

Vernon Teachers' Association

VOICES

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www.vernonta.com



Happy
Valentine's
Day!

Speaking for Teachers in the North Okanagan

Reflections.....

Greetings, colleagues;

The chronic underfunding of the Public School system in B.C. is not news. The effects are debilitating to our classrooms and to all of the people working in the system. Compounding the resulting lack of books, school supplies, computers, and support for high needs children, the Ministry of Education demands data, so the District demands data, so we generate data. So what do you think of this data?

Average Class Sizes (as of September 30)				
	Kindergarten	Grade 1 - 3	Grades 4 - 7	Grades 8 - 12
District	18.7	20.9	27.4	25.1
Province	18.3	20.7	25.9	25.1
Rank in Province (largest) / 60	10th	10th	5th	23rd

As a 'snapshot', it is interesting, I suppose. But it doesn't really mean a whole lot, does it? Other than noting that our class sizes on average are higher than in most other Districts. What is far more meaningful to me is what teachers have to say about their individual classrooms or assignments. I think most people would agree that relying heavily on one piece of information can lead to poor decisions, faulty conclusions and so on. That is why teachers, administrators, and District Staff are united in condemning the misuse of the FSA results. And it is why the most reliable source of information about student progress comes from teachers using assessment tools which are reliable and meaningful.

On another completely different topic, we are in a bargaining year, and I would like to commend the 12 volunteers for their work on the VTA Bargaining Committee. The Committee is examining the Collective Agreement, looking for areas where improvements are needed and developing proposals. Our committee Chairperson, Craig Leverman, will soon be submitting a letter to the School Board requesting the start of bargaining, and the BCTF is doing the same at the Provincial level. The BCTF has been very open with BCPSEA and the Government that we are committed to working towards improvements in Collective Agreements in all 60 locals while respecting unique local situations.

And finally, as you will see elsewhere in Voices, the VTA will be electing 9 delegates to the BCTF AGM which will be held at the beginning of Spring Break in Victoria. I encourage you to take part in this election either as a candidate or as a voter!

Until next time,

Bruce Cummings
VTA President

VTA General Meeting - Thursday, February 10th 4:00 pm in the Clarence Fulton Library

AGENDA

Election of 9 VTA Delegates to attend the BCTF AGM

- If you would like to put your name forward prior to the meeting please contact Kevin Bader at vta.kevin@gmail.com.
- Nominations may be made from the floor.

Updates

- Bargaining
- College of Teachers

BCTF AGM will be held March 19th to 22nd, 2011 in Victoria. Expenses for the AGM are covered by the BCTF and daycare is available for those travelling with their family. Please call Bruce if you have any questions.

*This is your federation, get involved, participate and
be a part of the changes in education!*

Act as if what you do makes a difference. It does.

William James



What does FTE mean?

Such a simple answer: Full Time Equivalent.

How is it calculated?

Easy peasy: $\text{number of days worked} / \text{number of days in session}$.

Oh, but some little wrinkles - what if you only work part days?

Well, you take the number of instructional minutes you work / the number of instructional minutes per day. However, mornings at different elementary schools may have a different number of minutes of instruction...so your FTE could be different from school to school!

Teachers are actually paid based on our instructional time because there is no way to measure all the hours that we work outside the classroom. And you can imagine how tricky this is to figure out when you teach in both Elementary and Secondary during the school year. Other complications in the calculations arise if you travel between schools or you work in an alternate setting.

So the School District payroll system has to have accurate information to make sure everyone is paid properly...not an easy task! To reduce the chances of making mistakes, the District has gone to a 'pay as you go' system for several part time teachers or teachers whose assignments shape-shift.

Exchange Teachers Wanted

More teachers from other countries want to exchange teach in B.C. than any other province. This means that the chances are high of a B.C. teacher getting a foreign school placement they want.

Exchanges can be arranged with a teacher in the United Kingdom, Denmark, Switzerland, Germany and the Netherlands. The largest number of exchanges are with colleagues in Australia.

Exchanges can also be arranged in some U.S. states, as well as other provinces in Canada.

Neither the BCTF nor the Ministry of Education are responsible for the exchanges. These are arranged through a non-profit society called the Canadian Education Exchange Foundation.

Applications for countries in the Northern Hemisphere closed January 31, 2011 but there's plenty of time to apply for the 2012-2013 school year!

