

Connecting the Dots
Parents ... Our Children ...
And the B.C. College of Teachers



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The B.C. College of Teachers has received a lot of publicity lately. It always seems to be in turmoil, and the report produced by Don Avison, and released by the Ministry of Education in December 2010,¹ told us once more that it was not functioning as it should.

Some parents might assume that the College is none of our business and we should leave it to educators to sort out. That's not the case. The College exists to "protect the public interest"—and the public interest is our children.

The College of Teachers is one of a number of "self-regulatory organizations" (SROs). Most professional groups, such as lawyers, doctors, accountants and nurses, have their own SROs and include lay people on their governing councils. All of them

- set standards for that profession
- are responsible for certifying members
- set the requirements for education and professional development of their members
- discipline members for incompetence and misconduct

Every educator in public schools must be a member of the College. That includes superintendents, principals, other administrators, and teachers. The College is not the employer—it is the body that issues teaching certificates and monitors them "in the public interest." Every member must have a teaching certificate **in good standing**, meaning that the member is "competent and suitable for the important role they play in society."²

The Avison report showed us that the College is not carrying out its role as it should. The Ministry of Education has promised to make legislative changes to improve the College. We need to pay attention to these proposed changes. Our kids are counting on us.

¹*A College Divided: Report of the Fact Finder on the BC College of Teachers*, available online at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/pubs/2010_factfinder_report_bcct.pdf

²See <http://www.bcct.ca/AboutUs/AboutUs.aspx>

How Does the College Affect Our Children?

Some examples might be helpful:

- 1. The Browns moved to a new city over the summer. Mrs. Brown doesn't know anyone in her children's new school, and she is anxious for information on her children's teachers. She goes to the College's website and looks up the teachers' names on the public registry. Both teachers are listed as members "in good standing."**

The registry is hopelessly out of date. It can take two to five years, or longer, for the College to adjudicate on reports or complaints of misconduct or incompetence. During that period, the member may continue to be shown as being in good standing. In addition, outcomes of discipline don't always reflect the seriousness of the offences.

BCCPAC is strongly advocating for change:

- Serious misconduct must have serious consequences. The College must treat misconduct and incompetence appropriately, in an open and timely way.***
- The public registry is not safe for parents to use. It must be reliable.***

- 2. Joey is in Grade 2 in Mrs. Smith's class. He is not yet reading and his parents are very worried. Joey is complaining of a sore stomach and refusing to go to school. He is having nightmares and fighting with everyone at home. His teacher is telling his parents that they will have to wait until Grade 3 for an assessment. In the meantime nothing is happening at school to help him.**

Not all teachers are properly trained in the teaching of reading or in early intervention to identify learning disabilities. In the past, these areas may not have been covered in teacher education programs, and there is no requirement for professional upgrading once a teacher has a teaching certificate.

The Avison report said, "There remains a considerable level of resistance to even considering professional development and currency of practice matters

that should represent a core aspect of the College's obligation to protect and advance the public interest."

BCCPAC believes that professional upgrading is key to improving student achievement, and we have been advocating for the College to carry out its legislated responsibilities.

- 3. Sarah is a Grade 10 student at her local secondary school. One of her teachers has been making suggestive remarks to her. He also appears to find reasons to touch her on the shoulder or leg. Sarah is very uncomfortable around him. Her mother has gone to the principal, but he has not taken her concerns seriously. Sarah's mother has written a complaint to the College of Teachers about this teacher's behaviour but has heard nothing back from them.**

In 2010, the chair of the College stated that 270 "person complaints" had been received by the College, but none of these had resulted in discipline for misconduct. Person complaints sometimes take years to resolve. In addition, the College has changed its procedures so that the member now receives the letter of complaint right away. This can be intimidating for a parent, and parents tell us they are afraid of retribution against their child.

Every regulatory body receives complaints from the public. Complaints must be taken seriously, and they must be addressed quickly and properly.

BCCPAC is very concerned about what is happening with person complaints at the College. Changes must be made so that parents feel safe in making a complaint and their issues are heard.

BCCPAC believes that we must support our educators in the important work they do with our children. That includes making our voice heard about the College. As the College itself says:

"In no other profession do professionals spend as much time with their clients as do educators. Parents entrust their children to the care of educators for seven hours a day, five days a week, forty weeks a year, for thirteen years. This intense interaction has an immense impact on children's intellectual, emotional and physical development. The College works to ensure that professional educators are well-educated and prepared for their

important work with children and their shared responsibility with parents to raise strong, healthy and informed citizens.”³

What Do We Need?

To address these issues effectively, BCCPAC advocates the following changes:

- Increased representation of parents and lay people on the College Council to ensure that the interests of children come first. Politics has no place at the College. The Council needs diverse representation so that no education partner group can exert undue influence.
- Discipline processes that are fair, timely and transparent.
- A person complaint process that respects the role of parents and keeps children safe.
- A revision of the standards for the profession that puts back the requirement to work collaboratively with parents and students.
- Requirements for teacher certification and ongoing professional training to ensure that teachers have appropriate levels of knowledge and competency.

What Can Parents Do?

There are several steps that we, as parents, can take:

- It’s important for parents to be well informed. Read the reports from BCCPAC to Don Avison and his report on the College at <http://www.bccpac.bc.ca/representation/BCCTFactFind.aspx>.
- Work with us to ensure that legislative changes are made that ensure that the College functions as it should.
- Write to your MLA, and to the Minister of Education, sharing your voice and adding it to ours.

Together we can make a difference for all our children.

³Available at <http://www.bcct.ca/AboutUs/AboutUs.aspx>