

March 29, 2020

Dear Brothers, Sisters and Friends

Late yesterday afternoon the Alberta government announced that they would no longer be keeping education workers on the payroll. This effectively laid off thousands of Custodial, Clerical and Educational Staff. OSBCU stands in solidarity with the Education Workers of Alberta. Last night I spoke to CUPE communications staff in Alberta to share what we were doing in Ontario in hopes that it will help them in their fight.

So what is OSBCU doing?

This question I am sure, has been on many of your minds during these uncertain times. While no one knows for sure what the future will bring the OSBCU executive has been working hard to develop plans that we believe speak to the necessity of our role as we contemplate the new reality of public education.

What have we done?

- We have held several meetings via Skype with our education worker union partners -- including ETFO, OSSTF, OECTA, AEFO, OCEW and EWAO -- in order for us work in unison and coordinate for the best possible outcomes.
- OSBCU initiated a joint letter from the education unions and associations to the Minister of Education to demand union involvement in planning for school boards around the COVID-19 pandemic.
- We subsequently have held several meetings by conference call with the Assistant Deputy Minister and Deputy Minister of Education alongside our union partners to share concerns and advocate for the unique needs of our membership.
- Your OSBCU Executive has been meeting weekly by phone to assess what is happening throughout the province and provide insight on how we need to proceed.
- Area VPs have been in contact with Classification Reference Group people to ascertain what challenges classification groups have identified regarding the continuity of learning as well as how we feel that we can turn these challenges in to opportunities to support our students in their new reality.
- Area Mobilization Officers have been in contact with Presidents to provide support and channel concerns that need to be addressed based on the individual needs of locals and school boards
- We have sent several updates and continue with our Facebook Live Sessions on Wednesday. (We are in the midst of setting up ability for closed captioning and French translation.)

What is next

- We have established 3 different working groups in conjunction with our union partners and the Ministry. These working groups will be working alongside the working group established by the teachers' unions to develop plans of education workers as we move forward.
-

- We urge presidents to be in contact with school boards continuously to determine plans as they happen and ensure that our members needs are considered.
- In areas where school boards are allowing use of school properties to be used (whether vacant or currently vacant as a result of COVID-19 closure), it is important that our members are continuing to provide the custodial services required. This may mean additional training and resources are required. This is important to ensure we are pushing back against contracting out of our work.
- It is important that our members are checking their emails, participating in staff meetings, etc. We continue to receive our full wages and in that respect the employer is within their rights to request us to perform work.
- Ensure that the Health & Safety information that was previously sent has been distributed to your members and that your board has established screening practices that will reduce the risk of exposure of our membership.
- If you have suggestions on how our classifications can contribute to the continuity of learning, please forward this information to your Area VP.

What members can do

- The COVID-19 pandemic has changed many things about the way we live and work. But it doesn't mean that members should stay silent about their concerns. My initial advice would be for members immediately to call, write or email their MPPs and schools board trustees to express
 - o how dismayed, disappointed and angry they are about what has happened in Alberta to education workers;
 - o that they, as education workers, are pleased that Ontario's government has chosen to work with education unions like CUPE to get through these challenging times together;
 - o that CUPE education workers are valuable allies in the keeping Ontario's education system strong and responsive.

As you can see these are very busy and trying times, I appreciate the strain that we are all under as we try to juggle the needs of our members, our families and our own anxiety. I have always been proud of the spirit that our membership has, especially in the face of adversity. Now more than ever before, we are the power of public education.

More communications will follow from OSBCU as developments take place. In the meantime, please take care of yourselves and each other.

In Solidarity,



Laura Walton, OSBCU President