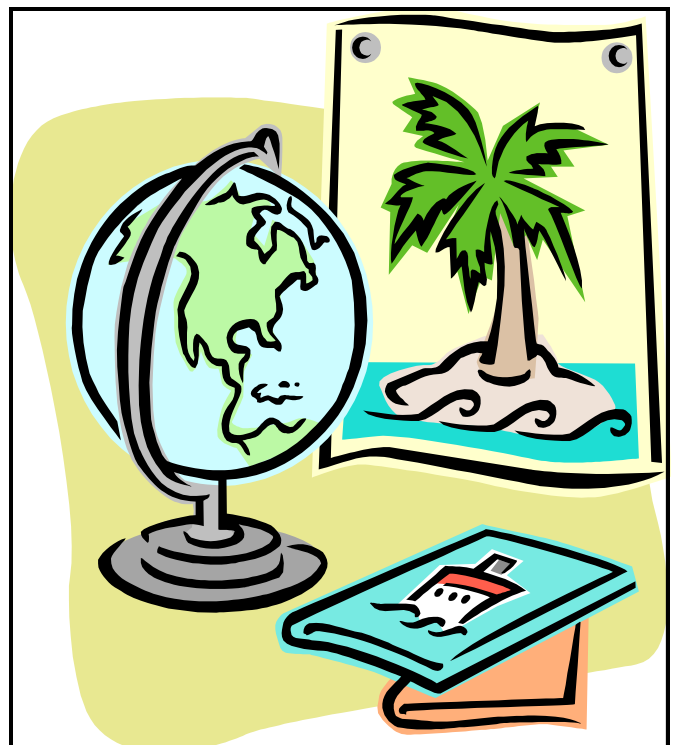
Because schools in Australia are on a calendar year basis, those applications can be submitted by the end of February.

If you want more information or details of the application process, contact the Canadian Education Exchange Foundation:

Their website is at www.ceef.ca and their email is info@ceef.ca or phone (705) 739-7596.

A group of B.C. teachers have organized as the B.C. Exchange Teachers' Association. For several years it has provided social activities and support for teachers from elsewhere working as exchange teachers in B.C. It also can provide suggestions about the exchange process, based on the experience of B.C. teachers who have exchanged in the past.

You can join the group and have a chance to meet colleagues from other countries. Or just take a look at their blog to see the kinds of activities they organize. It is at bcteacherexchange.blogspot.com



Teachers' Pension Plan

Voluntary extended health care plan for retirees

The subsidized extended health care (EHC) plan available to retired members will end in December 2011 and will be replaced with an unsubsidized voluntary EHC plan starting January 2012. Members who choose to have coverage under the new voluntary EHC plan will pay full premiums for this coverage. Pacific Blue Cross is the benefits provider for both plans and will be pleased to answer any questions members may have.

Beginning in February 2011 retirement packages to active members who are considering retiring will include information and application material for the subsidized EHC plan and the new voluntary EHC plan. Members will be given instructions on how to apply for or waive coverage under both plans, and will be advised how the move to a voluntary plan will affect them.

Some key points:

- To apply for or waive coverage under the subsidized EHC plan or unsubsidized voluntary EHC plan, members must submit the appropriate EHC applications with their pension application.
- If a member chooses to have coverage under the voluntary EHC plan, full premiums will be deducted from their pension starting December 2011 for January 2012 coverage (premiums are deducted one month in advance).
- If a member chooses coverage under both plans, they will receive a Pacific Blue Cross identification card for each.
- Members will pay full premiums for the voluntary EHC plan but will still have access to group rates. This typically makes premiums more afford-able than benefit packages individuals can buy on their own.
tpp.pensionsbc.ca

The voluntary EHC plan offers significant improvements over the subsidized EHC plan. More information about changes to retirement benefits is available on the plan's website at tpp.pensionsbc.ca or Toll-free: (BC) 1 800 665-6770

Factor 88 – If your age + experience total 88, you may elect to withdraw from the long term disability part of the Salary Indemnity Program (SIP). Just make sure you have enough short term (maximum 120 days) or sick days banked to reach your retirement date.

Know your Collective Agreement

ARTICLE D.26 AVAILABILITY OF TEACHERS ON CALL

1. When a teacher is absent from a school for half a day or longer and classroom coverage is necessary, a teacher on call shall be employed to replace that teacher.
2. When a teacher is absent from a school for less than half a day, arrangements for class coverage may be made between teachers subject to the principal's approval.
3. In emergency situations, a teacher may be required to perform the duties of a teacher who is absent or to supervise his/her students.
4. The teacher on call shall be required to assume only the duties of the teacher he/she is replacing unless advised of other circumstances before accepting the assignment.



BC Teacher's Vitality Project - *Living with Balance*

A Six-Week Group Program for Teachers

Pre-registration is Required, Minimum no. of Registrants Required to Run the Program

We are now taking registrations for another series of workshops, 'Living with Balance'. The sessions will be scheduled to commence when sufficient registrations have been received and registrants have been notified of the sessions times and dates. To register please access a referral form from the BCTF website at <http://bctf.ca/LivingWithBalance.aspx> or contact your local president.

This program has been initiated by the BCTF Health & Wellness program and developed by the Occupational Rehabilitation Group of Canada, a long-established service provider to the BC Teachers' Federation. There are a select number of BC communities where this program will be offered this year. *Living with balance* is a six-week program, which runs for two hours once per week. It focuses on developing tools and skills related to improving one's vitality and resiliency. Our holistic approach to wellness will equip teachers to make simple lifestyle changes that will positively affect their physical, mental, and emotional well-being.

