

REPORT ON BARGAINING

Regional Colleges Bargaining Units Status of Negotiations

September 2005

The Collective Bargaining Agreement for the Regional Colleges Bargaining Units expired in August 2003.

In preparation for the next round of bargaining, we began working on our proposals package in March 2003 based on the priorities set by the delegates at the February Proposals Conference.

Bargaining strategy

At our early meetings, the Negotiating Committee reached a consensus that it was not in our best interests to hurry our negotiations, especially in light of the fact that the teachers' contract would expire in 2004 and that other public sector unions, some with more economic clout, would also be at the bargaining table.

Bargaining history

When the regional colleges were created in the early 1970s, taken from a branch in the department of post-secondary education, salaries for instructors were comparable to the STF pay scale. For the past three decades, their salaries have been comparable to those paid to teachers in the K-12 system.

Last round of bargaining

During our 2000-2003 round of bargaining, we settled for 3-3-3% and 1% on benefits. The STF settled later and for more, resulting in the salaries of regional college instructors falling behind teachers by 12 -13% for Ranges IV, V and VI.

Current trend of negotiations

The STF recently ratified a new collective agreement that provides for economic increases of 2% in each of the next three years with the first increase taking effect September 1, 2004. In addition, they will see another step added to the pay ranges for teachers with 15 or more years of service. This generates a further increase of approximately 3%.

Our negotiations

We have met with the employer six times from March to June with our discussions focused primarily on non-cost items in the collective agreement.

Our next meeting is scheduled for October 3rd and 4th. We have not yet tabled monetary packages.

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Recruitment and retention

All regional colleges in Saskatchewan face some problems recruiting instructors and retaining their services. With a wage gap of 12% to 20% between similarly-qualified teachers employed by school districts, it has become increasingly difficult to entice qualified instructors to teach in the smaller centres, especially when colleges have few full-time jobs available. Some courses traditionally offered in the smaller centres have had to be cancelled over the last year because no instructor was available to teach the program. Although some job applicants are willing to teach some classes, the mobility of the younger work force and the higher wages offered by colleges in nearby provinces or the K-12 system usually results in short term service and a high turnover rate at the regional colleges.

Finding Solutions

Over the next few months, we will focus our efforts on analyzing our bargaining environment vis-à-vis a comparison to neighbouring provinces and our historical relationship with other teachers. If regional colleges hope to survive, we must be able to resolve the recruitment and retention problems regional colleges currently face. The demand for our course offerings remains high but many colleges have been unable to meet that demand, resulting in reduced services to the rural residents of Saskatchewan.

Compounding the problem of the wage gap between teachers and regional college instructors, many regional college boards have adopted a business philosophy of revenue generation for running the colleges. Profit and cost-recovery have taken the place of public education and service to the community.

What we see is a decrease in service to the people in our communities due to the mandate for cost-recovery and revenue generation coupled with course cancellations due to instructor shortages. If the trend continues, regional colleges face a bleak future. We must find solutions to make employment in regional colleges attractive, viable and rewarding. We will be exploring ways for putting pressure on government to increase regional college funding so we can meet the demand for educational opportunities in our communities.

In solidarity,

Regional Colleges Negotiating
Committee

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