

BCTF News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 29, 2017

BCTF calls on incoming government to act quickly on implementation of teachers' Supreme Court win

The incoming government, no matter which parties are at the helm, needs to speed up the pace of implementing contract language that will mean smaller classes and more support for students with special needs, in accordance with the teachers' Supreme Court of Canada win, said BCTF President Glen Hansman.

"When teachers won at the Supreme Court of Canada and then successfully negotiated an implementation agreement, most British Columbians-teachers included-thought the issue was finally settled," said Hansman. "However, in too many school districts across the province the pace of implementation is too slow. In some extreme cases, district leadership is being obstructionist. Teachers, parents, and students need the incoming government to act quickly and decisively to direct school districts to fulfill their side of the agreement.

"After 15 years of advocating for better working and learning conditions in our schools, British Columbians rightfully expect the next school year to start with smaller classes and better support for children with special needs. However, the current pace of work, uncertain funding, and obstruction tactics by some district managers is putting the successful start of the next school year at risk."

Hansman emphasized that implementation work between BCTF local associations and school boards has been going well in many areas of the province. For example, in Prince George, the district reopened a previously closed school and reorganized catchment areas to increase the number of classrooms and meet the needs of students according to the restored contract language.

"If other school boards need funding for more portables or to reopen closed schools, those trustees need to be pushing government to get that funding," said Hansman.

By contrast, too many other districts are deliberately and inexplicably holding up the process. In other areas, school districts are not getting the full funding, as promised by government, to meet the operational and capital costs of implementing smaller classes and higher support levels for children with special needs.

Hansman listed some of the problems being reported across BC:

- In Victoria and many other communities, school board trustees are not moving quickly enough to reopen closed schools or adjust catchment areas to accommodate more classrooms.
- In Surrey, the school district is trying to use shortcuts around the collective agreement language to make cuts to important positions like Learning Support Teachers.
- In Vernon and other communities, district leadership is trying to rewrite historic definitions of special needs designations to reduce the level of extra support needed.
- In Comox, Port Alberni, and other towns, district management is withholding crucial data about student populations and their specific needs, making it impossible to plan for proper class size and composition.

- In Vancouver, where elected school board trustees were replaced by a sole government representative, management seems to be focused on violating the collective agreement and relying on remedies instead of filling empty classroom spaces, which will result in hundreds of classes not in compliance with the restored language.

"The incoming government needs to provide immediate direction to school districts, and the necessary funding, to quickly get this implementation process wrapped up so the class organization process can be completed as soon as possible," Hansman said. "BC kids have waited long enough."