

IMPACTS HIT FAMILIES AS TEACHER STRIKES CONTINUE

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The war of words continues, and local parents are left to deal with the result.

The dispute between the provincial government and education workers has resulted in multiple days of closed schools in both the Catholic and public system. Work-to-rule campaigns and rotating one-day strikes are currently set to continue as unions and the government disagree on the terms of the collective agreement.

Stephen Lecce, the Minister of Education, has characterized the inability to sign a deal as being the result of the unions attempting to increase compensation and achieve more generous benefit plans at the expense of students. On the other side, union representatives have said the impasse is about not accepting cuts that will hurt students. Both have labelled the other side as inflexible.

Regardless, the result has been closed schools on a number of days already with the likelihood of

more days without school in the future. Carla Faneli, who has two children in Halton Catholic schools, said it's been an inconvenience, but they are working on options.

"You do what you have to do," said Faneli. "My husband and I have needed to take some time from work, but we can only do that so many times. We'll probably end up having to ask my parents for some help. It is what it is."

The Government of Ontario has offered a credit of up to \$60 a day to support families when schools are closed. Those interested can apply on the government website. Elisa Viliani, a mother with two elementary children in the Catholic board, said the impact on her family hasn't been enormous so far as she has the ability to work from home.

"As a parent, I feel a bit blind and helpless in a way. I don't think we have the full story or understand fully how the system works. I believe the teachers are fighting for the best interests of the children, but what is lacking is how



Nikki Wesley/Torstar

Catholic teachers protest outside MPP Effie Triantafilopoulos' office last week.

parents can also support this cause," said Viliani.

Unlike elementary schools in the public board, Catholic schools in Halton currently do not have further one-day strikes planned. Their union, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, instead announced on Feb. 5 they would be enhancing their administrative job action. That means that while teachers will continue to participate in extracurricular activities, they will not work beyond their scheduled teaching and supervision duties during the day.

Pat Daly, Director of Education with the Halton Catholic District School Board, said the decisions they have made have all been about ensuring students are safe.

"We are hopeful that a new central provincial agreement will soon be reached with (the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association). In the meantime, our actions during this period of job sanctions are focused on the safety and well-being of our students," said Daly.

At press time, there are no signs a deal is imminent with any

of the major boards. Social media comments on the dispute appear split with some supportive of the governments stance and others supportive of the educators.

Keith Boyd, President of the Halton Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, said they acknowledge the hardships the strikes cause but this is important for the Ontario students.

"We go from site to site telling our teachers this is a fight worth picking. The government wants to say it's all about money and our teachers know otherwise. It's about student learning environment, it's about class sizes," said Boyd. For more information on the current status of Halton Catholic schools labour position visit www.hcdsb.org.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: The latest chapter in education workers disagreements with the provincial government has begun with rolling strikes and work-to-rule campaigns. We've been following the war of words at marches, government events and numerous press releases from the involved parties. We decided to learn more about what this has meant for local parents.

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