



Update for February 26th, 2021

Wow, February is gone and March begins next week – it seems like this month just flew by! Hopefully all the snow came down this month and we can put the shovels and salt away for March and just enjoy cleaner halls and stairwells for a while!

New Screening Questions - Late last week, the province announced new screening questions relating to members of your household. The link to the screening tool remains the same at <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/> and must be completed before attending work each day. Please answer the questions honestly. If you fail the screening for any reason, you must enter Covid-80. Kelly from the Wellness Team will be in touch with you by HWDSB email that day to ask some follow up questions which also need to be answered to determine next steps.

If you don't have access to the screening tool at home, please print a copy at work from here [COVID 19 Printable Screening](#) and keep it at home to use each day.

Grounds Logs Information – At the bottom of your grounds logs that are completed daily, there is a box where you can add comments or information. This is very helpful to use when we have snow overnight and through the day. Each year, the HWDSB has numerous lawsuits against them for slip and fall incidents. We have had caretaking staff interviewed by lawyers about the snow clearing that was done on days in question. It's helpful to make simple notes on your logs about your activity – for example, "snow shoveled and walkways salted by 7:50 am – will monitor through the day and clear as necessary". If you go out again and check, make a note on the log about the time and what was accomplished. Even for afternoon staff – if you find yourself getting lots of snow after you come into work, make note of any snow clearing or salting you do on afternoons as a bit of protection for yourself. To be clear, it's not members that face the lawsuits, it's the HWDSB, but as the workers responsible for the snow clearing, there are times when there are questions we have to answer about what we did or didn't do on certain days.

Zoom Meetings – Last weekend, we had our first monthly meeting using the Zoom meeting software. The meeting went well with just a few hiccups, which is to be expected for our first use. I know things will get smoother as time goes on and we use it more and get more comfortable with the controls and all the things we can do with it. This is part of our new communications strategy which includes a new website and email system which we started using last week and how this update was sent to you today – to your personal emails for your convenience. There was a motion made and passed at our meeting to cease our business relationship with Union Strategies who has looked after our emails and the CUPE 4153 website for a couple years now. There is quite a bit of savings for the local in bringing things back under our own control and there's quite a few advantages for us as well – which we can discuss at our March members meeting. If you have a computer at home or smartphone, please install the Zoom software or app to make joining and participating in any meetings we have moving forward very easy for you.

Staff Relations Meeting on Monday – On Monday morning (what a great way to start the week LOL) we had our monthly staff relations meeting with management to discuss various issues. Myself, Mark L, Patrick C and Darlene were present along with Jamie Nunn, Bob Avery, David Anderson and Dan Rutherford for the employer. We had questions around the call-outs for snow removal last week and misinformation given by supervisors, supervisor conduct in general, maintenance vehicles and a couple other issues. I made it very clear in the meeting that there is a growing frustration with certain supervisors and how they treat staff and like to toss around the "Bob said" card. It is becoming very clear that there are a few supervisors who like to take liberties with what they say to staff, what they direct them to do and what they think they can get away with. I will be having a follow up meeting (hasn't been scheduled yet) with Bob and his boss about incidents involving these supervisors and how we expect there to be a common expectation on how supervisors act no matter which section of the city you work in.

How To Get In Touch - As of last week, the State of Emergency in Ontario has been lifted and we're back to a Rubik's Cube of color coded zones that nobody really understands. However, it does mean that our extraordinary office administrator Janna is in person again. If you have an issue that requires an in person visit to our office – please call ahead to make sure someone will be there. Sanitizing your hands will be required when you enter the office and a face covering when social distancing cannot be maintained is mandatory. Please do not come to the office if you are not feeling well or have any Covid related symptoms. For most issues, contacting the office by phone or email can resolve things and you can reach the office at 905-544-7733 or by email to cupelocal4153@bellnet.ca

New Schools, New Schedules – If you posted into one of the schools that opened in January and have concerns about the schedules – please contact Mark Lachowicz or Dave Winger. Often times once a new school opens, the schedules do need to be adjusted once things are up and running normally and now would be a good time to make sure things are in place for all our members in those positions.

Calling In, Leaving During Shift - Currently, there is no clause in the collective agreement about calling in a certain amount of time ahead of your shift. We have had members call in 10 minutes before their start time and we've had members call in after their start time. Out of respect for your co-workers, if you are unable to attend work due to illness or a failed Covid screening – please log your absence as much ahead of time as possible to give Eva a chance to arrange coverage and not leave your building short handed.

If you need to leave during your shift due to an illness or emergency – you need to contact your supervisor on days or afternoons and let them know. Even something as simple as forgetting your lunch and needing to go grab something from the nearest drive thru – pick up a phone and call them to make them aware. We are paid for our full shifts and are expected to be on site for the full shift.

What's Up With Coverage? - In between December 18th and February 8th, our shifts were covered pretty well if there was an absence. Casuals were working and not sitting at home unpaid and we were doing ok. Then kids came back into the building and last week we got the new screening tool from the province. Our low absence rate has now gotten higher. A higher daily absence rate means more positions to cover and some days, there simply aren't enough casuals to cover all the vacant positions. This week, I believe we've been at about a –10 to –15 position per day, meaning we're short 10 to 15 casuals to cover all vacancies. At that point, it's up to the employer if they want to cover those positions with overtime, or simply have us do the best we can with the time we have. A lot of this has to do with the individual area supervisor and their opinion of what the needs of the school are and general conditions. If you are finding that you are short on afternoons for more than a day or two and are having trouble keeping up and maintaining a clean and disinfected school – you should be talking with your supervisor about either having overtime approved to bring conditions back up – or asking that they send someone to cover the vacancy to have the job done properly. If neither option is addressed, please let a steward or Executive member know the dates you've been short so we can dig into the situation further for you and your co-workers.

I'm very proud of the work all our members are doing every day to keep the schools open, safe, disinfected and clean. This past year has been an enormous challenge for all of us and we have overcome some substantial hurdles and challenges. We are the ones keeping the schools open. Students and staff fail screenings and still enter the buildings. If it wasn't for us doing our jobs, the transmission rate in schools would be exponentially higher. We do the work that is vital to the system and allows everyone else to do their jobs with confidence and safety.

Cheers,

Blake