



Bargaining Update

2014 March 11

The VTF local bargaining team met with the employer for two final sessions on 2014 January 30 and February 7. The VTF has long believed in the importance of talking directly to our employer on issues that both parties are familiar with. The spectre of BCPSEA at the provincial table has undermined the process at the local table to freely and fully negotiate our working conditions. That even includes items that fall on the new local list. Frequently the Board has told us that they were not permitted to discuss items with even a theoretical cost. An example: language that included a meeting was deemed to be a cost item which the Board declined to negotiate.

Additionally, the Board continued to maintain that they were not interested in including any new language in the collective agreement and furthermore had been directed not to agree to any items that limited management rights. Clearly, this is a position that inhibits bargaining. Any true negotiations seek to balance the rights of the employer with the rights of the employee. Your bargaining team continues to be committed and passionate about local bargaining, yet this round was littered with unnecessary roadblocks erected by the Board.

Of our original objectives, the Board declared impasse on several. In our last few sessions, we continued to negotiate the few items that remained open for discussion. These included length of term for Consultants, Mentors and Community School Team Teachers, Teacher Input in the Construction of New Schools, a joint statement of commitment to locally developed Aboriginal curriculum and a clarification on the role of the Professional Development Committee.

Consultant and Mentor Positions

We were able to sign a final proposal that provides for improvements on the length of term for Consultant and Mentor positions. Our objective had been to remove the discretionary term for Consultants and Mentors and to extend the term for these members, and we achieved part of this objective in the lengthening of the possible term from three to five years. We continue to believe that the discretionary term for Consultants and Mentors is an unfair condition which does not exist anywhere else in our Collective Agreement but the Board had no interest in eliminating this aspect of the term. Until the advent of the Inner City Re-visioning Report, we had agreement that this extended term (3 years plus 2) would also apply to the CST teachers, but the Board is recommending that these positions be eliminated. We did receive confirmation from the Board that if these positions continue to exist after the budget process that the Consultant and Mentor term limits would apply.

Professional Development

In discussing the joint VBE-VTF Professional Development Committee's right to determine its own mandate, we proposed that this committee should determine what Board-provided opportunities constitute in-service rather than professional development. The VTF has a long history of maintaining a separation of in-service and professional development and we will continue to assert this right through the District Professional Development Committee and the Educational Change Committee.

Aboriginal Education

The VTF also tabled a Letter of Understanding that would jointly commit to Aboriginal Education. Despite the Board's continued statements of support for Aboriginal Education, they refused to even consider signing such an agreement. This is profoundly disappointing and indicates an ongoing disingenuousness in the way these district goals are being pursued.

Development of New Schools

The VTF also sought to achieve a clear process with the employer that would allow for teachers elected by the union to provide input into the development of their new schools. Our experience with the Board over the past few years has been that teacher input has been largely ignored and that the Board has continually made decisions contrary to the pedagogical concerns identified by educators. The Board flatly refused to discuss or to acknowledge the issues which have arisen with new schools built in Vancouver recently. We will continue to advocate on behalf of teacher input and teacher voice on the construction of new schools.

Bargaining Dates

There are no further bargaining dates scheduled. Given that there is currently no local mechanism to apply pressure on the local employer through job action, we are recommending a deeply unsatisfying agreement-in-committee which will be ratified in conjunction with the completion of the Provincial Bargaining process.

One of the most significant changes resulting from our local bargaining will be the return to the existing Collective Agreement language on Post and Fill. We could not, in all good conscience, agree to the Board's unsatisfactory language on Post and Fill. The Board chose to disregard five years of collaborative work with the Union in which both parties agreed to a made-in-Vancouver solution for Post and Fill. It was unclear what the rationale was for the concessions tabled by the Board.

Although the overall results from this round were very disappointing, the VTF was proud to represent teachers at the table with well-supported arguments in pursuit of the objectives ratified by our membership. Our struggle to improve our working conditions will continue as we fight for better Collective Language and a more effective bargaining process.

In solidarity,

The VTF Bargaining Team

Jill Barclay

Rory Brown

Dan Graves

Trish Mugford

Jody Polukoshko

John Silver

Robyn Wharram