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PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE: THE SIGNS OF SOLIDARITY

The Oxford dictionary defines **solidarity** as; **“support by one person or group of people for another because they share feelings, opinions, aims.”** The Latin word for solidarity is **“conjunctionis”**, meaning **union**. Going one step further with these literary connections, we find that **“conjoined”** can be described as; **“being or brought together so as to meet, touch, or unite.”**

The irony of coming together, despite having to stay apart

Over a year into the pandemic, we can all agree that we are tired of talking about it; watching the news; the daily numbers; and the utter bumbling of a government so fixated on cuts, reform and union busting, that it forgot what its one job ought to be. Committing all resources to squashing it in its tracks, vaccinating its citizens and putting it behind them. School staffs faced with the immense responsibility providing safe spaces and perhaps the only sense of routine in all this crazy, are exhausted from washing, disinfecting, distancing and most of all, missing people, moments and milestones.

Yet schools and educators are the lighthouses in all of this. You are guides to your students, endlessly reminding them of the rules, how to stay safe, and why it matters. You have become fervent learners, innovative creators, and adaptive artists of your craft. You are beacons of hope for your colleagues who need to share their story, have someone there to just listen, or be allowed to cry in a heap without judgement. And you can’t stop now...

Time and time again, those in schools have been left undervalued and overworked. Words of praise, while plentiful, are empty when there is no return of investment for the million daily have-tos, never mind all the above-and-beyond. There is no question, we in the Interlake have received pandemic related supports from our employer more than most. Personally, I am grateful that when members asked or needed, they were given; and that there was investment in staffing, training, safety and well-being. It is, after all, the responsibility of the employer and the province, to keep employees safe and to properly fund education. However, this is not a trade off for a delayed commitment to invest in equal pay for equal work.

The signs of solidarity must shine

As we work toward a renewed collective agreement with ISD, we need to remain mindful of the things we can control and contribute to unity. We are tired of reminding students to be Covid savvy and remain diligent ourselves yet we must. We are frustrated and mad, but we can’t turn that on each other. Remember to make room for more than just outcomes and exams in these final two months. Life lessons learned in this unique year will not need assessing. Your classrooms, even though drastically different and not ideal, are still the safe and positive spaces your students will remember when all of this is done. Keep yourself safe and reach out. Yours in solidarity.

Other Signs of Solidarity:

1. **What we do matters:** When we signed our ISD contract, we agreed to uphold the integrity of the employer. Teachers have always been under a microscope, and the smaller the community, the larger the magnifying glass. While members may have diverse beliefs and opinions, it is my duty as union representative to point out that actions that are illegal or in defiance of public health orders do not benefit the image of the union. Further, members may face professional consequences such as suspension or dismissal, and MTS would not have recourse. See [CBC](#) and [Winnipeg Free Press](#) articles, as suggested be shared with membership, by MTS.
2. **Social Media:** Just a reminder to of course, **#useyourvoice** on social media to advance the profile of the teaching profession. Having said that, we all have heard stories about the countless ways this can go wrong. Use a non-identifying handle if possible. Teachers have garnered the favour of the public in the battle against consistent underfunding and autocratic education reform, and we must not give it away with Facebook, Tweets, Instagram or the like.
3. **Stay informed:** Information is constantly changing. Please read the ITA news, emails, and MTS SUB.

MTS Provincial Bargaining Survey:

Starting on Monday, May 3, 2021, members will have the opportunity to complete the first ever online MTS Provincial Bargaining Survey. Per the MTS Provincial Bargaining Protocol, data from the Survey will help inform provincial bargaining. Our members' input will be important to understand what is needed in a new provincial agreement. The Survey will be voluntary and anonymous, and it will be accessed through the Survey link in My Profile, **until Monday, June 7, 2021**. It will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete and is of paramount importance. The collective bargaining power of the MTS depends on teacher voices being heard.

Local Bargaining Update: Where we are in the process of renewing our collective agreement with ISD.

