

SURREY
TEACHERS'
ASSOCIATION

The Advocate

WORKING CONDITIONS EDITION • NOVEMBER 2022



Synopsis of Fall News Release on Working Conditions



The President of the Surrey Teachers' Association, Jatinder Bir is calling on Surrey School Trustees to commit to ensuring that schools are safe spaces where all children are supported in their learning. When the District does not cover teacher absences of specialist teachers and non-enrolling teachers, children lose access to learning and this impacts all students, especially the most marginalized.

When our most vulnerable learners have their social and emotional needs met, they can thrive in the classroom, however, when specialist teachers are absent and when programs and services cannot be maintained, then there are more opportunities for students to become dysregulated. This unfortunate circumstance can result in violent incidents which may impact the mental and physical health of all students in the

classroom. A related consequence of not having teacher absences covered by replacement teachers is that students are falling further behind in numeracy and literacy due to prolonged absence or redirection of specialists in schools.

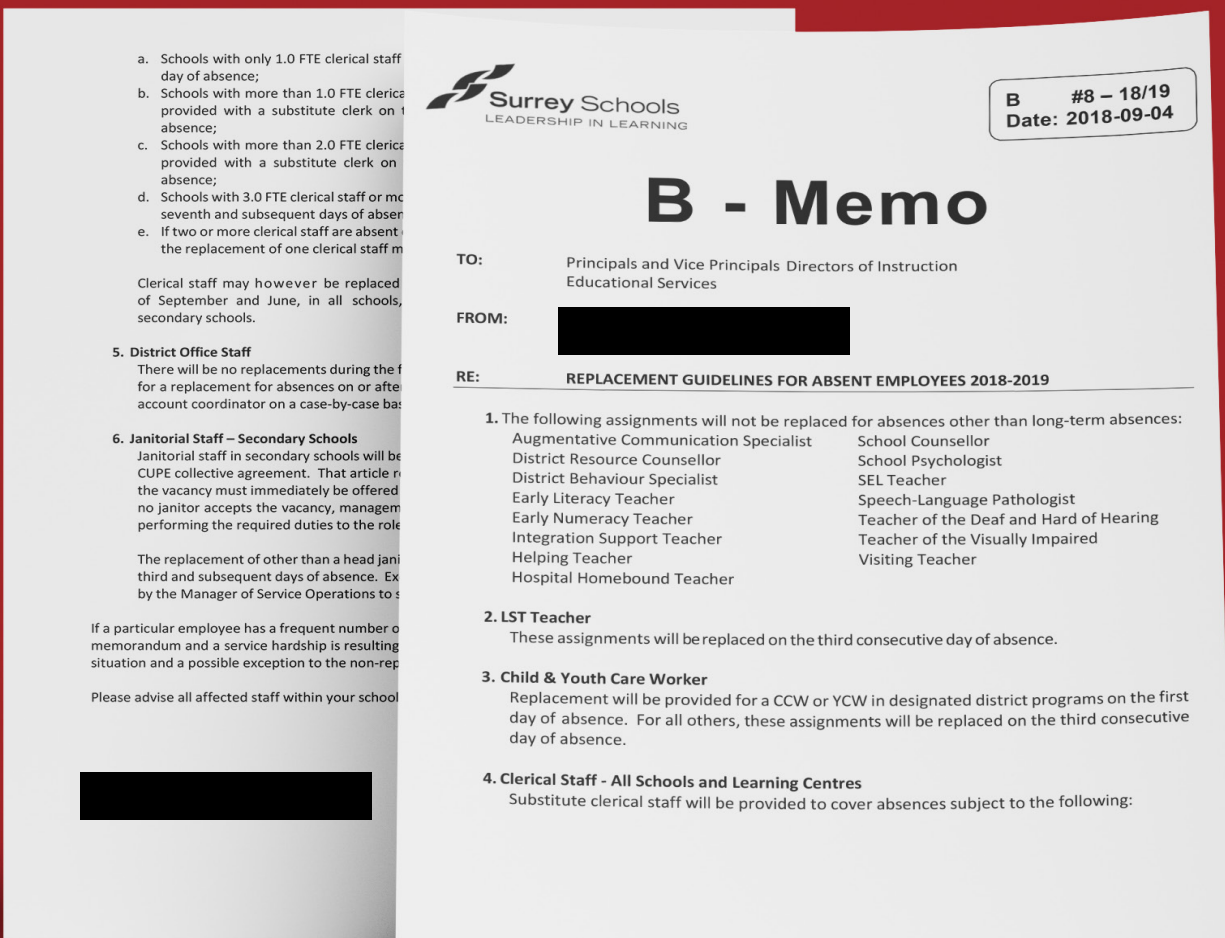
Teachers have been making distress calls to the union, explaining how impossible their workload has become, not only because their classrooms are overcrowded and organized in violation of our contract, but also due to the loss of service provided by specialist teachers. Some teachers have taken early retirement, others have gone on medical leave. New and veteran teachers are looking for ways to leave the profession.

