

Working Conditions for Professional Service

[1970, revised 1991, 2001, 2011]

Teachers must maintain the right to determine the conditions under which they work. Collective bargaining in the field of education must include all matters that affect the quality of the educational system and that affect decision making in public education. In short, negotiators in the education sector should begin their work with the premise that everything is negotiable.

Responsible, comprehensive collective bargaining has stood the test of time as being the most effective means for attaining the goals of the Alberta Teachers' Association and its members. The Association opposes any attempts to declare teaching as an essential service or impose contrived settlements. The Association favours bargaining for some matters at a central table, with the Government of Alberta as financier, while preserving the importance of separate collective agreements with each school jurisdiction.

Membership in the bargaining unit must be of concern to the Association. It must continue to oppose the exclusion of personnel presently included in collective agreements and should press for the inclusion of all personnel involved in the education process.

The ability of the Association to negotiate job security in the face of innovations in teaching depends on its ability to guarantee that members of the teaching profession will remain abreast of the changes and capable of adjusting to them. In order to do this and to ensure the maintenance of high standards of professional service, the Association should take a firm stand on unprofessional behaviour by assuming a degree of control over certification and decertification of its members.

In return for a commitment to maintain the quality of the teaching force, the Association must insist that it have a major voice in certification. However, the burden for the adjustment to changing techniques cannot be borne by teachers alone.

Impending changes in education point out the need for teacher-board cooperation. Neither party can operate in a vacuum and expect complicated problems to be resolved during the heat of regular collective bargaining. Use must be made of joint meetings prior to negotiations, continuous discussion between negotiations and joint study groups to enable the system of collective bargaining to keep pace with changing conditions.

For many years, school boards have determined educational policies unilaterally. Through their impact on teacher classroom functions, these policies affect working conditions. Teachers can implement educational policies more effectively when they have helped to formulate them. Consequently, they must actively participate in policy making. Given a share in the determination of these policies, teachers will be able to evaluate functions before final policy decisions are made.

A further policy decision in which teachers must have a decisive voice is that of the determination of the various facets of teacher load. To provide high-quality education to Alberta students, teachers must have sufficient time for preparation of lessons and assessment, time during the day for nonteaching professional activities, a limit to the number of students, and a limit to the total amount of student-teacher interaction time. Class size, composition and complexity must be tracked and the negative impact of "system average" class size minimized. As well, it must be recognized that teacher participation in school sponsored extracurricular activities is voluntary. Consideration must also be given to the issues of hiring practices, transfers, natural justice and replacement workers.

Educational expenditures help to determine the effective performance of teachers. Therefore, teachers must have an active part in determining how the educational budget is spent.

The curriculum must provide leeway for teachers who desire to be innovative. Teachers must have control over adapting the curriculum to suit the needs of the individual class. Teachers must also have a greater voice in the actual building of the various curricula.

Improved nonwage benefits must be viewed as part of the total compensation of a teacher. Parental leave provisions must allow teachers to fulfil their roles as parents. Improvement in working conditions and benefits will enable teachers to provide a higher standard of professional service. The recognition of and provision for a comprehensive benefit package for all teachers will provide needed security and improved classroom performance. It is necessary to recognize that benefits and stipulated cost sharing of premiums must continue while teachers are under contract.

Teachers must achieve a higher relative economic position in society. Actual dollar values are losing significance in the spiralling economy but relative economic position is becoming increasingly important.

Adequate remuneration for teachers should be based on the following principles:

- Beginning salaries should be reasonably equitable for university graduates from the education faculty as compared with salaries offered graduates from other faculties.
- The salary scale should grant financial recognition for changes in qualifications and provide an incentive for improvement.
- Financial recognition should be given to experience.
- Progress from minimum to maximum earning capacity should be accomplished in a sensible and orderly fashion.
- The rate of remuneration should be such as to attract and retain teaching staff.
- The salary scale should reflect economic conditions.