

# VESTA WEEKLY

TOPICS WORTH TALKING ABOUT! PLEASE READ AND DISCUSS WITH YOUR COLLEAGUES



SPECIAL BARGAINING EDITION:  
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## **Bargaining Objectives Recommended by VESTA General Meeting!**

The upcoming year will see negotiation at both local and provincial tables, and the preparation has been underway for months already by VESTA members. It may seem early to begin bargaining again, but recall that the term of this Collective Agreement was only 3 years, and we negotiated a full year into that term. Due to COVID, the process of implementation has been slower than usual.

The motions passed last night are “in committee” because bargaining matters are confidential, please reach out to your Staff Rep if you have questions about the content of the decisions, and please plan to attend meetings as bargaining progresses. The motions that were debated resulted from the member survey conducted online in Spring 2021, and included recommendations from VESTA Grievance Committee, VESTA Working and Learning Conditions/ Bargaining Committee, and VESTA Executive Committee. The recommendations were amended and added to by the General Membership as well.

Local bargaining is set to begin in November 2021 on a subset of issues. Objectives set last night will be forwarded to an upcoming VTF Executive Committee. Together with the VSTA, we will identify shared priorities and bring recommendations to a September VTF General Meeting to be finally ratified. This is the process because the two local unions share our Collective Agreement with the Vancouver School District. Please watch for an early September General Meeting where local objectives will be reviewed and discussed. It will be important for VESTA members to ensure our voices are reflected in the final decisions of the meeting!

Provincial bargaining must begin in spring, 2022. The objectives set by the VESTA membership last night will be forwarded to the BCTF, where they will become recommendations to the Provincial Bargaining Conference, taking place late October. At that meeting, locals from around the province, including VESTA, will determine the priorities and strategy to be followed by the Provincial Bargaining Team. These priorities and strategy are determined through representative voting. It's important to remember that VESTA is one of 60 locals in the province who are bringing our perspective, and that our delegates are guided by the decisions of our General Meeting.

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To learn more about what matters are discussed at the provincial and local levels, see Letter of Understanding #1, which is on page 142 of the [online Collective Agreement](#).

To see a graphic that shows timeline and processes for local and provincial bargaining, see this [BCTF Infographic](#).

In Vancouver, Adult Educators negotiate all terms and conditions directly with the Vancouver School Board and set their own bargaining objectives separately from the K-12 bargaining unit, although their bargaining timelines are similar! VESTA Adult Educators elect their own bargaining team and negotiate a separate Collective Agreement.

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- **Why Bargain?**

Teachers have rights in the Employment Standards Act, in Human Rights Legislation, EI and Worksafe Regulations, and sometimes in policy, but our Collective Agreement is the only place where we have rights that were directly negotiated between the employer and workers. These are rights we can directly enforce and that we can rely on. Improving things like class size and composition provisions, salary, benefits, staff meetings, post and fill, layoff and recall require negotiations.

We meet the employer as equal partners at our local and provincial tables and seek improvements because our jobs have become more complex and more challenging as the years proceed. We know that as technology, curriculum, students and the world around us changes, our rights and processes also need to change. Bargaining is our mechanism, as unionized workers, to address necessary changes and improvements to our working and learning conditions.



- **What about advocacy and political activism?**

The union uses political advocacy and activism when talking with School Trustees, the Ministry of Education, parents, MLAs, media and others. These are strategies that we use to influence policy, increase accountability of elected officials, support change in institutional direction or process. While decisions about the school district budget and education funding are integral to our work, they are outside of our Collective Agreement. Bargaining usually doesn't have an impact on school district policy or directly on provincial funding, and our advocacy on School District policy usually doesn't have a direct impact on our negotiated rights, such as class size and composition and other working conditions.

Both bargaining and advocacy are key components of the work of the union and they work hand in hand to raise awareness and build support for teachers' voices, issues and priorities.

Bargaining requires advocacy and activism from members too. Both the local and the provincial teams need the active and engaged participation of members. That means reading and learning about the objectives that are being pursued, supporting campaigns to apply pressure on the employer, and making informed decisions about job action, if necessary. Due to the fact that bargaining objectives and discussions are "in committee", or confidential, most bargaining information needs to be conveyed directly, member to member. Please talk with your Staff Rep to find out how to attend meetings where bargaining will be discussed, and to determine a schedule for Staff Representatives to report out to colleagues at each site what decisions require input and the direction at the table.

Last night's meeting carried a motion that all Staff Rep Assembly and General Meetings will include bargaining as a standing item – transparency around bargaining supports engagement and the work of the teams!



