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February 15, 2016

CUPE education workers ratify contract extension in province-wide votes

TORONTO – In votes held province-wide, education workers represented by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) have ratified a contract extension that settles central and local agreements until August 31, 2019. The deal was reached with the province of Ontario and the Council of Trustee Associations (CTA) in late December. The agreement was ratified by a majority of members and a majority of CUPE’s 110 participating bargaining units in the sector.

“Our members have been very frustrated for some time that their wages have fallen behind in successive rounds of negotiations,” said Terri Preston, chair of CUPE’s central bargaining committee. “This extension agreement goes some way toward reinvesting back into the system and into the wages of the lowest paid workers in Ontario’s education sector.”

The deal includes 4 per cent in wage increases spread over the life of the agreement, and an inflationary increase to the benefits trust that was bargained in the previous round of talks. Crucially, it also includes a significant investment in the areas of special education, early childhood education, clerical and custodial work. This will help to maintain positions in some areas where boards have made harmful cuts. The deal also includes some funding for apprenticeships and professional development.

Some of the funding allocated will be used to add 3 per cent to existing “community use of schools” funds. “CUPE members want to help turn schools into community hubs,” added Preston. “When schools are well used by community groups and our members are keeping them clean and safe, it’s huge benefit to everyone.”

“Our members have been objecting for years to cuts to staff positions necessary to adequately support students,” said Jim Morrison, staff coordinator for the education sector in Ontario. “CUPE members are the backbone of every school – keeping schools clean and safe, and supporting the most vulnerable kids in the system. This deal starts to re-invest in some of those positions.”

CUPE represents 55,000 workers in the education sector, across all four school board systems (English and French, Catholic and public), including educational assistants, early childhood educators, custodians, tradespeople, school administrators, payroll and IT clerks, library technicians and more.

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