

# Catholic board, teachers settle

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN  
Staff Writer

York's Catholic students can look forward to another two years free of labour strife — if the region's 2,700 teachers ratify a tentative contract agreement reached last week.

While no details can be released until teachers vote on the deal at school-based polling stations Monday, the agreement is a good one, a union spokesperson said.

"I think the members will be pleased," said Ihor Baczynsky, York Region president of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association.

"It doesn't offer everything people expected, but it goes a long way."

It's the second contract — including last year's one-year deal — negotiated with a minimum of rhetoric and no threat of job action, a situation both sides say they've worked hard to realize since the bitter, turbulent years of the late 1990s.

Three years ago we had two strikes in one calendar year," Baczynsky recalled. "There was a tremendous amount of acrimony created, virtually all trust between parties was gone."

He credits current chair Elizabeth Crowe and director Susan LaRosa for not only reaching out to union members, but making the board a better place to work.

"We took a leap of faith and the result has been improved relations," he said. "Both parties

are trying to understand each other, the constraints and difficulties they face. It's not perfect, but we're not going head to head anymore."

Crowe agrees. "Our director (LaRosa) made it her primary initiative to repair relations. We are committed to working with the union to improve and it has paid off."

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Board spokesperson Chris Cable said the morale is the best it's been in years and students are benefiting because the York Catholic District School Board is one of the few in the province still providing a full slate of extracurricular activities.

"We have all worked very hard to ensure we collaborate on issues," she said.

"So when the government throws things our way, we can minimize the anxiety in the

school community. That's reflected at the negotiation table and that good environment is then transferred to the schools."

Crowe said the tentative contract is "fiscally responsible" at a time when the board faces considerable budget challenges — including a projected \$1 million shortfall for next year.

"Staff are now looking at areas to make cuts in non-classroom expenses," she said, adding trustees expect to see a full report by July 3.

Meanwhile, if legislation tabled by Education Minister Janet Ecker last week is passed, the Catholic board and OECTA will have to negotiate a one-year deal in 2003.

Claiming it will bring stability to the system, Ecker is proposing three-year contracts to be negotiated at the same time across Ontario, beginning in 2004.

Boards and unions are worried about the move because the government only provides funding for one year at a time and they say negotiating without knowing how much money is on the table may prove impossible.

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