

Report *from the Chair*

BRITISH COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOL EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION

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By E-mail: Two Pages

New Trustees Orientation and Annual General Meeting

The BCPSEA New Trustees Orientation and 15th Annual General Meeting were held on January 22, and 23-24, respectively, in Vancouver. Both events provided a great opportunity for trustees, both new and returning, as well as district staff, to connect and to participate in workshops and plenary sessions on topical issues. We particularly hope that new trustees enjoyed their introduction to the association; please don't hesitate to contact any member of the Board of Directors or staff if you have questions or need more information.

On behalf of the BC Public School Employers' Association community, I would like to take this opportunity to extend sincere thanks to departing Board member Silvia Dyck, of School District No. 33 (Chilliwack). Silvia brought a thoughtful perspective to Board discussions, along with tremendous commitment and dedication.

I am also pleased to welcome to the Board Pete Williams, School District No. 64 (Gulf Islands) and Government Director Christina Zacharuk of the Public Sector Employers' Council.

Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA)

As we reported in *@issue* No. 2009-05, dated January 28, 2009, BCPSEA filed Application with the Labour Relations Board on January 28 with respect to the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) campaign in opposition to the FSA. As we have stated, it is the view of BCPSEA that the BCTF advice and direction to their members to refuse to prepare for, administer, and mark the FSA is contrary to the *Labour Relations Code*, arbitral and Labour Relations Board (LRB) decisions, and/or the collective agreement.

An informal hearing was held today at the LRB in order to set the parameters for the formal hearing scheduled for Monday, February 2. We will keep you informed as the process unfolds.

What has become known as the FSA dispute is troubling. We all know there are two sides to this issue — a policy side with political overtones, and an employment side. The FSA has been around since the late 1990s and actually only became an area of focus when the Fraser Institute started using the data to "rank" schools, and these rankings were published in *The Province* newspaper.

This year the BCTF launched its latest version of their campaign, citing in a newspaper advertisement the following reasons for their opposition to FSA:

"Foundation Skills Assessment testing doesn't help students learn or teachers teach. Instead, FSA results are used by the Fraser Institute for American-style ranking of schools that only erodes confidence in public education."

The BCTF has used a variety of approaches to message their opposition:

- Newspaper ads
- Media events
- Flyers home to parents, meetings with parent groups
- Meeting with boards and individual trustees
- Petitions from local teachers' unions and assertions that teachers will collectively, and individually by signature, refuse to prepare, administer, and mark the FSA.

We know there are a variety of views on the FSA. At the same time, we also believe those views belong at a policy table as part of a broader discussion with a broader group of stakeholders. Issues such as the third-party use of the FSA data to rank schools, parents' needs for accurate data about their child's progress, and the census versus random sample model of reporting are all legitimate matters for discussion. It is our understanding that the Minister of Education has today sent a letter to the BCTF indicating that such broader discussion and consultation will occur as we look forward to 2010. You may wish to refer to the BCPSEA @issue bulletin that will be distributed later today for more information.

However, these differently held views, no matter how passionately articulated, should not disrupt the workplace or students' learning environment. Boards are obliged to ensure that the FSA, as an initiative of the Ministry of Education, proceeds as required. Trustees and district staff have been placed in a difficult position in what has unfortunately become a "whose side are you on" campaign. Local teachers' unions have also challenged that the board and/or staff will put the relationship at risk unless they accede to teachers' demands to support the BCTF campaign against the FSA in whole or in part.

From an employment perspective, the matters boil down to these:

- Can a teacher or group of teachers decide what work they will do and what work they won't do?
- Can teachers, in concert with their province-wide vote and/or local petitions, not perform work which they have normally performed with the goal of compelling a policy change?

The BCTF advice and direction to its members to refuse to prepare for, administer, and mark the FSA is, by definition, a strike, from our perspective and a strike during the life of a collective agreement is a violation of the *Labour Relations Code*.

As the LRB Application proceeds, it is important for boards and district staff to ensure that teachers understand the expectations with respect to administration of the FSA.

Please contact your BCPSEA labour relations liaison for discussion and assistance as matters evolve in your district.

Please also feel free to contact me, or any other member of the Board of Directors or staff, with your questions, concerns, and comments. The Board and staff contact information can be found under Contact Us on the BCPSEA website (www.bcpsea.bc.ca).



Ron Christensen
Chair