2025/26 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S ANNUAL REPORT TO THE BOARD



OKANAGAN LABOUR RELATIONS COUNCIL

OCTOBER 14, 2026

OKANAGAN LABOUR RELATIONS COUNCIL

Governance

At the Annual General Meeting held on October 28, 2025, members of the Council reviewed and approved the Board of Director's annual report and the financial statements for the 2025/26 year. All the 2025/26 Board meetings took place via video conference.

The current OLRC Officers are in the second year of their two-year term, having been appointed at the March 5, 2025, Board meeting and are as follows: Trustee Rob 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, Bruce Tisdale of SD 19 (Revelstoke) with the Executive Director ex officio. There is an upcoming Trustee election in October 2026 which may result in new appointments to the OLRC Board. Gen Acton has chosen not to run for re-election as a Trustee in SD 22 which will create a vacancy in the Vice-Chair position on the OLRC Board. The OLRC wishes to extend sincere thanks and appreciation to Ms. Acton for her years of service on the OLRC Board and the Management Committee. The OLRC Board will select a new Vice-Chair following the Trustee election.

In 2025/26, OLRC expenditures totalled $461,801, below the approved budget of $480,200. This amount included a salary increase of 2% for the Executive Director and 2.5% increase for the Executive Assistant, HR and Workplace Health Specialist, effective July 1, 2025. This amount also included temporary additional hours for the Executive Assistant, HR and the Workplace Health Specialist while the Executive Director was engaged in collective bargaining. These additional hours were budgeted to be funded through surplus. The overall underspend was primarily due to the postponement of local support staff bargaining and reduced Executive Director travel costs.

Revenues for 2025/26 totalled $472,647, compared with the budgeted amount of $464,984. The variance was due to a duplicate invoice being recorded in January 2026, overstating revenue by approximately $7,700. The error will be reversed in 2026/27 and, as such, consulting fee revenue will be understated in the subsequent year.

The financial statements for 2025/26 are presented separately from this report. Miranda Burdock, Secretary-Treasurer in SD 53, was appointed by the Management Committee to conduct a review of the OLRC 2025/26 financial statements. Miranda submitted her report to the OLRC Board Chair, and the Management Committee formally accepted the review's findings in a memo included in the October 14, 2026, Annual General Meeting package delivered to the Board.

OLRC Membership and Staffing

During the 2025/26 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 2025/26 year and Ms. Kathy Wright, Workplace Health Specialist, at a .65 FTE level in the 2025/26 year.

OLRC Strategic Plan

The 2025/26 year marked the third and final year of the OLRC's three-year Strategic Plan, which was developed in 2022/23 and approved by the Board on June 21, 2023. The 2025/26 Operational Plan was presented to the Board in June 2025, with progress updates provided at each Board meeting throughout the school year. The work of OLRC staff and the Management Committee during the year supported the achievement of the established goals. The new four-year Strategic Plan for 2026-2030 was approved by the Board at the March 6, 2026, meeting.

Notable achievements in 2025/26 included the Executive Director serving as spokesperson for local teacher bargaining in four OLRC districts and providing support to the remaining three districts as needed. All OLRC districts successfully concluded local teacher bargaining and signed Local Matters Agreements well in advance of the established deadline and ahead of all other districts in the province. No unresolved local matters were referred by local teacher unions to the impasse process. The Workplace Health Specialist also supported two school districts with the implementation of attendance support programs and provided related training to leadership teams. In addition, OLRC staff successfully negotiated a new three-year office lease with no increase to the current lease rate over the term. The OLRC office was relocated within the same building to a larger space, which includes dedicated office space for the Workplace Health Specialist following her move to Kelowna.

Following the approval of the 2026/27 budget and new Strategic Plan in June 2026, the OLRC staff developed a supporting annual operational plan for the 2026/27 year which will be provided at the October 14, 2026, Board of Directors meeting.

Collective Bargaining Update

The three-year 2022-2025 collective agreements for both teachers and support staff expired on June 30, 2025.

