

Education workers willing to switch to health-care jobs during COVID-19 crisis

Catherine Whitnall

CUPE education members are willing to change hats when it comes to supporting their schools and communities through the new reality of COVID-19.

Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 997 president William Campbell said his members have been surveyed on a number of issues; firstly, how they could assist students, families and other staff while working from home.

“As you can imagine, this is easier for some classifications than others, but we received over 400 member responses in just 24 hours,” said Campbell.

Currently, educational assistants and many others such as the payroll and IT departments are working from home to support students and the system as a whole.

Members were also surveyed with a request that anyone interested in assisting at their local hospitals put their name forward so that where there is a need at a hospital, those interested can be contacted and provided more information.

“Our members recognize that we are all in this together and have stepped up to assist,” continued Campbell.

Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board communications manager Galen Eagle said the board has not yet received a request from local hospitals or long-term care facilities to facilitate the reassignment of board CUPE staff.

“If such a request was received, we would work with our local CUPE in coordination with the province and the provincial CUPE office to determine a voluntary process that would allow CUPE workers who wished to be reassigned an opportunity to do so,” continued Eagle.

The Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board is of the same mindset.

“As an organization, we are prepared to do whatever is needed on an ongoing basis to support the health and wellness of our communities. Decisions on redeploying school board staff to other sectors, such as hospitals or long-term care facilities, would be considered as part of an overall provincial health response, with directions then being given to school boards. These wouldn’t be local school board decisions,” stated board chair Diane Lloyd.

Trillium Lakelands District School Board director of education Larry Hope said he has received requests from local long-term care homes and was impressed when 20 CUPE members said they would be willing to help out.

These individuals will need to be screened and trained beforehand, added Hope, to

ensure the highest level of safety for not just facility staff and residents but for the members themselves.

Hope said the board is also discussing plans to re-engage other CUPE members, including office and clerical workers, to help ensure everything continues to move forward — such as printing out and packaging materials for students with no access to internet or equipment — particularly the Learn@Home efforts which may extend to the end of the school year.