Op-Ed: All I Want for Christmas Is... a Public Education System That Actually Works

By a still-hopeful, slightly pessimistic, Chilliwack teacher and current President of the Chilliwack Teachers' Association

Every December, my kids ask for the usual holiday gifts: LEGO sets, ninja turtles, a Barbie, and maybe a puppy (which is not happening). But this year, as a Local teachers' union President watching the state of our schools, my wish list is a little different.

All I want for Christmas is... a public education system that isn't held together with duct tape, good intentions, and whatever energy teachers have left after report cards.

And honestly? I can't think of a better time for this province to deliver a new, fair deal for educators—one that truly respects the work we do and finally gives students the learning conditions they deserve. If there's ever a season for generosity, compassion, and doing the right thing, it's this one.



Mish #1: Smaller Classes (because students shouldn't be packed in like shoppers on Christmas Eve)

In too many Chilliwack classrooms, we're past "full" and well into "overflowing." Teachers aren't asking for anything extravagant—we'd just like to be able to walk between desks without having to sideways-shuffle like a newly unwrapped action figure. Students deserve attention. Teachers deserve oxygen. Let's make both happen.



Wish #2: More specialists, more supports, more time

Kids with complex needs are waiting months—sometimes years—for assessments and services. If Santa can deliver gifts to millions of kids overnight, surely the government can deliver a few more school counsellors (like they promised last election), specialist teachers, school psychologists, speech and language pathologists, and Education Assistants to our province?



🧩 Wish #3: A serious plan to fix the teacher shortage

Teachers are leaving the profession faster than gingerbread disappears in the staff room. We need a long-term recruitment and retention plan—one that goes beyond "good luck and hang in there." Because "holiday spirit" shouldn't be the only thing keeping people in the job.



Wish #4: Less politics, more actual solutions

Look, I understand that SOGI123 makes for dramatic headlines. Controversy always sells. But while some Conservative MLAs seem determined to audition for the role of "Christmas Ghost of Manufactured Outrage," teachers are dealing with real problems — not imaginary ones.

While politicians argue about rainbow worksheets like they're illegal holiday contraband, teachers are trying to support a class of 28 students that includes:

- •Several complex learners
- •Students who should have been assessed long ago
- •Children waiting for counselling that doesn't exist
- •And two new arrivals who came mid-year with zero added resources

None of these challenges are solved by waving around culture-war ornaments and pretending they're policy solutions. Our classrooms don't need more political theatre; they need staffing, resources, and stability. Santa can deliver toys down a chimney, but even he can't deliver student supports that were never funded in the first place.

To the NDP: saying all the right things about supporting public education while quietly underfunding it? That's like promising a bike and then delivering two wheels and a manual.

Both sides need to do better.

🔯 Wish #5: Stop treating public schools like the discount bin while flirting with privatization

Public education isn't a stocking stuffer—it's the whole sleigh. Funding private alternatives while starved public systems try to keep up is like giving one kid a Nintendo Switch and handing the other a pack of AA batteries.

Wish #6: A contract that respects teachers and lifts students

Teachers aren't asking for gold, frankincense, and myrrh. We're asking for:

- •manageable class sizes
- •time to prepare
- •supports for kids
- •resources that meet today's needs

A contract that reflects reality—not the North Pole version the employer imagines.



& Why now?

Because this is the season when we're reminded that people matter. Community matters. Kids matter. And the people who help shape their futures—teachers, EAs, support staff—deserve a system that lets them do their jobs well. Every day, teachers across BC are performing holiday miracles: de-escalating crisis after crisis, adapting lessons on the fly, juggling complex needs, and squeezing a year's worth of care into every hour.

What we need now is for government—and opposition—to stop relying on those miracles.

So here it is, my simple Christmas wish:

A stronger, fairer, properly funded public education system.

One that honours students.

One that respects teachers.

One that gives families hope.

If Santa can haul a sack of gifts across the globe in a single night, surely our leaders—all of them—can manage to deliver a fair deal this holiday season.

Because all I want for Christmas... is for BC to invest in the future sitting in every classroom.

And unlike the puppy, this one really can happen.

Reid Clark

President