

EDUCATION: Catholic teachers' union and board prepared to bargain over the long weekend

Second strike would disrupt two school years in a row: parent

BY PATRICK CASEY
STAFF WRITER

All Teresa Ciaravella and Adrienne Sanjakdar want are some answers.

The two moms, whose children attend Catholic elementary schools in Maple, are furious that teachers are on the brink of a strike for the second time in less than a year.

Although Sanjakdar refuses to take sides as representatives of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association and the separate board continued mediated contract negotiations late Thursday, she said parents have been left in the dark about bargaining issues.

"If the teachers really want the support of the public, then do what they do best and that's educate. Educate the public about what's going on," said Sanjakdar, whose daughter, Sarah, is heading to Grade 8 at Father John Kelly and son, Abraham, will begin Grade 6.

"I am not getting the information I want and no one is helping us understand the issues. I am not a parent against teachers, I am a parent for my children."

Ciaravella said she can't understand why serious bargaining never seems to start until the 11th hour, jeopardizing the start of school Tuesday.

"This should have been fought over the summer, instead of getting the picket signs ready in September."

Many parents are getting to the point where, if teachers don't like the profession, then find another one. If Bill 160 interferes with the education system, you shouldn't be penalizing our children.

"I would have preferred to see last year's strike last another week, instead of going through all this again," she said. "Now it affects two school years."

The province's new education legislation requires average high school class sizes to be capped at 22 students and 25 in the elementary panel, but don't try telling student Marie-Claire Spizzirri her Grade 8 class will be that small this fall.

"There's usually at least 30 kids or more in the class and sometimes the noise is so loud you just can't think," Spizzirri said.

Jason Oliveira, 11, said a teachers strike would reduce the number of professional development days for teachers, resulting in fewer holidays for him.

One of the most contentious issues in the dispute is the board's insistence that high school teachers instruct one more period a day to meet the requirements of the provincial legislation.

The board has committed to maintain the same staffing levels and preparation time for elementary teachers, but in York Region, Catholic elementary and secondary teachers belong to the same union.

Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association district president Ihor Baczynsky had indicated all teachers in the system would be off the job unless a deal was signed by Thursday.

But on Thursday he indicated he was willing to negotiate through the weekend with mediator Bruce Janisse as long as progress was being made.

For updates on bargaining, parents can call the board's hotline at (416) 221-5051 or the local OECTA office at (416) 492-4200 or (905) 773-2037.



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