



Update for March 12th, 2021

Well, normally I'd be wishing a bunch of you a happy March Break next week and telling you to enjoy your time away somewhere warm and sunny with little umbrella drinks on a beach. But, we all know that ain't gonna be happening anytime soon. So, for now we will just have to enjoy 10-15 degree days with some nice sunshine and place our bets on whether another snowstorm will hit us at some point before the end of April!

Employee Assistance Program – Yesterday marked a year since the announcement of the Covid 19 pandemic. It's been a roller coaster ride for everyone the world over. Mental health issues have surged and almost everyone has been affected in a negative way from isolation, deaths of family & friends and other aspects of the pandemic. While I firmly believe that members of our local look out for each other and come together in times of crisis, there are still a number of people that feel that if you need to talk to someone about your problems, frustrations or situations that you're weak or fragile. Nothing can be further from the truth.

Many years ago during my separation and divorce I went through a very dark time and it was one of our supervisors that gave me a card for what was then Hurst Place and encouraged me to call them and talk to someone. That card sat on my hall table for about a week before I found the strength to pick the phone up and call them. For the next year I went and talked to someone every two weeks, did the reading that was suggested and was open and honest about my situation and feelings. Slowly but surely things started to turn around. It's a process and doesn't happen overnight. If that supervisor hadn't taken the time to talk to me and show concern, I wouldn't be employed by the board anymore. I would've let my anger loose in the workplace and been shown the door for my actions. I don't share this except to say help is available. People who are trained to help with financial, marital, family and personal issues are available to all of you as employees and nobody from the board knows that you're in contact with them or what you're talking about – it's all 100% confidential. Mental health is not a laughing matter. Mental health is not something to be ashamed of. Mental health is just as serious as any other physical injury. I wouldn't dream of trying to fix my own broken leg, so why would I think I can just 'fix' my own mental health issues. If you or a member of your family is in need of assistance – day or night – the LifeWorks program is available. The full contact information for LifeWorks will be included at the end of this update.

Pictures for the website – If you have a good picture of our members at your school and want to have us use it for the website, please email it to Janna at our office – cupelocal4153@bellnet.ca. Pictures of our members doing their work, wiping touchpoints, disinfecting desks, mopping floors, working on boilers, changing valves or anything else we do or just posing in front of your school sign (safely distanced and masked up) are all welcome!

Funding Cuts and Job Losses – Late last week, news broke about a memo from the Ministry of Education to school boards warning about funding cuts for the 2021-2022 school year. The memo was dated from the week before. The complete memo can be found here https://efis.fma.csc.gov.on.ca/faab/Memos/B2021/B04_EN.pdf

Right now, we have no idea about how any potential funding cuts may affect our members as the funding will be announced in the provincial budget which “should” come in the next 4 weeks. But, if you follow what comes out of Queen’s Park, this is how they do things. They leak a bit of information to test public reactions and go from there to see if they think it will negatively affect their approval ratings or not. I fully expect that there will be cuts. We knew last year that the funding for the 24 enhanced cleaner positions was only temporary until the end of August of this year. My hope is that when the budget is announced that the rest of our FTE positions (permanent, posted positions) will be left untouched and status quo. We will still need casuals to cover for absences and we’re hopeful that enough casuals will still have enough work to make it worth their while to stay employed with the board. It’s a tricky situation that has it’s ups and downs. If lots of people are absent, we run out of casuals and schools are short. If not many people are absent, schools are fully staffed and casuals sit home with no work available. There is no perfect balance between the two. When the provincial budget is announced, I’m sure that OSBCU and CUPE will go over the Education part with a fine tooth comb within a few days and we’ll be advised on how much of an impact we should be expecting.

Support Our Schools Campaign – If you haven’t done so already, please make the time to visit <https://www.supportourschools.ca/> and sign the letter to protect the education funding in Ontario. We are going to be dealing with Covid related issues in schools for quite some time to come. This isn’t going away soon and we all know it. Unless all staff and students are vaccinated before September – there will continue to be lingering issues in the schools and proper funding for PPE, supplies and staff is going to be needed. We are encouraging you to share this with family and friends on social media and ask them to get involved too – it only takes a minute or two!

Snow Clearing Maps – this is for all members, but especially for all head caretakers – please check your snow clearing maps on eBase and make sure they are correct. This is important for anyone filling in for an absence that may need to refer to the maps for direction on shoveling or snow blowing.

Enhanced Cleaners – Behind the scenes, this was an interesting week for the role of enhanced cleaners. What all started out as a principal overstepping their role and demanding extra work be done by the enhanced cleaner at their school quickly turned into a much bigger issue. As you all know, Bob Avery sent an email out on Tuesday about enhanced duties when schools have a symptomatic student. That was countered by a lengthy email from myself to a number of senior managers for the board stating my complete opposition to the change and questioning whether it was being driven by political issues or actual direction from Hamilton Public Health. Then there was a follow up email from Bob reversing the previous email. Bob did call me and said that the HWDSB Covid Team headed by Matthew Kwan and Superintendent Sharon Stephanian would be meeting to clarify the messaging sent to principals and caretaking. Apparently we've had principals doing things differently across the system since the revised messaging went out months ago about symptomatic students. Our position right now is this :

When a student is symptomatic at school – that student is sent to the isolation room to be picked up by caregivers. The student's desk, chair and all touchpoints on the way out of the room are to be disinfected by caretaking staff. Once the student has been picked up, the isolation room is disinfected as well.

