

Teachers refuse to administer EQAO test in protest of education cuts



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By Nate Smelle

Hastings-Prince Edward District School Board recently announced it had cancelled the Grade 9 math test conducted on behalf of the Education Quality and Accountability Office scheduled for Monday, Jan. 13. The school board made the decision in response to the provincial government's ongoing labour dispute with high school teachers represented by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. Following the OSSTF's announcement that teachers would not be participating in the province-wide testing HPEDSB's communications manager Kerry Donnell indicated that school boards across the province received word from the Ministry of Education that the administration of the Grade 9 EQAO math test would be a 'board-based decision.' 'At HPEDSB, the assessment will not be administered, meaning that students will not be required to complete it at this time,' said Donnell. 'This is in light of the current labour situation with members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation. Under the terms of the job action, OSSTF members may not participate in EQAO preparation or testing.' Donnell advises any students, parents or guardians with questions about the cancellation of the test to contact their school's principal. Although the effectiveness and necessity of EQAO testing has been called into question by teachers and education workers for years, Minister of Education Stephen Lecce defended the tests in a statement issued on Jan. 8, stating 'The EQAO Grade 9 math test provides valuable information to students, families, and the province about how students are performing in critical math skills and concepts. It also supports improved teaching and learning. It should not be in jeopardy for our students.' OSSTF District 29 president Scott Marshall has a different assessment of EQAO testing than Lecce. Pointing out the futility of the EQAO tests, Marshall said 'EQAO testing simply tells teachers, parents, and students what we already know. We have been proposing for years better ways to use the millions spent on this political tool.' Characterizing the teachers refusal to administer the EQAO test, and the union's legal job action as 'unfair' and 'undermining student success,' Lecce accused teachers of 'jeopardizing the learning experience of Ontario's future leaders.' If the Ford government was seriously 'focused on developing the skills our students need to succeed in the classroom and in the jobs of the future,' as stated by Lecce, Marshall said the province would be willing to address the key issues on the table for teachers 'larger class sizes, mandatory e-learning, teaching job losses, and less course options for students. 'They keep wanting to claim that it is the union folks in charge of everything but not when you look at the level of engagement and level of support from our members, but that's just not true,' explained Marshall. 'There was a vote for our member to support the leadership during the strike votes, and in our area 94 per cent voted in favour. The government narrative is just not truthful and they continue to try and look for traction with it, and that speaks for itself. They are cutting teaching positions and raising class sizes. E-Learning is really concerning too because it really is a step towards privatization. They won't admit that, but when they run it centrally, and that's what they are going to do, they are going to farm out learning to some central consortium.' Last week, Marshall said the OSSTF offered to cancel its planned full withdrawal of services in select boards if the government would agree to returning staffing levels to those in 2018/2019

(adjusted for student enrollment changes), however the government refused. While high school teachers throughout Ontario continue to fight the Ford government's cuts and the impact they will have on students and the education system, the province is also declaring that it is looking out for the interests of students. Highlighting how the provincial government refuses to release the findings from a survey of parents it conducted last spring, Marshall said it appears the government's own priorities take priority over the educational needs of the students. "They said they did the largest survey ever with parents, yet they have refused to release the results," said Marshall. "It has been leaked that the results show that parents do not support an increase in class sizes. So the government isn't being honest when they say they are 'setting students up for success' because they have gone against what the parents have said very clearly to them. I think it is about ideology now, and I don't think they value public education. I think they are cutting public education because they don't see the net value to our communities." Until progress is made at the bargaining table, Marshall indicated that the OSSTF will continue its withdrawal of certain services and weekly rotating strikes in select school boards throughout the province.

UPDATE:

On Tuesday, Jan. 21 there will be a one-day strike at secondary schools by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation teachers at all seven HPEDSB secondary schools (one is Grades K-12; four are Grades 7-12; two are Grades 9-12)

- All school activities, including field trips and co-op placements, are cancelled for the day. Any students in Grades 9-12 who show up at school or co-op placements will be redirected home
- Updates posted on our website at www.HPEschools.ca > Labour updates
- Parents/guardians should contact their child's school with any questions