



January 30, 2025

Dear Sturgeon Public School CUPE 4625 Employees,

I wanted to provide you with an update on our ongoing negotiations and share with you the challenges facing SPS. Even with the pressures we face, please know that we have worked tirelessly with CUPE Local 4625 to secure the best possible agreement for you, our valued staff. Our negotiating team has dedicated significant effort to meet your needs, while also ensuring the continued sustainability of staffing levels within our school division into the future. We know that these are uncertain times, and we are committed to standing by you throughout this process.

Since 2021, we have worked collaboratively with CUPE Local 4625 to reach a collective agreement on matters that we heard are important to you. As you know, a third-party mediator was appointed to assist the parties and on September 21, 2024, he issued a recommendation for settlement. The Board of Trustees felt this recommendation met your interests while ensuring we can maintain the staffing levels necessary for a safe and caring learning environment for students; because of this, the Board ratified the independent mediator's recommendations.

SPS was hopeful that the CUPE Local 4625 would also allow you, our employees, the opportunity to vote on this deal as well.

Regrettably, the Provincial CUPE Leadership rejected the offer without allowing you the opportunity to vote on it.

We think it is important that you know that 99% of public sector negotiations during the 2021-2024 period have settled. These settlements included 34 CUPE locals across the Province. Within just the Education Sector, 60 out of 67 agreements have settled for a 2.5% to 3% increase, which is less than the 3.25% recommended by the mediator.

We also want to acknowledge the ongoing financial pressures the Division has been facing, which have been communicated as part of our budget approval process over the past three years. Unfortunately, staffing cuts have already been necessary, with approximately 80 positions reduced last year, and we must cut an additional \$1.8 million for 2025/2026—part of a total \$6.9 million reduction over the next four years. We are deeply concerned that Provincial CUPE Leadership continues to set unreasonable and unprecedented expectations during bargaining, especially when 34 other CUPE Locals across the province have accepted settlements below the one recommended for us. Should CUPE leadership continue to push for salary expectations that far exceed the Division's ability to pay, further staffing cuts will be inevitable.



Despite these significant concerns, we remain committed to reaching a new collective agreement.

It is with this in mind that we wanted to share with you that we have extended an invitation to CUPE Local 4625 to return to the bargaining table on February 13, 2025. Thankfully, our invitation has been accepted. We are hopeful to make an offer that will settle the strike so you can return to the work we know you love.

Lastly, we want to clarify some of the misinformation we understand has been communicated by Provincial CUPE Leadership about your rights during a strike:

**1. Is it legal to cross a picket line and return to work with the employer?**

- a. Yes. Employees can decide to return to work at any time. There is no law or legal requirement that prevents an employee from crossing a picket line and engaging in work with the employer during a strike.

**2. Will I lose my job once the strike is over if I cross the picket line because the union says I will no longer be 'in good standing'?**

- a. No. You will not lose your job if you cross the picket line, but the Union may discourage you from working by threatening fines or imposing discipline.
- b. CUPE is prohibited by law from doing anything that would affect your employment, security and promotional opportunities if you decide to work.

**3. Can a union impose a fine or punish its members?**

- a. We expect that CUPE's constitution allows for fines. If you are not a member of CUPE, you are in no way bound by their constitution and no action of any kind purporting to fine you can be taken.
- b. CUPE cannot collect fines. This position has been made clear in a variety of cases across Canada. So, what this practically means, is that they can "fine" you, but they have no way to collect that fine.

**4. The union has told us that anyone who crosses the picket line will have their union dues deducted and the union will use that information to identify picket line crossers. Is that the case?**

- a. No, the Employer will not deduct union dues from the pay of employees who decide to cross the picket line and work for us.

We know that whatever decision you make needs to be right for you and your family, and what you choose as the right path for you may be different from what is right for other employees. The decision to cross the picket line is a personal one, and we respect the choices you make.

Please visit our website for regularly updated job action information, along with budget information and answers to other frequently asked questions.

Sincerely,



Shawna Warren M.Ed.  
Superintendent