

EDUCATION: Public school board teacher negotiations making no progress

Rotating secondary strikes continue

BY JENNIFER BROWN
STAFF WRITER

No talks have been scheduled and public high school teachers are gearing up for the second in a series of rotating strikes — the next set for Monday or Tuesday.

Board negotiation spokesperson Karen Barker said yesterday that things were "painfully quiet" between the union and the board, but they had asked mediator Kevin Burkett to approach the union about talks.

Teachers began their first day of rotational strike action Monday, with many teachers across the region setting up tables to do course planning on the picket line.

They indicated the day represented the preparation time they no longer have, with teachers required to instruct 6.5 classes every day, instead of six out of eight, as they did last year.

"They're taking 20 minutes of our time, so this is taking back our preparation time," explained Bill Sparks, head of the history department at Aurora High School and school branch president of the secondary teachers' union.

A 30-year veteran teacher, Sparks said the issue isn't just the requirement they teach 1,250 minutes per week, or four hours and 10 minutes a day, but that they need the extra time to prepare and mark assignments for the additional class of students.

"We've offered to extend the school day. Right across the province, teachers have offered to

extend the school day, but boards won't consider it," said Sparks.

And what bothers teachers most is the impression parents have that the new structure will benefit their children. "No student will spend any more time in the class," said Sparks.

Teacher union representatives say they don't feel the board has shown any support for teachers.

But board chairperson Bill Crothers said if trustees were to ask for more money, the province would be raising questions about their spending levels.

"If we do that, they'll say OK, give us your plan to get your spending back in line. Explain why you can't comply. The minister is going to say, 'How are you going to get their salaries in line?'" he said.

"We've got the money — we're not being unfairly treated. We have to work with what's on the table."

Crothers said the board and staff have been in discussion with the Ministry of Education and realize there is no more room to move with the funding allocation.

"You want to stand up and scream and holler — what does it accomplish? That's the law of the land. We have an allocation of funding and we can't spend more than what we've got. Are you going to suggest we take it from other employee groups or student programs? We believe what we've done is in the best interest of the students."

Prep time not only issue for elementary teachers

BY JENNIFER BROWN
STAFF WRITER

The York Region public school board denies union allegations it is going after elementary teachers' salaries in its quest for a contract settlement.

For weeks, loss of teacher prep time has appeared to be the main issue of the dispute. But, behind the scenes, teachers have been told by union officials the board wants the right to amend salary grids. As the Sept. 28 strike vote looms, many are worried strike action is inevitable.

"The (board's) position reserves the right to amend salaries and that is unacceptable language and, so, we have a stumbling block. It means as long as it's in there, they could change it and do anything they wanted to it," said Pam Gillan, local president of the elementary teachers' union.

After remaining silent in the media about the grid issue, Gillan now admits the dividing issues are about more than just prep time. "It is the language which has teachers terribly, terribly upset. It is less than satisfactory language that has to be addressed."

Officials say the union's perception isn't true. "I can't see how that language would fly," said Karen Barker, chairperson of the board's negotiation advisory committee. "Would you sign something that says you wouldn't know what you would be paid down the road?"

But elementary head negotiator Harold Vigoda said the board's opening position paper cites a clause regarding basic salary grids indicating "The board reserves the right to amend the salary grid".

Board officials say it was their pre-negotiation position that was forwarded to the mediator, but it has never been discussed at the table.

Teachers have been outraged at the idea their salaries could be clawed back and some regard it as more threatening than the loss of prep time.

But Barker is adamant that's not what the board wants. "There is absolutely no way this board would unilaterally change the salaries of our teachers," she said, especially since staffing levels that include 120 minutes of prep time would allow the board to achieve the savings it needs to comply with the new funding formula.

Barker said that if teachers accept a two-year deal with 120 minutes of preparation time — a 40-minute reduction per week — their salaries will remain as they are.


Talks between the union and teachers broke off two weeks ago and no meetings have been scheduled.

The board decided Tuesday to approach mediator Kevin Burkett about taking over contract talks. He is now assigned to the secondary negotiations and was successful in signing a last-minute deal with high school teachers and the board last year.



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