

Our Side of the Table



Recess – September 20, 2011

Vernon Teachers' Association Negotiating Team

As Vernon Teachers and their students are well aware, School District 22's CEO/superintendent, Bev Rundell, has cancelled recess. Here's a timeline of the related events:

- August 23: Ms. Rundell called the VTA to a meeting. She outlined her plan for district personnel to adequately cover morning and recess supervision at each elementary school.
- September 1: Ms. Rundell announced that recess would be cancelled.
- September 4: Vernon Morning Star: *"In 2002, we had similar job action," said [the VTA]. "There were more students but the same number of administrators and the district did not cancel recess, so we have to wonder what is different this time."* Ms. Rundell responded with, *"It's different than in 2002 because we don't know how long this strike is going to last...last time it was two weeks..."* Last time, no one could have predicted its duration either.
- September 5: The VTA wrote to the Trustees pointing out how our Collective Agreement states instructional time *"shall be inclusive of fifteen (15) minutes of recess."* The letter also stated *"I think we can all agree that it would be best if students and staff have the opportunity for bathroom and nutrition breaks at school sites."* Trustees did not respond.
- September 8: The Cranbrook District Teachers' Association voiced their concerns about cancelled recess. As a result, the Cranbrook Board of Education reversed their decision, reinstating recess.
- September 13: Having heard no response from the Trustees, the VTA filed a grievance pursuant to Article A.6.4 of the Collective Agreement, requesting *"a meeting as soon as possible to resolve this issue."*
- September 15: The VTA wrote to our Trustees a second time questioning why *"the 14 excluded staff and school administration's inability to follow the LRB ruling supercedes the basic needs of over 8000 students, their parents, their teachers, and support staff."* The letter also requested confirmation whether the cancelled recess was a decision of the Board.
- September 16: Mr. Turanski, Board Chair, replied in a letter stating he would *"not comment on the circumstances..."* of our grievance. He also said, *"I believe that you will discover, that if the teachers' strike continues for a prolonged period of time, that more school districts will also find it necessary to cancel recess..."*
- September 20: To date, the VTA has not heard back from Ms. Rundell.

Interesting Points:

Though the Labour Relations Board directed District Personnel to handle supervision, a BCPSEA document dated August 12 provides guidance to Districts, listing ways to reduce such responsibilities: ***“Examples of such reductions include cancelling recess, subject to whether it is in the best interests of students and teachers...”***

At the time of writing, we know of only 7 school districts who have cancelled recess! The vast majority – urban and rural – have not.

Surrey, which is the largest district and has the lowest ratio of management to teachers, is able to continue all recess supervision.

Teacher Comments:

“I teach grade one. When should I use the washroom? Is that what the lockdown pee buckets are for?”

“I'm not going to let this hurt kids.”

“You should have seen my son's face!!”

“3 1/2 hours without a washroom break, hello kidney stones.”

“I give my students extra help at recess. I'm so used to saying ‘see me at recess’ but now I can't.”

“Kids are supposed to come first....teachers believe this - why don't those higher up??? at least their actions don't suggest that kids come first...kids need a movement break and some food in their tummies!”

You can send feedback and comments to: vtanegotiatingteam@gmail.com and post your comments to the Facebook group: ***“VTA Bargaining Page.”***

-your VTA Negotiating Team