Teachers

On February 7, 2026, BCPSEA and the BCTF reached a Memorandum of Agreement for the 2025–2029 collective agreement. BCTF members ratified the agreement from March 2 to 4, 2026, followed by the Boards of Education on March 6, 2026, with 99.7% voting in favour. The agreement took effect that same day, concluding approximately 11 months of negotiations and forty-two bargaining sessions. Consistent with the 2025 Balanced Measures Mandate, the new agreement provided for a general wage increase (GWI) of 3% in each year. It also included a 0.2% Flexibility Allocation in years 2 and 4 to address table-specific matters of mutual concern, such as teacher workload and improvements to students' learning conditions.

The new four-year agreement provides for newly appointed temporary/term contract and continuing employees to be placed on the third step of the salary grid rather than the second step, as provided under the previous collective agreement. In addition, TTOCs on either of the two lowest steps of the salary grid who accept a contract will move to the third step for the duration of that contract. The agreement also enhances health benefits; introduces new annual allowances for certain specialized roles, including teachers of Indigenous languages and psychologists; adds elementary preparation time and clarifies scheduling; strengthens remote recruitment incentives; and improves student-support staffing ratios for counsellors, learning assistance teachers, and special education resource teachers.

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 and local support staff bargaining. Malcolm Reid, SD 22 Assistant Superintendent, along with Rob Zandee, SD 53 Board Chair and OLRC Board Chair, and Tammy Sowinski were members of the Technical Advisory Committee. Strong representation from OLRC districts ensured valuable feedback throughout the bargaining process.

Support Staff

Negotiations between BCPSEA and the CUPE K-12 Presidents' Council began on April 14, 2025, with the goal of establishing a new Provincial Framework Agreement (PFA) under the Balanced Measures Mandate. Following sixteen bargaining sessions, the parties reached a tentative agreement on April 11, 2026. Both BCPSEA and the CUPE K-12 Presidents' Council later ratified the PFA. Covering the period from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2029, the four-year agreement included a 3% general wage increase in each year. It provided $15.9M for local bargaining initiatives focused on service and learning improvements, along with $4.1M per year in Labour Market Adjustments to support recruitment and retention. Annual funding for the Public Education Benefits Trust (PEBT) was also increased to ensure viability of the Core LTD Plan. Beginning July 1, 2028, an additional $6M annually will be available for benefit enhancements to the provincial extended health plan, approved by a joint committee, which may include counselling services. The PFA also strengthens workplace health and safety measures by supporting critical incident response, developing a violence prevention toolkit, and continuing the provincial taskforce. A further $2.05M each year will fund professional learning for support staff through the Support Staff Education Committee, including work related to Reconciliation, equity, diversity, inclusion, and cultural safety. The agreement also calls for consultation with local unions when board-operated childcare is introduced or expanded on district property, and it supports the completion and implementation of the Provincial Classification Support System. Local agreements incorporating the Framework must be ratified no later than January 15, 2027.

The PFA is a voluntary agreement between BCPSEA and the CUPE K-12 President's Council, which represents support staff unions across the province. Unlike the BCTF, each local support staff union has its own bargaining unit and certification at the school district level. BCPSEA has the statutory authority to bargain on behalf of all school districts. Except for PFA negotiations, it delegates this authority to individual school districts for local bargaining. The BCPSEA Board must also ratify any resulting local agreement.

