

RETIREMENT

Comox District Teachers' Association



June
2026

***Congratulations to 2025-2026
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...”***

Chase	Lisa
Cooke	Bruce
Dittrick	Sherry
Hartig	Martin
Hedican	Jennifer
Higgins	Corey
Jerome	Tami
Lineger	Peter
Merritt	Pamela
Mulrooney	Victoria
Ogilvie	Krista
Pedersen-Skene	Lisa
Peta	Linda
Richards	Tracy
Stirrett	Linda
Walkley	Alison
Young	Andrew
Zbirun	Jacki

***A Message from CDTA President,
Shawn Holland to 2025-26 Retirees***

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

Together, all of you have enriched 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! -

RETIREMENT

A new chapter begins today,
With time to rest and play,
No deadlines pressing on your mind,
Just moments free and kind.
The road ahead is wide and clear,
With peace and joy so near,
Embrace the days with open heart,
A fresh, uncharted start.
No more rush of daily grind,
Just treasures left to find,
May every day bring something new,
In all you dream and do.



Lisa Chase ~ Mark Isfeld Secondary

I have spent the majority of my 28 years teaching at Mark Isfeld Secondary in the areas of: English, Art, and Photography.

Most of my best memories stem from being involved in the organization of spirit activities throughout the years. Also, I enjoyed being a part of helping students navigate high school life.

I have learned that the transition into retirement is a process. Future plans include focusing on creating art, starting a business, and taking care of my physical, mental, and spiritual health.

For me, I am now going to take the time to do what makes my soul breathe.

Thanks,

Lisa Chase



Bruce Cooke ~ Airport Elementary



I started teaching in the Comox Valley in 1992 at Puntledge Park and also made stops at Miracle Beach, Cumberland, Courtenay Middle, and Valley View. After a 13-year stint teaching in Saudi Arabia, I returned to SD71 in 2022 and finished my career at Airport Elementary, where I enjoyed some of my most fun and memorable classes.

There were so many highlights in my SD71 career but a few that stand out were putting on a class performance of

The Princess Bride, heading the committee that hung a grey whale skeleton at Miracle Beach, opening and closing Courtenay Middle School and coaching numerous sports such as soccer, basketball, volleyball, cross-country, track and field and ultimate.

In my retirement I plan to travel as much as possible, boat and fish, garden and pursue my hobby of fish printing. ~ Bruce

Sherry Dittrick

~ Brooklyn Elementary

I started working here in 1996 as a TTOC and accepted my first continuing job at Brooklyn Elementary in 1997.

In 2017 I embarked on a yearlong teacher exchange to Australia, and by 2022, I had officially worked in 13 schools before assuming the role of Vice-Principal of Brooklyn Elementary.

It's been an amazing career. I am thoroughly enjoying my time working on call again and reconnecting with so many amazing educators.

Since January, I've kept busy by travelling to Europe to visit friends, heading off on weekly mountain hikes and planning backpacking trips for the summer and fall.

Life is good. Sherry



Martin Hartig ~ École Puntledge Park Elementary



After a year of short-term contracts in my home province of Ontario, I accepted a job offer, sight unseen, to come teach French Immersion at Ecole Puntledge Park, in the Comox Valley. That was supposed to be a two-year trial run. It ended up being 35 years at Puntledge.

Teaching, coaching, environmental stewardship, and woodworking filled those years with many great memories and gratitude for such a fulfilling career.

Many people asked me over the years, " Aren't you tired of being in the same school that long?" I always answered that the job was always evolving, and having the forest and creek at our doorstep was a location that was unparalleled. I never once wondered if the grass was greener anywhere else. Laughing with colleagues and students every day only added to the enjoyment of being a part of Puntledge.

Retirement will bring more time for wellness, keeping active with sports and outdoor pursuits, traveling, doing projects around the house and shop, as well as some volunteering and TTOC work to stay in contact with the learning community. ~ Martin

Jennifer Hedican

~ Cumberland Community School

I started my teaching career way back in 1987 in a one room school (Gr 1-7) in an isolated logging community on the north end of the Island. I moved to the Valley in 1993 and started teaching here while raising our three children. I have worked at the old Brooklyn, Tsolum, Glacier View Elementary, Queneesh, Arden, Puntledge, Huband and Cumberland. I worked mainly as a primary teacher and as a Learning Support Teacher until I transitioned into the role of Vice Principal in 2015.