Many teachers have said that they go to work while injured and in pain because they know what impact it will have on

the school community when their absence is not covered.

The Surrey Teachers' Association believes that a fully funded education system is the bedrock of a democratic society. We agree with the Ministry of Education when they say that that our task is to help students "to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to contribute to a healthy society."

This can only be achieved when our public education system is fully resourced and all teachers, including specialists, are replaced on their first day of absence so that all services and programs in schools are fully staffed and all learners, including our most vulnerable, receive the education they need and deserve.



B-Memo Impacts

Specialist teachers and specialist colleagues are essential to our school communities. They provide important supports and learning opportunities for some of our most vulnerable learners. When our most complex kiddos are well supported by their team of specialized professionals, the entire school community is more able to thrive.

The chronic under-resourcing of BC's Public Education System, paired with the teacher shortage, both contribute to the long-standing practice in our District of not replacing specialist colleagues when they are away. The impact of loss of service to our most complex learners is felt system-wide. The issues these students face are ones of equity:

disability, physical and mental illness, neuro-divergence, trauma, and or economic disadvantage.

What are some of the impacts when these colleagues are not replaced? Our most vulnerable populations of students don't have access to the programming, services, and interventions they require, and the consequences can be devastating. For instance, when an Augmentative Communication Specialist is not replaced, students who don't yet have access to words to communicate their wants and needs lose out on being introduced to an appropriate communication system to help alleviate the frustration of not being understood. These are often the students we identify as most disruptive and dangerous to themselves and others.

Stories from the

**Specialist Teachers in Surrey
Share the Impacts of the B-Memo**



Who is supposed to be supporting ALL these students when **the needs keep increasing and the resources keep decreasing?**

I am an Early Literacy Teacher, supporting the most vulnerable learners in an inner-city school. Unfortunately, the District has a policy of not covering the absences of teachers like me, the ones that are listed in the B-Memo. We specialists listed on the B-Memo are not replaced on the first day of our absence and sometimes are not replaced until after day 20 of an absence.

When I am absent, support for vulnerable kindergarten and grade 1 learners isn't there. Small groups can't happen, targeted instruction can't happen, and teachers can't implement what we have planned.

Last year I had COVID and was absent for 20 days in isolation. For a month, my students didn't get any support. I had arranged with some TTOCs and a helping teacher to provide support at my schools but was then sent the B memo saying that I don't get replaced until after day 20. I have never felt so not valued in my life. I am hired as a specialist teacher, but I'm not replaced for 20 days. I was hired to support the most vulnerable learners, but I'm not valuable enough to be replaced.

That's not the only obstacle that blocks me providing support to my students. When there are failures-to-fill, and I'm pulled, the students don't get the small group instruction and support they need to learn.

I walk into work daily not knowing if I am going to be doing my job or covering a failure to fill. When it's a failure-to-fill, there is an added level of stress. If it was failure-to-fill the previous day, then I'm left scrambling trying to pull activities for the day - sometimes in a grade I don't really know or am comfortable with.

