



BC CONFEDERATION OF PARENT ADVISORY COUNCILS

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December 14, 2005

Mr. Vincent L. Ready, Commissioner
Labour Arbitration and Mediation Services Ltd.
#202 – 856 Homer Street,
Vancouver, BC V6B 2W5

Dear Mr. Ready:

Subject: Response to the Industrial Inquiry Commission

The BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) acknowledges that there is a complex bundle of issues associated with teacher collective bargaining in British Columbia and a lengthy history. There are competing interests, competing rights, complex governance issues and structural challenges involved which all affect the process and outcomes of negotiations.

At the 2001 BCCPAC Annual General Meeting, the membership approved a discussion paper titled, *The Role of Parent Advisory Councils in BC Public Schools*. The lack of opportunity to impact negotiations has been identified by Parent Advisory Councils as a barrier to effective PAC involvement in our schools:

“Labour relations and contractual agreements produced educational decisions that are not necessarily founded upon the interests of children. Parents have little opportunity to impact the development of contractual language; they are reliant upon their school district administration and media to communicate their viewpoint and exert their influence.” (The Role of Parent Advisory Councils in BC Public Schools pg 7, #4)

We are pleased therefore, to be asked to respond to your inquiries regarding the Terms of Reference for the commission from the perspective of parents. In a lengthier response we replied to Don Wright’s 60 Questions on the subject of Teacher Bargaining in June 2004. Attached is a copy of our original response.

BCCPAC members are very concerned about how the last two rounds of talks have negatively affected our children, both as a result of the extremely strained relationships that they produce and the disruption to educational services to students. We need a new approach in collective bargaining because historically the old methods have allowed schools to be arenas to further both the employee’s and employer’s point of view, with students and parents being used as pawns in the negotiating process. Pressure tactics by these groups can create tensions in school climate, which in turn affect the ability of Parent Advisory Councils, School Planning Councils and Student councils to operate autonomously, effectively and in a truly balanced, respectful, democratic fashion. It is imperative, therefore, that the deliberations of adults do not adversely affect the daily operations of healthy and supportive school communities or the educational outcomes for students.

Schools are far more than industrial sites producing “widgets” and based on production numbers; they are communities set up by society in order to support and assist children in growing into caring, capable and independent adults. Parents have entrusted public schools to carry out this function, but only if the school acts in the best interests of the children it serves. For most parents, the public education system is a

monopoly service that holds little choice for students within their communities. BCCPAC believes that this makes education a unique, sensitive and critically important public service. All parties involved in negotiating contracts for teachers must keep in mind that the reason schools exist is to serve children and their families and ultimately society at large. This primary purpose must be upheld, to the satisfaction of the public, if negotiations are to be deemed successful.

Don Wright's, *Voice, Accountability and Dialogue: Recommendations for an Improved Collective Bargaining System for Teacher Contracts in BC*, recommendations reflect **three key principles**:

- *Teachers must have an effective voice in influencing the terms and conditions of their employment.*
- *There must be sufficient transparency so that proper accountability can be established.*
- *We need to find the ability to engage in true dialogue about how to make a good school system even better. (pg 2)*

BCCPAC can support these principles. Teachers should be involved in decision that affect them and the more the public understands what is being decided and why, the clearer the accountability. It will only be through respectful conversations, shared decision making and willingness to mutually find solutions that all will win, including most importantly students.

Recommendations one and two are about where the bargaining should take place. BCCPAC agreed that BC should maintain a two-tier bargaining approach where the major cost items continue to be negotiated at the provincial table with clarification of which decisions are to be made at the provincial and district level in order to best serve local school communities and the students within.

There are currently a number of processes that devolve responsibility for planning and resource allocation to the local schools and School Planning Councils. It is important that the legislated responsibilities of District Parent Advisory Councils, Parent Advisory Councils and School Planning Councils not be hindered by any collective agreements and must be considered if there are to be any changes to province-wide or district-level contract language.

Recommendations three, four, and five are about who should do the negotiating. BCCPAC agrees that BCPSEA (BC Public School Employers' Association), made up of representatives of the provincial government and local school boards, and the BCTF should be the bargaining agents for teacher contracts in BC.

Recommendations six, seven, and eight are about the process and timeline for the negotiations. The report states that:

...the process has been designed to give effective voice to teachers through a combination of independent third party evaluation and transparency and objective presentation of positions to the public. It has also been designed to provide both sides to negotiations incentives to engage in good faith negotiations. Finally, the process has been designed to provide more transparency to the public through an objective source so that the public is in a better position to hold the parties accountable for outcomes. (pg 38)

In our June 2004 submission to Don Wright, BCCPAC supported a fair, respectful, and effective process that is accountable to the public.

Recommendation nine is about setting up public policy discussions, parallel to the collective bargaining table, to establish agreements on cost effective approaches to improving working and learning conditions

in BC's public schools. Both the employers and teacher representatives should be drawn from individuals who are not involved in the collective bargaining process.

A very important first step prior to negotiations will be determining what these policy discussions will include and need to involve all education partners and members of the public.

In BCCPAC's response to Don Wright, June 30, 2004 it was stated that:

It is important to define what items should be decided within the collective bargaining process and which items should stay in the realm of public policy. The ramifications for children need to be considered when deciding in what context decisions will be made. (BCCPAC's Response to the Commission to Review Collective Bargaining in BC, pg 11, #49)

Recommendations ten, eleven, and twelve are about the transition to one consistent provincial contract from the many within school districts and the timing and development of local district agreements. BCCPAC agrees with the establishment of one provincial master agreement.

In conclusion the report states:

Even if fully implemented, these recommendations will not significantly improve the state of bargaining unless there is an attitudinal and behavioral change on both sides. (pg 55)

This will require a real dialogue—genuine attempt to arrive at mutual understandings—between teachers and the employee group (i.e. government, trustees, and school administrators). The sooner we start on that, the better. (pg 56)

We couldn't agree more.

Mainly, it is important that everyone keep the children the schools serve, foremost in their mind when bargaining. Agree from the beginning that everyone needs to talk with mutual respect and attempt to consider different positions and needs as fair and reasonable adults. Model the behavior that you wish our children to adopt.

In conclusion, students and parents will be affected directly by the outcomes of this commission and subsequent negotiations and appreciate being included in developing solutions that keep children at the heart of the process.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information to you for your consideration. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,



Kim Howland, President

Attachment (1)