

Work-to-rule by elementary teachers hits Upper Grand District schools

On Monday morning, the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario (ETFO) began a work-to-rule, which affects the Upper Grand District School Board but not schools of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic board.

Although all the province's elementary schools are open, the strike will affect some administrative duties including standardized tests, no further comments added to report cards, and no participation in meetings and personal development initiatives. While some duties have been affected, at this point in time extra-curricular activities and field trips will continue for now.

The strike is the result of eight months of unsuccessful negotiations between the ETFO, which represents approximately 76,000 teachers, the Province and school board representatives. According to a press release sent out Friday afternoon from the ETFO, the strike is meant to target the Province, not the students.

Minister [Liz] Sandals and her government have been willing partners with the Ontario Public School Boards' Association (OPSBA) in making demands that would unravel a decade of progress in creating a strong education system and strong teachers, said ETFO President Sam Hammond. ETFO teachers are not prepared to allow increases in class sizes, have their preparation time directed by others, or be micromanaged and have their ability to support student learning compromised. After eight months of bargaining, it is entirely disingenuous of Minister Sandals to plead ignorance of how these and other issues have forced us to take this strike action.

Along with the Province's desire to increase class sizes and reduce class preparation time for teachers, other issues the ETFO has presented as causes for the strike include the concern that the Province has disrespected agreements reached over the last decade of bargaining, including those reached during a strike in late 2012.

The ministry needs the cooperation of our members to achieve its educational aspirations. That cooperation is now withdrawn until the government and OPSBA return to the bargaining table to address the issues that truly matter to students and teachers, Mr. Hammond said.

At this point in time, schools will remain open for this week. The ETFO is required by the Province to provide five days' minimum notice of a strike, which means there will be no working to rule just yet.

Monday morning, after beginning the strike action, the ETFO returned to the bargaining table, but walked away shortly afterward.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario returned to the central bargaining table this morning at the mediator's request, said Mr. Hammond. It was our expectation that the government and the Ontario Public School Board Association (OPSBA) would remove concessions from the table. That did not happen and the meeting ended at 11:00 a.m.

In the circumstances, the ETFO would continue phase one of its work-to-rule strike action.

In order for real progress to be made at the central table, OPSBA and the Liberal government need to reconsider their concession-based approach to central bargaining, he said.

When these concessions were initially tabled, OPSBA and the government stated that they were 'opening positions' only. ETFO would like to move beyond opening positions to meaningful bargaining.

Premier Kathleen Wynne told the Toronto Sun that she didn't know details of what had occurred, and would not confirm or deny ETFO's claims that teachers are being asked to make concessions.

But what I know for both the secondary and elementary teachers and support staff is that we want them all in the classroom, that we want them to be able to do their jobs fully, Ms. Wynne was quoted as saying. And so whatever has to happen in terms of getting

back to the table and having those discussions, I am encouraging all sides to do that. That's the only way we're going to find an agreement.?

Since the official press release regarding the failed attempt at bargaining Monday afternoon, there has been no additional information provided about the strike, and what the next action might be if the situation continues to go unresolved.