

# STAFF REPRESENTATIVE Handbook



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## OUR BACKGROUND

The Comox District Teachers' Association (CDTA) has been in existence for many decades and is a union of professionals representing approximately 800+ public school teachers in the Comox Valley, British Columbia, Canada. All public-school teachers in the Comox Valley belong to the BCTF (British Columbia Teachers' Federation) and the CDTA.

Employer	Union
Ministry of Education BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA)	British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF)
Board of Education Administration	Comox District Teachers' Association (CDTA)
Collective Agreement	

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Executive Committee is comprised of elected members who represent the voices of the Comox Valley's 800+ teachers. The CDTA is governed by its

## ABOUT US

Executive Committee – comprised of the President, Vice-President, Secretary-Treasurer, 2 Local Representatives to the BCTF, Professional Development Chair, Health & Safety Chair, TTOC Chair, Indigenous Education Chair, Public Education Defense Chair, French Education Language Chair, Social Justice Chair, 1 Member-At-Large. The executive meets monthly – usually on the first Wednesday of every month.

## REPRESENTATIVE COUNCIL

The CDTA is also governed by the Rep Council. The Rep. Council consists of staff representatives from each school and members of the executive. Only staff representatives may vote at a Rep Council meeting (Bylaw 4.1). The Rep Council usually meets on the third Wednesday of every month.

## TABLE OFFICERS

There are 3 Table Officers for the CDTA are the President (full time release), Vice President (.4-.6 release) and Secretary-Treasurer. They work together to support the 800+ CDTA members. They are there to answer any questions you may have and provide any support you may need.

Work-site union reps are: Pro-D Rep, Health & Safety Rep and Staff Rep. There can also be a staff committee chair

## WHO ARE COMOX DISTRICT TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION MEMBERS?

We work at more than 40 sites all over the province (Navigate has locations in many places). The term "Comox District Teachers' Association member" as used in the Collective Agreement means Board employees hired as:

- a. Teachers (face to face and online)
- b. Teacher Librarians
- c. School psychologists
- d. Speech Language pathologists
- e. Learning Support Teachers
- f. Counsellors
- g. Inclusive Education Support Teachers (eg Vision, Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Behaviour, etc)

## THE ROLE OF THE STAFF REP IS ENSHRINED IN OUR COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

The Collective Agreement is a shared agreement between the employer (Comox Valley School District) and us (the Comox District Teachers' Association)



### COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT (excerpt)

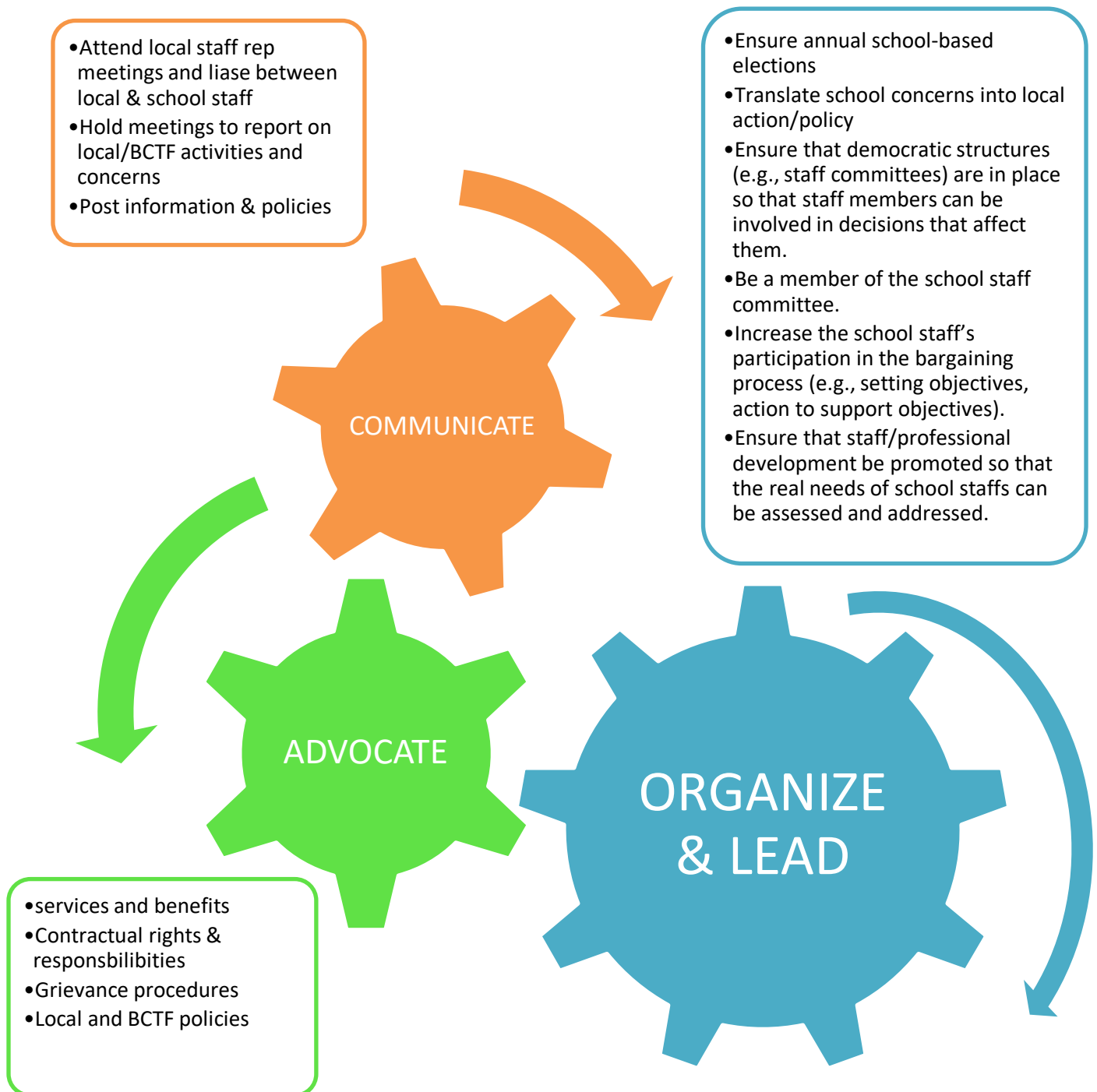
#### ARTICLE A.23: STAFF REPRESENTATIVES AND RIGHT TO REPRESENTATION

1. An employee is entitled to have a representative of the Association attend a meeting between the employee and a principal/vice principal or Board representative if the meeting is discipline related or pertains to criticisms of the performance of job-related duties other than evaluations under Article E.23 (Evaluation of Teaching Performance).
2. Should a meeting between an employee and a principal/vice principal or Board representative become disciplinary, the meeting will be adjourned until such time as a representative of the Association is able to be present, unless declined by the employee.
3. It is recognized that all such meetings shall, whenever possible, be conducted outside normal instructional time. If such a meeting is conducted during instructional time, then the representative of the Association attending such a meeting shall be relieved of instructional duties without loss of pay in order to attend the meeting.
4. The Association shall inform the Superintendent and principal of the staff representative elected in each school.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF OUR SCHOOL STAFF REPRESENTATIVES

Just as the President and the Executive Committee are the head of the union, and the general membership is the heart, the school union site-representatives are the legs of the union. No policy, no action plan, or communication vehicle will be brought to life in a school without the onsite skills, knowledge, and analytical capabilities of school union site-representatives.

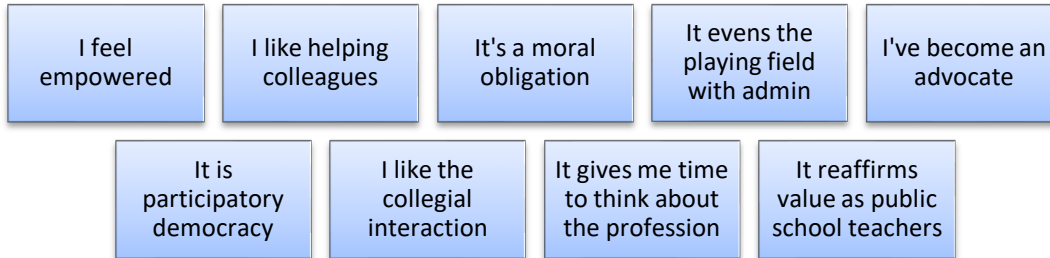
The Staff Representative is the school-level go-to-source for any questions that teachers may have, particularly about union-related information, such as our collective agreement. REPS CAN ALSO ACCOMPANY YOU TO ANY MEETING WITH ADMINISTRATION.



