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Clerical workers step up sanctions against board—but won't say how

TIM WHITNELL
Special to The IFP

Members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) District 20 Halton Office, Clerical and Technical (OCTU) bargaining unit have stepped up sanctions against the Halton District School Board on the eve of resuming contract talks.

Effective yesterday (Thursday), the union representing more than 250 front-line office, clerical and technical staff at elementary and secondary schools and the main board administrative facilities have increased punitive measures against the board. OCTU says it is in response to what it deems is foot-dragging in negotiations by the board.

The OCTU group, which includes secretaries, library technicians and repair technicians, has been without a contract since August 31, 2004.

After several failed negotiating sessions, including the use of a conciliator, the two sides are to meet again today (Friday).

The first level of sanctions began May 1 and are expected to remain in place during the ramped-up work-to-rule campaign, said Dawn Beckett-Morton, the board's executive officer of human resources and its chief contract negotiator.

Original job sanctions included members doing things like delaying or slowing down their work, leaving schools or the board office on time and not handling money related to school fundraising.

The union did not provide details of the second phase of its sanctions in a press release but Beckett-Morton said she expects the work-to-rule campaign to expand to include a further withdrawal of services that will increase pressure on principals and vice-principals, giving them more

administrative duties than usual.

"The members will not perform any work related to finances/budgeting. It affects elementary schools in particular," said Beckett-Morton. She added she has been told to expect OCTU members not to plan school or board functions and not book hotel rooms or make travel arrangements for schools going on trips.

Beckett-Morton said the overall situation has not resulted in any cancelled trips but that it adds to the workload of school and board administrators.

She said the union's members also won't deal with couriers bringing parcels into school offices, referring them to other administrative staff.

One issue of concern in the new sanctions, said Beckett-Morton, is the union's position not to supervise students sent to the office. She said her understanding is they will be sent back to where they came from.

"We have questions about that. I don't believe it is in their (union's) authority to do that. They can withdraw services but they can't dictate to us," said Beckett-Morton.

In Thursday's press release Debbie Majka, president of the District 20 OCTU bargaining unit, said, "I want to stress that the new sanctions continue to respect the importance of student safety and well-being and we have given the board sufficient notice and time to put alternative measures in place to ensure this."

Sandra Sahli, executive officer of OSSTF and chair of the negotiating team stated, "Our message to the Halton board has been clear. Our goal is to get back to the table and negotiate a settlement. We are pleased that the board has decided to bargain again tomorrow. It is our hope that their negotiators have been provided with a mandate that has the flexibility needed for us to resolve the remaining issues and reach a settlement."



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