**CUPE SCHOOL SUPPORT STAFF - Amendments in blue, July 13, 2021**

**YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED: BARGAINING, STRIKE MANDATES AND JOB ACTION**

1. **What is a strike mandate?**

A strike mandate gives the union the power to initiate job action if bargaining reaches a dead end, or impasse. It gives direction to the union bargaining committee, by a majority vote of the members.

A strike vote is a legal requirement before a union can go on strike, but it does not mean you must go on strike or take job action immediately. The goal is always to get a fair and reasonable contract settlement.

A strike mandate shows the Employer that members are serious about the union’s key proposals and ready to back up the union bargaining committee with strike action if necessary. By agreeing to a strike mandate soon, we are showing that we want to bargain in good faith – we are providing the Division time to meet with us before we strike.

**2. Are there options others than a strike mandate?**

Without a strike mandate, it will be much harder to achieve fair wages and job protections for all school support staff in Manitoba. CUPE members’ strength comes from our willingness to stand together and demand to be treated fairly, and to back up that demand with the willingness to go on strike.

The other option is to wait and see what the Division decides to do. There is no benefit to the Division to ratify our contract before September. If they can hold off until September, we will likely lose our voice at the bargaining table. If we were to strike after September 1, the law about both sides being required to sit down with an arbitrator will no longer be in place. Bill 16 will revoke that option. At that point, striking would only hurt us, not help us.

1. **Can members give a strike mandate if we have not been to the bargaining table?**

Members can give a strike mandate once bargaining begins. Keep in mind that both the Union and the School Division must bargain in good faith. A proposal was sent to the Division in Spring of 2019. Then the pandemic hit and everything was put on hold.

Union members often take a strike vote when the parties reach an impasse at the bargaining table. In this round of bargaining, there are strategic reasons to seek a strike mandate now. The provincial government has tried to force School Divisions to freeze wages for support staff, even though Teachers have received reasonable wage increases.

**Top 3 Reasons to Approve a Strike Mandate Now**

1. **Equality for School Support Staff:** Teachers have settled their bargaining across the province and established a pattern for general wage increases that CUPE believes support staff also deserve.
2. **Get Ahead of Bill 64:** Bill 64, *The Education Modernization Act*, does away with Anglophone school divisions and will probably result in fewer collective bargaining agreements in the sector. This reduction of the number of contracts or amalgamation of bargaining units would mean that new collective agreements have to be negotiated. Instead of dragging out bargaining to achieve minor changes to language for a contract that will need to be redone in a year or two, you can make wages and job security the priority.
3. **Strength in Numbers:** All CUPE school support staff are without a collective agreement right now. That means we can negotiate simultaneously, with essentially the same demands. We’ve never had as much collective strength to pressure School Divisions and government as we do right now. The possibility of a strike shows union solidarity and makes it clear that CUPE will not back down.
4. **What are the key issues in school support staff bargaining across the province?**

There are 2 major priorities that school sector locals have been discussing for this round of bargaining:

1. **Annual wage increases that match the settlements achieved by Teachers across Manitoba** (1.6%/1.4%/0.5%/COLA, which stands for cost-of-living allowance, an amount based on inflation – the increasing costs of goods and services).
2. **Provisions to improve job security and address amalgamation issues.** Ask your CUPE National Servicing Representative about model language for local proposals.
3. **Does voting in favour of a strike mandate mean we are going on strike?**

A local strike mandate lets your employer know that you are prepared to take strike action if your demands are not met.

It does not mean you are immediately on strike, but the local bargaining committee and Executive Board can call for job action if necessary, including rotating, partial, and full strike action. We are focusing on a rotating strike.

1. **If we go on strike, how can we educate members and build public support?**

CUPE locals in the sector will work with National staff to roll out a public-facing campaign over the summer and during any job actions to educate Manitobans about the importance of school support workers, the status of key issues in contract negotiations, and the reasonableness of our demands. CUPE members can also play an active role in getting the word out to their friends, family, and neighbours.

If you are out on strike, there are some important steps you can take to be effective. CUPE locals can host virtual meetings with members to discuss the importance of joining their fellow CUPE school support workers in demanding equal raises to teachers and improved job security heading into amalgamation.

Any locals on strike can provide updates and ask other CUPE locals, labour organizations, and allies to join them as often as possible on the picket line. This is what we feel will occur since 3 other RETSD locals are bargaining for a new contract now as we are.

1. **How much is CUPE strike pay? Who pays this to members?**

From day one of the job action, maximum strike pay is $300 a week, for a minimum of 20 hours of picketing or completing other assigned duties. The typical strike schedule is 5 days a week, 4 hours per day. Again – if we do end up striking, we are talking of rotating who will strike on what days.

Strike pay comes from CUPE’s National Strike Fund, and you must be on strike to receive it. The local works with their assigned National Representative to apply to the fund and the local is responsible to pay the appropriate amounts to members and track all funds carefully.

Remember, the goal is to get a fair deal for members, not to be on strike. If members make the tough decision to go on strike, it’s important to keep working towards the key priorities and to build support. Locals with members on strike can apply to the National Strike Fund for a strike aversion (prevention) or strike support (awareness and solidarity) campaign.

1. **Does CUPE National provide any strike assistance or cover benefits?**

In addition to strike pay, the CUPE National Strike Fund pays group life and group extended health premiums for members for the whole period of the strike, starting from day one. CUPE coverage does not apply to prepaid benefits premiums.

1. **What can CUPE locals do to ease members’ financial hardship while on strike?**

Locals with financial capacity may decide to provide financial assistance to members on top of the Strike Pay provided by CUPE’s National Strike Fund. Such assistance can either be universal (for all striking members) or can be based on individual hardship. This is up to a vote of local members.

In addition, the local can provide a letter that confirms members are on legal strike. Members can use that letter to request deferred payments on mortgages, loans, credit cards, day care fees, or other obligations during a strike.

1. **Are members eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) if they are on strike during the summer?**

Union members participating in a labour dispute are not generally eligible for EI. Under the rules of the CUPE National Strike Fund, members who are laid off and/or receiving EI are not eligible for strike pay. A local would not normally commence strike action for a group of employees, such as 10-month school workers, who are laid off and collecting EI.

1. **What if some members do not want to go on strike and cross the picket line?**

CUPE encourages all members to respect the democratic decision-making of their local and the sacrifices of their peers by joining the strike. Members who cross the picket line without authorization from CUPE would not be eligible for strike benefits and may also have their membership in the union revoked.