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The Next Challenge

By the time this magazine reaches you, most teacher and occasional teacher locals will have negotiated collective agreements with their boards. The deadline for reaching agreements was April 24. (Agreements for members who are educational and professional support personnel were reached in December.)

The next challenge for ETFO members and locals will be to ensure that boards fully honour their obligations under the new collective agreements.

You will recall that the provincial discussion table agreement provides for 80 minutes of supervision time for teachers in every school in every board. (The superior entitlements of those with less than 80 minutes of supervision time will continue.) You will also recall that ETFO members are not subject to the additional supervision requirements placed on elementary teachers in the other federations. For ETFO members the current requirements under Regulation 298 remain in place: teachers must be in the school 15 minutes before class in the morning, and five minutes before afternoon classes begin, but how they use that time is up to them.

In addition, the ETFO agreement provides teachers with an additional 10 minutes of preparation time per week, beginning in September 2009. This will be increased each year, and by the end of the collective agreement, August 31, 2012, teachers will have 240 minutes. When a teacher loses preparation time because of a principal's directive, that time must be repaid.

The provincial agreement also contains limitations on staff meetings: an average of one per month, no more than 75 minutes long. Teachers are expected, not required, to attend.

These and other collective agreement provi-

sions that represent improvements in working conditions will only be realized in practice if members demand that they are adhered to. There will undoubtedly be principals who will seek to get around them. These principals will plead hardship for one reason or another; or they will ask for a one-time-only exemption; or they will prevail on the goodwill of staff, asking teachers not to demand their rights so as to keep relationships harmonious.

Good relationships are key if schools are to be successful. And collective agreement provisions are key if teachers are to improve their working conditions. Good relationships and adhering to the requirements of the collective agreement are not mutually exclusive. There are principals who understand how to ensure that the collective agreement is respected and who have excellent relationships with their staff. They accomplish this by involving staff in problem-solving and decision-making, and by recognizing that a collective agreement is a legally binding document with which they must comply.

Members working with principals who do not take this approach must be prepared to say no, to ensure that they do not unwittingly compromise their own rights. Based on our experience in this bargaining round, you can be sure that boards and their representatives will try to strip from future collective agreements those rights that you ignore.

Saying no is not a sign of disrespect to principals, nor does it demonstrate a lack of professionalism. In fact, it is the principal who puts a teacher in the position of having to say no to a request to ignore the collective agreement who is demonstrating a fundamental lack of respect for the role of elementary teachers.