

RETIREMENT

Comox District Teachers' Association



**June
2023**

***Congratulations to 2022-2023
SD#71 Retiring Educators from
Comox District Teachers' Association***

*Your retirement has made everyone value you ever more.
It has made us appreciate the way you strengthened our cores.
You are not just retiring from your post, position, or role;
you are retiring as a teacher who inspired our souls...*



1	<i>Adebar</i>	<i>Cheryl</i>
2	<i>Cox</i>	<i>Nancy</i>
3	<i>Currie</i>	<i>Virginia</i>
4	<i>Fullerton</i>	<i>Debra</i>
5	<i>Fraser</i>	<i>Brad</i>
6	<i>Grant</i>	<i>Martha</i>
7	<i>Gummer</i>	<i>Celine</i>
8	<i>Harwijne</i>	<i>Nora</i>
9	<i>Heselgrave</i>	<i>Sarah</i>
10	<i>Jokanovich</i>	<i>Carol</i>
11	<i>Lewis</i>	<i>Ann-Marie</i>
12	<i>MacPherson</i>	<i>Brenda</i>
13	<i>Smith</i>	<i>Bradley</i>
14	<i>Willms</i>	<i>Heather</i>

*A Message from CDTA President,
Karla Neuffer to 2022-2023 Retirees*

- A heartfelt congratulations to all of the educators retiring from School District 71 this year.

Together, all of you have blessed the lives of the many students that have come through the doors of your schools. You have successfully educated young minds and young hearts over the course of your career. You can leave the profession knowing that you made a positive difference in the lives of your students and their families.

- Thank you so much for all of your years of dedicated service to public education. You've done great work and you are on to your next adventure in life. Much joy to you and your family as you embark on this new chapter of your lives!

~ Congratulations! ~



Cheryl Adebar ~ École Robb Road

Working in SD71 as well as school boards in Ontario and Saskatchewan have made for a rewarding career. I have appreciated, valued, and been inspired by many awesome educators, students, and families. I have become well connected to Ecole Robb Road and will miss them!

I do look forward to long cappuccinos, lots of travel and getting to all the hobbies that I haven't been able to touch yet! Cheryl

Nancy Cox ~ Highland Secondary

I started my career in Princeton, BC where I was responsible for starting the band program. In 1991 I moved to Courtenay and started teaching at Courtenay Jr. After 2 years I moved to Highland Secondary where I have been teaching band, choir, jazz band, vocal jazz, and musical theatre for the past 30 years.

In retirement I plan to remain active in the music community and have more time for family and traveling with friends. Nancy



Virginia (Ginny) Currie **~ Valley View Elementary**

I graduated from the University of Victoria in 1994 and was fortunate to start working right after graduation in Vancouver. Not long after my first contracts I decided to shift over to the Richmond School District and taught Grades 1 through 5 at McNeely, Gilmore, and General Currie Elementary schools. After working in Richmond for 14 years, my husband and I decided to move to the Comox Valley to enjoy a slower pace of life. It was a big leap at the time, and it was difficult to leave our jobs, and all our friends, but it was worth it, as we love living in the Comox Valley and can't imagine being anywhere else.



I feel very fortunate to have been able to work in a number of schools here in the Valley, as both an elementary classroom teacher, and as a Teacher Librarian. Working at my first school here, Miracle Beach, was such a treat after all of my Vancouver-Richmond commutes previously! I have also worked at Royston, Aspen, Cumberland, Queneesh, Huband, Courtenay El, and am finishing my time at Valley View Elementary. I feel so fortunate to have worked at so many different sites, and to have met as many amazing colleagues as I have.

In retirement I am most looking forward to spending more quality time with great friends, following less schedules and having lots of time to travel - and not during peak times! Travel plans have already been made, starting with New York City as soon as school finishes. Next it will be on to kayaking in the north Vancouver Island area for 10 days, visiting family in Kingston and Ottawa, relaxing on the beaches of Aruba, and then exploring Montreal. Hopefully Hawaii will be rounding out that list.

I appreciate all of the amazing colleagues that I have worked with over the years, who I admire and respect, and treasure the life-long friends I have made,
and the memories I will be taking with me. Ginn





Debra Fullerton
Queneesh Elementary

I have worked at numerous schools within the district throughout my 33-year career, mostly as a primary teacher, and then as Vice-Principal for the past 7 years.

I look forward to travelling and walking El Camino as well as enjoying fitness classes, running, kayaking, and spending more time with my family.





Brad Fraser ~ Huband Elementary

I believe that the role of the education system is to help the next generation prepare for life in the real world. To do this, I believe we need to get out into the community.

