

BCPSEA Meets With BCTF to Discuss Bargaining Structure

Following a series of meetings and exchanges of correspondence, the provincial parties met yesterday to discuss their views on an approach to this round of bargaining.

The BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) confirmed that they already have in place a bargaining plan that was developed internally through a process that took over two and a half years. Part of this bargaining plan includes obtaining a substantial increase in the number of issues to be bargained locally.

"The structure of bargaining **will** be put on the table," emphasized BCTF president Susan Lambert. In the past, she has stated that "everything except wages, benefits, hours of work and paid leaves" needs to be bargained locally. Yesterday she expanded on this statement by noting that this should include local negotiation of collective agreement language on class size and composition

John Wadge, the head of labour relations for the BCTF, was recently quoted in the *Teacher* magazine:

"There is a lot at stake in these upcoming negotiations and members have told us they are determined to make improvements in key areas such as salaries, benefits, preparation time, class size and composition, teacher workload and a plethora of other local provisions that haven't been properly updated in two decades."

With these two positions in mind, the BCTF advised us that they maintain their view that the parties should enter into a mid-contract negotiation to expand local bargaining. Concerns over funding of items to now be negotiated locally would be something that the BCTF intends to address through direct talks with the provincial government. This would include funding of locally negotiated provisions on class size and composition.

BCPSEA has always indicated a willingness to look at the most constructive ways in which to ensure all matters are addressed and has identified the following principles that should guide the parties in examining this issue and finding a process that:

- is constructive for both parties
- minimizes the possibility of disruption and harm to local relationships
- is sustainable for both parties
- is cost effective with limited duplication of effort and cost
- is efficient
- is best able to address issues unique to one district or region.

BCPSEA has also proposed that in order to begin this process, one possible approach would be for the provincial parties to:

- identify all matters at issue
- identify matters unique to one district or region
- develop a process to address such matters subject to the principles above.

In response to the BCTF call for immediate renegotiation of the provincial–local split of issues, BCPSEA further proposed that the parties should engage the assistance of a third party to examine issues which may need to be addressed within a local or other context and discuss potential solutions against the principles identified above. This proposal was rejected outright

At present, the BCTF is maintaining that it has a bargaining plan in place (including the intended split of local vs. provincial issues) and that there is no need to discuss appropriate principles for reviewing the current split of issues, nor any need for an outside facilitator to assist the parties in reviewing the issues. BCPSEA will continue to propose an examination of all the issues at hand based on the above principles with no predetermined outcome.

It is likely boards will face coordinated pressure to support local bargaining “for the sake of the local relationship.” While this request may come from the union local, the campaign to do so will be centrally managed by the BCTF.

Questions

BCPSEA can provide additional information regarding previous rounds of bargaining as well as more detailed information for boards to consider when discussing the question of local vs. provincial bargaining. Please contact your BCPSEA labour relations liaison for details. In addition, BCPSEA will be sending to districts responses and clarifications to any new BCTF statements or publications in the coming weeks in order to assist boards with this potentially controversial matter.