

**Education Workers' Steering Committee**  
**Staff Advisors Report**  
**Annual Conference**  
**November 5 & 6, 2010**

In the year since our last conference we have seen some unprecedented changes in the field of education. Some of those changes hold promise while others threaten many of our members. The EWSC executive has maintained a watchful eye on developments while at the same time working to lay the groundwork for a stronger, more effective bargaining structure. The executive understands that whether we are dealing with a friendly or a hostile government, Education Workers need to move forward to ensure fair and equal compensation across the province.

### **Education Taxation**

As we reported last fall, the government passed Bill 89 establishing new powers for the province over education taxation and removing those powers from the school boards. These changes to taxation and funding for school boards have had a profound effect on school boards.

Under the amended legislation, school boards must submit a final statement for the next fiscal year to the Minister of Education that will include details of items and amounts of expenditures for the next fiscal year along with estimates of revenue from taxes, grants, fees, receipts and any other sources that are anticipate for the next fiscal year.

Boards must also submit a written statement of program objectives for the next fiscal year accompanied by an estimate of revenues and expenditures for that same period. The minister's approval is required. If the minister does not approve, he or she may direct the school board to make any changes that the minister considers appropriate or in the public interest.

School boards are then required to abide by the approved estimates for that period of time. Failure to do so can result in the stoppage of previously approved payments of funds. Under this amended legislation, school boards do not have the power to tax as they have in the past. This will result in a shift in economic power away from the individual boards and transfer it to the province. Many of our locals are just now going into bargaining and we will soon see the full effect of these changes? Will our bargaining committees be dealing with decision makers or will the decisions on monetary items be dependent on an outside authority that is not present at the bargaining table?

The answers to these questions will soon emerge as locals go to the bargaining table.

This would appear to strengthen our arguments for provincial bargaining. After all, if the boards lose their economic authority they cannot be said to be able to bargain fairly with us. By rights we should be bargaining with those in authority to make decisions and under this new legislation that is only the provincial government.

## **Provincial Bargaining**

The efforts of your Steering Committee executive to further the cause of provincial bargaining were seriously impaired when the SSBA refused to continue discussions with CUPE and the provincial government. However, the executive continued to look for ways to collectively strengthen our bargaining committees. To this end, the executive has renewed its lobbying efforts.

The executive has also promoted coordinated bargaining in this province. In the absence of a provincial bargaining structure, coordinated bargaining will bring education locals closer together by providing more uniform collective agreements. If all our collective agreements are similar, the move to provincial bargaining is that much easier. With this goal in mind we are encouraging our locals to present the letter of understanding on Provincial Bargaining to each of the School Boards in the hope that they will agree to sign on. That could significantly strengthen our argument for Provincial Bargaining.

## **Meetings with the Minister**

Just prior to last year's conference, members of the executive met with Minister of Education, Ken Krawetz. Those in attendance were very positive about the discussions that took place. The Minister stated his support for equal pay for equal work and indicated that he would be recommending the resumption of meetings between his department, SSBA and CUPE.

The EWSC along with Regional Director Melanie Medlicott, Research Representative Cheryl Stadnichuk and Temporary Representative Dave Stevenson attended a meeting with the Ministry of Education again in June of this year. The Ministry requested a meeting following the public forum on EA reductions which was held in April in Regina. While the ministry had an agenda, the EWSC took control of the meeting with our prepared questions. Deputy Minister, Audrey Roadhouse claimed that school divisions were making balanced budgetary cuts and not focusing on reducing EA's. She also admitted that the Ministry should have communicated with the EWSC prior to recommending the reduction of EA's. Assistant Deputy Minister, Helen Horseman confirmed that it was not possible to track the current funding to special needs students due to the new needs based model. Assistant Deputy Minister, Daren McKee agreed to look further into the "lack of a paper trail" as there is no accountability to the public. They are hopeful that the new funding formula for school divisions will be ready in March 2011. We informed the Ministries' staff that we CUPE will not stop our campaign against EA reductions.

## **Cost Share Campaign to Fight Education Assistant Reductions**

With the assistance of Beth Smillie, Communications Representative and financial assistance from CUPE Saskatchewan and the EWSC affiliated locals, the EWSC put forward a proposal to CUPE National for a cost share campaign. The campaign was approved and we have all been working very hard on the campaign. Sister Smillie prepared a leaflet which was distributed to locals in April. Very successful public forums were held in Regina and Warman.

