

ETFO poised for strike if necessary

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By Nate Smelle

The results of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario's strike vote held throughout September and October are in, and the membership has given the union a strong mandate to strike.

It was announced by the union on Nov. 1 that its 83,000 members had voted 98 per cent in support of striking if negotiations between ETFO's central bargaining table and the Ford government fail.

Hastings & Prince Edward Teacher Local president Dave Henderson believes the results have sent a clear message that the union is standing together against the Ford government's cuts to education.

"The provincial result was an overwhelming show of support from our members for the ETFO central table team in their negotiations with OPSBA [Ontario Public School Boards' Association] and the government," said Henderson.

"The local result of the central strike vote has not been announced, but I would be very surprised if it was much different than the provincial result. The mood of our members in the meeting hall was very clear. They are mobilized and standing strong behind our provincial team."

Although negotiations are ongoing, Henderson indicated that a conciliator from the Ministry of Labour has been called in for mediation.

He said the big issues on the table for ETFO are: more resources for special needs students; job security; maintenance of the current kindergarten model which is a partnership between a teacher and a Designated Early Childhood Educator; improvements to class size in kindergarten and junior-intermediate; and measures to deal with violence in the classroom.

In terms of a timeline as to when a strike could take place, Henderson said it all depends on whether progress is made during the central table talks. Pointing out that a strike vote and conciliation are "legal steps along the road to possible job action," he said it doesn't necessarily mean it will result in a strike.

"A strike can be avoided if the government comes to the table with serious proposals for a deal," explained Henderson.

"Coming to the table with a demand for \$150 million in cuts from the elementary panel is not a serious proposal and could lead to a breakdown in talks."

While the union is not yet in a strike position, Henderson said things could escalate quickly if conciliation does not result in any more progress at that table. At that point in time, he said "the clock starts ticking on a timeline which could result in job action before Christmas."