

Elementary teachers and Province not at the bargaining table

By Tim Whitnell
Metroland Media Group

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) says it is rejecting what it believes is the Liberal government's "cookie-cutter approach" to a contract agreement, saying the government and the Ontario Public School Boards Association (OPSBA) need to return to the bargaining table.

"Premier (Kathleen) Wynne wants to impose another union's deal on ETFO. She wants to impose a quick deal, not a reasonable deal for elementary teachers, to help Mr. Trudeau's chances in the federal election," ETFO President Sam Hammond alleged in a press release, Monday.

Provincial negotiators and OPSBA recently reached separate tentative contract agreements with the Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA).

However, neither deal has been ratified by those teacher groups.

The tentative three-year deals reportedly include a small wage increase, an extra professional development day and retain current class sizes and teacher preparation time provisions.

ETFO remains without a tentative deal. It represents 78,000 elementary public school teachers and occasional teachers across the province. All Ontario teachers and school support staff have been without a contract since Aug. 31, 2014.

Last Friday (Sept. 11), the Liberal government and OPSBA walked away from the central bargaining table, said

ETFO. Ontario Education Minister Liz Sandals said Monday that the province is ready to get back to bargaining.

"We offered a complete settlement package, which includes a number of things the ETFO explicitly asked for ... We're certainly willing to discuss where it needs to be a little bit different (from the other deals)," she said.

Hammond explained his union's position.

"ETFO is not prepared to accept a flawed deal that does not address our members' needs and the needs of public elementary students in the long term," said Hammond. "A student who is six years old has different educational needs than a student who is 16. Anyone with children knows that's true. As a result, elementary teachers' working needs will be different than secondary teachers', so the imposition of a cookie-cutter deal just won't work."

Hammond stressed that the issues under discussion are related to teacher working conditions and student learning conditions, not salary.

"We are prepared to escalate our strike action if there is no change on the part of the government and OPSBA..."

In May, ETFO began an administrative work-to-rule campaign. As of Sept. 1, ETFO increased those sanctions instructing its teachers not to engage in certain activities such as participating in field trips, collecting funds for school-related activities or participating in fundraising activities, responding to any electronic communication from the principal or vice-principal outside of the instructional day except where there is a safety issue involved, collecting or

distributing to students any paperwork required by the school or school board, or attending open houses or meet the teacher nights outside of the instructional day.

ETFO has indicated it might soon add more sanctions, which could include the withdrawal of teacher participation in school extra-curricular activities.

Regardless of the stalled status of bargaining at the central table, talks

continue at the local school board level with various employee groups on a host of non-monetary issues.

In Halton, the public school board bargaining team has meetings arranged with local ETFO representatives on Sept. 22 and 28. ETFO in Halton represents close to 2,900 teachers, serving almost 40,000 pupils.

Talks with local public high school teacher reps (OSSTF) continue on Sept. 17 and 30, and Oct. 1. The OSSTF rep-

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

The board also has more separate 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).

— with files from the Toronto Star

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