OKANAGAN LABOUR RELATIONS COUNCIL

The 2024/25 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT TO THE BOARD

An overview of the services provided to member districts in the 2024/25 fiscal year.

OLRC
10/28/2025

OLRC 2024/25 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO THE BOARD

GOVERNANCE

At the Annual General Meeting held on November 7, 2024, members of the Council reviewed the Board of Director's annual report and the financial statements for the 2023/24 year. The 2024/25 Board meeting held on November 7, 2024 was in-person with the March 5 and June 18, 2025 meetings taking place via video conference.

Election of officers for a two-year term occurred at the March 5, 2025 Board meeting. The current OLRC Officers are as follows: Trustee R. Zandee of SD 53 (Okanagan Similkameen), Chair, and Trustee Gen Acton of SD 22 (Vernon), Vice-Chair. The Management Committee consists of the Chair, Vice-Chair and an appointed Secretary-Treasurer, B. Tisdale of SD 19 (Revelstoke) with the Executive Director ex officio.

In the 2024/25 fiscal year, the OLRC's expenditures totaled $463,064, which is slightly above the budget amount of $459,550. This is due to the decision to add extra hours to the Executive Assistant, HR and the Workplace Health Specialist on a temporary basis due to the time spent by the Executive Director on bargaining. The extra hours in the amount of $12,700 were budged to come from surplus.

Revenues for 2024/25 totaled $452,280 which aligned with the $452,273 budgeted amount. The financial statements for 2024/25 are presented separately from this report. Miranda Burdock, Secretary-Treasurer in SD 51 was appointed by the Management Committee to conduct a review of the OLRC 2024/25 financial statements and she provided her report to the OLRC Board Chair. The Management Committee responded to the results of the review and accepted the findings in a memo that is included in the October 28, 2025 Annual General Meeting Board package.

OLRC Membership and Staffing

During the 2024/25 year the OLRC had seven (7) member School Districts (SD 10, 19, 22, 51, 53, 58 and 74). The Executive Director of the OLRC also continued to provide contract district liaison services to BCPSEA.

The OLRC was staffed by three employees: Ms. Tammy Sowinski, Executive Director employed on a full-time basis, Ms. Nikki Cescon, Executive Assistant, Human Resources employed at a .85 FTE level in the 2024/25 year and Ms. Kathy Wright, Workplace Health Specialist, at a .65 FTE level in the 2024/25 year.

OLRC Strategic Planning

2024/25 was the second year of the three (3) year Strategic Plan developed in the 2022/23 year and approved by the Board at the June 21, 2023 Board meeting. The Operational Plan for the 2024/25 year was presented to the Board at the June 2024 meeting and updates were provided at each Board meeting during the 2024/25 school year regarding the status of the annual goals. The work done by the OLRC staff and Management Committee during the year contributed to the attainment of the established goals.

Some key accomplishments by the OLRC staff included the Executive Director acting as spokesperson for four OLRC districts during local teacher bargaining and assisting the other three OLRC districts as required. Through the good work of school district staff and the OLRC, six of the OLRC districts successfully concluded local teacher bargaining and signed LMAs in advance of all the rest of the districts in the province, and all OLRC districts concluded well in advance of the established deadline for local teacher bargaining. There were also no unresolved local matters referred to the impasse process by the local teacher unions. The Workplace Health Specialist actively supported two school districts in the implementation process for attendance support programs, including providing training to leadership teams. OLRC staff were also able to successfully negotiate a new three (3) year office lease for the OLRC with no increase in the current lease cost for all three years and relocation of the OLRC office to a new location with more space in the same building. This will help accommodate additional office space for the Workplace Heath Specialist who has now moved to Kelowna.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING UPDATE

2024/25 was the third and final year of the three-year 2022-2025 collective agreements for both teachers and support staff. The collective agreements came into effect on July 1, 2022 and expired on June 30, 2025. There were general wage increases during each year of the agreement along with cost-of-living (COLA) adjustments given the high levels of inflation that were present when the deal was being negotiated. The final wage increase for both the teacher and support staff collective agreements was a general wage increase of 2% and COLA increase of 1%, effective July 1, 2024. The initial monetary mandate set by government in 2022 did change during bargaining given the quickly evolving economic situation. This was a significant departure from previous rounds and may have an impact on the union's willingness to accept the government's monetary mandate in the current negotiations.

