



**Roles and  
Responsibilities  
of Teachers and  
Teacher Assistants/  
Education Assistants**



**A BCTF/CUPE Joint Paper**

# Table of Contents

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President’s Message . . . . .	1
A Brief History . . . . .	2
Context . . . . .	3
Special Education Policy, Procedures, and Guidelines . . . . .	4
Collective Agreements . . . . .	4
The Role of the Ministry of Education and School Districts . . . . .	4
Teachers’ and Teacher Assistants’ Working Relationship: General Responsibilities . . . . .	5
Glossary . . . . .	5
Specific Responsibilities . . . . .	6
• Designing programs . . . . .	6
• Implementing programs . . . . .	7
• Assessing, evaluating, reporting . . . . .	8
• Developing supportive environments . . . . .	9



British Columbia  
Teachers' Federation



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December 2009

## Message from the Presidents of BCTF and CUPE BC

Dear Colleagues and Education Partners:

We are very pleased and proud to introduce to you this joint position paper entitled **Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Teacher Assistants/Education Assistants**.

It is the result of much effort and determination over many years by a number of individuals serving on the joint committee, as well as groups such as the CUPE BC K-12 Committee, the CUPE BC Special Education Task Force, and the BCTF Special Education Association. This paper represents our ability to work together to reach consensus and to move forward to strengthen and enhance public education for all children in British Columbia.

It articulates our basic assumption that the roles of both teachers and teacher assistants are integral to ensuring the success of students with special needs. Further it makes clear that BCTF and CUPE BC have a fundamental role to play in supporting the development of good working relationships at the school level. This paper should assist collegial teams at the local level to continue to develop working relationships and to address conflicts that may arise.

The primary focus of this paper is the roles and responsibilities of those who work most closely with students—teachers and teacher assistants. However, the critical role of the Ministry of Education and school districts in establishing the necessary conditions for students with special needs to have successful, positive, and productive learning experiences in the public schools of British Columbia cannot be over-emphasized.

On behalf of BCTF and CUPE BC, we thank the joint committee members for their commitment and effort. We look forward to dialogue with our members and with all education partners on the important issue of quality public education for students with special needs.

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Irene Lanzinger  
President, BC Teachers' Federation

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Barry O'Neill  
President, Canadian Union of  
Public Employees BC

# A brief history

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In the Spring of 1995, BCTF and CUPE BC convened a small joint committee to address special education issues pertaining to:

- Roles and responsibilities of teachers and teacher assistants;
- Training programs for teacher assistants;
- Projects to assist members in dealing with classroom issues.

The joint committee met for the first time June 5, 1995. Much work was done by this and subsequent joint committees, including plans for a brochure, research projects, and problem-solving approaches to dealing with contentious issues, as well as identification of issues of mutual interest and concern.

However, the statement of roles and responsibilities remained unfinished.

In the fall of 1999, CUPE BC and BCTF again recognized the commonality of issues and concerns relating to special education, and the imperative provided by the provincial review of special education. It was agreed to reconstitute a joint committee, with the aim of reaching agreement on the roles and responsibilities of teachers and teacher assistants for recommendation to government.

In May 2000, BCTF and CUPE BC resumed meetings, and the **Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Teacher Assistants** position paper was endorsed by both union executives in April 2001.

In December 2008, BCTF and CUPE BC began discussions with a view to updating the document. The updated document was endorsed by both union executives in 2009.

Members of the most recent joint committee:

**CUPE BC:** Susan Blair, June Kaiser, Dee Beattie, Paul Tetrault, John Malcolmson

**BCTF:** Jim Iker, Jinny Sims, Janice Neden, Leann Buteau, Charlie Naylor, David Halme

# **Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Teacher Assistants / Education Assistants: A BCTF/CUPE joint paper**

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## **Context**

BCTF and CUPE BC recognize that teachers and teacher assistants play a key role in programs for students with special needs. This paper is intended to assist teachers and teacher assistants in establishing a co-operative, respectful working relationship to ensure the success of students with special needs.

Teacher assistants work under the general direction of a teacher in the school, and under the supervision of the principal/vice-principal. Overall, the relationship between teachers and teacher assistants has seen the development of a more collegial model.

“Teacher” in this document refers to all teachers, including classroom teachers, special education support teachers, learning assistance teachers, and other non-enrolling teachers.

“Teacher Assistant” in this document refers to all teacher assistants and paraprofessionals who are working with teachers to support students with special needs.

This joint statement elaborates the roles and responsibilities of teachers and teacher assistants as defined initially by, and within, the confines of the British Columbia School Act and Regulations, Ministry of Education Special Education Policy, Procedures and Guidelines, and collective agreements of both BCTF, its locals, and CUPE BC with the employing school district/BCPSEA.

Teacher assistants are supervised in regard to the employment relationship (e.g., evaluation reports, discipline) by the principal/vice-principal, not the teacher with whom the teacher assistants work.

