

Sullivan, Michelle A HLTH:EX

From: Thompson, Laurel HLTH:EX
Sent: October 13, 2021 10:28 AM
To: Henry, Bonnie HLTH:EX
Subject: FW: Letter from Teri Mooring
Attachments: Letter Dr Bonnie Henry October 12 2021.pdf

Importance: High

Hi Bonnie,

See letter attached from the BCTF. Would you like me to assign to someone for response? (Reka?) Would you like another meeting to be set up with them for further discussion?

Thank you,

Laurel Thompson | *Executive Coordinator*
Office of the Provincial Health Officer, Ministry of Health

From: Prov Hlth Office HLTH:EX <ProvHlthOffice@gov.bc.ca>
Sent: October 13, 2021 9:03 AM
To: Thompson, Laurel HLTH:EX <Laurel.Thompson@gov.bc.ca>
Subject: FW: Letter from Teri Mooring
Importance: High

Hi Laurel,

Got this into the inbox. It's referencing another meeting and asking some more questions, etc.

From: Teri@bctf.ca <teri@bctf.ca>
Sent: October 12, 2021 5:04 PM
To: Prov Hlth Office HLTH:EX <ProvHlthOffice@gov.bc.ca>
Cc: Minister, EDUC EDUC:EX <EDUC.Minister@gov.bc.ca>; Minister, HLTH HLTH:EX <HLTH.Minister@gov.bc.ca>
Subject: Letter from Teri Mooring
Importance: High

[EXTERNAL] This email came from an external source. Only open attachments or links that you are expecting from a known sender.

Hello,
Please see attached letter from Teri Mooring.
Thank you.
TM:vw:tfeu

Teri Mooring
President
British Columbia Teachers' Federation
100-550 West 6th Avenue

Vancouver, BC V5Z 4P2

Phone: 1-800-663-9163, 604-871-2159

Fax: 604-871-2290

Email: teri@bctf.ca





BCTF

British Columbia Teachers' Federation A Union of Professionals
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By email: provhltthoffice@gov.bc.ca

October 12, 2021

Dr. Bonnie Henry
Provincial Health Officer
PO Box 9648, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9P4

Dear Dr. Henry:

Thank you for finding the time to meet with the Federation on October 1, 2021. I am writing today to follow up on some of the issues and concerns that were discussed during the meeting, and to bring to your attention some additional issues that have arisen since.

The Federation continues to hear concerns regarding inconsistencies between the definitions used by regional health authorities and those issued by the BCCDC in the Public Health Communicable Disease Guidance for K–12 Schools document. In particular, the interpretation of the guidelines around school exposures, notifications, and the definition of a cluster appear to vary considerably. Specifically, both Vancouver Coastal Health and the Northern Health Authority are reporting vastly lower numbers of exposures than the other health authorities. While the Federation understands that regional health officers have a level of autonomy, continued inconsistencies in the interpretation of definitions and data, and the reporting of exposures leads to a loss of credibility of both the Provincial Health Office and the regional health authorities. It is essential that the definitions and guidelines have the same interpretation everywhere in the province.

The Federation is hearing, from our members, of many cases where they are aware of exposures in their school/classroom from school community sources, but that they have not been formally advised of through contact tracing or regional health authority notifications. In some cases, notifications are being posted to the regional health authority site, but notification letters are not being sent to parents in the affected schools. Again, the approach seems to be inconsistent between different regional health authorities and is leading to confusion and mistrust in the system. Simply posting exposure notifications on health authority websites rather than sending letters to school communities is problematic for those families without the necessary technology to access this information.

There continues to be a significant concern over delays in exposure notifications, particularly in the Northern Health region. It has been stated multiple times by both Dr. McKee and Ministry of Health staff that there is limited capacity for contact tracing in that region. It is vital for the safety of everyone in the school community that contact tracing and notification is timely—more resources need to be allocated to ensure that this is the case.

Another major area of concern being expressed by the Federation's membership is in regard to mask mandate exemptions. There are neither sufficient nor clear provincial guidelines as to what should and should not qualify a student for a particular mask exemption. In many schools there are a large number of exemptions being permitted and this is undermining the purpose of the mask mandate.

In one particular example, in a school in the southern interior of BC, a BCTF Local President noted that 75% of the students in one classroom had mask exemptions. There are many examples of where a student has been granted a mask exemption on behavioural grounds, where there is nothing in the student file to support this exemption. The use of behavioural exemptions has in some cases been extended by local administrators to include political or personal objections. We are aware that teachers are being provided political form letters from parents when asserting exemption. We also continue to be concerned that there are fundamental misunderstandings around the exemption process at the school district level, leading to the widespread practice of teachers being told to accept all of the exemptions with “no questions asked,” contrary to the government planning resource.

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/safe-caring-orderly/covid-19-planning-mask-exemptions.pdf>

The Federation strongly supports the use of a trauma-informed approach for the implementation and enforcement of the mask mandate. However, the system cannot be more concerned about those who do not want to wear a mask than those who do. For many staff and students, the only reason that they feel safer in school is the mandated use of masks. For these individuals, seeing large numbers of people not wearing masks in a school situation is trauma-inducing.

The Federation requests that the BCCDC and the Ministry of Education work together to produce clearer guidelines to school districts regarding the use of mask exemptions, and that there are clear guidelines on what should and shouldn't qualify a person for a particular type of exemption. Behavioural exemptions should be linked to evidence already in the student's school records. In addition, some exemptions may not need to apply for 100% of the time. In some circumstances, the exemption could apply while the student is in their classroom, but not when they are in other areas of the school where they have the potential to interact with a larger group of individuals. This would be in line with the following recommendations in the BCCDC's *Impact of School Closures on Learning, Child and Family Well-Being During the COVID-19 Pandemic* report: “With support of public health, implement public health and infection prevention and exposure control measures in schools described in BCCDC's COVID-19 Public Health Guidance for K–12 School Settings in BC.” and “With support of public health, develop and communicate a COVID-19 response plan for schools that includes surveillance, testing, staying home from school when sick and contact tracing.”

The Federation calls on the Provincial Health Officer to ensure that any order that mandates vaccines for K–12 workers and volunteers be province-wide. The Federation's position is that for any vaccine mandate to be successfully and fairly implemented, it must be one that treats all education workers and volunteers, except those with bona fide exemptions, across the province equally. Any approach that is determined on a district-by-district basis has the potential to create confusion and angst, and could lead to significant disruption within the education system. We are also concerned that a district-based approach may have unfortunate consequences, with districts in the province in communities with high vaccination rates being more likely to implement a mandate than those areas with the lowest vaccination rates.

Dr. Bonnie Henry
October 12, 2021

Finally, the Federation calls on both government and provincial health officials to develop a comprehensive strategy to vaccinate children from 5- to 11-years old in anticipation of Health Canada approval of a COVID-19 vaccine. We know that this work has begun, but there is a great urgency.

I also wanted to reiterate the BCTF's offer to work with the Provincial Health Office on a plan to increase vaccination rates, particularly in the Northern regions of the province.

The Federation would welcome further dialogue on these concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Teri Mooring', with a stylized, flowing script.

Teri Mooring
President

pc: Honourable Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Education
Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health

TM:vw:tfeu