



## Board Meeting Trustee Commentary

May 3, 2016

### At the May 2016 Board Meeting, Rainy River District School Board Vice-Chair, Michael Lewis's, statement regarding OSSTF strike action

OSSTF, the union that represents our local high school teachers, has chosen to add strike days to its negotiation strategy. Strike days will do nothing to enhance the negotiation process but they do hurt the students, both their in-class and extra-curricular activities. Students are held to ransom, while the union tries to garner support and pressure from parents and others to get the Board to give in to the union's remaining requests.

So why are we at this point? On April 12, OSSTF walked away from the negotiations, even though the following day was also scheduled for bargaining. The Board was, and is, willing to meet to bargain. All the issues left are local issues put on the table by the union. Contrary to the opinion of some, the Board has no issues on the table. The Board has offered to put the OSSTF issues before an arbitrator; the union has refused.

The Board is being firm on two particular issues remaining because they can negatively affect students and programs in our two small high schools. It is difficult enough now under the current collective agreement, and Ministry of Education requirements, to provide programming for the students, without further restricting the ability of administration to staff the high schools in Atikokan and Rainy River.

Another issue requires the Board to alter some timelines within the Teacher Performance Appraisal process, when adequate timelines are already set by the Ministry of Education through regulation.

Another issue requires the Board to pay for a portion of a union leader's salary for full-time union work. Many leaders in organized labour would join the Board in having concerns about that proposal.

Two other issues are agreed in content and context, and require only agreement on timing and dates.

The final issue asks the Board to put into the collective agreement, wording that would govern a board attendance management program that does not exist.

For those requests and the Board's responses to those requests, the high school students in the Rainy River District School Board are being held to ransom through the strike action of their teachers. The union has an obligation to advocate for its members, the teachers, but as teachers they also have an obligation to look to the best interests of students.

I know teachers care about their students and their schooling, but doubt is now being spread by using a strike as a negotiating tactic.

Mission: *"Together, we empower all students to believe in themselves, to achieve, and to dream."*

Vision: *"The Rainy River District School Board is an innovative community, nurturing hearts and minds, to build a foundation for tomorrow, today."*

*This publication is available in accessible formats upon request.*