The economic climate for the current bargain has shifted significantly since the last round with increasing levels of provincial deficit and unprecedented trade and tariff challenges arising in our economic relationship with the United States. The current fiscal mandate for bargaining is more modest to reflect this new reality. There is currently push back against this mandate with labour disruption taking place in the broader public sector. The BCGEU is in the sixth week of a strike and

PEA is also engaged in strike activity. These strikes are having an impact on the pace of bargaining in the K-12 sector.

In accordance with the Labour Relations Code, negotiations for the new collective agreements for both teachers and support staff could have commenced in March 1, 2025. There was no active bargaining for support staff until April 2025 when BCPSEA and the K-12 Presidents Council started meetings for the Provincial Framework Agreement (PFA). For teachers, there was a Letter of Understanding reached between the BCTF and BCPSEA for local teacher bargaining which allowed for an earlier commencement in November 2024 and agreed upon date for conclusion in February 2025. This helped the provincial parties to be available as required to support local teacher bargaining and it spread out the workload for districts who often have the same people involved in local teacher and support staff bargaining.

Teachers

The Executive Director acted as the spokesperson for SD 10, 22, 58 and 74 during local teacher bargaining this round and provided remote support to SD 19, 51 and 53 as requested. All member districts reached a local matters agreement with their local teachers' union without utilizing the impasse process and the agreements have been fully ratified by all four parties.

Provincial teacher bargaining between BCPSEA and the BCTF commenced on March 13, 2025. The parties have met over 20 days since then and are continuing to meet. The negotiations are starting to focus on monetary issues which can be the most challenging, particularly given the current economic climate and ongoing strike action by the BCGEU.

Bruce Tisdale, Secretary-Treasurer in SD 19 and a member of the OLRC Management Committee, is participating on the employer bargaining team for provincial teacher bargaining this round. Rob Zandee, SD 53 Board Chair, OLRC Board Chair and BCPSEA Board member as well as Tammy Sowinski, Executive Director OLRC are participating on the employer bargaining team with the K-12 Presidents Council. Bruce, Rob, Tammy and Malcolm Reid, Assistant Superintendent from SD 22, are also members of the BCPSEA Technical Advisory Committee which was created to provide sector advice and feedback to the BCPSEA bargaining team for both teacher and support staff provincial bargaining. This level of participation in bargaining from the OLRC districts helps ensure the interests of the districts are well represented.

Support Staff

BCPSEA and the K-12 Presidents' Council and Support Staff Unions commenced negotiations for the Provincial Framework Agreement (PFA) in Vancouver on April 14, 2025 and have met seven (7) times thus far with more sessions scheduled in October and November. Meetings stopped during the summer break and negotiations resumed in September 2025. Once the PFA is established it will need to be agreed to by each local school district, included in each local collective agreement, and ratified at each local level and provincial level to be in effect.

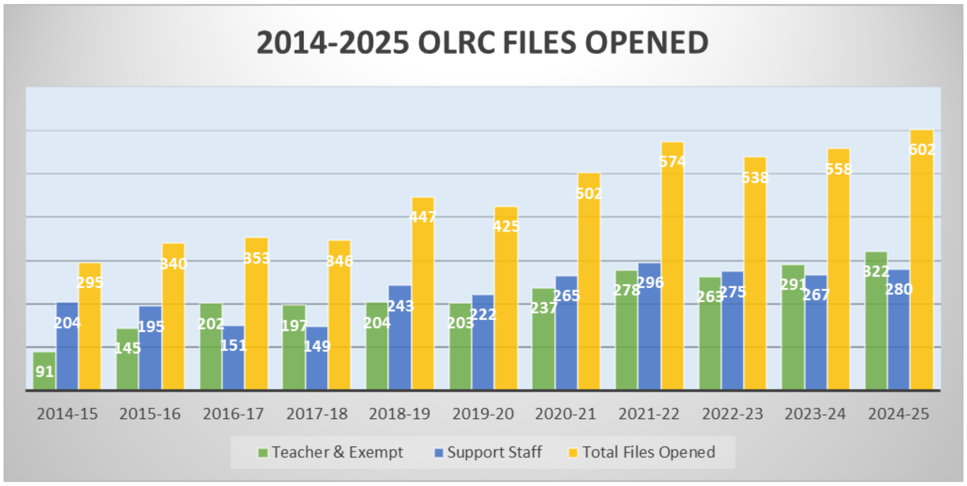
Local bargaining could have commenced in March 2025; however, there has been an increasing level of coordination in the timing of local support staff bargaining with many locals stating that they have been advised by CUPE national not to commence active local bargaining until the PFA has been concluded. This will create a compressed timeline for bargaining as the PFA typically includes the required date for ratification. The Executive Director has historically acted as a spokesperson or a member of the bargaining team for all OLRC member school districts in local negotiations with support staff and the plan is for that to continue this round. The Executive Director is working with school districts and local unions to try and schedule bargaining dates so that each district does have enough time for bargaining once the PFA is concluded.

