

From the Chair



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By E-mail: Three Pages

Representative Council: Boards of Education Affirm Support

As you know, BCPSEA held a Representative Council on Monday, October 3 in Vancouver. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an update on the state of negotiations with the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF), hear about the effects of the BCTF Phase 1 strike in districts, and discuss how best to move negotiations forward.

Trustees expressed their deep concern about the teacher strike, its negative effect on students, parents and administrative staff, and its potential to carry on indefinitely in its current form. In fact, several local teachers' union presidents have recently been quoted in various media that the Phase 1 teacher strike "could go on forever."

This was a very valuable meeting for trustees and for your BCPSEA Board. It is important to hear from each other and share our experiences. We heard that the BCTF strike is having different effects in different districts. We also understand the importance of the local relationship between boards and their local teachers' unions and how that relationship is being challenged through the BCTF strike action.

After a positive and productive discussion, trustees provided overwhelming support to the BCPSEA Board of Directors to make the necessary decisions regarding the nature and timing of employer response, with the intent of placing counter pressure on the BCTF to get serious at the bargaining table. We also recognize that the support was not unanimous and will reflect on all that we heard. The Board will make thoughtful choices in the coming days and are gratified with the support expressed by trustees for the Board and the bargaining team. We will continue to be diligent in our communications with you as events evolve and will ensure that we provide understanding of any decisions made and the underlying rationale.

It was interesting to note the media and BCTF preoccupation, both before and after our Representative Council, with the notion of a lockout. It's probably not surprising, though, given that the "controversial" tends to attract the most attention. Although lockout as one of the tools available to an employer under the *Labour Relations Code* was referenced in our [technical discussion paper](#) distributed to boards in preparation for the Representative Council, specific options, including lockout, were not a subject of discussion at the meeting. We will continue our efforts to properly focus the discussion on the real matters at issue.

The BCTF has said the strike is designed to have minimal effect on students, and that the strike is relieving teachers of administrative burdens so they can focus on teaching. That position is disingenuous. Many of the withdrawn duties are fundamental to the teacher-parent-student relationship, including teacher meetings with parents, administering and supervising tests, and assessment and report cards. Strikes, by their very nature, are intended to be disruptive; this strike is disruptive.

We are therefore calling on the BCTF to refrain from escalating their strike and ask them to ensure that teachers will provide report cards at the upcoming report card period. Report cards are a critical communication for parents and students to determine student progress and identify areas where assistance may be needed. Students and parents rely on the valuable information contained in report cards to ensure students have the most successful school year possible.

Productive Negotiations Still Our Goal

Our objective is to achieve a negotiated collective agreement with the BCTF, as we were able to do in 2006. However, we have been at the bargaining table since March 1, negotiations have moved at a glacial pace, and the BCTF is on strike. The BCTF continues to maintain \$2.1 billion of proposals on the table — an unrealistic approach at any time and particularly during a net zero compensation mandate period when two-thirds of other public sector employees have settled under that mandate. If other public sector unions and employers can settle under the mandate, there is no reason why BCPSEA and the BCTF should not be able to do the same.

BCTF Political and Media Campaign

The BCTF continues to devote considerable time and energy to their media campaign. We are calling on the BCTF to devote the same time and energy to meaningful discussions at the bargaining table.

We noted with interest today several media reports arising from the BCTF press conference this morning that the BCTF is blaming BCPSEA for the lack of progress in bargaining:

The president of the BC Teachers' Federation is blaming the BC Public School Employers' Association for the lack of progress at the bargaining table. Susan Lambert says while teachers have made concessions, the employer is refusing. (CFJC TV, Kamloops, Wednesday, October 5, 2011)

We are very surprised to hear that BCTF President Susan Lambert is claiming the BCTF has made "concessions." The BCTF has made no "concessions" at the table. We can only surmise that Ms. Lambert is referring to one very minor amendment to an unachievable proposal — a leave proposal that doesn't align with provisions in any collective agreement in any part of the public sector. That is not a "concession."

Both parties are responsible to work hard at the bargaining table to conclude a collective agreement. Rather than ascribing blame for the stalled negotiations and attempting to negatively characterize BCPSEA, we would hope that the BCTF would temper its political and media campaign and engage in meaningful collective bargaining.

One media report today put the bargaining context in frank terms:

Randene Neill: So, once again, Keith, it just shows how far apart the two sides are. What hope is there that they will agree on anything at this point?

Keith Baldrey: I don't think there's any hope whatsoever. It's just hard to see. First of all, on the contract talks, the employer estimates what the teachers are looking for at \$2 billion, more than what's currently used to pay teachers. Now you've got this class composition problem. The government's offering \$165 million over three years. The teachers want more than \$300 million in a single year. Faced with also some harsh economic realities out there...The world economy is on the brink of disaster, which has enormous and dire implications for the BC government and the BC budget. It would be very lucky to meet its deficit target this year given what's going on around the world. To expect, or to reasonably hope, if you're the teachers...To think that a government, any government, is going to increase its deficit by more than another \$1 billion or \$2 billion to appease one group of the public sector workforce is completely unrealistic. It's not going to happen.

So, again, we're inching towards an imposed settlement on the teachers — after the government can demonstrate it has consulted with the teachers' union at every turn. If the Teachers' Federation doesn't want to negotiate, that's fine, but the courts have made the ruling the government has to consult, and if the government can show it is consulting or attempting to consult, it's unlikely any

other court is going to throw out a settlement that the government will inevitably impose on the BC Teachers' Federation. (Global BC Noon News, October 5, 12:03 pm)

It's also important to note that in previous rounds of bargaining, we've seen the "whose side are you on" phase. Local teachers' unions come to individual trustees and boards of education with what is presented as a simple choice — do you support your teachers or do you support "the other side"? We are starting to see that now. It's truly an issue of clarity. What are the issues, what is the bargaining context, and what is a realistic zone of settlement? Everything else is posturing and politics, neither of which are particularly helpful and are divisive in communities.

BCPSEA will continue to actively pursue productive negotiations at the table. Ultimately, a negotiated collective agreement is in everyone's interests — the interests of boards of education, teachers, parents, and students.

Stay in Touch

School Trustees care deeply about our public education system, our employees, and our students, who deserve the very best education experience possible. Please don't hesitate to contact any member of your [Board](#) or [staff](#) for information or discussion as you deal with issues in your districts.

Information and updates on BCPSEA–BCTF bargaining can be found on our website at www.bcpsea.bc.ca. In addition, we introduced the *Monday monitor* a few weeks ago — the purpose of the *monitor* is to provide a concise overview of the week's events and what is anticipated in the coming week. We've received positive feedback to date — let me know what you think...

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