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NEWS

150 TEACHERS IN HALTON, TORONTO JOBLESS

ONTARIO SECONDARY SCHOOL FEDERATION SAYS SITUATION IN TDSB UNHEARD OF

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More than 150 teachers in the Toronto and Halton boards alone are still jobless, with only a handful likely to end up with work this school year.

The situation is unheard of in the Toronto District School Board, where in the past all teachers have always been recalled, Leslie Wolfe, president of the local Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, told the Star.

"This is historic," she said. "Even in the double cohort year - in 2003 - when (then premier) Mike Harris got rid of the Grade 13 or OAC year, which was a loss of 20 per cent of courses, everybody had a job at the end of that process, except for one or two teachers whose only qualification was cosmetology. But basically everybody was employed."

And over the past seven years, even as enrolment was declining, all surplus teachers ended up with a

classroom, she said.

"This is the very first time in the TDSB's history where teachers who were teaching the previous year don't have a contract this year," and despite enrolment being on the upswing, she added.

"This is exactly what we predicted."

Province wide, negotiations with all four teacher unions have hit a wall, and for the first time in more than 20 years they are all engaged in job action ranging from work-to-rule to one-day strikes.

The already tense situation heated up this week, as teachers in three of those unions held a string of strikes, starting with the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario on Monday hitting boards in Toronto, York and Ottawa.

Secondary teachers are in part fighting the government's plan to boost class sizes from an average of 22 to 25, which will phase out thousands of teaching positions and, as a result, tens of thousands of course options for teens.

That, combined with the loss of grants, has led to the layoff situation despite the Ford government's promise that no teacher would voluntarily lose their job. The province even set up a

\$1.6-billion attrition fund to help boards manage the losses.

The high school class average in the Toronto public board is now 23.5.

A spokesperson for Education Minister Stephen Lecce said new education policies have not led to layoffs. "The Financial Accountability Officer confirmed what we have been saying all along: No teacher will lose their job as a result of our class size or on-line learning policies," Alexandra Adamo said.

"Our government's plan is working. We are investing more than ever in student success to ensure students benefit from an inclusive, safe and rewarding academic experience," she said.

Last year, Lecce's predecessor Lisa Thompson said "local" situations could lead to job losses, which are not covered by the province's attrition fund.

The province's financial accountability officer did say the attrition fund was more than enough to prevent layoffs, but also noted education spending is not keeping up with actual costs.

Wolfe said typically, at this time of year, about 70 to

See - page 9



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