

English school boards

Teachers and province far apart in contract talks

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The present collective agreement between the provincial government and its teachers expires at the end of March.

"Once the contract expires we are technically without a contract, but the provisions in the current contract will be maintained until a new Provincial Entente is ratified," said Brian Smeltzer, Western Quebec Teachers' Association (WQTA) President.

WQTA is a branch of the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT) negotiating for teachers. Other side of the table is the Management Negotiating Committee for English-language School Boards (CPNCA). The CPNCA declined to comment to *The Bulletin* on the negotiations.

Unlike the CPNCA, the WQTA agreed to comment and highlighted the distance separating both parties. "As you can imagine we are not very happy with the offer from management," noted Smeltzer.

SECTORAL & INTERSECTORIAL TALKS

"There have been meetings at the two tables – the sectorial and intersectorial. The teachers (QPAT) have been asking for clarification of the items presented by the management. Unfortunately there have been few answers," indicated Smeltzer.

Intersectorial matters, negotiated between the common front negotiators and Québec's Treasury Board, include salaries, pension plans, group insurance plans, regional disparities and parental rights. Sectorial negotiations include employment conditions, fringe benefits excluding insurance and parental rights, remuneration mechanisms excluding remuneration as such, job security and so on.

The teachers requests include reductions in class size for pre-school groups and a reduction in class size for high school groups at Secondary 3, 4 and 5. The QPAT also wants to see an increase in the number of teachers for students with difficulties, a guarantee of service for special needs students and a conversion of some assigned non-teaching time to work of a personal nature.

The CPNCA replied with a proposal to increase the presence time of teachers in the school or centre from 32 to

35 hours, increase the work time to be assigned by the administration, reduce the number of temporary leaves.

ALL PUBLIC EMPLOYEES

For the intersectorial negotiations, affecting close to 400,000 public sector workers, teachers are asking to recoup their purchasing power lost over the years. However, the Treasury Board has offered a salary increase of 1% for the last three years of the five year agreement, with nothing for the first two years. The yearly salary

increase for the expiring collective agreement was 0.5 %, 0.75%, 1%, 1.75% and 2% for the fifth year.

Average annual inflation between 2010 and 2015 reached 1.55%, according to the Bank of Canada.

"We feel it is imperative to get the message out to the public and parents that many of the issues mentioned above certainly impact the daily life of a teacher but will also impact the daily life of the students in the classroom," concluded Smeltzer.