

HISTORY OF THE BCTF

A decade-by-decade sketch of 90 years of BCTF history is outlined below.

Decade 1: 1916–17 to 1926–27

- George Lister organized a meeting of teacher association representatives from Vancouver, Point Grey, South Vancouver, North Vancouver, and Victoria on October 28, 1916, at Dawson School in Vancouver to discuss and plan for the formation of a larger teacher organization.
- The first annual meeting of the new organization, the BC Teachers' Federation, was held on January 4, 1917, at King Edward High School in Vancouver. George Lister was elected first President. Lister actually served for five terms as President, though not all consecutively.
- Original objectives of the BCTF adopted at the founding convention remain to this day:
 - to foster and promote the cause of education
 - to raise the status of the teaching profession in BC
 - to promote the welfare of teachers in BC
- The BCTF had voluntary membership and was open to all teachers irrespective of their sex, religion, or race. The BCTF was incorporated as a society on July 12, 1919. Harry Charlesworth, who was President that year went on to be the Federation's first general secretary in 1920. The BCTF office was established in Victoria in 1919 in the Belmont building, at the corner of Douglas and Fort Streets.
- The BCTF launched *The Educator* in 1919, which two years later became *The Teacher*, as its vehicle for communicating with members. Charlesworth also helped to found the Canadian Teachers' Federation in 1920 and became its first President.
- The first teacher strike in Canada occurred in Victoria in 1919 over salaries. As a result, the BCTF convinced the new department of education to establish arbitration as an acceptable process for salary matters. New Westminster teachers went on strike in 1921 after their board refused to implement a salary award granted through arbitration. The BCTF initiated work with government on teacher pension and tenure issues.
- BCTF prompting led to the creation of the first major examination of education in the province, the Puttman-Weir report of 1925, notably resulting in the creation of junior high schools. In 1926, the BCTF offices were moved to the Credit Foncier building in Vancouver at Hastings and Howe.

Decade 2: 1927–28 to 1936–37

- The Teachers' Pension Act in 1929 established years of service and contribution level as the basis for pensions. In 1929 Vancouver teachers received a salary scale based upon certification and experience.
- The BCTF moved its offices in December 1932 to "Adeline House" at 1300 Robson Street, in Vancouver.
- George Fergusson, President of the BCTF in 1923–24 and principal of King Edward High school (where BCTF held its founding meeting), died suddenly in 1928. The Federation established the G.A. Fergusson Memorial Fund, which resulted in the GA Fergusson Memorial Award that honours teachers who have made a significant contribution to education and to the BCTF. The *Public Schools Act* in 1937 permitted either party to demand binding arbitration in salary disputes.

Decade 3: 1937–38 to 1946–47

- The Langley School Board in 1939 refused to implement an arbitrated salary award and instead fired its teachers. Ultimately a united local supported by the BCTF had the teachers reinstated and the board fired.
- In 1938 continuing contracts were established for teachers.
- In 1939, the BCTF established its own Sick Benefit Fund to assist teachers who were ill and had run out of sick leave. This later became the Salary Indemnity Plan.
- In 1940, the BCTF established the Lesson Aids program.
- In 1943, teachers voted for a provincial strike on salaries but the BCTF did not act on this vote because the Federal government

instituted a wartime federal wage-control program. In 1943, the BCTF joined the Canadian Trades and Labor Congress, following a successful membership vote to do so. Also in 1943, the BCTF adopted a Code of Ethics.

- The Cameron Commission in 1945 again saw significant BCTF involvement—the BCTF took on the issue of the relationship between teaching the whole child and class size.
- In 1947, government granted the BCTF statutory compulsory membership; there was a voluntary sign-up of 93% at the time.

Decade 4: 1947–48 to 1956–57

- In 1950, the BCTF held its first summer conference in Qualicum.
- In 1951, BCTF offices moved to 1644 West Broadway in Vancouver (first building owned by the BCTF).
- The mid-1950s saw the elimination of discrimination against women teachers in salary scales. Henceforth the two criteria for determination of salaries would be qualifications and years of teaching experience.
- Hilda Cryderman became the first woman to be elected as BCTF President—1954–55.
- The 1956 AGM ended the BCTF's formal relationship with organized labour by narrowly turning down a motion to affiliate with the new Canadian Labour Congress.
- In 1957, the BCTF began to actively promote the creation and existence of Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs).

