



February 29, 2012

Ref: 152938

Dear Board Chairs:

Yesterday, government introduced Bill 22, the *Education Improvement Act* (the Act), to suspend the teachers' union's strike action, set a "cooling off" period, appoint a mediator to facilitate bargaining and implement a new \$165 million Learning Improvement Fund and other initiatives that will benefit teachers and students. You can learn more about the *Education Improvement Act* at: [http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news\\_releases\\_2009-2013/2012EDUC0015-000204.htm](http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2009-2013/2012EDUC0015-000204.htm).

The legislation does not impose a new contract. Rather, it sets out a mediation process with the goal of reaching a mediated settlement within the net-zero mandate by the beginning of summer. If there is no agreement then the mediator will issue a report by June 30, 2012, with non-binding recommendations.

The *Education Improvement Act* also includes several initiatives that will benefit teachers and students. Collectively, these initiatives serve as government's response to the BC Supreme Court decision on Bills 27 and 28.

- The Act implements a \$165 million Learning Improvement Fund, which school districts can use to hire additional teachers and education assistants, provide additional teaching time and support professional development and training to help teachers meet the complex needs in their classrooms. The process for allocating these funds will include consultations with the BC Teachers' Federation, classroom teachers, education assistants, administration and district staff.
- The Act restores class size and related matters to the scope of collective bargaining, effective for the next round of bargaining which is expected to begin in Spring 2013.
- The Act eliminates the use of district class size averages and implements a class size maximum of 30 students for Grades 4-12. The new cap will not apply to some subjects where large groups are desirable such as a band or drama class. The existing cap of 22 students for Kindergarten and 24 students for Grade 1-3 will remain in place and cannot be exceeded.
- The Act allows a Grade 4-12 class to exceed 30 students if the principal and superintendents consider the learning conditions to be appropriate, but in these cases, school districts must provide additional compensation to the classroom teacher, proportionate to the added workload. This compensation can consist of increased pay, additional preparation time, professional development funding or a combination of different accommodations.

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- The Act eliminates the formulaic and cumbersome consultation process on class composition and promotes regular consultation between principals and teachers on all matters of class organization, including the placement of students with special needs.

The *Education Improvement Act* provides certainty to students and their parents by suspending the current strike so that every parent in BC can receive a full accounting of how their children are progressing in school and schools can resume the collaborative meetings that are so important to supporting our students.

The Act also puts a mediator in place to help the parties achieve a mediated settlement that follows the lead of more than 100 agreements already signed under the government's net-zero mandate.

Lastly, the Act puts more money into classrooms, improves supports for students and teachers, provides additional teacher compensation where class size exceeds the student limit, improves consultation on class organization and restores the opportunity to bargain class size and related matters. Taken together, these are significant gains that recognize the important role and contribution of teachers.

The *Education Improvement Act* brings a responsible conclusion to this dispute and I hope all parties will take a constructive approach in the days ahead to move forward and provide the certainty necessary to improve our education system and support our students.

Yours truly,



George Abbott  
Minister