1. Boards may employ persons other than teachers to assist teachers in carrying out their responsibilities and duties under this Act and in the Regulations.
2. Persons employed under subsection (1) shall work under the general supervision of a teacher or principal/vice-principal.

Section 18 ([www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/revisedstatutescontents.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/revisedstatutescontents.pdf)) of the School Act: (04 06 09)

The index to the School Act and related legislation uses the term Teacher Assistant to identify the paraprofessional role. There are, however, numerous other titles in use within the province. CUPE BC is actively seeking changes to Section 18 of the current School Act in order to standardize job titles to Education Assistant and to reflect current employment relationships as reflected in CUPE BC collective agreements.

## **1. Special Education policy, procedures, and guidelines**

The following excerpts are taken from the Ministry of Education Manual of Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines for Special Education Services (Section B.3):

“The teacher responsible for a student with special needs is responsible for designing, supervising, and assessing the educational program for that student.”

“Teachers are expected to design programs for students with special needs. Teachers’ assistants play a key role in many programs for students with special needs, performing functions which range from personal care to assisting the teacher with instructional programs. Under the direction of a teacher they may play a key role in implementing the program.”

“While teacher assistants may assist in the collection of data for the purpose of evaluating student progress, the teachers are responsible for evaluating and reporting on the progress of the student to parents.”

## **2. Collective agreements**

Teachers and teacher assistants are covered by collective agreements between the unions that represent them and the employer. Many of these agreements have provisions that set out some conditions relevant to roles and responsibilities. Collective agreements must be followed and take precedence.

## **3. The role of the Ministry of Education and school districts in ensuring conditions for success of students with special needs**

Teachers and teacher assistants agree that the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the school district is paramount in ensuring the necessary conditions for students with special needs to succeed in schools. These conditions include but are not limited to:

- 3.1 Provision of adequate resources to maintain an appropriate learning environment.
- 3.2 Availability of a suitable workspace to accommodate the learning activities of those working with students with special needs.
- 3.3 Access to appropriate information regarding the student, the Individual Education Plan (IEP), as well as techniques and strategies necessary to carry out the respective responsibilities of each in relation to students’ programs.
- 3.4 Provision of appropriate in-service on instructional and behavioural techniques and strategies.
- 3.5 Adequate release time for members of the school-based team, and adequate time within the school day for members of the student-specific support team, including the teacher and the teacher assistants, to participate as required in the process of developing, implementing, and monitoring the IEP.

#### **4. Teachers' and teacher assistants' working relationship: General responsibilities**

Inherent in the School Act and Special Education Policy, Procedures and Guidelines is the teacher's responsibility for designing, implementing, and evaluating the educational program, and the teacher assistant's role to assist teachers in this responsibility. Both the teacher and the teacher assistant facilitate the inclusion of students with special needs. It is their joint role to encourage the student to become an independent learner and member of the classroom, school, and community.

In order to foster a co-operative, respectful working relationship, teacher assistants need to be aware of those responsibilities that are specific to teachers.

Similarly, teachers need to be aware of job descriptions and the parameters of the responsibilities of teacher assistants.

To provide effective support for students with special needs, teachers and teacher assistants work together and share responsibility to:

- 4.1 Develop a positive, respectful working relationship.
- 4.2 Meet standards of professional and ethical conduct in relation to students, parents, and colleagues.
- 4.3 Advocate for conditions of success for students with special needs.
- 4.4 Advocate for the protection of the legal and human rights of students and their families.
- 4.5 Follow guidelines established by the school/district to protect the safety and well being of children and youth.
- 4.6 Maintain positive, supportive, professional relationships within the education community.

#### **5. Glossary**

IEP ( Individual Education Plan): a written plan, developed for a student, which describes the program modifications and/or significant adaptations for the student and the services that are to be provided.

Adaptation: retains the learning outcomes of the prescribed curriculum but includes changes such as alternate formats (e.g. Braille, use of technology), instructional strategies (e.g. use of interpreter, visual cues), and assessment procedures (e.g. oral exams, additional time).

Modification: changes to learning outcomes which are substantially different from the prescribed curriculum, and specifically selected to meet the student's special needs.

*<http://bctf.ca/issues/resources.aspx?id=10572>*

## 6. Specific responsibilities

The following are some specifics of the roles and responsibilities of teachers and teacher assistants, and some roles and responsibilities that they share.

