



# Memorandum

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

## INFORMATION MEMO

**Date** 2025 02 20

**To** Members with School Leadership Designations of the Calgary Public Teachers' Bargaining Unit

**From** Sean D Brown, Coordinator, Teacher Employment Services (TES)

**Re** Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Labour Dispute with the Calgary Board of Education

You should have received the general memo from the Alberta Teachers' Association (Association) to your bargaining unit members today. The memo contained advice and guidance and identified some general risks for members, but as it grew in length, it became clear that separate communication for school leaders would be required.

School leaders play a crucial and unique role in school functioning, shouldering pressures that often differ from those their classroom colleagues face. One significant source of pressure stems from their closer relationship with the central office, which brings heightened expectations and a sense of accountability less directly experienced by their colleagues in the classroom.

The Association has heard from school leaders about concerns regarding their lack of time protection and workload. While central bargaining continues to address those very real and legitimate concerns, improvements have not been easily achieved.

The inability of the Calgary Board of Education (Division) and CUPE Local 40 (CUPE) to avoid labour action creates a challenging and complicated situation for school leaders. While school leaders understand and support their CUPE coworkers' demands for higher pay and overall increased education funding, the Association recognizes school leaders are responsible for ensuring student safety and maintaining a clean and well-maintained school site. It is further complicated if the tasks traditionally completed by custodial and maintenance workers are asked of school leaders, who are already overburdened during a labour action, not to mention the additional pressure some may feel because they lack a continuing administrator designation.

The following advice is meant to help guide you during the challenging days ahead and is in addition to what was generally provided to all bargaining unit members today.

- The Association understands that central office personnel have contacted school leaders to discuss contingency plans for the strike.

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- While school leaders need to maintain positive learning environments during the CUPE strike, connecting with your teachers most impacted by the lack of custodial and maintenance staff will be crucial.
- As mentioned in the other communication, expectations will need to shift for the duration of the CUPE strike. The ability to deliver the same high level of service or cleanliness may not be possible. While school leaders may wish to take on more, doing so is not generally your work or expected work, and it will likely increase the length of time of the job action. To be clear, this is easier said than done.
- School principals should obtain clear direction from the central office regarding the expectations during the strike. While “site-based decision making” places school leaders in a position of knowing their buildings the best, a common approach for all schools, wherever possible, should be followed for consistency's sake.
- Some situations, especially parental concerns, may require difficult conversations with your central office or area superintendents. School leaders are encouraged to call TES (1-800-232-7208) for assistance.
- School leaders should follow the Division's directives where reasonably practicable, but there are limits on the services one can provide during CUPE's strike action.
- Seek clarification from your central office and be as transparent as possible about the challenges when speaking with parents, community members, and staff. Clearly communicate what services your school can provide, including any limitations caused by current circumstances. Transparency builds trust and fosters understanding.
- Some information the Division may put out could realistically direct questions to the school. This may make school leaders feel like they are on their own. You should connect with your central office contacts to ensure you have all the information necessary to address questions or concerns from parents and community members. You may also need to direct questions back to central office personnel. Should you require assistance with messaging, please call TES.
- Due to the CUPE strike, your teachers may have questions about leave entitlements, duty-free lunch provisions, assignable/instructional time, or other collective agreement provisions. While your agreement remains in force, school leaders are encouraged to call TES for advice if questions arise about its implementation and interpretation.
- While the CUPE situation in the Division is different from other disputes in other jurisdictions since there are no educational assistants included in this labour action, there should only be rare situations where a teacher could be assigned additional tasks.
- If additional time is justified, it is essential to note that assignable time limits are annual amounts. While there is some flexibility in assigning additional time to teachers if necessary, increasing a teacher's time can only be done to the limits of their FTE (proportional to a typical teacher's total assignable time) in the case of a part-time teacher or, if they are full-time, to a maximum of 916 hours of instructional time and a total of 1200 hours assignable time (inclusive of instructional time).
- Increases in assigned time because of the CUPE strike should be carefully tracked and factored into scheduled time to avoid exceeding the assignable time cap per the collective agreement. If adjustments are required, work with your teachers to address them, as no resolutions are available if maximums are exceeded.