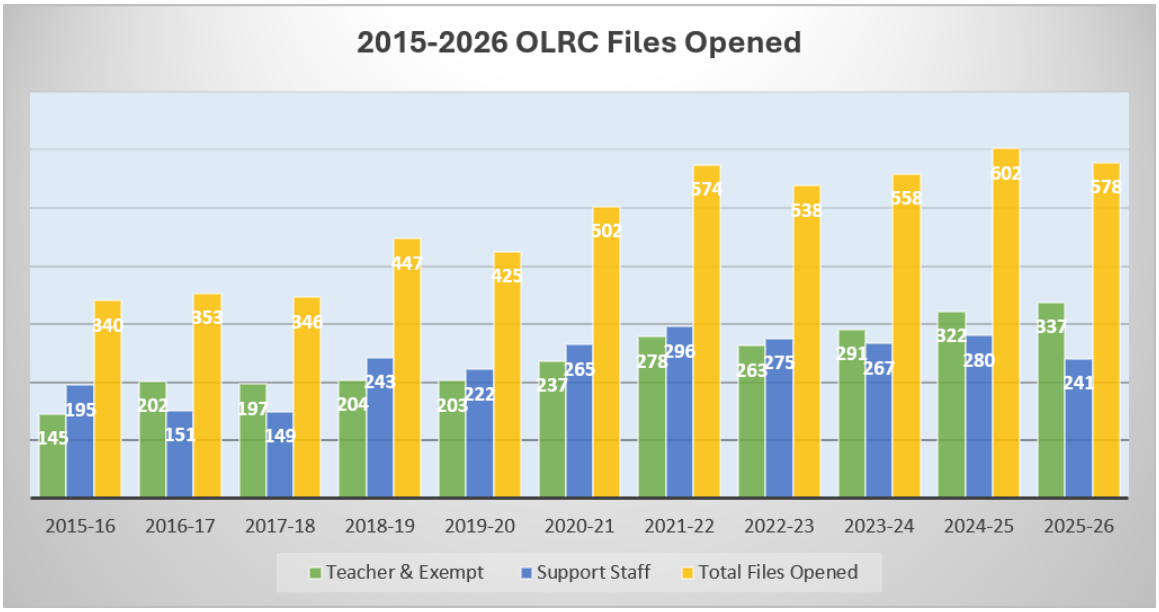
The Executive Director is acting as the spokesperson on the bargaining teams for local support staff negotiations in all seven OLRC member districts, consistent with past practice. As a result of CUPE National directing local unions to defer bargaining until the Provincial Framework Agreement (PFA) was finalized, bargaining dates were rescheduled multiple times. SD 74 was the first district in the province to conclude bargaining, signing a Memorandum of Agreement on May 28 after five days of bargaining. SD 10 concluded bargaining on June 3 after four days of bargaining. SD 22 exchanged proposals on June 15 and is scheduled to meet again at the end of October. SD 58 was the third OLRC district to conclude bargaining, signing a Memorandum of Agreement on June 25. SD 19 signed a Memorandum of Agreement on September 11, 2026, after 2 half days of bargaining. SD 53 commenced bargaining on September 8 and concluded on September 23 after five days of bargaining. Bargaining with SD 51 began on September 15 and concluded on September 29, 2026, after 5 days of bargaining.

The tone at the tables has been positive and focused on updating language and making useful, mutually beneficial changes to the operation of the collective agreement. Some of these agreed upon changes included moving to a standard 8 hour days for all classifications in a district, streamlining post and fill processes, opening up summer postings, ensuring appropriate limits on banked time, streamlining vacation accruals and payment, simplifying seniority and Vacation systems, as well as moving some important issues such as custodial workload and EFAP service to forums which did not include collective agreement changes. Some districts and locals also choose to reallocate existing funds within the collective agreement to other mutually agreed areas such as expanding Childbirth leave, adding a new Wellness Account and paying for employer requested medical documentation.

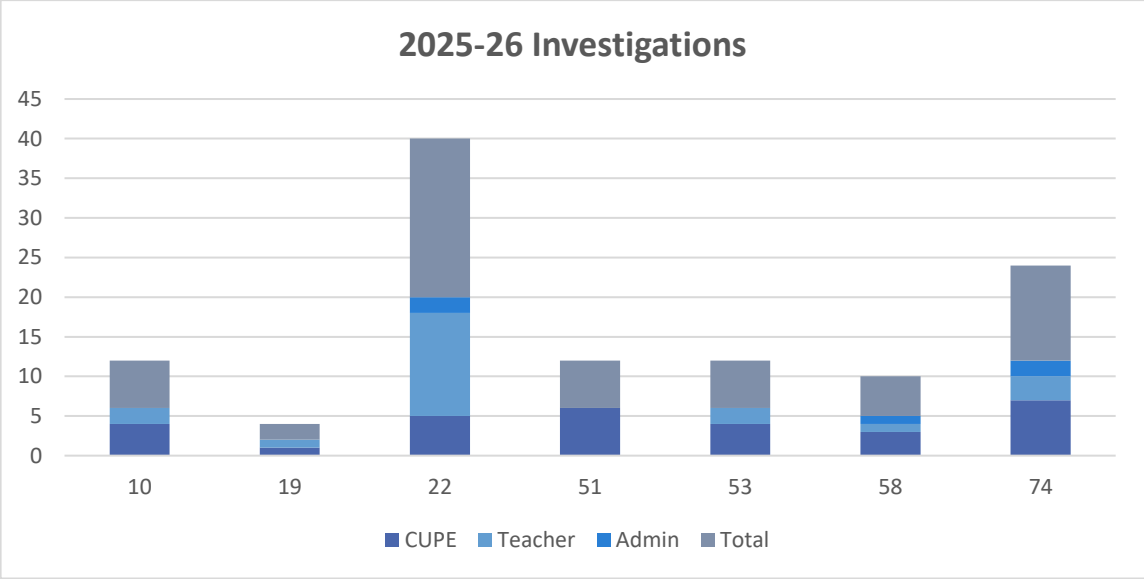
All six (6) OLRC districts and locals who have concluded bargaining at this point have elected to review the finalized Provincial Classification Support System (PCSS) and, if accepted, allocate some or all their local bargaining money towards the adoption of the PCSS. This will allow districts and locals to move to a provincially supported job evaluation plan and to work together on the implementation, including defining a new salary schedule associated with the plan with new ongoing funding.

