



Update for April 1st, 2021

Quick Updates:

Long Weekend – It's a 4 day weekend for all of us this weekend and I truly hope that everyone will be able to enjoy the time away from work, maybe get out and go for a walk or hike with their families and even squeeze in Easter dinner within your household for those who celebrate the holiday. I figured by putting out the update a day early this week that it would reach more people on a work day than a day off and I know there's lots of questions about what's going to happen for us in the next few weeks and maybe months.

Employee Assistance Program – Very important for all our members to be aware that help is available and no problems anyone is facing right now are too big or small to talk about with a professional. The EAP information will continue to stay attached to the weekly update for quick reference. The service is for all HWDSB employees (permanent and casual) and is totally anonymous and provided by a 3rd party.

Daily Screening – Right now, with positive cases on the rise and variants showing up more and more, doing your daily screening and being honest about your answers is the best way to keep your fellow members and the entire school population safe. Currently, I'm at home waiting to get a Covid test because I failed my screening on Tuesday morning due to a massive headache at 4am. I could've just used a personal sick day, but now more than ever – following the rules helps keep everyone safe. While I'm very confident it's not Covid related and more due to stress and exhaustion – being honest as you go through the screening is the best thing you can do for yourself and others. You can find the education screening tool online and/or print off a copy to go through the questions before coming to work each day. <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/school-screening/>

Now onto some new info for you.....

What's Up Dougie? – Sometimes, what bugs me most about Doug the Slug is the timing of his media leaks. I call them leaks in a sarcastic way because they're not really leaks, they're more like intentional and anonymous updates to certain people. Last night at 11:30 I had the update all ready to go and set up and then BAM – the news started breaking online about what's in store for Ontario. So, back to the proverbial drawing board to re-write a few things. It looks like enough info has been given to media outlets that they're already announcing that on Saturday, the province will enter another "lockdown" or "shutdown" or "emergency brake" period lasting up to 4 weeks. Both reports linked below are uncertain about school closures so we'll have to wait for a definitive word on that – which is what we're all keen on knowing. I'm not sure what way to lean right now – with boards being advised to have staff and students take belongings home today – will they come back next week? If they come back next week for 4 days, will they return after the Spring Break the following week? Will the Spring Break still stay in place for April 12-16th? Instead of leaking info about golf courses being open - now I'll know where to find Brothers Larry Smith and Ryan Cameron after work – next time there's a "leak" from Queen's Park, I'd like to request that it be about education and be leaked a day before I do the weekly update – okay Doug? Stay tuned for updates once we get official word on what's happening with education!

Here's the news reports that were posted online late last night, so we'll see if they got the info right from their anonymous sources:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rdGfwopl60>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-leBK0TsHql>

OSBCU Convention Update – Last Thursday and Friday, Pat Amatangelo and myself attended the annual OSBCU Convention on behalf of our local. For those of you that don't know – OSBCU is the Ontario School Board Council of Unions and represents approximately 55,000 CUPE education workers across Ontario. They are the bargaining agent for all Central Agreement matters relating of our two part Collective Agreement. There were approximately 300 attendees for the virtual conference and things went pretty smoothly thanks to all the planning and preparation that went into an event of this size to be held online. There were votes on resolutions, votes on bylaw amendments and some presentations from various people to all the people attending. There were also elections for the OSBCU Executive and I'm happy to announce that Laura Walton, Rod McGee, Tammy Graham and Christine Couturre have all been elected to serve another term of 3 years which will carry us through the next round of bargaining. I was nominated to be elected for an Area 2 position as Mobilizer (our local is in Area 2 of the province) but I declined the nomination as I feel my first priority and the majority of my time needs to be with my own members and making sure things are being handled properly for all of us, so I'm not going anywhere despite what you may hear.

Postings and Deployment – Unfortunately, more than a couple schools will be closing at the end of this school year. Permanent positions at schools that are closing will be redundant and staff holding those positions have the option of posting to other positions or be part of the deployment process. Some have already successfully posted to other positions and for those that haven't yet – postings will continue to come on the regular schedule until the end of April. At that time, postings will be held in order to ensure that enough positions are available for deployment, then postings will resume again for all members.

Memo, what memo? – So, the all important memo about clarifying what is to be done when we have symptomatic students during the instructional day still hasn't been issued as of writing this part last night. I emailed the Director last Friday morning and asked him to push the issue (after waiting two weeks with no memo produced) with other senior managers and explained why the memo was needed – because of the major differences between schools and one way of doing things across the system should be communicated to everyone. I was told that there would be a memo by Tuesday of this week. Late Tuesday night I was told it would be put out to staff on Thursday. So, we'll see if it comes out today or not. I made it clear to the Director that as long as there was one procedure for all schools, CUPE members would do their part to ensure a safe learning environment for everyone. Our work for the HWDSB provides a safe and secure learning environment for everyone in the schools and we should hold our heads high and be proud of the work we have done and continue to do. We need to stay on top of our game and do the jobs we do during the day and evening to make sure that continues. While we can't stop other staff members or students coming into the building without doing their proper screening – we had one school this week send 5 students home within 20 minutes of classes starting – our enhanced cleaner positions and a thorough disinfection at night continue to keep cases as low as possible.

Education Worker Vaccines – No further update on this issue as far as scheduling. If you follow the media reports on number of vaccines available, personally I'd be surprised if the vaccine is offered to education workers before the end of the summer. I will make it very clear to everyone that if you have doubts about the vaccines, you should speak with your medical professional. It's also worth noting that at this time, there is no signaling from our employer or the Ministry of Education that the vaccine is mandatory. If a member doesn't want to get the vaccine for medical or personal reasons, they don't have to get it.

Personal Safety Issues – We had an issue at one of our schools last week where a head caretaker arrived at their building and the alarm was going off. There had been a break in. Security was called and the member waited as long as they felt they could without anyone showing up before they went in to shut the alarm off. I know that the majority of our members take a great deal of pride in their work and enjoy being part of the school community they work in. Our co-workers are our friends and we enjoy interacting with the students when we get a chance to. Personal safety can never take a back seat to anything. I never want to get a call that someone has been severely injured in the workplace. Safety needs to take first place over everything else – including daycare programs and angry parents who are going to be late for work if they don't drop their children off right at 7am. Please don't put yourself at risk in the workplace, it's really not worth it. If you encounter a situation like this – the HWDSB contracted security company or FOS staff should be ensuring the building is safe before allowing anyone to enter. I know it would be a tough decision for many of us, but I would much rather any of our members put caution and safety first rather than take an unnecessary risk.

Facebook Page Update : Thanks to Ian at CUPE National who has helped us a great deal with setting up our new 4153 website and tech issues with our new email system, He has also helped us with having access to what is the official Facebook page for our local that used to be controlled by Union Strategies. You can find the page here - <https://www.facebook.com/cupe4153> The page will be used to share information only in conjunction with our email system. Posts on the page will only come from a few people and comments have been disabled on the page for a couple reasons and any questions on the information shared should be directed to one of our stewards, health and safety reps or other committee members.

Lastly, never forget the importance of your role at the HWDSB. From our head caretakers who make sure our buildings are safe, secure and comfortable for everyone, to our enhanced cleaners and the multiple bottles of disinfectant they use every day to wipe down hundreds of door handles, handrails, bathrooms and every other touch point to our afternoon crews who make sure all the classrooms are disinfected and as clean as possible for the next day to our maintenance team who literally keep the buildings running by fixing issues with electrical, plumbing, HVAC and general breakdowns in equipment.

We are the ones who keep the system running.

And I'm damn proud of every one of you.

Cheers,

Blake



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