

Understanding the B.C. College of Teachers *By Catherine Abraham*

Professionals such as doctors, lawyers, teachers or engineers hold a special place in our society.

Understanding Professional Self-Regulation in British Columbia, an article by the B.C. College of Teachers, quotes from Ryan and Cooper's "Those Who Can, Teach",

"A profession renders a unique, definite and essential service to society – only people in the particular profession render the service and the service rendered must be considered so important that it is available to all people in a society. For example, only lawyers practice law, medical doctors practice medicine and accountants practice accounting."

The status of professional groups has lead quite naturally to the establishment of "colleges" for each professional organization. These colleges:

- are accountable to the public (rather than their members);
- issue certificates to potential candidates when they have completed the training necessary to enter the practice;
- set standards and requirements for the ongoing practice of the profession; discipline their members when misconduct occurs.

Each college is established through its own legislation. In exchange for the privilege of self-regulation, each college promises to act in the "public interest" in regulating its members. Colleges are not advocacy organizations for their members. Instead, they protect the public by regulating the profession. That is why they are called "self-regulatory organizations (SRO's).

"Comparison of the Teaching Profession to Other Self Regulating Professions in British Columbia" provides a great deal of information on the various features of SRO's.

Each SRO is governed by a council composed of members of the profession *and* laypersons. Including laypersons is an important feature common to all SRO's, to ensure that the perspective of the public is included in all the functions of a college. Each council member must promise to act in the public interest. In other words, they do not sit on the council as representatives of a group of the profession, their allegiance must be to the "public interest".

The B.C. College of Teachers (BCCT) was established in 1987 through the *Teaching Profession Act*. This Act is the framework for the self-regulation of educators. Members of BCCT include teachers, principals and all other administrators in both public

and independent schools from kindergarten through to grade 12. All educators must be BCCT members in good standing in order to be employed. If an educator has allowed their certificate to lapse, or if they have been suspended or terminated, they are not permitted to work in our schools.

Parents can become easily confused about the roles of the college, school boards and the B.C. Teachers Federation (BCTF). How do they differ and how do they relate to teachers?

School boards are the employers for teachers and administrators. They are responsible for hiring educators, and can also discipline them. They are bound primarily by the *School Act*, employment legislation and, in the case of teachers, by the provincial contract negotiated with the BCTF, plus any local provisions they may have. When a school board disciplines an employee, in most circumstances it must file a report with the College.

The College has jurisdiction over the certificate of an educator. Not only does it issue the certificate – it can suspend or remove it for professional misconduct. It is not bound by employment legislation, because it is not the employer. Instead, it is bound by the *Teaching Profession Act* and its own bylaws and policies.

The BCTF is the union that advocates for public school teachers, and bargains on their behalf. When a teacher is disciplined, it acts in defense of the teacher, both with the school district (employment) *and* with the College (certificate).

Among the duties of BCCT, discipline is often the area of greatest interest to parents.

Parents are entitled to complain directly to the College about misconduct, just as they can complain to any other self-regulatory body such as the College of Physicians and Surgeons. They can also complain to the school district, but they can do both actions independent of one another.

Section 27.2 of the *Teaching Profession Act* lays out the requirements for the College to provide public notification when it disciplines. Section 27.3 lays out the requirements for the College to maintain a public registry of all educators. This registry gives parents information on the status of an educator's certificate, and includes links to formal discipline.

<http://www.bcct.ca/Newsroom/>

[FormsAndPublicationsOverview.aspx](http://www.bcct.ca/Newsroom/FormsAndPublicationsOverview.aspx) links to

"Comparison of the Teaching Profession to Other Self-Regulating Professions in British Columbia" and *"Understanding Professional Self-Regulation in B.C."* The *Teaching Profession Act* can be found at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/teaching_profession_act_contents.pdf