

YOU CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN

VESTA endorses the joint COPE/Vision slate for school board trustee

Dear Colleagues,

The Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association and the Vancouver & District Labour Council have endorsed the **joint COPE/Vision slate** of school board trustees. Voters in Vancouver can choose up to nine trustees to be elected. In November, all of us need to work hard to help elect a progressive school board comprised of . . .

- BACCHUS, Patti** Vision Vancouver
- BARGEMAN, Bill** COPE
- BLAKEY, Al** COPE
- BOUEY, Jane** COPE
- CLEMENT, Ken** Vision Vancouver
- GREGSON, Sharon E.** Vision Vancouver
- LOMBARDI, Mike** Vision Vancouver
- SINGH, Alvin** COPE
- WONG, Allan** COPE

WHY IS THIS SO IMPORTANT?

Vancouver teachers have worked many decades to get progressive trustees elected. These are trustees who will:

- Advocate continually and publicly for the students they serve
- Challenge the provincial government on its decisions around education, regardless of which party is in power
- Make decisions based on broad, meaningful consultation
- Speak out against intrusion of the private sector into public education
- Work *with* the employee unions where and when possible, and respect differences in opinion when they occur
- Be concerned with equity and broader social concerns
- Support teachers in their fight against the FSA and other externally-mandated assessments

The best-case scenario occurred in 2002, when we were successful in electing a progressive, pro-education Board for three years.

Unfortunately, the current NPA-majority Board elected in 2005 refuses to speak up on the underfunding issues, it hasn't followed through on seismic upgrading timeline, it hasn't fought the BC Liberal agenda, it has cut non-enrolling positions unnecessarily while at the same time creating more management positions, it has approved more funding for BCeSIS, it has proceeded with a faulty process to close schools, and has back-pedalled on the previous Board's anti-FSA position.

You are the most important aspect of the campaign. Our polling repeatedly confirms that teachers are the most trusted voices on public education. Your voice and just a little of your time are needed to elect a progressive school board.

YOU CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN!

Glen Hansman
President

Freedom of Expression dispute settled in teachers' favour!

Sometimes teachers in British Columbia must speak up, even when others in the system try to pressure us not to do so. We've had to take our right to communicate on public education issues to arbitration and even to the courts, and we've had that right affirmed time and time again. Now we've had another dispute on the same issue settled in our favour!

As reported at the October Staff Rep Assembly, our dispute with the Employer pertaining to the distribution of material opposing the FSA has now been resolved.

On October 15, a consent award was reached between the parties. In this award, *the Employer concedes that its directive prohibiting teachers from sending material opposing the FSA test home to parents through students was contrary to the Canadian Charter of Human Rights & Freedoms.*

Consequently, the Employer will withdraw its April 2007 directive to principals which blocked teachers' freedom of expression rights, and will withdraw a letter of expectation given to a Vancouver teacher because she distributed material (via students) opposing the FSA. An expedited procedure has also been put in place in case there are future issues around the distribution of these materials.

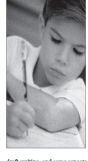
The 2008-2009 version of our FSA flyer has been distributed to schools, and is available for you to print off at www.vesta.ca The flyer is the same as last year's - except for a change in photograph and a date change reflecting when this school year's FSA will be held.

It is now absolutely clear that teachers in Vancouver may distribute material opposing the FSA by a variety of means. Teachers may distribute the material

- by giving it directly to parents
- on school property
- by posting it on bulletin boards
- by sharing it at PAC meetings
- by distributing it via students
- and by other means

If you have any questions about the consent award, or about the campaign opposing the FSA, please contact glen@vesta.ca

Withdraw your child from FSA testing!



What is the FSA?
The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is a set of national provincial tests in reading, writing, and numeracy for students in Grades 4 and 7 across BC.

Who writes the FSA tests?
The Ministry of Education has contracted a private company to write the tests. The Ministry of Education has also been accused of not allowing teachers to see the tests.

When are the FSA tests?
The FSA tests will be given to students in February 2009.

Why are teachers concerned?
The FSA tests do not help students reach their full potential. Teachers work with students to learn every day. The FSA tests are a one-time test that does not measure a student's true ability. The FSA tests are also a waste of time and money.

What about the rankings?
The FSA tests are used by the Ministry of Education to create a one-dimensional ranking of our schools. These rankings are based upon a narrow set of criteria and do not reflect the quality of education in our schools. They have nothing to do with a good education, and can cause additional pressure on schools to jump for the scores at the expense of other learning and assessment.

What can you do as a parent?
Withdraw your child from the FSA tests by writing a letter to the school principal.

How do I withdraw my child?
Talk with your principal and ask for the negative effects of the FSA tests.

How do I withdraw my child?
Talk with your principal and ask for the negative effects of the FSA tests.

A message from the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association (VESTA)

Dear Principals,
I understand that parents may request the principal to excuse a student in the event of a family emergency.
Please contact my child, _____, _____, _____
Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) tests for the following reasons:
 Family emergency Other extraordinary circumstance:
 Family illness
Thank you for your co-operation.
Principal's signature: _____

School board elections

Members are urged to mark their calendars for the **advance polls on November 5th**, so that they will be free on the official election day of **November 15th** to help pull the vote for progressive candidates - whatever community you live in.

Voter turn-out in Vancouver municipal elections is very low, and so every vote by a teacher is significant. During the 2005 elections, we lost several of our progressive trustees by only a slim margin.

