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Education workers, government agree to a tentative contract]

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Education workers and the provincial government agreed to a down-to-the-wire tentative agreement on Nov. 20 that staved off a strike that was to kick off the next day.

Details of the tentative agreement are scarce. It's been reported that the Canadian Union of Public Employees secured a 15 per cent wage increase for its members over the life of the four-year pact. That's about a $1 per hour raise.

The union is taking the proposed contract to its 55,000 members to vote to accept or refuse the deal.

Secretaries, clerks, computer technicians, custodial and maintenance staff, and educational assistants represented by the CUPE walked off the job Nov. 4 in protest of Bill 28.

That legislation, the Keeping Students in Class Act, was designed to make a strike by CUPE members illegal. The provincial government used Section 33 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, called the Notwithstanding Clause. It was the first time any of Canada's premiers used that clause.

The labour action was short-lived and picket lines were dismantled days later when the crowd at Queen's Park agreed to repeal Bill 28 if negotiators for both sides would resume talking.

Fast forward to last week when the union threatened to hit the streets Nov. 21 if an agreement couldn't be reached over the weekend.

The Upper Grand District School Board, which operates schools in Dufferin County, warned parents that schools would close and classes will be held online. Such arrangement was averted, thanks to the Hail Mary effort to bear fruit on the final day.

This is the first tentative agreement reached through the 2022 round of collective bargaining in the education sector.

Education Minister Stephen Lecce said the government's focus throughout negotiations with CUPE has always been to keep children in school.

?I am pleased to formally announce that the Crown, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), and the school board trustee associations have reached a tentative agreement that keeps schools open so that kids can stay in class,? he said in a prepared statement.

?This is not a win for governments or education unions. It's a win for Ontario families who finally have peace of mind knowing their children will remain in the classroom. After two and a half years of unprecedented disruptions, nothing matters more than stability in our schools. We are pleased to have reached a deal today that will make sure kids are in class catching up on their learning.?