Over the past thirty plus years, I have had the privilege to work with some outstanding community leaders who have taken time to share their skills knowledge about the special place that we call home. I have many fond memories of being out with my class and the most powerful was a moment that was much like when you are watching a flock of birds. When the birds change direction, they all turn at the same time, a message is conveyed instantaneously.

Something like this happened to my group as we were hiking to the Comox Lake power dam. We were caught in a sudden downpour, and they burst into a spontaneous cheer celebrating the joy of being one with nature. I believe that we all have this sense that we belong and that we need to take care of the place we live. It is of utmost importance to provide young people with the opportunities to be out in nature. We all know how challenging this task is but the implications of not doing this are dire.

Over the years, I have given workshops for teachers addressing some of the issues of getting students out of the classroom into the real world and will continue to do this until I cannot. Brad



Martha Grant

~ Huband Elementary



As a 7-year-old non-reader, I discovered that my grade 2 teacher had an answer key. It was at that very moment that I decided to become a teacher. After all, armed with an answer key, I'd be unstoppable.

And so. I made a beeline through all the required grades, degrees, and courses, jumping through a multitude of hoops, in search of that elusive answer key.

I found answers to many things along the way but usually ended up with more questions. As I began my career in 1994, I asked, "why am I stuck on the TOC list for another year?" and 'why do I get laid off every May?'. And, when I finally secured my first contract as a Kindergarten teacher, 'how am I supposed to host 44 Kindergarten parent interviews in one afternoon?' and eventually 'why am I spending so much of my salary on Teacher Pay Teachers resources?'

I switched districts three times during my career - Richmond (1994-2007), Delta (2007-2012) and then the Comox Valley (2012-2023). Each school district has its unique flavour but all of them are filled with children with sparkle, staffs with amazing talent, innovative minds, and kind souls.

Retirement has come as a surprise to me this year. After 8+ years at Huband Park, I finally realized that all those old adages about life are true. I am planning to try my hand at freelance copywriting, a writing career that I can do anywhere there is a Wi-Fi connection.

With long distances out there that I have yet to run, places that I need to venture to on my bike, dreams my husband and I have yet to realize and so many mountains I want to summit, I couldn't put it off for another day.

I have a lot to do, and I need to get going. Martha

Celine Gummer ~ Valley View Elementary

UBC was where I had intended to become a social worker. Those plans had to be changed when I wasn't accepted into the program. It was clear I was meant to be a teacher. I graduated in 1991, met my beloved Mr. Gummer and moved to teach in Alberta for one year. I coaxed him to marry me and move to Vancouver Island.

I was born and raised on Vancouver Island and knew it was where I wanted to live and raise my family. My first contract was as a grade six teacher at Glacier View Elementary School. When Valley View opened in the spring of 1994, I was one of four classrooms that got to move up the hill to the brand-new school! I went on to teach at Brooklyn, Village Park, Puntledge and Comox Elementary. I have taught grades 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 and kindergarten. I returned to Valley View 15 years ago and have been a permanent resident ever since.

I plan on enjoying family, friends, and freedom in my retirement...with the odd TOC Day to strengthen my reduced pension due to pulling the plug early.

I have so much gratitude for my experience teaching and learning in this community. I am eternally grateful to the many SD 71 employees and volunteers who have directly and indirectly touched and enriched the lives of the Gummer Five! I leave with great memories and many friendships. Celine



Nora Harawijne ~ Royston Elementary



After careful soul searching, and 34 years of teaching (1 year in the Kettle Valley and the remainder in the Comox Valley), I have decided to retire!

I have taught, loved, and nurtured so many children over my career. Each and every one of them has a place in my heart forever. Every student and colleague added richness, joy, and some super hilarious moments to my life and these memories will live on. I am thankful for a job I truly loved and was passionate about.

My retirement plans include slow mornings in my garden, walks on the beach, travel, crafting and spending time with my family and friends. Nora

Sarah Heselgrave ~ Brooklyn Elementary



A career in education was not my initial plan! I started out in Biology at Queen's and pursued graduate studies at Acadia, with the aim of becoming a biologist. Being married to an Airforce navigator, we moved a lot so in between degree programs I ended up working as an educational assistant for a year at a high school in Nova Scotia. Though not trained as an EA, I applied on the off chance as jobs were scarce, and it was through this experience that a spark for teaching was first lit.

I went on to complete my Masters, then worked for a couple of years as a biologist but missed being with people, especially kids, and thought back to my best job ever – being in the classroom.