If you are a VESTA member who lives in Vancouver, support the endorsed candidates. Please . . .

- make sure that **you** vote for the COPE/Vision school board slate
- urge your friends to vote COPE/Vision
- urge your family to vote COPE/Vision
- get involved in the COPE or Vision campaigns – email cschut@vesta.ca to get connected

Everyone who teaches in Vancouver, please . . .

- connect with the parents of your students, and encourage them to vote for the COPE/Vision slate
- make plans with your colleagues at your school to help pull the vote for November 15th (*material will be coming to your school to help you do this*)

If you live outside of Vancouver, please . . .

- please support the candidates and issues identified by teachers in the community where you live

WHAT IS YOUR HISTORY OF DIRECT AND MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT IN PUBLIC EDUCATION?

BACCHUS, Patti

Vision Vancouver

At the school/parent level, I've been involved in many volunteer and PAC-related activities, including the one-to-one reading program for grade one students, to coordinating the "Let's Walk To School" program, to driving on field trips, volunteering in the classroom and organizing school events.

At the district level, I've served as the DPAC representative to the Educational Facilities Review Phase I and the Emergency Preparedness & Planning Committee. I also coordinate a parent advocacy/networking group called Vancouver Parents for Successful Inclusion, and serve as their representative on the VSB's Special Education Advisory Committee.

I've played key roles in advocacy groups including Vancouver Save Our Schools (SOS), the BC Society for Public Education, and Families for School Seismic Safety.

During the 2006 teacher job action, I organized a successful and well-publicized parent rally on the picket lines in an effort to convince the provincial government to negotiate respectfully with teachers.

I've presented workshops for the BCTF on how teachers and parents can work together to remove barriers to successful inclusion and communicate effectively on "hot-button" issues.



BARGEMAN, Bill

COPE

I am asking for your support as one of the COPE, Vision & Green candidates to return progressive government to Vancouver.

I've lived in Vancouver for 40 years, and taught at Tupper and Gladstone schools for 30, where I learned how important well-funded public education is for our children and for a democratic society. I learned that when students and parents engage in public education, the quality and relevance improves. I treasure the diversity of these schools and the growing culture of inclusion. I developed the understanding that no two children learn in the same way and that educators need the resources to meet all students' needs. I served as vice president and president of the Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association and worked with teachers and administrators throughout the district gaining a thorough understanding of the challenges facing Vancouver's schools. Help your COPE, Vision & Green candidates create Schools for Everyone.



BLAKEY, Al

COPE

I am a retired teacher with 33 years experience on the teaching staff in Vancouver and nine years experience on the School Board of Education. In my nine years on the Board, I and my COPE colleagues, have actively advocated for the students in our classrooms, for increased funding; improved class size; open and transparent decision-making; seismic upgrading; improved parent, student and teacher consultation; anti-racism and anti-homophobia programs; ESL programs and strong labour relations. We will continue to work on these issues, and will continue the important advocacy for our schools, which the NPA refuses to do.

I spent 11+ years on the VESTA Executive, with three of those years as President of VESTA. I also spent 11 years on the BCTF Executive, 2 of which were as President of the BCTF. I have served on virtually all committees in both. I have also spent 6 years of the Board of Co-Development Canada, one as president, linking Canadian unions with their counterparts in Central and South America to strengthen civil society.



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BOUEY, Jane

COPE

I am asking for your support as one of the COPE, Vision & Green candidates to return progressive government to Vancouver. Help your COPE, Vision & Green candidates create Schools for Everyone.

I've been active since my son started in 1992. I was a typical parent volunteer at Dickens (my son's school). When we discovered my son had major challenges to learning, I advocated and worked alongside an incredibly supportive teaching and support staff at Dickens to get him assessed. Together we attempted to get him the supports he needed. Frustrated by the cutbacks and lack of resources that created barriers for thousands of students like my son, I became involved in broader campaigns for public education.

In 1999, I ran for school board and was narrowly defeated by less than 200 votes. I continued to publicly advocate in defence of public education. I had the honour of speaking to a teachers rally at the Pacific Coliseum in 2002 when your collective agreement was stripped of its class size and class composition language. I was elected as part of the COPE/Green board of 2002-2005. Our board redirected money to

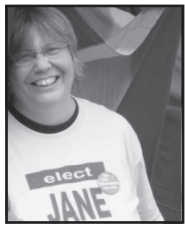
classrooms, expanded all-day K, reduced class size for intermediate grades, increased SEAs, increased money for resources, renewed antiracism education, and developed and implemented the groundbreaking LGBTQ policy and action plan to make our schools safer and more welcoming for all students. We reached out to, listened to, informed and involved parents, teachers, students, staff and community.

Together we stopped cuts to inner city funding, made public education funding a political issue, and won increased funding for schools across the province.

Since 2005 (when I was narrowly defeated by around 200 votes), I have continued to be active in advocacy for special education as a member of Vancouver Parents for Successful Inclusion. I have continued as a member of the VSB's Pride Advisory Committee, and sit on Egale's national Education Committee. And I am an active and founding member of the Vancouver Public Education Project.

My goals is a well-funded, quality, universally accessible, free, and engaging public education system where every student receives the support they require for their diverse learning needs.

My community work includes local literary events, literacy tutoring, a term on my housing co-op board, and co-managing an independent bookstore.



