

CPE union asks for mandate for 10-day strike in September ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

MONTREAL -- Exhausted and out of patience, 11,000 workers in Quebec's public daycares (CPEs) are threatening to go on strike in September.

The unionized workers, represented by the CSN, are currently in consultation to obtain mandates of up to 10 days of strike action in all regions of Quebec.

They have been without a working contract for nearly 18 months and, according to representatives, negotiations are going nowhere.

Educators are demanding a significant wage hike, in a sector currently affected by a labour shortage.

"Negotiations are not moving fast enough for our liking. We still have no answer on our financial demands, on more than two thirds of our demands, we want to put pressure on the employer," explains Stéphanie Lachance, CPE representative at the Fédération de la santé et des services sociaux (FSSS), affiliated to the CSN.

"We are only negotiating small deals at the margin," she said in an interview with The Canadian Press. "It's not normal that we don't have an answer, even though our demands were submitted at the beginning of February."

Childcare workers are paid an hourly rate of \$19 when they start work, rising to \$25 after 10 years. Their union is demanding an average increase of \$4 per hour in the first year, plus annual indexing and a 1 per cent annual increase.

Union members argue that because of the rising cost of their group insurance, their income has actually decreased in recent years because salary raises do not compensate.

"Our workers are getting poorer every year," Lachance said, adding the Quebec government is demanding concessions, particularly when it comes to management.

Educators argue that their workload is "very heavy" and is only getting worse.

They are asking for more teaching hours, time set aside to prepare a child's file, as well as assistance for children with special needs.

The FSSS is also calling for agreed-upon ratios to be respected as it states being overworked is one of the reasons workers are leaving the profession in the middle of a pandemic.

"Our existing employees are leaving because they are exhausted, tired," concluded Lachance.

The ratio of two-to-three educators who have to be qualified in the CPE setting was reduced to one-to-three by the CAQ government.

The waiting list for a daycare spot has now reached a record 51,000 names.

Region: Quebec ^[3]

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