- At the April 26 board meeting, ITA bargaining representatives spoke once again to the board.
- The board acknowledged our concerns on Bill 45, and the urgency of matching the PTTA pattern.
- They have since scheduled another meeting to work toward this by adjusting the budget.
- They expect to be able to communicate on this early next week.
- Currently, we & MTS feel this timeline is acceptable.
- We continue to make this our top priority. The overall mood is that this is moving in the right direction.
- MTS is set to begin a targeted approach to assist remaining locals in achieving renewed agreements.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE INTERLAKE TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

- The 2021 ITA Annual General Meeting e-vote has concluded.
- Thank you for participating. 26% of members voted with 68 of 261 votes cast. (Quorum = 40)
- All motions were carried. The 2021-22 ITA fee will be \$130 FTE, \$0.60/day for subs.
- Addresses were compiled by MTS from the preferred email in [MYPROFILE](#), so please update.
- School reps are collecting member non-work emails. We would like move from union communication via the ISD email. There will be a constant stream of info from MTS as they guide is into amalgamations and through Bill 64, and a need for communication over summer when many don't use ISD email. When we move to Provincial Bargaining, the My Profile portal will be used to ensure one member = one vote.

Links to Important Bills:

Bill 45 – Public Schools and MTS Amendment Act – (Provincial Bargaining Bill)

Bill 64 – The Education Modernization Act. 300+ pages that will change education in MB. It does not parallel the recommendations document, and in fact often contradicts the recommendations of the commission.

Make an oral presentation - Register by calling the Office of the Clerk (204) 945-3636 and state your name and the bill number to which you wish to speak. Presenters are allowed 10 min to present, and an additional 5 min to respond to questions from members of the committee. Everyone who applies must be allowed to speak.

Written Submissions – Send to: Clerk of Committees Room 251 – 450 Broadway Winnipeg MB R3C 0V8, fax (204) 945-0038, or email to: committees@leg.gov.mb.ca. State name and bill number.

The MTS toolkit gives you background on the legislation, how it impacts teachers, and most importantly, how you can **#raiseyourvoice** as a Manitoba educator in opposition to Bill 64.

- Click [HERE](#) for the MTS site and the full toolkit.
- Click [HERE](#) to FACEBOOK Frame yourself to fight Bill 64.



Local Reminders & other items:

- **Retirement Deadlines** - Teachers have until April 30 (if hired on or after December 7, 2004) or May 31 (hired before December 7, 2004) to give a resignation notice effective June 30.
- Teachers are defined as **“critical service workers”**, not essential workers.
- The same rules apply for the use and transfer of **personal days and extra-curricular days** as in a normal year. These are part of our Collective Agreement, and can not be altered outside of bargaining. Full-time teachers receive 2 personal days per year (pro-rated for FTE) and can carry one over to the subsequent year. If you earned hours last year, they can be carried over to this year, but not beyond. Any days you earned last year and transferred, need to be used.
- [LINK](#) to “Handful of Holdouts” at mbteach.org, includes the link to MB teacher gross salaries.
- If you have any questions, please contact me at president@interlaketeachers.ca.

Teachers’ Idea Fund:

On March 25, 2021, the provincial government launched a five-year \$25 million **Teachers’ Idea Fund**. MB Education has approached MTS Members to participate on the Review Advisory Panel, which will be responsible for the selection and approval of project applications that are awarded funding. The \$25 million will be dispensed to “worthy” teacher applicants. An important question is how this government will define “worthy”, and why they will have teachers “judging” their peers. This is an unsustainable and unacceptable funding model and **MTS stands firmly in opposition.**

The Society’s position is that teachers produce innovative ideas to improve education every single day. Suggesting that competing for funds is offensive and divisive. The Manitoba Teachers’ Society believes in publicly funded, accessible, and equitable public education, not a Hunger Games model of funding. Contact Lia Gervino, MTS Staff Officer at lgervino@mbteach.org for more information.