

# Some teachers quick to resume activities

*But not all rushing back to volunteer duties*

BY KIM ZARZOUR  
kzarzour@yrmg.com

It may be another week before parents, teachers and students get clear answers about the future of extracurriculars in elementary schools.

The Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario announced Tuesday night it was suspending its advice to members to withhold voluntary extracurricular activities, but not all teachers are rushing back to their volunteer duties.

Some, though, were eager to jump back in.

"As of today, my concert band, my choir, my jazz band, my woodwind ensemble and my recorder ensemble are up and running," said an elated Carla Silver, a music and visual arts teacher at Roselawn Public School in Richmond Hill.

"Now, it will be up to the kids to prepare in two months for a concert that would normally take five months. I hope they are up to the challenge! Oh, happy day!"

*'From what we've seen, both sides have patched up relations. It may not yet be 100 per cent, but at least we're back to a better state.'*

George Thomas, a Grade 3/4 teacher and athletic rep at Ashton Meadows Public School in Markham, said the news brought him tears of joy.

"Let's just hope that all the teachers in public schools give the kids what they deserve."

Alick Siu, a Markham parent and co-chairperson of the York Region Parent Association, expressed similar hopes.

"From what we've seen, both sides have patched up relations. It may not yet be 100 per cent, but at least we're back to a better state."

While some union members cheered the news, others responded with anger and students asked their teachers bewildered questions about whether or not it's game on again for their cherished sports and clubs.

The union, representing 76,000 elementary teachers, withdrew volunteer duties as part of protests that began in September over Bill 115.

The province has been in talks for several weeks with the elementary



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

Music and visual arts teacher Carla Silver is happy school bands are up and running after the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario announced it was suspending its advice to members to withhold voluntary extracurricular activities.

union and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, which advised members to resume extracurriculars last month. The elementary union did not resume at that time, saying it wanted to see concrete action from the ministry.

The federation and government have been involved in meaningful discussions since February, union president Sam Hammond said.

"Talks are continuing and we are now confident the government has demonstrated a commitment to dealing with concrete items of importance to our members."

The federation is expected to meet with union leaders in Toronto on Wednesday and an all-member vote will be conducted upon con-

clusion of any agreement reached with the government.

The activities were never formally banned and the announcement does not mean they will automatically resume, as participation by teachers is voluntary.

Premier Kathleen Wynne said she is happy to learn about the change of heart by the teachers' union.

"Today's news is a great indication of the hard work all parties are putting into the repair of this valued relationship. It shows our willingness to work together, to listen to one another's concerns and to find common ground on which we can rebuild a foundation of trust and create an effective pro-

cess going forward."

However, the province has been clear the issue needs to be addressed within Ontario's existing fiscal framework, she added.

That's led to some skepticism from teachers, who want to see concrete action before they go back to their volunteer duties.

Teachers responded on social media with comments ranging from anger at what they viewed as capitulation of their union leaders, to reservation as they waited to see exactly what kind of deal was struck between the holdout union and the ministry.

"We have no idea what changed between yesterday and today, so I'd be curious to know," Ms Silver said.

"On the other hand, my students are not responsible for whatever mess we have gotten ourselves in, and in my heart, my contract is not with the board or the government. It is with my students that I will provide them with every opportunity for learning and experiencing whatever I can offer."

Ms Silver said she suspended her extra-curricular activities because fellow teachers felt their human rights were being violated.

"They are my colleagues with whom I have to work for the next several years. Sometimes the relationships have to be more important than your own personal feelings or opinions."

## REACTIONS ON TWITTER

@PoeticDevicesX <<http://www.twitter.com/PoeticDevicesX>> : Well, maybe. Some people won't be going back to xc now or ever. It'll be a mess for a while.

@Erethizon <<http://www.twitter.com/Erethizon>> : ETFO doesn't decide for us. Teachers will decide, as they always have, if they want to return. Sorry to disappoint.

@OntarioTeacher3 <<http://www.twitter.com/OntarioTeacher3>> : Prediction: The majority of elementary school teachers will not CHOOSE to resume ECs UNTIL something concrete is seen.

@mcpolitics <<http://www.twitter.com/mcpolitics>> : @ETFOpresident - We are starting to feel as used as #OSSTF members. I do hope "concrete" means real action. Otherwise, this was useless.

@hey\_sarahhay <[http://www.twitter.com/hey\\_sarahhay](http://www.twitter.com/hey_sarahhay)> : We would feel a whole lot better about volunteering if these 'talks' weren't confidential. We aren't that trusting anymore.