



## **CUPE BC 2022 CONVENTION COLLEGES COMMITTEE REPORT**

The CUPE BC Colleges Committee is comprised of Local Presidents or designates from BC colleges, institutes, and special-purpose universities, who are appointed by the CUPE BC Executive Board.

Pandemic-related issues, mental health, governance, inclusion, Truth and Reconciliation, access to post-secondary education, and inadequate funding continue to be significant challenges faced by post-secondary workers. As a sectoral committee, our challenges are ongoing, and resolutions are difficult to attain in the short-term. However, we continue to advocate for affordable and accessible public post-secondary education for current and future generations of workers and students.

### **COVID-19**

CUPE members in BC colleges are still very much affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Most CUPE college members who were working remotely during the height of the pandemic returned to campus in the summer of 2021. Colleges across the province did not have a common approach to returning staff to the workplace. Some colleges adapted rotational working days to increase physical distancing, some have returned to full onsite capacity, and some have introduced hybrid work models, allowing employees to choose to remain working remotely on a full or part-time basis. Some institutions that have adapted to hybrid or remote working agreements are inconsistent on how it is being regulated or approved. These inconsistencies on how remote work is being approved/denied is causing animosity and confusion amongst staff.

As variants continue to emerge, so do concerns from CUPE members in the college sector. At the time of writing this report, the Omicron variant appears to have peaked

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and we see case numbers declining. The increases in absences due to illness at its peak has had a lasting effect, from the strains on the staff who must backfill the employees who are absent. The increases in workload on people who already have heavy workloads is causing increased stress, leading to fatigue and frustration. Also, some members are afraid to come to work or perform duties that they believe to be unsafe due to their personal fear of catching the virus. After 2 years of lockdown, members have pandemic fatigue. However, Covid-19 is still circulating and the chance of catching the virus, and spreading it to vulnerable family members, has not been eliminated. In summary, the pandemic is still very much a concern for the sector and the front-line employees who are the most at risk.

### **Mental Health**

During COVID, the stigma around Mental Health appears to have lessened, due to the impact the pandemic has had on everyone's mental health. The consensus is that we support one another - no matter how mild or severe the impact is to any one individual. The mandate of all Colleges across BC may be to provide education to students, but these same institutions also have a duty to provide their employees and students with the education and resources needed to support mental health. While BC Colleges may acknowledge their responsibility towards mental health, the reality is that it is increasingly difficult to manage these issues and provide the services needed using past and traditional methods of supporting medical conditions.

### **Boards of Governance (BOG)**

As college employees, CUPE members have the ability to make a difference at their workplace by becoming members of the Colleges Board of Governors. The CUPE BC College Committee is committed to increase the number of elected members to these Boards.

College Governance is legislated through the College and Institute Act. The College Board of Governors consists of appointed and elected board members as well as the President of the institution (ex-officio) and Chair of the Education Council (ex-officio).

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There are eight people appointed by Government, plus the following who are elected by the respective organizations: one support staff, one faculty member, and two students. The BOG Chair is elected by the Board but must be one of the eight members appointed by Government.

The CUPE BC Colleges Committee urges you to inquire through the [Board Resourcing Office](#), which is responsible for candidate appointments to public sector organizations funded by the BC government.

The Education Council consists of 2 support staff, 10 faculty members, and 4 students who are elected by their respective organizations. There are also four administrators appointed by the College President. All members of the Education Council have a vote. The Chair of the Education Council is elected by these members, who can also run for the position.

### **Inclusion/Racism**

The barriers that exist in all post-secondary institutions around racism, equity, diversity, inclusion and justice mirror those we see in our society. Over the past few years, we have seen efforts being made by these institutions to address such gaps. Most colleges now have Equity, Diversity and Inclusion committees established to work on identifying these inequities and working to find ways to remove barriers. Our members are active participants in these committees and are doing the work to help bring about changes in their workplaces. The CUPE BC Colleges Committee recognizes the importance of, and supports the efforts of, all post-secondary institutions making meaningful changes that go beyond talk and result in effective actions that move us towards achieving inclusive and safe workspaces.

### **Truth and Reconciliation**

CUPE members in BC colleges are very conscious of the impact of Truth and Reconciliation. We are working together on our worksites to promote the indigenization

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of our curriculum and our workplaces to recognize the history of the residential school system and to educate our future generations.

We recognize the significance of building relationships, supporting our Indigenous communities, and allowing them an equitable education.

### **Campaigns: Education for All**

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Canadian colleges and universities hard, resulting in layoffs, disrupted programs, and mental health challenges for students and workers alike. The loss of meaningful work and wages combined with the uncertainty and fear brought about by the disruption of normal routines, isolation, and the virus's death toll, have had a huge impact on our economy and mental health. This, combined with decades of declining funding and a reliance on international students, has taken its toll on many institutions in Canada, resulting in huge deficits. Alongside the pandemic, we have seen the increasing environmental impact of climate change. British Columbia, for example, saw extreme heat and devastating forest fires in the summer of 2021 followed by record rainfall, flooding, and the destruction of crucial infrastructure in the fall.

These social, cultural, economic, and environmental challenges can be addressed through quality PSE, research, and civic engagement. Having access to equitable and affordable quality education enables individuals to increase their earning potential and live longer, better quality lives.

*Education for All*, a joint campaign between the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), and the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), launched in January 2021. This group, with its combined membership of more than one million students and workers, put forward a vision of a more affordable, accessible, high quality, publicly-funded post-secondary education system in Canada.

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This campaign proposes:

- a post-secondary education system that is high-quality, fully accessible, and publicly-funded;
- fair wages and working conditions and secure employment for all workers at our colleges and universities;
- an end to contracting out and the privatization of services, including teaching, cleaning, and food services;
- a research ecosystem driven by the quest for knowledge and not corporate priorities; and
- open and transparent governance with diverse representation of academic staff, students, and workers.

Studies confirm that university and community college graduates generally have:

- higher lifetime earnings and higher contributions to government revenues through their taxes, making it possible to pay for programs such as health care, childcare, and social assistance;
- lower unemployment rates, shorter periods of unemployment when they are unemployed, greater resilience to economic downturns, and lower rates of poverty; and
- higher contribution rates to research and development activity, innovation, and economic growth.

Post-secondary institutions also provide stable public sector jobs for many people, with economic, social, and cultural spin-offs that benefit entire communities.

If you would like to sign up for periodic updates from the campaign and its partners, go to [www.educationforall.ca](http://www.educationforall.ca). On this website you will also find more in-depth detail on why education for all is so important, the *Education for All* report, and CUPE's submission to Finance Canada's Pre-Budget 2021 Consultation.

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### Engagement

Engaging our membership and obtaining community support for CUPE members is an ongoing challenge faced by the post-secondary sector. While the shift to virtual meetings increased opportunities to connect with our members, it also amplified internet access and access to personal technology devices inequities throughout communities in BC. The Colleges Committee remains committed to fighting for gains in social and economic justice for our members by engaging and motivating our members through communication and education.

Our committee is committed to educating our membership, employers, and the general public on the values of union principles and the benefits of union membership. We encourage you to join us in our fight for publicly funded post-secondary education.

We hope you will support our resolution regarding the creation and funding of a permanent full-time Election Coordinator for the BC Region to support Federal, Provincial, and Local Government elections, by-elections, and boards and governance bodies.

### Respectfully submitted:

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