I therefore did my after-degree B.Ed. in Winnipeg and when my husband Ian was transferred to Comox in 1995, I got my first job at Highland Secondary teaching math

and science. From there I went to Cumberland Junior for a year and then to Cumberland Elementary where I found my true niche – teaching grade 4-6.

My 10 years in Cumberland were special, with a close, supportive, collaborative staff and a lot of laughter. Highlights from Cumberland include the hand rung school bell, class camping trips to Tribune Bay, creating the first fish fence in our district and our memorable staff potlucks and clothing swaps!

I transferred to Brooklyn in 2007 and this school has been my home since, first at old Brooklyn on Noel Ave and then into the old science room of the former Cape Lazo site, where I have managed to fill every nook and cranny of my classroom ever since. A one-year Covid secondment to NIDES for 2020/2021 provided me with an opportunity to try out distance learning and develop my tech skills. While I missed the hands-on aspects of teaching kids in person, I really enjoyed connections with my colleagues and my province-wide students and families, also trying out this new way of learning. I was happy to return to in person learning after a year and have cherished being back in the classroom since.

I have loved teaching for the last 28 years in the Comox Valley and hope that my most consistent goals have been to promote kindness, and to develop a love of reading and a passion for science in my students. I have had the privilege of learning with many incredible colleagues and teaching partners, amazing families, and wonderful kids. I have so many career highlights, but the most important ones involve the connection and relationship with my students, their families, and my colleagues. I feel lucky that I love the children and people I work with every day and that my heart has been touched by so many beautiful people.

Next steps for me include more time with my friends and family (especially Jake, Rachel, and Ian), daily ocean swims, learning about fossil digging, garden time, reading great books, a little TTOCing, travelling near and far and other as yet unknown life and learning adventures! Sarah

Carol Jkanovich ~ Mark Isfeld Secondary

Having graduated from SFU in 1988, I was fortunate to be hired into a full-time continuing contract teaching French and PE at Cumberland Junior. Those first 4 years were formative ones, with a close-knit staff who mentored me, and life-long friendships were forged. Having ultimately chosen a teaching career for its flexibility – though with parents who were both teachers, it was perhaps inevitable ~

I left Cumberland to spend 4 years teaching in Holland, 5 years in Nova Scotia and then taught Grade 7 at an English immersion school in Santiago Chile for 5 years before returning to the Comox Valley in 2005.

After a couple of years at Vanier, I wrapped up my career with 15 years at Isfeld teaching Spanish and Psychology. Highlights of my years at Isfeld included outdoor trips to Cape Scott and Albert Edward, a cultural trip to Cuba and 2 social service trips to Nicaragua where students raised money for, and helped build, housing for local families.

A personal career highlight is the 4 summers spent in Peru doing Pro-D work with Peruvian teachers through the BCTF International Solidarity Program. Retirement will bring leisurely outdoor days: skiing, cycling, walking the dogs, and learning how to relax! Carol



Ann-Marie Lewis ~ Aspen Elementary



My teaching I have always loved being a teacher and I am so happy it was the career I chose. After 36 years, I can still say I love going to work every day. My biggest goal every year is for my students to want to come to school and be in my classroom for the day. I really hope that most of the kids I have taught have felt good about coming to school.

I did my B-Ed at UVic graduating in 1987. I was then hired at Sooke, Metchosin and Wishart schools. In 1995 my husband Bruce

convinced me to move back to his hometown of Comox so he could set up his surveying business here. Luckily, I ended up working back at Village Park, the place where I did my final practicum. After one week living here in Comox, it was home! I could not imagine living anywhere other than the beautiful Comox Valley.

I've spent my whole time since leaving Victoria in 1995, at two schools, beginning at Village Park and ending at Aspen Park. During my time at Village Park, I was so fortunate to be at the same school as my boys, Noah, and Sam, along with their many friends. I loved going to school together, seeing them at points during the day, coaching their teams, and teaching them and their friends in PE.

Most of my classroom teaching has been in grade 5,6 and 7 and I have spent a few years providing PE prep. I always loved the PE days where I could see every student in the school and hopefully give them a love of being active. From day one, coaching sports has been one of my favourite things. I have been lucky enough to coach so many kids who I hope to have gone on to appreciate sport and all of the life skills that are learned from being on a team.

In 2011, I moved to Aspen Park, which is where I end my happy 36 years. I have been so lucky to have so many wonderful colleagues during my career, many of whom have become lifelong friends.

My plans in retirement are to travel, (starting with a trip to Greece in September), see my boys more often, play pickleball, (joining all the other retired teachers!) stay fit and active, and finally....clean my junk drawer!

