

EDUCATION WORKERS' STEERING COMMITTEE REPORT

This has been a very busy year for the Education Workers Steering Committee (EWSC) since our last convention in March of last year.

Provincial bargaining has been, and continues to be, an issue that has been problematic to our committee. Recently, the provincial government has completely changed the manner in which the school divisions are to be funded. The division boards have traditionally been able to generate their own revenue levels by setting mill rates within their boundaries, however this option has been removed from their scope of duties. The provincial government will now be the sole funding provider for school divisions. The division boards are troubled about this new direction and are unsure about the way the funding will roll out. This has caused some concern at the local bargaining tables, but may eventually prove to be an unlikely ally, as having one funding source may be a step towards one agreement.

Another issue that the EWSC has been busy with this year has been a direction aimed at the reduction of Educational Assistants in the province. The provincial government continues to claim they are not the ones leading the charge towards a large scale reduction. They maintain the school boards have all come to this conclusion on their own, independently of each other. This issue has surfaced in many arenas including the legislature itself. The EWSC, EAs, and other interested parties were invited to a question period in which Pat Atkinson asked the Minister several questions about the EA issue. The Minister managed to sidestep the queries and continued to maintain innocence. The EWSC would like to thank CUPE Sask for their assistance in this campaign, especially Brother Tom Graham for his clarification letter to the Saskatchewan Down Syndrome Society.

Organizing has been a problem within our sector. Currently over 70% of the education support staff are under the CUPE umbrella. There is another 10% that are still waiting in the wings while the Saskatchewan Labour Relations Board continues to delay the approval process. Another factor influencing organizing is the dreaded *Trade Union Act*. This repressive Act was designed to make it harder for unions to do their duties and continues to impede organizing in all sectors.

The EWSC sponsored a call out for an educational All Presidents' meeting to be held in Davidson. This meeting turned out to be very informative and spawned an offshoot committee, with the mandate of addressing the EA issue head on. This committee has been very successful in its endeavors and has pressured both the government and the public to consider the implications involved, were the amount of EAs to be drastically reduced.

The EWSC has also managed to meet with other organizations who share the interest in educating our youth. Jackie Christianson and Omar Murray attended the Saskatchewan School Board Association annual convention in November. This year's theme was "Education, Community, and Stewardship." This maxim was to reflect the ideas of success of all students, building relationships within the community, and acting as stewards of the resources the ratepayers have entrusted them with. This was a very good conference and I think we managed to put a human face to the concept of school "support staff" with members of various division boards.

We have met with the Education Ministry on various levels during the past year. In June, members of the EWSC met with a panel consisting of the Deputy Minister and two Assistant Deputy Ministers. The main topic of conversation at that time was the decrease in staffing for EAs. In January of 2011, the EWSC also met with the Ministry's finance department to discuss the new funding model in the upcoming budget and the implications this may have for the education sectors. At the time, writing the budget had not been released, so there is still some uncertainty as to how deep of an impact it will have.

The EWSC Annual Conference was held in November. Guest speakers included Pat Atkinson - NDP Education Critic, Judy Henley - CUPE Saskatchewan Vice-President, National staff representatives Cheryl Stadnichuk and Bill Robb, and Assistant Deputy Minister - Helen Horsman. There was a very good presentation from the EA committee regarding the EA campaign and the timelines that have occurred. As at every EWSC annual conference, elections were held for half the executive positions. We saw the return of incumbents Earl Booth and Rona Tyson and, with the reintroduction of Marie Moore, the Member at Large positions were filled. Brenda Anderson was re-elected as the Recording Secretary. Jackie Christianson has replaced Brigitte Scott as the chairperson of our committee. We look forward to direction of the new leader, but the dedication of Brigitte will be greatly missed.

The EWSC has also lost one of our staff advisors. Malcolm Matheson has retired and enjoying life away from the pressures of "the daily grind," we wish him well. His replacement, Elaine Ehman, is doing an excellent job. Elaine and our other staff advisor Lois Lamon, who has only been in this position for a year herself, have managed to steer our committee on the right path, as We Keep The Ball Rolling.

Submitted in solidarity,

Omar Murray

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