Decade 5: 1957–58 to 1966–67

- In the summer of 1957, the BCTF moved to its new building at 7th and Burrard in Vancouver. Ten years later it added a new wing and became 2235 Burrard Street.
- In 1961, the current basic formula for the calculation of teacher pensions was established; service, age of retirement, and final average salary.
- The BCTF International Program was launched at the 1961 AGM. In 1961, the BCTF was granted significant representation on government curriculum committees which shaped elementary and secondary education for the next decade. The Federation's governance structures were dramatically overhauled in the mid-1960s. The Federation's Working and Learning Conditions' program was established. The 1967 AGM launched the Federation's "Over 40 Campaign" aimed at reducing class size.

Decade 6: 1967–68 to 1976–77

- Vancouver teachers achieved a Learning and Working Conditions' contract with their board in 1969.
- In 1970, a BCTF Task Force on the Status of Women was followed by the Status of Women program three years later.
- Jim Killeen became the first to serve for two terms as full-time President—1969–71.
- On March 19, 1971, BC teachers participated in their first provincial withdrawal of service protesting the government's refusal to improve the pensions of retirees.
- In 1971, the provincial government eliminated compulsory membership for teachers. The BCTF engineered a voluntary sign up of all but 69 of some 22,000 teachers.
- In 1971–72 the provincial Social Credit government restricted school districts' ability to raise revenue and imposed ceilings on teacher salary arbitrations. BCTF President Adam Robertson declared "We won't live with it." The BCTF launched a major political action initiative in the August 1972 provincial election.
- Compulsory membership in the BCTF was restored legislatively in 1973.
- In 1974, Surrey teachers walked out of their classrooms and traveled to Victoria to protest large class sizes. The BCTF negotiated a major addition of teachers over several years to dramatically reduce the pupil-teacher ratio. Thousands of additional teachers were hired across the province.
- The Federation's Program Against Racism was established following the issue of racism in schools being raised at the 1975 AGM.

Decade 7: 1977–78 to 1986–87

- In the fall of 1980, a number of locals, particularly in the Metro area protested the lack of action by the government on the indexing of their pension plan through walkouts and demonstrations in Victoria and Vancouver.
- The BCTF began its Associates' program; teachers teaching teachers, in 1978.
- In the early 1980s, the Federation launched a major campaign to expand the scope of teacher bargaining to include all terms and conditions of employment of teachers in contracts.
- A six-day strike in Terrace in June 1981, achieved a number of personnel matters being put into an agreement.
- In the fall of 1981, a number of locals were able to bargain "expanded scope" items into their collective agreements.
- In February 1982, teachers, in a province-wide member vote, turned down asking government for the right to strike.
- The government launched a major restraint program in the spring of 1982 that would have repercussions for years to come, bringing about major cutbacks in education and reversing the gains made by the Surrey action of 1974.
- In July 1982, the BCTF established the Bargaining Division, melding former economic welfare and working and learning conditions areas.
- In July 1983, the provincial government tabled 26 pieces of legislation that together constituted an overall assault on the social safety net for working people. Solidarity Coalition and Operation Solidarity were formed and the BCTF was a key participant.
- In November 1983, BC teachers walked off the job for three days and participated with other unions in a major protest against the government actions. Thereafter, BCTF policy insisted that members honour picket lines.
- Larry Kuehn was the first President to serve three full-time terms—1981–84.
- The Federation initiated three new programs in the mid-1980s, the School Staff Representative Training program, the Internal Mediation Services, and Program Quality Teaching.
- In 1985, the Federation launched a Charter challenge claiming the denial of full bargaining rights for teachers was a violation of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.
- In 1987, the provincial Social Credit government tabled Bills 19 and 20. BC teachers lost statutory membership but gained full bargaining rights at the local level including the right to strike. Principals and vice-principals were removed from the teacher bargaining unit and became part of the management structures in school districts. A College of Teachers was established to attempt to take over the "professional" functions of teachers from the BCTF.
- On April 28, BC teachers held a day of protest against the establishment of the college.
- On June 1, BC teachers joined the BC Federation of Labour in a one-day general strike protesting negative changes to labour legislation.

