OKANAGAN LABOUR RELATIONS COUNCIL

ORGANIZATION OVERVIEW

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This document provides an overview of the Okanagan Labour Relations Council (OLRC) for staff and trustees who are members of our organization and for those who are interested in learning more about us. More information can be found at our website at Okanagan Labour Relations Council (olrc.ca).

Foundational Information

The OLRC Board established the Mission, Vision and Values of the organization to give clarity of purpose, to articulate what we stand for and what gives us relevance to our customers. These foundational commitments guide the work of staff every day.

VISION: Where we are going

We will be the preferred provider of strategic labour relations services in support of the school districts we serve.

MISSION: What we do

Providing trusted, efficient labour relations solutions that enhance the working and learning cultures of member school districts.

VALUES: What we believe in and how we behave

Integrity
We act with honesty, respect and sensitivity without compromising the truth.

Competence
We are trusted experts who keep learning and developing others to increase individual and organizational capacity.

Customer Centric
We are school district focused, providing timely, effective and enduring advice in support of the public education system.

Objective
We use evidence-based decision making and thoughtfully manage emotion.

Collaborative
We build relationships with school districts, partners and stakeholders and work together to create sustainable solutions and shared success.

VALUE PROPOSITION: Why choose us?

Customers choose us because we provide quality, timely, cost-effective service that respects local culture.

Organizational Information

The Okanagan Labour Relations Council (OLRC) is a not-for-profit shared-service organization that has a long history of providing labour relations services to school districts in the interior of British Columbia.

In 1971 the British Columbia School Trustees Association (Okanagan Labour Relations Council) (BCSTA) represented the employer interests of school districts. BCSTA was originally accredited by the Industrial Relations Council as the bargaining agent for nine (9) School Districts in the greater Okanagan area, who were all part of CUPE Local 523. In 1979, when it was determined that the labour relations and bargaining functions should be separate from the advocacy function within BCSTA, decision making, and authority were transferred from the BCSTA to the Okanagan Labour Relations Council and the OLRC became a separate body. The OLRC held the accreditation for bargaining for school districts covered by CUPE local 523 until June 7, 1994, when the *Public Education Labour Relations Act* came into effect and the accreditation was transferred to the British Columbia Public School Employer's Association (BCPSEA). Since that time, the OLRC has continued to provide bargaining support and labour relations services to member districts, initially through formal delegation of authority by BCPSEA and later as a service without formal delegation.

The OLRC currently has three staff members, Tammy Sowinski, Executive Director; Nikki Cescon, Executive Assistant, Human Resources; and Kathy Wright, Workplace Health Specialist. Ms. Sowinski, CPHR has over 25 years of experience in labour relations and human resources in the private and public sector with both union and non-union workforces. Ms. Cescon, CPHR has 15 years of HR experience. Ms. Wright has 30 years of public sector experience in attendance support, wellness and disability management with 20 years of that being in the BC K-12 education sector.

The Executive Director reports to a Board of Directors, elected bi-annually, comprised of trustee representatives and staff alternates from each member school district. Officers of the Board are the Chair and Vice-Chair, elected from the Board member Trustees during the first meeting of the calendar year. The Management Committee consists of the Chair, Vice-Chair, and a Secretary-Treasurer from one of the member districts and the Executive Director.

The OLRC is currently funded by annual membership fees from the member school districts based on a funding formula as well as fees from contract services with the British Columbia Public School Employers Association (BCSPEA). An annual budget is established and approved by the Board. Fifty-five percent of member fees is based on an equal share of the OLRC budget for all districts and forty-five percent of the fees is prorated by district based on the school district's operating grant. The financial statements are created by School District No. 22 (Vernon), who administers the payroll and accounting for the OLRC, and the statements are reviewed by another Secretary-Treasured designated by the Board on an annual basis.

Customers

OLRC customers are small to medium sized school districts in the Okanagan and Kootenay areas. By participating in this shared service, member school districts access senior level labour relations expertise as required without the cost of full-time employees and benefit from trusted enduring advice which supports a positive working and learning environment and an avoidance or reduction in external legal costs. In the history of the OLRC there has been stability of staffing, which supports the retention and transfer of institutional knowledge.

The number of OLRC school district members has varied over time as amalgamations and occurred, districts grew large enough to have sufficient internal resources and new districts joined. The OLRC currently provides ongoing Labour Relations support to its seven (7) member School Districts:

- School District No. 10 (Arrow Lakes),
- School District No. 19 (Revelstoke),
- School District No. 22 (Vernon),
- School District No. 51 (Boundary),
- School District No. 53 (Okanagan Similkameen),
- School District No. 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) and
- School District No. 74 (Gold Trail).

Since 2016 the British Columbia Public School Employers Association (BCPSEA) has had a contract with the OLRC to have the Executive Director provide district liaison services to OLRC member school districts.

Services

The OLRC provides support to member districts on all manner of human resources and labour relations issues such as collective bargaining, contract interpretation, grievance and arbitration management, investigations relating to complaints/performance concerns/harassment allegations, progressive discipline, medical leave and disability management, human rights, employment law, exempt staff decision consultation, job evaluation and the general application of management rights. The OLRC also provides education and in-service to staff in member organizations. A more comprehensive overview of the most frequently used service areas is outlined below:

Collective Bargaining

The OLRC has supported member school districts in collective bargaining since its inception in 1979. Historical bargaining records are maintained at the OLRC for all supported negotiations and research can be done on bargaining history as required.