The first public forum was held in Regina on April 29<sup>th</sup>. Approximately 100 people attended this forum. The Ministry of Education sent Daren McKee to answer the many questions from the concerned public. Mr. McKee continued to state that the Ministry has “no plan” on reducing EA’s. He also brought a letter from the Minister to that effect stating that it is the School Board Trustees who are responsible for the staffing of schools.

On June 8<sup>th</sup> a second public forum was held in Warman. This was in response to the Prairie Spirit School Divisions reduction of 41 EA’s. The public outcry of this reduction was felt in the room as 232 people attended the forum. The Ministry of Education did not send anyone to this meeting. The Prairie Spirit School Board Trustees explained to the public that the reduction was the direction that the Ministry wanted to take. They felt that better supports could be provided to special needs students with more professionals and less educational assistants. The parents in the room disagreed with the Trustees.

The EWSC responded to the Ministry of Education’s letter that was distributed during the Regina public forum. Many school divisions had e-mailed the Ministers letter to all employees. The EWSC letter in response was sent out to all education local presidents to distribute to their members.

## **Organizing and Labour Relations Board**

While CUPE represents a clear majority of education sector workers in Saskatchewan, there are still 30 % of the support staff who are unorganized. One third of those unorganized workers will join CUPE should we have success with six certification applications that have been tied up at the Labour Relations Board and the courts for several years now.

CUPE’s applications were based on the Horizon decision authored by Labour Relations Board Chairperson James Seibel. Unfortunately, Seibel and the Vice-Chairpersons of the Labour Relations Board were dismissed by the Saskatchewan Party Government. The new Chairperson of the Board, Kenneth Love, changed the rules set out by Seibel and rejected CUPE’s applications. The lead case is Prairie South School Division where the Court of Queen’s Bench ruled in favour of the Employer in their review of the LRB decision on Local 5506’s application for a certification order that would include all non-management workers in the Prairie South School Division that are not represented by STF. The local took the case to Judicial Review and

unfortunately were not successful in that effort either. CUPE has now appealed that decision to the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal. Crystal Norbeck, CUPE Legal Representative has had her work cut out for her dealing with all of the issues at the Labour Relations Board and will be taking this case forward in December. We hope that this can be favourably resolved in 2011.

In addition to Prairie South, our CUPE locals in Prairie Valley, Prairie Spirit, Good Spirit, Horizon and North East school divisions are still waiting for the final results of their applications for all employee units.

We were very pleased that Local 4802, Sun West School Division, did manage to organize an all employee unit by winning a certification vote which was upheld when the Employer tried to overturn the decision through judicial review. Congratulations to President Susan Munchinsky, the local executive and local members.

## **Staff Changes**

CUPE staff in Saskatchewan continues to change to meet the needs of the members. Brother Malcolm Matheson has retired and Sister Elaine Ehman has moved over from the Health Care Sector to replace the position held by Brother Matheson. We will benefit from her considerable skill and experience.

This has been an interesting and eventful year for education workers in Saskatchewan. We have experienced another level of change implemented from this government and will wait to see how this will affect our members. However, we will not be idle while we wait.

We must lobby members of the legislature to ensure that our voices are heard. We must go out to talk to workers in this sector and bring them into the CUPE family. We must continue to work hard in our school divisions to protect our members from job loss due to employer and government initiatives.

Much thanks are owed to all the National Representatives servicing education locals in this province. They are continually consulting with each other on developments in their assignments and providing assistance and support to each other and CUPE members. We are very fortunate to have the participation of Beth Smillie, Communications Representative, Wes Payne, Temporary Communications Representative and Cheryl Stadnichuk, Research Representative. Their contributions far exceed their professional advice and service. They are committed activists and regularly go beyond the requirements of their jobs to give CUPE members the best chance to succeed in achieving their goals.

Saskatchewan Regional Director, Melanie Medicott, supports all the staff in the province, but has a special place in her heart for education workers. She has been invaluable in moving the provincial bargaining agenda forward.

Finally, thank you to the EWSC executive. They have spent many hours in discussion and debate to plan and execute their mandate. They have never lost sight of their duty to represent CUPE members.

**In solidarity,**

**Lois Lamon**  
Staff Advisor  
EWSC

**Elaine Ehman**  
Staff Advisor  
EWSC

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