Decade 8: 1987–88 to 1996–97

- In the fall of 1987, the BCTF held a major certification sign-up campaign: all 76 locals chose the "union" model and 99% of BC public school teachers voluntarily signed up to the BCTF.
- The BCTF engaged in three rounds of local bargaining under the full collective bargaining model, dramatically changing the very nature of the organization.
- Thirty-two disputes led to strikes and three resulted in lockouts. There were also five support-staff strikes. The BCTF established the Collective Bargaining Defence Fund and expanded the Federation's capacity to handle grievances.
- In the third round of local bargaining, government ordered striking Vancouver and Surrey teachers back to work. In 1994, government imposed provincial bargaining on teachers against the protests of the BCTF.
- In 1991, the Federation waged a major campaign of political action in that fall's provincial election, focussing on education funding and opposition to Bill 82, which imposed wage controls on behalf of the Federation's locals.
- In 1991, the Federation established a Research Department and several years later launched a pilot on a Health and Wellness

Program, which eventually became an important part of the Federation's Salary Indemnity Plan.

- In 1994, the Federation established a new program based on the results of a Task Force on French Programs and Services.
- The Sullivan Royal Commission on Education reported out in 1988 establishing a new student centred primary program supported by teachers.
- In 1994, the Federation moved its offices into its current location at 550 West 6th Avenue in Vancouver.
- The BCTF initiated the organization of a Coalition for Public Education, primarily involving unions that worked in all levels of public education.
- The BCTF played a key role in the formation of a BC office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- In 1996, acting on AGM direction, the Federation held an unsuccessful member vote on affiliation with the BC Federation of Labour.
- The first round of provincial bargaining in 1996 necessitated the involvement of government before a deal could be reached. The key development was the continuation of the terms and conditions of employment negotiated locally.
- Government moved to amalgamate numerous school districts around the province causing the Federation to respond by allowing its locals to continue, if they so chose.
- The 1997 AGM made history when it passed a resolution calling for the establishment of a program to eliminate homophobia and heterosexism in the BC school system. Both protesters and supporters gathered outside the meeting. Delegates voted overwhelmingly to do what is necessary to make schools open and accepting for all students and teachers whatever their sexual orientation and identity.

Decade 9: 1997–98 to 2006–07

- In 1997 the Federation signed a MOU with the BCSTA, the federal government, the provincial government, First Nations School Associations, organizations representing BC's First Nations chiefs, and others to create the K–12 Education Partners table to work collectively to address success for Aboriginal learners.
- Also in 1997, the Federation established a Health and Safety program, which eventually involved assisting members with WCB appeals.
- The Federation, following a 1998 AGM decision, melded its Status of Women program and Program Against Racism into a new Social Justice Program.
- Following on the work of a Task Force on Aboriginal Education appointed in 1998, the Federation established an Aboriginal Education program in 2000.
- In 2000, the Federation also initiated its Peer Support Program.
- Following a member vote in 2000, the Federation moved to participate in a full trusted teacher pension plan.
- The second round of provincial bargaining resulted in major improvements in class size for primary classes, and staffing ratios for learning specialist teachers.
- In March 2000, CUPE struck in 43 school districts and in every one of those, teachers honored picket lines. Immediately following the election of a Liberal government in May 2001, Essential Services legislation for teachers was introduced.
- In the third round of provincial bargaining, in the fall of 2001, the BCTF took their first provincial strike vote.
- In January 2002, government imposed a settlement on teachers, gutting the collective agreement of class-size, class-composition, and staffing-ratio provisions. Future negotiations of such terms and conditions of employment was made illegal.
- On January 28, 2002, teachers held a one-day protest, the first day of a multi-year protest against government unilateral intervention into bargaining.
- In 2002, the Federation developed a long-term Public Education Advocacy Plan and moved to reorganize the staff to facilitate implementation of the plan. The 2002 AGM voted to establish a Public Education Defence Fund.
- The Federation launched a province-wide discussion about education through the Charter for Public Education process.