There can be challenges linked with all these descriptors. It is essential to respect your boundaries with colleagues and to maintain a respectful tone. You won't always have all the answers, so it is important to check with the CDTA.

## BENEFITS OF BEING A STAFF REP

When we asked people why they became a Staff Rep, and why they continue to be one, here are some of the responses we got:



## FIVE SIMPLE TRUTHS

1. The staff rep is the **peer of the principal** in matters related to the interpretation and application of the Collective Agreement in the school.
2. The rights and responsibilities of the staff reps are firmly **grounded in the Collective Agreement, in statute** (Labour Relations Code, School Act, Employment Standards Act, Workers' Compensation Act, Industrial Health and Safety Regulations) in **arbitration jurisprudence** (case law, court decisions.)
3. The Collective Agreement was not imposed by the union on the employer; the CA **represents the mutually agreed terms and conditions of employment** for teachers in the district.
4. The union has a legal obligation to **fairly represent** the members of the bargaining unit.
5. The grievance procedure often represents the **most appropriate and least disruptive** way of resolving disputes between employees and employer.

## ROLE OF THE STAFF REPRESENTATIVE IN COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT ENFORCEMENT AT SCHOOL-SITES

- Is familiar with the collective agreement
- Raises staff awareness of contract provisions
- Ensures that all parties **abide by the collective agreement**
- Attends to problems identified by staff members
- Determines whether problems are collective-agreement related
- Communicates problems/potential grievances to local union office

## KNOW YOUR COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

The most up to date version of the collective agreement can always be found on the [CDTA website under documents](#).

### OUR COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

Appendix 1: Provincial Matters and Appendix 2: Local Matters	This is an agreed upon split of issues that lists what can be bargained provincially or locally. The simplest way to determine if it is a provincial or local issue is if it costs money. If it does cost money, it is usually a provincial issue.
Section A: The Collective Bargaining Relationship	Deals with the working relationship between the employer and the union. It recognizes the union as the representative for the workers and how it will function and resolve disputes.
Section B: Salary and Economic Benefits	Deals with compensation issues such as salary, allowances, and benefits.
Section C: Employment Rights	Deals with employment rights such as the process for resigning and how seniority affects apply for positions, evaluations, and investigations.
Section D: Working Conditions	Deals with the school calendar specifying bookends for the school year and number of hours in the school day. It also specifies the number of minutes that teachers are entitled to preparation time. Class size and composition can be found here.
Section E: Personal Practices	Deals with providing a non-sexist environment and a harassment/sexual harassment resolution procedure. It could also include appointments, transfers, post and fill procedures. Evaluation procedures and personnel files.
Section F: Professional Rights	Deals with professional issues such as curriculum change, professional development and professional autonomy.
Section G: Leaves of Absences	Deals with the types of leaves that are available to teachers. They include: sick leave, compassionate care leave, maternity leave, bereavement leave, discretionary leave, leave for union business and other leaves with or without pay.

The Collective Agreement is grounded in statues, regulations, and provisions including

- Collective Agreement provisions
- Letters of Understanding (LOU's)
- Local union and district policies
- WCB regulations
- Human Rights Code
- Employment Standards Act
- BC Labour Code
- School Act

### LOU stands for Letter of Understanding

A Letter of Understanding is a formal text that sums up the terms and understanding of a collective agreement which mostly has been negotiated up to this point only in spoken form. It reviews the terms of an agreement for a service, a project, or a process and is often written as a step before a more detailed article is incorporated into the collective agreements.

## TIPS FOR BEING AN EFFECTIVE REP

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STAFF REPRESENTATIVE

- Try to develop a cohesive, positive and productive school team. Ask questions and gather all relevant facts.
- Support each other in your roles.
- Develop a plan at the school level for school union reps to communicate about and coordinate their work.
- Try to build a positive and collegial professional relationship with the principal. This can help when dealing with difficult issues



### SCHOOL UNION TEAM

To establish effective member advocacy, collaborate with the Staff Committee Chair, Health & Safety Rep, and Pro-D Chair. Set a time monthly, or whatever works best for you all to meet, to strategize, to debrief and to troubleshoot issues.

