

Kids are back in school

By Bill Rea

After three weeks off, secondary students in the Peel District School Board are back in class.

Classes resumed yesterday (Wednesday) morning after the Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) ruled that the previous day that local secondary teachers' strikes, directed by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF), in Peel, Durham and Rainbow district were in contravention of the School Boards Collective Bargaining Act, 2014.

"We're pleased that the OLRB's ruling supports what we've believed all along, that provincial OSSTF began an unlawful strike in Peel to put pressure on provincial negotiations," Board Chair Janet McDougald commented in a statement issued by the board. "But we're even more pleased that the ruling returns our 42,000 secondary students to their classrooms, where we know they will be supported in their learning. We're confident that our dedicated Peel teachers will return to their classrooms and deliver the quality education they always have. Our students deserve nothing less."

"Every day, we work hard to build confidence in public education, to build trust with our students, families and community members," she added. "The conflict and confusion created by the new two-tiered provincial bargaining structure has undermined this work. As a board, we'll continue to bargain local matters with all our unions and federations, and hope that central table negotiations progress and move all school boards across Ontario closer to achieving fair, local agreements."

This was not good news for the teachers, according to Mike Bettiol, president of District 19 (Peel) of OSSTF, as he reflected that the Province has been working on legislation to get the teachers back to work.

"What this basically does is take away our right to collective bargain," he commented, adding the government is not giving teachers the right to negotiate their contract.

"We went on strike for local reasons," Bettiol said, adding he's not sure the OLRB's decision was based on anything that went on in Peel.

The Teachers are not pleased with the developments.

"They're obviously upset by this, because there is no closure for them," he remarked.

Bettiol added he was at one school site yesterday morning, and was told the teachers all walked in together.

"There is still solidarity left in them."