### 6.1 Designing programs and planning and organizing learning experiences for students with special needs

TEACHER	SHARED	TEACHER ASSISTANT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designs instructional program.</li> <li>• Develops IEPs.</li> <li>• Identifies responsibilities of individual members of student specific support teams in terms of participating in the development, implementation, and monitoring of the programs as described in the IEP.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss learners' strengths and weaknesses and consider best possible areas of program focus.</li> <li>• Attend program planning meetings, based on school and district policies, to assist with developing IEPs and transition plans for children and youth with special needs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shares relevant information about the performance and behaviour of individual learners to support IEP goals, transition, and program design.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plans learning activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss objectives and goals.</li> <li>• Discuss and clarify, on a regular basis, the ways in which the teacher assistants can assist the teacher with instructional programs, classroom management, and expectation setting for students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gathers relevant information through working with student or students to provide feedback into the planning process.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determines appropriate modifications and adaptations in line with IEP goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss adaptations and modifications to curriculum and resource materials.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Produces materials and implements strategies to accommodate individual learner needs/styles.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifies the appropriate instructional learning resources.</li> <li>• When needed, advocates for the appropriate instructional learning resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss what instructional learning resources are needed to reach IEP goals (e.g. flash cards, social stories, abacus, etc.).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assists with development of instructional learning resources.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviews and reinforces learning activities for concept and skill development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review learning resources together to clarify and share experiences and expectations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviews and reinforces learning activities using lesson plans and learning strategies developed by the teacher/team to help students master concepts and skills.</li> </ul>

<b>TEACHER</b>	<b>SHARED</b>	<b>TEACHER ASSISTANT</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops school-based learning goals for individuals and groups.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan activities to meet goals.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assists students with learning activities and/or independent study projects developed by teacher/team.</li> <li>• Monitors and reports to teacher/team on implementation of the program.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designs learning and skill development goals for worksites and other community-based settings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan activities to meet goals.</li> <li>• Share resources and concerns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supports learning and skill development activities in worksite and community-based settings.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establishes work plan priorities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review plan daily and weekly</li> <li>• Set consultative meeting times.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follows priority plan.</li> <li>• Keeps teacher up to date on the implementation of the program.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides the teacher assistant with the requisite information regarding the classroom management structure, discipline plan, and expectations for students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss and clarify classroom management structure, discipline plan, and expectations for students.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carries out work within developed structures and plans, being consistent with expectations for students.</li> </ul>

## 6.2 Implementing programs for students with special needs: Delivery of service

<b>TEACHER</b>	<b>SHARED</b>	<b>TEACHER ASSISTANT</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instructs, supervises, and facilitates student learning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss successful practice with goals in mind (e.g. IEP, behaviour plan, safety plan, etc.).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitates student learning individually and in small groups.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develops individualized, appropriate, behavioural program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss specific philosophy, techniques, strategies, and appropriate language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implements the techniques and strategies as discussed.</li> <li>• Documents, monitors, and reports to teacher/team on implementation of the program.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defines the use of specific techniques, strategies, and appropriate language, as required in individual situations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss specific techniques, strategies, and appropriate language.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implements specific techniques, strategies, and appropriate language as discussed and/or demonstrated.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeks assistance of principal to provide a workplace for the teacher assistant.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss and identify workplace settings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitors effectiveness of workplace settings and reports to teacher and/or principal.</li> </ul>

### 6.3 Assessing, evaluating, reporting and recording student progress

<b>TEACHER</b>	<b>SHARED</b>	<b>TEACHER ASSISTANT</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensures assessment and learner profiles are current.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carries out functional (informal) assessment activities to assist the teacher in developing learner profiles.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Convenes/attends meetings of student specific support team within a teacher's instructional hours and TA's paid work hours.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss information with the entire team.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attends meetings of student specific support team during paid work hours.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evaluates progress according to goals of IEP.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Exchange and discuss information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Observes and documents learner strengths, achievements, and needs through daily learning activities.</li> <li>Assists in the collection of data for the purpose of evaluating student progress.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reports to parents (a) informal, ongoing, and (b) formal, written reports.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss relevant confidential information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provides information to teacher for home/school formal/informal communications.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintains required school, school district, and provincial records.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify data requirements.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assists in maintaining learner records required by school, school district, or provincial policy.</li> </ul>

## 6.4 Developing supportive environments: For learners, their families, school and district staffs

TEACHER	SHARED	TEACHER ASSISTANT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documents and shares workplace concerns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss concerns to facilitate early problem solving through informal and regularly scheduled meetings during the workday.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Documents and shares workplace concerns.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remains current in school, district, and provincial policies and procedures.</li> <li>• Reviews and monitors that policies are being implemented.</li> <li>• Shares information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow guidelines established by the school/district to protect the safety and well-being of children, youth, and staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remains current in school, district, and provincial policies and procedures.</li> <li>• Reviews and monitors that policies are being implemented.</li> <li>• Shares information.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shares relevant student-related information on behaviour, social, emotional, and physical health subject to privacy regulations</li> <li>• Requests that appropriate health or other training is provided to support staff.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain confidentiality.</li> <li>• Support occupational and physiotherapists, speech-language pathologists, vision and hearing-impaired specialists, and nurses in the delivery of required services.</li> <li>• Follow established protocol and collective agreements regarding administration of medicine and/or medical procedures.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carries out personal and health care routines as directed.</li> <li>• Carries out specific procedures only if appropriate training has been provided.</li> <li>• Follows all established reporting procedures.</li> </ul>



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