### WHAT TO DO WHEN A COLLEAGUE IS CALLED INTO THE PRINCIPAL'S OFFICE

If an administrator wants to see a teacher for a potential discipline issue, they should always have a staff rep of their choice with them. Staff reps are advocates who are present, an information source, a legal authority, a recorder, a witness, an accompanier, and a defender. If they are not comfortable, they can call us at the office at (250) 338-1461. One of our Released Officers will provide support.

If an administrator wants to see a teacher for a potential discipline issue, they should always have a staff rep of their choice with them. Your role is to be an advocate, an information source and a legal authority and:

- To listen to what the administrator has to say
- To take notes and to be a witness
- To keep your colleague out of harm's way – while they should respond to the administrator's questions, you may wish to help them stay focused on the issue at hand and not wander off into other territory
- To ask clarifying questions
- To support the member before and after the meeting – to listen to venting or be a shoulder to cry on
- To Let the CDTA office know if you sense the potential for a larger issue or if you have questions
- To call the CDTA office anytime for support or comfort at 250-338-1461

### ADVOCACY TIPS

- Plan your meeting strategy before going into any meeting with an administrator.
- Ask questions and gather all relevant facts.
- Be watchful that the member does not jeopardize their rights. Intervene when necessary. It's OK to take a break!
- Remember that advocacy is not the same as problem solving.
- Watch your body language.

- Build a paper trail. Take clear notes!
- Keep the Local President informed.
- Refer issues that you are uncomfortable with to the local office.

NOTE TAKING

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time from: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting initiated by: \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Present: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes taken by: \_\_\_\_\_

Notes: \_\_\_\_\_

**Keeping a file of notes from meetings and incidents is key if an issue becomes a grievance.**

\*\*see page 15 for a photocopiable Note Taking Page



## BCTF CODE OF ETHICS

The Code of Ethics states general rules for all members of the CDTA/BCTF for maintaining high standards of professional service and conduct towards students, Colleagues, and the professional union.

1. The member speaks and acts toward students with respect and dignity, and deals judiciously with them, always mindful of their individual rights and sensibilities.
2. The member respects the confidential nature of information concerning students and may give it only to authorized persons or agencies directly concerned with their welfare. The member follows legal requirements in reporting child protection issues.
3. A privileged relationship exists between members and students. The member refrains from exploiting that relationship for material, ideological, or other advantage.
4. The member is willing to review with colleagues, students, and their parents/guardians the practices employed in discharging the member's professional duties.
5. The member directs any criticism of the teaching performance and related work of a colleague to that colleague in private. If the member believes that the issue(s) has not been addressed, they may, after privately informing the colleague in writing of their intent to do so, direct the criticism in confidence to appropriate individuals who can offer advice and assistance.\*  
It shall not be considered a breach of the Code of Ethics for a member to follow the legal requirements for reporting child protection issues.
6. The member acknowledges the authority and responsibilities of the BCTF and its locals and fulfills obligations arising from membership in her or his professional union.
7. The member adheres to the provisions of the collective agreement.
8. The member acts in a manner not prejudicial to job actions or other collective strategies of her or his professional union.
9. The member, as an individual or as a member of a group of members, does not make unauthorized representations to outside bodies in the name of the Federation or its locals.