LABOUR RELATIONS

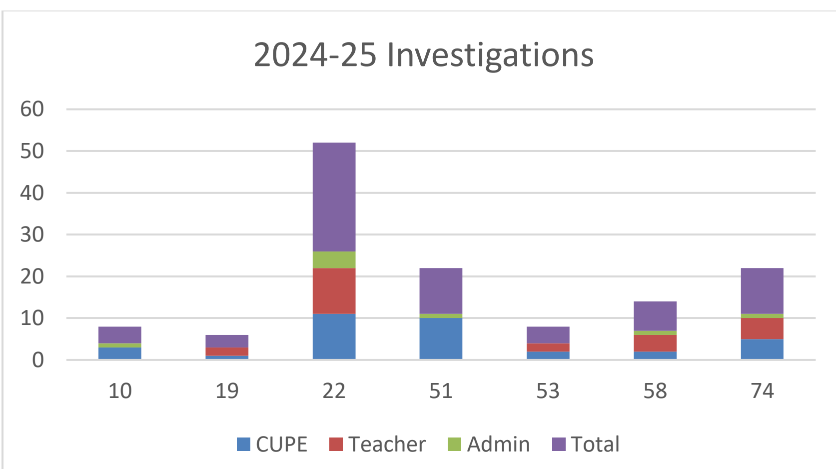
During the 2024/25 school year, OLRC staff experienced a modest rise in workload compared to prior years. Staff supported districts by handling a greater number of investigations and grievances, with a notable increase in cases progressing to mediation and arbitration. There was also a steady caseload of disability management files, preparations for support staff bargaining, training and the drafting of a multi-year OLRC budget in addition to routine business. Ongoing support was provided to districts regarding disciplinary issues, contract interpretation, medical leave and accommodation issues, employee conflict, harassment claims, and exempt staffing issues.

Many districts were in a different position during the Spring staffing cycle this year and inquired with the OLRC about layoffs and restructuring due to budget restrictions and reduction in staffing resulting from enrollment changes. This is a marked change from the many years of district's struggling with recruitment and filling vacant positions. Some districts were advised to issue section 54 notices under the Labour Relations Code, on a without prejudice basis, due to the number of layoffs being issued at one time.

During the 2024/25 year there were 602 active files which included 322 files involving teacher or exempt staff issues and 280 files involving support staff.



Over the past year the OLRC supported districts in 66 investigations (32 teacher or exempt and 34 support staff) which is a 45% increase from last year. Investigations were initiated to pursue complaints from parents, students, co-workers, or district staff which, if proven to be true, could result in a disciplinary outcome. During investigations the facts, motivation and knowledge of expectations are clarified. The outcome to the individual employee is based on all the witness and documentary information on the current incident, the information provided by the employee, a review of their past performance, a credibility assessment, the standards in the workplace and the application of legal principles. At the end of an investigation, it is often the case that the facts are quite different than when they first appear. This shows how important it is to conduct a thorough investigation prior to determining what, if any, discipline is appropriate.



