



BC CONFEDERATION OF PARENT ADVISORY COUNCILS

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Learning Roundtable Class size and Composition Position Paper

BCCPAC is pleased to participate in the discussion on class size and composition. Parents have an important perspective to bring to these issues. We appreciate that each partner may bring a differing perspective to the Roundtable, however we share a common commitment to doing the best we can for all children.

Class size and composition are important factors that impact student learning, but we recognize that they are not the only factors. An effective discussion must consider the many ways of improving student success and the various other influences on student learning. It is our suggestion that this discussion requires a holistic approach; therefore we request that the Roundtable include other factors that impact learning in our classrooms in its discussions. This could include, but not limited to, teacher certification and continuing education, special education, school based leadership and teacher competence and disciplinary.

Parents throughout our province express very clearly their expectations for their children's education. First and foremost, they want all children to be safe at school, to be challenged in their learning, and to have numerous opportunities to be successful learners. Parents consistently emphasize these values through surveys, discussions, focus groups, and resolutions approved at our AGMs.

Parents recognize that each student, each class, each school and each community is different and unique. They understand that flexibility is essential in order to accommodate variations in communities and diversity of opportunities around the province. They want neighborhood schools to be organized so that all children in one family can attend the same school. They want small and rural schools to include all the children in their community. They want a reasonable range of courses for their students and they want creative strategies developed to provide these opportunities. They also want students with special needs to have the freedom to participate in classes in which they can be successful. Parents clearly recognize the balance that must be found between other factors and class size and composition to arrive at the best solution for each school situation. When parents are given factual information, they will always choose the direction that is focused on enriching their children's programs and services.

BCCPAC supports the flexibility and balance that is required to address student needs, school needs and community needs. The proposal put forward to the Roundtable by the B.C. Teachers' Federation would remove that flexibility. Accommodating this expenditure within our current fiscal framework could also result in unprecedented loss of valuable programs and services. Those same dollars, if added to our school system, could be used to provide every school with music and fine art programs, early intervention programs, continuing education for teachers, enriched library programs and resources, more choices in electives in secondary schools, literacy programs, individual assessments, resource materials for students with special needs, playground equipment, earthquake upgrades, to name a few of the ways we could enrich our schools.

Parents recognize that there must be a common sense limit on the size of classes, and that this limit cannot be the same around the province. They also recognize that some classes have challenges with size and composition but are very successful. Other classes have fewer challenges with size and composition, yet are less effective. From our resolutions, we know that parents are more comfortable with larger classes in secondary schools than in elementary schools. We also know that in the past, contract language provided some reassurance to parents that classes would not be overcrowded. Although some parents may wish to return to that “comfort zone”, the majority strongly endorse flexibility as key to allocating staffing where it best suits the goals and needs of students.

Parents want to understand their school communities and to participate in discussions and decisions that focus on the best interests of children. Parents want increased public accountability for decisions made at schools throughout our province. They want their principals, superintendents and trustees to share information in a timely manner that allows for reflection and meaningful discussion; and to be accountable along side parents for demonstrating that decisions regarding school organization take the needs of all students into account.

The Roundtable is also specifically focusing on class composition, the inclusion of students with special needs. Quoting from the recommendations of the Special Education Review in 2000:

13. The Minister of Education should ask employer and employee organizations to identify clauses in existing collective agreements that might adversely affect students with special needs or contravene the rights of such students under the School Act, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or provincial human rights legislation, and to undertake steps to eliminate such clauses from future agreements.

Subsequent legislation addressed these concerns and we do not support the re-introduction of potentially discriminatory language on class composition. Parents support inclusion for students with special needs, and support common sense decisions that place students in classes where they have opportunities to be successful. Decisions on placement should be made in consultation with parents and should be realistic and fair for all students.

In reviewing the data on class size and composition, we acknowledge that the majority of districts are complying with legislation, and that most classes are, in fact, reasonable in size. Large classes tend to occur for subjects such as band and drama, and size is understandable for these electives. Some decisions on class size and composition can and should be questioned, but this should occur at the local level. By increasing the public accountability for decisions, and by sharing information on those decisions with school communities, we can achieve our objectives, while still allowing funding to be available where it is most needed, and to be focused on the best interest of students.

Attachments:
Statement of Policy
Issue Bulletin – Dec 2000