

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **We will not be bullied into a collective agreement, say CUPE education workers after meeting with Premier Wynne**

**TORONTO, ON** – Premier Wynne’s promise to grant requests from the Council of Trustees Association (CTA) to respond to job action by CUPE’s 55,000 education workers could make an already difficult labour situation worse, said the president of Ontario’s largest union.

“The Premier entertaining the CTA’s request won’t improve labour relations in Ontario’s schools,” said Fred Hahn, President of CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees) Ontario. “Our members are sick and tired of the lack of respect from this government for their critical work in our schools. They’ve seen the services they provide to students cut by this government. CUPE education workers have been without a fair collective agreement for well over a year because of this government. And now, when the government should be resolving this labour dispute, we get ultimatums.”

The 55,000 education workers represented by CUPE in Ontario have been without a collective agreement since August 31, 2014. Only on September 10, 2015, did members begin a province-wide job action, after the provincial government and CTA failed to negotiate a fair collective agreement.

“We’ve been working hard to get the CTA to get serious about negotiating an agreement that respects our members and addresses their specific working conditions, which are not that same as other workers’ in our public education system,” said Terri Preston, Chair of CUPE’s Ontario School Board Bargaining Committee (OSBCC).

“We were already scheduled for two days of bargaining next week and we were clear with the CTA, before this meeting happened today, that we wanted them to get serious about bargaining a fair collective agreement. Given the Premier’s statement today, I expect the employer to be available to bargain for all coming eight days.”

In a meeting today with the leaders of CUPE and teachers unions ETFO and OSSTF, Premier Wynne and Minister of Education Liz Sandals said they would grant requests from Ontario’s trustees associations to respond to the current labour dispute under the new *School Board Collective Bargaining Act 2014* unless agreements were reached by November 1.

“Our members are very frustrated,” said Preston, “I think we’ve shown quite clearly in the last six weeks our willingness to stand up for respect at work. It should be obvious to the government and School Board Associations that any attempt to alter our current working conditions will not be tolerated. I don’t think the government or the School Board Associations really want to go there.”

CUPE’s 55,000 school board members work in schools and board offices across Ontario, in all four school systems. Some of the lowest-paid workers in the education system, CUPE members work as educational assistants, custodians, office administrators, early childhood educators, trades people, instructors, library technicians, speech pathologists, IT specialists and in many other classifications.

“CUPE education workers are the backbone of our schools,” said Hahn. “Our current job action has shown the many vital roles – often unpaid or on top of other duties – that our members play in our schools. They deserve respect, not ultimatums.”

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