

# VEAES WEEKLY

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



Colleagues,

Each year we return after summer holidays, it seems there is always a new, often unanticipated, nexus of external factors that impact on our working conditions and our students' learning conditions. When I think of the complexity of our work, it's helpful to imagine public schools at the centre of a set of concentric circles. We have always known that schools are community hubs, but increasingly, schools and teachers are places where students and families learn and, together, pivot towards a better, more inclusive, safer world.

It cannot be denied that teaching plays a fundamental role in changing the world for the better. We see the backlash against progressive curriculum and instruction in the United States, and recently, some Canadian provinces, privatization and underfunding, and the increasing de-professionalization, and at times, criminalization of teaching on the global stage. This is because the power of education is profound and transformative, and critical pedagogy serves as an antidote to right-wing ideologies of hate and encourages informed participation in our social and democratic structures.

This is a distinction I'm proud of, and I hope you are too. As teachers, we are the vanguard against misinformation, isolation, fundamentalism and oppression. Over and over again, education has reshaped itself as a collective mechanism that has, at its core, equality of access. Education plays an important role in building strong, equitable, communities, economies, informed electorates, and as a social determinant of health. I like to think that all of our work teaching about critical thinking, justice, and equity will result in a future where norms and status quo are confidently challenged by empowered students, where youth and young adults are motivated by injustice to create change.

I know you all will be familiar with the Honourable Murray Sinclair's commentary on Reconciliation, referring to the legacy of Residential schools: "Education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of it." In this statement, I hear about the power of education – its power to harm and also its' power to heal. For many of us, worn down by years of unreasonable working conditions, seeing the need of our students grow without commensurate increases in support, the stagnating funding and attempts to de-professionalize our work, such calls to action can feel overwhelming, even impossible.

But we don't have to accept things the way they are. Teachers have very powerful tools at our disposal to make changes to the system. We are voters, who, every four years, get to elect our own bosses. We can choose and educate our communities about the role of trustees, and hold those elected to account through our union and democratic structures. We are the face of public education, who continue to be the most trusted source of information when it comes to the needs of students and the system. We talk with parents and with our neighbours about the challenges – and the potential – of a fully funded, truly inclusive public education system.

AND our single most important and powerful tool is our right to full, free, collective bargaining. The terms and conditions of our employment are contained in the collective agreement, a document we have the opportunity to improve every few years. In our last round, we saw some salary gains that made a difference for members. But the stagnation of our working and learning conditions is unacceptable. We are back at the table in 2025, and it's never too early to start talking and thinking not only about what needs changing, but about the centrality of public education to visions of a better, more just, world.

It's time we insist that our working conditions and our students' learning conditions are addressed in meaningful ways. This requires what bell hooks, Black American academic describes as *"...the opportunity to labour for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality even as we collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom."* I invite you to join the global movement of teachers standing together in the present, and dreaming together for a better future. At the root of it all is solidarity and a commitment to recognizing and fighting for the potential of our career.

On behalf of the VEAES Executive Committee, I wish you a Happy New Year, and look forward to working together with you in familiar and new ways to protect and defend the centrality and potential of public education. We deserve it, our students deserve it, and our communities deserve it.

In solidarity,

*Darren, Eric, Jody, Karine, Marjorie, Vanessa.*



**Your In-House and Staff VEAES Team**

**Pictured**, L-R Jody Polukoshko, Marjorie Dumont, Lori Liang, Karine Ng, Darren Tereposky, Vanessa Lefebvre, Hitomi Maruyama-Prasad, Lily Cho

**Missing**: Eric Proulx, Andrea MacLeod, Amy Jang

**Surrey, Burnaby, Vancouver Elementary and Adult Educators**  
**Committed to Inclusion and Fully Funded Public Education**

**We acknowledge that we are located on the unceded and stolen territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), səliwətał (Tseil-Waututh), the q'w̓a:ńł'əń (Kwantlen), q̓ícəy̓(Katzie), q̓iqéyt (Qayqayt), and səmi 'ɑ:mu: (Semiahmoo)**

The first week of September is always an exciting time for teachers as we get ready to welcome back students into our school communities, but each year this excitement is tinged with concern because we know that there are not enough resources allocated to public schools to meet the learning needs of all our students.

As the representatives of Surrey, Burnaby, and Vancouver Elementary and Adult Educators, it is essential that we speak about the overall goal of public schools being welcoming spaces for all students. We come into the profession from a place of caring, with a deep desire to see all our students thrive, and yet each year we return to a public education system continually struggling to meet the needs of our students.

We know that every student arrives at our door with their own unique strengths and needs, and we believe that all students should be included in meaningful learning, but true inclusion requires that services and resources be provided through adequate funding. For over two decades now, this has not been in place in public schools in BC.

Currently all governments across the country are struggling to recruit and retain teachers. We believe that the solution to that is to ensure that the working conditions in schools make it possible for teachers to provide what students need for meaningful learning. Good working conditions for teachers would include access to all the resources that they know their students need for learning. Our working conditions are students' learning conditions after all.

We invite our community partners to work with us to ensure that supports and resources are in place so that all students' well-being is taken care of while they are included in all learning opportunities in our schools. In other words, we are asking our community partners to make a commitment to a fully funded, inclusive public education system that meets the needs of all learners.



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## Dates to Remember

**Executive  
Committee Meeting**

September 12, 2023

@ 4:00 pm

**VEAES Office**

**410 - 2238 Yukon Street, Vancouver, BC**



**VEAES**

The Vancouver Elementary and Adult Educators' Society is the union representing elementary teachers and adult educators working in public schools in Vancouver.