CLEMENT, Ken

Vision Vancouver

I am from Ktunaxa First Nation (Cranbrook) and have resided in Vancouver for 25 years. My experiences through residential school have contributed my resilience and strong community leadership.

Within Vancouver's School Board, I will provide the specialized knowledge that will bridge the gap between the diverse cultural communities within Vancouver.

Involvements:

- Healing Our Spirit HIV/AIDS Society, Executive Director
 - Lu'ma Native Housing, President
 - Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network (CAAN) Chair
 - National Aboriginal Council on HIV/AIDS, Co-Chair First Nations Caucus,
 - Vancouver Coastal Health Aboriginal Health Committee
 - Vi Fineday Transition Shelter Society, Board Director
 - Circle of Eagles Lodge Society, President
 - Aboriginal Community Career Employment Services Society, Board Director



GREGSON, Sharon E.

Vision Vancouver

I have experience at various levels. As an involved parent on several school PACs, of course, and also since 1987 as an outspoken activist for quality, publicly funded, affordable, non-profit early childhood education. I was involved with the SOS project actively calling on the provincial government to restore funding for inner city school programs. I was elected in 2005 as a trustee and have supported teachers, parents, and community in their efforts to ensure all children have access to quality public education. I have been outspoken during the Educational Facilities Review in my position that public land must not be sold and that communities need more respectful and meaningful consultation (Garibaldi and QEA). I have argued against accepting class size and composition reports that exceed guidelines. I have put forward motions and voted from investment of budget surpluses into



classrooms rather than rainy day funds. I have also supported individual parents in their efforts to deal with the education system as it impacts their children. As the mandate of school board has increased to include early learning, I believe my experience in early childhood education and middle-childhood issues will be even more of an asset on the Board.

LOMBARDI, Mike

Vision Vancouver

I believe in a public education system that helps all students realize their potential so that they can become active members of our democratic society. As a progressive school trustee I will provide leadership, advocacy, and action to strengthen an inclusive, dynamic, and sustainable public education system. Throughout my 35 year career in education I have been a passionate advocate for public education. In every capacity—as a teacher, as an education leader, and as a parent activist—I have worked tirelessly to support and improve our public schools. My priorities include: building confidence in public education, promoting program alternatives and options, engaging the community in genuine consultation, preserving neighbourhood schools, reducing class sizes, improving services for students with special needs, seismically safe schools, equity and access, increased education funding, and environmental sustainability. If elected, I will use my knowledge, skills, and experience to put Vancouver students first.



SINGH, Alvin

COPE

I am asking for your support as one of the COPE, Vision & Green candidates to return progressive government to Vancouver.

For the last seven years, I have campaigned for safer schools, more student engagement, and better education. In 2001, I helped found a student-based lobby group that campaigned for seismic upgrades of all at-risk schools. During that same time, I served as President of the VanTech Student's Council, Vice-President of the District Students' Council, and sat as representative on the VSB's Committee II.

I want a Board of Education that works with all stakeholders, especially students; a Board of Education that is transparent. In 2001, I helped found a student-based group that successfully campaigned for seismic upgrades of at-risk schools. But since then, upgrades have ground to a halt, parents are left in the dark, and student engagement has ceased.

My entire education has been in Vancouver. I have seen what the Trustee's decisions mean for students in classrooms across our city. I will continue to advocate for student input and transparency in decision-making, and for more options for education in Vancouver's schools

Help your COPE, Vision & Green candidates create Schools for Everyone.



WONG, Allan

COPE

I am asking for your support as one of the COPE, Vision & Green candidates to return progressive government to Vancouver.

I am a father of four; two in elementary, two in secondary. After graduating from UBC, I taught in Vancouver area public schools for five years, and have worked at Telus for twenty.

As a three-term Trustee, I advocated for public education and ESL and Special Needs students. I was chair of the School Board Committee that initiated Vancouver's seismic upgrades. I also advocated for properly maintained schools that are safe and conducive to learning. I am a current and past member of the Bicycle Advisory Committee, the Advisory Committee on Cultural Diversity and the ESL Advisory Committee.



Where are the statements from the NPA candidates?
All candidates running for school trustee were asked the same questions for VESTA to be able to share with the membership. At press time, Heather Holden is the only NPA candidate to respond to our survey. Her response to the open-ended question is printed on page 6.

YOUR RIGHTS: Information on Evaluations

Being notified that you will be evaluated can be very stressful. However, the Collective Agreement outlines your rights before, during and after this process. It's important that you are aware of what the process should look like, and what the eventual outcome of the evaluative process will be. You can find the information in this article in Article C.22 (formerly Article 8) of your Collective Agreement.

As soon as you find out that you will be evaluated, it's a good idea to check in with your Staff Rep. Article C.22.1 (formerly 8.A.) states that the evaluative process may not be performed for arbitrary or capricious reasons. Your Staff Rep may be aware of other evaluations, or be able to provide you with some information about how the process has been conducted at your school in the past. Remember that you have the Right to Representation under Article A.26 (formerly Article 1.J.) and that you may request a Staff Rep at any meeting with your Administrative Officer.