Labour Relations Update

During the 2025/26 school year, overall workload levels were generally consistent with historical trends. There were 578 active files which included 337 files involving teacher or exempt staff issues and 241 files involving support staff.



Over the past year the OLRC supported districts in fifty-six investigations (28 teacher or exempt and 29 support staff) which was comparable to last year. Investigations were initiated in response to complaints raised by parents, students, co-workers, or district staff where, if the allegations were substantiated, disciplinary action could result or bullying and harassment may be found. The investigative process helps clarify the relevant facts, the circumstances and motivation involved, and the employee's awareness of workplace expectations. Any outcome for the employee is determined after considering all available witness and documentary evidence, the employee's response, their prior employment history, credibility assessments, applicable workplace standards, and relevant legal principles. By the conclusion of an investigation, the facts are often materially different from how they first appeared. This underscores the importance of completing a full and careful investigation before determining whether discipline is warranted and, if so, what level of discipline is appropriate.



Many investigations completed during the 2025/26 year involved allegations of a less serious nature and resulted in either no findings of misconduct or letters of expectation. However, approximately 16 investigations involved more serious allegations, including matters related to bus operation safety, teacher conduct/classroom management, physical contact, theft of time, and racism. These investigations required a considerable time commitment from district and OLRC staff, and many resulted in findings of misconduct and disciplinary outcomes, including suspensions and terminations. External contractors were engaged in some cases where investigations were particularly complex, sensitive, or time-consuming. In each investigation, relevant facts were gathered and assessed, and determinations were made as to whether the allegations were substantiated. Well-structured and thorough investigations provide the foundation for well-reasoned, defensible decision-making regarding outcomes and consequences.

Historically, disciplinary outcomes arising from these investigations are rarely arbitrated or litigated. Where they are challenged, the decisions have generally been supported. This demonstrates the value of a careful investigative process and helps avoid significant time and cost for districts 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 two different teachers for fraudulent use of sick leave for vacation. Investigations completed – findings of misconduct. Both teachers waived Board hearings, and both teachers received a Letter of suspension.
- Complaint against secondary school teacher for inappropriate conduct and comments. Investigation conducted – findings of misconduct. Letter of suspension issued.
- Complaint against shop teacher for inappropriate comments, conduct and failure to follow safety procedures. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.
- Multiple complaints against elementary school teacher for inappropriate classroom management and behaviour. First investigation completed – misconduct found. Letter of suspension issued. Second investigation completed – findings of misconduct, however, still on medical leave.
- Complaint against secondary school teacher for inappropriate comments and professional boundary issues. Investigation completed. Letter of suspension issued.
- Complaint against administrator for inappropriate conduct. Investigation conducted – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.
- Complaint against TTOC in a secondary school for inappropriate comments and conduct. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of suspension issued.
- Complaint against administrator for bullying and harassment. Investigation conducted by external contractor – no findings of misconduct.
- Complaint against exempt employee for bullying and harassment. Investigation conducted by external contractor – no findings of misconduct.

There was one grievance challenging the length of a teacher suspension. A settlement reached which maintained a significant suspension on the teacher's file and the grievance withdrawn. The OLRC also supported districts in conducting teacher evaluations when teacher competence was at issue.

