

Working Conditions for Professional Service

[1970, revised 1991, 2001, 2011, 2023]

Teachers must maintain the right to determine the conditions under which they work. Collective bargaining in the field of education must include all matters that affect the quality of the education system and decision making in public education.

Responsible, comprehensive collective bargaining has stood the test of time as being the most effective means for attaining the goals of the Alberta Teachers' Association and its members.

The Association opposes any attempts to declare teaching an essential service or impose contrived settlements. With the *Public Education Collective Bargaining Act* coming into force in 2016, Alberta's education sector shifted its past practice to a bilevel bargaining model. This model places the more expensive and common matters at the central table, in which the funder (the Government of Alberta) has direct input on the financial expenses for the system. Matters at the local table, with local teachers bargaining with the employer, have a smaller and more niche set of matters that more directly impact the local bargaining units.

Membership in the bargaining unit must be of concern to the Association. It must continue to oppose the exclusion of personnel presently included in collective agreements. The agreements should include all certificated teachers employed by the school authority, with the exception of the superintendent.

The ability of the Association to negotiate job security in the face of innovations in teaching depends on its ability to guarantee that members of the teaching profession will remain abreast of the changes and capable of adjusting to them. In return for a commitment to maintaining the quality of the teaching force, the Association must insist that it has a major voice in certification.

However, the burden of the adjustment to changing techniques cannot be borne by teachers alone. Impending changes in education point out the need for teacher–authority cooperation. Neither party can operate in a vacuum and expect complicated problems to be resolved during the heat of regular collective bargaining. Use must be made of joint meetings prior to negotiations, as well as continual discussion between negotiations and joint study groups to enable the system of collective bargaining to keep pace with changing conditions. For many years, school authorities have determined educational policies unilaterally. Through their impact on teacher classroom functions, these policies affect working conditions. Teachers can implement educational policies more effectively when they have helped to formulate them.

Consequently, teachers must actively participate in policy making. Given a share in the determination of these policies, teachers will be able to evaluate functions before final policy decisions are made. A further policy decision in which teachers must have a decisive voice is that of the determination of the various facets of teacher load. To provide high-quality education to Alberta students, teachers must have sufficient unassigned time for lesson planning and assessment, time during the day for nonteaching professional activities, a limit to the number of students based on class composition factors, and a limit to the total amount of student–teacher

interaction time. Class size, composition and complexity must be tracked, and the data used to inform bargaining.

As well, it must be recognized that teacher participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities is voluntary, and where it is not voluntary, it is considered to be assignable time.

Education expenditures help to determine the effective performance of teachers. Therefore, teachers must have an active part in determining how the education budget is spent.

The curriculum should provide leeway for teachers who desire to be innovative. Teachers need to have control over adapting the curriculum to suit the needs of the individual class. Teachers must also have a greater voice in the actual building of the various curricula.

Improved nonwage benefits must be viewed as part of the total compensation of a teacher. Parental leave provisions must allow teachers to fulfill their roles as parents. Improvement in working conditions and benefits will eliminate systemic sources of stress. The recognition and provision of a comprehensive benefits package for all teachers will provide needed security. It is necessary to recognize that employee-paid benefit premiums must continue while teachers are under contract.

Adequate remuneration for teachers should be based on the following principles:

- Beginning salaries of university graduates from the education faculty should be reasonably equitable to salaries offered to graduates from other faculties.
- The salary scale should grant financial recognition for changes in qualifications and provide an incentive for improvement.
- Financial recognition should be given to experience.

Appropriate infrastructure, favourable conditions of practice and the opportunity to provide a high level of professional service help to recruit and retain teachers.