

Minister 'disappointed'? CUPE members may strike again

The Province, and particularly Education Minister Stephen Lecce, are disappointed that CUPE members may be heading towards a strike. "We are disappointed that after only a few short days back at the table, students may be forced out of the classroom because CUPE has made the decision to strike. The government offered CUPE more money in salaries, while maintaining their generous pension, benefits and sick leave program, and it is unfair that they are walking out on students and their parents, many of whom are frontline health care workers," Lecce said. "Following two years of pandemic disruptions, students need to be in class learning. That's where they deserve to be. We will remain at the table and ready to land a fair deal that invests more in lower income workers and most importantly, keeps kids in class. "Until we can reach an agreement, we know this will be difficult for many parents with their children learning at home. We also recognize it is critical that health care and licenced child care workers can continue to do their jobs. That's why our government will provide these workers who may not be able to support their child's learning at home with access to free care for elementary school children starting Monday, Nov. 21, and for the duration of CUPE's labour disruption in the 2022-2023 school year. "Eligible health care workers includes but is not limited to, doctors, nurses, personal support workers, other health care providers and those who work in hospitals, long-term care, retirement homes, and applicable congregate care settings. Staff in licensed child care settings, both homes and centres, are also eligible. Minister Lecce has also taken action to ensure more parents can access child care support they may need over this period. That's why regulatory and policy changes have now been made so that care can be provided by a variety of different programs, like day camps and recreation programs or existing licensed child care programs that still have available spaces. Parents and guardians with school-aged children and looking to access a no-cost program should contact their local service system manager for information on availability, program locations and registration. "As we look to help more families during these labour disruptions, we are also ensuring that licensed before- and after-school programs who choose to do so can easily pivot to full-day programs, expediting licence revision requests and relocation approvals to make it easier for licensed programs to expand and serve more children and stay open, and ensuring camps are permitted to operate on school days when schools are closed for in-person learning. "We remain on the side of all parents who just want to see their children in the classroom learning. We'll continue to be at the table to make that happen."