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Danelle Precesky, left, Pete Precesky and Dad Felix Precesky show their support at the rally for public education in Canmore on Tuesday (Oct. 7). JUNGMIN HAM RMO PHOTO

Public education rally supports strike 'born out of exhaustion, frustration'

JORDAN SMALL

CANMORE – Classrooms across Alberta are empty this week as teachers hold a historic strike, calling for better resources, fair wages and basic respect from the provincial government, while the province says it has remained committed to heading back to the bargaining table at any time.

Gathering public support with signs and chants, hundreds of teachers, parents, students and other supporters stood in solidarity at a public education rally in Canmore on Tuesday (Oct. 7), one day after 51,000 members of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) walked off the job.

The Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) gave lockout notice as well, going into effect Thursday (Oct. 9).

"This strike is not a decision we made lightly," said South Central Rockies district representative Wade Westworth to the crowd. "It's an act of necessity, born out of exhaustion, frustration and disrespect, but, most of all, out of a deep love for public education itself."

Westworth added the province doesn't respect the vital work educators do.

The ATA rejected the province's offer by a whopping 89.5 per cent in late September, signalling that a strike was imminent. The province said the offer would have included a 12 per cent general wage increase over four years and promised to hire 3,000 new teachers over three years, among others.

President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance Nate Horner said the rejected deal would have provided "tremendous investments in classroom supports to help alleviate population growth and classroom complexity pressures."

"I am disappointed that Alberta's teachers have voted to reject the tentative agreement for a new four-year central agreement," Horner said.

"This is the second time teachers have rejected a potential settlement that provided what their union said teachers wanted in response to growing classroom complexities."

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