Many investigations completed during the 2024/25 year included allegations of a less serious nature and resulted in either no findings of misconduct and/or letters of expectations. However, there were also a significant number of investigations which entailed more serious allegations, including bullying & harassment, theft and racism, which required a considerable time commitment by district and OLRC staff with many resulting in findings of misconduct and disciplinary outcomes including suspension or termination. External contractors were used at times for complex, sensitive, or time-consuming investigations. In all the investigations completed, the facts were gathered, and the allegations were either substantiated or not. Well-structured and thorough investigations provide the foundation for well-reasoned and defensible decision-making on the outcome and consequences. Historically, these consequences are rarely arbitrated or litigated, and if they are, the decisions are supported, which saves a significant amount of time and money going forward.

The following are a sample of the investigations where the OLRC provided support to districts in the past year:

Teachers and Administrative Officers

- Complaint against teacher for inappropriate social media posts. Investigation was put on hold while the teacher was on medical leave. Teacher resigned before completion of investigation. Resignation reported to the TRB.
- Complaint of teacher's fraudulent use of sick leave for vacation. Investigation conducted – findings of misconduct. Letter of suspension issued. Grievance filed and in progress.
- Complaint of teacher's fraudulent use of sick leave for vacation. Investigation initiated but currently on hold; teacher on medical leave.
- Complaint about TTOC's inappropriate comments and physical contact. Investigation conducted – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.
- Complaint of teacher's inappropriate comments and yelling. Investigation conducted – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.
- Complaint against an elementary teacher for using inappropriate videos in class. Investigation conducted – no findings of misconduct. Letter of direction issued; teacher resigned.
- Complaint about exempt employee's use of district money for personal reasons. Investigation conducted – findings of misconduct. Employee resigned.
- Complaint against an exempt employee for inappropriate conduct. Investigation conducted – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.
- Complaint against exempt employee for bullying & harassment. Investigation conducted by external contractor – findings of misconduct. Employee resigned.
- Complaint against teacher for inappropriate conduct and comments. Investigation conducted – findings of misconduct. Letter of suspension issued. Grievance filed and in progress.

There are two active teacher grievances, one is challenging a suspension, and the other is challenging a termination which were issued by the districts as the disciplinary outcomes to an investigation.

Support Staff

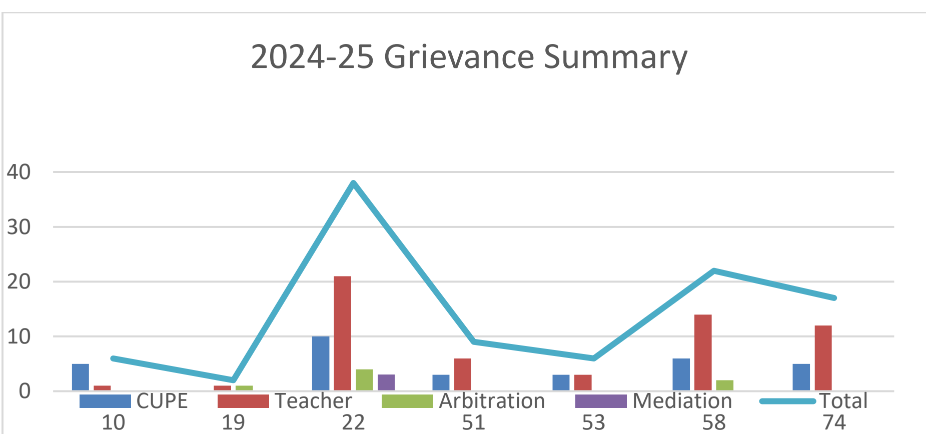
- Complaint against tradesperson for yelling at students. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.

- Complaint against bus driver for comments and conduct. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.
- Complaint against education assistant for inappropriate physical contact. Previously investigated for similar issue with disciplinary outcome. Employee resigned prior to investigation.
- Complaint against food service employee for inappropriately using school district gift cards for personal use. Investigation conducted – findings of misconduct. Employee terminated. Grievance filed and in progress.
- Complaint against bus driver's competency following incident. Investigation conducted – findings of misconduct. Driver placed on unpaid leave of absence until driver training and assessment completed. Grievance filed and in process.
- Complaint against custodian for inappropriate comments to administrator. Investigation conducted – findings of misconduct. Employee terminated because of prior discipline. Grievance filed but withdrawn.
- Complaint against education assistant for fraudulent use of sick leave for vacation. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of suspension issued.
- Complaint against tradesperson for inappropriate conduct towards supervisor. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of suspension issued. Grievance filed and in progress.

