

# **Questions and Answers about The Maintenance and Construction Skilled Trades Council**

## **When and why was the Skilled Trades Council formed?**

The Skilled Trades Council (the Council) was formed during the amalgamation of Toronto's six public school boards into the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) in 1998. The six boards had various collective agreements with CUPE, teacher federations and a total of 14 skilled trades unions.

Because of the challenges in bargaining with 14 trades and administering 14 collective agreements, the Fewer School Boards Act, introduced by the provincial government, established the Council as the central bargaining agent for all the 14 trades unions and their workers. As the certified bargaining agent, the Council was given responsibility to handle negotiations, grievances, arbitrations and other union services. As a result, this has streamlined the collective bargaining process. TDSB has one bargaining agent, not 14, to deal with on all union matters including collective negotiations and union-management issues. It is not in anyone's interest to go back to the old ways of collective bargaining.

## **How is the Skilled Trades Council funded?**

The Council functions as a union and its members who are TDSB employees pay dues only when they are working on TDSB job sites. The dues support the union services for Council members, just as other unions are supported by dues.

## **What about outside contractors who have been awarded work at the TDSB? Do they pay the Council dues?**

Yes they do. Outside contractor skilled trades doing work at the TDSB receive union services and support from the Council. In short, the Council is the bargaining agent for contract workers while working at the TDSB. As their bargaining agent, the Council handles union issues such as grievances, arbitrations, legal representation and other union services. This is why they pay dues when they are working on TDSB job sites.

## **Why would the TDSB and the Council have this arrangement?**

The arrangement is efficient and saves time, staff resources and ultimately tax dollars. Without the Council, the TDSB would be forced to deal with day-to-day union-management issues, grievances and arbitrations with the unions for each of the contractors hired to do work at the TDSB. At any one time this could involve multiple contractors and unions on a single job. The payment of dues is part of the cost of a job in any unionized environment.

On projects that exceed \$1.6 million in value, there is no working dues checkoff and contractors can use either union or non-union labour.

**What is the cycle of a work order from start to finish?**

- A school issues a work order request.
- The work order request is reviewed by a TDSB supervisor.
- The supervisor has the option of agreeing to this request, making inquiries about the request or denying the request.
- If a supervisor dispatches a skilled traded person a time sheet is completed by the tradesperson for every day worked.
- The time sheet is provided to a TDSB supervisor who reviews the time sheet and notes any errors or irregularities associated with the time allocated for the job or jobs specified in the work order.
- A clerk then enters the time into an electronic data base. The tradesperson does not see the data entry after it has been made.
- The supervisor would bring irregularities to the attention of the tradesperson for clarification or follow-up to determine any job site issues that required any additional time such as moving furniture to get access to the job site or additional clean-up required.
- Normally any outstanding discrepancies are rectified before the supervisor approves the time sheet.

**Other than providing union services to its members, does the Skilled Trades Council direct employee work or assign employees to work?**

No. Employees are directed to work and assigned to work by TDSB management and supervisors.

**Does the Skilled Trades Council see or review the work orders approved by the TDSB supervisor or review the timesheets for work performed?**

No.

**Are TDSB schools required to use skilled trades worker for small jobs like installing pencil sharpeners?**

No. A work order request for small jobs like a pencil sharpener would normally be denied by a TDSB supervisor. Under TDSB policy this kind of job would be done by a caretaker. This policy was instituted to avoid costs associated with sending a skilled trades worker to do work that does not require certification and therefore a more expensive trades person.

**What is the Council’s role in the setting budgets and estimates for school construction projects such as the installation of outside signs or installation of kitchens in schools?**

The Council does not have any role in setting these budgets and estimates.

Budgets are prepared by TDSB management. The budgets should be established and approved ahead of time before any work commences and include the cost of materials and time for labour.

**Does the Council hire construction and maintenance employees?**

The Council does not hire workers. The TDSB places a request to the Council for workers such as electricians and plumbers. The Council then sends the request to the appropriate affiliate or union representing electrical, carpentry, plumbing and so on. The affiliate will fill the request.

The Council receives the list and ensures that the tradesperson is properly certified for the job.

The Council does not determine who is on any list from the affiliate. The list is given to the TDSB and TDSB supervisors hire the tradesperson. TDSB supervisors often request workers by name to be recalled for a job based on past performance.

The role of the Council is to centralize and streamline the request process so that the TDSB does not have to contact 14 different affiliates and the TDSB does not have to use its staff and resources to verify certification.

The process has been in place and working for years. There has been no request by either the Council or the TDSB to change it.