

Ontario school workers to hold strike vote starting Sept. 23^[1]

While no job action is planned, the move could put 55,000 custodians, office staff, educational assistants and early childhood educators in a strike position in October

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Source: Toronto Star

Format: Article

Publication Date: 23 Aug 2022

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

EXCERPTS:

School support staff will take a strike vote starting Sept. 23, a move their union says will “be a signal” to the Ontario government and boards that workers will not accept concessions at the bargaining table.

And while no job action is planned, the move could put the 55,000 custodians, office staff, educational assistants and early childhood educators in a strike position in October.

“Education workers holding strike votes is about workers understanding and using our collective power to win long overdue gains for students, Ontario’s families and each other,” Laura Walton, president of CUPE’s Ontario School Boards Council of Unions, said Monday at an online news conference.

The decision to hold a strike vote comes on the heels of the province’s offer of a two per cent raise each year over four years for those earning less than \$40,000 and a 1.25 per cent increase for those above that income level. CUPE has been seeking a yearly increase of about 11.7 per cent, putting all workers at the top pay rates and making all overtime payable at double time, as well as guaranteed service and staffing levels in schools.

At Queen’s Park, Education Minister Stephen Lecce said the move will create anxiety. “The union is proceeding on their plan for a potential strike impacting two million kids who ought to be in school not just in September, but in October, November — every month,” he said. “And so my hope is that the union will listen to parents who have overwhelmingly pleaded with all of us to get on with business.”

Lecce said the government offer is “fair, reasonable and affordable for the taxpayer,” while CUPE’s proposal would lead to a \$21-billion increase in the education budget, as it would set the standard for all other education unions that are also in bargaining now.

CUPE workers earn an average of \$39,000 a year, although that includes part-time workers.

Their strike vote will be held between Sept. 23 and Oct. 2. Contract negotiations are scheduled to continue into September.

“We’re not on a path to strike,” said Walton, who added there is still time to reach a deal. “We’re on a path to ensure that we have real services in our school boards.”

All contracts for education unions expire at the end of August.

Region: Ontario ^[3]

Tags: strike ^[4]

early childhood education ^[5]

wage enhancement ^[6]

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