As more and more refugees and students who have never been to preschool come into our schools, our resources are being stretched thinner and thinner. There are so many holes to fill and not enough resources to fill them. At both of my inner-city schools, enrolment is up, ELL learners numbers are up, the number of reception students is up - but both schools have lost Learning Support Teacher time. Who is supposed to be supporting ALL these students when the needs keep increasing and the resources keep decreasing?



I am a Learning Support Teacher and work in the LST/ELL department in our inner-city school.

My students are all newcomers to Canada and not only are they here to learn English, but they are also learning social skills. Having come from conflict zones, many of them have experienced lots of trauma and other hardships so, when there is no TTOC dispatched to cover my absence, the impact of this disruption to their learning is dramatic.

I have a huge workload where I feel like I am on the verge of burnout. When I first started at this school 6 years ago, teaching the ELL Reception class, students usually came from the Bridge Program at the Welcome Centre with very low literacy skills or from Grade 7 (elementary school). At that time, I was told a reception class is meant to be small due to the complex needs of about 6-8 students thus my classes were usually in that range. This class grew to 10-12 students over time. But last school year, my class went up to 17 and it became very stressful.

A major issue that we are seeing currently is that some students need psycho-ed testing. Due to the students not having enough years of ELL service, we are told to wait for testing when we highlight this need at School Based Team meetings. For example, I worked with a student for one full year until we finally received testing in June. After testing, it turned out that the student had a mild intellectual disability and that the student would actually need to be a part of the BASES program. There are a number of other students as well who, in addition to needing English, may have a learning disability.

The changes now taking place at the Welcome Centre are also making matters worse at schools and really impacting our roles. The Welcome Centre used to have a system that worked well and helped us at secondary schools. Much to the dismay of many teachers, they have made a number of

changes that are negatively impacting us at schools. What's worse is the fact they want to make additional changes next year that will worsen conditions.

This school year, students were being sent to our high school without having any assessments being completed at the Welcome Centre. This past September, students were put into classes they were not ready for. Many academic classes were well beyond their skill level. Many of these students did not have a basic grasp on the English language. The number of students being sent to our school without assessments created a scheduling and timetable nightmare that we teachers had to resolve.

It's untenable that Learning Support Teachers are being asked to do more and more with less and less. We need to be treated like classroom teachers and receive coverage regardless of how many days we are absent. LST support should be considered a priority too, as our students matter.

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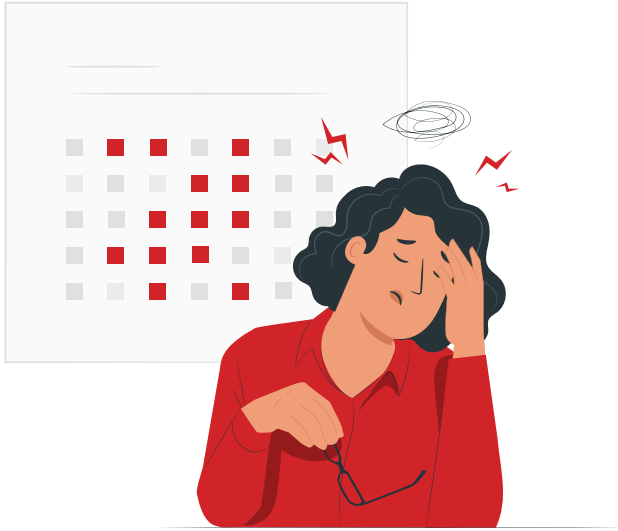
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As a music teacher, when I have been pulled to cover other teachers for failures to fill,

I have on multiple occasions seen students cry upon being told that they were missing music for that day. Many of our students say that music is their favourite subject, and we've had times where students miss weeks of music in a row due to a high number of failures to fill. Some weeks I've been pulled away from teaching music for three days in a 5-day week. I've had to prepare for Spring concerts when I've seen a class half as much as I had expected, or write report card comments when I've seen a class for a total of 6 hours of educational time. Having me cover failures to fill is severely disruptive to our music education programs, as well as to students' well-being.

