindergarten Survey, check out  
[www.bctf.ca/frontline/](http://www.bctf.ca/frontline/). ■**



# New president for BCFED

By Jennifer Kimbley, BCTF staff

**Delegates rose to their feet giving outgoing BC Federation of Labour (BCFED) President Irene Lanzinger a warm standing ovation at the end of a tribute, thanking her for all her work to make BC a better place for working people. A former president of the BC Teachers' Federation, Lanzinger was first elected BCFED secretary-treasurer in 2010, and then president in 2014. She was the first woman president and teacher elected to lead the BCFED. She tirelessly advocated for workers' rights, a fifteen-dollar minimum wage, advanced equality, and called for tougher workplace safety.**

TEACHERS JOINED other BC unionists the last week of November to attend the 58th BCFED Convention. Held every two years, over a thousand labour activists come to the constitutional convention to debate how to advance the cause of working people and strategize for political action. The BCFED represents more than 500,000 working people from nearly 50 affiliated unions in every sector of the economy.

Laird Cronk of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers takes over as BCFED president, and Sussane Skidmore of the British Columbia Government and Service Employees' Union replaces Aaron Ekman as Secretary-Treasurer. Sussane is the first openly queer woman elected to a senior position within the BCFED. Laird and Sussane were elected with the full support of the affiliate unions of the BCFED, including the BCTF. Burnaby teacher Shanee Prasad was re-elected chair of the BCFED Workers of Colour caucus. "It's an honour to serve the workers of colour in the union movement. Our caucus brings together workers from various sectors, passionate to see the union movement become more diverse and inclusive," she said.

Federal NDP leader Jagmeet Singh, Premier John Horgan, and Labour Minister Harry Bains delivered rousing speeches. Horgan's address was the first by a sitting Premier in two decades. Well-known storyteller and author Ivan Coyote spoke humorously about their experiences as a non-binary person navigating the world.

During the convention, delegates received word that the federal government had legislated the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) back to work, effectively ending their rotating 24-hour strikes. The BCFED quickly organized a demonstration for fair and respectful treatment of postal workers, calling for Canada Post and the federal government to negotiate in good faith.

*Demonstration outside the convention in support of CUPW.*

Delegates debated pages of resolutions, including organizing new members and proposing lobbying actions, and voted unanimously for this BCTF resolution: "The Federation will encourage the provincial government to work closely with affiliates of the BCFED in order to fully and meaningfully implement Call to Action #57 (from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada) across the entire province over the next two years." This resolution encourages the provincial government to educate public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools.

Rick Kumar, an early career teacher in Surrey and member of the 83-teacher-strong BCTF delegation, reflected, "The BCFED convention was a great way for me to unite with our union brothers and sisters to achieve common goals, establish better working conditions, and become part of something bigger. Although I am a proud BCTF member, I felt part of a greater movement that is strong in voice and caring in heart." ■

*Below, L to R: Laird Cronk and Sussane Skidmore.*



Jennifer Kimbley photo

# US midterms 2018

## Voters deliver big wins for public education

By Staci Maiers and Tim Walker

Reprinted from NEA Today (neatoday.org) with permission from the National Education Association

**Last spring, American educators in state after state took to the streets to demand greater investments in public schools. The protests launched a national movement, #RedforEd, that elevated public education as a top issue and promised to harness the energy of educators everywhere and carry it to the ballot box in November.**

ON NOVEMBER 6th, they delivered in spectacular fashion, helping sweep pro-education candidates—many of them former or current educators—into office at every level of government.

The victories marked a major victory for students and education and serve as a mandate for real change in our public education system, said NEA President Lily Eskelsen García.

"Lawmakers learned an important lesson tonight: You can either work with educators to address the needs of students and public education, or they will work to elect someone who will," said Eskelsen García.

"Candidates across the country witnessed unprecedented activism by educators in their races. Standing up for students and supporting public education were deciding factors for voters, and educators will hold lawmakers to their promises."

The balance of power will shift in Washington DC, as the Democrats' new majority in the US House of Representatives will serve as an important check on President Trump and Education Secretary Betsy DeVos. More than 100 women were elected to the House, the most in US history.

It was the gubernatorial and state legislature contests, however, that delivered the most impressive wins for pro-public education candidates. Education policy is decided primarily by these legislatures and the bulk of money allocated to public schools comes from state and local coffers.

At least 290 state legislative seats and seven state chambers were flipped to pro-public education majorities, many in states that have suffered through a decade of devastating cuts to education and relentless attacks on educators and other public sector workers.

Beyond that, at least seven governorships were flipped, including Tony Evers, who put an end to the Scott Walker era in Wisconsin, and J.B. Pritzker defeated Bruce Rauner in Illinois.

