

**Subject:** Back to school message from Minister of Education

OPINION-EDITORIAL

Back to school message from Minister of Education

B.C. Education Minister George Abbott  
(447 words)

This is an exciting time for B.C. students. As another school year begins, they're heading back to class with fresh memories of recent successes and high hopes for their future education. It is our job to make sure we nurture, encourage, and equip them to achieve their best.

At the same time, we're starting the year under a cloud. As you know, the government is involved in negotiations with the B.C. Teachers' Association around a collective agreement. Those negotiations have not been successful to this point and the BCTF has made it clear it intends to take job action this fall.

While I am disappointed at the timing, the BCTF president has assured me the pending job action won't affect student learning and that teachers will continue to focus on students in the classroom.

However, like many parents out there, I am naturally concerned about the ramifications around teacher-parent communication. What are the implications for parents who won't have access to updates on their children's progress in school? The union says its members won't be supplying report cards.

Our concern is that parents may not get the information they need about how their children are doing. It is, to say the least, a difficult situation. The teachers of this province are second to none, and they work hard to create a teaching environment where every student can reach their full potential - not only as learners, but as human beings. My hope is that all parties can quickly come to a rational solution so that job action can be avoided and we can truly return the focus to maintaining and improving our great education system.

For our kids' sake, B.C. teachers need to be the best-supported in the world. To do that, we must raise the bar for pre-service training and standards; we must have the highest standard of conduct; and we must have teachers remain current and demonstrate continued excellence throughout their career.

The simple fact is that the union's demands for increased benefits and wages come at a time when the vast majority of public servants in British Columbia have agreed to no wage increases at all. This recognizes the very difficult economic situation the province is in. We are continuing to battle the economic storms that are still battering North America and the world and we are trying to get ourselves back on track financially by coming to terms with the provincial deficit.

What British Columbians need now are cool heads focused on the task at hand, honest, open negotiations that will treat our teachers fairly in the context of today's realities and ultimately result in what is best for students, parents and families.

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