When I retire, I plan to explore my passion of the Right Brain Reading method, to help those students that struggle to be successful readers. I created this reading intervention when I saw that not all people learn the same way but if we match up how they learn to read, they can be very successful.

We have a few trip ideas for 2026-27 - Africa, Egypt, Japan, Newfoundland, France. When I'm not walking my dog, hitting golf balls or lounging at Sproat Lake, I will look back on my career with SD71 and the good people I met with fond memories.

~ Jennifer Hedican

Corey Higgins ~ G.P. Vanier Secondary



I was fortunate to begin my teaching career straight out of Teachers College in 1991, landing in a small-town Ontario high school where I spent 8 wonderful years teaching math and science. Those early years were full and joyful - from Pro-D involvement to Leadership/ Intramurals, and coaching volleyball and gymnastics.

With two young boys in tow, my family moved to Hamilton for four years, and then life shifted again with a move to Calgary — and the arrival of our third child, a daughter. Calgary is where I stepped away from the high school classroom and opened a Preschool business, discovering how much I loved teaching the littlest learners. After 5 Alberta winters, the Comox Valley called to us with its promise of a gentler climate and a lifestyle we couldn't resist.

In 2008, I took a year to explore this incredible valley before working briefly at a pre-school and a tutoring studio and eventually started my own tutoring business. Joining the TOC list brought me back into the school system, and before long I was on the path to becoming a continuing teacher. I spent a semester at Mark R. Isfeld before moving into a full-time math/science position at G.P. Vanier - the place I've proudly called home for the past ten years.

My time at Vanier has been the highlight of my career. The Science Department truly became my second family, and the friendships I've made here are ones I will always treasure. This has been my favourite school in all my years of teaching. I feel incredibly lucky to have spent this chapter with such exceptional colleagues and students.

As I step into retirement, my next adventures will be slower and sweeter: long mornings and extra cups of coffee with my husband Dale, who has been patiently waiting for this moment; unlimited time with my grandson, who can finally say "NANA"; gardening, exercising, and sharing good wine with good friends. And of course, more travel with Dale — and my promise to finally learn to golf. ~ Corey Higgins

Tami Jerome ~ Highland Secondary

I moved to the Comox Valley in late 1994 and began my career as a TTOC before securing positions with Contract Tutoring, Courtenay Jr, Robb Road Jr (dual track), and Cape Lazo Middle School. I then spent the majority of my career at Highland Secondary.

Over the years, I taught Grades 7 through 12 in a wide range of subjects, including Humanities, Math, Science, Media, and Leadership.

In 2001, I took on the role of Teacher-Librarian while continuing to teach in the classroom—an experience that allowed me to connect with the school community in multiple ways.

It has been a deeply rewarding career, and I am especially grateful for the meaningful relationships built with students, colleagues, and the broader community.

Looking ahead, I plan to TTOC, volunteer with local charities, and travel within Canada, as well as to Europe and parts of Asia. I also look forward to spending more time gardening, hiking, staying active, and enjoying time with family and friends.

I move forward with a deep sense of gratitude and a spirit of adventure. ~ Tami Jerome



Happy Retirement

Peter Lineger ~ Mark Isfeld Secondary



My teaching career has taken me across the country. I started out in Antigonish, Nova Scotia where I studied at Saint Francis Xavier University.

I think it was here that all my cousins and I hatched a plan to become teachers so that we could spend more time at the beach!

After Nova Scotia it was back to Ottawa and really launched my teaching career.

After 5 years, the mountains of BC called, and I taught for 2 years on the North Shore. Vancouver Island was the place to go though. Since 1997 I have been in School District 71, and I have not looked back.

A big thanks goes out to all the great colleagues I have worked with at Robb Road, Aspen Middle and Mark Isfeld.

