

COPACS

The Confederation of Parents' Advisory Councils of Saanich

November 4th, 2019

Dear Parents and Families of SD 63,

We are encouraged that CUPE 441 and the District are back at the table and are actively working to get our kids back in school.

COPACS respects that the bargaining process is fundamentally between the employer and the employees. We still maintain our confidence in the two parties ability to develop a fair and reasonable contract together.

However, despite both sides actually agreeing on the underlying need to address wage parity and both having a vested interest in doing so, we find ourselves entering week two of our schools being closed. Also troubling for COPACS, beyond the obvious hardship and stress, is the damage and strain occurring on the relationships among all of us in our school communities the longer negotiations are deadlocked.

Like most issues in Education, it is complicated. SD 63 is one of many employers across provincial public service sectors that is currently renewing contracts with unionized staff. The provincial government is ultimately responsible to taxpayers for the costs and service delivery outcomes for the programs it provides. To manage this process so that it is fair and consistent and balances cost with service provision needs and outcomes, the Province created the 2019 Sustainable Services Negotiating Mandate (SSNM)¹. This is the overarching framework within which the province will negotiate contracts with all of its unionised employees across sectors.

Within the K-12 Public Education sector, there is an added layer of complexity. The Provincial Framework Agreement (PFA) is a framework created by the contract negotiating body for the Ministry of Education (BCPSEA-- British Columbia Public School Employers Association) and the K-12 Presidents Council (comprised of local Cupe presidents and other support staff unions (not all support staff in the province are represented by CUPE)).² Unlike teachers, the main contract negotiations are done at the local level. The document makes recommendations on various issues specific to k-12 Education system that members of the Presidents Council are being asked to take back and incorporate into their local bargaining processes.

This seems to be the stumbling block. On the one hand, CUPE411 is saying publicly that it is hopeful it can reach a deal within the parameters of SSNM given there are provisions within the mandate to address wage parity concerns and that precedent has been set by the province providing funding to redress wage inequities for other sectors. In terms of the PFA, our understanding of the Union's position

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<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/employment-business/employers/public-sector-employers/public-sector-bargaining/mandates-and-agreements>

² <http://bcpsea.bc.ca/support-staff/collective-agreements/>

is that the framework does not adequately address its members' concerns. Although, the PFA has clauses in it specifically on wage parity, the processes undertaken to address it, do not appear to be moving forward fast enough according to the Union. For them, the issues are so serious that support workers can no longer wait for the process to play out well after the deadline for negotiations.

On the other hand, the District feels bound by the terms and resources associated with the PFA. The Board has some discretion and autonomy related to tailoring service provision at the local level but is ultimately accountable too and essentially an extension of the Ministry of Education. Our understanding of the District's position is that it has been told that BCPSEA will not authorise any negotiations outside of the PFA.

Of course, there is always more detail and complexity but in its simplest terms, this is COPACS' understanding of why we are where we are today. Both sides want to address wage parity issues. Both sides want a solution and importantly nobody wants schools closed. The Union feels that the current offer framed by the PFA will not do it. They feel that the situation is so desperate that they have no choice but to use the tools available to them at this moment. The District feels that it does not have the ability to negotiate outside of the PFA and is doing everything it can think of within that framework.

Where does that leave parents? As mentioned earlier, contract negotiations per se are not the purvey of parents as ultimately they are between the employer and employee. However, it is clear that in this situation there are issues of concern to parents outside of the two parties' ability to find a deal.

Specifically:

- The difficulty at the bargaining table is not of the making of the local parties involved and to be successful, will likely involve some leadership and movement at the provincial level.
- Both parties agree on the importance and desire for addressing wage parity issues for support workers in our district.
- In the short term, school closures are taking a significant toll on children, families and everyone else within the school system.
- In the long term, wage parity issues currently are and will continue to have significant long term impacts on our children's learning environment if not addressed.

COPACS' appreciates parents frustration and anger in trying to understand a complex situation that is having such a negative impact on them and their families. We are calling on parents to share their concerns and experiences with everyone involved and actively write to the province.

We are asking parents to write to the provincial government for their support in providing our Board the tools and resources it needs in fulfilling its mandate of providing a quality inclusive education for all of our children. It is clear that unresolved wage parity issues in SD 63 are having and will continue to have a significant impact on the learning environment of our children.

Yours for the children...

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