



Memorandum

The Alberta Teachers' Association

INFORMATION MEMO

Date 2025 01 10

To Members of the Fort McMurray Public and Catholic Teachers' Bargaining Units

From Sean D Brown, Coordinator, Teacher Employment Services

Re Canadian Union of Public Employee (CUPE) Labour Action in Fort McMurray Public and Catholic Schools

The Alberta Teachers' Association (Association) has been meeting with local and provincial CUPE officials regarding the labour action by their respective members employed at the Fort McMurray School Division and the Fort McMurray Roman Catholic Separate School Division (School Divisions). With over 250,000 public service members in negotiations this year, it is important that the unions work collaboratively since 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 with inflation. Each one of these items directly benefits the communities where we live and work.

The Association wants to ensure our members have the most up-to-date and accurate information regarding the active strike by CUPE members and know their responsibilities during a labour action from another union. We are committed to addressing our members' questions about how action may impact them 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.

The Fort McMurray CUPE Locals are not alone in their labour dispute. CUPE 3550, in the Edmonton School Division, the largest of the support staff locals across the province, has served notice that they will commence strike action on 2025 01 13. In addition, the support staff of CUPE Local 4625, Sturgeon Schools, have also served strike notice. They will commence a withdrawal of services effective 2025 01 13.

Fort McMurray 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.

. . . continued

- Teachers are free to show solidarity and support for their CUPE colleagues but must do so professionally and responsibly.
- Should resolution not be possible before the strike commences, teachers are still required and expected to attend their work sites as usual, even if this means crossing a CUPE picket line.
- Previously, teachers were informed that they *could* take part in an information picket if CUPE were to have them. That situation has **now changed** with a full-on strike.
- There is a **risk of discipline** should a teacher choose to join a CUPE picket line. While there may be an argument around freedom of expression, members should be aware that given they are not in a lawful strike position they continue to have obligations to the employer. This obligation could include a duty of loyalty and fidelity; therefore, participation carries some risk of discipline, even if it is done on your own unassigned time or outside of school hours. Should the Division act against a teacher, the Association would represent the member to the best of its abilities, to the extent possible.
- With an active strike commencing, 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 concerning a child's *immediate* health and well-being. However, teachers do not have the same flexibility to be released from classroom responsibilities as support staff, as a teacher's duty of care applies to all students, not just one, even if there is an immediate need.
- 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 TES as soon as possible.**
- If you are assigned such work:
 - A teacher should ask why they are being assigned to it and what other measures have been considered or attempted before coming to them to complete the task.
 - Teachers should then ask if they are being directed to do the work.
 - If they are, the Association strongly suggests that they follow the lawful order of the Division unless the teacher believes the work to be dangerous (from an Occupational Health and Safety perspective).
 - 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.*
 - Then, teachers should keep track of any additional assigned time and contact TES for assistance.

- Subject to any dress code policies in the Division and the school, teachers are encouraged to show their support by wearing purple.
- The discussion of the labour action needs to be carefully managed around students and should be age appropriate.

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 the Local President to ensure members understand what is happening and how they can support it.

During the 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 J R Duffett, Local President, Fort McMurray Local No 48

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TES Staff Officers