

EDUCATION

Board finds funds for 80 teachers

BY JENNIFER BROWN
STAFF WRITER

Even without a new contract, York Region elementary teachers will be getting extra preparation time in the coming weeks — something they have rejected twice during contract talks, according to the board.

In a letter sent to teachers Tuesday, board director Bill Hogarth explained that 80 teachers will be hired for York Region schools in the coming weeks. The money will come from grants the board discovered it was entitled to late in the summer, money the union has known was available for almost two months.

In fact, it was on the table when talks with the teachers first broke off in early September.

"We asked them to partner with us in the deployment of those teachers," said Karen Barker, chairperson of the board's negotiation advisory committee. "They said they were coming back to the table, but they took a strike vote instead."

In August, the Ministry of Education and the board reviewed the grants and realized additional funds were owed to the York Region public board.

Barker said the union was told during the last bargaining session the funds would add another 80 teachers to the system and provide for 150 minutes of preparation time in the first year, with 130 minutes in the second year, as well as two additional professional activity days designated for prep time.

But the teachers felt more was at stake — language about amending teacher salary grids was still on the table and the promise of more prep time was not enough to get a deal.

Barker said the board held off deploying the 80 teachers because it feared the union would view that as bad faith bargaining.

And now the union has asked for an audit of the board's books to determine if full disclosure has been made.

But too much time and too many opportunities have gone by, Barker said. "We're into getting a collective agreement — we've already spent an inordinate amount of time withholding these resources from teachers and students," she said.

There are no immediate plans for talks to resume, but it appears the two sides are further apart than ever before.

The union is still seeking a wage increase between 1 and 2 per cent, as well as asking for a capping of class sizes and additional prep time.

Barker hasn't ruled out the possibility of returning to the bargaining table with teachers, but said the final offer is on the table.



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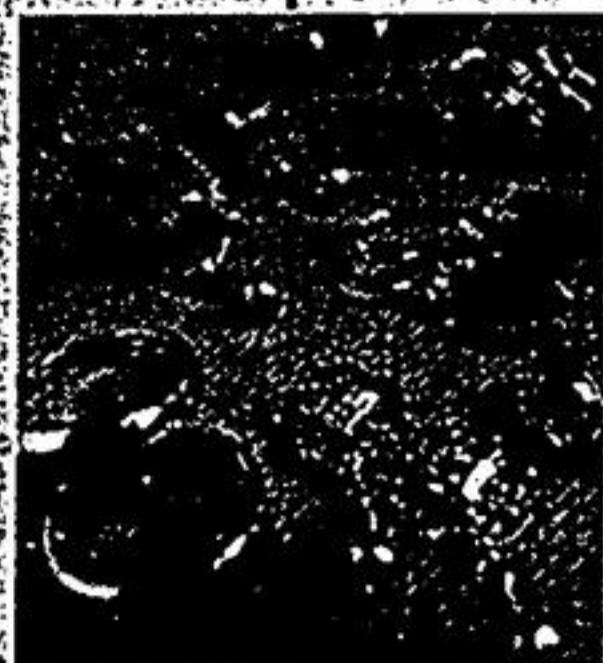


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