



CUPE
EDUCATION
WORKERS

**Members'
bulletin**

THE POWER OF PUBLIC EDUCATION

May 2019

Town Hall Call - recap

Thanks to everyone who took part in the Town Hall call on Thursday, May 2. For those who couldn't call in, I am sending this bulletin as a summary of the points covered.

Locals are welcome to use this bulletin when talking to CUPE members and when reaching out to community organizations, parents' councils and other allies who can support us in fighting the cuts.

Wage Compensation Consultations

The provincial government has been holding consultations in April and May on wage restraint in the public sector.

Along with representatives from other CUPE sectors, school boards coordinator Darcie McEathron and I attended a CUPE-only consultation on April 23. The following day, we took part in a consultation with other education unions and associations. These consultations were held with officials from the Treasury Board and were facilitated by legal counsel retained by the government.

Why attend consultations?

CUPE and OSBCU's decision to attend the consultation meetings was made after receiving outside legal advice on the implications of attending. The advice was clear: not attending could possibly compromise our position in any future court challenges against government wage restraint measures.

What was said

We made it plain in both consultations that we completely reject the premise that public sector wages and benefits are the cause of Ontario's deficit and debt problems. We pointed out that the province doesn't have a spending problem, it has a revenue problem.

We also said clearly that we reject the notion that it is either appropriate or even legal for the government to restrict free collective bargaining by imposing restraints through legislation or by other means restrict the settlements for our compensation, both direct and indirect.

We also rejected outright the government's appeal to have us join them in finding ways to lower workers wage and benefit outcomes.

We pointed out the waste of contracting out, P3s, and the cost of hired lawyers leading the consultations and suggested the government could find savings in these areas.

What's next

CUPE Ontario will make a written submission to the consultation before it closes on May 24; OSBCU will contribute its section on education workers to CUPE Ontario's submission.

The government was clear that one option to restrain public sector wages is to introduce legislative measure. This would be an attack on free collective bargaining and we will work with other sectors and labour partners to take actions to oppose any such plan.

Provincial budget and GSN

The provincial budget was released on April 11 and contained very little new information in additions to the Education Minister's announcement in March that revealed cuts of some \$300 million.

One announcement of note around the budget was a Minister's Task Force on School Boards, which will focus on how to find efficiencies. Although details are not yet public, we are concerned that these efficiencies will be on the backs of our members.

The real details came in the late release of the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) on April 26.

Overall, total education spending is increasing by less than 0.2%, which adjusted from inflation amounts to a 1.7% **cut** in funding. The budget and GSN announcement, combined with the recent wage consultations, signal that we are facing a very difficult round of bargaining.

Member engagement and mobilization will be the key to overcoming this government's hostile agenda and seeing any real gains.

Bargaining: OSBCU has filed notice to bargain

On April 2, the government filed Regulation 59-19, setting April 29 as the date on or after which the parties for school board bargaining could give early notice to bargain.

At the OSBCU bargaining conference in November and again at the OSBCU convention in January, we talked with members about the best time to file notice to bargain. In April, OSBCU's bargaining committee again deliberated the same topic with CUPE National staff. After taking all these discussions into consideration, OSBCU filed notice to bargain on May 3.

By now, all local presidents will have received a copy of the notice to bargain. Notice to bargain centrally also serves as notice to bargain locally, therefore, Directors of Education in school boards with CUPE members will have also received a copy of the notice.

Under the terms of Ontario's *School Board Collective Bargaining Act*, the central parties have to meet within 15 days of notice to bargain; OSBCU and CUPE now have a date of May 15 to meet with the Council of Trustees Association (CTA) to start establishing the ground rules for bargaining and to begin discussions on the scope of central bargaining.

The next steps between the parties will be determining the scope of central bargaining, that is, deciding which issues are central and which are local. This sometimes means that we have to refer decisions to the Ontario Labour Relations Board, which is a lengthy process in itself.

Local bargaining can only begin after the scope of central bargaining has been determined. Last time local bargaining was concurrent with central, although other locals did bargain sequentially, meaning that local bargaining happened only after central bargaining was concluded.

The decision on sequential or concurrent bargaining will be made according to individual locals' circumstances. Communications will be forthcoming as we move along the process.

We are working with CUPE's Union Education on training for the next stages of mobilization, including strike preparation and strike averting. Details will be shared as they become available. The best way to be prepared for any job action is to have good mobilization and strategic plans in place.

Next steps

As we ease towards the summer months and a period of layoff for the majority of our members, it is imperative that locals have the following items in place:

1. **Contact information for all members** so that we can be effective at sharing information with members throughout the summer months.
2. **Mobilization leads:** each local must have a named mobilization lead and/or chair. This member cannot be a member of the bargaining team, but will be the contact for the OSBCU. This person can be the same member who is acting as the mobilization for CUPE Ontario (as mentioned on the CUPE Ontario town hall call on April 29).
3. Local presidents must ensure that **local bargaining proposals** are complete.
4. **Layoffs:** Forward information about layoffs among your members as soon as possible to your National rep and to OSBCU. We will make every effort to publicize these layoffs as one of the ways that we will hold the Ford government to account.
5. **Power of Purple Wednesdays:** ensure that locals are sharing information about the importance of wearing purple on Wednesdays – it is an action that shows our solidarity, builds our identity as education workers, and tests our ability to communicate with and mobilize our members.

In solidarity,



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