- In March 2003, members voted to affiliate with the BC Federation of Labour.
- When government dismissed the teacher-elected members of the BC College of Teachers' Council, the BCTF organized a major campaign that had members refuse to pay the college fee. This forced the government to re-establish a democratic college.
- To deal with continued underfunding by government and the downloading of provincially initiated costs to school boards, the Federation organized a grass roots province-wide "Caravan Against the Cuts."
- The Federation spent \$5 million in the 2005 provincial election to make education a vote-determining issue.
- In the fall of 2005, and in response to the government's imposition of another contract, the BCTF engaged in a two-week strike, deemed illegal by the courts. The resulting settlement, brokered by Vince Ready, broke the zero mandate of government and set the stage for the upcoming round of public-sector bargaining.
- In March 2006, members voted to join the Canadian Labour Congress and thus continue their affiliation with the BC Federation of Labour.
- At the 2006 AGM, delegates declared it was time to reverse the government's "Accountability Agenda" and called for a dramatic shift away from an overemphasis on inappropriate testing, ranking, and narrow achievement measures to a focus on providing the conditions for optimal teaching and learning. Members were encouraged to withdraw from formulating accountability contracts and school growth plans, participate in education change that produces a positive outcome for students, increase involvement with parents through PACs, and withdraw from participating on School Planning Councils.
- In May 2006, government, through its Learning Roundtable, moved to legislate class-size and class-composition provisions as a follow-through from the 2005 fall strike.
- In June 2006, the Federation concluded a collective agreement through the involvement of government in the process, achieving significant improvements in salary.

Decade 10: 2006–07 to 2016–17

- While teachers were faced with funding cuts, instability, and increasingly difficult teaching and learning conditions, the government continued its attempts to undermine the profession. In March 2007, the *Teaching Profession Act* was passed, introducing online registries of records of discipline for individual teachers and the publishing of teacher names and discipline, including any contravention of the broad standards. It also decreed that teachers should report on each other, encouraged parent complaints, and established that the Minister could appoint a special advisor if it was felt that a board or superintendent failed in their duty to report teachers.
- In May 2007, the *School (Student Achievement Enabling) Act* was passed, further centralizing power and, among other changes, creating the Superintendents of Achievement, giving the Minister power to appoint a special trustee, permitting fees for Special Academies.
- In October 2007 the BCTF officially launched an affinity program for members, *BCTF Advantage*, through which the BCTF leveraged the collective numbers to secure discounts for members on a wide range of services and purchases.
- The 2008 AGM made the decision to withdraw from the Canadian Teachers' Federation. Although the BCTF was very active in the CTF since its inception in 1920, it had been pursuing an agenda for change in the CTF and the assessment of the 2008 AGM was that it was time to withdraw.
- In May 2008, teachers won a significant freedom expression award. Arbitrator Kinzie ruled that the Southeast Kootenay Board violated teachers' and their union's freedom of expression by denying them the right to communicate with parents about the FSA.
- At the end of May 2008, the government passed Bill 42, the *Election Amendment Act*, which became known as the "Gag Law," imposing extreme restrictions on public engagement well in advance of election dates. The BCTF joined with other unions in a court case to oppose the restrictions on freedom of expression in the legislation. The court ruled against government, which then redrafted a second gag law, which was also deemed unjustifiable by the courts.

Government appealed and the BC Court of Appeal affirmed the ruling in 2011, concluding the gag law provisions were unconstitutional.

