Ontario elementary, secondary teachers to hold strike votes, province says talk of strikes 'unnecessary'

Public elementary school teachers in Ontario are taking a step toward a strike, with the union announcing Monday that it will be asking members to vote for a strike mandate.

The president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario told members at the union's annual general meeting that the union has come to the bargaining table with proposals on special education, class sizes, violence in schools and wages that keep up with inflation.

In response, she said, the government has "refused to meaningfully engage" and has put forward proposals that are tantamount to cuts to salaries, benefits and working conditions.

"We have reached a tipping point," Karen Brown said in a speech.

"ETFO's patience has run out. Our members' patience has run out. We now need to pressure this government to come to the table and start to bargain with us seriously."

Brown said ETFO will be holding meetings starting mid-September for central strike votes.

"Based on what I have been hearing from members across the province recently, there is no doubt in my mind that the delegates at this annual meeting and that our 83,000 members want to send this government a strong and united message -- enough is enough," Brown said.

## Little progress made, OSSTF says

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation said it, too, will hold strike votes this fall.

The union told its members in a memo obtained Monday by The Canadian Press that the government has shown "little interest in engaging in substantive negotiations" and little progress has been made.

"It is well past time for this government to come to the table willing to conclude a deal to ensure students in Ontario can learn and grow in a world-renowned public education system," the union wrote in a memo.

"A strong strike mandate will demonstrate our unity and determination to achieve fair and favourable terms for our members and students."

## Threatening strike 'unnecessary and unfair': Lecce

Education Minister Stephen Lecce criticized the steps taken by the unions, saying they rejected private mediation in order to reach deals.

"Threatening another strike and creating anxiety for parents and students just weeks before the start of the school year is unnecessary and unfair," he wrote in a statement.