

## **Goal is to preserve and enhance services for students, say education workers heading into bargaining**

**TORONTO, ON** – As school boards across Ontario suffer deep and destructive cuts at the hands of the provincial government, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), representing 55,000 education workers, is heading to the bargaining table. But as they give notice to bargain, they will also be giving notice to their counterparts in negotiations: CUPE will bargain to ensure services for students in Ontario’s public education system are high quality, publicly funded and publicly delivered.

“CUPE takes a different approach to bargaining. It’s a tool we use to secure and improve the services that students, families and teachers rely on and that CUPE members provide,” said Laura Walton, president of the Ontario School Board Council of Unions (OSBCU), CUPE’s provincially designated bargaining agent. “And with services under threat from this government’s cuts to education, our negotiations take on special significance as a means of defending what’s under attack.”

Walton described negotiations as “an opportunity to address the effect of cuts on children with special needs, when there is already a shortage of education assistants; or the ways that everyone’s health will be affected if there aren’t enough custodians to keep Ontario schools clean and safe.”

“Sitting at the table with representatives from government and school boards, we can demonstrate the ways that cuts to education funding will intensify problems of recruitment and retention of qualified staff. We can demonstrate with hard numbers that cutting maintenance only increases the cost of fixing our schools, which already face a \$15 billion backlog of repairs.”

CUPE represents over 60 percent of education workers in Ontario and has members in 63 school boards and one school authority. Over 70 percent of its members are women, who bear the brunt of cuts to education through layoffs, eliminating jobs, and the practice of “gapping” – that is, staffing at levels lower than required to provide high-quality services.

The union has been actively engaging parents, community allies and other education unions around the issues of government cuts to education funding and how they will affect services in schools.

“Our goal for bargaining is to produce improvements in services in our public education system – improvements that will benefit Ontario students, their families, and our communities,” concluded Walton.

CUPE’s Ontario School Board Council of Unions represents 55,000 education workers in public, Catholic, French and English school boards. It is part Ontario’s largest union, CUPE Ontario, which has 270,000 workers in every community in the province.