

2014-01

March 3, 2014

By E-mail: Three Pages

BCPSEA Responses to BCTF Statements

At the provincial bargaining session with the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) on February 14, 2014, the BC Public School Employers' Association tabled a comprehensive package of proposals for discussion, including:

- An opening position of a 6.5% wage increase (plus additional fiscal dividend entitlements tied to improvement in the provincial GDP) over the first six years of the proposed 10-year agreement
- A proposal to increase benefits equal in value to the percentage salary increases over the same time period
- A full re-opening of wage, benefit, and all policy matters at the six-year point of the agreement, including the opportunity for binding arbitration if agreement is not reached
- A proposal to address teacher workload as it relates to class composition, which provides for a district based "workload fund" to address issues raised by teachers.

The BCTF has recently made a variety of media and internal statements in conjunction with its announcement of February 25 that a strike vote of its members will be held March 4-6. There are several inaccuracies in the BCTF comments that require correction.

BCTF News Release, February 25, 2014 "Facing unreasonable government, teachers call strike vote"	
BCTF Statement	BCPSEA Response
<p>"...BCPSEA has tabled unreasonable proposals ... that would yet again strip all provisions on class size, class composition, and staffing levels for teacher-librarians, counsellors, special education, and other specialist teachers..."</p>	<p>BCPSEA is seeking to negotiate class size and composition provisions in a new agreement. Our current proposal on class size and composition would incorporate significant new language in the collective agreement. The union doesn't agree with our proposal, but that doesn't constitute "stripping all provisions."</p> <p>Data clearly indicate that BC students' educational outcomes have been steadily improving since 2001. For example, school completion rates for aboriginal students have risen from 42% to 60%, and school completion rates for special needs students have risen from 33% to 60%. Our current proposal is based on the successful processes of the past 12 years — processes that ensure that teachers have a key role in the professional judgment needed to address class composition issues.</p>

<p>“Their proposal to eliminate class size, class composition, and staffing levels would "supersede and replace all previous articles that addressed class size, composition, and staffing levels.”</p>	<p>The 1980s approach, which uses fixed formulas to drive allocation decisions in the school system, is out of step with the transformational changes that have been and are occurring in the public education system.</p> <p>For further background, an editorial in the February 28 edition of <i>The Vancouver Sun</i> may be of interest.</p>
<p>“A salary offer that starts with a 0.5% increase on the date of ratification. The increase is not retroactive. Because the previous contract expired last June, this means zero for all of 2013–14 school year to date. The proposal is followed by another zero for 2014–15 school year and then various ones and point fives over the next four years.”</p>	<p>The BCPSEA salary offer — which is an opening proposal — is for 1.0% on the date of ratification (0.5% of which would come from savings within the present agreement). The next five years would be the same as the general wage increases offered to (and accepted by) other public sector unions, including the trend-setting public service bargaining unit. Those agreements provide wage increases of 5.5% over five years, plus additional increases if the province’s economic performance is better than predicted.</p> <p>It is important to note that the BCTF collective agreement does not align with the timing of the agreements of other large public sector unions. The BCTF is out of synch due to a five-year agreement for 2006-2011 (when the majority of other unions had four-year agreements). The BCTF received a 2% increase in the fifth year of that agreement, while most other unions received 0% for the same time period.</p>
<p>Global BC – Vancouver Morning News, February 26, 2014, 8:21 am</p>	
<p>“We have tabled all of our provisions, including a salary provision. We haven’t actually put numbers to that, but we do have a proposal.”</p>	<p>We expected the union to table its full position on all issues at the bargaining table — including a full salary proposal that includes actual numbers— before calling for a strike vote</p> <p>The BCTF has not, in fact, tabled its position on salaries. BCPSEA has received from the union only a sheet of paper with blanks beside “cost of living” and “market” adjustments.</p> <p>For further observations, a column by Michael Smyth in the February 27 edition of <i>The Province</i> may be of interest.</p>

Jim Iker's strike vote letter to BCTF members, February 28, 2014

"They need to remove their unfair proposals and provide some sort of incentive for teachers. That means responding in good faith to our proposals, letting go of the misguided 10-year scheme, putting a meaningful salary offer on the table, and respecting our rights to bargain our working conditions."

"[T]he government is still intent on the Premier's disjointed 10-year scheme, even though we already rejected the concept in a province-wide vote by 90% back in June."

There are many statements in the union's strike vote letter that are misleading and/or wrong. Below are comments on two of them:

"Good faith" means bargaining with a genuine interest in reaching agreement. At the table, the union has not accused our bargaining committee of failing to bargain in good faith. At the table, the union recognizes that disagreement with a union proposal doesn't constitute bad faith.

On the 10-year proposal, to date the union has failed to engage in any substantive discussion. The 10-year proposal includes a full re-opener after six years. In effect, the proposal is for two agreements, with third-party resolution instead of job action after six years. We have yet to hear from the union why this proposal is "misguided," other than the union doesn't like it.

Contrary to the claim in the strike vote letter, the wording of the BCTF ballot in June didn't mention the 10-year proposal at all. For the record, the ballot read as follows: "Do you support our bargaining team and their efforts to achieve a negotiated settlement, and oppose any government interference in the bargaining process? Yes or No."

BCPSEA and the BCTF will be back at the bargaining table March 4-7. BCPSEA will continue to provide updates and clarify information as events progress.

The BCTF will announce the results of its strike vote the evening of March 6.

Please contact Mike Roberts at 604 730 4519 or miker@bcpsea.bc.ca if you have any questions.