

EDUCATION: Wage hikes and bonuses part of package

Support staff signs deal

BY JENNIFER BROWN
STAFF WRITER

School support workers across York Region now have two-and-a-half-year contracts delivering 3-per cent wage increases and lump sum bonuses.

The agreements were reached quietly, unlike the battles waged last fall with the board's teaching unions.

As trustees ratified the deals Thursday night, board vice-chairperson and negotiations spokesperson Howard Shore noted that the contracts were reached in record time.

"This board did something unprecedented in the history of public education; we were able to reach an accord with two important staff groups in the span of four days," Shore said.

Caretakers and secretaries, clerical, information service staff and teaching assistants at the public board have a settlement that will provide an immediate 2-per cent lump sum payment and a 3-per cent wage hike spread over the course of the three-year agreement.

The first 1 per cent hike will be retroactive to Jan. 1.

The lump sum payments are a result of the current suspension of payment into the government's pension plan for municipal employees. Because the pension plan has a surplus, school boards, local governments and other municipal agencies don't have to make payments.

Another 2-per cent lump sum pay-

ment would also be paid in January 2000, if the break from pension payments continues.

All non-union staff at the public board will automatically be given the same contract and salary increases.

At the public board meeting Thursday night, Shore acknowledged the role of support staff.

"The best teacher can do precious little without our caretakers and maintenance staff ensuring that the place just hums."

At the board meeting, local union leaders John Cromwell and Gail Hodgson said the board tried to understand their issues and concerns, while the union respected the board's financial constraints.

At the separate school board, a similar two-and-a-half-year deal was achieved for CUPE local 2331 representing 622 educational assistants, secretaries and lunch supervisors at the board, retroactive to Jan. 1 and continues to Aug. 31, 2001.

The union voted 98 per cent in favour of the deal, which also improves vacation time and benefits to reflect the benefits package received by teachers and non-unionized staff.

"We were happy with the progress made in negotiations," said Bernadette Kenny, president of CUPE local 2331.

"Our members are pleased with the gains their bargaining team were able to achieve."

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