The Executive Director acts as spokesperson or bargaining committee member on behalf of the Employer for each member school district for CUPE collective agreement negotiations. Since 2010 the Executive Director has also been a member of the BCPSEA provincial bargaining committee for the Provincial Framework negotiations with Support Staff Unions.

Collective bargaining support includes working with the employer bargaining committees to develop employer proposals and related strategies for negotiations that are consistent with the PSEC mandate and coordinated with BCPSEA; providing advice to bargaining committee on bargaining tactics and responses; development of comparative information as appropriate; organizing the bargaining documentation; acting as a liaison with the union committee through the union spokesperson; generation of a final Memorandum of Agreement and Collective Agreement, and ensuring legal requirements of relevant statutes are met. The OLRC also acts as an advisor and/or spokesperson for local teacher negotiations as practicable, given available resources.

Collective Agreement Administration

The OLRC provides interpretation, advice and guidance on matters arising from the collective agreements based on historical information, past practice, arbitral jurisprudence, legal precedents, general labour relations principles and experience to ensure problems are resolved and management rights are protected. Interpretations are documented and kept for reference for the relevant collective agreements. The OLRC works closely with BCPSEA on issues that have provincial implications.

Investigations and Progressive Discipline

Working with district management to appropriately manage the investigation and progressive discipline process for CUPE, teachers and exempt staff is an important and ongoing service that the OLRC provides. This support typically begins at the time a complaint is received and includes a determination as to whether an investigation is appropriate given the circumstances; assistance with the notice of investigation, if required; planning of the investigation – identification of witnesses, timing of investigation and creation or editing of the interview questions. It concludes with a review of all the information gathered, a recommendation of required action and preparation of necessary correspondence and support during the grievance process if required. The Executive Director may also be asked to personally conduct the investigation if appropriate and time permits, on a subsidized fee for service basis.

Grievances and Arbitration Management

The OLRC supports districts in the grievance and arbitration process for both CUPE and teacher disputes. This includes providing proactive advice on issues to avoid grievances, researching contract interpretation and legal issues, developing appropriate responses to the unions and direct participation in the final stages of the grievance process as part of the employer committee as required.

The OLRC assists in negotiating resolutions to grievances with the unions and helps ensure consistency of response across districts on similar issues to prevent the erosion of management rights and/or bargaining through the grievance procedure. The OLRC can assist in preparing and managing interpretation arbitrations and provide advice and file management on discipline arbitrations.

The OLRC works with districts and BCPSEA to ensure appropriate referral of grievances into the provincial Coordinated Legal and Arbitration Support Services (CLASS) system which provides coverage for the defence costs of grievance arbitrations and other labour actions.

Job Evaluation Plan Administration

The OLRC has been involved in pay equity and job evaluation since the formation of the plans and maintains records from the onset of the Provincial Pay Equity and Job Evaluation process commenced in 1992 for districts who were part of CUPE local 523. Historically, the OLRC has supported all school districts who were part of CUPE local 523 and who were part of a common collective agreement. These districts worked together in a regional job evaluation committee structure. Since 2019 all school districts now bargain separate collective agreements with CUPE which shifted the job evaluation committee structure. The OLRC continues to support individual districts in their job evaluation processes and works to support the revitalization of job evaluation processes in school districts who have not had active committees. Since 2014 the OLRC has also provided support in the administration and facilitation of the SD 22 Job Evaluation program.

Management Coaching

The OLRC is available for coaching and support for all manner of labour relations and human resources issues to support effective and defensible decision making at a local level. By developing relationships with member school districts over time the OLRC staff can ensure that support and solutions offered reflect local culture. In addition, the OLRC can support management by acting as a "buffer" in their relationship with the union on difficult issues and can assist with the development and deployment of labour relations strategies at the local level.

BCPSEA Liaison

The OLRC has a current contract with BCPSEA to provide district liaison services to member school districts regarding legal, human resources and labour relations matters. This allows for effective coordination in decision making and quick response to emergent issues both for the OLRC districts and BCPSEA. The Executive Director of the OLRC has also been retained by BCPSEA to assist in training workshops offered by BCPSEA.

Employee and Workplace Health

In 2015 the OLRC Board initiated another shared service undertaking. Ministry funds allocated to school districts for the implementation of the Attendance Support and Wellness initiative were pooled to fill this position on a contract basis to assist districts in the implementation of the Attendance Support and Wellness initiative and to provide support to districts on disability management issues. In 2020 the OLRC Board acknowledged the value and need for ongoing support for school districts with the management of medical leaves, return to work and duty to accommodate issues, disability management and the intersection between these issues and labour relations. The OLRC now provides districts with a continuum of support in this area.

Professional Development

The OLRC is committed to providing seminars for professional development/growth in areas of labour relations such as Progressive Discipline and Investigations, Management in Education and Professional Boundaries. Guest speakers are invited to attend OLRC in-person board meetings to present on a variety of topics of interest to the group.

Value

The value of the shared OLRC labour relations services is most apparent for small to medium-sized organizations who are faced with regular labour relations and human resources challenges with limited staff and legal budgets to address them. Provincial K-12 Education is a highly unionized, legalistic, process-oriented sector. Having quick and easy access to experienced, qualified, labour relations and human resources professionals who have a working knowledge of the culture, collective agreements, legislative framework and who can do hands-on-work as required makes a real difference.

Districts have typically seen the value of membership in the OLRC coming from a reduction in their labour relations legal expenses, an increase in internal capacity building and better pro-active decision-making which translates to a respectful labour relation climate within the districts.

It is the objective of the OLRC to provide a valuable service to all member districts. Feedback is always welcomed on what can be done to maintain and enhance the services available to both existing and prospective members.