

Pre-arbitration meeting set for separate board, union

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The York Region Catholic school board and its teachers union will meet for the last time this year tomorrow at a Markham Hotel.

Provincially-appointed arbitrator Lloyd Houlden won't attend the information meeting, but Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association district president Ihor Baczynsky is hoping many outstanding issues can be resolved before the arbitration meetings.

"Hopefully, we can sit down with the board and settle some of the things we should have done long before now," Baczynsky said.

"Here is a perfect opportunity for the board to come through and treat the teachers properly and get some of the issues off the table before the end of the year. Maybe they will even surprise us and put an entire offer on the table," he said. "If it's anything but a long meeting, I will be disappointed."

Houlden has scheduled Jan. 7, 11 and 12 to listen to arguments from the two sides on a clause-by-clause basis and make binding rulings on any monetary or non-monetary issues the parties cannot settle themselves.

New board chairperson Elizabeth Crowe said their negotiating team has been busy reviewing its financial picture since Houlden was appointed in late October.

Although she anticipated substantial progress can be made before January's three bargaining dates, Crowe didn't indicate a new offer was coming.

"The board has gone over the minutes of the previous meetings to determine what's been signed off and what is still outstanding," said the Stouffville-Aurora-King trustee.

"We are ready to come to discuss the key issues. Obviously, the major areas remaining are salary increases that have been requested and the issue of workload."

Once January's three days of bargaining begin, Houlden must keep in mind new requirements from the Ministry of Education for instructional time and class-size standards — 1,300 minutes a week and an average class size of 25 children for elementary teachers and 1,250 minutes and 22 students for high school teachers.

Based on its interpretation of Bill 160, the high school timetable introduced this fall scheduled one extra classroom period for teachers. But OECTA is demanding a return to three instructional periods a semester.

The union is also seeking a 6.5-per-cent salary increase over two years.

"I just hope we can get through all the clauses by the third day and get an agreement," Baczynsky said.

"Luckily, I don't believe the arbitrator is going to take any nonsense from the board in terms of stalling with their information."

"There is no tolerance for non-disclosure in the justice system and I think this board can be in for a surprise if they try to bury information."

The region's Catholic teachers have been without a contract since the end of August and went on strike on Sept. 8, only to be legislated back to work three weeks later by Education Minister Dave Johnson.



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