

Labour relations, sex ed. among issues to greet new school year

By **Tim Whitnell**
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The start of a new school year is always hectic for all involved — students, teachers, staff and parents — but 2015-16 has additional weighty issues to be considered and resolved.

In Halton, the public school board bargaining team has local meetings arranged with Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) representatives on Sept. 22 and 28.

ETFO in Halton represents close to 2,900 teachers, serving almost 40,000 pupils.

ETFO has been in a legal strike position since May, 2015.

Meanwhile, work-to-rule sanctions continue with ETFO and the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

ETFO says that it will begin rotating, one-day strikes in October unless the government and school boards return to the bargaining table and progress is made.

Starting Monday, Sept. 21, teachers have upped their current work-to-rule campaign:

- fill in for an absent teacher or take on additional students if a class needs to be re-organized
- take on other duties during regularly scheduled preparation times including being reassigned to teach in another class
- update classroom websites/blogs, complete or distribute class newsletters
- take part in any activities beyond the classroom (e.g., extra-curriculars) on Wednesdays. Actions on these days will also include ETFO members demonstrating union solidarity by wearing symbolic items (e.g., buttons). Members may also engage in

planned lobbying activities including information pickets and local rallies.

This in addition to its phase two work-to-rule efforts:

- plan, organize or participate in field trips
- plan, organize or participate in fund-raising activities
- collect monies or distribute to students any paperwork required by the school or school board
- attend open houses or 'Meet the Teacher' nights outside of the instructional day

The Halton public board also has more separate local contract meetings arranged with representatives of its occasional teachers, early childhood educators, teaching assistants, office staff, educational assistants, custodians and its professional care workers (social workers, child care, personal support workers).

Two teachers' groups that recently agreed to tentative contracts with the province earlier at the central bargaining table had ratification votes this week.

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA), which represents 50,000 elementary and secondary school teachers in Ontario, has been in a legal strike position since Aug. 17. Its members ratified the deal on Sept. 17 on what has been reported to be a three-year deal.

OSSTF teachers held their contract ratification vote over two days, Sept. 16-17, and ratified the central agreement with the Province. In August, HDSB reached a tentative agreement with the local union.

The OSSTF represents 1,300 permanent full- and part-time high school teachers at the Halton District School Board.

Ontario's 10,000 French-language el-

ementary and high school teachers union agreed to a tentative contract on Sept. 16. It still has to be ratified by its members.

Another contentious education issue to start the 2015-16 school year is the introduction of an updated physical and health curriculum.

Changes to the sex education portion of the curriculum have upset many parents, who believe it presents inappropriate material and/or at too early an age.

Some parents have staged public protests with others vowing to remove their children from class when the new sex ed information is being taught.

Halton District School Board Education Director David Euale said he was not aware

of any students at the board who were absent on the first day of school last week for that reason.

"We will investigate any type of withdrawal of students on the first day of school but I have heard nothing about it at this time.

"We believe our plan for the in-service of staff and the information to parents (on sex education) has been well received," Euale said in an email to the Post.

"We will continue to allow for religious accommodations on curriculum issues as part of our inclusive strategy; we acknowledge the right of parents to withdraw their children from school if they feel the instruction is inappropriate for their children," he added.

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