

"A slap in the face" 85% of Prairie Rose support staff in favour of strike mandate

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Some employees of the Prairie Rose School Division have voted to strike before the start of the upcoming school year.

The support teams of the division staff recently held a vote earlier this week, where members were overwhelmingly in support of striking. CUPE Local 4701 president Tracey Stephen explains.

"We also held voting online, so in-person voting tallied 62 people in favour, and seven not. During online voting, we had 31 in favour and nine not," says Stephen. "Right now, the division has been notified of the strike vote, and we are now expecting communication from them shortly."

In total, 85 per cent voted in favour of the strike mandate, and 15 per cent were not in favour. Those taking part are divided into two units, one being educational assistants. Unit B consists of others like librarians, bus drivers, maintenance and IT members.

"We will not come to the table with any proposals. All we want is a four-year agreement of 1.6 per cent, and 1.4 per cent and .5 and cost of living (COLA) built in because we've been without a contract since June of 2018," she says. "They countered with 0 per cent, 0 per cent, .75 per cent and 1per cent."

Around the province, divisions such as the Brandon School Division, custodians and trades at the Winnipeg School Division, custodians, library techs, bus drivers, IT and clerical at the Seven Oaks School Division, and support staff at Turtle Mountain and Park West School Divisions now have strike mandates.

Michelle Salo works as a bus driver within the Prairie Rose Division and has cast her vote. She says a lot of staff are frustrated.

"Everyone I've talked to from work has felt that it was a slap in the face," she says. "I mean, nobody wants to strike. We're just trying to get back to normal from the pandemic. It was looking like a nice bright future, and this wasn't something that we thought we would have to be dealing with."

The Prairie Rose School Division consists of 2,300 students and employs 395 staff members. There are 17 Hutterian schools and ten community schools in the division. Salo talks about some of the impacts children could face if a strike is enacted.

"It's not convenient for most of the parents on my route to drive their students to school. I know they won't be happy with that. The other issue is, will they even be able to attend school when they get there? You're looking at secretaries, librarians and custodial staff, including IT staff (and educational assistants). How is the school going to function without these people?"

Communities affected include St. Laurent, Roland, Miami, Carman, and Elie, among others. Portage Online has requested a statement from the Prairie Rose School Division board of trustees but has yet to receive a comment.