The biggest pressure point in my workload is the lack of support for students who are dysregulated frequently in my class. One time I was trying to teach a music class while two undesignated students were playing keep-away with the xylophone sticks and grabbing my personal belongings from my desk and trying to get the attention of the class in the middle of us performing a song we were rehearsing. I can spend the entire class redirecting, chasing, and encouraging these learners to participate, but then the other students are learning a fraction of the lesson I had prepared. I can see the frustration and boredom in other students who are at school to learn and who are forced to spend their entire day watching the teachers try every possible strategy to help students who are dysregulated to modify their behaviour so that everyone in the class, including them, has access to learning.

I work in a social development program, where I am supposed to receive coverage

but every time I have been away, and someone picks up my job, they get pulled to cover another classroom. We're told that social development does not need a teacher and that the childcare worker can support the room.

I can barely get a TTOC to cover for me because now they know if they sign up for a social development position, they will just be redirected every time, so they stop picking up the job from the spare board.

Once I was off with COVID, I booked off a Monday and Tuesday and a TTOC picked up both days. When she arrived, she went to our social development room and got the understanding for the day but just before the bell rang admin came down and pulled her stating she would be doing prep recovery.

Not only did they pull my own TTOC they gave me prep recovery with my own TTOC!

When I'm absent, my students go unsupported, and dysregulation behaviours go up. When I come back, I have to make up for the days I was away to get things back on track. It's not worth calling in sick. It breaks my heart that when I had to stay home due to COVID, my students who needed the breaks or extra support did not receive it.

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I am an Integration Support Teacher. Last year I took a long-term absence for a compassionate care leave. It was both an important and challenging decision to make. We started the year with enough students for 3 full-time ISTs but were staffed with 2. I knew that my absence would leave my students and colleagues un-supported but had to remind myself that this was not my responsibility to shoulder. ISTs don't get replaced until we are on a long-term absence, and in the 4 months I was off I was not replaced.

When an IST is absent, specialized materials do not get made or purchased that help our learners engage more meaningfully within their capacities. It means that I was not there to work with and mentor the new support staff working with my vulnerable learners, giving them the tools to most effectively work with the kiddos they support. At my school, many IEPs were not updated until my return. Actions assigned to me at SBT such as filling out referrals to Student Support may not have been completed until my return or became offloaded to my already overworked colleague.

It means when kiddos are in a 'big feelings dysregulation', there isn't always another adult to come help support (bringing something soothing or comforting to the location of the school they are in). It means there isn't someone to tag team out the supporting adult whose nervous system may need a break to ensure they can maintain their own regulation to ensure best supports to the student as they reregulate.

My lone IST colleague was expected to maintain service levels for her students, my students and the 15 other students who still did not have a case manager.

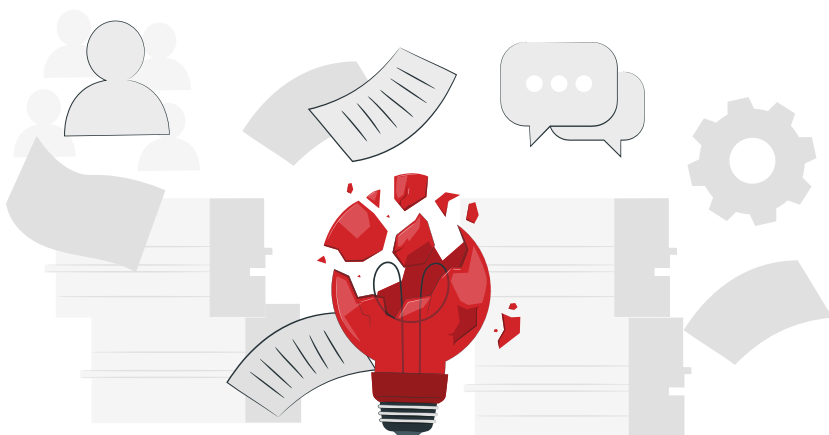
On the many days when I'm called out to cover classes because of TTOC shortages, the majority of the work that is encompassed in my job description is done on my own time, after my workday ends.