When your Administrator decides to evaluate you, or you request an evaluation, there is a procedure that must be followed. The following outlines your rights chronologically throughout the process:

Before the Observations begin:

- ✓ Observations can only occur between October 15 and May 31 of any school year unless leave is taken
- ✓ Observations may not begin within the first 20 days of the start of an assignment
- ✓ Members must be given at least 10 days of notice before the process begins
- ✓ The evaluator must give, discuss, and clarify evaluation criteria (you can find a list of acceptable criteria in Article C.22.2. This list includes items such as instructional technique, planning, classroom management, etc, and may not be based on voluntary activities or issues covered by professional autonomy).

During the Observations:

- ✓ At least one day of notice must be given prior to an observation
- ✓ A "reasonable number" of observations must be completed, with a minimum of 3
- ✓ After each observation, the member should receive:
 - A discussion of the observation with the evaluator
 - A written anecdotal statement of comments
 - Constructive suggestions
 - The right to review any concerns with the evaluator prior to the next evaluation

After the Observations:

- ✓ Within 6 months of the first formal observation, a draft of the report must be given to the member.
- ✓ The report must be in writing
- ✓ Within 7 days of the receipt of the draft report, the member may meet with the evaluator to discuss the report, suggest changes, make comments, or point out errors
- ✓ The final report will be filed at the Board in the members' personnel file and a copy must be given to the member
- ✓ Within 14 days, the member may submit a written commentary to be filed with the report

Please remember that at any time, you may request the presence of your Staff Representative. This is especially important if you are having difficulty with the feedback provided, or with the criteria, especially if you choose to meet with your evaluator to discuss the draft. It is essential to discuss any written commentary you intend to write to accompany your evaluation with your Staff Representative.

Reports can either conclude as "satisfactory" or "less than satisfactory", in your evaluator's assessment.

If your report is "less than satisfactory", this should not be a surprise to you. Each observation should have been followed by a feedback session, and an opportunity to address any concerns your evaluator provided. However, C.22.4 outlines your rights when a "less than satisfactory" report is drafted.

- Comments on areas requiring improvement may only be included if they have been discussed with the member
- Positive comments must also be included
- The member must be informed of their right to contact the Union
- If the member requests, the Union may meet with the evaluator for the purpose of proposing mentoring and / or support

If you receive two "less than satisfactory" reports, the third evaluation will be completed by a Superintendent, Associate Superintendent or Director of Instruction within 1-6 months of the second "less than satisfactory" report. This evaluation will have the same process as described above, but may be used by the Board to support an argument for dismissal. VESTA advises members to contact the VESTA office directly if you have received one "less than satisfactory" report.

Article E.31 (formerly 7.I.) outlines your rights under the Collective Agreement with regards to your Personnel file at the VSB. Please check this section if you are not sure what materials may be in your personnel file, or how such materials will be handled.

A different process is followed if the Board has concerns or questions about issues not related to "satisfactory performance". The next VESTA News will include an article on this process.

Please do not hesitate to contact your Staff Rep or the VESTA office if you have questions about this process, and be sure to familiarize yourself with your Collective Agreement rights.

**Jody Polukoshko
Grievance Officer /
2nd Vice-President**

**VESTA acknowledges the
joint traditional territory
of the Musqueam, Tsleil
Waututh, Squamish, and
Sto:lo Nations.**

NPA TRUSTEES HID A KEY FACILITIES REPORT

For the past ten months, as a former school trustee, I have endeavoured to obtain a copy of the yet-to-be-released, Vancouver board of education's district-wide, report on possible school closures and the status of seismic upgrading in city schools.

On June 26th of 2007 the VSB tabled an in-camera report entitled "Educational Facilities Review" compiled and written by Les King, the former, highly-regarded, director of facilities services for the newly-elected NPA majority board.

This report was requested by the former COPE board of trustees, of which I was a member, in order to obtain a broad picture, across the district, of the impact of declining enrollment.

NPA trustees subsequently voted to withhold this report from discussions with "school, parent and public" members last fall, as suggested in the lead-in to this document.

Starting in December 2007, in written correspondence with the VSB, and through the Office of the Freedom of Information (FOI) commissioner, I formally requested the release of the King document.

As part of a negotiated agreement with the VSB and the FOI mediator I agreed to accept a modified version of the report; however, the document that I received was so severely redacted that it did not provide me with any of the information I requested.

How much of the original document was deleted? Out of 58 pages in the body of the report, two thirds, or 38 pages, were either fully or partially severed. Twenty five pages were severed in full—these were totally blank pages with a hand-written notation listing the section of the FOI act that the VSB used to justify its deletion.

Over the past year, at a number of tumultuous board and community-based meetings on threatened school closures (Queen Elizabeth Annex and Garibaldi), NPA trustees repeatedly evaded questions on the original report.

The board insisted, through its lawyers (NPA trustees retained a high powered legal firm, despite having its own in-house counsel and FOI Coordinator) that all of the relevant information I needed was available on its website or in a report tabled on the Queen Elizabeth Annex closure.

Sadly, this piecemeal approach dealt with only a quarter of the board's 109 schools, located in the West side of the city, while the full district overview of possible citywide closures remained hidden.

Also, it did not provide any information on the implementation of the board's "BC Seismic Mitigation Program", badly behind schedule, and one of the four stated objectives of the report.

Listing the schools and annexes slated for possible closure was tellingly missing from the severed document, and this was clearly something that NPA trustees were very reluctant to comment on.

No doubt NPA trustees will argue that the King report is a dated document and that the board has moved on since then.

However, the time lost in withholding the report and the lack of leadership that school communities so badly needed on this issue points to a weak and waffling board.

