

Cranbrook Chronicles

Newsletter of the Cranbrook District Teachers' Association
December 2021



The greatest of follies is to sacrifice health for any other kind of happiness. – Arthur Schopenhauer

Vice-President's Message – Larry Dureski

Hello Colleagues,

I hope you opened this attachment in a place where you do not have to breathe through a mask and in a state of mind that will sustain you to the upcoming break. If you have experienced improved mental health during this pandemic, count yourself among the lucky two percent (see that number and additional teacher health and safety survey results further down). As I write this piece, Shelley is away facilitating a *Staying Well at Teaching* workshop to local members. The group size has allowed for this one to be in-person so long as there was enough space. This edition of the newsletter is an attempt to include all of us in the wellness loop with information and resources as well as keeping you informed of what is happening at both local and provincial discussions. Luckily for you, I have not given you my lengthy hand-written or badly-typed notes from meetings attended. Instead, here is the version that has had some cleaning and organizing. Whether you read all the articles or not, be sure to scroll to the bottom. A lot of us miss the Christmas Office Socials we used to have here, and hope for their eventual return. In the meantime, we offer you something to get your Christmas Cheer going. Enjoy your break.

President's Message – Shelley Balfour

As I look forward to the break, I recognize that in my own life, Christmas is the least restful holiday of the year! My kids are grown so I don't have that wonderful chaos, but the expectations of the Hallmark Christmas still haunt me. Those expectations are my own and so by the end of the holiday, I don't feel rested or ready to return to work. Each year I promise myself that it will be different, but as I write this, I have the 20 bins of Christmas decorations sitting on my deck ready to unpack and move into the house. Maybe next year I tell you this story so that maybe you will be smarter than me and recognize that Hallmark is for movies and that you take time for yourself, your mental and physical health! The PCU (formerly TRB) Commissioner recently stated that the cases he has seen this year all result from teachers not recognizing their level of stress. Please take some time to rest and recharge! Best wishes for the holidays and enjoy whatever plans you have! Be safe!

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What is the BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan (SIP), and who can use it?

The BCTF has provided the following information on their website about the Salary Indemnity Plan. Here are some answers to the most common questions about using this support. In this newsletter, we will look at the short-term option because this is what members accessing the plan would use first.

Am I eligible to participate in the plan?

- All active members of the Federation employed by a school board or a local association on a regular full-time or regular part-time assignment.
- All employees of the Federation, except those specifically exempted from participation in the Plan by the Federation.
- All affiliate administrative members not participating in a wage loss replacement plan may participate in the Plan for up to a maximum of 12 months, provided they apply within 30 days of appointment as an administrative officer.

I am running out of sick leave. How do I apply for short-term SIP?

Contract teachers, who suspect that their illness will continue beyond their sick leave entitlements, are encouraged to contact the Income Security Division of the BCTF at least one month prior to the expiration of their sick leave. Call 604-871-1921, or 1-800-663-9163 extension 1921, and ask for a short-term disability benefits application package.

How much does short-term SIP pay?

SIP benefits are 50% of the salary reported to us by the school district. The benefit is non-taxable. In addition, the member does not pay, but receives credit for having paid, their pension as well as local and BCTF fees.

How long does short-term SIP last?

A contract teacher is entitled to a maximum of 120 days of short-term disability benefits, in respect of any one claim.

For further reading, go to [BCTF SIP Information Page](#) on their website.

Who pays my premiums while I am off?

For this, we go to our own Collective Agreement, Article G.29: Medical Leave of Absence:

Where a teacher is on medical leave of absence, following the termination of sick leave, the Board will continue to pay its share of the cost of the premiums during the period the teacher is in receipt of BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan (Short Term) benefits and, where the teacher is in receipt of benefits from the BCTF Salary Indemnity Plan (Long Term) for each of the plans the teacher was a participant in at the time the absence began.

The teacher must make arrangements for advancing their share of premiums.

Hearing Tests and Documentation

Members who work in potentially noisy environments (i.e., shops, gym, band, etc.) are booked for annual hearing tests that are provided by the district. The hired testing contractor shows up once a year with a mobile hearing test lab and appointments are scheduled for eligible staff. If you receive an email from the district about an annual hearing test, this advice applies to you:

- Attend your appointment. When I have visited with the contractor after my tests, they often comment about the number of people on their list who do not show up. These tests are for your benefit, helping to track possible work-related hearing loss over time. Not supplying reliable hearing test data could mean that you pay for your own hearing aids (starting at \$3500.00) at the other end of your career rather than having the necessary documentation to file a WCB claim. Not attending your appointments can also delay mitigation measures to protect your hearing from your work environment.
- Keep written records of each test. Upon request, the contractor will copy the test data onto a business card-size form. Keep these cards in a safe place. Over the years, you will maintain a consistent set of records even when the district changes hearing test providers. If you have been leaving the test lab without a card in your pocket or a hard copy of the test results, you can email Shelley. She will then submit a group request for past hearing test records to the board office.

