

Two Proposals to Address Class Size and Teacher Workload: How Do They Differ?

Both BCPSEA and the BCTF have already tabled substantial proposals regarding “class size” at the bargaining table. The approach of each party to addressing teacher workload issues is, however, quite different. The purpose of this *For The Record* is to identify the differences between the proposals, and specifically address the BCPSEA position that we cannot support the continuation of 1980s-based language in the collective agreement. Copies of [each party's proposal](#) can be accessed on the BCPSEA website.

❖ **“But Justice Griffin told us the old language must continue in the new Collective Agreement.”**

Justice Griffin’s decision placed no restriction on the parties bargaining new language going forward and, in fact, suggested that an overall resolution to the matter should be negotiated by the parties.

Teachers “...have had certain language returned to their collective agreement retroactively. This does not guarantee that the language is clad in stone, as it can and likely will need to be the subject of ongoing collective bargaining...” [para. 679].

Regardless of the outcome of the appeal process, the parties are free to immediately bargain new language for the next collective agreement. BCPSEA has proposed language that reflects appropriate workload protections for teachers in a 21st century context.

❖ **Why does BCPSEA oppose the return of fixed class size/class composition limits and non-enrolling teacher staffing ratios to the collective agreement?**

1. Fixed class size ratios do not allow schools the flexibility to appropriately adjust class sizes (up or down) to best meet the needs of students using available resources. Even though student–teacher ratios have not increased since 2002, we can currently “flex” individual student enrollment class by class to better meet their needs. Fixed limits are not designed to meet the educational needs of students — quite the opposite.
2. Fixed limits on special education student enrollment in individual classes are discriminatory and work against long-held efforts toward integration. It would be inappropriate to deny a student access to a class based solely on their abilities. A number of human rights concerns are raised by arbitrary barriers to access.
3. Fixed limits and defined staffing ratios take away from elected officials the ability to make significant decisions about how classes/schools should be organized and which teaching positions best meet the needs of students. Guidelines for such decisions are best defined in board or provincial policy, and final decisions as to appropriate allocations are best determined by elected officials and senior educators in districts.
4. Positive working relationships at the school and district level are best developed through respectful collaboration and consultation. All educators should have the opportunity to engage in consultation as to how the needs of their students can best be met while maintaining an appropriate workload. Current Learning Improvement Fund (LIF) processes have been especially

successful in this regard, while also providing significant additional funding to address identified classroom/teacher concerns. The LIF will be increased by 25% to \$75 million for 2014-2015.

5. The true purpose of class size limits and teacher staffing ratios is to ensure more teachers are hired (even if boards do not identify this as their first priority) and to drive funding for this purpose. These limits and ratios take the decisions out of the hands of elected officials and put them into the collective agreement. Available funding should be allocated by the individuals accountable for it and directed where it is best needed for students. Set ratios assume the same needs in all school districts regardless of local circumstances.
 6. Every school district in BC has made significant progress toward the personalization of learning for all students, not just special needs students. The return of 1980s collective agreement language would be counter-productive in this regard. Fixed class structures and teacher work assignments that were in place over 30 years ago are no longer appropriate. The sector is telling us that schools should now be organized to meet the varied needs of individual students.
- ❖ BCPSEA has tabled a fair and respectful opening proposal in bargaining that addresses teacher concerns about having a voice in determining their working conditions, including workload issues. Our proposal provides:
1. Inclusion of specific language in the collective agreement to address teacher workload issues.
 2. An annual dedicated district-based fund (based on a modest percentage of yearly operating budgets) to address workload issues raised by teachers (the percentage will be determined in current bargaining).
 3. School-based consultation between teachers and their principal (as well as the union) prior to the start of each school year to recommend the allocation of resources to address teacher workload issues. Further consultation and recommendations would also occur in September to address emergent workload issues.
 4. Consultation between the union president and the superintendent on an initial district resource allocation plan, which would consider the issues raised by teachers and principals. The plan could incorporate any number of actions intended to address teacher workload concerns, including but not limited to the reassignment of classes, school organization restructuring, the addition of teaching or support staff to a school.
 5. Obligations on superintendents to make reasonable efforts to reach agreement with the president of the union local as to the final resource allocation plan to address identified teacher workload issues.
 6. No reduction or discontinuation of current statutory provisions or requirements of the LIF (section 115.2 of the *School Act*) brought about by the implementation of this proposal. The processes set out in our proposed article may, however, be used at the same time to fulfill the processes required by the Regulation.

Meaningful school- and district-based consultation on the distribution of dedicated resources is the most appropriate way to address teacher workload issues in the collective agreement. Teachers are provided with both a defined sum of money to address their needs, and consultation processes that provide the union and individuals with direct input to the allocation of the resource. Boards, in turn, are allowed to retain the ultimate decision-making authority over the organization of schools and student programs, including the ability to make educational decisions that they believe are in the best interests of students.

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