



From the President

September-October 2012

Editor: Donna Howey President

Grand Erie Elementary Teachers' Federation

GEETF Meetings and Events are listed on our website

www.gefed.on.ca

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Our Office

You will find us at our office at 49 Dalkeith Drive, Units 1 & 2, Brantford. Our phone number for local calls is 519 753-9291 and toll free at 888 753-9291. The office is open each day from 8:30 am to 4:30 pm. Many evenings the office is open much later due to meetings and workshops. We also endeavour to leave Fridays at 3:30 pm.

Putting Students First

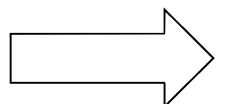
As I write this I recognize that any words I say may be outdated by the time they reach you. There are still so many uncertainties and we are in uncharted territory right now. What is certain is my confidence in Grand Erie Elementary Teachers. You have been keeping yourselves informed and challenging us with many important questions. As you learn about the real, dangerous potential of legislation such as Bill 115, many of you are turning into more than just teachers - you are turning into activists. Keep spreading the truth to counter the headlines that try to frame this as a narrow issue related to only a pay freeze and a loss of gratuity. It is much more than that. We would be doing a disservice to our students' future if we were to do nothing in this circumstance. Right now, we need to stand up for more than just our terms of compensation. We need to stand up for our democratic rights and freedoms. By standing in solidarity, in opposition to this government's actions, we are putting students first.



8 busloads of GEETF teachers and supporters gathered with at least 10 000 others at Queen's Park to oppose Bill 115

Considering a Pregnancy?

Save yourself grief! Have the blood test done to determine if you have immunity to Fifth's Disease (Parvovirus B-19). The test results take two weeks so don't wait until Fifth's Disease happens. Every year pregnant teachers experience frustration and fear because of the presence of Fifth's Disease in their school. An outbreak at a school is not considered over until there are "10 days with no confirmed cases". As cases often come in waves, those 10 days can drag into several weeks. For those women whose doctors provide a note indicating they should not be in the workplace where Fifth's is present, this means using a large number of sick days or working daily occasional assignments in other buildings. Good news: fifty to sixty per cent of women in the childbearing age group have immunity to Fifth's.





The BDLC Labour Day events featured the 56th Annual Soap Box Derby. Thanks to GEETF member Adam Walker for helping with this fun event. The Labour Day Parade was led by teachers, both GEETF and OSSTF. In a speech before the parade started, I was able to provide some information about Bill 115 and its damaging impact on education workers. Everyone was wondering just how far this government will go. The question becomes — who's next?

Adam Walker will be just one of our delegates at the Labour Council. Contact me (pres@gefed.on.ca) if you would also like to be a GEETF delegate. The BDLC has been, and will be a great source of support as we face this struggle. Our involvement in the BDLC has built awareness amongst the labour movement. Check out their site—<http://www.brantfordlabourcouncil.ca/>

ETFO Annual Meeting 2012

You will not be surprised that it was a very interesting ETFO Annual Meeting. Grand Erie delegates enjoyed the debate, the information and socializing with teacher delegates from across the province.

This year, Grand Erie's former GEETF President, now ETFO First Vice-President, Susan Swackhammer was the honoured recipient of the ETFO President's Award. As Sam Hammond described the recipient, naming her accomplishments, we all started to guess that it was our Susan. It is well deserved recognition of course!

GEETF Second Vice-President, Caroll Ann Macsai has long served as a Functionary at the ETFO Annual Meeting. This year she was asked to shadow on the ETFO Annual Meeting Steering Committee.

Thanks to all Grand Erie delegates for their involvement in ETFO.

JOHSC Health & Safety Site Reps

We are fortunate in Grand Erie to have a Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee. The safety standards in our workplace are best upheld through this committee—the conditions in boards without one are testimony to that. In order for us to maintain our rights to a JOHSC, the Ministry of Labour insists that we have site reps and that we have monthly inspections. The GEDSB Trustees and the MOL check the records to ensure monthly inspections are happening.

Being a site rep is a voluntary role. The actual inspection is to happen within the work day (not within the teacher's prep or 40 minute lunch). We respect all teachers' rights to not take on voluntary roles but I want all teachers to be aware of the value of our JOHSC and the risk of losing it.

Collective Bargaining—What has it done for teachers?

Almost 40 years ago, teachers gained the right to bargain collectively and the right to strike. That means that about two generations of teachers may not be aware of what teacher contracts were like before these rights were gained. At that time, only salaries and benefits were part of teacher contracts; and these were not the decent compensation packages that teaching professionals deserve. Class size, preparation time, supervision time, the length of the school day, just cause for dismissal, rights to leave and many other working conditions were entirely a management decision (better hope you're in favour with your manager).

As well, today's teachers might not be aware of the extreme acts of solidarity that were necessary to achieve the right to bargain collectively. In 1973, teachers' demands for better working conditions were not being heard by boards or the government. In protest, teachers resigned en masse, setting up the possibility of students being left without teachers. In December of that year, 80 000 teachers left their classrooms. The government reacted by withdrawing the offensive legislation and starting a consultation process which resulted in the 1975 School Boards' and Teachers' Negotiations Act. This act gave teachers the right to open scope collective bargaining and the right to strike.

Note: "open scope" means that any aspect of employment conditions can be brought to the negotiating table.