Two questions remain:

Why has the VSB sat for 16 months on this significant report? Why would trustees not discuss the fate of several highly-regarded elementary school annexes, allegedly on the chopping block, especially now, with early childhood education emerging as a priority?

However, in the first few uncensored pages of the report I seem to have found the answer to the above questions. Tellingly, the report warned trustees that "The following pages review the challenges we face and proposed strategies to deal with them. These challenges will test us severely." With the latter stark warning ringing in their ears, NPA trustees took to the hills leaving openness and transparency in the dust.

Sadly, the essential ingredients of trust and confidence are lost when a school board behaves in the secretive manner that the current Vancouver board of education has done.

Noel Herron is a former Vancouver principal and former COPE school trustee

BCeSIS: Millions of Dollars to Take Attendance

Ms Nelson waits until all the Grade 1 children have put their coats and books away and have seated themselves on the carpet, sitting around the rocking chair in the corner of the room. On the walls around her, at eye level with the seated children, is a large calendar decorated with cards on which there are numbers and pictorial symbols to show the weather, holidays and other important information about the day and the month. There is a number chart to show how many days school has been in session. We are at day 75 and Ms Nelson is noting the number of children who can count to 75 and those who are still having some trouble. 100 day is still a month away and Ms Nelson wants to make sure that everyone can count to 100 by then.

Ms Nelson begins the morning with a little song and identifies the special helper of the day. Cherrine, the special helper of the day, begins by holding up the name cards. As each child recognizes their name they claim the card and sit down again. Ms Nelson is keeping the attendance list as this goes on. When all the children present have claimed their name cards, the leftover cards are identified and anyone who has information about why these students are away shares it. Ms Nelson and the class know already that Jerry is away in hospital having some surgery and Ms Nelson explains that she has included get well cards in the writing centre today so that students can send get well messages to Jerry.

As soon as the attendance is completed Sukhi who is the messenger today takes the sheet to the school office. This has to be done promptly because the school has a safe arrival program and the parent volunteers are waiting for the information so that they can begin making calls to the homes of those students who have been reported absent. The class continues with identifying today's date, discussing upcoming events and holidays and counting to 75, the number of days school has been in session today . . .

We're being told what BCeSIS can do but we're not hearing much discussion about whether all these changes are doing anything better than the way they were done before, or what the pedagogical impact on these things are.

How will this change when BCeSIS, the school and student information database supported by the Ministry of Education, is implemented in Vancouver

schools? In the course of her morning activities Ms Nelson has worked on learning outcomes in literacy, numeracy and social responsibility. The data of the classroom is not a side administrative issue, it is part of the learning activities of the children in the class. BCeSIS will replace Turbo, the current program used in the schools by school secretaries to track attendance and enrolment. Instead of school secretaries entering the data teachers will be expected to do so on the shiny new computer that has been provided especially for that purpose. Attendance is not something that you can leave until later—emergency procedures require that we know who is at school and both the school office and the teacher need that information first thing every day. Will we see teachers sitting behind computers in the mornings instead of facing their students? **For whom is the new system better?**

The VBE is spending millions of dollars on implementation of what is essentially new proprietary software. This includes new computers for teachers' desks, staffing for inservice and support as well as the cost of the software itself. Once it is implemented the program will cost ten dollars per student per year, about five hundred thousand dollars to take attendance every year!

While the program is currently limited to taking attendance and maintaining such student information as special needs designations, its proponents will tell you that it is capable of much more. I'm told it can give parents access to their children's marks as soon as the teacher posts them on the database. Teachers can post homework and other information about what is happening at school so that parents can have up-to-the-minute information about what is going on at school.

We're being told what BCeSIS can do but we're not hearing much discussion about whether all these changes are doing anything better than the way they were done before, or what the pedagogical impact on these things are.



Christina Schut
Local Rep to the BCTF

Why Vancouver teachers are concerned about the introduction of BCeSIS into elementary schools.

- Teachers are concerned that the system will intensify the work of teachers, adding to the daily administrative tasks paper work that has already increased in the last number of years. BCeSIS is being introduced into classrooms and transfers the responsibility for entering attendance data into the database to teachers. While teachers currently take attendance, the information is sent to the school office and entered there. CUPE has filed a grievance on this matter.

- Teachers are concerned about the future effects of BCeSIS on professional autonomy. While the current implementation of BCeSIS is to take attendance, we are told that it has the capacity to do many other things such as posting student marks, report card formats, parent communications, posting homework and lesson plans. While this may sound attractive, when they become an expectation, these are additional duties and may result in an increased expectation of parent communication, again adding to teacher. As well these programs are being introduced without any discussion of whether these activities are pedagogically beneficial or if they interfere with good pedagogy.

- Teachers are especially concerned that the VBE has decided to spend millions on the installation of BCeSIS and incurring ongoing costs in the coming years, at a time when support for students with special needs is woefully inadequate, libraries are not supported and so many other needs of students and teachers are not being met. BCeSIS, once it has been installed in the district, will cost \$10 per student a year (BCeSIS is commercial software hosted by Fujitsu Canada) \$500,000 per year for Vancouver.

Make sure that you are aware of the motions passed by the VESTA General Meeting on October 21st. VESTA members will not be entering attendance into the BCeSIS program or doing any other data entry for BCeSIS.

Gwen Giesbrecht: District Parent Advisory Council chair

Congratulations on becoming the DPAC Chairperson for this year!

