

## Recap of the OCASC (Ottawa Carleton Assembly of School Councils) Meeting of 20 February 2020

Representatives from over 30 OCDSB (Ottawa Carleton District School Board) parent councils came out tonight to talk with the local bargaining units of the OSSTF (Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers Federation)—this union represents the Secondary Schools, as well as the custodial staff, office support workers, occasional teachers, special ed teachers, psychologists, speech therapists, and educational assistants for the Secondary Schools and Elementary Schools—and the OC-EFTO (Ottawa Carleton branch of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario). Two OCDSB trustees were also in attendance as observers.

The discussion was balanced, courteous, and very honest and frank. For more information about the labour dispute and what you can do: <https://ocasc.ca/information-shared-by-osstf-and-oc-efto/> These notes aim to represent the fast moving dialogue in the room.

The following are the questions that were asked, and the answers that were given:

1. Why are elementary teachers pushing on class sizes when there are many other issues?

Answer: The class sizes were already too big. The goal to improve the current size situation, not to have them grow anymore.
2. What are parent councils allowed to do in this dispute?

Answer: Parent councils should ensure they represent all perspectives of parents at the school.
3. What are actual bargaining meetings like? Are people actually talking? Who is there?

Answer: OSSTF's last day at the table was 16 December 2019, and EFTO's last day at the table was 4 February 2020. Representatives spend very little time at the actual table; rather, they present offers and then retreat to discuss in private.
4. How do we hope for solution?

Answer:
5. What is "struck work" for custodian workers? What are the implications for events in future months (e.g., spring fairs)?

Answer: Hard to tell what will happen in the future. Overtime hours are still covered in current state; weekend events should still be able to go ahead if they were planned in advance. Currently, custodians are not allowed to cover work for absent employees.

6. What does Phase 6 look like?  
Answer: They were not able to answer this question. Information is confidential, due to ongoing negotiations.
7. For office support staff, what is “struck” work? How does it affect school cash online “parents are going to war over pizza days”?  
Answer: Existing work should still be done. Sanctions should not have a negative impact on parents and students. If this work was being done before, it should be able to continue.
8. How could there be clearer info about what is “struck” activity in a school?  
Answer: Best resources for information are the websites for the unions. Some resource were distributed to attendees, and others will be on the OCASC website. There may be differences in schools, based on what/how work was being done before the labour dispute; this will change what the “struck activity” means in different schools. Union reps offered to come to schools (Secondary Schools), to speak to parents and assist with communication.
9. Struck work for custodians: Are there exemptions for health and safety issues? For example, what happens with the lead flushing if a custodial staff is sick?  
Answer: Lead flushing is done by the chief custodian and that is not affected by work to rule. Schools always have to have a chief custodian.
10. Will the school year be affected?  
Answer: At this point there is no intention to change the school year duration (students have not missed enough school to make this necessary). The decision is not made by the OCDSB. It is a much more complex process, and this is not being discussed at this point.
11. Is everyone in all boards bargaining? What is the difference between central and local bargaining?  
Answer: Generally central bargaining needs to be settled, before local bargaining can happen.
12. What courses will be shifted to mandatory online courses?  
Answer: These have not been specified. The specifics of this plan have not been provided at this time.
13. Where is “struck work” decided? Centrally or school by school?  
Answer: Basically, this is decided based on approach of the central standard that anything being done now can continue, but no new duties will be started. The idea is that there should be no impact on kids and parents (e.g. If school cash online is already running, it should continue, but it can’t be started in a school that doesn’t already have it).

14. What happens if one union gets finalized? What will the affect be on other bargaining?  
Answer: There can be a “me too” clause included to ensure that if additional provisions are made in agreements with other union groups, they can be retroactively added to an agreement.
15. What is different this time around? Doesn't this just happen in bargaining?  
Answer: Actually, this is the first time in 20 years that they (all the bargaining units) are all in position to strike.
16. Why are so many elementary support workers in the secondary union in Ottawa? Seems like elementary schools taking the brunt.  
Answer: Elementary school support workers are part of the OSSTF. When the OSSTF goes out, the elementary schools have to close for health and safety of the students. The reason the support workers are a part of the OSSTF goes back to the time of amalgamation of the boards.
17. Because of the confusion about the work to rule seems to also happen at the staff level, how do we know what can be done or said?  
Answer: This is because the “struck work” determination is complex and can be interpreted differently. It's a challenge for all union members to stay up-to-date on all communication to ensure that everyone is completely informed. Information may be sent, but individual members may not have received or read the information.
18. Can online courses become “how to learn online,” because it is becoming the new normal and will help kids learn?  
Answer: It isn't clear which courses might be pushed online, and it is an interesting idea. Discussion: But the technology access and infrastructure need to be in place to deliver to everyone: Kids without tech, rural areas without WIFI, poorly designed interfaces, etc. make it frustrating.
19. How can parents actually carry out support—emails sent to minister/government have been getting just generic auto response? How does a parent get a message heard?  
Answer: Personal stories of real impact are powerful. Families can show support by writing letters, calling elected representatives, walking with teachers, etc.
20. When the elementary teacher negotiations failed at the late hour, what were the “new things” added by the government that the union couldn't accept?  
Answer: One example of the issues that caused talks to fail was that the special education funding currently in place was expected to be kept at status quo, and the government wanted them to agree to a drop in special education funding. Cuts to special education will affect all kids, so the issues affect all.

21. Are extracurricular activities considered “struck activities” in secondary schools? That is, are activities being cancelled because of work to rule?  
Answer: No, they aren’t, and activities shouldn’t be cancelled. However, “on call” cover-off support is considered to be part of “struck activity,” so it might not be available. Elementary teachers are not doing extracurricular, so they are “struck” in elementary (e.g. volleyball cancelled).
22. How do we get this issue to be felt, understood, and supported by the people who aren’t living it and don’t have kids in school? A parent explained that they are politically conservative (but do not support the “Ford Government’s” position); however, they are struggling to get non-parents to understand implications. They don’t know how to bring a voice to conservatives who disagree with the impact of government position on the schools (and by extension on children, parents, and teachers).  
Answer: Share prepared materials from the unions. Many excellent resources on union websites. Tell personal stories of the impact these changes will have on our own families.
23. How can messages be clearer, so parents can understand a more unified labour perspective?  
Answer: Much of the presentation of the teachers’ message depends on what is picked up by the media and the way that the messages are portrayed.
24. How do parents engage with the media, to get messages across and issues to be clearer?  
Answer: Parents can ask to be added a contact list for local media. OCASC co-chairs maintain a contact list for local media, for parents and students who wish to be interviewed. This can be brought back to local councils, to invite as many interested parties as possible. Parents may need be cautious of the questions they answer, and the way their responses are framed, to ensure that they accurately represent their position. Some parents may also be concerned about their privacy or conflict of interest with their jobs. No one should feel any pressure to talk to the media.