

# From the Chair



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By E-mail: Two Pages

## Congratulations!

On behalf of the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) Board of Directors, we offer our sincere congratulations to all those who participated in school trustee elections on November 19. For new and returning trustees, you are about to embark on, or return to, the gratifying and challenging role of trusteeship in public education. For those who did not run again or who were not successful this time, we hope that you found your experiences rewarding.

We would also like to take this opportunity to extend a special thanks to our colleague Ron Christensen of School District No. 6 (Rocky Mountain), who did not run for re-election. Ron is retiring from trusteeship after serving 24 years on the Rocky Mountain board and its predecessor board. Ron also took an active role at the provincial level, serving as chair of many provincial committees through the BC School Trustees Association and BCPSEA, including successive terms as Director and Chair of the BCPSEA Board. Ron's contributions to public education in the province are extensive, and we have all benefitted from his experience and wisdom. Ron will remain on our Board until elections at the BCPSEA Annual General Meeting in January.

## BCPSEA–BCTF Bargaining

As you know, the BCPSEA and BCTF bargaining teams have now engaged in 56 negotiating sessions since bargaining began on March 1, 2011; the BCTF commenced its Phase 1 strike on the first day of school; very little substantive progress has been made; the BCTF maintains compensation improvements of approximately \$2.1 billion on the table; and BCTF and local teachers' union representatives have stated on multiple occasions that they have every intention of continuing their strike action (although BCTF President Susan Lambert has also stated there are no plans to escalate to Phase 2 at this time). Just a reminder that the class size consultations arising from the BC Supreme Court decision in April are the subject of a separate table and are not the subject of discussions at the bargaining table or the BCTF Phase 1 strike.

In an attempt to focus discussion at the table in order to conclude this round of bargaining, on November 22 BCPSEA tabled [a comprehensive package of proposals](#). The package includes 15 proposals; further, we have withdrawn eight proposals from the package initially tabled in June as a signal of good faith and our desire to conclude a collective agreement. Our discussion paper, [BCPSEA-BCTF At the Table 2011: What's Happening, What's Next](#) outlines the context and rationale underlying our proposals.

We also asked the BCTF to consider a similar approach — drop some proposals of lesser priority and work with us to narrow the agenda. It's important to note that our package is not a "final offer" — it's designed to focus on our key issues. Unfortunately, the BCTF responded by rejecting our package of proposals, reiterating that all of their current proposals are a priority and they will not drop any of them, and rejecting the net zero compensation mandate, telling us we need to go back to government for a new mandate that addresses their proposals. Although the government has repeatedly said they will

not alter the mandate, the BCTF continues to hold the view that they should not be required to settle under the same mandate as so many other public sector unions have done already.

Again, it's important to note that there is room to manoeuvre under the net zero mandate. For example, in one sector, a small change to annual vacation entitlement was negotiated with the savings allocated to wage increases for some employees. The parties will annually assess the savings over the life of the agreement and if more savings are realized, they will be allocated to other initiatives. This is but one example of how the employer and the union were able, by working together, to address a priority issue within the mandate.

The BCTF also continue to dispute our costing of their proposals. This week their spokesperson emphasized their view that our costing is unrealistically high and intended to discredit their proposals. We reminded the BCTF that we shared with them our methodology and that our original invitation to jointly work through the costing of their proposals remains in place. We further noted that in our view our cost estimates are an accurate representaton of their broad proposals. Despite their criticism, the BCTF has not tabled any costing analysis of its own, nor have they taken us up on our standing offer to work through the costing together.

We will continue to consider and employ strategies at the table to engage the BCTF in meaningful discussion.

## The Rhetoric Escalates

The rhetoric around bargaining away from the table remains an ongoing challenge. Public statements in the media, on twitter, and on blog posts, for example, by BCTF and local teachers' union representatives and some other BCTF members, tend to focus on negative labels and mischaracterizations.

Bargaining should typically include discussions and the related concessions, compromises, trade-offs, and back and forth that leads to a negotiated agreement reflective of the current realities and the interests of the parties. However, any employer proposal or position is often vilified with labels such as "contract stripping," "concessions," "disrespectful," "undemocratic," "undermining teachers...." Subsequent commentary tends to build on those characterizations.

A recent example is the response to our November 22 revised package of proposals. A member of the BCTF bargaining team promptly dismissed our move as "19<sup>th</sup> century labour relations," including references to the "elimination of rights for employees and almost total control for management." A letter to the editor from a local teachers' union representative stated that "[BCPSEA] have brought language that would completely dismantle the collect(ive) agreements we have negotiated over the past 30 years or so."

We encourage you to access the [information and resources](#) on the BCPSEA website for accurate information on the state of bargaining and related issues, including the discussion paper that outlines the rationale for our proposals (as referenced on page one). Rather than continued rhetoric and posturing, a negotiated collective agreement can only be concluded through meaningful, focused discussions at the bargaining table.

## Upcoming Meetings

BCPSEA will be conducting an orientation session for new trustees at the upcoming BC School Trustees Association 2011 Trustee Academy December 8-10 in Vancouver. We also look forward to seeing many of you at our Annual General Meeting scheduled for January 20-21 (preceded by our one-day [Symposium](#)). [Preliminary program and registration](#) information was distributed to districts and can be accessed on our website.

## Stay in Touch

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.