EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT TO THE BOARD

Okanagan Labour Relations Council

MARCH 6, 2026

OKANAGAN LABOUR RELATIONS COUNCIL

Labour Relations Update

It has been an interesting start to the 2025/26 school year with the evolution of provincial teacher bargaining, support staff framework bargaining and the delayed start of local support staff bargaining. Meanwhile, OLRC staff have been busy providing ongoing support to districts with contract interpretation, grievances, investigations, and disability management, including some highly complex mental health and addictions files.

As of January 31, 2026, the overall file count at the OLRC was 342 (200 Teacher/Admin. and 142 Support Staff), which is comparable to previous years. There are 35 investigations within this file count (19 Teacher/Admin and 16 Support Staff). Ten of these investigations resulted in findings of serious misconduct with significant disciplinary outcomes, including five cases of suspensions for teachers with durations between five and thirty unpaid days. Investigation themes included sick leave misuse, TTOC/teacher misconduct and professional boundary violations.

Grievance and Arbitration

Year to date within the OLRC districts there are currently 36 active grievances (27 Teacher & 9 Support Staff) at Step 3 or further in the CLASS system with 11 currently referred to arbitration, mediation, or human rights. There are some themes in the current teacher grievances which include union challenges to the use of teacher librarians for prep coverage, placement on scale, failure to fill, and interpretive issues including restored language of class size, composition, best efforts and identification of students with special educational needs.

There are three upcoming OLRC district arbitrations and mediations this spring. One involves a challenge to the appropriate pay for a part time secondary teacher on a partial medical leave. This is being heard on March 30-31, 2026, by Arbitrator Jacquie de Aguayo. There is a one-day mediation scheduled on April 7, 2026, for a grievance involving the layoff of a CUPE maintenance employee, where the district is being represented by Warren Woodhurst from Harris, and there is a five-day arbitration hearing on a teacher termination arising from professional misconduct and dishonesty which is scheduled from April 13-17, 2026, with Arbitrator Alison Matacheskie.

Earlier in the school year there were some positive outcomes in arbitration and mediation for OLRC districts. SD 22 received a positive arbitration decision in October 2025 from Arbitrator Jackie de Aguayo for a hearing that was held on April 15, 2025, regarding the interpretation of teacher collective agreement language for the allocation of paid prep time to part time secondary teachers and the specific methodology used by the district to calculate this. David Woolias, from Harris, was the employer's council. Arbitrator de Aguayo found in favor of the employer and dismissed the grievance. She found that the language of the collective agreement was clear and unambiguous, and its terms could be read harmoniously. Based on the plan and ordinary meaning of the words used, and reading them consistent with their purpose, she found that it was clear that the parties' mutual intention was to provide a premium of 12.5% of salary as compensation for the fact that certain part time teachers do not receive the 12.5% of scheduled prep time as a component of their total workload as contemplated by the collective agreement.

SD 22 also reached a positive settlement agreement in October 2025 during mediation with Arbitrator Jacquie de Aguayo for a teacher grievance regarding failure to fill based on lack of TTOC availability and the failure to replace absent teachers with TTOC's. Since the grievance was filed, changes in the employment market have taken place such that there are now sufficient TTOC's. Michael Hancock, from Harris, was the employer's council. As a resolution to the grievance, there was no retroactive liability and the employer agreed to provide the union with a report three times per year for this school year and the following school year showing each instance in which a teacher was not replaced by a TTOC and if a teacher was reassigned to cover an absence in each instance. The parties also agreed to continue ongoing discussions in labour management meetings regarding the current size of TTOC roster, areas of shortage where the district is unable to meet the need for replacement teachers, and whether there is sufficient work to warrant hiring additional TTOC's.

SD 58 reached a favorable settlement agreement on a support staff grievance related to the termination of an employee during mediation in September 2025 where the district was represented by Warren Woodhurst from Harris.