- In December 2008, the BCTF held a province-wide vote to oppose the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) based on the damage it does to teaching and learning, the unfair nature of the assessment, the resources it drains from public education, and the impact on students, schools, and school communities. Members voted 85% in favour, and concerted campaigns to eliminate the FSA, and the resulting school rankings, continued with many other education partner groups also critiquing these tests and their misuse.
- In July 2009, the Supreme Court of Canada upheld a BC Court of Appeal decision that the restrictive policies of Translink and BC Transit were unconstitutional. BCTF, joined by the Canadian Federation of Students, had taken the case forward after BCTF ads informing the public about conditions in schools were refused.
- The Federation advanced public education issues in the provincial election of May 2019, through the "When Will They Learn" campaign that focused on school closures, overcrowded classes, and government neglect of students with special needs.
- In 2010, the BCTF launched a new wellness program, Living with Balance, as part of the BCTF Rehabilitation program (now Health and Wellness Program) providing support to members in wellness, vitality, and resilience.
- Following a thorough pension consultation with a member survey and visits to locals in 2009–10, the 2010 Annual General Meeting passed a series of recommendations to increase member contribution slightly to address full indexing, redirect the slated reduction in employer contribution to the Inflation Adjustment Account, and redirect any emerging surpluses to the IAA.
- The BCTF launched the Social Justice lens in 2010. The lens, developed by the Committee for Action on Social Justice, serves as a framework for members, locals, and the Federation overall to use to guide policy, plan actions, and assess resources.
- The *Teachers' Act*, Bill 12, was passed in 2011. It dissolved the College of Teachers and established the Teacher Regulation Branch and the Teachers' Council. The legislation also opened discipline hearings to the public, limited the right of appeal, and gave the TRB greater control over certification for teachers and retired teachers. The Minister had met numerous times with the BCTF in advance, but the legislation contained elements that were never discussed.
- In April 2011, Madam Justice Griffin, BC Supreme Court, issued a monumental ruling concluding that what the BC government had done in stripping the collective agreements in 2002 was wrong and that the government did not have the authority to take away teachers' bargaining rights as they were guaranteed through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The ruling declared the legislation invalid and gave the government a year to remedy the situation.
- MyBCTF, a members-only portal, went live on the BCTF website in April 2011, providing a new resource for communications and support for members.
- In June 2011, BCTF members approved by over 90% a provincial strike vote in the face of numerous unacceptable employer concession demands at the bargaining table. In the 2011–12 school year teachers acted on the vote and committed to a "Year of Joyful Teaching" in which they focused on the classroom and their students, and did not undertake the many administrative and bureaucratic tasks that had been proliferating in their working lives. This job action escalated to a three-day strike in March 2012, after the government had introduced not yet enacted new legislation aimed at teacher bargaining rights.
- In March 2012, in response to the Griffin ruling requiring government to address the contract stripping and in the face of the Year of Joyful Teaching, the government passed Bill 22, the *Education Improvement Act* that both repealed provisions of Bills 27/28, the contract stripping legislation from 2002, and immediately reintroduced them. The Act further interfered with the collective bargaining process under way, imposing a government appointed mediator with a net zero mandate, introducing further concession, declaring any strike action in that round of bargaining an offense subject to heavy fines. The BCTF participated in the imposed mediation process and prevented the concessions, signing off an agreement at the end of June 2012.

- The 2013 Annual General Meeting amended the AGM Standing Rules of Order to enable delegates to speak in their working languages, and have other delegates accompany them to the microphone to provide translation.
- The BCTF returned to the Supreme Court (Madam Justice Griffin) in September 2013 to argue that Bill 22 was unconstitutional and to seek damages for the contract stripping.
- The BCTF intensified its use of social media in 2012–13, adding a short-term social media co-ordinator position to an already strong communications and campaigns division, and social media became an integral aspect of all Federation communications.
- In 2012–13 the BCTF created the Better Schools for BC, a plan for quality public education, and advanced this platform in the lead-up to the election. The Federation undertook an ad campaign asking why BC students were still waiting for the support they needed.
- The BCTF was at the bargaining table as of February 2013, working with a facilitator through the spring. However, the government suspended talks in June and appointed a new confrontational chief negotiator, Peter Cameron. In July the government fired the BCPSEA board and installed a bureaucrat in its place.
- The BCTF fully supported the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, sponsoring the attendance of members from around the province at the education day events at the TRC's session in Vancouver in September 2013. The BCTF subsequently supported the TRC recommendations relating to education.
- In January 2014 the BC Supreme Court, Madam Justice Griffin, reaffirmed that the legislation limiting teacher bargaining rights and stripping the collective agreement was unconstitutional, restored the provisions, and ordered the government to pay damages of \$2 million. The government appealed this ruling and the hearing was held in the fall of 2014.
- In time for the new school year in 2014, the BCTF launched TeachBC, an online site with teaching resources and materials developed for teachers by teachers. Designed as a creative commons, the site was set up to facilitate teachers uploading materials to share and downloading materials to use.
- In 2014, in partnership with Dr. Andrew Miki, the BCTF launched Starling Minds, an online Cognitive Behaviour Therapy to support for members in dealing with stress, anxiety, and depression.
- In March 2014, after over a year at the bargaining table, the BCTF took a province-wide strike vote and began a limited job action. The employer responded with a partial lock-out and docked teachers' pay, while asking teachers to continue to spend many hours on volunteer activities and while rejecting all BCTF proposals for settlement. Rotating strikes began in May with a full strike under way in mid-June. The government rejected the call for binding arbitration and efforts to work through a mediator. In September the strike was still under way, but public support for teachers remained high. Very generous donations were made to the BCTF and locals, and reallocated to support members in need.
- In September, the government finally agreed to work with a mediator and a settlement was reached on September 18, 2014. The BCTF did not take concessions, gained salary and benefit improvements, gained further improvements for TTOCs, and secured a \$105 million dollar grievance settlement, which was then allocated to individual members.
- In April 2015, the BC Court of Appeal sided with the government in its appeal of the Griffin ruling of January 2014. In September, the BCTF sought leave to have the Federation's appeal of Bills 28 and 22 heard by the Supreme Court of Canada.
- In response to a 2014 AGM decision, the BCTF set up a Member Engagement Task Force in 2014–15 to develop a report and recommendations to enhance engagement in the Federation. The Task Force reported to the Executive Committee in June 2015. The Executive Committee circulated the report for feedback and adopted recommendations in January 2016.
- In 2014–15 the BCTF created a comprehensive resource, *Project of Heart: Illuminating the Hidden History of the Indian Residential Schools of BC* to support members in learning and teaching about the legacy of the residential schools. The resource

