

To: ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local Members
From: Craig Smith, President, ETFO Thames Valley Teacher Local (ETFO TVTL)
Date: October 9, 2020
Regarding: Summary of Meeting with Deputy Minister of Education (Shared with Local Presidents)

Presidents, today's meeting took place after the conclusion of Rep Council and I was able to join in and raise some of the issues that were identified at our meeting. My summary of the issues discussed is as follows:

1. The issue of parent interviews was discussed. The Ministry responded to our concern about boards suggesting in-person interviews as an option. This is not being encouraged by the Ministry. Ministry Staff indicated that their earlier guidance document re school reopening was clear around limiting visitors to the school. Interviews "should be conducted remotely by video or by telephone." In-person meetings should continue to be very limited.
2. The Deputy Minister raised the issue of staff shortages and her letter to OTF requesting a suspension of the 50 day rule for retirees. She advised that the Ministry has done its homework on the issue of a possible shortage. They have heard from 35-40 boards who are concerned about a shortage in November when current retirees (both principals and teachers) hit their 50 day max. The Ministry is asking for reconsideration on this. This is not the only solution that they are exploring. The Affiliates raised the issue of safety as a possible factor in why some occasional teacher/retirees may be declining assignments.
3. The Deputy Minister was asked about a decision on the issue of TPAs/evaluations. The issue has been raised by the Affiliates as well as OPC. She indicated that the Ministry is reviewing the issue and will respond formally next week on their decision. She asked about NTIP and the Affiliates indicated that all appraisals should be delayed this year. This is an additional stressor to an already overstressed system. It would be impossible to meet the rigid timelines outlined in the manual. It is also impractical to assess teachers/education workers in learning environments that are completely unfamiliar to them such as the virtual classroom. This is not a year to make judgements on performance as classrooms are very different due to the pandemic.
4. The Deputy Minister advised that they do not have a response yet on the issue of salary continuance for occasional members who are unable to continue working if a case breaks out and they are ordered to self-isolate. They are in the process of reviewing this and will report back as soon as possible.
5. The Affiliates raised the issue of the joint media conference that took place on Wednesday, October 7 and encouraged the Deputy Minister and Ministry Staff to read the affidavits that were prepared for the OLRB hearing by our three expert witnesses. The information is posted on all websites and is focussed on ensuring that safety is a priority in all of our schools. The Deputy Minister shared that a number of the staff were on the conference yesterday but will review the information that is posted.

continued...

6. The Affiliates raised the issue of some boards changing delivery models and dismantling their virtual schools in favour of a model where the classroom teacher teaches and provides simultaneous instruction to students who have opted for distance learning. Concerns were raised again about this model of delivery. Affiliates advised that it is extremely challenging for members to deliver instruction in this manner. Staff are overloaded and overstressed. This will impact the mental health of our members and lead them to become unwell. The Deputy Minister was reminded about Upper Canada where they are also being asked to deliver correspondence to students in addition to in-person and synchronous instruction. The Deputy Minister indicated that this issue is “top of mind” for them. They are concerned for boards who are trying to meet the changing needs of parents. More parents are opting for distance learning due to increasing cases in their communities. The Ministry has not mandated a specific model but are open to suggestions on this. The Affiliates reiterated that this expectation is unreasonable, cannot be done effectively and is untenable. This will lead to more instability in the system if it continues.
7. The issue of the math curriculum was raised again by the Affiliates. The Deputy Minister was asked to reconsider her decision on the implementation of this curriculum. It is adding another layer of stress and burden to our members.
8. The Affiliates raised the issue of the reporting protocols for outbreaks in schools. The Deputy Minister was asked if consideration could be given to sharing the room number in schools where breakouts occur. This information would assist in alleviating some of the fear and anxiety of our members who are concerned when they hear that there has been a positive case in their schools. The Deputy Minister indicated that she would take the question to the next meeting with Public Health. The Ministry has been pushing for more information to be shared. In some cases they have reached agreement with Public Health to share details regarding whether it was a staff or student affected if there were particular sensitivities involved. The Deputy Minister will ask for more information to be shared and indicated that she understood the concern.

Sharon O'Halloran
General Secretary

For more information regarding this *summary* please contact the ETFO Local office by phone at 519-474-3150 or by email at etfotvtl@etfothamesvalley.com.