

Government Trustee Bargaining Committee Offer to Saskatchewan Teachers

The Government Trustee Bargaining Committee has put forth an offer it considers a fair and reasonable deal for teachers that includes a \$1,500 one-time payment for teachers in the first year and a 2 per cent salary increase in each of the next three years of the agreement. This is in addition to the 1 per cent salary increase that teachers received on August 31, 2019, the last day of the previous contract.

This offer balances the Government's appreciation and respect of teachers with the responsible fiscal management that taxpayers expect and other unions have accepted.

The GTBC's position is that class size and composition is not an appropriate matter for provincial-level collective bargaining with the STF. This position was confirmed through both the conciliation process and the arbitration process. It is a subject that requires consideration of the interests of multiple stakeholders and educational policy. Last fall a Class Size and Composition Committee was formed which has held several meetings and is expected to provide a report to the Minister of Education. The STF declined an invitation to participate on this Committee; however, the invitation to become involved remains open.

Government understands the challenge teachers have regarding class complexity. There is opportunity for the parties to address these issues at the local level which is more appropriate given the vast differences in the needs of individual schools. Government will continue to work with boards of education as its valued partner in this regard.

The GTBC has on multiple occasions invited the TBC back to the bargaining table to continue negotiations and try to work towards an agreement. The TBC continues to be non responsive.

Q&A

A. GTBC Offer

What is the offer?

The GTBC has offered a three-year deal including:

Year 1 – 2019-20

- \$1,500 one-time payment per full-time teacher (it is being proposed to use repurposed extended health plan contributions to reduce the plan's \$80 million surplus)

Year 2 – 2020-21

- 2 per cent salary increase

Year 3 – 2021-22

- 2 per cent salary increase

Year 4 – 2022-23

- 2 per cent salary increase

This offer is in addition to the 1 per cent salary increase that teachers received on August 31, 2019, the last day of the previous agreement.

Why doesn't the offer include a solution for class size and composition concerns raised by the TBC?

The GTBC believes that class size and composition is a matter best addressed by boards of education and stakeholders, who understand the local context. The size of classes and the assignment of students to those classes is a local matter and not suited to a provincial collective agreement.

During the last provincial-level collective bargaining process, the TBC also sought to bargain over class size and composition. The arbitration board declined to award the STF's proposal. The recent conciliation report also recognized that class complexity isn't required in a collective agreement.

This is a complex issue which requires careful and thorough analysis to define the problems which need to be addressed. The GTBC maintains that the complexity and variation in needs across schools, including vast differences in local teacher agreements, are unique and that there is no simple one size fits all solution. The Minister of Education has also created a broad committee of sector stakeholders to help shed light on this complicated issue, and the STF has chosen not to participate on this committee.

Government is also committing a pool of funds to begin to address this issue.

The TBC continues to ignore requests to continue bargaining. The STF continues to not participate in a committee set up to better understand and discuss these issues.

How does this offer compare to offers received by other unions?

This offer is in-line with other Government of Saskatchewan unions. The Saskatchewan Government Employees Union (SGEU) signed a similar agreement and the Saskatchewan Crowns signed the same deal offered to them following 17 days on strike.

Where does the \$1,500 in repurposed money come from?

The \$1,500 one-time payment per teacher would be provided upon ratification of the agreement. It is being proposed at the bargaining table that these funds, totaling approximately \$18 million be repurposed from the annual government-funded contribution to the extended health plan. This will bring the extended health plan surplus closer to industry standards.

How much "extra" money is in the health plan fund?

There is approximately \$80 million surplus to the Government funded health plan for teachers. Our analysis indicated that a one-year redirect of these funds to teachers would not negatively impact the financial stability of this plan. The plan is significantly above the industry standard for reserves and four times the annual premium.

Who pays into the health plan fund and why is there so much extra money?

The Government of Saskatchewan provides funding to the plan. Government contributes 2.1 per cent of salary into the plan that the STF administers, as per the existing Collective Bargaining Agreement. The surplus has been growing over a number of years due to the cost of the plan being less than the contribution and earnings. Any specific questions about this plan should be directed to the STF as they are the administrators for this plan.

How would this offer compare to teachers in other provinces?

This offer would see Saskatchewan Class IV teacher salaries rise to 3.9 per cent higher than the Western Canadian Average at a time when Alberta teachers received zero percent salary increases for 2019 and 2020.