

## Questions & Answers About CUPE Education Workers' Work-to-Rule, Legal Job Action

As CUPE Ontario education workers, represented by CUPE's Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU) begin legal job action, many students, parents, and community members have questions.

Given the negative, and sometimes even false, spin being provided by some media reports, we thought it was important to share the facts. Please see below some frequently asked questions about the job action and information that we hope will equip CUPE Ontario members not working in the school board sector in understanding and explaining CUPE's OSBCU Work-to-Rule.

### \* **Why are CUPE education workers taking work-to-rule job action?**

For CUPE education workers, this job action is about securing the best services for Ontario students and restoring the services that have been lost because of the Ford government's cuts to education. Most people have no idea that work done by CUPE Education workers every day in schools across the province often isn't actually part of their assigned duties. Just like many people have no idea this critical work is not funded by the provincial government, even though they expect it to be performed. This reality, coupled with the Ford Conservatives' deep cuts to funding which has resulted in layoffs for education workers, means even more pressure on these vital publicly-delivered education services. Our goal is to protect services in our schools, and this work-to-rule is meant to apply pressure to ensure a settlement can be reached.

### \* **What does Work-to-Rule actually mean?**

Work-to-Rule is a form of legal job action that takes place while workers remain on the job. Many of the duties CUPE Education Workers are withdrawing from are tasks that successive provincial governments have refused to fund. For example, the budget for custodians' work is based on the size and number of the classrooms in a school, but not its hallways, offices, gym, or cafeteria. Withdrawing from these unfunded duties draws the employers' attention to all the critical roles CUPE education workers perform and their valuable contributions to student success. CUPE OSBCU members bargain both with the provincial government and a Council of Trustees representing all four school board systems. This work-to-rule will hopefully apply pressure to the Ford Conservatives and trustees to ensure a fair agreement that secures publicly delivered education services for students.

### \* **Is a Work-To-Rule just another name for a strike?**

Work-to-Rule is being conducted after the legal date by which CUPE education workers could have begun a full-blown strike—where **all** CUPE education workers withdraw from performing **all** their duties. It is a legal job action that is aimed at focusing attention on the important work done by CUPE Education Workers, the funding gaps that already exist for those services, and the need to maintain and improve these important supports.

### \* **Won't it just be the students who suffer?**

The Ford Conservatives' cuts to education funding—resulting in fewer services and supports for students—are what is making students suffer. CUPE education workers are using bargaining to secure the publicly-delivered services in our schools that students need to succeed.

**\* Will work-to-rule put students' safety in jeopardy?**

CUPE education workers, who democratically constructed and voted on this work-to-rule, have been clear that not provisions of their job action should ever put student safety in jeopardy. Guidelines clearly state no CUPE member must ever do anything or omit any practice to make a school unsafe or put any student at any risk.

**\* Is it true, as reported in some media outlets, that CUPE gave out written instructions telling their members to refuse to take special needs kids to the toilet?**

No—this is not true. This is just fearmongering. We have asked Educational Assistants, who work with children with special needs, to support, in every way, those students they are assigned to, including toileting. We have asked that members avoid working with students they are not assigned to. School Boards are responsible for having staff to support all students' needs in schools. All too often it is our members who step in and take on much more responsibility than their work assignments, filling in the gaps the provincial government should be funding, and school administrators and boards should be filing. Our members will never do anything that puts the students in their care at risk.

**\* Is it true that CUPE members told their members to refuse to clean school hallways?**

Yes – under Ontario's current education funding formula school hallways, like gymnasiums and too many other parts of school buildings, are not funded by the provincial government to have people clean them. This is not a new reality. But now, the Ford Conservatives' cuts to education are causing school boards to cut the number of custodians and custodial hours in our schools. This has made an already difficult situation worse in schools across Ontario. By only cleaning the parts of schools the provincial government provides funding for, CUPE education workers are highlighting serious gaps that exist in the system. If the Ford Conservatives, or the Liberals before them, cared about cleaning hallways and gymnasiums, they should provide funding to support this vital, publicly delivered service in our schools.

**\* Isn't this just CUPE education workers caring about themselves instead of students?**

CUPE education workers love their work. Their average wage is \$38,000.00 per year. Every summer, the majority of CUPE education workers are laid off. Many must work an extra job, or even two extra jobs, just to make ends meet for their families. They are facing ever-increasing workloads and deserve a fair collective agreement that values their work and funds the critical services they provide.

As front-line workers, parents and community members, CUPE education workers understand how important their work is to the overall success of our schools and students. They know that cuts to education funding—which results in cuts to their jobs and layoffs—ultimately means fewer services and supports in our schools. They are the backbone of our schools and they know their work helps the entire school community, particularly students. By working hard for a fair agreement that protects their work and maintains funding, CUPE Education workers are fighting for themselves and the students they support every day.