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- If assigning CUPE work to teachers, explain why the additional work is necessary and share any measures considered or attempted before assigning it to them. This helps maintain trust and collaboration. If teachers have concerns or questions about the additional assignment, encourage them to follow this process:
  - Ask for clarification about why they are being assigned the work.
  - If directed, the teacher should follow the lawful order of the Division unless the task is deemed unsafe under Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) guidelines or if they believe they have not been provided with the proper training [for example, Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS)] required to complete the task.
  - WHMIS training is essential for handling cleaning chemicals, ensuring they understand the hazards and safe handling procedures. The Alberta OHS Code mandates that employers provide education and training to workers exposed to hazardous products, stating: "An employer must ensure that a worker who is or may be exposed to a hazardous product at a work site receives education and training to ensure the safe use, handling and storage of the hazardous product."
- Encourage teachers to document their concerns or objections in writing and submit them to you. This ensures their voices are heard while protecting them from potential employment ramifications.
- As was mentioned in the memo to classroom teachers, school leaders may choose to show solidarity by wearing purple, subject to division dress code policies.

You can contact TES for assistance if asked or directed to complete the tasks discussed above. As well, you can provide a letter to your employer outlining your concerns. Below, you will find a template for your use:

Hi *(addressed to school leader's immediate supervisor in central office)*,

I have been asked to *(describe the custodial or maintenance related task the administrator has been asked to perform)*.

With respect, I do not believe it is reasonable for the Division to ask me to perform this task because I do not normally do this kind of work as a school leader, nor would I be expected to, since it would be handled by other personnel in the Division.

***[OPTION 1, (two paragraphs)]*** I am not comfortable performing this task since I do not feel that I have the proper skills or training. Several potential hazards are also involved, including damage to cleaning appliances and equipment, respiratory hazards, biohazard contamination, or flammable substances that I am not properly trained to identify and control.

As a result, I do not believe it appropriate for me to perform this task, and I request that the Division make arrangements to have this work done by a qualified professional.

**OR**

***[OPTION 2 (two paragraphs), IF THE SCHOOL LEADER PERFORMING THE TASK CONSTITUTES AN IMMINENT DANGER TO THEM AND/OR OTHERS IN SCHOOL, under Alberta's Occupational Health and Safety Act they should refuse to carry out work and state the following]*** I am not comfortable performing this task since I do not feel that I have the

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proper skills or training. Several potential hazards are also involved, including damage to cleaning appliances and equipment, respiratory hazards, biohazard contamination, or flammable substances that I am not properly trained to identify and control.

As a result, I believe it is my duty under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* to refuse to carry out this task because it presents an imminent danger to my health or safety **and that of staff and students in the school**. I request that the Division arrange to have this work done by a qualified professional.

Thank you.

Your Name  
Title and School

Should you, as the school leader, choose the template above relating to "imminent danger," you are strongly advised to contact TES **before** you send in that version of the letter. Imminent danger is a high bar and could require other steps to be taken, like calling 911 and reporting the danger, contacting parents and sending students home. Essentially, if you are reporting an imminent danger, you need to be prepared to act accordingly.

Both locals are pushing hard for this information as their respective employers are sending out information.

Due to the complex nature of school leadership, providing general advice is difficult. Most situations require significant contextual considerations to offer helpful guidance. As such, school leaders are encouraged to call the Association.

The CUPE strike will undoubtedly affect your workload and well-being, creating additional pressure during what is already a difficult time in your complex schools. Please know that TES is here to support you as you navigate this uncertain period. Whether you need assistance or guidance, our team is ready to help.

School leaders are encouraged to contact TES for support to mitigate stress and provide stability during this time. We greatly appreciate your resilience and dedication and remain committed to supporting your well-being throughout this process.

**School leaders with questions or concerns about their roles and responsibilities should contact TES at 1-800-232-7208.**

SDB/dmc/ejl

cc S E Clements, Local President, Calgary Public Teachers' Local No 38  
J C Schilling, President, The Alberta Teachers' Association  
K L Kempt, D J Moroz, A L Scott Davies, District Representatives, Calgary City  
TES and Local Staff Officers