

January 8, 2009

## **OPSBA sets the Record Straight – Again**

Misleading statements made by ETFO (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario) leadership in their media conference today obliges OPSBA to restate the facts. Everyone who is concerned about student success and safety in Ontario's elementary schools needs to know what OPSBA proposed in these negotiations. Our proposal focused additional resources on improving student achievement and on providing secure and safe learning environments. Our proposal would have provided higher salaries and more preparation time for teachers. Our proposal offered schools the peace, stability and confidence in continued progress that strengthens public education for students and staff.

The original Ministry Provincial Discussion Table (PDT) agreement was faithfully reflected in the OPSBA Proposal to ETFO. It included a three per cent annual salary increase for four years, compounding to 12.55 per cent by 2012, more teachers to improve class sizes, more teachers to improve student programs and more teachers to provide more planning time for existing teachers, PLUS improvements in benefits and other working conditions for English public elementary teachers.

In a media conference this morning, ETFO accused OPSBA of contract “strips” – an inflammatory term that implies removing benefits and reducing salary. Collective agreements do not just deal with monetary issues such as salary. They deal with a variety of working conditions which determine how teachers spend their time during the school day. The kinds of things boards want to address, which the union refers to as “strips”, include the following:

- Clarifying the provincial law which requires teachers to be present and available to their students in their classrooms or teaching areas 15 minutes before the start of classes in the morning and 5 minutes before classes start in the afternoon
- Giving principals a reasonable say in how teachers use some of their time during the school day when they are not teaching their students
- Allowing principals the ability to provide reasonable amounts of teacher professional development after classes are let out, so that student instructional time is not disrupted
- In unusual situations, ensuring that principals will be able to depart from scheduled teacher supervision assignments in order to ensure student safety

These are reasonable requests unequivocally related to student safety and student achievement. The claim made by ETFO that making these proposals at the Provincial Discussion Table somehow violated the “rules” is simply not true. The process we have all been engaged in is called negotiations. It is the legal venue where issues such as these are discussed and where operational problems are resolved.

Contrary to ETFO's assertion, it has not been the Boards but rather ETFO who, up until now, has not been interested in meeting at the local board level. And it was not OPSBA who left the Provincial Discussion Table. OPSBA's member school boards have always been available to meet with ETFO to negotiate in good faith with the funding provided by the provincial government. It is unfortunate that the available funding is now significantly reduced because ETFO failed to sign on to the PDT agreement.

ETFO repeated a claim today that their proposal was costed and endorsed by the Ministry of Education. This is not true. In a letter issued to the media on December 17, Education Minister

Kathleen Wynne confirmed that ETFO's demands far exceeded the funding provided in the Provincial Discussion Table agreement.

"The ETFO final proposal was not mutually agreed to by the parties and was not within the financial parameters established by the Ministry," said Minister Wynne. "OPSBA did raise legitimate concerns about the financial implications created by ETFO's final proposal. The only agreement that the Ministry would have endorsed was one that was mutually agreed upon by both parties and within the financial parameters established by the Ministry."

ETFO's final offer would have cost at least \$463 million more over 5 years than had already been agreed by the 3 other Provincial Teachers' Unions.

"We are dismayed that EFTO would threaten a strike given that ETFO's leadership had every opportunity to sign a provincial agreement that would support student success and public education," said Rick Johnson.

The interests of our students must continue to remain the first priority for all parties - there can be no disruption to their education. This is what parents expect of us and what students deserve.

For more information contact:

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The Ontario Public School Boards' Association represents public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, which together serve more than 1.3 million public elementary and secondary students. The Association advocates on behalf of the best interests and needs of the public school system in Ontario. OPSBA is seen as the credible voice of public education in Ontario and is routinely called on by the provincial government for input and advice on legislation and the impact of government policy directions.