## BCTF SERVICES - HEALTH & WELLNESS SUPPORTS

Health and Wellness is an emerging area of concern for the teaching profession. The CMHA reports that 20% of all Canadians will struggle with mental health at least once in their lifetime. The BCTF reports that 46% of our members on leave are struggling with mental health. Although discussions around mental illness have become more common, there is still stigma attached to the notion that we might be suffering from mental health issues. Even if we ourselves are not facing a mental illness, all of us are, or will be, directly affected by those who do. Teachers, in particular, would appear to be facing higher than average cases of anxiety and depression, in part due to greater challenges in our working conditions. We have listed supports available to us below:



### 1. BCTF HEALTH & WELLNESS PROGRAM

This program gets a teacher access to work 1 on 1 with a wellness consultant who helps them to take stock of where they are at physically, mentally, emotionally, socially and spiritually. This person gets to know you and has access to many supports and ideas to help you get well so you can either continue teaching or return successfully to teaching. This program is operated through the Salary Indemnity Program (SIP)

Support for individual members is available on a voluntary basis. The BCTF has rehabilitation consultants throughout the province who provide these support services to members which includes the following:

- working with teachers in their own communities
- coordinating individualized treatment & wellness interventions with health care providers
- working with employers and unions to support a return to work that is durable and sustainable
- knowledge of the work that teachers do and the workplace environment.

Here is a link to more information and to refer yourself to the program (call the CDTA office if you want help getting referred):

<https://www.bctf.ca/services-guidance/wellness>

## 2. STARLING MINDS

Starling is an online program that provides education and a mental health toolkit to manage stress and prevent depression and/or anxiety. Using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy tools, the online modules help you manage your own depression and/or anxiety as well as your understanding about what is triggering your depression and/or anxiety. This is free and voluntary and has had very positive feedback from teachers who have engaged with it.

[https://www.bctf.ca/services-guidance/wellness/access-online-mental-health-therapy-\(starling-minds\)](https://www.bctf.ca/services-guidance/wellness/access-online-mental-health-therapy-(starling-minds))

## 3. The Well Teacher

One of BCTF's Health and Wellness Program's Rehab Consultants, Wade Repta (OT, Vice President at humanworks consulting group) has published a comprehensive book on health and wellness designed for educators based on his 20 years of experience working with public school teachers in BC. Some of the chapters cover topics such as mental health, physical health, classroom ergonomics, return to work, and many more. Staff reps can ask their site to order a few copies for their staff through various funds such as Pro D.

<http://www.humanworks.ca/thewellteacher/>

## 4. LIVING WITH BALANCE

Living with Balance is a group wellness initiative exclusively for members. Developed and piloted in 2009, the program consists of a series of workshops to provide strategies and skills for living a healthier lifestyle and managing the stressors that exist at home and in the workplace, including:

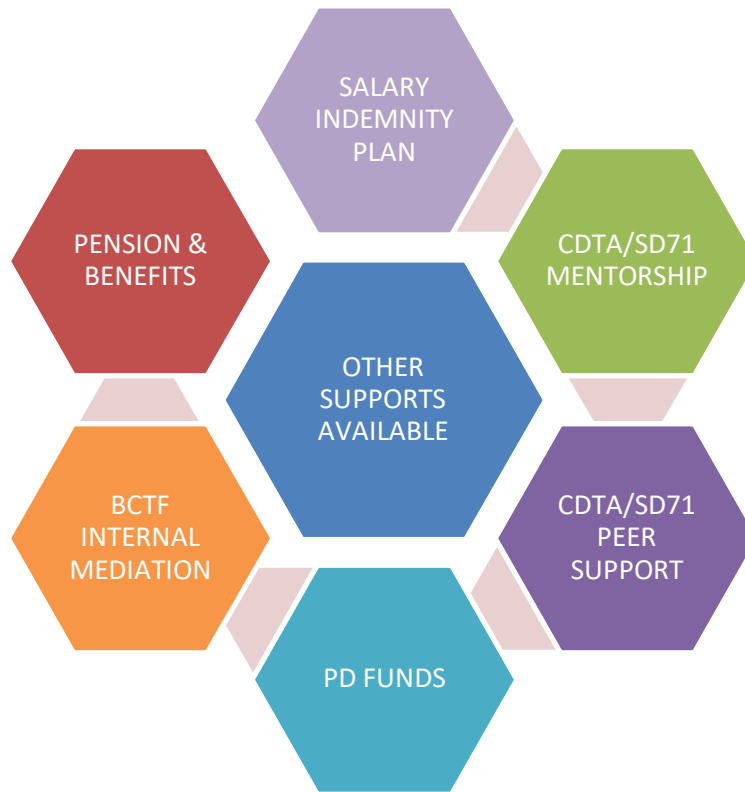
- improving personal well-being
- understanding our problems and learning to restructure our thinking
- defining work-life balance and boundaries
- attaining goals toward wellness
- understanding the importance of social connections.

