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**Media Release: Education support workers deserve a seat at the table: CUPE Education Workers Steering Committee sends message to the Minister of Education**

**(Saskatchewan)** Representatives from CUPE Saskatchewan’s Education Workers’ Steering Committee met virtually yesterday with Saskatchewan’s Minister of Education Everett Hindley and Deputy Minister Clint Repski. They discussed issues facing support staff in Saskatchewan schools, and to ask for a seat at the table during discussions about improving our education system.

Karla Sastaunik, chair of the EWSC, spoke of challenges facing education workers.

“I have been working in the education system for 38 years and conditions for staff keep getting worse,” said Sastaunik. “Staff are working short, exhausted, and underpaid. New workers are not equipped to handle the classrooms and work environment they’re entering. Retention is a growing issue across the province, especially in rural areas. We are here today to ask for help, and for a seat at the table when discussions about our classrooms are happening.”

Sastaunik was joined by three support staff from across the province to share their experience in classrooms.

Delayne Pumphrey explained that some education assistants are expected to handle the medical needs of a student that even paramedics don’t provide, such as administering catheters and tube feeding, without specialized training.

Samantha Warren, a school liaison, spoke about the impact that staffing reduction is having on staff and students. She is responsible for ensuring that 1,100 students in one school are in attendance each day after losing a half-time position this school year.

Shandel McLeod, a behavioral support education assistant and vice-chair of the EWSC, talked about the growing problems of violence in the workplace, and interactions where support workers in various classifications have been spit on, threatened, harassed, and assaulted.

Other concerns that were shared included caretakers who are paid based on the square footage of a school, without factoring in the number of students within that school.

The Education Workers’ Steering Committee is asking for support workers to be part of consultations around improving classrooms in this province.

“We are heartened that the Ministry seemed to share this perspective, and we look forward to being included in discussions. Plans for the future won’t be successful if education support workers are not at the table where decisions are made,” added Sastaunik.

CUPE Saskatchewan’s Education Workers’ Steering Committee represents workers in 40 different classifications in 22 of Saskatchewan’s 27 school divisions, with over 7,000 members.

- 30 -

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