

Why education workers are preparing to take job action

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If your child goes to school in Ontario, chances are that Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) education workers help keep your child's school clean, safe, supportive and welcoming. There are 55,000 of us and our work is one of the cornerstones of public education. Kids can't learn and teachers can't teach if we're not in schools.

We love our work and we're proud of the benefits it brings to students, families and communities.

We're also preparing to take job action in September.

We want you to know why. And although it's a big ask, we want your support. At stake is nothing less than your child's right to a high-quality, well-supported and well-rounded public education.

Because of the Ford govern-

ment's cuts to education, it's likely that your child's school has lost education workers. Kids and parents alike will feel the effects as soon as school is back in session: Not enough education assistants to support children with special needs. Not enough custodians to keep schools clean and healthy. Not enough maintenance workers to tackle a backlog of repairs. Not enough school secretaries to monitor who's in the building.

Not enough psychologists, child and youth workers, or social workers to nurture vulnerable kids. Not enough music, language or arts instructors to connect students to the world beyond the classroom.

CUPE is negotiating now with the province and representatives of Ontario's school boards for a contract that tackles these deficiencies. Yes, we want a better deal for our members — and not

just because we earn an average \$38,000 a year, but because we have children too. And we believe that all families want and support high-quality services that help children thrive and that CUPE education workers provide.

We do know that cuts to education funding don't help school boards recruit and retain qualified employees or fill any of the chronic staffing shortages across the province. They don't stop a revolving door of precarious workers or create stable learning environments for students. We also know that a bigger wave of education cuts is coming in 2020-21 and will hit students even harder.

It's no way to run Ontario's beloved system of public education, but the province and school boards give no sign that stabilizing services is their priority.

In fact, their position has put students' education and well-being at risk.

So CUPE education workers are taking a stand.

Earlier this month, hundreds of CUPE school board leaders gave their support for province-wide job action. In September, we'll ask thousands of rank-and-file CUPE members to do the same.

Any action we take — whether work-to-rule, rotating strikes, full strike, or reaching a deal — will focus on reversing cuts to education funding and protecting services for students.

Of course, we know that whatever we do, the same old union-bashing notions will be trotted out: That we're disrupting children's education because we want crazy wage increases or jobs for life. Or that we're putting our sick leave and benefits before

families' and kids' needs.

The truth is, education workers are the front line against cuts that hurt kids. And we're bargaining to ensure that services for students in Ontario's public education system are high quality, publicly funded and publicly delivered.

Families like yours can help: Our fight to protect services will be shorter, stronger and more effective if you let MPPs and school board trustees know that you share CUPE's commitment to high-quality education services, even if it takes job action by education workers to defend them.

Laura Walton is an education assistant, CUPE member, and president of CUPE's Ontario School Board Council of Unions, which bargains centrally on behalf of 55,000 education workers in public, Catholic, French and English school boards.