

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

19 May 2015 – The Ontario Student Trustees' Association - l'Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario (OSTA-AECO) encourages the Ministry of Education, the Ontario Public School Board Association (OPSBA), and the Ontario Secondary School Teacher's Federation (OSSTF) to put students first in coming to an agreement on teacher contracts.

OSTA-AECO has met with all three parties, and appreciates the value they put on student achievement, and student voice in the bargaining process. OPSBA President Michael Barrett said "Our collective agreements must build public confidence by reducing barriers that impede learning conditions in schools and enhance student achievement, learning and well-being,"

Trevor Sookraj, OSTA-AECO President and Peel District School Board Student Trustee, comments "We recognize that collective bargaining can be a tedious process, and we appreciate that OPSBA, OSSTF, and the Ministry of Education have answered student concerns and value our voice. If student well-being is a priority during discussions, we are confident that not only will students return to their classes soon, but also that students will prosper from whatever agreement that three parties come to."

Durham District School Board secondary students enter their 5<sup>th</sup> straight week without class, with Rainbow District School Board secondary students into their 4<sup>th</sup> week, and Peel District School Board secondary students starting their 3<sup>rd</sup> week. No action has been taken against the other four school boards identified in the initial announcement (Ottawa-Carleton, Lakehead, Halton, and Waterloo).

Students are largely confused by why strike action has taken place, and struggle to find reasoning behind issues like classroom caps and seniority hiring practices. The Ministry of Education responded to these concerns, stating that looser classroom caps provide more flexibility to administration in providing students with the courses they need, especially in rural areas where even required courses can be difficult to offer due to low enrolment. Teacher unions argue that classroom caps should not be at the central bargaining table, as the caps will differ from one board to another.

"Our priority during bargaining is the working conditions of our members which translates directly into learning conditions for all students...during this round of bargaining we have been adamant that the recognition of class caps must be maintained and the time teachers have for one on one student assistance cannot be diminished." said Paul Elliott, President of the OSSTF.

In an effort to answer other questions from students, OSTA-AECO is working collaboratively with the Ministry of Education and OSSTF to develop a strike action fact sheet. Some school boards, such as the Peel District School Board, have already answered the call by creating their own electronic strike action fact sheet, actively updating website information and engaging in frequent social media communication with students.

Though many affected students feel unprepared for post-secondary education and future grades, school boards have released online resources on subject matter for self-directed learning, as has the Ministry of Education. The Ministry is also investigating summer preparatory courses offered by universities and colleges, to ensure incoming students are achieving to their full potential.

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