

ETFO deal reached in cloud of COVID-19 in Peterborough, Kawartha

Taylor Clysdale

While teachers might not be in classrooms now due to the ongoing novel coronavirus pandemic, they are looking forward to returning without job action.

That's because on March 20, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) reached a tentative deal with the province, potentially ending the rotating one-day strikes, which have occurred since November.

"There's definitely a sense of relief from teachers," said Shirley Bell, the ETFO local president in Peterborough.

While the details aren't yet known on when the deal will be ratified with teachers, it will likely be an online vote to maintain social distancing.

Neither the province nor the union has released the contents of the deal.

Over the course of months-long negotiations, where the province was bargaining with four separate teachers' unions, key issues [included class sizes](#), mandatory e-learning, funding and pay.

The province publicly backed down from increases in class sizes, reverting back to the previous average of 23. Meanwhile e-learning was scaled back and made optional.

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association [also reached a tentative deal with the province](#) shortly after schools were shut down at the recommendation of provincial health authorities.

Whether or not the current COVID-19 situation helped speed up negotiations, Bell said it's possible.

"It may have put a different light on things," she noted.

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But now teachers are anxious to see a return to normality and see students back in class after the shut down ends.

The four teachers unions were performing rotating one-day strikes over the past few months, and Bell said she hoped it created enough chaos to draw attention while not burdening students or families.

"I'm hoping our job action was achieving that purpose," she added.

Diane Lloyd, chair of the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, said the board

is busy dealing with the current COVID-19 pandemic, but the good news of a tentative deal shouldn't be lost.

Given everything that's going on, Lloyd said it's important to recognize "we value our teachers and their professionalism."

According to Lloyd, when it comes to the one-day strikes, at this point parents are acknowledging job action is going to happen.

"For the most part, people understand these things are going to happen every three to four years," she added.

While everything is a bit twisted now, Lloyd looks forward to when classrooms are filled with students, and teachers can continue doing what they love.

"When things are back to what we're used to, that will be wonderful news," she said.



by **[Taylor Clysdale](#)**

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