

# Bellingham Technical College denied injunction against striking teachers

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Striking Bellingham Technical College instructors picket outside the Whatcom County Courthouse Tuesday morning, Sept. 24, 2013, while school administrators seek an injunction in Whatcom Superior Court against the strikers to force them to go back to work.

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By SAMANTHA WOHLFEIL — THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

A Whatcom County court commissioner denied an injunction to stop a strike by Bellingham Technical College instructors Tuesday morning, Sept. 24, allowing picketers to continue demonstrating while negotiators try to settle contracts for the next biennium. Faculty members

cheered in front of the Whatcom County Courthouse as word was handed down that the court would not force them to immediately stop their strike and go back to work.

Members of the Bellingham Education Association, the faculty union, held picket signs and frantically checked their smart phones for news, which came after a two-hour court hearing between the union and the college's lawyers.

BTC instructors went on strike Tuesday, forcing the cancellation of classes on what was scheduled to be the first day of the fall term.

Commissioner Fred Heydrich issued the ruling in Whatcom County Superior Court.

Faculty members voted Thursday, Sept. 19, to strike if the school failed to offer a "fair contract settlement by the scheduled start of school Tuesday, Sept. 24," according to the union.

Mediators from the Washington State Public Employment Relations Commission worked with both sides over the weekend, but they still could not agree on terms by Monday. Negotiations were scheduled to resume at 11:30 a.m. Tuesday.

The faculty has been negotiating with the school for almost a year, according to union liaison Tony Kuphaldt, an instructor at BTC.

The union is asking for a three-year contract with across-the-board faculty salary raises of 3 percent in the first year, 2.5 percent in the second year, and an undefined raise during the third year for faculty stipends, Kuphaldt said.

The faculty at BTC has not received pay increases since 2008, Kuphaldt said. Neither have they received pay cuts, something a BTC press release said the school was able to avoid in 2012 and 2013 during a time when employees at other colleges and state agencies took 3 percent salary cuts.

Faculty members also wanted the school to clarify contract language regarding work load, Kuphaldt said.

"Our contract defines hours of contact time, but it doesn't talk about non-instructional duties, like how much we're paid for non-contact duties or other extra duties," he said.

BTC's latest proposal, as of Monday afternoon, was for a three-year contract with various salary and stipend increases. The cost to the college in the first year would be \$133,801, with additional costs in the next two years, according to BTC spokeswoman Marni Saling Mayer.

A BTC statement said, in contrast, the latest demands from the faculty union would cost the college in excess of \$287,000 the first year, more than double BTC's offer.

The administration posted its [latest offer here](#) (PDF).

BTC faculty and classified staff receive above-average wages compared to others in the state community and technical college system, according to a school release.

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Read more here: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2013/09/24/3222429/btc-seeks-injunction-against-striking.html#storylink=cpy>