SD 58 also reached a settlement agreement in September 2025 during mediation with Arbitrator Jacquie de Aguayo for a teacher collective agreement interpretation grievance that was originally scheduled for arbitration. David Woolias, from Harris, was the employer's council. The grievance was 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 given that their district had existing superior language. Through settlement, the employer accepted the union's interpretation for new teachers without experience, which was in line with a recent arbitration award in SD 41 Burnaby where the employer focused on the placement of new teachers with no experience. SD 58 was able to maintain their practice of placement on scale for teachers with experience and to negotiate a reduction to retroactive liability. SD 19 has a similar grievance referred to arbitration and will use Keith Mitchell as counsel from Harris, who was also counsel for SD 41 Burnaby. BCPSEA appealed Arbitrator de Aguayo's decision in the SD 41 Burnaby case and recently received the decision from the Labour Relations Board. The appeal was unsuccessful and therefore the results of the SD 41 Burnaby arbitration stand.

Provincially, BCPSEA and the BCTF recently agreed upon a process to address the issue of retroactive liability for TTOCs who may have missed entitlement to paid sick leave under the Employment Standards Act (ESA) in accordance with an arbitration decision by John Hall. In that decision Arbitrator Hall determined that TTOCs and other causal employees, including support staff, are entitled to the five paid sick days under the ESA for days when they are called to work and need to refuse because they are sick, even if they were not previously scheduled. This rebutted the employer's claim that TTOCs and other casual employees would not be entitled to paid sick leave unless they missed a previously scheduled day of work.

Following this award there has been an obligation to rectify any missed earnings for those TTOCs or casual employees impacted. Many districts did not keep clear records of when an employee refused a call out due to illness. As a result, the BCTF and BCPSEA have agreed to a claim process where the district provides the TTOCs and casual employees with a claim form and it is up to the employee to submit information about days where they say they were entitled to a paid ESA sick leave day. The district then reviews the claim for payment. This process of submitting claim forms is available to employees until April. Districts are also obliged to provide the local union with any reports that they have which show missed call outs, by early March.

BCPSEA

BCPSEA has recently completed their work on an updated Strategic Plan for the period from 2026-2030. The plan was approved by the BCPSEA Board and was distributed to school districts on February 4, 2026.

BCPSEA's 32nd AGM took place virtually this year on January 29, 2026. Several resolutions were addressed along with elections for the BCPSEA Board Northern Interior and Metro regions. One of the noteworthy resolutions includes a change to the timing and structure of the AGM to conform with the Societies Act, which entails moving to a June AGM with another General Meeting in February. Another resolution includes a change submitted by SD 39 Vancouver to the BCPSEA Conflict of Interest Bylaws which was debated but not passed. The date for the 2026 BCPSEA Symposium was recently confirmed as November 30 and December 1, 2026, in-person, at the Coast Coal Harbour. The date is later this year in recognition of the changes that may come from Trustee elections in October 2026.

BCPSEA distributed a CLASS legal costs report for Q1 (2025-2026) on January 6, 2026, which included finalized experience-based fees for the 2025-2026 school year. In general, the fees for OLRC districts are similar or less than other comparable sized school districts. Vernon is an exception and has seen a significant increase in costs based on experience which can be attributed to a higher number of teacher grievances being referred to arbitration by the union during the past two years.

The Executive Director of the OLRC continued her work with BCPSEA including providing BCPSEA district liaison services to OLRC districts, participating in the employer bargaining team for Provincial Framework discussions with the K-12 Presidents Council, and fulfilling her role as a member on the Support Staff Education Committee (SSEC) and Provincial Job Evaluation Steering Committee.

Teacher

Provincial teacher bargaining between BCPSEA and the BCTF commenced on March 13, 2025, and after 42 bargaining sessions the parties reached a tentative agreement early in the morning on Saturday, February 7, 2026.

