

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 8, 2015

Education workers give CUPE a resounding strike mandate in provincial talks

TORONTO – Results have been tallied in strike votes held across Ontario over the month of March, and education workers have given their union a 93% mandate to take job action if necessary in the current round of provincial negotiations.

“That number says it all,” said Terri Preston, chair of CUPE’s provincial school board bargaining committee, which is negotiating with a council representing employers from Ontario’s English and French public school boards, English and French Catholic school boards (Council of Trustee Associations), and the provincial government. “Our members have communicated clearly their commitment to fighting concessions. They have also said, through the strong mandate they’ve given us, that they are deeply frustrated with the pace and tone of this process so far.”

The parties have been meeting since the fall of 2014 and have so far been unable to reach agreement on a list of items that will be bargained centrally vs. what will be bargained locally. “In a normal round of talks, we bring our list, they bring their list, and we get down to talking,” said Jim Morrison, staff coordinator for CUPE’s school board sector. “In this new process, we are not even able to agree to what we’re talking about, and we’ve had to invoke a dispute resolution process at the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB). It’s discouraging.”

“There are a number of items that belong at the central table,” said Preston. “For instance – ensuring schools are properly maintained and safe for kids – that is a province-wide issue. Finding ways to keep educational assistants in the classroom – that is also a province-wide issue. Our members have ideas about cost-savings that apply across the province – these things belong at the central table. The strike mandate our members have given us reflects a great frustration with our lack of agreement on something that simple.”

This is the first round of talks unfolding according to a new process established by legislation, in which a central table determines, by mutual agreement or by dispute resolution hearings at the OLRB, what will be bargained centrally. Local bargaining (local school boards bargaining with union locals on all matters that are not at the central table) will happen concurrently once there is agreement on a list of central issues.

At the same time the central strike vote was taken, locals across the province also took strike votes on their local issues.

CUPE represents 55,000 education workers in Ontario, including educational assistants, school office staff, custodians, early childhood educators, instructors, library technicians, trades people, information technologists, social workers, and student supervisors.