What has drawn you to this important work and has kept you involved?

When my son started school there were changes to our education system that I saw as detrimental to the quality of public education. Funding to inner city schools was being cut, there were reductions to library services, there was increasing pressure on parents to raise funds for things like books, playground equipment, sports equipment, art supplies, and it was clear to me that teachers didn't have the resources

required to fully meet the needs of those students who struggle in the classroom – and therefore were also not able to meet the needs of those students not being challenged. Those are some of the reasons I was drawn to the role.

What has kept me here is the growing awareness, through involvement, of the importance of the parent voice in public education and a fuller understanding of how much work there is still to be done.

DPAC has taken a more public stance in its advocacy over the past few years in sharing parents' concerns about the state of public education in Vancouver. Why is it important at this time in particular for DPAC and for parents in general to take that vocal and visible position?

It is important for parents to keep the conversation going with the district, the provincial government, and the educators – on the issues that they identify as important in public education. If parents are not vocal and visible, the conversation stops, and public education is at a risk of going in the same direction that we have seen many things in our culture go. As the parents on watch, at this time in history, we have the responsibility to ensure that our public education system is valued by everyone in society, and is not diminished in the interest of making it fiscally accountable.

Trustee elections are only a handful of days away. What opportunities do you see for parents and teachers to work together during the lead-up to these elections?

I see the opportunities for parents and teachers to work together as the same opportunities for all of us in a democracy. We have a right

and a responsibility at election time to become informed on the issues, to give thought to who will best address the issues, and to vote. Parents, students, and teachers are the people directly affected by the decisions made by the elected officials. When parents and teachers work together to identify the issues they see as important in the district, there is an opportunity. By looking at the actions of incumbent trustees, and by determining common goals, parents and teachers could elect a school board that will work in the best interests of the district.

What sort of advocacy does DPAC expect of public school trustees?

Advocacy and more advocacy. If there is an importance for parents to be visible and vocal, there is an even greater importance for public trustees to be visible and vocal.

Parents spend a lot of time and energy working to advocate for and support public education. As our elected representatives, we want trustees to articulate the concerns we have identified, in as clear a way possible, to the source of the funding. I think there is an expectation from parents that since their input has been sought and given, though countless hours of volunteer time, that the trustees that they have elected will take that input to heart and advocate to have those concerns addressed at the provincial level.

Last school year, much of the Board's attention was taken up by the Facilities Review, the Avison Recommendations, and constant adjustment to the many top-down changes mandated by the province. What important issues got missed as a consequence?

The Facilities Review and the Avison Recommendations were items that required attention. Unfortunately, they did take the focus away from some of the other items that should have received greater attention. Although the process of seismic renewal did proceed slowly forward, there was great concern from parents in the district, one, that there were too few projects started, and two, that the ones that did get started had major

problems with the consultative process. Parents were not happy with the timelines for consultation, with how fully and transparently information from the district was forthcoming, and with the decreases in the space provided for under the guidelines. All of these items could have had a great deal more time and attention spent on them. Another item that could have had more attention, before the expanded implementation this year, is the BCeSIS program. Another item: school-based emergency response teams and earthquake preparedness. Although there was some money included in the budget to start to address the shortfalls in the district, on this very basis need for student safety, no movement toward implementation was in place at the start of this year. These are a few examples of items that are of major significance in the district that really didn't, in my opinion, get the attention they deserved last year.

Teachers have the professional responsibility to communicate concerns about educational issues to parents and the public. Beyond the individual progress of their children, what do you think are the issues parents most want to hear from teachers about?

Parents, in general, I think, are caring people. The individual progress of their child may be the thing teachers are asked about most frequently. However, I do feel among parents there is an interest in all the children in the classroom. Although the conversations between teacher and parent, quite rightly, would be about their child, I think parents do have a broader concern for all students in the school. I think parents want to hear from teachers, in a generic way, about the issues that they face in their endeavour to support, not just that parents' child, but all the students.

I think in the same way that parents and trustees need to continue to be vocal and visible in their advocacy for excellence in public education, teachers must too.

Interviewed by Glen Hansman

THE OTHER CANDIDATES FOR SCHOOL BOARD

As stated on page 3, HEATHER HOLDEN is the only NPA candidate for trustee who responded to VESTA's survey for trustee candidates. She is a Vancouver Library Board Trustee, and is former chair of the Vancouver Parks Board.

Here is her response to the same question about "direct and meaningful involvement in public education" asked of COPE and Vision candidates on pages 2 & 3:

"As an educator in the public post-secondary system in Ontario, BC and Singapore. As the Director of Research at the Vancouver Aquarium, contributing materials for educational programs for teachers and students. As a volunteer Big Sister, helping my Little Sister through situations involving her public school."

VESTA appreciates that she took the time to respond. We would have printed other NPA candidates' statements, as we did in 2005, had they also responded.

VESTA also received a response from the two independent candidates, PETER RAYMOND HASKELL and ROBERT ALLAN STARK. In response to our question about "direct and meaningful involvement in public education," Mr. Haskell wrote:

"From 1968 thru 1972 I was a student in Mrs. Sharps' dyslexia program at McBride elementary school, a program that the Vancouver School Board has no record of ever existing. Why is this so? Could it be that this past program was much more progressive than anything which now exists?"

To the same question, Mr. Stark only wrote his name in capital letters. On the City Clerk's webpage, however, Mr. Stark makes a number of claims about his experience as a former Vancouver Board of Education employee.