Prior to this agreement being reached, the BCTF had declared impasse on January 13, 2026. The BCTF then held a meeting with all of the local presidents on the evening of January 13 to inform them about reaching impasse and they issued a press release on January 14, stating in part that “Teachers are being asked to accept less support for students than other public sectors have received for their work” and that “If teachers received the same funding as other public sector unions, the Federation believes progress could be made in the following areas: More counsellors… quoting a ratio they say is the average in North America as 1:250 students vs our current 1:693; Class size limits for Grades 4-12 for all districts within the collective agreement, specifically for those districts without existing language; More preparation time for teachers; and Salary improvements at the low end of the pay grid to attract more new teachers to the profession”. These requests went well beyond any additional money allocated to the other public sector unions, including the BCGEU or the Facilities Bargaining Association; however, they did identify the union’s stated priorities. The BCTF met with government to seek an increase to the mandate. If the BCTF was unsuccessful in securing additional money, it was likely that there would have been a strike vote taken. BCPSEA began preparations for this potential outcome and initiated a sector call with school districts regarding the current state of bargaining and next steps.

However, despite declaring impasse, the parties did resume bargaining on January 26 and continued to meet over the next two weeks making good progress on tabled items. Some additional resources were provided to the table which helped the parties come to agreement in the early hours of the morning on February 7, 2026. BCPSEA’s Board of Directors approved the tentative MOA as did the BCTF’s Executive Committee so that it can be brought to membership for ratification voting. BCPSEA is in the process of organizing calls with the sector to explain the content of the deal which was reached under the Balanced Measures Mandate with a 4-year term and a 3% general wage increase (GWI) per year in keeping with other settlements in the public sector.

Bruce Tisdale, SD 19 Secretary-Treasurer and OLRC management committee member, participated on the employer bargaining team and BCPSEA Technical Advisory Committee for provincial teacher bargaining this round. Malcolm Reid, SD 22 Assistant Superintendent, along with Rob Zandee, SD 53 Board Chair and OLRC Board Chair, and Tammy Sowinski were also actively involved with the Technical Advisory Committee. The Committee continues to provide sector advice and feedback to the BCPSEA bargaining team for support staff provincial bargaining.

Support Staff

BCPSEA and the K-12 Presidents' Council and Support Staff Unions commenced negotiations for the Provincial Framework Agreement (PFA) from April 14 to 16, 2025. The parties have met 12 times so far. On November 19 and 20, 2025 the employer tabled a revised monetary and term proposal, which was equivalent to the one presented to the BCTF during provincial teacher bargaining before the winter break. Following these sessions, no new bargaining dates were set and CUPE began actively lobbying government for parity with other negotiated settlements.

BCPSEA and the K-12 Presidents' Council met again on February 17, 2026, in a virtual session. During this session the employer tabled an enhanced mandate which was in line with the relative value of the mandate for the teacher table. There was no change to the general wage increases or term, but some additional supplemental funding was made available in targeted areas. This was well received by the union, and the parties are now working on scheduling dates to reconvene with in person bargaining.

The local support staff unions have continued to postpone bargaining until there is an agreed to PFA under the direction from the K-12 Presidents' Council. The Executive Director has encouraged districts to review all previously bargained monetary accounts to ensure the accurate balances are known and have an opinion on whether they have been helpful. With a new round of bargaining there may be opportunity to repurpose existing money as well as to choose how to use any new funds.

The Executive Director has continued to be actively involved in the Provincial Job Evaluation project as a member of the Provincial Job Evaluation Steering Committee. The Executive Director also provided a presentation to the K-12 Presidents' Council during bargaining regarding the Provincial Job Evaluation project to review the status of the project and the implementation phase. CUPE is pushing back regarding the implementation, which is a significant change from their previous support. BCPSEA will continue to provide updates on this during bargaining.

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.

Exempt Staff

The PSEC Secretariat directed all public sector employers in April 2025, including school districts, to refrain from providing in-range, performance-based increases until the general unionized wage pattern for the current fiscal year has been established through public sector bargaining. This freeze has been in effect since then. Once the mandate is established and collective bargaining is well underway, BCSPEA will notify school districts of the government's annual compensation policy direction through the PSEC Secretariat.

General Update

Workplace Health

The first half of the 2025/26 school year reflects trends consistent with previous years: increasing file complexity, evolving circumstances, and the need for thorough review and strategic decision-making. Ensuring best practice remains essential to achieving fair, consistent, and defensible outcomes across districts.

