

HISTORY OF THE BCTF

A decade-by-decade sketch of 90 years of BCTF history is outlined below.

Decade 1: 1916–17 to 1926–27

- George Lister organized a meeting of teacher association representatives from Vancouver, Point Grey, South Vancouver, North Vancouver, and Victoria on October 28, 1916, at Dawson School in Vancouver to discuss and plan for the formation of a larger teacher organization.
- The first annual meeting of the new organization, the BC Teachers' Federation, was held on January 4, 1917, at King Edward High School in Vancouver. George Lister was elected first president. Lister actually served for five terms as president, though not all consecutively.
- Original objectives of the BCTF adopted at the founding convention remain to this day:
 - to foster and promote the cause of education
 - to raise the status of the teaching profession in BC
 - to promote the welfare of teachers in BC
- The BCTF had voluntary membership and was open to all teachers irrespective of their sex, religion, or race. The BCTF was incorporated as a society on July 12, 1910. Harry Charlesworth, who was president that year went on to be the Federation's first general secretary in 1920. The BCTF office was established in Victoria in 1919 in the Belmont building, at the corner of Douglas and Fort Streets.
- The BCTF launched *The Educator* in 1919, which two years later became *The Teacher*, as its vehicle for communicating with members. Charlesworth also helped to found the Canadian Teachers' Federation in 1920 and became its first president.
- The first teacher strike in the then British Empire occurred in Victoria in 1919 over salaries. As a result, the BCTF convinced the new department of education to establish arbitration as an acceptable process for salary matters. New Westminster teachers went on strike in 1921 after their board refused to implement a salary award granted through arbitration. The BCTF initiated work with government on teacher pension and tenure issues.
- BCTF prompting led to the creation of the first major examination of education in the province, the Puttman-Weir report of 1925, notably resulting in the creation of junior high schools. In 1926, the BCTF offices were moved to the Credit Foncier building in Vancouver at Hastings and Howe.

Decade 2: 1927–28 to 1936–37

- The Teachers' Pension Act in 1929 established years of service and contribution level as the basis for pensions. In 1929 Vancouver teachers received a salary scale based upon certification and experience.
- The BCTF moved its offices in December 1932 to "Adeline House" at 1300 Robson Street, in Vancouver.
- George Fergusson, president of the BCTF in 1923–24 and principal of King Edward High school (where BCTF held its founding meeting), died suddenly in 1928. The Federation established the G.A. Fergusson Memorial Fund, which resulted in the GA Fergusson Memorial Award that honours teachers who have made a significant contribution to education and to the BCTF. The *Public Schools Act* in 1937 permitted either party to demand binding arbitration in salary disputes.

Decade 3: 1937–38 to 1946–47

- The Langley School Board in 1939 refused to implement an arbitrated salary award and instead fired its teachers. Ultimately a united local supported by the BCTF had the teachers reinstated and the board fired.
- In 1938 continuing contracts were established for teachers.
- In 1939, the BCTF established its own Sick Benefit Fund to assist teachers who were ill and had run out of sick leave. This later became the Salary Indemnity Plan.
- In 1940, the BCTF established the Lesson Aids program.

- In 1943, teachers voted for a provincial strike on salaries but the BCTF did not act on this vote because the Federal government instituted a wartime federal wage-control program. In 1943, the BCTF joined the Canadian Trades and Labor Congress, following a successful membership vote to do so. Also in 1943, the BCTF adopted a Code of Ethics.
- The Cameron Commission in 1945 again saw significant BCTF involvement—the BCTF took on the issue of the relationship between teaching the whole child and class size.
- In 1947, government granted the BCTF statutory compulsory membership; there was a voluntary sign-up of 93% at the time.

Decade 4: 1947–48 to 1956–57

- In 1950, the BCTF held its first summer conference in Qualicum.
- In 1951, BCTF offices moved to 1644 West Broadway in Vancouver (first building owned by the BCTF).
- The mid-1950s saw the elimination of discrimination against women teachers in salary scales. Henceforth the two criteria for determination of salaries would be qualifications and years of teaching experience.
- Hilda Cryderman became the first woman to be elected as BCTF president—1954–55.
- The 1956 AGM ended the BCTF's formal relationship with organized labour by narrowly turning down a motion to affiliate with the new Canadian Labour Congress.
- In 1957, the BCTF began to actively promote the creation and existence of Provincial Specialist Associations (PSAs).