- **Benefits Plan**

Extended Benefits Plans (Medical and Dental) are matters that are negotiated at the provincial level. Prior to provincial bargaining, locals each negotiated their own packages. The Provincial Benefits plan was adopted on an “opt-in” basis, whereby each local made a decision through local votes whether or not they would join the provincial plan, or remain with their locally negotiated plan.

Vancouver, along with two other locals, have continued to retain the local plans, as a result of membership votes, because the members have determined that the local plan is superior. The decision will come to members again after the upcoming round of bargaining. You can view a document that compares the local and provincial plans on the [VESTA website here](#).

The decision is a complicated one, and members’ perception of relative strength will vary on their own needs and the priorities of their families. There are many aspects of the Provincial plan that are superior, but our local plan far exceeds other plans in provision of RMT, physio, and chiropractor, as well as the coverage of all physician prescribed medication.

As we move towards bargaining, it will be important to continue to consider the relative strengths of the two plans. As benefits is currently a provincial matter, we are unable to independently negotiate improvements to our local benefits plan.

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- **Class Size and Composition**

Workload provisions specific to Class Size and Composition were negotiated locally prior to the creation of provincial bargaining and vary significantly around the province. About 1/3 of locals have no class size or composition, and about another 1/3 have class size limits but no composition provisions. Vancouver has some of the strongest Class Size and Composition language in the province, due to the fierce and determined negotiation of our mentors and legacy VESTA members.

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The legislation that created Provincial Bargaining, and followed a decade later by the stripping of all Class Size and Composition provisions sidelined the ability to make improvements to workload provisions for locals like VESTA, but made it actually illegal to negotiate CSCC provisions in the interim. Now that our language is restored, there have been additional complications such as the Jackson Arbitration that determined not all Q and G designated students “counted” towards our Class Composition caps. The additional creation of Best Efforts and Remedy, as well as the provincial teacher shortage have been significant hurdles that discussions about improvements need to consider. This will be the work of the Provincial Bargaining Conference and subsequently, of the Provincial Executive Committee and Bargaining Team.

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- **Provincial Bargaining**

Both VESTA and the BCTF have policy to work toward a return to local bargaining. While Provincial Bargaining creates a larger and potentially well-resourced bargaining structure, the ability to respond to the unique needs of locals is reduced. The two paragraphs above outline some of the areas where VESTA members’ rights have not seen improvements in years due to the fact that we had strong existing local provisions. Locals from around the province prioritize different matters based on the needs of their membership. Rural and remote locals often face challenges connected to accessibility of services or transportation, which are not significant concerns for metro locals like ours. Adult Educators in most locals outside of Vancouver do not receive Preparation Time.

In addition to considering the needs of teachers around the province, bargaining is a place to consider equity issues as well. We are all undertaking antiracism and decolonial work in our classrooms, and it is essential that our bargaining also consider historical and current inequities and recognize that our school structures are part of that work.



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In sum, the setting of provincial priorities is a multi-step process where multiple factors play a part. It represents a complex interplay between local and provincial goals and objectives, and a consideration of the needs of teachers and the political climate in which we are bargaining.

If you have questions about bargaining, would like to learn more, or want to get involved, keeping updated on VESTA communications, attending school VESTA meetings, General Meetings and Staff Rep Assemblies, completing surveys, learning your Collective Agreement rights, and talking with your colleagues. Please consider joining the VESTA Working and Learning Conditions / Bargaining Committee, who meet monthly after school, to work with other VESTA members to support the Executive Committee and the Local Bargaining Team.

**Dates to Remember**

**TTOC  
 Committee Meeting**  
 June 17th, 2021 @ 4 pm  
**Join Zoom Meeting**  
<https://zoom.us/j/91948907868>  
 Meeting ID: 919 4890 7868  
 Passcode: 090189  
 Dial by your location  
 +1 778 907 2071 Canada

**WLC/Bargaining  
 Committee Meeting**  
 June 17th, 2021 @ 4 pm  
**Join Zoom Meeting**  
<https://zoom.us/j/92813331233>  
 Meeting ID: 928 1333 1233  
 Passcode: 768115  
 Dial by your location  
 +1 778 907 2071 Canada

**Executive Committee  
 Meeting**  
 June 22, 2021 @ 4 pm  
**Join Zoom Meeting**  
<https://zoom.us/j/91822042365>  
 Meeting ID: 918 2204 2365  
 Passcode: 464618  
 Dial by your location  
 +1 778 907 2071 Canada

**VESTA**

The Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association is the union representing elementary teachers and adult educators working in public schools in Vancouver.