I look forward to changing my routines and catching up to my children spread across the country! ~ Peter

Pam Merritt ~ Aspen Park Elementary

During my 30 years in the District, I have taught at almost every school as either a Teacher-on Call or as a full-time teacher. This has given me the opportunity to meet many students and work with many different teachers and administrations.

I spent my last ten years at Aspen Park where my colleagues were very supportive of one another and extremely dedicated to their students.

The highlight of my time teaching was seeing a student understand a concept or master a skill they didn't think they could.

My plans for retirement include spending time with friends and family, working in my garden, and possibly trying out some new hobbies. ~ Pam Merritt



Victoria Mulrooney ~ Mark Isfeld Secondary

When I began my career, I never imagined that I would one day draw on every part of my education and travels in my role as an International Support Teacher at Isfeld.

Somehow, it all came together, Pacific & Asian Studies, English Literature, Education, and working abroad in five different countries, into a deeply rewarding calling.

I started as a teacher-on-call in Richmond, then received my first contract as a teacher librarian before moving into ELL and Grade 2.

In 2005, my husband and I relocated our young family to the Comox Valley. I once again appreciated the flexibility of being a teacher-on-call before securing a part-time teacher librarian position at Isfeld.

When the International Student Program expanded at Isfeld, I eagerly put my name forward, knowing it would be the perfect fit. I never looked back. Teaching international students has been one of the greatest joys of my career, being both a mentor and, at times, a second “mom” to remarkable young people from around the world. My family and friends have certainly enjoyed the many stories that have come with the role!

I also found my niche as a volunteer at Isfeld, a role that really fulfilled me. From school events to Interact Club, it has been a privilege to inspire others to give back to our community.

I am deeply grateful to my wonderful colleagues with whom I have laughed, learned, faced challenges, and celebrated milestones. Your support, kindness, and friendship have meant so much to me. I will miss our daily interactions and chats.

Thank you to my incredible husband and amazing children. I feel truly blessed to have had you by my side on this journey. As I look ahead to new adventures, you may find me in the garden, at my cabin, up on the mountain, or perhaps travelling once again with my family and friends. I leave with heartfelt appreciation for the people, the experiences, and the community that shaped my career.

Thank you for being an important part of my story. ~ Victoria Mulrooney



Krista Ogilvie ~ G.P. Vanier Secondary

I became a teacher when I graduated with a BEd from Brandon University in 1994. I was a bit of a late bloomer and when I started teaching, I was aware that many of my students would perhaps be those late bloomers too. Throughout my career I always tried to remember that, and to put that understanding at the forefront of my practice.

We moved to the Comox valley in 1995 and didn't know a soul. It was hard to get my foot in the door. Through persistence and a willingness to work hard (I volunteered at a local school, knocked on doors and took a job as a noon- hour assistant at another school) I finally acquired a job at Courtenay Junior as it was known then but is now Mark R Isfeld.

The staff and admin were a dream. It was an incredibly enriching environment and to this day we still have a bond that cannot be denied. During that time, I continued pursuing my passion for Special Needs Education at UVIC.

Eventually, things changed and I had the opportunity to work at Aspen Park Middle School (as it was known then). Again, the staff and admin were amazing and were devoted to the task of inspiring our students. I began my Master's Degree Program and while completing it I made the jump to Vanier Secondary School. It was my dream job and there I faced many challenges but also got to work with so many wonderful, caring and inspiring individuals. I am so grateful for those people and for the joy I hope we brought to our students.



To those that come after me, I know it's hard and the days are sometimes too long, and I know you love your students and you want to do your best for them. You are amazing and every single day I would ask that you too remember the late bloomers, the ones that are easily forgotten in the thick of things.

And finally, and above all, I would ask you to give yourself grace. Take good care of yourself. Reach out to your colleagues and know that you are not the only one who is struggling to make it all happen. Take those sick days and rest. Set aside those papers you have to mark and spend time with your families and friends...

An extra special thank you to Linda Kember, Marianne McCrae, Dave Bawtinheimer, Mo Mackendrick, Judy Berkeley, Charlie Schellinck, Julie Shields, Sue Wheeler, and so many others. My plan is to chill in my garden and give foster dogs a forever home.

