

**EDUCATION:** Clock ticking as teachers wait for board to hand over detailed financial information

# Union not telling teachers what's on table: board

BY JENNIFER BROWN  
STAFF WRITER

The clock is now ticking. York Region's 2,800 public elementary teachers will strike Nov. 12 if the board fails to reveal financial information, the union says could lead to further contract talks.

At a mass rally of teachers at the board's Aurora headquarters Thursday night, provincial union president Phyllis Benedict told teachers the one-day strike will be followed by rotating job action.

"We call on parents to say to this board, 'Get back to the table and

get it done," Benedict said to teachers, who chanted, "Let's go early."

On Thursday, the union delivered a letter to the board indicating it had told the current mediator it no longer required his services, and supplied a list of four new mediators for the board to choose from.

Included in the list was Kevin Burkett, who helped the board and its secondary teachers reach a tentative agreement late last week.

He has already been invited by the board to join the elementary

talks, according to Karen Barker, head of the board's negotiation committee.

"It depends on his availability, but our first priority is to get back to the table. We have every hope it will be in the next few days," Barker said. "We still feel there is light at the end of the tunnel."

Barker said the rally by teachers indicates they don't have a firm understanding of what has been offered to their union.

"It tells me the information on the negotiation table is not being shared with the membership

Clearly, I don't believe our teachers understand, or believe, we have a fair resolution on the table," she said.

Barker insists the teachers' concerns about job security and other issues can be resolved if the union returns to negotiate.

The board insists it has nothing to hide in its financial records and says the teachers would be hard-pressed to find budget areas padded with money that could be used to achieve their contract demands. But Benedict said it would only cost the board about \$5

million, or one-half per cent of the total budget, to give teachers the prep time and modest salary increase they are seeking of no more than 2 per cent.

"They have the money," she told teachers at the rally. "They say they don't have the money, then show us the books."

As trustees met inside the board offices, teachers chanted, "Show us the books, show us the books."

"We hope they are in there listening because we will be on the street in November unless something changes," Benedict said.

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