

THE FACTS

Education Funding Announcement Ignores Support Workers in Ontario
cupe.ca ***June 19, 2006***

The General Legislative grants (GLGs) for education that were released today are another big disappointment for education support workers. Last year's GLGs focused on implementing the framework agreement that was struck with teachers and school boards last spring that led to increased preparation time and new teacher hires. CUPE members can be forgiven for thinking it might be their turn this year, but it wasn't: today's announcement of an additional \$600 million in education spending for 2006-07 did virtually nothing to address the concerns of education support staff.

You might have thought that the recent strike in London would have been a bit of a wake up call for the new minister. To many it is clear that the strike demonstrated that EAs, can't be asked to continue carrying the burden of shortfalls in the system. EAs have had hours of work cut back across the province in recent years, and their workloads have only gotten worse since teachers won increased preparation time.

Did the minister also not hear about protests in London by the Catholic board local about contracting out of custodial work? A few CUPE locals have waged public campaigns about contracting out

of school custodial work recently: it's no secret that CUPE members are fighting back against attempts to balance the books on their backs.

Last year, there at least appeared to be a few nuggets in the GLGs for support staff. The "Cleaner, Safer Schools" fund promised to lead to the hiring of new custodians and maintenance personnel, but that has actually happened in only a few boards, as best as we can determine. So we wouldn't get fooled again if they tried to tell us that there was a pot of money for CUPE salaries, but it looks like they aren't even trying to fool us this year.

Today, the government said they are going to fully fund the cost of teacher salaries — i.e. eliminate the gap between the benchmark the ministry uses to calculate salaries and what boards actually pay, about 8%. This gap is a longstanding complaint about the funding formula; even Rozanski had recommendations to address it in 2002, but they were ignored. However, in the half page the government used to congratulate itself today on its move to fully fund teacher salaries, there was no mention whatsoever of the support staff salary benchmark gap that Rozanski also noted existed. We can only conclude the government doesn't plan to address it.

The money to pay for closing the teacher salary benchmark gap is being carved out of the Learning Opportunities grant, and the Local Priorities grant, which disappears altogether. That leaves even fewer budget lines for boards to raid when looking for funds — an ominous sign for CUPE “non-classroom” workers.

So what is the \$600 million in new spending? First of all, the ministry once again gets a failing grade for the math presented in the GLG document, as the totals seem to add up to over \$800 million. It appears the amounts shown for new teachers (\$185 million) isn't included as new spending, which suggests that the money to fund them is coming from other — i.e. “non-classroom” — budgets. We'll have to wait until next week's technical briefing with finance branch officials to see how they got the numbers to add up.

- \$338 million will be committed to salary increases for 2006-07. (That represents a 2.5% increase over last year — so if your collective agreement calls for more than that, you may hear whining from your board that the ministry isn't covering it!)
- There's a new School Foundation Grant, which takes money from existing grants and adds a new \$35 million to ensure funding for salaries for a principal and secretary and supplies at every school.

- Francophone boards get an additional \$10 million.
- One-time money outside of the funding formula for rising heating, electricity and gasoline costs.
- Language and ESL programs get an additional \$22 million, but details were vague on where this money will be directed.
- Supplementing last week's announcement on special education reforms, an additional \$33 million is being pumped into the special education folder. That will not even cover cost increases, likely, leaving nothing for increasing EA hours, or improving training programs, etc.

The capital spending figures contained nothing new beyond what was previously announced.

And that's basically it: a few more million dollars here and there, most of it to meet previous commitments (and announcements). There is more talk about transparency and accountability than usual, which is all well and good, but that's the kind of thing you talk about when you have nothing new to say, really. And that about sums up this education grant announcement: it was all quite predictable, and it continues to ignore the concerns and needs of the workers that underpin the education system. We were shut out once again!