

And the answer is...

George Kennedy School recently held its own Battle of the Books competition as 88 students, on eight teams of 11 each, faced off in a round-robin tournament. Grade 5 students (from left) Lindsay Perryman, Allison Waters and Erin McConaghy were studies in concentration as they searched for the correct answer in a race against the clock. Photo by Ted Brown

Some progress made in teachers' talks

here's been no hugging or high-fiving around the negotiating table but it __ appears to be a case of no noise is good news as it relates to contract talks between the Halton District School Board and its high school teachers.

Representatives of the public board and the 750 full-time equivalent secondary teachers met with a mediator for 11 hours last week and have decided to continue talking.

The next mediated session is May 7.

Spokespeople for both sides indicated the meeting was cordial and somewhat fruitful.

"I think there are a lot of areas where progress was made and some positive signs about many of the items on the table. We hope to clarify the rest and look for an agreement May 7," said Joe Harwood, president of District 20 (Halton) of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, on Monday.

Harwood's counterpart at the Halton public board wasn't as specific but nonetheless expressed guarded optimism about the first round of talks in two months.

"I think we're all trying to work for the same end result, to get an agreement, and that's very positive (because) sometimes it doesn't come through in mediation but certainly it did with us," Dawn Beckett-Morton, the board's executive officer of human

resources, also said.

Beckett-Morton said the board and its high school teachers had several face-to-face meetings the afternoon and evening of April 24 followed by some separate meetings with the provincially-appointed mediator.

The secondary teachers have been without a contract since Aug. 31, 2002 and been on a work-to-rule campaign since late February.

In the most recent add-on to the job action, implemented in mid-April, the teachers' union announced it was withdrawing its members from on-call work in the event of a colleague's absence.

That prompted the board to react by cancelling some high school field trips and other extra-curricular activities. Beckett-Morton has said the board feared schools might be left in a situation where there are not enough teachers to cover classes for ill or absent instructors.

Harwood has said it was for reasons of student safety they chose to withdraw on-call duties rather than refusing to do supervision of students in cafeterias, libraries and hallways.

In any event, Harwood said an understanding was reached with the mediator that there would be no escalation of the work-torule campaign during the break before the next mediation session.

—By Tim Whitnell, special



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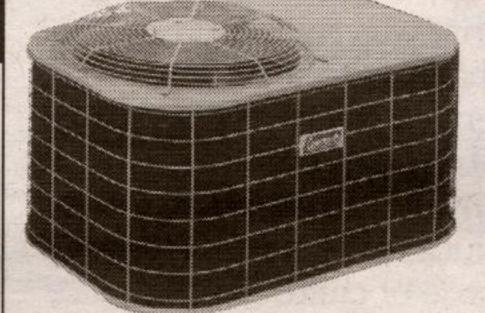




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