

December 21, 2021

Letter sent to DDSB Trustees

Dear ,

I/we are representatives of Local 218 of the Canadian Union of Public Employees and we write on behalf of our members who are education workers at Durham District School Board.

CUPE Local 218 members are Custodians, Maintenance staff, Educational Assistants, Outdoor Education Instructors, Clerical staff, Continuing Education instructors, and IT technicians. In short, we are the people who make schools work.

We write with concerns that you may not have heard before from the perspective of education workers, but we believe they are concerns you will share. I/we outline them below in the hope that action can be taken in both the short- and long-term to resolve these issues.

Staffing: A lack of funding, lack of fulltime Permanent staff, inappropriate use of staff, excessive workload and worker burnout are all problems that prevent education workers from providing the support and services that students deserve.

Budget: When the board finally posted their financial statements in November, we were shocked to see that the DDSB reported a surplus of \$32 million. With not back filling Educational Assistants and Custodial staff, the DDSB has been able to achieve this surplus on the backs of their employees. These are dollars that could have and should have been invested in staffing to support services for students. For example, the DDSB custodial management claims there is no money to hire, yet its financial statement indicates otherwise. There is a serious need for additional Educational Assistants in the work place which would benefit the health and safety of students and employees.

Excessive workloads: In DDSB schools, one custodian is doing the job of two, in addition to all the extra cleaning, disinfecting and sanitizing required as part of COVID prevention. Custodians are routinely denied vacation because of staff shortages and heavy workloads leading to burnout.

Unqualified staff: the board is hiring unqualified “emergency assistants” to substitute for trained, qualified Educational Assistants (EAs). Lunchroom supervisors are standing in for EAs, despite lacking Behavior Management Systems training, which is required for EAs. Needless to say, school boards open themselves up to liability by supplying this discount education by following these hiring practices.

Violence in schools: Violence against education workers is a long-standing problem, and was most recently documented in the report *In Harm's Way* by researchers from the University of Ottawa. At DDSB, staff continue to be verbally and physically attacked and injured by students and practices like “in-school suspensions” are making the problem worse. CUPE 218 has also tracked DDSB’s Violent Incident Reports from September to December 2021 and has found a 30% increase in reports. In three months, there have been over 860 Violent Incidents Reports submitted.

Labour Relations: Labour management relations are at an all-time low at the board. Instead of resolving grievances, many grievances are being moved to arbitration at major cost to both the board and the union.

Toxic Work Environment: We are seeing an increase of aggressive supervision especially in the custodial department. The morale is at an all-time low. I have reached out numerous times to the DDSB's superintendents with my concerns and have seen no changes, which leads us to bring this to your attention.

Health and safety: Understaffing, underfunding, baseline PPE and workplace violence leave CUPE education workers at risk, while our employer is seemingly unwilling to take measures to protect them. The board has an alarming number of employees on LTD and WSIB. The Board's general disregard for health and safety is a poor example to staff and students.

Linda, I hope that, rather than view this letter as a laundry list of complaints, you will take the opportunity to examine the concerns we raise in the light of their impact on education workers, but on the quality of education that students receive in DDSB schools. We are sure that you, like us, don't believe that students should have to settle for a bargain education supported by discount services.

DDSB should be investing in the education services that ensure a high-quality education for students in safe, well supported schools. We hope to meet with you to discuss the ways that CUPE and DDSB trustees can make them happen and we will contact you for a meeting at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Dennis Gibbs

President, CUPE 218
