

# Halifax-area school support staff, pre-primary educators on strike <sup>[1]</sup>

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### Excerpts

School support staff for the Halifax Regional Centre for Education waved pink placards and chanted outside schools across the region on Wednesday — the first day of the union's strike.

Members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 5047, which represents more than 1,800 workers in the HRCE, walked off the job at 12:01 a.m. AT.

Schools in the Halifax area remained open — with the exception of pre-primary classes — but support workers such as educational program assistants, who help students in need of one-on-one care, were on picket lines.

Striking members paced in front of schools, holding pink signs with white letters that read: "Fair deal now for school support."

Only CUPE members in the Halifax area are on strike. Over the weekend, they voted to reject a tentative agreement that had been reached by the province and their union last month.

Union locals in other parts of the province representing school support workers have voted to accept the agreement.

CUPE Local 5047 president Chris Melanson has said wages are the outstanding sticking point.

He said union members are looking for a four-year contract with a wage increase of more than what the employer was offering — 6.5 per cent over a three-year contract.

The striking workers also include early childhood educators, educational program assistants, assistive technology support workers, child and youth care practitioners, Mi'kmaw and Indigenous student support workers, African Nova Scotian school support workers, SchoolsPlus community outreach workers and school library specialists.

Claire Carter has a six-year-old son, Jackson, who relies on an educational program assistant to attend primary at Sackville Heights Elementary School. She said Jackson has a rare brain disorder that means he's unable to speak or walk independently.

"His EPA is with him all day, or at least a big chunk of the day. He doesn't have safety awareness, so it's really a safety issue for him," Carter told CBC's Information Morning.

"His EPA is so important because she's helping him experience things at school.... He can't come home and tell me about his day so every day, his EPA will write a little blurb about if he had a good day and what he's done and what he found interesting, which I really appreciate and rely on."

Carter said she believes the workers deserve the wage increase they are seeking, and she supports the strike.

"They take care of my child. They deserve to have a good, living wage," she said.

The first day of the strike caused some traffic woes, including in Hammonds Plains, where vehicles were at a standstill for a time on Hammonds Plains Road near Hammonds Plains Consolidated Elementary.

The RCMP said it responded to more than 10 incidents related to traffic disruptions across the municipality, but no arrests had been made and there were no criminal investigations ongoing.

"Officers would like to remind the public to exercise patience, use alternate routes and expect delays in areas located near Halifax Regional Centre for Education schools," said Cpl. Guillaume Tremblay in a statement.

**Region:** Nova Scotia <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** workforce <sup>[4]</sup>

unions <sup>[5]</sup>

decent work <sup>[6]</sup>

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