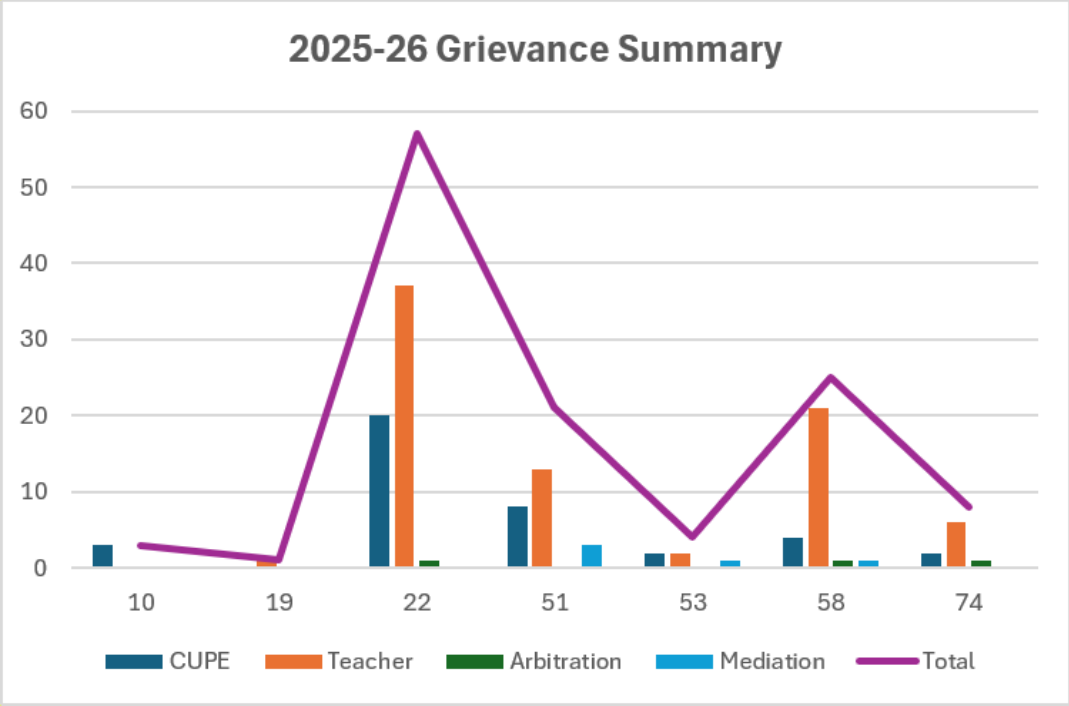
Support Staff

- Complaint against bus driver for racially insensitive social media post. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of suspension issued.
- Complaint against tradesperson for unauthorized use of company credit card for personal reasons. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of suspension issued.
- Complaint against tradesperson for disrespectful behaviour towards coworker. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.
- Complaint against bus driver for failure to follow safety protocol. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.
- Complaint against bus driver for unsafe driving behaviour causing an accident. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Employee terminated.
- Complaint against food service employee for unauthorized absence. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Terminated for lack of suitability.
- Complaint against education assistant for inappropriate transportation of students. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.
- Complaint against custodian for threatening behaviour towards coworker. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.
- Complaint against tradesperson for theft of time. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of suspension issued.
- Complaint against bus driver for inappropriate and unsafe driving behaviour. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of discipline issued.
- Complaint against early childhood educator for inappropriate physical contact. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Letter of suspension issued.
- Complaint against food service employee for unsafe practices. Investigation completed – findings of misconduct. Employee resigned.
- Employee convicted of criminal charges. Employee did not want to participate in investigation. Employee terminated.

There was one grievance regarding a disciplinary outcome that was eventually withdrawn.

