

Teaching and Learning Conditions in Alberta: A Global Perspective





The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Alberta Teachers' Association

11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton AB T5N 2R1

Telephone 780-447-9400 or 1-800-232-7208

www.teachers.ab.ca

Further information about the Association's research is available from Lindsay Yakimyshyn at the Alberta Teachers' Association; email lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

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Foreword

Schoolteachers ... are the economic proletarians of the professions.

—C Wright Mills (1951)

Depending on one's views about the impacts of globalization over the past few decades, C Wright Mills's (1951) analysis both clarifies and confounds our understanding of the current conditions of practice for Alberta teachers and their collective status as a profession. Since Mills offered up this prescient conclusion decades ago, we have seen a rise in the number and status of "the professions" alongside widening income disparity among the professional classes—all accompanied by diminished workplace control and flexibility over conditions of practice. Across health care, policing, education and business administration, external mechanisms of control have been facilitated by technological advances such as data analytics and surveillance tools—all supported by the growth of performance management systems, hierarchy and regulation.

This historical trend helps to contextualize a key element of the Association's strategic plan to advocate for optimal conditions of teaching practice. A growing body of research points to the growing gap between government policy rhetoric that claims support of teacher professionalism, autonomy and leadership, and the experiences of Alberta teachers who increasingly live their lives as "professional employees" (Smaller et al 2005, 30) held to account by managerial models of school governance and inappropriate performance measures that do little to build capacity or trust in public institutions. Further, given teachers' current paradoxical role as "professional employees," the aspiration of Alberta teachers to be seen as professionals "is continually in jeopardy because of organizational decisions made outside the influence of classroom teachers. Educational practices such as standardized curricula, testing and reporting, bigger classroom sizes, and increased administrative duties, just to name a few, have an enormous impact upon the immediate workspace of teachers" (p 42).

As the Association engages in this collective challenge, the dilemma remains clear: to advocate for building the capacity of the profession while acknowledging the fact that teacher and school factors combined determine no more than 30 per cent of student learning outcomes (Berliner and Glass 2014). In a recent speaking tour of Alberta, David Berliner, one of the foremost educational writers today, further reminded us that, "in the rush to improve student achievement through accountability systems relying on high-stakes tests, our policymakers and citizens forgot, or cannot understand, or deliberately avoid the fact that our children live nested lives." When one considers the findings of ongoing Association research, the same can be said for Alberta teachers:

- The average teacher in Alberta works 56 hours a week, which amounts to almost two days per week of unpaid time.

- Thirty-two per cent of Alberta teachers report that they have little control over their work lives, and 72 per cent report high levels of conflict between their working life and their personal time.
- Outside of declining support for students with special needs, the most critical reason that teachers are experiencing a dramatic decline in their professional work life is that they are seldom consulted about the acquisition of new technologies, especially those used to track and report on student progress.
- All these developments are key findings of *Teaching and Learning Conditions in Alberta: A Global Perspective* and point to the need for a comprehensive and systems-oriented perspective on the impacts of continued deterioration of teaching practice conditions in Alberta.

A HUMAN ECOLOGY APPROACH TO ENHANCING TEACHER EFFICACY AND CONDITIONS OF PRACTICE

One of the Association's research studies highlighted in this publication is *Reflections on Teaching: Teacher Efficacy and the Professional Capital of Alberta Teachers* (ATA 2014b). This study explores the key influences that characterize the relationship between teachers' sense of efficacy and work-life balance over the course of a school year. This study's overriding purpose was to examine the potential and utility of a teacher reflection tool that school leaders could employ to engage their staffs in collaborative inquiry about the critical influences that shape the day-to-day lives of teachers. This tool was adapted from Christopher Day and Qing Gu's (2010) longitudinal study of teachers' career paths in the United Kingdom. This work draws on a long line of social-ecological theory that seeks to understand the complex interrelationships that influence an individual's behaviour in complex social subsystems (Bronfenbrenner 1977). Bronfenbrenner's work on human ecology was later applied to the study of teachers, specifically studies of special education teachers conducted by Miller, Brownell and Smith (1999). The four influences that shape teachers' sense of efficacy (personal, pupil, practice setting and policy)—from Day and Gu's (2010) study—were applied to the Association's recent study of teacher efficacy.

This study, *Teaching and Learning Conditions in Alberta: A Global Perspective*, builds on teacher work-life studies recently conducted in schools across Alberta, including *The New Work of Teaching: A Case Study of the Worklife of Calgary Public Teachers* (ATA 2012b), which identified a number of complex factors that contributed to teachers' work-life balance and teachers' capacity to carry out their professional roles and responsibilities. As well, the growing interest in better understanding the drivers that sustain teacher efficacy was the focus of a collaborative study funded by Alberta Education and conducted by a University of Alberta research team, the Association and other education partners in the province. The study, *Exploring the Development of Teacher Efficacy Through Professional Learning Experiences* (Klassen et al 2014), will help schools and districts better consider ways to develop professional learning initiatives to build teachers' self- and collective efficacy. An invitational symposium held at the end of November 2014 featured this important research and identified strategies for mobilizing this work in the schools.

