



Chairperson's Report

JACKIE CHRISTIANSON

EWSC Annual Conference | November 14 – 16, 2013

Dear Sisters and Brothers:

As we gather at our annual conference, we reflect on a year that has brought no shortage of challenges:

- The 2013 - 2014 provincial budget, marking the second year of the “new” PreK – 12 education funding model, makes cuts to five school divisions and mandates an inadequate 1.5 per cent increase for education support workers as many locals enter into contract negotiations;
- The Provincial Government has announced they will pursue a misguided plan to construct nine new joint-use schools using public-private partnership (P3) privatization schemes that evidence shows costs more - diverting valuable dollars for education to corporate profits in addition to potentially reducing public control of schools and threatening jobs;
- Rumored changes to *The Employment Insurance Act* through back-door regulation could see education support workers lose the right to collect benefits when most are laid off for twelve weeks a year or more – insurance we already pay for and will lose if such changes are made by the Harper Government in Ottawa;
- Continuing cuts to the number of education support workers in school boards across the province while overall enrollment increases; and
- Top-down changes to our K-12 school system including increased instruction hours and the introduction of “LEAN” to potentially make cuts under the guise of “efficiency” will directly impact CUPE members in their work to support students each and every school day.

In addressing these challenges, the EWSC has worked hard over this past year to connect and unite CUPE education locals, improve our communication with stakeholders, meet with the Minister of Education to bring forward CUPE member issues, and build closer ties to CUPE education support workers in other provinces.

It has never been more important for all of us to work together to meet the needs of CUPE locals, and ensure that we have one strong province-wide voice for education support workers.

Thank you to fellow members of the EWSC Executive Board for your dedication and active participation.

I would like to extend appreciation to all the staff that support the EWSC: CUPE National Staff advisors Brother Dave Stevenson and Brother Gary Day; Sister Aina Kagis - Regional Director, Sister Cheryl Stadnichuk - CUPE National Research, and Sister Janet Szliske - CUPE National Communications; and the clerical support staff in the Regina and Saskatoon offices.

I would also like to thank Brother Tom Graham, President of CUPE Saskatchewan Division and Brother Nathan Markwart, Executive Assistant.

Most importantly, thank you to delegates for the honour of serving as chair.

Please find following my complete report of activities throughout this past year.

In solidarity,

JACKIE CHRISTIANSON
Chair, Education Workers' Steering Committee (EWSC)

NM cope 342

HIRE YOUR OWN BOSS

Province-wide municipal elections were held on October 24, 2012 and our first active Hire Your Own Boss campaign wrapped up. One trustee was successfully elected, and other candidates gained knowledge and experience in municipal elections.

We should all be proud of our efforts to encourage and engage our CUPE members to support progressive candidates for the Saskatoon Public school division, Moose Jaw Public school division, and both Regina Public and Catholic school divisions.

Dozens of CUPE members volunteered their time and energies supporting progressive candidate by delivering leaflets, taking lawn signs, and talking with fellow CUPE members and others about the need to elect school board candidates who believe in strong, well-resourced schools.

Get ready as the pre-planning stages for our next municipal elections will start in 2014!

IN BRIEF: WORKING WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA)

The EWSC was invited to attend the 2012 SSBA Fall General Assembly in November, and in April we met with the SSBA executive and administrative staff.

There appears to be a genuine interest in developing a relationship with the EWSC and, for the first time, the EWSC was acknowledged as “partners in education” by SSBA President, Janet Foord.

Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF)

The STF met with the EWSC in May to share information about the common issues impacting teachers and education support workers including: the new funding model/provincial education budget, changes to *The Education Act* (school calendar and instructional hours) and LEAN. There was also an opportunity to discuss the recent CUPE education support workers survey and the STF campaign “this is the classroom”.

We made a commitment to schedule meetings twice a year, depending on negotiations.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

The EWSC met with the Minister of Education, Russ Marchuk, in May. At this meeting, we discussed: the 1.5 per cent increase for support staff and the square footage for caretaking and maintenance in the funding model, LEAN, P3 schools, CUPE education support workers survey, and issues regarding staffing profiles for all classifications in education.

Information about the LEAN review was also gained at the meeting. Deloitte was contracted to perform a LEAN review, and it was completed in March. The eleven recommendations on efficiency will be reviewed with consultants and further recommendations are expected to be made public in the near future. Among the recommendations mentioned included: facilities, transportation, construction, and centralized purchasing.

In September, Don Morgan was appointed to replace Russ Marchuk as the new education minister.

CONNECTING WITH LOCALS

Member Survey

CUPE National Research Representative, Cheryl Standnichuk, prepared and sent out a survey to collect information about the impact of the new funding model on our members. The results revealed that the workload of our members is increasing, and many members feel pressure to complete their work absent of overtime pay.

Members responded that positions are being cut, vacancies are not filled, and certain positions have seen their hours reduced. At the same time, many members are experiencing increased workloads, new duties or responsibilities are being added to our jobs, fewer support staff are in schools overall to do the work, there exists a growing expectation to do more work in the same amount of time, and there is an increase in the number of intensive needs or English as an Additional Language (EAL) students enrolled.

When asked what would alleviate the workload issue, the answer was more staff needs to be hired to alleviate the workload. Improving union and management relations and coverage for leaves were also viewed by members as a way to help address increasing workloads.

Education Local meetings

In May, the EWSC held our second CUPE Education Local meeting in Davidson. We were able to get a detailed update from each of the 16 locals in attendance. We discussed the following topics: the bargaining climate; the school budgets/funding model/LEAN /P3 schools; Bill C 377 and 85, the school calendar, the CUPE survey results, and EI changes. This meeting was packed with information on all current pressing issues that affect our members and locals.

CONNECTING WITH OTHER PROVINCES

In September, the EWSC was invited to attend the Alberta Education Employees Committee (AEEC) biannual conference where we discussed: *The Saskatchewan Employment Act* (formerly known as Bill 85), staff reductions, LEAN, and P3 Schools. Discussions also lead to the Response to Intervention (RTI) model used in our school divisions with our intensive needs students.

At CUPE National Convention, a resolution has since passed that will see a National Education conference established every two years to promote communication among CUPE education workers across Canada.

CHANGES TO EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (EI)

At the Education Sector meeting held at CUPE National Convention, delegates were informed that the Harper Government is potentially planning to make further changes to *The Employment Insurance Act* that could see education support workers placed in an exclusionary category exempt from the definition of "insurable employment" – thereby making education support workers ineligible for Employment Insurance (EI).

This change can take place by a simple stroke of a pen behind closed doors through regulation made under The Act, and is in addition to the restrictive changes to EI implemented in the 2012 Federal Budget that have increased frustration in the ability of members to receive EI benefits – insurance we already pay for every paycheck.

CONCLUSION

Our EWSC Executive was able to accomplish a great deal of actions this past year because of our unionist belief that together we are stronger.

I look forward to another year of action!

Submitted in solidarity,

JACKIE CHRISTIANSON

Chair, Education Workers' Steering Committee (EWSC)

NM cope 342