Grievance and Arbitration

During the 2025/26 year the ORLC provided support to school districts on 119 grievances (80 teacher and 39 support staff). 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. 32 of those 119 grievances, (24 teacher and 8 support staff) were at Step 3 or further in the CLASS system as at June 30, 2026, with 8 referred to arbitration, mediation, or human rights. The 2025/26 school year saw a higher-than-average number of mediations and arbitrations, which were held to address grievances referred during the previous two years. 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 regarding appropriate pay, sick leave deduction, and prep time entitlement for a part-time secondary teacher on a partial medical leave. Arbitration was scheduled for March 30 & 31, 2026; however, both parties agreed to proceed with mediation instead. The employer was represented by David Woolias (Harris) and the mediator was Jacquie de Aguayo. Settlement was reached on May 1, 2026 which provided a clear process to use to address partial medical leaves in a secondary system which does recognize the proportionality of prep time in relation to instructional time and it something that payroll can apply in the same time period as the leave without doing additional/changing calculations throughout the year.
- Grievance regarding the termination of a teacher for alleged professional misconduct and dishonesty. The OLRC supported the district to conduct the investigation which led to the termination. A Five-day arbitration hearing took place from April 13–17, 2026 with Arbitrator Alison Matacheskie. Colin Edstrom (Harris) represented the employer. Arbitrator Matacheskie released her decision on June 11, 2026. The grievance was dismissed and Arbitrator Matacheskie ruled in favour of the district which is a positive decision for the district and the sector. This was the first arbitration related to a district disciplinary decision based on an investigation supported by the OLRC for the past 16 years and it was a reaffirmation of the value of a proper investigation.
- Grievance regarding the restored class composition language in the teacher collective agreement. A two-day hearing took place from June 10-11, 2026, with Arbitrator Jacquie de Aguayo with the parties agreeing to do argument by written submission. Michael Hancock (Harris) represented the employer.

This was his last hearing at Harris before taking his new position as Vice Chair at the Labour Relations Board. The BCTF was contesting the process of designating students with special educational needs as well as the frequency with which this takes place during the school year. The district is still awaiting a decision.

- Grievance concerning the interpretation of the teacher collective agreement, specifically the placement of an experienced teacher on the salary grid following the removal of the lowest step, given the district's existing superior language. A three-day arbitration hearing before Arbitrator Allison Matacheskie was scheduled for June 17–19, 2026; however, the parties resolved the grievance and reached a settlement agreement on June 1, 2026. A similar settlement agreement was reached in another district where 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 and the district was able to maintain their practice of placement on scale for teachers with experience and to negotiate a reduction to retroactive liability.
- Grievance regarding failure to fill based on lack of TTOC availability and the failure to replace absent teachers with TTOC's. Changes in the employment market took place such that there are now sufficient TTOC's, so the union asked the district not to hire any more. Grievance was referred to arbitration; however, settlement was reached on October 9, 2026.
- Grievance regarding the disciplinary outcome of a teacher. Mediation scheduled for October 2026 with Bob Pekeles. Grievance was resolved in a favorable manner in advance of mediation.
- Failure to fill/non-enrolling grievance regarding historical practice of having dedicated prep teachers in two elementary schools using teacher librarians to provide some of the prep coverage. Mediation scheduled for November 2026 with Jacquie De Agayo.
- Grievance regarding long standing practice of attaching a teacher's continuing status to the location of the term contract that triggered the conversion for future staffing cycles. Mediation scheduled for November 2026 with Jacquie De Agayo.

Support Staff

- Grievance related to the layoff of a support staff maintenance employee. Mediation occurred on April 7, 2026, and the employer was represented by Warren Woodhurst (Harris), and the mediator was Brett Matthews. Settlement was reached on May 6, 2026, through ongoing discussion between the parties which resolved the current grievance as well as several outstanding matters and was a positive outcome for the district.
- Grievance of termination arising from theft of money. Referred to arbitration; however, settlement reached in mediation with Jackie De Agayo in November 2025 with no return to work.
- Grievance regarding the method of appointment of a support staff employee. Referred to arbitration.

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 2025/26 school year. The Executive Director plans to meet with the Executive Director of BCPSEA, Chris Beneteau, this Fall to review the status of the contract between BCPSEA and OLRC. Chris did request feedback from OLRC district staff about the district liaison services being provided by the Executive Director during the spring of 2026 and there was very positive feedback provided.

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 continued her participation as a member of the employer bargaining team for Provincial Framework negotiation with the K-12 Presidents Council and as a member on the Support Staff Education Committee (SSEC) and Provincial Job Evaluation Steering Committee. A key accomplishment of the SSEC this past year was the completion of the second Education Assistant (EA) training course called: *Understanding Common Medical Conditions*. This four-hour course is a self-paced online course available free for all BC public school district employees via the BCPSEA website. The first EA training course called *Understanding Behaviour & Inclusive Education* also remains available via the BCPSEA website.