You're welcome to pop by for some tea and sympathy. ~ Krista Ogilvie

Lisa Pedersen-Skene ~ Brooklyn, Airport Elementary & SBO

***“I come to you humbly not to tell you what to do on your journey,
but to share with you what I have learned on mine.” — Wab Kinew***

After 30 years in education, I leave this work with deep gratitude—for the children, families, and colleagues who have shaped my thinking and my heart.

My journey as a Teacher, Vice Principal, Principal, and District Principal across both the Qualicum School District and SD71 has been one of learning, growth, and unlearning. Along the way, I moved from a more traditional model of teaching toward a way of being that centers children’s gifts, honours their individuality, and trusts in the power of play, joy, and relationships.



Here are ten things I have learned along the way:

1. Every child arrives with brilliance.

Our role is not to fill them up, but to notice, nurture, and amplify the unique gifts they already carry.

2. Learning is not linear.

Each child moves in their own way and at their own pace. Growth is not a straight line—it is dynamic, layered, and deeply human.

3. Play is serious learning.

Through play, children make meaning, test ideas, take risks, and build the foundations for lifelong learning.

4. Joy matters.

When joy is present, engagement deepens, relationships strengthen, and learning becomes something children want to do—not something done to them.

5. Relationships are everything.

Learning lives in connection—with peers, with educators, with families, and with the world around us.

6. You need your people close by.

The strongest teams I’ve been part of were in priority schools—places where we held each other up, shared the weight of the work, and found ways to laugh together, even on the hardest days. That laughter wasn’t extra—it was essential.

7. Shift from control to curiosity.

Moving away from “covering curriculum” toward wondering alongside children opens up richer, more authentic learning experiences.

8. Assessment is about noticing and responding.

It is less about measuring and more about understanding—seeing where a child is and thoughtfully supporting their next steps.

9. Environment is a teacher.

Spaces that invite exploration, creativity, and collaboration communicate to children that their ideas matter.

10. This work is about hope.

To teach is to believe in possibility—in each child, in each other, and in a future shaped by compassion, creativity, and care.

Thank you to all who have walked alongside me on this incredible journey—one I am deeply proud of. Through every role, every school, and every chapter, it has been an honour to learn, to lead, and to grow together. ~ Lisa Pedersen-Skene

Linda Peta ~ Royston Elementary



I started my teaching career with School District #71 in 1991 right after I graduated from Memorial University of Newfoundland.

I have had the privilege to teach for 35 years in our school district at Union Bay Elementary, Airport Elementary, Arden Elementary and Royston Elementary.

Thank you to my colleagues for your friendship, collaboration and support. In my retirement, I am looking forward to having more free time to play and spending more time outside in nature.

~ Linda Peta

Tracy Richards ~ Mark Isfeld Secondary

I find it hard to believe that twenty-eight years have passed since I first joined the district. For those who know me, it is no surprise that I've framed my career milestones through the lens of Disney attractions. Surprises and plenty of magic!

The Disney Railroad My career spanned four provinces (stations) in an unforgettable cross-country journey.

The Carousel of Progress is the heart of teaching. Watching students mature from grade eight to grade twelve and seeing the remarkable young adults they become.

The Tower of Terror were the years of deep layoffs (if you are a '98, you know) and the 'free-fall' moments when we had no budget for copier paper.

The Haunted Mansion belongs to the year the Middle Schools closed. A time of 'ghost' buildings and wandering spirits.

It's a Small world (my favourite ride) is about the diversity of learning styles and the global perspective of my own teaching journey.

Splash Mountain represents all the WHOOO moments and splashes of joy in the classroom.

Expedition Everest navigating the new curriculum with no resources and the steep climb during the year of no secondary prep time.

Rise of the Resistance standing strong through three teacher strikes. Fighting for the light side and finding a collective voice

Living with the Land is the quiet work of nourishing student potential, and planting the seeds of knowledge in students

Gift Shop every great ride exits through the gift shop. I'm leaving my classroom keys behind, but I'm taking away the best souvenirs. I have twenty-eight years of memories, friendships, and knowledge that I was part of the magic.