When I am out of the building or not working in my role, my colleagues and students feel it. They are always SO grateful to have IST back. I feel extremely appreciated by the folks I support/collaborate with. But I feel pretty devalued by my employer when not replaced or redirected out of my role. It sends the message that the work I do is not essential, and that my absence can be easily absorbed by those present.

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This is **depleting us and contributing to burnout.**

People are leaving and contemplating early retirement or medical leaves.

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I am a school psychologist, and I am not replaced when absent.

If a school psychologist is sick or takes a study or parental leave, it is rarely filled. We have colleagues who have been on leave for years. Sometimes we are willing to work beyond the school year to help cover schools that do not have a school psychologist due to unfilled positions or school psychologists on leave. We can handle this for a while, but it has been a constant need year after year. This is depleting us and contributing to burnout. People are leaving and contemplating early retirement or medical leaves. We know that working extra is voluntary. We do it to support the students and to support each other so our colleagues don't return to schools that are desperate because of lack of service. We also work extra because our pay is so much less than school psychologists make in other districts, in private clinics, or on other settings (hospitals) so working in the summer or on weekends helps some of us afford to stay in schools. But I'd rather have a manageable load for compensation that is commensurate with what I could make elsewhere.

There has been a lot of words about getting school psychologists a stipend like nearly every other lower mainland district offers. Our admin tells us they support it. They tell us Sr. Leadership support it. The union leadership has told us they support it, - but it never happens. We have had people leave for other districts because of pay and I know others are considering leaving to work in private practice.





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We, Adult Education teachers, are **second-class members** of our profession.

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We are asterisk educators. We looked on in envy as our colleagues shared their excitement about their experiences on the province-wide professional development day in October.

There are no such days for us because we are asterisk educators.*

***In the Surrey teachers' collective agreement, there is the following note:**

Any article or clause in this Agreement which does NOT apply to adult education teachers is preceded by an asterisk (*).

***F.21.6 District Pro-D Activities**

Notwithstanding the foregoing, by mutual agreement the parties may designate one (1) of the four (4) non-instructional days (to which reference is made in Article F.21.2) for district or jointly organized professional development activities.

***F.21.2 School Non-Instructional Days**

At least four (4) non-instructional days will be approved by the Board for school-planned and teacher-directed professional development activities. Board approval will not be unreasonably withheld or denied.

***F.21.3 STA Convention Day**

One (1) non-instructional day will be granted for the Surrey Teachers' Association convention.

We have the same qualifications and teach the same courses as our K-12 colleagues, but even when we work full-time plus an extra two nights each week, we will never make the salary they do. Asterisk educators working full-time, five days per week, earn 800 hours per year; if they also work

two nights each week, they'll earn 960 hours per year. For my colleagues who work in K-12, 1,000 earning hours is considered normal.

We are not paid on statutory holidays. We do not have paid prep time. We are second-class members of our profession.

Asterisk educators have students who come from society's margins. People recovering from addictions, homelessness, and who have been incarcerated. People who have fallen through the giant holes in our social safety net come to us seeking a bridge to a better future.

Students, many school-aged, also come to us after having fallen through the cracks in the underfunded elementary and secondary school system. They may have cognitive, emotional, or physical disabilities, or unstable mental health. Some of our students have language or learning challenges and are sent to us after they age-out of regular high schools.

Without us, the asterisk (adult) education teachers, many of these students would be headed for a cycle of poverty and minimum wage jobs. Through education, students can become literate participants in our democracy, and walk on a pathway to a more equitable future.

There is nothing in the tentative agreement for us even though for each bargaining round over the past 20 years, we asterisk educators have campaigned for redress. On every picket-line over the same time, we stood alongside our colleagues.

And yet, there is nothing in the agreement that addresses our second-class status.

