



# Memorandum

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

## INFORMATION MEMO

**Date** 2025 02 14

**To** Members of the Parkland Teachers' Bargaining Unit

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

**Re** **UPDATE:** Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Labour Dispute in Parkland School Division

In the memorandum provided to the Parkland School Division (Division) teachers at the end of January, the Alberta Teachers' Association (Association) committed to keeping members updated on CUPE Local 5543's (CUPE) labour action plan and providing advice and guidance to teachers.

The Association has been informed that CUPE, representing support staff and educational assistants in the Division, took a strike vote earlier this week with a ninety-six per cent turnout. Ninety-one per cent voted in favour of strike action and CUPE has since served their required 72-hour notice to commence labour action. From the information the Association has acquired, CUPE is planning a work-to-rule campaign to commence on Tuesday, 2025 02 18.

Even though CUPE has provided strike notice and intends to commence a work-to-rule campaign next week, there is still uncertainty on when or if they will escalate to complete service withdrawal. As a result, the guidance provided at the end of January memo to Division teachers still stands. The Association knows that teachers will likely have questions, especially now, given CUPE's action, about how the action may impact them, their obligations if a CUPE strike were to commence, and how they can show solidarity with their coworkers.

The general information below, which is the same guidance provided previously, is meant to provide some clarity for our members and, hopefully, ease some concerns. Should CUPE's dispute escalate and another memo is required, the Association will provide more detailed advice and guidance.

CUPE, at their sole discretion, may take any or all of the following actions:

- hold 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,
- during the school day, may conduct a work-to-rule campaign where they would only complete the core duties of their work,
- a complete withdrawal of service, or
- other actions they deem fit.

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Information pickets are meant to inform parents about the status of their bargaining and to 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 CUPE leaders and will offer our support how and where we can.

Division teachers will likely have questions about what they can and should not do concerning CUPE's action. There is also likely an interest in how teachers can show solidarity with their CUPE co-workers 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 teacher concerns regarding potential labour disruption by CUPE.

1. Teachers are free to show solidarity and support for their CUPE coworkers 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. Teachers would need to adhere to their assignable/instructional time responsibilities and not join in any activity that conflicts with those commitments. *It is important to note that should a full withdrawal of services occur, the advice pertaining to picket lines will need to change to reflect a potential risk for disciplinary action from the Division.*
4. Should CUPE initiate their planned work-to-rule campaign or should a complete withdrawal of service occur, teachers **should not** be taking on the work of another bargaining unit.
5. Because of the potential uncertainty between what may be considered "teacher work," as opposed to the work a teacher should be doing, given their education, training, and expertise, the delineation between the two are not as straightforward as some may think regarding classroom supports. In some cases, it **could** be teacher work, especially if it relates to the health and well-being of a child.
6. The Division should be undertaking the development of contingency plans. Some teachers are likely to have concerns, specifically around toileting/hygiene support and medication management for students, and how to address those situations. To provide teachers with advice, 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.
7. The ambiguity regarding the role of the teacher exists because of the *Education Act*, specifically s. 196 (1)(g), "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**. 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.
8. To be clear, the Association will represent a teacher should they choose to refuse a directive. However, it is important to note that while the Association will do everything possible to

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protect the teacher, there may situations where even through its best efforts, the Association cannot remove all consequences of a teacher's actions. **Teachers are encouraged to contact TES for advice and support.**

9. While teachers may want to assist the school in providing these services to "help out," doing so prolongs strike action, should it occur, by not allowing the Division(s) to experience the teaching day without the services of CUPE members.
10. If there are questions relating to the tasks or "work" being directed to complete, or if a teacher believes the work is unsafe or lacks the necessary training and development to undertake the directive appropriately, they should **contact TES as soon as possible.**
11. Subject to any dress code policies in the Division and the school, teachers are encouraged to show their support by wearing purple.
12. The discussion of the labour action needs to be carefully managed around students and should be age appropriate.
13. It is an individual's choice to join an information picket and/or to choose to wear purple to show support.

As previously suggested, if a teacher is assigned support staff and educational assistants' 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 point out that they believe the work to be dangerous (from an Occupational Health and Safety perspective) and/or they lack the proper training and inservices to complete the task. Should a teacher choose to comply, because they interpreted the direction to be a lawful order of the Division, they should contact TES as soon as possible for assistance and keep track of any additional time work (assigned time).

It is undeniable that local teachers and school leaders are facing additional pressures because of the strike. This is what strikes do; they stress a system. They are meant to demonstrate the importance of the work that has been withdrawn. Quite simply, the more work that is done outside the striking group, the longer it may take for the disputing parties to resolve. Unfortunately, these situations are rarely simple. The work of a teacher is complex and many times there are tensions between what a teacher should be doing, their work given their education and expertise, and the work being assigned.

The current situation is particularly challenging for school leaders. Principals need to carefully balance the needs of their school and supporting their staff. By following the direction provided by the Division, they can make certain that messaging and direction is consistent. This ensures that, wherever possible, substitute teachers are only undertaking work that would be teaching. A separate memo will be sent to school leaders today, as they experience unique challenges in their roles.

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 teachers' Local President to ensure

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teachers understand what is happening and how they can support it.

*Additional memos will be provided, with a specific advice for school leaders, should the situation escalate to a complete withdrawal of service by CUPE.*

**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 S N Cresswell, Local President, Parkland Teachers' Local No 10  
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TES Staff Officers