## 5. FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

For further study and exploration, the Mental Health Commission of Canada has created a Mental Health First Aid program.

<https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/>

## OTHER SUPPORTS AND SERVICES AVAILABLE TO CDTA MEMBERS



### 1. SALARY INDEMNITY PLAN (SIP)

The BCTF operates a Salary Indemnity Plan that provides benefits to members who are prevented from working due to illness or injury. This plan is funded by BCTF member contribution and provides benefits beginning the day after the last day of paid work or sick leave. However, if the injury or illness is work-related the member must file a Workers' Compensation Board claim. If anyone is almost out of sick days, they should [benefits@bctf.ca](mailto:benefits@bctf.ca). All information and forms can be found at the following link:

<https://www.bctf.ca/services-guidance/benefits>

### 2. CDTA/SD71 TEACHER MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Release time and support is available to support mentor/mentee relationships in SD71! While there is a focus on supporting teachers that are newer to the profession, all teachers who want to benefit from this program are encouraged to apply. Contact the mentorship lead teacher at [mentorship@cdta71.org](mailto:mentorship@cdta71.org) for more information. Application forms can be found at on the [CDTA website](#).

### 3. CDTA/SD71 PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM

Teaching is a complex profession full of changing landscapes, a variety of relationships, significant responsibilities, and both joy and challenges. It can be hard work. We know, as teachers, that some of the deepest growth and learning takes place when we struggle and work to move through a challenge.

If you are currently experiencing something that you are finding professionally challenging or that you feel you

uncomfortable to ask for support or to express your needs when faced with things that seem difficult, frustrating, or even overwhelming. It can also be empowering to work collaboratively with another teacher who is committed to supporting you in your teaching profession and classroom practice.

Peer Support is an opportunity to develop a partnership with a colleague who has experience, compassion, and skills to share. It is a completely confidential, non-judgmental, non-evaluative process of two teachers working together. You can set your goals with your partner, brainstorm ideas, and share insights and concerns. The partnership is open to developing as you and your Peer Supporter decide.

There is release time available! Contact [mentorship@cdta71.org](mailto:mentorship@cdta71.org) for more info or [THIS LINK](#) (CDTA site)

#### 4. PD Funds

Teachers in contract have access to Professional Development funds. These funds are managed by the Joint Professional Development Committee (JPDC). The JPDC handbook can be found on the CDTA website under Pro-D. To find out how much you have in your account, contact [teacherprod@sd71.bc.ca](mailto:teacherprod@sd71.bc.ca)

#### 5. BCTF INTERNAL MEDIATION SERVICES (IMS)

- Is a work-related dispute getting worse and you don't know what to do?
- Are you feeling stressed because of a break down in a work relationship?
- Are you less effective as a teacher because of a workplace conflict?

The BCTF Internal Mediation Service (IMS) may be able to help. All you have to do is ask! BCTF members are entitled to access the confidential services of trained teacher-mediators who provide effective processes through the BCTF Internal Mediation Service. Their mandate is to aid in resolving disputes between members and others. Click [THIS LINK](#) for more information

#### 6. PENSION AND BENEFITS

The BCTF has full time staff dedicated to providing information regarding your teachers' pension and group benefits including MSP, Extended Health Care, Dental Care, Life Insurance and BCTF group RRSPs. Assistance can be provided on a variety of topics, such as:

- how your pension is accrued
- how to purchase service after leaves
- what pension options are available upon retirement
- what happens to your pension in the event of a marriage breakdown
- transferring service from another teachers' pension plan or public service pension plan
- Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security, and the Guaranteed Income Supplement
- optional life insurance available through the BCTF and your school district
- optional BCTF group RRSPs with payroll deduction.

Thank you to Surrey Teachers' Association for their resources

NOTE TAKING TEMPLATE

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

TIME FROM: \_\_\_\_\_ TO: \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT: \_\_\_\_\_

NOTES TAKEN BY: \_\_\_\_\_

LOCATION: \_\_\_\_\_

MEETING INITIATED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

REASON FOR MEETING:

NOTES: