

February 5, 2025

Dear parents, families and guardians,

We are writing to provide an update on the ongoing negotiations with CUPE Local 3550.

Over the past few days, we have been actively engaged in bargaining sessions with the goal of reaching an agreement that would end the strike. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, the Local executive left the bargaining table before we could reach an agreement.

We continue to bring creative ideas to the table and explore all options. However, the reality is that we remain far apart on wages.

The union is seeking the following for a six-year deal:

- \$1.25/hr increase on September 1, 2023
- \$3.50/hour increase on September 1, 2024
- \$3.50/hour increase on September 1, 2025

This amounts to an approximately **31%** increase in hourly wages, on average, over the term of the agreement.

The Local continues to focus on general wage increases that far exceed the Division's ability to pay.

Our offer

We have offered the following:

- **General wage increases:** 13.5% over eight years.
- **Enhancements:**
 - extending the workday by 15 minutes (approximately a 3% increase).
 - removing steps from the salary grid to accelerate wage progression.
 - providing additional training and certification opportunities that would include a premium on support staff pay (approximately a 4% increase).
 - earlier recall dates for 10-month staff to participate in professional learning.

The general wage increases, when combined with the enhancements, bring a potential for 13.5% to a more than 23% increase for staff.

We are committed to investing in our students and our staff. To fund these enhancements, we are prepared to allocate resources strategically to enhance the learning environment and support student success.

This is the very best offer we can make for support staff that lives within our means and also recognizes the important role they have in schools and central services.

We have also expressed our willingness to discuss wage increases that align closer to what the custodial union received (14.75% over eight years).

Our fiscal reality

We believe an eight-year agreement offers stability and predictability in these uncertain economic times. It allows us to secure a good deal now for support staff.

The Division receives 97% of its funding from the provincial government through a weighted moving average formula. Schools use about 97% of the funds they receive to pay for staff salaries and benefits. We've tried to put forward proposals to CUPE Local 3550 at the bargaining table that maximizes general wage increases that are within our ability to pay for throughout the agreement and beyond.

The Board of Trustees has advocated for changes to the Weighted Moving Average formula, which provides the funding we receive from the provincial government. The Weighted Moving Average has had a significant impact on the Division's financial resources for the past five years. We're hopeful this formula will be adjusted to better support the anticipated 5,000 more students we are expecting for the 2025-2026 school year and to fund investments into staff.

The path forward

We are extremely disappointed that we could not reach an agreement, which means the strike continues. This is not the outcome we had hoped for, and we know this is causing ongoing challenges for students, families and staff.

Despite these challenges, we remain committed to bargaining in good faith and are hopeful that we can find a resolution soon. The union indicated they would reach out to us when they are ready to resume bargaining. Right now, we don't have any meetings scheduled despite continuing to express the urgency to meet, so schools can return to normal operations.

We will continue to keep you informed of any significant developments or new information as it becomes available.

Sincerely,



Darrel Robertson
Superintendent of Schools