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December 31, 2020

As we near the end of this tumultuous year, I wanted to provide an update on the work that we have undertaken over the past week because of the Ministry Announcement.

Child care

We have reached out numerous times to the Ministry of Education – they are responsible for both K-12 and child care directives. The last email received a script response similar to that a member of the public would have received. We also reached out to the Assistant Deputy Minister directly, a pathway we reserve for extraordinary situations. We were able to talk to the ADM for about a half hour today – we explained that we now have members who are being told they cannot be accommodated for child care needs (much due to the government oversight to include us as a sector requiring care). At this time the government is not willing to budge. We shared that we feel that this is a dangerous decision – many of our members are at a breaking point – we do foresee members seeking medical stress leave as a result and there is simply not enough staff to fill spaces. We will be following up with media but also urge members to reach out with their concerns to their MPP. We highlighted that should this lockdown be extended, this oversight must be considered and rectified.

Pandemic Pay

We have heard that members feel that work at schools during the period of grey lockdown and virtual learning should qualify for pandemic pay. We have raised this with the government who provided the following response – those classifications who have receive(d) pandemic pay are primarily in residential settings (meaning no option of working virtually) and make considerably less than our education workers. When pressed further about this issue, we were reminded that all our permanent members will be brought back from layoff and will continue to be paid regardless of work performed. The ongoing employment and wages of our members remain our number one priority. Our members simply cannot afford to go without wages. To that end we will continue to advocate to ensure all members are able to maintain meaningful employment.

Return to School

We are hearing a variety of scenarios from across the province as school boards prepare to return to school following the winter break. As we have seen throughout the pandemic, the provincial government has abdicated their role to the local school board level. It is our understanding that at this time custodial and maintenance folks will be at work, some EAs may need to be at the schools dependent on special education needs and folks that are unable to work virtually may be accommodated in school buildings. However, the extent of who is returning to schools and when, varies across the province.



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We thank all our local leaders who have taken time away from their family and friends over the winter break to advocate for their members at a local level.

Health and Safety

A key piece as we move forward is the knowledge that this is not the lockdown of March 2020. The government has imposed the public health measure of grey zone on the entire province for a period. Normally, in grey zones, schools would be open, during this time the school will be closed for public access. Naturally, this situation has brought forth many concerns by members regarding their health and safety should they be required to be on site in a school. We urge members to remember that the same health and safety rules apply January 4th as they did on December 18th when members were last at work. While the reduction in staff present at the schools should allow for easier social distancing, it is important to note that if there are concerns, that these concerns must be addressed to the worker's supervisors.

While it appears that the government yet again undervalues the work that we do, please rest assured that we continue to advocate for all our members with the government and the community. To that end we would appreciate if you could complete a quick survey to allow us to get a sense of what is happening out in the school boards. Please complete as soon as you can – we will share results Monday January 4th, 2021

The link to the survey is here: <https://forms.gle/fqfnJMnqwaDCkYcy9>

In Solidarity,

Laura Walton

President

OSBCU
