

## **CUPE BC 2023 CONVENTION K-12 COMMITTEE REPORT**

### **Violence in the Workplace**

Violence in the workplace is one of the biggest challenges facing the K-12 Sector. The CUPE BC K-12 Committee encourages locals to continue efforts to educate members on their rights and responsibilities with respect to reporting incidents of violence in the workplace, irrespective of whether an injury occurs. When members report all incidents, locals are better able to work with their employers and through Joint Health and Safety Committees to prevent future workplace violence, ensure appropriate and timely responses to incidents when they occur, and re-evaluate prevention practices in order to provide safer workplaces for all.

Educating members on their rights and responsibilities under WorkSafeBC legislation and regulations is a key action in addressing workplace violence, as is holding employers accountable. A recurrent theme we hear from locals is that members are often discouraged from reporting incidents of violent behaviour. We know that failure to report does nothing to improve worker safety or learning conditions for students.

The Committee also encourages locals to advocate for workers to be consulted in the development, implementation, and evaluation of individual safe work instructions, known as worker safety plans. WorkSafeBC requires employers to provide workers with time to review these plans, but it does not require employee input or consultation in their development. Workers are best positioned to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the safety plans meant to protect them, so the workers directly affected should be given the opportunity to contribute to the creation and revision of their respective plans. A key resource for K-12 locals for this work are the [K-12 Workplace Violence Prevention Tools](#) available on the BCPSEA website.

### Recruitment and Retention

As is the case in many sectors, the K-12 system faces an ongoing struggle to recruit and retain workers. From trades workers to education assistants, custodians, and youth and child support workers, school districts across the province are struggling to keep positions filled. Unfilled postings result in increased workloads for existing workers, which affects the support provided to students and families they serve. The recent wage increases and labour market adjustments achieved through bargaining are a step in the right direction, but are insufficient to address the scale of worker shortages. Funding increases to expand training spaces for trades programs in public post-secondary institutions is one measure the BC government can take to effectively address the shortage of trades workers. Addressing low wages in the K-12 system, not only for trades but for many classifications, is another key action that would ensure schools are able to recruit and retain workers.

### Provincial Job Evaluation

Wages in the K-12 sector are inconsistent, not only across the province but within regions as well. A worker in one district may make less than someone in a neighbouring district doing the same or very similar work. A major project to address these disparities is the Provincial Job Evaluation Program, which is close to completing its next major milestone: Phase 3—Job Matching and Data Gathering.

The next steps are for the Support Staff Job Evaluation Steering Committee to finalize a Provincial Job Evaluation Plan and develop an implementation plan. Implementation will begin once all 60 school districts have completed the matching process.

### Childcare

The K-12 Sector has participated in CUPE BC's campaign for public childcare, which seeks a universal model of before- and after-school care delivered through the K-12 system. Public schools have enormous potential to quickly create thousands of urgently needed before- and after-school care spaces. We see real potential for school districts to address recruitment and retention of education assistants (EAs) by staffing before- and after-care programs with those workers who wish to work additional hours on top of their regular part-time positions as EAs.

We urge members to support CUPE BC's Childcare Campaign by using the [action site](#) to send a letter of support to the BC government. We also encourage members to talk to their school districts and trustees about the importance of public, universal, and accessible childcare.

### Education Assistant Credential Standardization

CUPE has advocated for many years to standardize EA credentials as provided by training institutions across the province. Classrooms in BC have become increasingly diverse and complex, and EAs play a vital role in ensuring a safe and inclusive learning environment for students. After CUPE published a [paper](#) in 2021 calling for the government to standardize credentials, CUPE and the Ministry of Education and Child Care formed a working group to assess the current state of EA training in BC. The working group confirmed that training for EAs varies widely from institution to institution, and that there is inconsistency in qualification requirements established by school districts.

As a next step in this work, CUPE BC has called on the Ministry of Education and Child Care to carry out a broad consultation on standardizing EA credentialing to seek input from the various stakeholders in the sector. CUPE K-12 locals and activists will continue advocating for consistent and coherent training to ensure our members enter the public education system equipped with the skills they need to work safely and effectively.

