

# B.C. teachers consider strike to end standard tests

United In Opposition; Union votes to boycott provincial tests, which lead to school rankings

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The B.C. Teachers' Federation is considering job action to eliminate standardized tests in reading, writing and math.

But BCTF president Irene Lanzinger yesterday said they have yet to decide if job action will be one of those moves.

"I'm not prepared to discuss the details of the plan yet," Ms. Lanzinger said. "What we're going to do is talk to our members and ultimately our members will make the decision."

Ms. Lanzinger, who was attending the BCTF annual general meeting in Vancouver, said it will take time before any action such as a work stoppage takes place.

"It will be a process that takes about a year," she said.

"Right now there is no decision -- we have a number of strategies we think we have to look at."

B.C. Education Minister Shirley Bond refused to speculate on the outcome of a boycott, but said parents often tell her that they approve of standardized tests, which offer perspective on their children's education.

"This has been an ongoing agenda item of the B.C. Teachers' Federation for some time now. It continues to be disappointing. It is really very contrary to what I hear from parents all across the province. Parents tell me they want more information about their students' progress, not less," she said.

"I don't want to anticipate what steps we might take. I am hoping that the B.C. Teachers' Federation would be willing to stop and reconsider. This is an important piece of assessment that's done. Certainly not the only piece. I am happy to talk to them about how the outcomes are used and how we can do that strategically."

Teachers have been opposed to the testing that began in 2000. The provincial tests, known as the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA), are given every year to students in Grades 4 to 7. The Ministry of Education then gives the results to the Fraser Institute for rankings.

Teachers are united in their opposition to the tests, she said. "The one thing we all agree on is that the Fraser Institute rankings are not a valid reflection on the schools."

In the past, there have been calls for a boycott on teachers administering or marking the FSA tests.

The Vancouver Sun learned that in a secret vote on Monday, delegates to the union's annual meeting approved a plan for a boycott next year of the provincial tests.

The vote arose from a resolution from the union's Prince Rupert local urging teachers to refuse to prepare for, administer or mark the FSA in 2009.

Teachers would like the government to stop testing every child and return to the random sampling that was in effect prior to 2000. That would bring an end to the Education Ministry's practice of releasing school-by-school results and kill the Fraser Institute rankings.

Most debates and votes at the BCTF annual meeting are held in an open forum. But before discussion of the Prince Rupert resolution began, delegates decided to go into committee and exclude the media because of a potential decision involving job action.