

Wednesday, Oct. 19, 2016

Community update re: Unifor strike

We are now entering Day 3 of the Unifor 2458 strike. As we're certain you are aware, we have experienced some challenges, but we are doing our best to maintain decorum in our schools. Here's what we can tell you so far:

- We are committed to keeping our schools open. There have been no discussions about closing schools.
- We have experienced significant back-ups at St. Anne, St. Thomas of Villanova, and Cardinal Carter High Schools. Unifor is allowing students in, but delaying teachers, which means in some situations, we have had to gather students in cafeterias or gymnasiums, and then release them to their classes when the teachers make it in to the schools. Section 170 of the Education Act clearly defines the minimum amount of instructional time that is required for students, and we believe that by delaying teachers' entrance to our buildings, students are being denied their rights to legislatively protected instructional time.
- We are working closely with area police forces, and have been in regular contact with the Windsor Police Service, the LaSalle Police Service, and the Ontario Provincial Police, and are asking for their cooperation to ensure that teachers are not being delayed, and are allowed access to their classrooms. We continue to maintain that contact with police forces and are having on-going dialogue on the issue.
- There have been reports of some vandalism in washrooms at schools. Please be assured that these are isolated incidents. Our principals have been sharing positive messages with their students during morning announcements, trying to encourage students to respect the facilities, and in most cases, this is having the desired outcome. We have excellent students and believe that the vast majority of them are exhibiting exemplary behavior. We are all doing our best to keep the schools clean and orderly.
- Re: bargaining: much has been said about the Board's unwillingness to negotiate. This is patently false. Our negotiating team was at the table for three separate rounds of multi-day bargaining sessions in April, August and most recently on Oct. 6 & 7, when we presented a comprehensive proposal to Unifor which we believe would have fairly compensated our employees. As yet, we have received no written response from the union, which is the natural next step for bargaining to resume. A mediator has been assigned to the file, and if that person sees a possibility of getting the two parties back to the table, they will be directed as such. We are prepared to return to the bargaining table at any time.

- Re: communications: We are doing our best to keep parents informed about the situation. In cases of schools that have been experiencing more challenges than others, principals at those schools have been relying on Synervoice messages, school blogs, and social media to keep parents informed. From a Board perspective, we have been granting interviews to local media outlets, and relying on Synervoice messages and web updates such as this one when the situation warrants.

In conclusion, we would respectfully ask for continued patience and prayers as we try to work towards a resolution on this matter. Our most important priority is the education of our students, and we take that responsibility very seriously.

From the Senior Administrative Team
Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board