Walker led the attacks on public sector unions with Act 10, the 2011 anti-collective bargaining law. In 2015, Rauner was chiefly responsible for pushing the Janus case that made its way to the US Supreme Court in 2018.

The 2018 elections also saw an unprecedented number of educators step up and run for office. According to an NEA analysis, nearly 1,800 current or former teachers and other education professionals ran for state legislative seats this year and more than 100 more vied for top state or federal offices. Many of these candidates hailed from states that experienced #RedForEd walkouts: West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, and North Carolina. Oklahoma led the charge with more than 62 educators who were on the general election ballot. ■



# Protect your voice

By Wade Repta

There are few professions that require the use of voice more than teaching. Unfortunately, with this constant use of voice comes the risk of voice-related dysfunction and poor vocal health. Indeed, 58% of teachers will develop a voice disorder in their lifetime, compared with 20% of the general population (Pitman, 2011). But, since teachers spend so much time considering the needs of others, they rarely take time to consider their own needs. Let's face it, voice dysfunction is usually far down the list of a teacher's daily concerns.



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SPEECH IS A PRODUCT of several components working together as one system. As air is exhaled from our lungs through our larynx (voice box) our vocal cords vibrate, which is the basis of speech known as phonation. However, the sound made by the vibration of the vocal cords is weak. The cavities in our head and neck act as a resonator to convert the vibrations of the vocal cords into audible speech. The volume of our voices is determined by the air pressure that is exhaled through the system and the tension in our vocal cords. The louder the voice, the greater volume of air being pushed through the vocal cords.

Voice dysfunction can result from abnormalities anywhere in this speech system, however, the most common issues involve lesions on the vocal cords as either nodules, polyps, or cysts. Other less common disorders can result in voice dysfunction for teachers, such as certain types of cancer, laryngitis, muscle tension dysphonia, and

spasmodic dysphonia. Despite the diagnosis, many of the disorders that cause voice dysfunction result in similar symptoms, including hoarseness or raspy voice, decreased vocal range, vocal fatigue, breathy or airy voice, voice tremor, throat discomfort, and feeling the need to cough or clear the throat. Teachers who don't have clear "diagnoses" regarding their voice can still struggle, and often times report that their voice simply feels tired, overused, or sore.

Despite the large amount of teachers' voice time each day, classrooms are not set up with acoustics and proper voice use in mind. Concrete walls, linoleum floors, unsealed doors and windows, and large numbers of students create an environment of competing noises all reverberating unabsorbed throughout the classroom. This forces teachers to try to speak over the noise, which increases voice demands, and leads to overuse and dysfunction. The good news is that teachers can protect their voices, regardless of what they are teaching.

Perhaps the most well-known way of doing this is by using a voice amplification system. It seems obvious that all teachers should have access to voice amplification, but only a small percentage of teachers actually do. Voice amplification systems act as both a preventative and restorative voice care tool by allowing teachers to speak

using normal speech at a relaxed volume, without needing to shout over students or projecting voice to the back of the room. The two most common providers of voice amplification systems for teachers are FrontRow and Lightspeed; your district will likely have a preference based on sourcing and costs. Other strategies that will help absorb sound and decrease reverberations in the classroom include using carpeting or matting on floors, ensuring doors close tightly with a proper seal, using curtains or blinds to keep voice in and outside noise out, and installing cork bulletin boards as makeshift baffling systems. And, if you want to bring some nature into your classroom, plants can dampen some of the sound that reverberates around your room.

See the next edition of *Teacher* for tips to maintain voice health and for possible accommodations that can assist teachers who are experiencing voice dysfunction.

**Wade Repta is the author of *The Well Teacher: Everything Teachers Need to Know to Be Well and Stay Well in the Classroom* ([www.humanworks.ca/thewellteacher/](http://www.humanworks.ca/thewellteacher/)). He is an occupational therapist and vice-president of Humanworks, and has worked with teachers through the BCTF Health and Wellness Program for almost 20 years. ■**

**“It seems obvious that all teachers should have access to voice amplification, but only a small percentage of teachers actually do.”**

# Lessons I learned

*from a university sabbatical spent teaching Grade 7 social studies*

By Meg Holden, SFU professor

In 2017, my children were not excited to go back to school. They did not have a teacher. It was not clear they would get a teacher. My nine-year-old fixed her eyes squarely on me one September evening. "You are a teacher, Mommy! Why don't you be my teacher?"

SHE HAD A POINT. Since 2003, I have been a professor of geography and urban studies at Simon Fraser University. And, as it happened, I had limited teaching responsibilities in the 2017–18 academic year, because of an earned study leave. I had big plans for my study leave that involved research and writing about sustainable cities, but my daughter's question drove me to investigate the process for applying for a teaching position at her school, via a Letter of Permission. Because we are a Francophone family, I don't want to say I was a shoe-in, but let's say the extraordinary need factor was unavoidable. I got the job—not in her class, but in her school.

