

Funding for cleaning only helps if there is enough staff to do the work: union

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The province's green light for school boards to use reserve funds to cover such costs as more personal protective equipment and purchasing enhanced cleaning products is good news, but not if it's not being utilized.

Local boards — like the Kawartha Pine Ridge, which has already purchased touchless hand sanitizer units and ordered 20,000 cloth masks for students and enough disposable ones to last at least one month for every employee — are confident they will have the supplies in place come Sept. 8.

The problem, says Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Local 997 and Education Workers of Trillium Lakelands District School Board president William Campbell, is there may not be enough people.

“With school reopening this year there will be a significant amount of extra time spent meeting the ministry's schedule for cleaning plus disinfection of desktops, washrooms, handles, switches, counters and other high-touch surfaces,” says Campbell. “The (Trillium Lakelands District School Board) has said that they are confident they can meet these demands; however, they have yet to share their plan with us.”

Campbell explains that, in all but a couple of elementary schools, there is only one custodian working during times when students and staff are in the buildings. This is the time the extra cleaning is to take place. Campbell says the extra cleaning and disinfection will put an “unmanageable workload” on those working the day shift. He added most of the custodial staff work their scheduled hours following school dismissal.

Secondary schools are much larger in terms of space and number of staff and students, and usually have two or more custodial staff working during the day.

In terms of hiring custodians, the ministry has provided \$382,057 in added funding to the school board “to support the hiring of additional custodial staff” in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Also, says Campbell, through negotiated settlements, Trillium Lakelands has been provided with money through two funds to hire more permanent custodial staff, secretarial staff and educational assistants.

“In terms of custodial positions, the TLDSB has posted 5.5 new custodial “floater” positions that will travel from school to school as needed. The COVID-19 extra funding and one of the other two pots of money have not been used to post new positions as of today (Aug. 13),” continued Campbell, pointing out the positions are to be in place by the beginning of the new school year “so the timelines are very tight and possibly unobtainable.”

Campbell says CUPE is very concerned about the custodial workload, and by extension, their ability to keep the school cleaned and disinfected to ensure that staff and students are safe.

“These new positions will build public confidence, assist with school reopening, keep staff and students safe and assist with student learning,” added Campbell, who has been actively trying to engage the board to “post and fill these needed custodial positions with the funding provided by the ministry.”