



Memorandum

The Alberta Teachers' Association

INFORMATION MEMO

Date 2024 10 17

To Members of the Edmonton Public Teachers Bargaining Unit

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

Re Canadian Union of Public Employees Labour Dispute in Edmonton Public Schools

The Alberta Teachers' Association (Association) has been meeting with both local and provincial Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) officials regarding the potential labour action by their respective members at schools in the Edmonton School Division (Division). With over 250,000 public service members in negotiations this year, it is important that the groups work as collaboratively as possible since, in the end, we all want the same thing: respect for the work that we do, working conditions that allow us to provide the best possible service and wages that catch up and keep up. Each one of these items directly benefits the communities where we live and work.

The Association is committed to keeping our members informed with the most up-to-date and accurate information about the situation and their responsibilities during a labour action from another union.

On the evening of 2024 10 16, the CUPE Local 3550, representing support staff members in the Division, voted overwhelmingly to support a strike vote with a 92 per cent (92%) turnout and a 97 per cent (97%) approval for action. Local 474, representing custodial staff, is scheduled to hold their strike vote later this week. Currently, the Association is unaware of the timing of any possible strike notice, which must be provided 72 hours before any action can commence. As a result, while CUPE Local 3550 is in a legal strike position, the Association is unsure of the details of its next steps.

Despite the current uncertainty, the Association is ready to address our members' questions about how action may impact them, their obligations if a CUPE strike were to commence, and how they can show solidarity with their colleagues. The general information below is meant to provide some clarity for our members and, hopefully, ease some concerns. When more specific information on CUPE's action becomes available, the Association will provide more detailed advice and direction, guiding you through this situation and ensuring that you are not left in the dark.

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1. CUPE Local 3550 is the largest of the support staff locals across the province whose labour dispute has boiled over. Their colleagues in Fort McMurray Public and Catholic have successfully taken strike votes, but, in response, the Government of Alberta imposed a Disputes Inquiry Board before their strike action started. Their situation remains unresolved currently. While their CUPE colleagues with Greater St Albert Catholic Schools (in Morinville and Legal) had given their 72-hour strike notice earlier in September, the parties resolved their dispute before the strike action started.
2. CUPE, at their sole discretion, may take any or all of the following actions:
 - a. holding information pickets (to provide information to parents when they are dropping off and picking up their children) at the beginning and end of the day while remaining at work,
 - b. during the school day, they may conduct a work-to-rule campaign where they would only complete the core duties of their work,
 - c. a complete withdrawal of service or
 - d. other actions they deem fit.

These actions are meant to inform parents about the status of their bargaining and ask for public assistance in achieving a fair and reasonable settlement at the bargaining table. While the Association is not part of the decision-making process for how and what CUPE will do, we are connected with local and provincial leaders and will offer our support how and where we can.

Edmonton Public teachers will likely have questions about what they can and cannot do concerning CUPE's action and how they can show solidarity with the CUPE local(s) since what they are going through now may be a road that Alberta teachers must strongly consider in the months ahead. The items below should address many member concerns regarding potential labour disruption by CUPE.

1. Teachers are free to show solidarity and support for their CUPE colleagues but must do so professionally and responsibly.
2. If CUPE were to hold information pickets before and after school, teachers would be required and expected to report to work on the same schedule as they usually would and to continue with their regular duties and responsibilities without interruption.
3. At their discretion, teachers could participate in information pickets during their unassigned time and before/after school. Members would need to adhere to their assignable/instructional time responsibilities and not join in any activity that conflicts with those commitments.
4. Should CUPE initiate a work-to-rule campaign or a complete withdrawal of service, teachers **should not** be taking on the work of another bargaining unit. While, in some cases, the work of the CUPE members is not teacher work, especially custodial and maintenance related, the line is not as straightforward as some may think regarding classroom support. This work **could** be teacher work, especially if it relates to the health and well-being of a child. Teachers should ask why they are being assigned the task and what other measures have been considered or attempted before coming to them to

- complete the work. Teachers should then ask if they are being directed to do the work. If teachers are directed, then the Association strongly suggests that they follow the lawful order of the Division and contact TES for assistance.
5. Discussions with the Division are ongoing to help understand what contingency plans are being considered. Some members have raised concerns, specifically around toileting/hygiene support and medication management for students, and to address those, the Association needs to know the plan. There may be instances where new tasks are directed. Still, they require specific training and inservicing to complete them effectively and comply with directives set out by a student's support plan.
 6. Section 196 of the *Education Act* states that, among other things, “a teacher, while providing instruction or supervision, **must**, subject to any applicable collective agreement and the teacher’s contract of employment, **carry out the duties that are assigned to the teacher by the principal or the board.**” Given this, teachers who feel directed to undertake a task they believe is unsafe, is not the work of a teacher or lacks the necessary training and development to undertake the directive appropriately should **contact Teacher Employment Services as soon as possible**. In the interim, the Association strongly suggests that teachers make their protest known to their principal, in writing, regarding the direction given and follow lawful orders of the Division to avoid future employment ramifications. *Each situation may require a different response and set of actions to resolve. Therefore, no one path or course of action can be provided.*
 7. Subject to any dress code policies in the Division and the school, teachers are encouraged to show their support by wearing purple.
 8. The discussion of the labour action needs to be carefully managed around students and should be age appropriate.
 9. It is an individual's choice to join an information picket and/or to choose to wear purple to show support.

Labour action can have a life of its own and is not easy, but it takes a concerted and sustained effort to make a difference. As a result, information from the Association to our members may change throughout any action that CUPE may engage in. We commit to keeping members as up to date as possible and will work with CUPE officials and your Local President to ensure members understand what is happening and how they can support it.

During any potential CUPE action, members with questions or concerns about their roles and responsibilities as teachers should contact TES at 1-800-232-7208.

SDB/dmc/ejl

cc H J Quinn, Local President, Edmonton Public Teachers Local No 37

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TES Staff Officers