

NEWS RELEASE

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STF: Government Must Put Commitment in the Contract

SASKATOON – The Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation won't return to the bargaining table or pause job action until the provincial government is willing to embed its most recent promises around class size and complexity into the body of a new provincial collective agreement.

"Saskatchewan teachers have made it clear that predictable, sustainable funding to address classroom size and complexity is their priority," says STF President Samantha Becotte. "Wednesday's surprise announcement by Premier Scott Moe continues this government's patchwork approach to funding education. Any funding must be accompanied by a long-term commitment and assurances that these funds will be directed to supports for classrooms. This is an attempt to sideline bargaining and avoid that commitment to students.

"This government has a long history of making and breaking promises when it comes to funding education. This time, the Premier and Education Minister must be accountable for commitments made to students and families. That's why teachers insist that any measures to address class size and complexity be included in a provincewide collective agreement – this is the only way to ensure government will live up to its word."

Instead of negotiating in good faith with teachers, Premier Moe has resorted to playing political games with education as government faces a wave of public pressure and opposition to government bargaining tactics. Wednesday's unveiling of education budget items a full two weeks ahead of the actual budget day is just the latest unprecedented stunt.

“This government has had to be pushed into responding to the needs of students,” says Becotte. “It took more than 3,500 people rallying on the steps of the legislature last April for government to find additional dollars for education. Since then, there have been mini rallies across the province, weeks of job action by teachers and the disruption of the lives of students and families – but government’s response has been delays, denial and distraction. Instead of face-to-face engagement at the bargaining table, it makes ad-hoc funding announcements on social media and billboards. Students and families deserve better.”

The STF is also concerned about documents showing the Ministry of Education and provincial leadership of the Saskatchewan School Boards Association are engaging in secret talks outside of the collective bargaining process to formulate a memorandum of understanding around class complexity. Funding would be subject to budgetary consideration, which means it could change on a whim. Local school boards had only 24 hours to review the proposal and indicate their support to the Minister, which is a poor approach to system planning.

“We are at a crucial point for the future of education in Saskatchewan. Teachers have expressed concern about class complexity for most of a decade, but the SSBA has been ineffective at finding a solution through its advocacy. Agreements that emerge from secret meetings are an attempt by government to sideline teachers and co-opt the SSBA. If government would bring its proposals to the bargaining table instead of regularly trying to work outside of negotiations, an agreement could be quickly concluded,” Becotte says.

Teachers know that job action has been difficult for many students and families; however, government’s continued unwillingness to sit down at the table and negotiate on priority issues has left the Federation with no other option than escalation of job action.

“The STF has heard and appreciates the support of parents, caregivers and students from across the province. Teachers want to be in classrooms and supporting students; we don’t want to be on the picket lines or withdrawing voluntary and extracurricular services,” Becotte says. “We will continue our fight until government provides a guarantee within the collective agreement to properly fund education.”

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