

Report *from the Chair*

BRITISH COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOL EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATION

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By E-mail: 2 Pages

Teacher–Public School Employer Bargaining 2011: BCTF Local Bargaining Initiative

We are now well into the school year; on the bargaining front, support staff bargaining has begun, albeit slowly, and bargaining with the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) is on the horizon.

As I said in my previous report, bargaining with the BCTF can begin as early as March 2011, with the agreement expiring in June. The backdrop for bargaining will be the compensation mandate, other public sector settlements, and our experiences since the BCTF–BCPSEA negotiated agreement in 2006.

It is also worth reflecting...it has been almost 20 years since local employers and local teacher unions bargained locally...provincial bargaining has been the norm for 16 or so years, and...with these experiences, Vince Ready in his capacity as Industrial Inquiry Commissioner recommended that the model that led to the negotiated agreement in 2006 is the bargaining model that the parties should adopt. There have been five inquiries into bargaining structure over the years and Ready said choose the one that worked! While the government and employers said they accepted his recommendations, the BCTF was less enthusiastic.

The BCTF's most recent comments lead us to again look at structure, with them returning to their long held view that local bargaining is the desired model. As many of you know, BCTF held its Bargaining Conference on October 29-30. They have previously stated that they want to increase the *degree of local bargaining* and, although they haven't provided precise details regarding their desired final outcome, based on their communication to date they appear to want to return most items to local tables.

Your employers' association Board of Directors wants a constructive dialogue and a bargaining approach that focuses on the matters at issue. A more productive approach to the *how and what* of bargaining may be to focus on the issues, their nature, and then on the appropriate forum. Vince Ready's model provides an approach, with principles that need to be incorporated.

You may be approached by your local teachers' association on this matter next week or some time in the future with new information and ideas on the issue stemming from their Bargaining Conference. They may use similar strategies to those they have attempted to use in the past to mobilize support for their position. To varying degrees they may solicit support for a return to local bargaining by leveraging the current local relationship with statements such as, "*If you respect teachers...*" or "*If you value our relationship...*"

Boards of education have spoken clearly in response to our recent bargaining survey and other discussions in forums such as regional meetings — there is no desire on the part of boards to move to expanded local bargaining. It is generally recognized that the resources required to engage in local bargaining when facing a highly centralized and resourced provincial organization such as the BCTF do not currently exist. For local bargaining to be effective it

would require a considerable investment and that would likely have to come from other areas in the system — potentially at the expense of services to students. Clearly, this is not desirable.

We all share a commitment to developing and maintaining strong relationships. It may be useful to point to the reality that the provincial parties, BCPSEA and BCTF, have successfully negotiated a provincial collective agreement and have also worked constructively together on many issues provincially since then. When you look at agreements such as the Foundation Skills Assessment protocol from last year, it's clear that both provincial parties recognize that many issues are best addressed in a consistent and coordinated way at the provincial level.

BCPSEA has advised the BCTF that we are committed to finding a way to address issues of concern for both the BCTF and boards in the most efficient and effective manner possible. We have therefore proposed to the BCTF that the best approach is to develop a pilot project or provincial working group to look at a way to explore and assess matters that would best be approached in a coordinated way to avoid duplication and wasted resources, as well as identifying local issues that may be unique and discussing possible approaches in light of our given structure. As such — no action is required by boards of education at this time.

We will keep you informed of the BCTF response. In the meantime, I hope these comments will be helpful if you are approached on this matter.

On behalf of the BCPSEA [Board](#) and [staff](#), we look forward to seeing you at the Symposium next week (November 4-5). Please stay in touch...!



Ron Christensen
Chair