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Stop the layoffs, work with us for better funding, CUPE tells Bluewater school board

MARKDALE, Ont. — The union representing 240 custodians, trades and maintenance workers with the Bluewater District School Board has asked board negotiators to deliver a message to trustees and Director of Education Mary Anne Alton: let us work together for improved funding for schools in Grey and Bruce counties.

Both sides met today at school board offices in Markdale to try to avert a lockout or strike on September 4. The main issue is the board's decision to issue layoff notices to 62 members of CUPE 1176, also effective September 4.

"We're saying to the board, let's work together to approach the Ministry of Education to solve your financing problems," said Don McAngus, president of CUPE 1176. "The problem here is the funding formula, not the people who keep the schools clean and safe.

"We've got a provincial election coming up. Let's go to the Liberal government and tell them to move now on fixing the flawed funding formula that doesn't recognize the real cost of school operations. Clearly, the new money they announced recently is not enough to solve the problem."

The main result of layoffs will be dirtier, crumbling schools, McAngus said, noting that even when enrolment declines the schools have to be cleaned and maintained.

The union also tabled a new proposal for a three-year collective agreement that maintains current staffing and benefit levels and provides reasonable wage increases in line with settlements at other school boards in the province. The existing collective agreement expires on August 31.

"We are hopeful that the board negotiators will come to our next meeting with the mediator on August 29 ready to say yes to our proposal," McAngus said. "That's the right thing to do in order to ensure that students and teachers come back on September 4 to schools they can count on for cleanliness and safety."

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