

From the Chair



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By E-mail: Two Pages

BCPSEA Symposium and Annual General Meeting

It was great to see so many trustees and district staff at our Symposium and Annual General Meeting (AGM) last weekend. The Board of Directors is gratified with the support expressed by districts. We also extend a warm welcome to Trustee Shirley Wilson of School District No. 34 (Abbotsford), who replaces Ron Christensen on our Board. As most of you know, Ron retired from trusteeship after 24 years of service, including eight years as BCPSEA Board Chair, and the membership expressed to Ron its resounding thanks.

Feedback on the workshop sessions has been overwhelmingly positive, and the delegate discussion on the state of collective bargaining with the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) was thoughtful and helpful to your Board of Directors as we continue to seek ways to engage the BCTF in meaningful bargaining and conclude a negotiated collective agreement.

BCPSEA–BCTF Bargaining

There is no question that this round of bargaining is challenging, and the teacher strike action is taking a toll on staff morale and student learning outcomes in school districts. Your Board is gravely concerned about the negative implications for district staff and the public education system as a whole as the strike goes on with little progress in sight.

As you know, the BCTF unveiled a revised package of proposals at a news conference on January 17. We did not receive the revised package until later that day. This is a particularly troublesome approach, which demonstrates a lack of respect for the bargaining process. Meaningful discussions — true collective bargaining discussions — have to happen at the bargaining table, not in the media.

We were able to have those in-depth and productive discussions with representatives of the K-12 support staff unions, which led to a negotiated framework agreement last month. Those discussions were held away from the glare of the media spotlight — all parties were committed to doing the necessary work and having the tough and frank discussions needed to get to a deal. Winning a public relations campaign was not the goal — rather, the goal was to achieve an agreement to meet the needs of our respective constituents.

Kicked off by the BCTF news conference, there has been media “back and forth” on the revised package and the costing. As we've said before, we shared our costing and methodology with the BCTF and offered to have our staff meet with their staff to review our respective approaches and identify areas of agreement/disagreement. Complicating the issue is the fact that the BCTF have provided very little information on their methodology. Rather than arguing about our costing in the media, the BCTF should take us up on our standing offers to sit together and review the approach to costing; however, they continue to reject our offers to meet on this issue.

But the approach to the costing is not the issue. The issue is that whether we use the BCTF figures — “overall cost” of \$300 million, revised at the bargaining table to \$305 million for the first year, then further revised to \$565 million — or the BCPSEA figures and detailed methodology — \$2.06 billion over the proposed three-year term — we are still well outside the range of settlement achieved in the support staff deal and inconsistent with the net zero compensation mandate...well outside the zone of agreement.

The real issue is that we could be having discussions on ways to re-adjust the collective agreement — as has been done in other sectors — that yield benefits for the bargaining unit. Review/re-adjustment of sick leave provisions, and health and welfare benefits provisions, are just two examples of areas that could be explored, modernized, standardized, and addressed to re-allocate money within the walls of the agreement. Surely it should be possible to discuss the concepts to see if any options are revealed. But the BCTF has said no to any such discussions.

In fact, at the January 10 bargaining session, the BCTF expressed what they call their “pre-conditions” to achieving a settlement:

- Government dropping the net zero mandate so that BCPSEA can negotiate a substantial wage improvement for teachers.
- Additional improvements in both preparation time and other entitlements for teachers.
- A resolution of the Bill 28 dispute that includes the return of all old class size, class composition and non-enrolling staffing ratio language to the collective agreement along with the right to negotiate improvements in this round of bargaining.
- A significant restructuring of the provincial–local split of issues so that all (or perhaps nearly all) non-*Public Education Labour Relations Act* items can be negotiated at the local level in this round of bargaining.
- The dropping of all employer proposals at the provincial table that they have labeled as “contract stripping” or “concessions” (including those dealing with changes to teacher evaluation, teacher professional growth, post and fill, and benefit trade-offs). A “concession” has come to mean *accept no agreement that would result in the BCTF, any local of the BCTF, or any member of the BCTF losing any provision, term, or benefit that existed under the terms of the previous agreement.*

If they continue to hold to their pre-conditions without examining any options or engaging in meaningful discussion of the employer issues, agreement is unlikely. When bargaining resumes on Wednesday (February 1), BCPSEA will provide a response to the BCTF revised package of proposals. However, given the current context, it seems likely that bargaining will continue at its present pace, with the BCTF media rhetoric and posturing, unless some form of reality check occurs. At some point, the BCTF are going to have to come to grips with the notion that the government’s compensation mandate applies to every union and employer in the public sector; the ministers of education and finance have been clear on that. In addition, public sector unions representing approximately three-quarters of public sector employees have settled under the mandate, including the K-12 support staff unions.

Your Board is considering the options available, as we set out in our paper, [Can We Get There From Here?](#), discussed at last weekend’s AGM. We will continue to keep you informed through our various communications, including the [At the Table](#) reports distributed after every bargaining session.

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.



Melanie Joy, Chair