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EDUCATION: Union, board determined to reach deal, avoid strike

Teachers to strike Thursday if no resolution reached

BY JENNIFER BROWN
 STAFF WRITER

Union leaders and public school board negotiators determined to reach a deal extended talks into the night yesterday, hoping to avert a strike by 2,700 elementary teachers.

"We're going to try and keep it going as long as possible to get a successful conclusion," Karen Barker, chairperson of the board's negotiation advisory committee, said from the site of the talks last night.

Both sides agreed to prolong the talks, knowing mediator Kevin Burkett would not be available for the rest of the week and that the strike date was set for Thursday.

Barker said she expected the negotiation session would go late into the night.

A news blackout was in effect, so details of the talks were not disclosed.

If a resolution is not reached, York Region's elementary teachers will strike Nov. 12, affecting all schools. Rotating strikes would occur after that date.

It is unknown if the board would cancel busing or close schools during the one-day strike.

Officials have declined to comment on what action would be taken, hoping a resolution could be reached before such decisions had to be made.

Elementary teachers are seeking a deal that will restore preparation time — they are currently working with 120 minutes a week, a reduction of 40 minutes compared to last year.

A maximum two-per-cent salary increase and improved language around working conditions and job security are other items being sought by teachers.

The union has asked the board to reveal detailed financial information in an attempt to find dollars it says the board is hiding in other budget lines.

Throughout the process, the board has insisted it has followed the formula prescribed by the province and has not padded other areas of the budget.

In early October, elementary teachers withdrew from voluntary services such as extra-curricular activities.

Last week, secondary school teachers ratified a two-year agreement, which restored the teachers' schedule of six instructional periods out of eight, but did not provide for any salary increase.

Parents who have questions about what to do in the event of a strike should call their local school or the board office at 727-3141 or (416) 969-8131.



KAREN BARKER

'Keep (talks) going as long as possible.'



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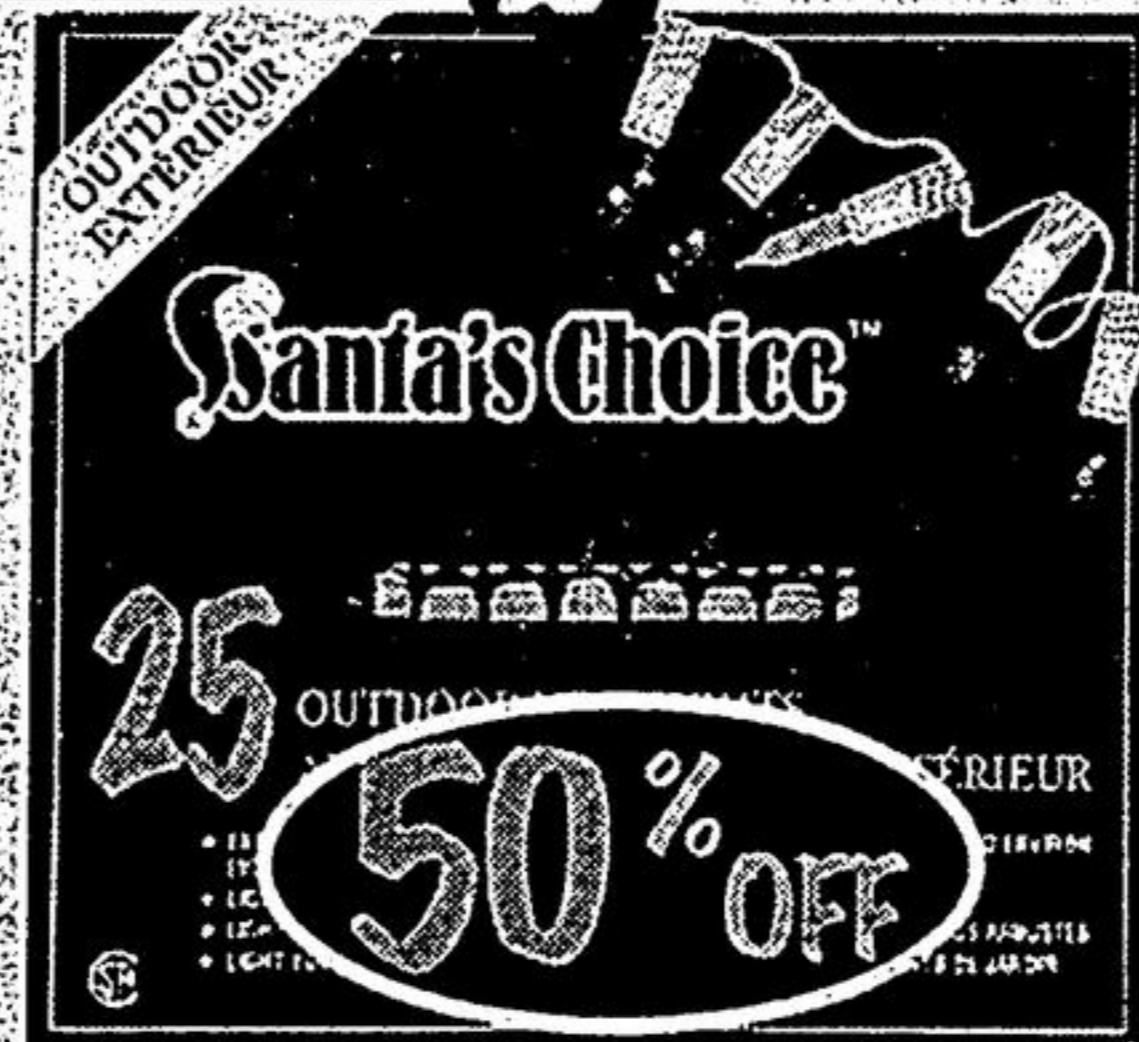


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