

FINDING A NEW TEACHER BARGAINING MODEL

The Education Services Collective Agreement Act was introduced in January, 2002 to provide a collective agreement covering teachers in the public school system. The act also provided for the appointment of a commission to review the structures, practices and procedures for collective bargaining for the public school employers' association, school boards and the BCTF.

In September, Labour Minister Graham Bruce asked Don Wright to recommend terms of reference for the review. Wright is recommending a one-person commission to review teacher bargaining and develop options for improvement in the future.

The commission would:

- Consult with the employers' association, school boards and the B.C. Teachers Federation and other key education groups on the best structures, practices and procedures for collective bargaining.
- Review structures, practices and procedures to teacher collective bargaining in other jurisdictions within Canada and elsewhere in the world.
- Propose options for improved teacher collective bargaining in British Columbia.

Each option for improved bargaining would need to take into account such elements as the definition of the bargaining relationship, the school financing and accountability system that would be used with the proposed structure for the employer bargaining agent, the process for a successful negotiated collective agreement at the bargaining table, what procedures are to be followed in the event of an impasse at the bargaining table and whether there should be alternative dispute settlement mechanisms to strikes/lockouts.

The commission would also need to balance a number of factors, including the public's interest in minimizing disruptions, the right of employees to be fairly compensated, and the value of maintaining and enhancing a positive atmosphere at all levels of the school system.

Commission choice:

The report states that all parties must have meaningful input into the choice of the commission, concluding that, "if the commission is to be fair, objective and capable of taking a fresh look for solutions, it must have a level of independence and disinterestedness, not just with respect to the provincial government, but with respect to all parties."

Preparation for expiry of the current agreement:

The report recommends the minister consult with the parties to determine what to do in the context of the expiry of the current agreement in June 2004. Wright expects the commission would complete its work by fall 2004.

The complete report is available at <http://www.labour.gov.bc.ca/teacher-bargaining/welcome.htm> online.

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