Under BCPSEA's updated bylaws, two general meetings will now be held each year: an Annual General Meeting (AGM) in June and an Additional General Meeting in February. The AGM will be limited to the business required under the Societies Act, including the presentation of the financial statements and auditor's report, as well as the appointment of an auditor, if required. The 2026 AGM was held virtually on June 15, 2026. The Additional General Meeting will address broader governance matters, including the election of Directors, consideration of resolutions, approval of the annual budget, presentation of the Directors' report, and any other required business.

BCPSEA's Symposium is being held in-person in Vancouver at the Coast Coal Harbour Hotel on Monday, November 30, 2026, and Tuesday, December 1, 2026. The date is later this year in recognition of the changes that may come from Trustee elections in October 2026. In recent years, the OLRC Board has held its AGM and Board meetings in person during the Symposium. Because of this year's elections, however, those meetings will instead be held earlier in October virtually, with an informal gathering at the Symposium to welcome any new Board members.

Exempt Staff

In April 2025, the PSEC Secretariat implemented a freeze on in-range, performance-based increases for all public sector employers. The freeze was lifted in March 2026 after BCPSEA received direction that school districts could proceed with 2025 salary increases for exempt staff, management, and executives. This direction followed the establishment of the general unionized wage pattern for the current fiscal year through public sector bargaining. BCPSEA is continuing its total compensation review of executive and exempt staff salary grids in the K-12 sector, in accordance with compensation best practices, and school districts were asked to complete exempt compensation surveys as part of this work. The previous comprehensive review was conducted during the 2021–2022 school year. The current review is expected to be completed in fall 2026, with BCPSEA anticipating minimal to modest adjustments to salary ranges.

Job Evaluation

Throughout the year, the Executive Assistant, HR, supported SD 10, 19, 22, 51 and 53 in administering their existing local CUPE support staff job evaluation plans. This work included developing job descriptions and establishing interim wage rates. The Executive Assistant, HR also helped facilitate meetings of SD 22's joint job evaluation committee in October 2025 and March 2026.

The Executive Director remained a member of the Provincial Job Evaluation Steering Committee, and this involvement was particularly beneficial during the PFA negotiations as well as in local bargaining. Drawing on her knowledge and experience with job evaluation at both the local and provincial levels, she supported BCPSEA throughout the Framework negotiations, which ultimately resulted in an agreement to move forward with the newly named Provincial Classification Support System. Work on the provincial job evaluation plan began in 2014 and has now progressed to the implementation stage. School districts are being encouraged to adopt the new Provincial Classification System and use the funding available through local support staff bargaining to support its implementation. Where agreement with the union cannot be achieved, the OLRC will continue to assist with facilitating the existing job evaluation system.

Workplace Health

The 2025-2026 school year once again highlighted the value of specialized expertise in managing complex employee health and attendance matters. Member school districts continued to require support with medical accommodation, return to work planning, obtaining appropriate medical documentation, and addressing attendance concerns. All seven member districts had active files requiring Workplace Health Specialist involvement during the year.

A total of eighty-two active cases were managed throughout the school year, including thirty-four files carried forward from the previous year. Thirty-one resulted in successful return-to-work and/or medical accommodation outcomes, supporting employees in safely and effectively returning to the workplace. During the year, nine files were closed following employee resignations or retirements. Sadly, one additional file was closed following the death of an employee.

School districts that have invested in developing attendance support knowledge and implementing supportive attendance management processes continued to engage the Workplace Health Specialist more frequently and have experienced positive results in addressing employee attendance concerns. However, the impact of recent collective bargaining priorities, coupled with turnover among key district personnel, has created challenges in maintaining momentum and advancing these efforts consistently across all member districts.

Looking ahead, there remains a strong commitment to supporting member school districts through timely, practical, and relevant intervention strategies. By proactively addressing workplace health concerns, facilitating accommodations, and supporting employees through return-to-work processes, the Workplace Health Specialist continues to help improve outcomes for employees, administrators, and school districts alike.