has been shared widely, in other provinces, with other unions, community groups, etc.

- The Ministry of Education began to engage the BCTF regarding plans for education reform shortly after the strike was settled. In 2014–15 and throughout 2015–16, the BCTF and its members have been very busy with facilitating curriculum change while also raising issues and concerns to be addressed. An unprecedented number of members have been engaged in on curriculum development committees and in helping to facilitate the change process.
- The 2015 Annual General Meeting passed a recommendation to consult members on changes to the Teachers Pension Plan, leading up to the 2016 AGM. An extensive consultation was held in 2015–16 with thorough information for plan members, a survey, and meetings in all locals. The 2016 Annual General Meeting approved the Executive Committee recommendations to delink from the Canada Pension Plan's Year's Maximum Pensionable Earnings (YMPE) and make additional improvements for members of the plan. The changes to the joint trust agreement were signed off with government in June 2016.
- In time for the Summer Conference in 2015, the Federation produced the Professional Development lens, through the work of the Professional Issues Advisory Committee. This lens, made widely available, is a support for distinguishing between in-service and PD, supporting professional autonomy, guiding PD choices, and helping local PD chairs in conversations with members.
- In November 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled on a case that had begun as a grievance in Surrey and had proceeded through the arbitration to BC Court of Appeal to the Supreme Court. The court sided with the BCTF almost immediately after arguments were made, agreeing that it was discriminatory to deny birth mothers parental benefits because they had received pregnancy benefits.
- At the 2016 Annual General Meeting, the BCTF made the decision to rejoin the Canadian Teachers' Federation, having determined that rejoining was in the Federation's interest. Discussions with the CTF and research on rejoining had taken place throughout 2014–15, with reports to the Representative Assembly. The AGM determined that returning to the CTF was in the Federation's interest. The CTF AGM will vote on accepting the application, with membership expected to begin on September 1, 2016.
- In January 2016, 14 years after BC government's contract stripping legislation, the BCTF was granted leave to appeal the ruling of the BC Court of Appeal on Bills 28 and 22 to the Supreme Court of Canada. The case will be heard in November 2016.
- In 2016 the BCTF celebrated its 100th Annual General Meeting, kicking off a year of centennial celebrations. The founding AGM took place on January 4, 2017. The Federation is marking this very important milestone, turning 100, in a myriad of ways between the 100th and 101st AGMs.
- In June 2016 the BCTF Executive Committee dealt with a report on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within the union and adopted a thorough set of recommendations to further support member engagement and move the Federation forward in ensuring members of equity-seeking groups are welcomed and included in the union.
- The BCTF launched a program to encourage more women to participate in bargaining and collective agreement enforcement, Women in Negotiations (WIN), that includes training a cadre of women to deliver bargaining and grievance workshops in locals.