When a student is symptomatic AND there is a bodily fluids spill (vomit, feces, etc.) then the entire class is evacuated to another space and the classroom receives a full clean – desks, chairs, sinks, soap dispensers, paper towel dispensers, floor, etc. The students and teacher remain outside the classroom until the room is ready again (floor is dry, desks are dry, etc.)

Enhanced cleaners DO NOT clean classroom desks during the day – the board has directed teaching staff to disinfect their classrooms (or assign a 'responsible' student) once per day during the instructional hours. The role of enhanced cleaners is to consistently disinfect touchpoints throughout the school and attend to classroom and isolation room disinfection calls.

If and when any of these procedures change, communication in black and white will come from the employer and/or the local on the expectations for enhanced cleaning staff.

Member Information Accuracy – Earlier this week, I went online to check my OMERS account for pension info. To my complete and utter surprise, I found out that the beneficiary information I had on file with them listed an ex girlfriend from about 7 years ago as being entitled to my pension in case something happened to me. I'm sure you can imagine the look on my face when I saw that pop up on the screen. Life lesson for me. It's very important to keep your information updated. From your pension info to your life insurance info to any other place you may have information stored that could be important. For instance, our union office. We need to have your current information on file. Address, email, phone number (cell or home) are very helpful in making sure we can contact you for updates, upcoming votes and any other important information. If you want to check and make sure we have your current and correct info, give Janna a call or email at the numbers listed on the bottom of the page or check out how to contact the office at our new web page at www.cupe4153.ca

New CUPE National Rep – As of March 1st, our rep from CUPE National has changed due to a leave of absence taken by Brother Graham Marquette. Carlos Capurro will be assisting us in Graham’s absence and we have welcomed him and brought him up to speed on a number of our issues already. I met Carlos at a conference before Covid took over and have kept in touch with him and picked his brain for advice since meeting him. He’s from the Toronto School Board local and he’s a very knowledgeable and helpful guy with a very strong background in Workplace Injuries and Return to Work issues. We are happy to have his advice and experience behind us when needed to deal with the employer on various issues.

School Caretaking Phones - For health and safety reasons after a very nasty incident a few years ago with one of our members that ended up with the employer being issued orders from the Ministry of Labor to provide “immediate access to emergency services”, the employer decided that providing the ability of each caretaking staff to call 911 if needed while working could be accomplished by purchasing approximately an extra 170 cell phones throughout the system. These phones were delivered and assigned to each school and should still be in place today. This is something that was fought for and should not be taken lightly. There needs to be enough caretaking phones on hand that anyone working at any time can have their own. If this isn’t the case at your school and one or more of the extra phones isn’t working – this needs to be reported to your supervisor as a health and safety concern. In case of an emergency, the phone could be the difference between being rescued from a slip and fall, medical episode or worse. These phones are NOT to be taken home and used as your own personal phone.

I’m blown away each week by the effort, attention and care our members put into the jobs we do – usually with very little thanks from anyone above us on the corporate ladder that we have contact with. Throughout the past year, we have overcome things that I wondered if we would get through. We’ve grown together as a local and we’re stronger for it. We’ve been thrown curveballs and hit them out of the park and celebrated amongst ourselves. Is everything sunshine and roses? Not a chance. I do know as the guy leading us right now – I have 100% confidence in our ability to keep on doing the invaluable work we do, keeping people safe each and every day and keep a positive attitude while doing it. You’re all rockstars in my books!

Cheers,

Blake

DATE: September 4, 2020

TO: All Employees

FROM: Jamie Nunn, Superintendent of Human Resource Services
Lori Steacy, Manager, Employee Support and Wellness

RE: Lifeworks – Employee Assistance Program

We would like to take this opportunity to remind you that all HWDSB employees and their dependents have access to **LifeWorks** – a confidential Employee Assistance Program (also known as an EAP) and innovative well-being resource. **LifeWorks** is a benefit provided by HWDSB at no additional cost to you. LifeWorks is available any time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with support for your mental, physical, social, and financial well-being. The service includes:

- 24/7 access to qualified advisors for expert advice, information, and resources related to work, life, family, health, money, and everything in between
- referrals to counselling
- connections to community supports and organizations
- a secure online platform (login.lifeworks.com) full of practical well-being content
- free mobile app for iOS or Android

There are three ways to connect with LifeWorks:

1. **By mobile app:** The app is the best way to keep **LifeWorks** with you on the go, wherever you go! Available on the APP Store at <https://apps.apple.com/gb/app/workangel/id662088737>.
2. **Online resources:** Available at www.lifeworks.com – new employees will receive an invitation by email to enrol.
3. **By toll-free number 1-888-521-8300**, 24/7, whenever you like, as often as you like. A professional advisor can provide expert guidance and resources to assist you with a wide range of issues, such as:
 - **Life:** Stress/Overload, Anxiety, Depression, Grief/Loss, Community Resources
 - **Family:** Parenting, Separation/Divorce, Blended Families, Caring for Older Adults, Education
 - **Money:** Saving/Investing, Debt Management, Estate Planning/Wills, Home Buying/Renting
 - **Work:** Work Relationships, Job Stress/Burnout, Managing People
 - **Health:** Fitness/Nutrition, Sleep, Addiction/Recovery, Smoking Cessation, Alternative Health

If you have any questions about how to use **LifeWorks**, please contact: **Lori Steacy, Manager, Employee Support and Wellness.**