



Bargaining update: far apart on money issues, more work to be done

The K-12 provincial bargaining committee met last week with their counterparts from the B.C. Public School Employers' Association. This third session focused primarily on monetary issues, including wages and term for a new provincial framework agreement.

After years of chronic underfunding by past provincial governments, inflation driving up our province's already high cost of living, and the toll of a 2-year long pandemic, school support workers are falling farther behind. From the opening of these talks, the K-12 bargaining committee has been clear that the top priority for school support workers is the need for wage increases that recognize the vital role they play in our public schools and our communities.

In last month's throne speech, the provincial government committed to tying increases to provincial minimum wages to inflation rates, a policy it says will "make everyday life more affordable" for workers.

The K-12 bargaining committee is firm that the starting point to fairness for school support workers are wage increases that reflect the rising cost-of-living in line with current inflation rates. But the BCPSEA's first wage offer falls far short of addressing the financial pressures being carried by school support workers and their families and does not live up to the province's commitment to "leave no worker behind."

Our members are highly trained, qualified, and dedicated to public service. They are ready to take on new opportunities – such as expanding our school systems to be places for early learning that can be for childcare, before and after school. They are ready to face new challenges – as they did throughout the pandemic keeping our schools clean and healthy, and keeping them running for all students.

But to keep serving B.C. communities, K-12 support staff need to be properly resourced, treated with respect, and paid fairly. The province and BCPSEA must live up to their commitment and recognize the crucial role school support workers have in a high-quality public education system that better serves and cares for students, offers more support for families, and benefits everyone in our communities.

The parties are committed to meet again in the future to continue bargaining.

Over the past 2 years, our members have been told time and time again that their work is critical to keeping students learning, families supported, schools clean and healthy, and communities thriving. We remain hopeful a wage settlement can be reached that reflects the value and importance of our work and does not leave our members behind.