This six-week group program provides opportunities for:

- ♦ education, self-evaluation, and examining the importance of maintaining life-style balance
- ♦ discussing the importance of nutrition; exercise; sleep
- ♦ managing symptoms of low mood, anxiety, and stress; boundaries and managing conflict
- ♦ learning strategies that increase awareness of factors that contribute to fluctuations in mood as well as methods to manage them
- ♦ reviewing proven techniques used to improve self-esteem and self-confidence, and manage stress and low mood
- ♦ defining what work-life balance means to each of us and what happens when our roles collide, having good boundaries is often attributed to having clear values
- ♦ setting goals and achieving them
- ♦ discussing how to be intentional, creative and assertive when you need to be.
- ♦ learning the importance of social connections and community in building long-term wellness, understanding that social isolation is a significant health risk factor.

For further information, please contact Lynn Hiscoe at 1-866-766-5911 or by e-mail at lhiscoe@orgoc.ca. Lynn Hiscoe is a consultant with the Occupational Rehabilitation Group of Canada (ORGOC). ORGOC is one of several service providers who provide supports to teachers across the province. Lynn is a clinical social worker who specializes in workplace mental health. Note: The purpose of this program is not to treat, but to promote, healthy lifestyles and improve emotional well-being. Consult your physician for specific guidance on health concerns.

Upcoming Pension Seminars

The Teachers' Pension Plan no longer sends a printed list of seminar dates and locations to schools. They discontinued this practice last year after they had difficulty with hotels and other venue providers cancelling their room bookings with very little notice.

The seminar schedules are online at the Teachers' Pension Plan website:

www.tpp.pensionsbc.ca Please note there are two upcoming seminars planned for **Vernon on April 9th, 2011: 'Your Pension, Your Future' - 9:00 am to 10:30 am and 'Thinking About Retiring' - 12:00 pm to 2:00 pm.**

Social Justice Report

The **Day of Pink** is coming soon! On Wednesday, February 23, schools across BC will celebrate the Day of Pink. Start discussing with your students how you can make your school's celebration the best ever. This is not a generic anti-bullying day. Please talk to your students about the true origins of the day and the harm that homophobia and transphobia causes within schools and society at large. This day is now celebrated right across Canada and helps to demonstrate and remind students that:

- colours, toys, sports, etc. don't belong to any gender
- homophobia, gender teasing, and name-calling are not OK
- speaking up against homophobic bullying does make a difference
- students have the power to inspire meaningful change.



For the original story, go to cbc.ca and search for "Pink T-shirt." Look for posters with more class activities in your school or ask your Social Justice Rep.

Did you know that BC has the highest child poverty rate in Canada and the lowest minimum wage? Are you aware that BC has no concrete plan to tackle child poverty while seven other provinces do? Please add your voice to the call to end child poverty. Members are encouraged to sign onto the open call for BC to have a Poverty Reduction Plan legislating targets and time-lines to dramatically reduce and ultimately end poverty and homelessness. **You can sign on at bcpovertyreduction.ca.** The Dignity for All Campaign calls for vigorous and sustained action by the federal government to combat the structural causes of poverty in Canada. www.dignityforall.ca

February is Black History Month, go to: <http://www.blackhistorycanada.ca/index.php?lang=en>

LOOK FOR FAIR TRADE CHOCOLATE FOR VALENTINE'S DAY!



S.D.#22 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Dear Colleagues,

Although this school year was front loaded with PD days, there is still opportunity to participate in high quality professional development in the second half of the year. Friday, February 18th is the Zone Conference “Making Connections 6” at George Elliot Secondary in Winfield. The PD chairs from the Okanagan Zone have been working for months to put this together. Our keynote speaker this year is Dr. Gordon Neufeld. His topic is Relationship Matters: Harnessing the Power of Attachment. Closing this year’s conference is comedian Roman Danylo. In between is a very wide variety of workshops both on and offsite. If the Zone Conference doesn’t offer what you are looking for then there are several other options that day including “Just Write” Conference in Salmon Arm put on by the BC Teachers of English Language Arts PSA and a SMART Learning Symposium in Penticton. Go to our website www.vernonta.com for details. You will also find the Zone Conference brochure and the registration link.

This brings me to expectations around attendance and participation on professional development days. It’s a hot topic these days and seems to come across my desk weekly. The Collective Agreement says this:

Article F.24 NON INSTRUCTIONAL DAYS

1. Non- instructional days shall be considered as instructional days for salary purposes.

The **district** has asked **principals** to report on the whereabouts of their staffs on February 18th. So that means that principals will be asking teachers what they are doing on that day. I’ve been told that this is for payroll purposes. It is the VTA’s position that if a teacher is not engaging in PD on PD days, for any reason, then they should be taking the appropriate leave (sick or discretionary). If they are doing self directed PD, then a form should be filled in. Rest assured that discussion around this issue will take place at the District PD committee meeting on February 11th.

Enjoy your day on February 18th with whatever activity you choose. As always do not hesitate to call me at the office on Fridays or email me anytime with your questions and concerns.

Sincerely,

Robyn Ladner
Professional Development Chairperson
prodchair@shaw.ca