You can read the official candidates' statements at: vancouver.ca/ctyclerk/election2008/candidate-profiles-schooltrustee.htm

REMINDER: VBE/VESTA Joint Statement on School Goal-setting & Planning

Are teachers expected to be involved in School Goal Setting and Planning?

Yes, the sixth non-instructional day is for this purpose. (This could be taken as two half days or other equivalent.) **School Goal Setting and Planning** is dynamic and on-going. Frequently monitoring progress towards attaining goals allows adjustments to be made.

The School Plan is a reflection of the learning taking place and a guide for future focuses. **The Plan should be narrowed to one or two goals based on real school needs.** Goals should be eliminated or modified as necessary. Time lines to meet school goals need to be realistic and appropriate to the school community.

What have teachers been advised to stop doing?

Across the province, teachers have decided through the BCTF not to participate in the development of government mandated School Growth Plans or to be part of School Planning Councils (SPCs). As professionals, teachers are encouraged to be involved in setting school and classroom goals.

How will this impact parent involvement in School Goal Setting and Planning?

Parents and family play an essential role in the child's learning and development. Widespread and on-going dialogue with parents is essential. SPCs, mandated through legislation, will continue without teacher involvement. Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) represent the broader parent community. Some schools include parents in the sixth non-instructional day set aside for School Goal Setting and Planning.

What does this mean for the collection of evidence (data) of student progress in School Goal Setting and Planning?

The School Goal Setting and Planning process asks participants how they will know there has been movement toward goal(s). It is important to have evidence, although **the evidence does not have to be in the form of numerical data.**

What does this mean for the collection of evidence (data) of student progress for government mandated School Growth Plans?

The data collected in the School Goal Setting and Planning process and the data that is normally collected and recorded by teachers can be shared with Principals/Vice Principals. Teachers have decided through the BCTF that they are not to provide this data "in any additional way beyond their normal record keeping (e.g. chart form)" for the purposes of developing government mandated School Growth Plans.

What are the expectations for reporting assessment information from Community School Teams and Inner City Projects?

Community School Teams and Inner City Project assessment information is required to ensure continuation of Community Link funding from the Ministry. Teachers are still expected to submit this data in the format required by the Principal for the compilation of a district report for the Board of Trustees and the Ministry.

What are the expectations for all teachers to be involved in school and/or grade-wide assessments?

Teachers assess to determine student progress and inform instruction. Through Staff Committee and professional dialogue, staff make decisions regarding the most appropriate assessments for their school community and context, as well as the use of school and grade-wide assessments. Teachers are encouraged to participate in school and grade-wide assessments if this has been the decision of the school, but **individual teachers may choose to use other assessments.** The same expectations regarding the sharing of this data with Principals/Vice-Principals apply.

What kind of assessments are recommended?

On-going classroom assessment and modification combined with students' abilities to self-assess are most powerful in enhancing student learning. Student learning needs are best met with assessment that is broad and varied in its range, and includes qualitative evidence.

Teachers have decided through the BCTF that FSA not be used for any kind of measure of school goals.

Agreed-to in Winter 06/07 by the Board, VESTA, and the Elementary Principals & Vice-Principals Association



When Will They Learn website

The BCTF election page, **WhenWillTheyLearn.ca**, is now live. It will be used for trustee elections, and building toward the provincial elections in May so that public education issues are in the forefront.

On the buses and in supermarkets

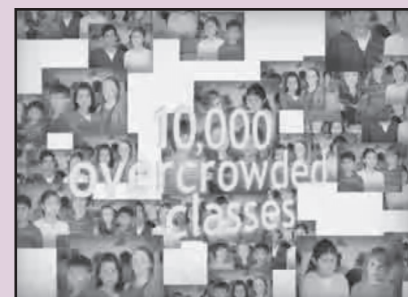
The BCTF's province-wide advertising campaign began with ads on Translink and BC Transit buses province wide, as well as in Lower Mainland supermarkets. The bus ads are running from October 13 to November 17. There are three different ads, each featuring one of the following issues:

- 177 schools closed
- 10,000 overcrowded classes
- Special needs neglected

The campaign uses the slogan "**When will they learn?**"

TV ads beginning on October 20

The Federation's TV ad will be aired during the news hour, running province-wide through the weeks of October 20 and 27. The ad will emphasize the 177 closed schools, 10,000 overcrowded classes, and special needs neglected and will make the link with the importance of the school trustee elections. You can watch the TV ad at **whenwilltheylearn.ca** or on the YouTube link posted at **www.vesta.ca**. Please circulate the YouTube link to friends and contacts.



Critically Examining the Olympics: A Collaborative Website for Teachers

There is just over a year until the Vancouver 2010 Olympics. Teachers may be looking for resources and lessons on the Olympics for their classroom. It is important that teachers provide students with the opportunity to think critically about how the Olympics will impact people and the environment.

The official Vancouver 2010 website provides a portal for teachers to share and access resources. Unfortunately, this resource is limited to a celebration of sports and teaching what the Olympics could be and should be, but aren't; environmentally sustainable, accessible to everyone and a positive influence on communities.

According to No One Is Illegal - Vancouver, a grassroots anti-colonial immigrant and refugee rights organization, the Olympics will increase homelessness, the privatization of public services and expand sports tourism and resource extraction on indigenous lands (<http://noii-van.resist.ca/>).

