

# HDSB to follow ministry's lead in dealing with teachers' unions

By **DOMINIK KUREK**  
Metroland Media Group

The Halton District School Board intends to take the Ministry of Education's bargaining roadmap to the table when it meets with its unions to negotiate new contracts.

However, the board does not expect the new contracts to be signed before the Aug. 31 deadline set out by the ministry.

Trustees voted during a special board meeting Tuesday (Aug. 7) to accept the parameters set out by the ministry. The special meeting was held in response to Education Minister Laurel Broten's recent announcement that school boards must sign new contracts with their teachers by Aug. 31 or face legislation that would force schools to open in September. The minister also called on school boards to use the ministry's memo of understanding (MOA) with the Ontario English Teachers' Association (OECTA) as a roadmap to bargaining with all its unions.

The MOA calls for no pay increases over the next two years and no movement on the salary grid, either horizontal (through gains in qualifications) or vertical (gains in years of experience).

At the special board meeting, trustees discussed the ministry's announcement and broke into private session to decide on a stance to take. In the end, trustees took the ministry's position for bargaining, while honouring its current contractual agreements.

"Positions taken by the Halton District School Board to date reflect the funding commitments of the Ministry of Education in the 2012-2013 Grants for Student Needs," the decision reads. "Although our board intends on remaining compliant by the physical requirements set by the Ontario government, under section 86(1) of the Labour Relations Act, we are prohibited from altering rates of wages or any other term or position of employ-

ment now that notice to bargain has been given. If the statutory freeze established by section 86(1) remains in force at the commencement of the coming school year, the (HDSB) intends to honour all collective bargaining provisions as it is legally obligated to do. We expect that all of our schools will be fully operational on the first day of school in September."



**DON VROOMAN**

The current four-year contract expires Aug. 31. With no new contracts signed, the existing contract will roll over. Though teachers would not receive an annual raise as no fifth year is written in the current contract, teachers would still be eligible to get raises based on grid movement.

Teachers move up the grid based on years of experience, receiving annual raises for approximately their first 10 years of employment and for gains

in qualifications.

"Although negotiations respecting the Ontario government's financial constraints will be difficult, we believe a resolution can be found within our timelines," said Don Vrooman, board chair, in a press release issued after the meeting. "To expect contracts to be settled locally by August 31 on issues the government was unable to resolve in five months at the Provincial Discussion Tables, is unreasonable."

Broten said grid movement will result in some teachers receiving raises of 5.5 per cent. No funding was allocated to such raises in the provincial budget, meaning school boards would have to pay them out of their own pockets.

The board's superintendent of business services, Lucy Veerman, said the grid movement would cost the board \$750,000 per month. Despite these costs, the board will not speed up its negotiation process.

"Moving aggressively and unilaterally to force deals on our unions may very likely lead to job actions such as strikes that will not only be detrimental to the government's goals and would not reflect the best interests of our students and communities," Vrooman added in the release.

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