Districts actively engaged in the Attendance Support Program are now seeing tangible results. In several recent cases initially flagged as potential attendance concerns, the program quickly identified underlying medical issues, allowing districts to transition appropriately into disability management processes. This is exactly the intended function of the program. It reinforces the value of early identification, demonstrates to unions that attendance monitoring can surface broader employee needs, and ensures concerns are addressed through the correct pathways. Nearly all districts now have reliable access to absence data, strengthening their ability to intervene early and consistently.

We continue to observe longer durations for open files. This is largely due to increasing complexity and shifting circumstances, for example, investigations that begin as conduct or attendance matters but evolve into medical absences. These transitions can extend timelines and delay resolution.

Adherence to established processes remains critical. While compassion and support are important considerations, stepping outside formal procedures can create unclear expectations, inconsistent outcomes, and missed opportunities to manage files effectively. A consistent, structured approach ensures fairness, clarity, and timely resolution.

Job Evaluation

The Executive Assistant, HR continues to provide direct assistance to SD 10, 19, 22, 51 and SD 53 with their existing CUPE support staff job evaluation plans, including job description creation and interim wage rate setting. The Executive Assistant, HR assisted with the facilitation of SD 22’s joint job evaluation committee meeting which took place in October 2025.

Strategic Plan

The OLRC staff continued to meet established goals and timelines identified in the 2023-2026 strategic plan and 2025/26 annual operational plan. Given that this is the final year of the current strategic plan, work has been underway to update the plan.

A survey in support of the new strategic plan development was distributed to district staff and trustees in December 2025. The survey helps assess the current level of satisfaction with the OLRC services, the priorities of service and opportunities for improvement.

The feedback received from both district staff and trustees was consistently positive. 100% of district staff surveyed agree that the OLRC staff are available when they need them and respond in a timely manner. 100% of respondents agreed that their labour relations and HR decision making is positively influenced by advice from the OLRC and 100% say that there is an ongoing need for OLRC services in their district. In the trustee survey, 100% of respondents agree that their district received valuable services from the OLRC and 100% agree there is a continuing need for labour relations services in their district.

The top four services provided by the OLRC, as identified by district staff, were: Grievance/arbitration/mediation support; Collective agreement administration/interpretation; Investigation Services and Collective Bargaining.

When asked about the membership fees, 87% of trustee respondents agree that OLRC membership fees are appropriate. There were no respondents who disagreed with the fees but there was some uncertainty. 100% of trustee respondents were aware that their district was a member of the OLRC and 88% were aware of the services provided by the OLRC. 75% of trustee respondents say that communication from the OLRC board meetings is shared with trustees through the OLRC Director. There were a variety of comments about the strengths of the shared service model provided by the OLRC including, as one district staff put it "I sincerely appreciate the early support when issues arise and the experience and proactive recommendations that are provided. This truly results in cost savings for our district." And as another said "Excellent service. Highest quality in BC!".

When asked about opportunities for improvement there was a suggestion that orientation for new district staff to understand the OLRC and school district connections include non-HR staff such as operations managers and payroll. Trustee comments were that “Shared cost is a benefit” as well as that the OLRC provides “Extremely valuable, professional service”, “Collaboration and shared learning” and that the districts receive “Increased support through a shared resource.” There were limited comments from trustees related to improvements other than to ‘liaison with union and employer representatives” and a trustee reflected that they could “try reporting to the (SD) board a bit more.”

Feedback from this survey has been considered along with other input in the formulation of the new strategic plan by the Management Committee. The Management Committee is recommending that the Board approve the Strategic Plan at the March 6 meeting for a period of four years instead of three to better align with the collective agreement cycles.

Once the Strategic Plan is approved by the Board, the OLRC staff will develop a supporting operational plan for the 2026-27 year. Any items which may impact the budget will be brought forward when the Board approves the 2026-27 budget in our June 2026 meeting.

OLRC Budget

In June 2025, the OLRC Board approved the 2025/26 annual budget, and the OLRC has stayed on target during the first half of the fiscal year with no unexpected expenses arising.