Highlights from the Fall Representative Assembly – November 5 and 6 Online

President's Report – Teri Mooring – Vaccination rate among teachers is over 95 percent. Discussions continue between the BCTF and PHO about mask mandates. Locally, bring concerns to your site-based Health and Safety Committee and keep a paper trail. Some local Health Authorities are communicating well, others are not.

BCTF Health and Safety Survey – Brendon Watts – The following results were collected from 6000 surveys returned from a random sample of 15,000 members.

- 71% disagree that adequate COVID information is shared.
- 49% report worsened physical health.
- 79% reported worsened mental health.
- 2% reported somewhat improved mental health.
- 27% are more likely to leave the profession due to the pandemic.
- 51% are not more or less likely to leave the profession because of the pandemic.
- 82% support a vaccination mandate for adults working in schools.
- 76% of teachers in the Interior Health region support a vaccination mandate for students.
- 95% of teachers vaccinated (92% for Interior Health), teachers reporting higher vaccination rates than the provincial average.

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Teachers' Council Report – A survey of new teachers will be conducted in the near future. Teachers who have graduated from teacher training between 2015 and 2020 will be eligible to participate.

Pensions Report – Leslie Roosa, Pension Trustee – The Teachers Pension fund has grown on average of 8.7 percent annually over the last five years, compared to 0.25 percent at the bank. There are currently 101,600 members including active members, retirees, and those who have left the profession but are eligible to collect pension later in life for their service. In 2020, there were 39,803 pensions paid out to retirees. To access your personal pension information, including the personal pension estimator, you can start your own Teachers' Pension Plan profile by logging on to [my account](#) and registering. You will need your personal ID number at the top of your printed pension statement to complete this process. If you experience difficulty, call 1-800-665-6770 M-F 8:00-4:30 PST. If you know of someone who is leaving the profession, remind them to register and keep their profile up to date.

Key Decisions:

- That the BCTF engage in climate discussions with government about timelines for reaching a net zero emissions requirement for new construction and phasing out the sale of fossil fuels.
- That the Federation be a signatory to the BC Climate Emergency Campaign letter to the BC Government.
- That the BCTF demand that sex/gender be removed from all provincial and local school forms and be replaced with pronouns. (Shelley has already asked that our district remove these from the forms we use in SD5.)

Highlights from the CDTA Executive Meetings – Nov. 3, 2021

- A new **Aboriginal Education** program presented by Dustin Louis, where 20 educators were becoming more familiar with decolonization and bringing those strategies into the classroom.
- Concern over staffing shortages for support staff including SLPs, EAs, Counsellors.
- Mask mandate concerns, no means to enforce it.
- **Elementary Pro-D Chair** position is still vacant. We need someone.
- **Staying Well at Teaching Workshop** scheduled for December 3. This is open to the membership, not just union reps.
- **Health and Safety** – The district is investigating the number of blinds that would be required for windows and glass panels in interior classroom doors to facilitate a quick lock-down. Permanently placing paper over glass panels creates a **liability issue** for workers being in a classroom with children behind a solid door.
- **Taking on more...** Thinking about taking no more on. Having the support from your colleagues, you do have the option to say no about adding more to your plate.

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... December 1st Executive Meeting

- The current [Collective Agreement](#) (2019-2022) is available on the CDTA website. Staff reps will be printing a hard copy of this for each school.
- Pro-D Reps – We are still looking for permanent Elementary and Secondary Pro-D reps. Colette and Carol have filled these roles for a long time, and are willing to mentor new people considering these positions. Very interesting and fulfilling work. Please think it over.
- Masks continue to be of concern. Not all students are wearing them, making teachers feel unsafe. TTOCs also need to know who actually has a mask exemption when they walk into a classroom.
- MyEd concerns regarding the disruption of Wednesday and Sunday maintenance periods.
- French Pro-D – Opportunities can be accessed through your Pro-D funds or through the District. If you teach Grades 5 or 6, contact Leann Shade. She will steer you in the right direction.
- Investigations – From her work on the BC Teachers' Council, Shelley reports a direct correlation between elevated teacher stress level and the number of investigations. Look after yourself. Take mental health time if you need it.

Dates to Remember

December 17, 3:00 – Step back, breathe.

January 12 – CDTA Executive Meeting via Zoom

Free Drink or Snack Offer on the CDTA!

Between December 1st and 16th, all CDTA members are encouraged to visit Max's Place on 10th Street to enjoy a free drink or snack. As pre-covid Christmas Office Socials (remember those?) are yet to be allowed, this is a little something for Christmas cheer. Enjoy!



Your friends here at the office wish all of you a relaxing and enjoyable Christmas break. Take care, enjoy time with friends and family!

Shelley, Pearl, and Larry

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