

Wednesday, March 22, 2017

Information update for parents and guardians of Niagara Catholic Elementary Students

The Niagara Catholic District School Board appreciates and understands the frustrations that parents have expressed during the current lockout. We appreciate everyone who has written and called to support us during this difficult period. We are grateful for all of the comments we have received from the parents and guardians of our students, from their neighbours, and from the community about this difference with OECTA. A reminder to all families that the days of the lockout will not be added to the end of the school year, nor will any student absences during the lockout be recorded on report cards. All schools will continue to be open to receive students. While regular programming will be affected, Principals with available staff will, to the best of their ability, organize programs for students.

There is only one outstanding item, and that is the Board's proposal that OECTA would no longer be entitled to make presentations directly to the Board of Trustees as part of the grievance procedure. This proposal is consistent with a change to the *Education Act* about school board governance. The Board's proposal:

- would not in any way stop OECTA or any Teacher from grieving;
- would not in any way stop any grievance that was denied from being sent to arbitration; and
- would not affect any other of the terms and conditions of employment for our teachers.

There is no reasonable need for this clause to be in the collective agreement. No other collective agreement with teachers in Catholic school boards in the province of Ontario has this provision. And when we settled with OECTA Secondary last year, they agreed to remove the same provision and to substitute a different form of access to the Trustees. OECTA Secondary has written that it is more than satisfied with the outcome of their negotiations. It is important to note that the Board offered the exact same access to OECTA Elementary.

Early last Tuesday morning, after we had resolved all of OECTA's other proposals, the union proposed that we end the lock-out and agree to have an arbitrator decide this outstanding issue in exchange for an end to the work-to-rule.

We have reviewed OECTA's offer very carefully. We asked OECTA why it didn't offer to go to interest arbitration in September 2016. Why did OECTA instead choose to enforce an increasingly harsh work-to-rule that punished 14,700 students for six months instead of going to interest arbitration then? They simply said they are offering it now; that is after OECTA resolved all of its proposals.

The Board continues to believe that the appropriate place to resolve this difference is through local bargaining, and the Board is committed to do so.

We pray for a settlement, well in advance of any date that OECTA thinks this will be ended by government legislation. Our students deserve no less.

We thank you for your continued support of Catholic education within the Niagara Catholic District School Board.

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