The experience of teaching Grade 7 social studies last year taught me five profound lessons that I will take back to the university classroom. Each of these lessons was learned at the end of my rope, my vocal chords, my theatrical ability, my attention span, and other visceral endings.

- 1 **When I speak**, no more than 10% of what I say is actively heard by all of the students in a given class on a given day.
- 2 **Each new day** is an opportunity to connect with a student who yesterday may have been among the 10% of students who heard precisely none of what I said.

3 **Learning what is placed** in front of them is not something that comes naturally to the majority of students. The more distance between them and the learning material placed in front of them, the less likely they are to learn it.

4 **Excitement** has its place in the classroom.

5 **Putting the lid** on excitement once it is loosed in the classroom is more difficult than generating the excitement in the first place. And more important for ongoing classroom morale.

**I'd like to thank** the teachers and students at L'École Jules Verne for tolerating my own awkward, sometimes emotional, deer-in-the-headlights process of learning these lessons. Because even if the teaching-learning process took me to the limits of my capabilities, at the same time it represents a new beginning for my understanding of pedagogy.

1 **I know now** the importance of time for review, rephrasing, demonstrations, a new approach and perspective-taking.

2 **I understand** that just because students aren't actively listening does not mean they are not actively learning. I see the classroom as a landscape in which I have a responsibility to seek out the students who have come to class ready to learn and to meet them where they are, because their readiness and starting point will change from day to day, and so should I.

3 **As much as I value** PowerPoint for its ability to organize my understanding of the material at hand, I know that the teaching begins where the PowerPoint ends—slides are physically and conceptually far, far away from where most of my students are likely to be.

4 **I understand** that sites, sounds, and moving pictures are distracting for a reason: real sights and sounds are exciting and fun, and this can make them a boon to learning.

5 **At the same time**, I understand that ratcheting down this excitement takes at least as much energy as ratcheting it up, and that physical and social energy, once generated in the classroom, take on their own trajectory. Being explicit about my expectations of my students, time and time again, and being true to my word about my own commitment to teaching them, with the same force of character, does not go unnoticed—not even by students who are not listening. ■



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Teachers of Inclusive Education of BC are holding Crosscurrents 2019 at the Sheraton Vancouver Airport hotel. Keynote speaker Dr. Ross Greene will speak on the Collaborative and Proactive Solutions model. We have several other speakers on inclusive education relevant for K–12 teachers, administrators, and others working with children and youth in schools. Visit our website at [tiebc.com](http://tiebc.com).

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**MARCH 2019****Cross Border Conference 2019****March 2 Surrey**

All welcome! The Surrey Teachers' Association International Solidarity Committee is hosting the second Cross Border Social Justice Conference on March 2, 2019. This year's conference is focused on Teaching for Joy and Justice. We invite teachers, activists, and artists from British Columbia, Washington, and Oregon to imagine our classrooms as spaces where joy is the syncopation that sustains the work for justice. This year's keynote speaker is Mercedes Martinez, the president of the Puerto Rico Teachers' Federation. She will share post-Hurricane Maria experiences, and how teachers and parents resisted as government moved quickly to privatize public education. Contact the Surrey Teachers' Association at 604-594-5353 for more information.

**Stress Management vs Breaking a Stress Cycle****March 27 Kelowna**

Dr Shanker's session includes explorations and practical applications of: 1) The impact of an excessive stress load on a child's energy,

mood, behaviour and learning; 2) The Triune Brain: Limbic versus learning states and the limbic brake; 3) The five domains of Self-Reg: biological, emotion, cognitive, social and pro-social; 4) The difference between self-regulations and self-control, and the difference between stress behaviour and misbehaviour. [contact@4children.ca](mailto:contact@4children.ca).

**APRIL 2019****2019 Digital Learning Symposium****April 7–9 Burnaby**

Join us for the annual Digital Learning Symposium brought to you by the BC Partners in Online Learning, BlendEd BC, EDL, and the Canadian eLearning Network. The focus of the symposium is innovative learning models reflecting new curriculum in online learning environments. <http://canelearn.net/symposium19>.

**Restorative Justice Facilitator Training****April 16–18 Vancouver**

This is a highly interactive workshop where participants will practice and gain confidence in facilitating a model of dialogue that is participant driven, culturally sensitive, and empowering for all involved. <https://lis.gd/mYIFLL>.

**PD Online Calendar**[bctf.ca/PPcalendar](http://bctf.ca/PPcalendar)Changes/additions: [msteele@bctf.ca](mailto:msteele@bctf.ca)**Interested in Tutoring?****Join Teachers' Tutoring Service**

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