Thank you to the many students, teachers, support staff and administrators here in district 71 who have made my career so rewarding and fulfilling.

I leave with a full heart! Ann

Brenda MacPherson ~ Highland Secondary

I moved to the Comox Valley in 1992 and taught in a variety of schools, grades, and subject areas. My first teaching job was at Airport Elementary. After ten years of teaching elementary, it was time for a change, I was given the opportunity to move to Cape Lazo Middle School teaching Learning Support for a year and then Grade 7 - 9 Humanities for the remainder of the time. It was there that I found the joy of teaching teenagers.

When the district underwent the change of closing middle schools, I chose to join the staff at Highland Secondary, where I taught Grade 8 and 9 Humanities for the last 15 years. I have worked with many different students over the years and a smile is brought to my face every time, when the student who has struggled in their learning reaches out later to say, 'Thank you for teaching me'.

Throughout my time, I have been involved in the school district as a school staff representative for both the CDTA and the professional development committee.

At the district level I have been involved on the joint professional development committee representing at different times as an elementary and secondary teacher. I have learned so much from these people who are a wealth of knowledge and who provide support for the people here in our district. I have been lucky to have worked in many schools with so many wonderful colleagues, in so many capacities. Many of my lifelong friends have been former colleagues.

During my time at Highland, I decided to take a leave for six months and drive across Canada, traveling from coast to coast. Our country is so vast and so beautiful. Many of the places left me with the feeling that this is a return visit. Well, it is time for that return visit! My plan is to drive across Canada this summer, along with my partner, Brian. Along the way we will be visiting family and friends, as well as seeing many new places. Our goal is to be on the other side of Canada in the fall to witness the changing leaves. With both of us being from that side of Canada, we do miss the changing colours of the leaves. We live in such a beautiful country and there is so much more to see.

**As Dr. Seuss would say, "You're off to Great Places! Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting, So... get on your way!" Brenda**



Brad Smith ~ Mark Isfeld Secondary



Brad began his teaching career in 1989 teaching for a year in Japan. Following this, he taught in Northern Ontario for two years. He then moved to the Comox Valley in the early 90's and started teaching at Robb Road Middle School. From there, he transferred to Aspen Park, Lake Trail and finally Mark Isfeld School where he has been teaching for the last fifteen years. Brad has enjoyed teaching students in theatre arts and other subjects as well as coaching improv and a variety of sports.

Brad is grateful for the many friendships and relationships he has formed with students, colleagues, and parents throughout his teaching career. He would like to thank everyone he has had the pleasure of

working with during the past thirty years.

Now, he is looking forward to having more time to be active and to pursuing other interests, including coaching hockey and perhaps directing a show for Courtenay Little Theater as well as spending time with all the wonderful people in his life, especially his wife and children. He looks forward to new adventures and opportunities and will always cherish the happy memories of his experiences as a teacher, director, and coach.

Heather Willms ~ Inclusive Education

I began my career as an itinerant band instructor in Swift Current Saskatchewan. For 3 years I drove between 7 rural schools, working with students from grades 5-12. When our family moved to Lethbridge Alberta, I taught elementary music for several years before landing in a grade 5 classroom.

I have always said that I loved teaching grade 5 because "they are old enough to know better."

I had the privilege of teaching in the same school for over 10 years, which meant that I taught many siblings. I enjoyed building relationships with families and preparing students for their move to middle school in grade 6.



For two years I worked as an Alberta Teachers Association instructor, traveling and presenting workshops on emergent educational issues. At this time, I also worked as a Learning Support Teacher in an elementary school. In 2018 I was hired as the district ELL Teacher which I absolutely loved. I learned so much about privilege, immigration/refugees, and basic human rights. During this time, I completed a master's in art education from Boston University.

Four weeks before the shut down for Covid, I was hired as the District Reading Intervention Teacher for Comox Valley School. Literacy has been a passionate thread throughout my career, and over the past 3 ½ years, I have loved working alongside teachers and LSTs, as they have shifted their practices to meet the complex needs of students. I am grateful to Esther Shatz for facilitating extensive Professional Development around reading instruction and encouraging me to extend my work to Vancouver Island University.

I am grateful to be able to leave my public education career after these incredible years with Comox Valley Schools. I leave with reading scores on the rise (after watching them drop over the course of my career), and I am confident the work will continue by the dedicated educators in our district.

I look forward to continuing to teach at VIU, presenting and consulting across Canada, and especially spending time with our grandson in Calgary. Heather



Happy Retirement