It's past time that we become asterisk-free.

Typical IST Morning



I am an Integration Support Teacher (IST). This month we learned that our school will lose 15 hours of EA time and we are devastated. What our principal heard from the District, is that our school is richer than most when it comes to student support. Knowing how thinly we are all stretched at my school, I can't imagine how other school teams are being impacted. Here's a snapshot of my 'typical morning' before recess.

8:15 am

Arrive at the school and look at the school absence sheet to scan for colleagues who are absent who share students with IST. I need to help transition TTOCs to my complex learners so that everybody has a more successful feeling day. I might jot their names on my hand with a marker to not lose sight of these important

conversations that realistically I may not get to. I sigh when notice the numbers of colleagues who the system was not able to replace and wonder if my day will be impacted by filling in for their absences.

I scan the sheet for missing EAs and ABA SWs, have they been replaced? It's not unusual to have 1-3 support staff not replaced on a given day. This is when my mental gymnastics begin, working with my other IST colleagues, triaging which student support will be pulled to cover absences. Some students have such specialized supports that when their primary and secondary support person are both absent on the same day, we call home to tell parents that the school is not prepared to receive their child that day. Those phone calls are heart-breaking.

8:30 am

My administrator tells me that I am covering a class for a portion of the day. I know that it butts up against an IEP meeting that I have later that afternoon and hope that the transition is smooth. I learn my two IST colleagues have been redirected for the start of the day. I guess our IST Team meeting will be delayed once again. I wonder why we are always working reactively instead of proactively...?

I look at my hand and remember there are people I need to brief about my students and head to those classrooms. Enroute a colleague stops me to let me know about a new behaviour that she is seeing in a student. The student has started spitting on others every time they drink from their water bottle. I will have to contact parents to see if they have any insight. I will also need to find

or create some visual social stories to communicate with the student about this because they struggle to process spoken language.

8:45 am

Before I arrive at my destination, I see one of my complicated kiddos running down the hall with her parent trying to keep up with her. She is not following her morning entrance plan. I greet her warmly and help her parent walk her back outside to follow her morning routine. Not supporting her to follow this first part of her routine can lead to increasingly disruptive and dangerous behaviours throughout the day, resulting in students and staff getting injured. As I walk her to her classroom, my walkie-talkie interrupts us and asks for IST to join another class for support. As I am the only IST not covering a class at that moment, I hope that the parent will get her child to follow her routine, and head to the other classroom.

9:00 am

When I arrive I learn that one of our yet-to-be assessed students has had an accident. They are afraid to use the washroom at the school. The support staff in that classroom supports two other very vulnerable students and cannot leave them unattended to change this third child. I stand in while she changes the student. While waiting, I hear IST called out to open the downstairs office. Of course, with the other IST having been redirected, no one has unlocked the office which doubles as a “calm down room” for one of our most complex kiddos. Because the room was not available when needed, I know this child’s emotional dysregulation is going to be incredibly impactful.

When I arrive, the EA is working hard to keep herself and the child safe as per the Employee Safety Plan (ESP). The student is refusing their chewlery tool and are lunging to bite staff between wailing cries. This child’s desire to bite when emotionally dysregulated is intense. Classroom teachers have closed and locked their doors. They know this student may try to enter their classrooms next.

Because our student is not yet able to handle the disappointment of accessing what they want when they



want, the distress is so great that they’ve removed all their clothing from the waist down. The EA and I work to preserve the student’s dignity. We bring them into the office and close all the blinds. Unfortunately, the cold floor on their bare bottom has induced urination. I walkie to the office team that a daytime custodian needs to be dispatched.

Now that they are in their preferred space, the student is able to start to calm themselves. We put paper towel on the floor. A colleague from a neighboring classroom asks if the student is in physical distress. Oh no, this is just the emotional distress of being perpetually misunderstood.

