My name is Tara Duff and my son attends a TCDSB Elementary School.

I am speaking today to advocate on behalf of my son, his friends, their parents, to bring an immediate end to Work to Rule Action that has been ongoing since May 2021.

I have been emailing and phoning the TCDSB and my Trustee to voice my concerns and was encouraged to come forward to speak to you all, so you too can hear and understand the impact this ongoing action is having on our children.

I want my plea to be clear - to end this action by ratifying an agreement before the end of December, so we can return to a full school experience in January 2022.

I was told by the TCDSB to ‘Please rest assured that every effort is being made by the Board’s bargaining team to reach a local agreement with the Toronto Elementary Catholic Teachers.’ We are doing all that we can to support families and students’

I want to be clear that **I will not rest** **and I have not been assured** that every effort is being made to reach a local agreement.

**My family, and my student, does NOT feel supported**. It has taken a great deal of follow up and pushing and persistence to get myself here. Please do not let this bargaining go on any further, especially as we know now that both sides are willing to sign a status quo agreement.

Our children have rights to a complete and fulfilling education.

They have voices that need to be heard.

In this instance, I am their voice, as they are worn down after all of the school shut downs, the online learning, and now the adults who are spinning wheels and not resolving this issue that has been going on since MAY 2021.

My son and I have had conversations about the Work to Rule Actions.

Mom, when can we get back to regular school? Online was the worst and I thought things would be better when we got back to school. But it’s not the same. There are no teams or plays or clubs to join. The teachers aren’t ‘allowed’ to do any of that? Why? I’m in grade 6 and this is when we are supposed to be able to join all the teams as the older kids in the school. Why can’t we?

I explained that Work to Rule Action means teachers are withholding doing all those things with students to get what they want from the Board.

What do they want he asked?

When I asked, I was told they just need to sign the agreement. It’s status quo, meaning it’s the same as before, they just need to sign.

He said it’s not about money or anything? Nope.

As we talked further, he arrived at this…so it’s like the TV shows where someone wants something so they hold people hostage and tell the other people to give them want they want so they will release the hostages.

So, me and my friends, we are the hostages in this case then? They won’t let us go do the things we want to in school until they get want they want. They are using us and, to make things worse, the other side isn’t giving them what they want to make it stop!

I’ve never seen a show where they hold people hostage for 8 months, and definitely not kids.

So, as Ben’s Mom, and on behalf of Ben, I ask you to immediately, release the hostages.

Be the adults, looking out for the safety and well being of the children, and ratify the agreement before the end of December 2021.

The children have lost SO much already. Even the most joyous time of the year and most festive in the school will be done, with nothing to show for it. No Christmas Concert, not even a virtual performance, the sad list goes on.

The holiest of times in our Catholic faith, and it’s all crushed because adults won’t ratify an agreement?

Get the agreement ratified before the end of December. There is no other option.

And, may I remind you that it is because of the students that you all have the jobs you have. You actually work for them and because of them.

I do not want to hear that ‘status quo’ can also mean different interpretations so we have to be diligent. You have had 8 months to be diligent, to discuss, to bargain. Like students, there is always a due date, a deadline to get an assignment done.

The due date for your assignment is December 17th. If you have to meet after hours or on weekends or pull all nighters, so be it. This is what I would tell my child if they procrastinated.

Release the hostages. They are our future, your future leaders. It’s time to lead by example and preserve their mental health and bring joy and fulfillment to their schools and classroom experience.

I’m not going away until you do. I owe it to Ben. I owe it to his classmates. I owe it to all of the elementary students in the TCDSB.

They don’t deserve ANY of this.