

Backgrounder: Teacher Salaries

April 2011

What is the BC Teachers' Federation saying about teacher salaries?

BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) President Susan Lambert has been quoted extensively in the media, commenting on the BCTF salary objectives for the current round of negotiations.

The BC government will have to ditch its public-sector wage restraints if it hopes to reach a new collective agreement with public-school teachers, the president of the BC Teachers' Federation said Monday.

Susan Lambert refused to say what pay hike her members want from bargaining this year, but acknowledged during a news conference that the BCTF and government are far apart on salary expectations and other key issues.

"We haven't arrived at a figure yet," Lambert said when asked if the union bargaining team will press for a double digit increase.

"It's a complex mathematical formula," she added, because salaries vary according to experience and place of employment.

But Lambert made it clear the union has no intention of accepting the net zero mandate for public servants ordered by the B.C. Liberal government in the midst of the global economic downturn.

"That's just not realistic," she said. "We're asking government to revisit their mandate to ensure that this round of bargaining is productive and there's a satisfactory conclusion."

BC teachers deserve pay similar to that of colleagues in other parts of Canada, but their wages have not kept pace during the past five years, tumbling from third place to eighth, she said in Victoria during a break from the BCTF's annual general meeting.¹

What compensation increases did teachers receive in the last round of bargaining in 2006?

During the last round of bargaining in 2006, while virtually all other public sector unions, including support staff in the K-12 public education sector, negotiated four-year deals that expired in 2010, the BCTF was able to achieve a five-year deal that expires June 30, 2011.

While all public sector unions are subject to the government's net zero compensation mandate (July 1, 2010 through to June 30, 2012), by virtue of achieving a five-year deal in 2006, the last year of the BCTF deal — with a 2.0% general wage increase — is everyone else's first year of net zero.

The BCTF's 2006 deal focused both on general wage increases for all teachers, and differentiated salary increases targeted to senior teachers and teachers in remote and rural school districts. For the period 2006-2011, the minimum percentage increase a BC teacher realized was approximately 14.0%, while the maximum percentage increase a BC teacher realized was approximately 21.5%.

¹ "B.C. Teachers, government far apart on bargaining," by Janet Steffenhagen. *The Vancouver Sun*, March 22, 2011.

In 2008 alone, for example, a senior teacher in a remote/rural school district received a total compensation increase of approximately 8.7% as a result of:

- a 2.5% general wage increase
- the introduction of Teacher Supply and Demand Initiatives targeted at senior teachers through an additional salary grid increase of 3.0%, and
- the introduction of a new Remote Recruitment and Retention Allowance of \$2,200 targeted to all teachers in identified remote/rural districts or individual schools designated as remote/rural within a district.

Where do BC teachers' salaries rank in a cross-Canada comparison?

While the BCTF has articulated the position that BC teachers' salaries rank 8th in Canada, further analysis is warranted because, as BCTF President Susan Lambert has stated, "salaries vary according to experience and place of employment."

Further, the BCTF has stated:

...wages have not kept pace during the past five years, tumbling from third place to eighth...²

Teachers are paid according to their level of educational accomplishment and experience. It is important to understand that the same level of education and experience results in a different salary placement both across provinces and within provinces.

For example, the average teacher in BC has completed five years of post-secondary education, whereas most teachers in Alberta and Saskatchewan have completed four. The most accurate comparison across the provinces is, therefore, the category in which the largest number of teachers is employed and not the salary rate for the same category across the province, as categories and category definitions vary widely.

In addition, the analysis of salaries across Canada must take into account geographic differences and labour market supply and demand. For these reasons, an accurate comparison of teacher salaries across Canada should compare provinces only, and exclude the northern territories, given the vastly different context in those geographic areas.

Using this methodology BC teachers' salaries rank 4th across Canada.

Further, the BCTF statement with respect to wages "tumbling from third place to eighth" is inaccurate and misleading, as the 3rd and 8th place rankings are arrived at using differing methodologies.

The reference to 3rd place is using 2006 salary data, and excludes the northern territories, consistent with the methodology set out above. In contrast, the reference to 8th place uses current data and includes the northern territories. An accurate description of how BC teachers' salaries have evolved from 2006 to 2011 would include either of the following:

- In 2006, BC teachers' salaries ranked 3rd in Canada, and in 2011 now rank 4th; or
- In 2006, BC teachers' salaries ranked 6th in Canada, and in 2011 now rank 7th.

Further information on BC teachers' salaries, teachers' salaries across Canada, and comparison methodologies across Canada will be available shortly in a more detailed discussion paper on the BCPSEA public website.

² "Ibid.