There are three active support staff grievances at this point regarding the disciplinary outcomes, one is challenging a suspension, one a removal from the job due to competency/safety and the other a termination.

Grievances and Arbitrations

During the 2024-25 year the ORLC provided support to school districts on 96 grievances. Once grievances move past step three (3), they are entered into the CLASS system to ensure that legal support is provided should the grievance move on to arbitration or mediation. As of June 30, 2025, there were 38 active grievances (29 Teacher & 9 Support Staff) at Step 3 or further in the CLASS system, which is a 19% increase over last year, with 8 referred to arbitration, mediation, or human rights. The OLRC supported districts with drafting and reviewing grievance responses in a timely manner.



The following are some of the local grievances that were referred to arbitration where the OLRC provided support to districts:

Teachers

- Grievance related to the interpretation of the restored composition language and how many meetings per year are required to identify students with special educational needs and whether a particular student was properly removed as a student with special educational needs. Referred to arbitration, November 2024. Mediation took place which resulted in a Settlement Agreement on part of the items in dispute. Arbitration on remaining interpretive issues scheduled for February 2026.
- Grievance regarding calculating prep time for part time teaching assignments. Arbitration occurred April 2025. Still awaiting written decision.
- Grievance regarding the termination of a teacher following a misconduct investigation and Board hearing in September 2024. Referred to arbitration, April 2026.
- Grievance regarding the application of Article B.1.5 and the placement of teachers on scale when B.1.6 and B.1.8 were introduced then the bottom step of the salary grid was removed in a district who had an existing superior MOA. Referred to arbitration. Similar arbitration occurred in Burnaby school district focused on placement of new teachers with no experience. Arbitrator found in favor of the union. Mediation for our district occurred in September 2025. The union said that, based on the combined effect of Articles B.1.5 and B.1.8, new continuing teachers should start at Step 3 of the local salary grid. The employer said that new continuing teachers should start on Step 2. The union and employer also disagreed with how teachers with experience should be placed i.e. a teacher with 4 years of experience being placed at step 7 vs 5. Through settlement, the employer accepted the union's interpretation for new teachers, which was in line with the Burnaby award, but was able to negotiate a reduction to retroactive liability and to maintain its approach for the placement of teachers with experience. One other OLRC school district has a grievance heading to arbitration on a similar matter.
- Grievance regarding failure to fill based on lack of TTOC availability and the failure to replace absent teachers with TTOC's. Referred to arbitration. Mediation scheduled for October 2025. Changes in the employment market have taken place such that there are now sufficient TTOC's and the union is asking the district not to hire any more.

Support Staff

- Grievance of termination arising from theft of money. Referred to arbitration.
- Grievance related to the layoff of a support staff employee. Referred to arbitration. Mediation requested by the union.

OTHER ISSUES

BCPSEA District Liaison Contract

The Executive Director continued to provide contract district liaison services to OLRC member school districts on behalf of BCPSEA during the 2024/25 school year. On August 19, 2025 the Executive Director met with Bruce Anderson, BCPSEA CEO and Chris Beneteau, Executive Director, Labour Relations at BCPSEA to review and discuss the contract between BCPSEA and the OLRC.

All parties agreed that the existing contract was working well and expressed a commitment to an ongoing productive working relationship. Based largely on the success of the OLRC model, BCPSEA is pursuing a similar shared services initiative to provide additional labour relations support for a group of northern School Districts.

The Executive Director continued to participate in scheduled weekly virtual meetings and ongoing communication with BCPSEA as well as new employee mentoring as part of her liaison role. The Executive Director communicates provincial information to OLRC member districts, supports the mid-contract modification process, participates in provincial committees, assists with the management of arbitration cases in CLASS, supports provincially appropriate settlement discussions for arbitrations and ensures appropriate responses to district inquiries as well as communicating district issues to BCPSEA.

