

# Parents vent on social media over cancelled strike

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illegal — released at 4 a.m. Friday morning, there wasn't time to reverse the decision on transportation services.

Many teachers reported just a handful of kids per class, much fewer than arrive for actual snow days. Parents who scrambled to get children there were left wondering if students would spend the day playing in the gym, instead.

Students who could not make it to class would not be penalized, Mr. Miguelo said, nor would they miss out on any curriculum.

It was the only fair thing to do, he said, given the board's announcement came at 6:20 a.m. Friday.

"We understand it's frustrating for parents," he said.

Parents said it was a struggle to figure it all out themselves, let alone explain it to their children, who went to bed assuming they could sleep in late this morning. Many vented their anger about the flip-flop through social media, vowing to hold a protest of their own by keeping their kids home.

"Both my wife and I are at work," dad Dave Mitchell said. "We kept our older daughter off high school and our nine-year-old off school in protest of Bill 115."

Others, such as Markham par-

ent Meg Stokes, decided to march outside her children's school to display her dismay.

"Parents are even more frustrated," said Ms Stokes, whose students attend Sir Wilfrid Laurier Elementary School in Markham. "We've made alternate plans and are scrambling this morning to switch everything. Parents took the day off work so they aren't getting paid today, but now the schools are open? Total confusion and frustration!"

*'Hard to be supportive when today has caused nothing but chaos for everyone with kids in school!'*

Ms Stokes is one of several parents who planned the "counter-protest" to let the teacher unions and provincial government know they are fed up with their kids being used as pawns in the ongoing labour dispute.

Newmarket's Nicole Craddock was not impressed by the uncertainty. "Hard to be supportive when today has caused nothing but chaos for everyone with kids in school!" she tweeted to the board and Elementary Teachers Federa-

tion of Ontario.

"Our school sent (an) e-mail at 8:25 a.m. that school was open. School starts at 8:30. A mess," said Tracey Kent in Vaughan.

Ann-Marie Hulse, a teacher at Lincoln Alexander Public School in Markham, suggested that by switching its plans at the last minute, the school board made a difficult situation worse.

She said the only recourse for teachers now is a "permanent pause" in extracurriculars.

She said she loves her job and most parents are supportive, but she plans to withdraw volunteer duties for the next two years if necessary to stand up to the province's "bullying" — withdrawing the right to strike and her banked sick days.

"Children sneeze directly on me, throw up on my shoes."

Local unions in the GTA are planning mass protests around the former Maple Leaf Gardens at Ryerson University during the Liberal Convention later this month, York ETFO president David Clegg said.

He said he would not be surprised if teachers also hold spontaneous protests before and after school or during lunch hours.

"Elementary teachers in York Region are seething this morning," he added yesterday.

Elementary teachers union president Sam Hammond said his mem-

bers will respect the decision, but are calling on the person elected premier this month to meet for "respectful" discussions.

"We did not believe this to be an illegal strike based on past political protests directed at the government," he said. "However, we still have a situation where the terms and conditions of our members' employment have been dictated through a disgraceful misuse of government power. It cannot be business as usual in the education sector."

In a press conference yesterday, Premier Dalton McGuinty agreed it has been a roller-coaster ride for parents, but said now is the time to rebuild relationships between teachers, students, parents and government.

Returning extracurricular activity to schools would be a good start, he said.

"The responsible thing for us to do is keep this dispute out of the schools. We are asking federation leaders to allow teachers to do what they most naturally want to do, which is devote themselves to their students."

Teachers can withhold goodwill from the government, "we can take that, but don't withhold from students. They need you."

It would have been nice to have been able to ensure parents not endure Friday's chaos, he said.

"In an ideal world, we would have had a ruling sooner," and in an ideal world, he added, the union would have given more lead time for a ruling to come through.

But it's not an ideal world, Tory education critic Lisa MacLeod said to reporters later. The Liberals could have prevented the turmoil by legislating a provincewide wage freeze, she said.

*'Children sneeze directly on me, throw up on my shoes.'*

"Bill 115 was half a loaf, but it was clear the union was not prepared to negotiate and the province not prepared to play hardball.

"I don't send my daughter to school to learn to break the law and for ETFO to suggest it was OK to walk out of classes, was wrong."

Michael Barrett, president of Ontario Public School Boards' Association, which also participated in the OLRB hearing, said the ruling does not end here.

"We still have much work to do to rebuild a damaged relationship and a flawed negotiation process," he said.

## Kids using underground forums

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the library. "It's just that this is a current interest and the library is trying to be proactive in getting information to the public."

The first session is for parents — Invest an Hour and Hack-Proof Your Family.

"Every site that you visit collects personal information. They collect personal information with impunity," he said.

Mr. Popa said the seminar supplements what parents teach their children about safety on the streets, which includes don't talk to strangers.

One in five kids have been approached by malicious strangers online, he said, noting kids under 15 are particularly at risk.

Along with the social media sites that even your grandmother is a part of, there are those underground forums that Mr. Popa said are "a lot cooler than Facebook, which was so 2009".

With kids constantly asking for and receiving the newest high-tech gadgets, it's almost impossible for parents to keep track of how their security operates.

"I think parents are saying their own ability to monitor their kids is not where it should be," he said.

One suggestion Mr. Popa has is for parents to continue learning about social media and instant messaging, as well as its lingo.

Do you know what POS, WTGP or LMIRL mean? They are "parent over shoulder", "want

to go private" and "let's meet in real life", respectively.

When it comes to the adults in the household, he said they have become complacent in recent years about giving their credit card number online, especially during the holidays.

Oftentimes, fake companies will be created that come to the top of Google searches and offer the searched-for product at a rock-bottom price.

Who doesn't want a deal? So you buy from a company you never heard of before but has a legitimate-looking website only to realize weeks later the product you thought you bought never arrives.

"If they find just that right (item), they will not think twice about buying it," Mr. Popa said.

The seminar is free and runs from 7 to 8 p.m. plus Q&A. Space is limited and pre-registration is required, which can be done at register@knowledgeflow.ca

### ONLINE ADVICE

Mr. Popa's online safety tips:

1. Never trust webcams
2. Do not click on links in e-mails
3. Know when you're being lied to
4. Learn to properly report attacks
5. Secure your mobile device

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