9:30 am

I head to my office to prep for my IEP meeting later that day. I pass a student in the halls who asks if he can help me set up the trampoline that has arrived. This child breaks my heart each time I see him. He’s an intermediate student who is illiterate. There is almost no support directed his way because he is not a danger to himself or others so what little support he has received the last few years keeps getting triaged away to students with greater behavioural challenges. He does not want support in-class from his teacher because he is painfully aware of how far behind he is the rest of his peers. He is the kind of kid I worry about getting sucked into gangs later in life.

10:00 am

Sitting at my desk to print documents for my IEP meeting, I notice a student of mine wander into the IST area. She is selectively mute and has an intellectual disability. She should not be wandering on her own. This is the first year that

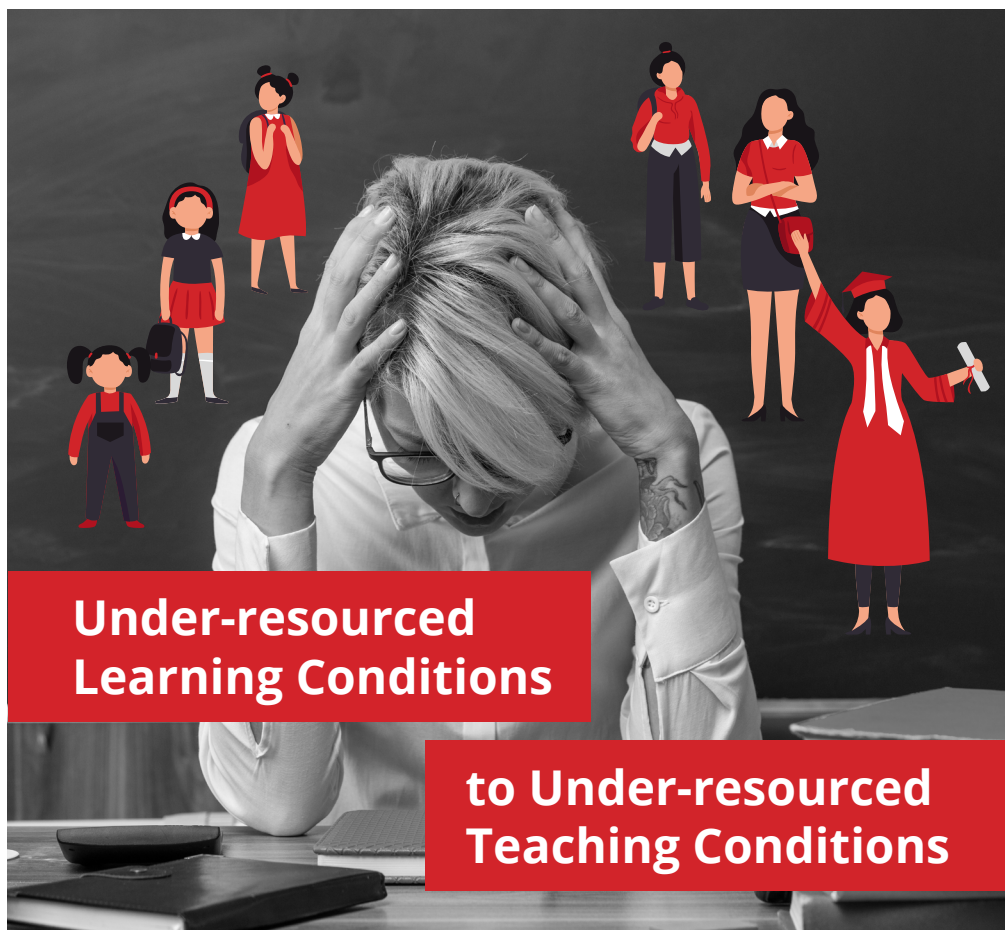
she does not have an EA with her full-time. She cannot tell me anything to help clarify the situation. I walk her back to class as I get a call out on my walkie that she is missing.

