

SPEAKING NOTES

SPC Presentation August 23, 2005

SLIDE 1

Good afternoon all,

On behalf of the Alberta School Boards Association thank you for this opportunity to present school boards' advice about how bargaining should be structured in Alberta.

Of the Learning Commission recommendations you still have to deal with, we believe the call for a new approach to teacher bargaining is the single most important policy decision you face and we are pleased to advise you of our position on this issue.

Joining me at the table is ASBA Executive Director David Anderson. Also in attendance are: ASBA Vice-President Maureen Emond; Heather Welwood, the trustee who chaired the task force that developed the new model; and Mac MacDonald, our association's leading expert on teacher bargaining.

SLIDE 2

I understand you have received detailed documentation about the new model school boards have developed.

My presentation will focus on **WHY** school boards (like the Learning Commission) concluded we must change the bargaining structures in Alberta in the face of a very powerful and influential provincial Alberta Teachers' Association.

I will also provide a broad strokes description of the model school boards are proposing.

As indicated on this slide, we are asking for legislation to create an Employer Bargaining Association.

We believe it's important that:

- all school boards would automatically be members of this EBA
- all school boards would govern this new EBA

Because we require mandatory membership; we need legislation to make this a reality.

Key features of our proposal include:

- a single collective agreement covering all teachers and school boards
- flexibility within this single collective agreement – much as the provincial government has --- to address unique and local issues like a northern allowance. We are proposing addenda and appendices for such matters.
- most importantly, (like the Learning Commission) school boards are calling for an exclusion of specific working conditions from the collective agreement (pupil teacher ratio, class size and instructional time)

Note: The Learning Commission made this same recommendation in 81 C.

Does this mean school boards don't care about working conditions? Absolutely not. In fact our recommendation is that school boards and teachers have conversations locally about these matters and then set down commitments in policy --- NOT in contracts so that if changes are needed down the road, these can be made without facing the extreme hurdles of strike and lock-out which any item in a contract is subject to.

SLIDE 3

This slide speaks to the fact that -- while school boards traveled further down the road in terms of developing the specifics of a new model -- the Learning Commission came to the same conclusions -- in broad strokes as we did. At the heart of the matter for the Learning Commission was the core issue of imbalance between a very coordinated effort by a single provincial union dealing with 62 individual school boards.

SLIDE 4

Wherein is the imbalance?

Well under the current structure, we have 62 individual boards negotiating with a single provincial union.

As a result school boards can literally be "picked" off one at a time.

The union comes to every table with the same mandate, same approach and same agenda. This means school boards stand alone... and some like our Francophone Board currently facing a strike ...are very, very small with limited local resources at their disposal to stave off this pressure.

SLIDE 5

And so what if there are 62 individual school boards negotiating with a single provincial union?

Well in the absence of a unified school board group to counterbalance the provincial union, we see patterns like the one on this slide.

This slide identifies the range of settlements in a given year... For example in the year 2004 -05 settlements ranged from 1.53 per cent to 4.33 per cent.

From a common sense perspective, given that all boards receive the same percentage increase in funding each year, wouldn't we assume that percentage increases in teacher salaries would be in the same neighbourhood?

Well that's not the case.

In fact what we witness is a pattern that sees boards that settle early, get a deal at the lower end of the scale.

But if the board gets its deal a few more months later, well suddenly what was acceptable is just not enough.

The “going rate” is up .5 per cent... and so on..... and so on.

Is this really the way we want to see taxpayers dollars directed?

SLIDE 6

This slide tracks funding increases to school boards against average increases in teacher salaries.

In any given year the percentage increase in teacher salaries is higher than the percentage increase in funding for school boards.

SLIDE 7

This slides outlines the cumulative effect of this trend. Even using the most conservative of assumptions... we see an 11.1 per cent difference between percent increase in funding and the percent increase in teacher salaries for the same period of time.

SLIDE 8

We are talking about a lot of money.

On the 2003-2004 grid a province-wide increase of 1 per cent on the salary grid is worth about \$18.6 million. These are big money commitments

SLIDE 9

The Learning Commission and school boards concluded that the current bargaining structure creates the imbalances we have... and that those imbalances are skewing funding priorities in the public education system.

We believe that legislating an EBA and creating a single collective agreement will:

- address this structural imbalance
- create consistency for teachers across the province
- see responsibility for negotiations remain with school boards as employers and with teachers as employees
- reduce costly duplication of efforts.....

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SLIDE 10

I close with a sobering look at the kind of administrative resources going toward negotiating 62 separate agreements for teachers.

During any given round of negotiations around this province... under the current structure we see the following:

Walk through the flow of resources on the slide.

Does anybody in this room want to see these dollars and resources continuing to flow in this direction – supporting an infrastructure for bargaining 62 separate agreements?

I don't think so.

Thank you for your attention.... I welcome your questions.