

Report *from the Chair*

BRITISH COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOL EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION

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By E-mail: Three Pages

As the 2010-2011 school year closes, it's a good time to reflect on our individual and collective successes, and plan our vacations to renew for the opportunities and challenges ahead. The BCPSEA Board and staff wish you a restful and enjoyable summer.

Collective Bargaining — Teachers

Local teacher union – local board of education bargaining is continuing; slowly in many cases although district staff and trustees are doing much good work to move the process forward.

Despite the campaign by the BCTF to move most provincial matters to local bargaining tables, it's important to remember that there is a designated place for all collective agreement issues to be discussed. The BCTF and BCPSEA have agreed-upon letters of understanding in place (Letter of Understanding No. 1, Appendix 1 matters are dealt with at the provincial table and Letter of Understanding No. 2, Appendix 2 matters are dealt with at the local table).

On the provincial bargaining front, as you know, the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) received a strike mandate from its members in June and is threatening job action when students return to school in September. Given that the parties hadn't even completed the exchange and canvassing of proposals at the time the strike vote was planned and taken, we are concerned at the timing. A strike should always be a last resort.

We know that bargaining is taking place in a very challenging environment, both economically and politically. The net zero compensation mandate is a challenge. But two-thirds of the public sector has already settled within the mandate, and we should be able to do the same.

We believe the parties should be at the bargaining table through the summer, and should commit to engaging in productive and substantive discussions. At the moment, with approximately \$2.1 billion worth of proposals currently on the table — not including their salary proposal — the BCTF is not within what we would call the zone of agreement. While we understand these are opening proposals, they are opening proposals in a net zero environment. Even in buoyant economic times, these initial proposals are not realistic.

We are also concerned with the way in which the BCTF is characterizing bargaining generally and our bargaining proposals in particular. They have said our proposals are concessions and contract-stripping.

The reality is that when you look at the advances in technology, for example, when you look at the changing demographics of our students and employees, the public education system is in transformational times. We then ask ourselves whether the collective agreement provisions we have today facilitate the changes that are happening and the changes that are needed?

One of the bargaining themes we presented to the BCTF, which arose out of our extensive consultation with boards of education, is to facilitate continuous growth, development and engagement of our workforce. Most of the current collective agreement provisions around that date back to the 1970s and 1980s. We would like to engage in some meaningful discussion with the BCTF around the notion of integrating individual teachers' development, professional development generally, and initiatives related to ongoing growth plans and mentorship as a package of elements that facilitate individual growth and also address individuals who find themselves in a difficult situation. In the absence of that meaningful dialogue, it's easy to posture and say any change we propose is contract-stripping. But we believe that if we want the system to work well for teachers, for students, and for districts generally, then we should be engaging in the necessary discussions on these and other issues.

We recognize that bargaining has its share of rhetoric and posturing, and we are seeing that play out in the media. It's easy to get lost in the charges and counter charges, and inflammatory local bulletins, some of which find their way to board tables. But it is important that we and the communities we represent have the true facts about the bargaining process and matters at issue. The state of bargaining, the proposals of both parties, and other resources are available and open to you and the public on our website at <http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/bc-teachers/teacher-collective-bargaining.aspx>. Trustees have given us great comments on the value of this information and we have incorporated suggestions to make sure you have what you need.

We hope that negotiations will resume with renewed focus and commitment, and that by moving to the realism phase and putting in the hard work that will be necessary, the BCTF and BCPSEA will be able to conclude a negotiated collective agreement as so many others in the public sector have done already, and as we were able to do in 2006.

I think it's also important to note that as an association co-governed between the provincial government and school trustees elected in their local communities, we are always striving to balance public policy matters with the educational and operational priorities of boards of education. It is not always an easy balance to achieve and we are always seeking to improve understanding and approach.

Collective Bargaining — Support Staff

The provincial-level discussions between BCPSEA, school district representatives, and representatives of the CUPE K-12 Presidents' Council Provincial Bargaining Committee (PBC) continued today.

As we have previously reported, this process is intended to be complementary and not a replacement for the current delegated authority model of bargaining.

With respect to the process, the parties agreed that the intent is to come up with an agreement in principle that could then form part of any Memorandum of Settlement at the district level. The process would be similar to the Framework Letter of Understanding from the 2006 round of negotiations.

We will report further to districts on the discussions that took place today. Further meetings have been set for August 16 and 17.

New Board Members

We would like to extend a warm welcome to two new government representatives on our Board of Directors: Paul Straszak, President and CEO of the Public Sector Employers' Council; and Claire Avison, Executive Director, Governance & Independent Schools, Ministry of Education.

Both Paul and Claire bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to our Board and we very much appreciate their contributions.

Symposium 2011

The BCPSEA Symposium 2011 is scheduled for Thursday, October 27 and Friday, October 28 at The Sutton Place Hotel, 845 Burrard Street, Vancouver, BC. The program for both days will run from 8:30 – 4:30, with registration opening at 8:00 on October 27. The preliminary program will be distributed shortly — we are sure you will find this to be an informative and engaging event and look forward to seeing you there!

Looking Ahead

As we look forward to our vacations and the start of a new school year, on behalf of the BCPSEA Board I would like to extend our sincere thanks to the BCPSEA staff, and all school district staff, for the work they do in support of public education in this province.

As always, we are faced with ongoing and emerging challenges. As Chair, I am committed to working with each board to ensure that BCPSEA is a responsive and effective employers' association. It's integral to keep the lines of communication open between boards and the Board of Directors. I am available, as is any member of our Board, to speak with you or meet with you on matters of interest or concern.

And remember to check our [website](#) often for information and updates on bargaining, events, and our other service areas.

All the best,



*Melanie Joy, Chair
Board of Directors*