I'm looking forward to spending quality time with my family and embarking onto new adventures. The gates are finally open! (Frozen) ~ Tracy Richards



Linda Stirrett ~ Inclusive Education



I moved to the Comox Valley in September 2016 to continue my work as a Teacher of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI). During that first year, my position was shared among the Nanaimo, Comox Valley, and Campbell River school districts. Thereafter, I supported students in Comox Valley and Campbell River until this school year, when I shifted to more part-time work in SD71 as part of my retirement plan.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of supporting children with a wide range of visual conditions, from low vision to complete blindness. Some had a single sensory impairment, while others faced more complex sensory, physical, medical, and learning challenges. A highlight of my career was the years in an Alberta high school coordinating programs for students learning through braille and enlarged print. These students (some with dog guides!) were enrolled in a broad range of academic courses, and others learning life skills.

It was an anomaly, and I'm proud to have been a part of the many student successes.

I am humbled and forever grateful for the rich education I received from my daughter and from my many students. Their strength, tenacity, perseverance, and resilience have made them my greatest teachers in a career that has been both challenging and uniquely rewarding. Your tears and fears deepened my compassion and understanding. Your trials and successes inspired me, and your humour and laughter are forever woven into my memories. I'll remember you, your stories and your families. I hold you in my heart.

As I move through this transition and continue to discover what comes next, I am most thankful for the gift of more time with family and friends. I have a bookcase full of recommended books collected over the years that I am eager to explore. My small garden provides organic fruits, vegetables, and herbs, as well as a reflective space to putter and stay grounded. I look forward to experimenting with new recipes, (I'm still trying to master cinnamon buns!), taking another stained-glass class, improving my sketches, and embracing new adventures.

Travel plans on the horizon include local camping trips—perhaps upgrading from a tent to a Class B camper van—the Camino Portuguese, and journeys to Ireland and Southeast Asia. I also hope to spend time volunteering with children who are visually impaired. This work has been my life's passion, and I remain open to opportunities to share the lessons I have learned from many throughout these years.

To my family, colleagues, students, student families, and friends: thank you for your trust, support, collaboration, patience, and friendship. I leave this chapter with many cherished memories and a profound sense of wonder as I ask myself, "How the hell did I get here?"

Many blessings to you all. ~ Linda Stirrett

Alison Walkley ~ Courtenay Elementary

It's been a wonderful journey! I've been with the district since 1989, working as a counsellor, learning assistance teacher, acting VP, CST, and primary teacher. I'm so grateful to have worked alongside such incredible educators, students, and families.

My heart is truly with Courtenay Elementary, my school for almost two decades. What a caring community it is—you all have taught me so much.

Teaching really is an amazing career. You are always learning, and there is always so much to discover! I've loved the chance to learn and be creative.

Looking ahead, I'm excited for more time for visiting family and friends near and far.



I'm curious to see where this journey takes me next. ~ Alison Walkley



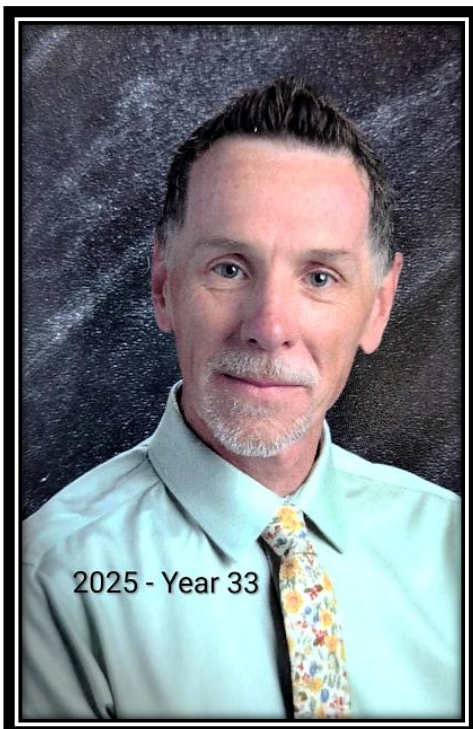
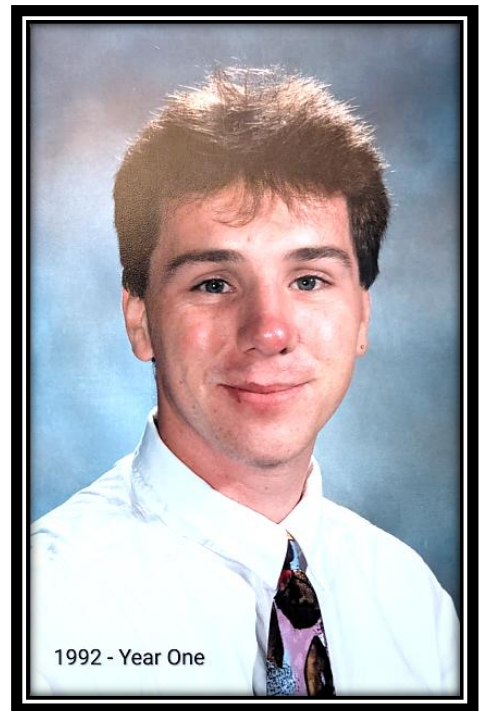
Andrew Young ~ G.P. Vanier Secondary