Decade 5: 1957–58 to 1966–67

- In the summer of 1957, the BCTF moved to its new building at 7th and Burrard in Vancouver. Ten years later it added a new wing and became 2235 Burrard Street.
- In 1961, the current basic formula for the calculation of teacher pensions was established; service, age of retirement, and final average salary.
- The BCTF International Program was launched at the 1961 AGM. In 1961, the BCTF was granted significant representation on government curriculum committees which shaped elementary and secondary education for the next decade. The Federation's governance structures were dramatically overhauled in the mid-1960s. The Federation's Working and Learning Conditions' program was established. The 1967 AGM launched the Federation's "Over 40 Campaign" aimed at reducing class size.

Decade 6: 1967–68 to 1976–77

- Vancouver teachers achieved a Learning and Working Conditions' contract with their board in 1969.
- In 1970, a BCTF Task Force on the Status of Women was followed by the Status of Women program three years later.
- Jim Killeen became the first to serve for two terms as full-time president—1969–71.
- On March 19, 1971, BC teachers participated in their first provincial withdrawal of service protesting the government's refusal to improve the pensions of retirees.
- In 1971, the provincial government eliminated compulsory membership for teachers. The BCTF engineered a voluntary sign up of all but 69 of some 22,000 teachers.
- In 1971–72 the provincial Social Credit government restricted school districts' ability to raise revenue and imposed ceilings on teacher salary arbitrations. BCTF President Adam Robertson declared "We won't live with it." The BCTF launched a major political action initiative in the August 1972 provincial election.
- Compulsory membership in the BCTF was restored legislatively in 1973.
- In 1974, Surrey teachers walked out of their classrooms and traveled to Victoria to protest large class sizes. The BCTF negotiated a major addition of teachers over several years to dramatically reduce the pupil-teacher ratio. Thousands of additional teachers were hired across the province.
- The Federation's Program Against Racism was established following the issue of racism in schools being raised at the 1975 AGM.

Decade 7: 1977–78 to 1986–87

- In the fall of 1980, a number of locals, particularly in the Metro area protested the lack of action by the government on the indexing of their pension plan through walkouts and demonstrations in Victoria and Vancouver.
- The BCTF began its Associates' program; teachers teaching teachers, in 1978.
- In the early 1980s, the Federation launched a major campaign to expand the scope of teacher bargaining to include all terms and conditions of employment of teachers in contracts.
- A six-day strike in Terrace in June 1981, achieved a number of personnel matters being put into an agreement.
- In the fall of 1981, a number of locals were able to bargain "expanded scope" items into their collective agreements.
- In February 1982, teachers, in a province-wide member vote, turned down asking government for the right to strike.
- The government launched a major restraint program in the spring of 1982 that would have repercussions for years to come, bringing about major cutbacks in education and reversing the gains made by the Surrey action of 1974.
- In July 1982, the BCTF established the Bargaining Division, melding former economic welfare and working and learning conditions areas.
- In July 1983, the provincial government tabled 26 pieces of legislation that together constituted an overall assault on the social safety net for working people. Solidarity Coalition and Operation Solidarity were formed and the BCTF was a key participant.
- In November 1983, BC teachers walked off the job for three days and participated with other unions in a major protest against the government actions. Thereafter, BCTF policy insisted that members honour picket lines.
- Larry Kuehn was the first president to serve three full-time terms—1981–84.
- The Federation initiated three new programs in the mid-1980s, the School Staff Representative Training program, the Internal Mediation Services, and Program Quality Teaching.
- In 1985, the Federation launched a Charter challenge claiming the denial of full bargaining rights for teachers was a violation of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.
- In 1987, the provincial Social Credit government tabled Bills 19 and 20. BC teachers lost statutory membership but gained full bargaining rights at the local level including the right to strike. Principals and vice-principals were removed from the teacher bargaining unit and became part of the management structures in school districts. A College of Teachers was established to attempt to take over the "professional" functions of teachers from the BCTF.
- On April 28, BC teachers held a day of protest against the establishment of the college.
- On June 1, BC teachers joined the BC Federation of Labour in a one-day general strike protesting negative changes to labour legislation.

