

CUPE BC 2022 CONVENTION K-12 COMMITTEE REPORT

The CUPE BC K-12 committee is thankful for the opportunity to connect and collaborate on the land of the Coast Salish peoples. May we all walk softly through this land upon which we are uninvited visitors, respect it, and care for it as the Indigenous Peoples have done for centuries before us.

The Committee met in October 2021, November 2021, and January 2022, as well as several times in smaller groups. The Committee has many new members and has spent some time learning who we are and why we wanted to be part of this committee. We have discussed many of the issues that the K-12 sector faces as well as the successes we have seen. This is a strong group with strong voices for our CUPE Brothers, Sisters, and Friends.

Violence in our Workplace

The Committee held important discussions about violence in the workplace and what we need to do to keep our members safe. We created a resolution to present at this year's convention to promote important violence prevention tools in the K-12 sector.

The physical and physiological impacts of violence in schools have a significant effect not just on Education Assistants (EA's) but on all education workers, including child and youth care workers, Indigenous support workers, clerical staff, custodians, and bus drivers. "Violence" means the attempted or actual exercise by a person, other than a worker, of any physical force that causes injury to a worker. It includes any threatening statement or behaviour which gives a worker reasonable cause to believe that he or she is at risk of injury.

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In the 2019 K-12 Provincial Framework agreement, an Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) Taskforce was developed. The Taskforce worked with the Workplace Violence Prevention Working Group to promote a new Violence Prevention Toolkit specific to the K-12 sector. The Working Group included WorkSafeBC, CUPE BC, BCTF, BCPVP, BCSSA, BCPSEA, and all educational partners in the K-12 sector. This toolkit raises awareness about what violence looks like in the K-12 sector and provides concrete tools to ensure WorkSafeBC regulations are adhered to and to help prevent workplace violence.

Workplace violence is a hazard that everyone can play a part in preventing. The number of workplace violence claims has been steadily increasing in K-12 in the last five years. It is everyone's responsibility to identify and eliminate those hazards towards preventing further violence. Principals, Vice Principals, Joint Health and Safety Committees and workers need to be involved in the process of identifying workplace violence in their schools.

Employers must develop and implement prevention strategies and include workers in responding to and reporting incidents. School leaders have a responsibility to ensure the physical and physiological health and safety of all in schools. Locals can advocate for training on tools such as the 'Violence in the Workplace Tool Kit,' and work with members to ensure they understand their rights and responsibilities in maintaining a safe workplace and knowing that violence is not part of our job.

Daytime Custodians

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been limited, one-time funding to Districts to implement daytime Custodial to keep schools safe, clean, and open. This has immensely assisted school districts with their operations. Daytime Custodians open the buildings in the morning and are the people who work to keep the paper and soap stocked, washrooms clean, and the halls, stairwells, and classrooms free from debris, and ensure eating spaces are kept sanitized. These folks have pride in the work that they do, and it is typically a thankless job.

Recruitment & Retention

One of the most pressing issues in K-12, besides wages is recruitment and retention of all support staff in all job classifications. This was an ongoing problem; however, COVID-19 has exasperated its complexity even more. Most support staff are burning out and having no one to replace a sick employee or fill a temporary placement has now taken its toll on members' mental and physical health. Furthermore, it lowers the retention rate to keep employees working with school districts.

Below are a few examples of the problems that (K-12) school districts commonly face on a routine basis when there are insufficient resources for employee recruitment and retention:

- Finding enough personnel for trades, EAs, bus drivers, custodians, administrative assistants, and other staff groups.
- Once members such as custodians, EAs, or administrative assistants receive training and experience, they move onto other jobs that pay more and/or offer more hours.
- Many CUPE members need to work multiple jobs to keep up with the cost of living as well as not being up to par with other sector (comparable) wages
- There are no consistent wages or hours for all EAs across the province in K-12.
- COVID-19 has brought down extra work for bus drivers, as many school districts are not doing field trips at this time.
- COVID-19 has members burning out due using up all their sick time at the beginning of the pandemic, with constantly changing protocols in case of variants

Finally, addressing these concerns of recruitment and retention for all K-12 members province-wide will increase employee productivity. It will lessen burnout and retain employees in school districts, but most importantly, employees will want to come to work in this sector and be a proud CUPE member.

StrongStart

The Committee felt it was important to discuss StrongStart workers and the impact they have in our schools. Through this, we found that not all schools have StrongStart programs, and many that do incorporate workers in the Collective Agreement through a Letter of Understanding (LOU).

It is important that Locals understand how these Letters of Understanding interact with collective agreement provisions such as job classification language, job evaluation, and professional development opportunities. Most importantly, we must recognize their value as union members who are part of the local, so they feel as if their voices are heard too.

One way that locals can help ensure StrongStart workers feel that they belong is by highlighting their work, which includes encouraging districts to work to improve the school culture by acknowledging StrongStart members as part of their staff. We want to honor Strong Start Workers, who they are, what they do and their contribution to the school, the union and especially, the community in which they serve.

Coalition for Healthy School Food

The Coalition for Healthy School Food made a great presentation to the K-12 Committee, and as a result, the CUPE BC K-12 Committee recommended that CUPE BC become a member of the Coalition. The Coalition (which includes a BC Chapter) is a national network of organizations that advocate for public investment in a cost-shared, universal, Canada-wide food program. Members include many public sector unions, non-profits, and advocacy organizations.

According to the [Coalition's research](#), 1/10 households in BC experience food insecurity, and less than 4/10 students eat three meals a day on school days. School food programs that improve access to healthy food and help children achieve food literacy and healthy eating from

a young age are recognized as a valuable health promotion policy. However, school food programs are currently a patchwork of provincially and independently funded programs.

The Coalition is seeking public investment in a universal health school food program that will eventually enable all students in Canada to have access to a healthy meal or snack at school every day. The guiding principles of the Coalition are that school food programs should be universal, health promoting, flexible, connected to community, encourage food literacy, have national guidelines, and respect Indigenous food sovereignty. The K-12 Education Committee is pleased to support this important initiative for equitable access to healthy foods in the K-12 sector.

Front Facing Dash Cameras

The Committee worked with CUPE staff to investigate funding for front facing dash cameras on buses. As a result of this work, the Committee confirmed how districts can access funding for front facing dash cameras – it is available when applying for funding to replace buses. This information may be helpful for CUPE locals interested in advocating for front facing dash cameras as a way of increasing safety for students and bus drivers.

School districts have access to funding to replace buses when they reach a certain age or mileage through the [Ministry of Education's Bus Acquisition Program \(BUS\), within the Minor Capital Programs](#). Replacement funding for buses includes between \$7,500 and \$10,000 for additional options that school districts can select. One of these options is front facing dash cameras, which cost approximately \$2,500 - \$3,500. It is a school district's decision which options to select. The Ministry of Education has been informed by the Association of School Transportation Services of B.C. that approximately 80 percent of new bus purchases include camera systems, either internal or external.

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Front facing dash cameras are an important tool to address violations of current laws requiring drivers to stop for school buses. Although there is currently a \$368 fine and 3 penalty points for passing a bus with flashing lights, few charges are ever laid because the offence is hard to prove. Installing cameras would ensure that drivers who put children's lives in danger are caught and issued the appropriate sanction. Publicising the existence of such cameras would also function as a deterrent to drivers and ultimately make students safer.

Respectfully submitted,

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