

MEMO TO: All ATU Members
FROM: Doug Smuland, Labour Relations Officer
DATE: May 6, 2021
RE: Professional Development Day - May 21st, 2021



**Working on May 21, 2021
A Professional Development Day in Abbotsford**

"Today, we are reporting 697 new cases, including 16 epi-linked cases, for a total of 132,353 cases in British Columbia.

"There are 7,161 active cases of COVID-19 in the province, with 10,961 people under public health monitoring as a result of identified exposure to known cases. A further 123,383 people who tested positive have recovered.

"Of the active cases, 486 individuals are currently hospitalized with COVID-19, 173 of whom are in intensive care. The remaining people are recovering at home in self-isolation.

(May 5, 2021 gov.bc.ca)

At various times during the year, school is in session for teachers but not for students. These days are devoted to teacher professional development, or Pro-D.

The scheduling of Pro-D days does not mean a loss of instructional time for students, as these days were added to the school calendar many years ago. The inclusion of Pro-D days in the school calendar increased the number of days of work for teachers with no loss of instructional days for students.

Then came Covid-19 and the variants of destruction.

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic, many school districts in the Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley have heeded the advice of Dr. Henry and determined that teachers and general community health would be better served if people work from home where possible. Teachers attending their on-line PD sessions from the safety and comfort of their home would fit well within this advice. Our closest neighbours, including Langley, Mission, Surrey, New Westminster and others have determined as much and have stated that on-line learning during PD days can take place from a teacher's home without any adverse effects.

In light of these decisions being made around us, the ATU has asked on several occasions if SD#34 would also be allowing teachers to remain at home for on-line PD events. The repeated answer has been no.

Although Abbotsford has a Work-At-Home agreement with the ATU, has teachers providing instruction from their homes currently when needed, and recognizes that in individual circumstances working from home is entirely appropriate, they have refused to allow teachers engaged in on-line learning to remain at home on May 21st.

While it may be entirely safe for teachers to attend their schools on May 21st and certainly the rate of transmission would likely be lower than on days when students are in attendance, there is still the pesky advice from the office of the Provincial Health Officer that advises people to work from home where possible that isn't being adhered to.

If the decision was instead to allow teachers a day to remain in their homes while participating in PD, there is no doubt that the mental health and anxiety levels of teachers would be greatly improved and bring about absolutely no negative consequence, unless increased teacher professionalism and autonomy is seen as a negative.

"Admin in 2020: please be prepared to teach on-line, in person, both simultaneously, on a moving train, while juggling, in a burning building, under the sea, during a wrestling match with a T-Rex, as a hologram, and riding a unicorn. Also, be safe and we value you."

Alexandra Finley (Twitter)