

Chalking up thousands of hours of unpaid work

Education assistants feel bound by duty to help children at all times, says report

When it comes to unpaid work, most education assistants will tell you that they don't feel as though they have a choice. If kids need help getting to the bus, if a teacher or family member needs to consult, or if it means the difference between a student getting to go on a field trip or not, education assistants find it very hard to walk away – even though sometimes they aren't being paid.

So says CUPE BC general vice-president Deb Taylor regarding CUPE's release of *Recognition & Respect*, an in-depth report on the work of education assistants (EAs) in B.C.

Taylor, who is an EA in the Campbell River school district, says that the report's documentation of systemic unrecognized and often unpaid work is an important marker in a growing campaign to gain fairness and respect for these workers.



BEATTIE

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CUPE K-12 sector coordinator Bill Pegler says that following bargaining in 2006, where the issue of unpaid work by EAs was raised, employer and union representatives created a joint committee to investigate and make recommendations regarding the problem of unpaid work. The work of this committee led to the EA survey.

The report, released on November 27, is based on the input of 40 per cent of the province's education assistants in the comprehensive on-line survey. Over 4,000 EAs – in 54 of the province's 60 school districts and education authorities – participated.

Dea Beattie, an EA in Surrey (CUPE 728) and a member of the CUPE Education Assistants Resource Committee which served as a reference group for the survey development and implementation, says the report will help EAs to advocate more effectively for themselves.

"We know that we give free time, but when it is actually documented, and we see that it equals thousands of hours and mil-

lions of dollars when it is multiplied across the 12,500 EAs in B.C., it really hits home just how big this is."

The survey finds that the unrecognized and often unpaid work of EAs amounts to approximately 800,000 hours a year.

While some of the time is reclaimed through informal school-level arrange-



□ **ABOVE AND BEYOND** This new report reveals that unpaid work by B.C. education assistants occurs at all times of the school day – before, during, and after work, as well as in the evenings and on weekends. EAs cite the need to deliver the best quality service to students.

ments, much of it is not. The unpaid time represents a financial subsidy by EAs to the public school system worth several millions of dollars every year.

Further reports are being produced for each school district. And three reports will also be produced summarizing findings for EAs of First Nations background, educational qualifications and aspirations of EAs, and EAs who work on a casual basis.

CUPE will be working with parents, teachers, administrators, trustees and other elected officials to look at solutions and strategies to address issues of unpaid work.

The report is available at www.bc.educationassistants.ca.