My teaching journey started in Gambia, Africa, and took me to Prince Rupert before arriving at Lake Trail in 1995 and then on to Vanier from 1999-2026.

From 2008 to 2017, I also taught EDCP 432, a methods class in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy (Faculty of Education) at UBC. From 2006-2025, I had the privilege and the responsibility of taking Vanier students on field studies to Mount St. Helens seventeen times.

I was the BC and Yukon Territory representative on the national executive for Canadian Geographic Education (CGE) from 2003-2010. In 2010, I was inducted as a member of the College of Fellows for the Royal Canadian Geographical Society. In 2012, I wrote "Teaching Elementary Students to Think Geographically" which was published as Chapter 5 in the updated edition of The Anthology of Social Studies: Issues and Strategies for Elementary Teachers. In 2013, the RCGS and CGE honoured me with the inaugural "Gilles Gagnier Medal for Innovation in Geographic Education" national teaching award.

In February 2017, I was highlighted by Canadian Geographic as their inaugural "Geography Teacher of the Month". In 2019, the RCGS and CGE honoured me with the inaugural "Alex Trebek Medal for Geographic Literacy", another Canadian national geography teaching award.



As I move into retirement, I have nothing but enormous gratitude for the students who challenged me, for the students who surprised me, for the students who were patient with me, and for the students who laughed with or at me. For the students who spoke up and spoke out, for the students who showed up, and for the students who pushed me to be better for them, for the students who taught me more than any textbook or university pedagogy class ever could.

Also, for the students who struggled to find any joy in their time with me, and for the students who demanded I be better not just for them, but for the profession and for the community to which I belonged.

I look forward to a schedule free and alarm clock free life sailing on our boat in the Salish Sea, riding my bike on Tour de France climbs in the French Alps, digging my hands in the garden at home and living a relaxed, carefree and lighthearted life. ~ Andrew Young

B.A., B.Ed., M.A., F.R.C.G.S

Member College of Fellows: Royal Canadian Geographical Society

Jacki Zbirun ~ Royston Elementary

After I graduated from the University of Calgary in 1986, my husband and I high tailed it out of Alberta and moved to Hornby Island, BC where I began my teaching career at the Hornby Island School in 1994.

As our kids grew and we faced the need for them to bus off the island for school, we decided to move into the Comox Valley where I expanded my teaching assignments to include Denman Island School and then Union Bay School. There I taught for a few years until its closure in 2006.

Next, it was off to Royston Elementary School where I taught music and in the classroom for the remainder of my teaching career. I have loved the Royston students, staff and the Royston community and am honoured to have worked, played, sung and created with their wonderful children.

I have always worn many hats - singer with the big band, flower farmer, traveler, and now grandmother, the best gig of all!

The road ahead will include traveling in our little motorhome to see our magnificent country, visiting friends and family and enjoying the little people in my life.

Changing the world doesn't stop at retirement. Thank you SD71!

~ Jacki Zbirun