Decade 8: 1987–88 to 1996–97

- In the fall of 1987, the BCTF held a major certification sign-up campaign: all 76 locals chose the "union" model and 99% of BC public school teachers voluntarily signed up to the BCTF.
- The BCTF engaged in three rounds of local bargaining under the full collective bargaining model, dramatically changing the very nature of the organization.
- Thirty-two disputes led to strikes and three resulted in lockouts. There were also five support-staff strikes. The BCTF established the Collective Bargaining Defence Fund and expanded the Federation's capacity to handle grievances.
- In the third round of local bargaining, government ordered striking Vancouver and Surrey teachers back to work. In 1994, government imposed provincial bargaining on teachers against the protests of the BCTF.
- In 1991, the Federation waged a major campaign of political action in that fall's provincial election, focussing on education funding and opposition to Bill 82, which imposed wage controls on behalf of the Federation's locals.
- In 1991, the Federation established a Research Department and several years later launched a pilot on a Health and Wellness

Program, which eventually became an important part of the Federation's Salary Indemnity Plan.

- In 1994, the Federation established a new program based on the results of a Task Force on French Programs and Services.
- The Sullivan Royal Commission on Education reported out in 1988 establishing a new student centred primary program supported by teachers.
- In 1994, the Federation moved its offices into its current location at 550 West 6th Avenue in Vancouver.
- The BCTF initiated the organization of a Coalition for Public Education, primarily involving unions that worked in all levels of public education.
- The BCTF played a key role in the formation of a BC office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- In 1996, acting on AGM direction, the Federation held an unsuccessful member vote on affiliation with the BC Federation of Labour.
- The first round of provincial bargaining in 1996 necessitated the involvement of government before a deal could be reached. The key development was the continuation of the terms and conditions of employment negotiated locally.
- Government moved to amalgamate numerous school districts around the province causing the Federation to respond by allowing its locals to continue, if they so chose.

Decade 9: 1997–98 to 2006–07

- The Federation, following a 1998 AGM decision, melded its Status of Women program and Program Against Racism into a new Social Justice Program.
- In 1997, the Federation established a Health and Safety program, which eventually involved assisting members with WCB appeals.
- Following on the work of a Task Force on Aboriginal Education appointed in 1998, the Federation established an Aboriginal Education program in 2000.
- In 2000, the Federation also initiated its Peer Support Program.
- Following a member vote in 2000, the Federation moved to participate in a full trustee teacher pension plan.
- The second round of provincial bargaining resulted in major improvements in class size for primary classes, and staffing ratios for learning specialist teachers.
- In March 2000, CUPE struck in 43 school districts and in every one of those, teachers honored picket lines. Immediately following the election of a Liberal government in May 2001, Essential Services legislation for teachers was introduced.
- In the third round of provincial bargaining, in the fall of 2001, the BCTF took their first provincial strike vote.
- In January 2002, government imposed a settlement on teachers, putting the collective agreement of class-size, class-composition, and staffing-ratio provisions. Future negotiations of such terms and conditions of employment was made illegal.
- On January 28, 2002, teachers held a one-day protest, the first day of a multi-year protest against government unilateral intervention into bargaining.
- In 2002, the Federation developed a long-term Public Education Advocacy Plan and moved to reorganize the staff to facilitate implementation of the plan. The 2002 AGM voted to establish a Public Education Defence Fund.
- The Federation launched a province-wide discussion about education through the Charter for Public Education process.
- In March 2003, members voted to affiliate with the BC Federation of Labour.
- When government dismissed the teacher-elected members of the BC College of Teachers' Council, the BCTF organized a major campaign that had members refuse to pay the college fee. This forced the government to re-establish a democratic college.
- To deal with continued underfunding by government and the downloading of provincially initiated costs to school boards, the Federation organized a grass roots province-wide "Caravan Against the Cuts."

- The Federation spent \$5 million in the 2005 provincial election to make education a vote-determining issue.
- In the fall of 2005, and in response to the government's imposition of another contract, the BCTF engaged in a two-week strike, deemed illegal by the courts. The resulting settlement, brokered by Vince Ready, broke the zero mandate of government and set the stage for the upcoming round of public-sector bargaining.
- In March 2006, members voted to join the Canadian Labour Congress and thus continue their affiliation with the BC Federation of Labour.
- In May 2006, government, through its Learning Roundtable, moved to legislate class-size and class-composition provisions as a follow-through from the 2005 fall strike.
- In June 2006, the Federation concluded a collective agreement through the involvement of government in the process, achieving significant improvements in salary.
- The Federation has served notice to government that it will challenge its "Accountability and Achievement" agenda.

(From BCTF member's Guide)