The Executive Director provided a collective bargaining presentation to the BCSTA chapter meetings in both the Okanagan and Kootenay zones at the start of the 2024/25 school year. These meetings took place in person in Nakusp in September and Revelstoke in October 2024, and the Executive Director provided an overview of collective bargaining in the sector for all attendees, including trustees in conflict. The Executive Director also helped facilitate the BCPSEA Bargaining Academy training in Kelowna in October 2024 and co-presented on Local Bargaining at the BCPSEA Symposium in November 2024. The BCPSEA AGM was held in Vancouver on January 30-31, 2025 with a primary focus on bargaining.

Exempt Staff

At the June 2024 OLRC Board meeting, salary increases of 3% were approved for the three OLRC employees, effective July 1, 2024, as per PSEC's exempt compensation mandate for 2024. Enhancements to the OLRC benefit plan which mimic the standard teacher extended health plan were also approved and included expanding the counselling benefit to include registered clinical counselors and registered social workers with an annual limit of $1500 as well as the addition of the HPV and Shingles vaccines.

In the spring of 2025, the general unionized wage pattern for the current fiscal year was not yet established through public sector bargaining so the PSEC Secretariat directed all public sector employers, including school districts, to refrain from providing in-range, performance-based increases. BCPSEA sent communication to districts regarding this freeze on April 29, 2025. The freeze remains in effect.

Job Evaluation

The OLRC Executive Assistant, HR continued to act as a facilitator of the job evaluation committees in SD's 22, 53 and 10 which included the coordination of meetings, preparation and distribution of meeting material and follow up communication. OLRC staff also assisted other member districts with the development of new job descriptions, amendment of existing job descriptions and the recommendation of interim wage rates as identified through the job evaluation plan, market research or a combination of both, depending on collective agreement language on wage rate setting.

Currently the provincial job evaluation project is the subject of negotiation between BCPSEA and the K-12 Presidents Council. More will be known about the future of this initiative at the conclusion of bargaining. The Executive Director has been actively involved in the provincial job evaluation project and assisted the employer bargaining committee with the development of proposals to move this project forward in bargaining. The Executive Director developed and presented to the K-12 Presidents' Council during bargaining regarding the provincial job evaluation project's status and next steps.

Meanwhile, the local job evaluation plans and collective agreement obligations remain in place. Over the term of the current collective agreement CUPE has been increasing pressure on districts who have not been actively maintaining local job evaluation systems to do so. CUPE is offering to provide training to job evaluation committee members and may be pushing to review/update/create job descriptions (which are the foundation of the current job evaluation system) or to re-evaluate all existing positions. In some cases where the historical relationship between job evaluation points and pay bands has been lost, CUPE is offering to re-create the system. Although it is not wrong to take advantage of the training being offered by CUPE and to listen to their feedback and suggestions, it is important for school districts to have a good understanding of their management rights in this area, the cost implications of job evaluation decisions and some of the key principles of job evaluation (i.e. it is a way to organize jobs within the district in an equitable way, it is not to compare jobs to the external compensation market; it is a way to value a job based on the requirements of the position, it is not a way to evaluate the contributions or qualifications of a particular person doing a job).

We will know soon whether we are proceeding with a provincial job evaluation plan using a whole job matching methodology with provincial support or whether we are going to continue to administer the local individual factor job evaluation plans. Either way, job evaluation will continue to be an important way to ensure internal equity between new and existing positions in school districts. The OLRC and BCPSEA are available to assist districts in this area, either directly or by identifying appropriate external resources.

Workplace Health Specialist

This past school year revealed a growing demand for support across member districts in managing employee wellbeing. The number of active workplace health cases increased, with many involving complex medical and attendance-related challenges. These cases often required tailored approaches, including accommodation and coordinated return-to-work planning.

Across seven school districts, a total of 89 active files were reported. Of these, 30 cases were carried over from the previous year, indicating ongoing support needs. Return-to-work outcomes were achieved in 37 cases, while 7 resignations and 1 termination were recorded. Districts such as SD 51 Boundary and SD 22 Vernon demonstrated strong return-to-work performance and proactive accommodation strategies.

The Attendance Support Program continues to gain traction. One district has fully committed to launching a comprehensive program this fall, with education and training already underway. The OLRC remains engaged in supporting all member districts as they prepare to implement similar initiatives.

This year's data underscores the importance of early intervention, sustained support, and collaborative planning to promote employee wellbeing and workplace continuity.