### Member Engagement

During K-12 bargaining, locals worked hard to engage members. Surveys and in-person meetings were organized to help understand members' bargaining priorities, bulletins and member check-ins were coordinated to communicate about the bargaining progress and provide updates, and education sessions and workshops were facilitated to provide strike training and other learning. These methods, plus the ongoing engagement of community allies, were just some of the ways locals ensured members participated in the bargaining process and were able to support their bargaining committees in reaching deals at the table.

While bargaining for 2022-2025 is now complete, we must continue this vital member engagement work to make sure we are ready for the next round. Highlighting the important work our members do to provide a safe, diverse, and accessible learning environment is one way we can build awareness of our members' work and generate support and solidarity among members and the broader community alike. Mapping our membership, talking to members about their priorities, and taking action together to address workplace issues make our membership stronger, ready to stand together for the next round of bargaining.

### Bargaining

The 2019-2022 Provincial Framework Agreement (PFA) for the K-12 Sector saw historic gains for workers, with a 10.74% wage increase over the next three years, up to 2.25% in cost of living allowance increase, and a \$0.25 flat wage increase in the first year. Year 2 of the agreement will see the full wage protection triggered, and members will receive the full 6.75% wage increase starting July 1, 2023. This is the most substantial public sector wage increase in decades. The PFA also allocated significant funds for collective agreement improvements at local tables, and this is in addition to the provincial settlement. This additional funding meant that locals had the ability to make real and meaningful gains for their members on issues of local importance, from increased hours for education assistants, to labour market adjustments supporting improved recruitment and retention. These successes at local bargaining tables should be credited to the strength and hard work of local bargaining committees, and their ability to work with members to identify needs, and then have those needs directly addressed.

The historic wage increases would not have been possible without the leadership provided by CUPE, both the BC Region and CUPE BC, and the K-12 Provincial Bargaining Committee. Equally, this settlement would not have been possible without the solidarity developed and expressed between HEU, BCGEU, HSA and the BCTF, which allowed the united voice of public sector workers to stand firm, demanding a wage increase that recognized the rising cost of living, and refusing to settle for anything less. The results at the bargaining table are a testament to what we can achieve together when we stand united in solidarity.

### Resolutions

The K-12 Committee has submitted resolutions to address many of the issues we face in the K-12 Sector: to support members with information on the right to refuse unsafe work; to urge the BC government to develop strategies to improve safety in the workplace; to address challenges in trade worker recruitment and retention; and to lobby the provincial government to change the K-12 funding model to ensure we have a fully funded public education system with a fair funding model so that schools meet the needs of our communities.

### Resources

BC Public School Employers' Association

*OHS Resources & Tools - BC Public School Employers' Association*

<https://bcpsea.bc.ca/sector-services/occupational-health-safety/resources-tools>

## K-12 COMMITTEE REPORT

Canadian Union of Public Employees

*Job Evaluation – CUPE K-12 BC*

<https://bcschools.cupe.ca/category/job-evaluation/>

BC Public School Employers' Association

*Job Evaluation Committee - BC Public School Employers' Association*

<https://bcpsea.bc.ca/support-staff/collective-agreement-administration/job-evaluation-committee/>

Canadian Union of Public Employees

*BC Families Need Affordable, Public Childcare for School-aged Kids*

<https://www.publicchildcarenow.ca>

Canadian Union of Public Employees

*Position Paper: Standard Credentials for Education Assistants*

<https://bcschools.cupe.ca/files/2021/03/Position-Paper-Standard-Credentials.pdf>

Respectfully submitted:

Amber Leonard, Chair

Jeanette Beauvillier, Co-Chair

Teri Wishlow, Recording Secretary

Dave Bollen

Tammy Carter

Jennie Copeland

Anita Early

Daun Frederickson Caralyn Hoffman

Shona Kelly

Jane Massy

Tammy Murphy

Andrew Schneider

Kirsten Daub, Staff Advisor

Greg Taylor, Communications

Maja Bohinc, Administrative Assistant

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