So where can teachers find resources that go beyond celebrating to critically examining the Olympics? An informal group of Vancouver teachers are compiling resources, lesson plans and links for a website called **teach2010.org**. We are planning to launch the website at the end of November. It will be a collaborative site for teachers to find and post ideas for teaching the Olympics in a thoughtful way.

We are looking for lesson plans, resources and links to information geared for K-12 classes as well as upcoming events listings. Please email us at **contact@teach2010.org**

Stephanie Lofquist

To play or not to play?

Teachers raise several kindergarten-specific issues

A few teacher colleagues have often told me that they believe Kindergarten teachers should be paid more than other teachers because of the various needs of students at that age. This statement has always mystified me to some extent because I've often wondered whether other people are inclined to think we should be paid less than other teachers. After all, Kindergarten students only do one thing at school, don't they? Play?

A large number of Kindergarten teachers from all over the district have met at the VESTA office three times over the past several months to discuss issues that they believe are pertinent to their Kindergarten students in particular and—in some cases—to all students in general.

One of these issues is indeed the question of play, or more specifically perhaps, the lack of it. Many teachers worry that where Kindergarten students should be involved in social skill development, social responsibility, and learning in a play-based environment, academics are still being pushed down on them “from above”—especially on students attending All-Day programs. And since the provincial government is

looking into establishing All-Day Kindergarten for all Kindergarten-aged students, and is also looking into having junior school programs for three- and four-year olds, there is a worry that this “push” may extend to even these younger children.

Teachers have raised a number of other issues as well. For instance, there seems to be a reluctance on the part of schools to allocate support for the needs of Kindergarten students. A misperception exists that students will necessarily grow out of whatever behaviours or needs they're evidencing. However, every teacher present at the meetings could cite an example of a student who would likely have benefited from proper support in Kindergarten.

One of the great surprises at the meetings was in regards to the variability in the access of Kindergarten teachers and

students to School-Based Teams. At some schools, Kindergarten students were allowed to be brought up to SBT; at other schools, they were not allowed at all. At still other schools, Kindergarten students were allowed to be brought up to SBT, but only later in the school year; and at yet other schools, Kindergarten teachers could not sit on SBT when their students were being discussed. Even where Kindergarten students were brought to SBT and their needs recognized and the required support pursued, those same students often finished Kindergarten without that support. When support came, it came to the child in Grade 1 or 2. There is a definite need for appropriate support of Kindergarten students to be accessed more readily, and for students requiring 100% support to be allocated that same amount rather than a portion thereof.

These issues must be looked into more deeply and then they must be addressed in ways that best meet the needs of our students and that create the best possible learning environments for them.

Questions also arose around ESL-assessments on potential students for All-Day Kindergarten programs. Once again, there seemed to be a fair amount of variability in the kinds of assessments used and in the standards used for determining entry into or exclusion from an all-day program. One of the

biggest questions raised was around the value in placing ESL students into a separate program from English-speaking students. The general consensus was that segregating non-English-speaking children into a separate class is not a good language experience for them. Where are their role models in speaking English during this critical school year?

These issues must be looked into more deeply and then they must be addressed in ways that best meet the needs of our students and that create the best possible learning environments for them.

**Ken Kilback
Fleming Elementary**



UPCOMING EVENTS & MEETINGS

NOVEMBER 5
Communications Committee meeting, 4 p.m. at VESTA

NOVEMBER 5
All-candidates meeting for school board, 7 p.m. at Van Tech

NOVEMBER 6
All-candidates meeting for school board, 7 p.m. at Bayview

NOVEMBER 17
Status of Women Committee meeting, 4 p.m. at VESTA

NOVEMBER 19
Aboriginal Committee meeting, 4 p.m. at VESTA

NOVEMBER 19
Health & Safety Committee, 4 p.m. at VESTA

NOVEMBER 30
Adult Educators' General Meeting, 2 p.m. at VESTA



In commemoration of the lives lost in the Montreal Massacre of 1989 the VESTA Status of Women Committee will give a presentation on the **We Can Project**. - an international organization working towards ending violence against women. (It began in Bangladesh and is supported by Oxfam.)

Dec. 8
4 - 6 p.m.
VESTA office
snacks will be served
Please register as space is limited.

Staff Rep Assembly November 18

TUPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL CAFETERIA at 4 p.m.

MAKE SURE YOUR WORKSITE IS REPRESENTED EVERY MONTH AT THE STAFF REP ASSEMBLY. YOUR STAFF'S VOICE IS NEEDED!

<http://lateliteracy.blogspot.com>

As a means of communicating with intermediate and high school teachers interest in literacy across the curriculum, I created a blog (thanks to help from Moira Ekdahl, teacher librarian consultant). I to update it on a regular basis, talking about a variety of topics related to literacy. This might be book reviews of trade books, professional books, or even adult books. It could be a report on a conference or a workshop or a link to an interesting web site. I try to keep it updated weekly but must admit I am currently a bit behind! Blogs are actually easy and fun to do and one of my colleagues, Joanne Carlton at McBride has found it a wonderful way to give her students voice and an opportunity to use the internet in a responsible way. You can find the blog at <http://lateliteracy.blogspot.com/> If you want to learn more about blogging and wiki possibilities please feel free to contact me.

**Meredyth Kezar
Later Literacy Consultant
(Grades 4-12)**