10:15 am

As I head to the office I am flagged by an EA whose classroom is in the process of doing an evacuation. A student IST supports has trouble perceiving situations accurately and believes that he was pushed by another student in class; the adults believe that it was an accident. Regardless, the student was throwing chairs in anger. He and I have a good connection. I called his name and told him I was so sorry to see how upset he was. I asked him to put down the chair and breathe with me. I leaned into our connection and hoped I was not putting my body at risk as I approached him with compassion. He broke down in sobs and when feeling calmer, I asked him and his EA to take a long walk before rejoining his class. I look at my sharpied hand and realize that this was one of the classes I was hoping to connect with at the start of the day. Sigh...

10:30 am

I have just enough time to use the washroom and grab my printed documents for my IEP meeting. On my way I learn that one of my students has started eating wood chips and another has grabbed and choked a child. I know I won’t retain this important information as I am focused on the meeting and ask them to send an email and CC admin. I sit down, and wonder what will my day be like when we lose 15 hours of EA time. How will we function? This thought takes me into recess.



Under-resourced Learning Conditions

to Under-resourced Teaching Conditions

I started kindergarten in 2001 and graduated grade 12 in 2014. My entire K-12 experience was shaped by the stripping of our contract by the BC Liberal government in 2002.

Despite the Supreme Court of Canada restoring that stripped language in 2016, I now teach under conditions similar to what I experienced as a student. How can that be?

In grade 1, I spent my mornings in an all grade 1 classroom but after lunch the kindergarteners joined our class. This was done in response to a shortage of teachers and a shortage of space in our school. When the K's joined our class, myself and five other grade 1s went downstairs to the grade 2/3 classroom of Ms. C who was tasked with teaching us first graders the basics of how to read, while also having students in the room who should have been well into reading novels.

The following year, the way the grade levels were divided to accommodate for IEP designations, I was put into the grade 2-3-4 classroom. Ms. C was now not only teaching three grades in one class all day, but she was also now balancing primary and intermediate

curriculum as well. She was an absolute rock star, but she should not have had to have been.

And today as a teacher looking at our tentative agreement from the latest bargaining round, I am disappointed and frustrated that the SCC win in 2016 has changed nothing. **What were my under-resourced learning conditions are now my under-resourced teaching conditions.**

Honestly, the 2016 Supreme Court decision left me feeling ripped off as a student—the government had stripped what my teachers, myself, and my peers of the tools we needed for success for my entire K-12 schooling. But I had also felt hope after the ruling because I thought that no future students would have to go through the type of schooling that we went through.

It seems I was wrong.

During my teaching practica in 2019 I was devastated to see that the classrooms looked almost identical in size and composition to the ones I was a student in pre-2016. Once, it took two fully qualified teachers plus myself

hours to come up with a seating plan that somewhat accounted for students with behavioral issues being separated, students with IEPs being in an area where we could easily support them as well as being near helpful/inspiring peers, keeping students who could not hear or see well close to the board, ELL students seated near home-language peers that could translate, and all of the other things that need to be thought about when planning out a classroom space that is beyond capacity given the diversity of learners.

In one case I TTOC-ed for an intermediate class that was in triple remedy: when I asked a student to not sit on the top of the bookshelf during quiet reading time she jumped down, screamed that I was ruining everyone's lives, ran out of the classroom and then out of the school. When I called the office for help to track her down as I calmed down the student having a panic attack from student 1's yelling, I was assured that this situation was quite typical, and they were surprised I had made it the 2.5 hours I did without any major incidents. Congrats to me.

Now in my own classroom, the realities of how many kids need my help versus how much time I can give them in the 80 short minutes I see them for leaves me sad for the students who just need more time and support to become the stars that they are.

How can we teach well like this? Our students deserve better. We need more staff and more resources to help all students have access to a safe, healthy, and happy schooling environment. Our students with extra needs should not feel like they are constantly on the struggle bus; and the students who are plugging along meeting expectations deserve to be better seen. And our students who master learning outcomes should be given their place in the sun.

Class size and composition matters, because we can't be our best teacher selves without a government that wants to invest in us and our kids. Education is a right and it is my respectful hope that our current students have their needs recognized and met by the employer and province too.