Teaching and Learning Conditions in Alberta: A Global Perspective contextualizes the work life of Alberta teachers in an international context. Ongoing research efforts will continue to highlight the challenges teachers face in their classrooms, where conditions of practice continue to be characterized by the growing complexity of student needs and expectations to improve learning opportunities for all students. Association members further interested in these research activities or who have suggestions for exploring related lines of inquiry are invited to contact the Association.

J-C Couture
Associate Coordinator, Research
Alberta Teachers' Association

Jim Parsons
Department of Secondary Education
University of Alberta

Preface

As 2015 begins and we initiate the process of moving into the next phases of collective bargaining, this publication should spark a renewed commitment to address the conditions of practice for Alberta teachers—not to mention the host of other systemic barriers to creating a great school for all Alberta students. With the current four-year legislated framework coming to an end in the 2015/16 school year, we are past the time for vague promises that characterize too many New Year's resolutions. Addressing teachers' workload must be a cornerstone for enhancing Alberta's education system and could become an important legacy for a rebooted Alberta government that claims to be "under new management."

In the past three years, Alberta Education has conducted its own internal workload review, as well as a third-party study, to examine how teacher work life can be enhanced in ways that improve the educational experience of Alberta's 600,000 students. Similar efforts continue to be undertaken by each of Alberta's 62 school boards. Yet, after reviewing the synthesis of recent Alberta workload studies offered in this publication, there can be little doubt that teachers' working conditions have continued to deteriorate.

The international perspective offered in this report further underscores the reality that Alberta teachers are part of a global struggle to achieve the conditions of practice that will optimize their impact on student learning and system performance. Specifically, *Teaching and Learning Conditions in Alberta: A Global Perspective* contributes to the Association's research mobilization strategy to address the ongoing refusal of key jurisdictions and government officials to attend to workload issues. Drawing on recent data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), this study demonstrates that Alberta teachers work, on average, 10 hours more than the international average and with larger class sizes and more complex student populations than many other Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) jurisdictions. With the exception of Japan, no other jurisdiction reports higher numbers of hours worked by teachers. This finding is even more significant given the composition of Alberta classrooms and the declining supports for students with special needs highlighted in the Association's *Report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools*, published in September 2014.

Having endured the government's recent focus on "excellence in teaching," the emerging enthusiasm by some system leaders and government officials to ramp up "quality teaching"—driven by the marketing of John Hattie's Visible Learning program—ignores the complex interrelationships that determine the conditions of teaching practice and student readiness to learn. The poverty of Hattie's work is that it also ignores the psychological lives of teachers and their school communities, relationships with students, personal and family circumstances, and overall efficacy. Similar to other

researchers profiling “teacher quality” as the next educational policy cure-all, Hattie’s work offers some useful insights into teaching and learning; however, there is a huge risk that this focus will continue to justify the continued refusal to address the systemic obstacles to optimal teaching and learning conditions in Alberta classrooms.

As with all Association research initiatives, a collaborative effort drove this project to completion. J-C Couture, who oversees the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s research, designed and coordinated the analysis, which was undertaken by lead researcher Chris Smith, a doctoral candidate at Carleton University. Long-serving University of Alberta professor Jim Parsons joined the work as a coauthor. Administrative officer Lindsay Yakimyshyn oversaw production of the final publication. Special thanks to Linda Duxbury, one of the world’s leading researchers in organizational health, who provided technical assistance and oversight.

This study is a timely and powerful reminder that teachers and policymakers across Canada—and indeed the globe—are currently grappling with the growing intensification of teachers’ work. I invite thoughtful consideration of this report, but, more importantly, hope it will act as a catalyst for action.

Gordon R Thomas
Executive Secretary

Introduction and Rationale

Within the context of a continually changing education environment—one that has recently seen a proliferation of technology for communication and assessment, growing class sizes and an emphasis on standardization—the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) undertook its Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) in 2013. TALIS “focuses on the working conditions of teachers and the learning environments in schools” and “aims to provide valid, timely and comparable information to help countries review and define policies for developing a high-quality teaching profession” (OECD 2014, 27). To meet its objectives, TALIS focuses on issues related to workload, classroom composition, professional development and job satisfaction. Though international in scope, the TALIS report provides insight into the working conditions of Canadian—more specifically, Albertan—teachers. As the study’s Canadian sample consists entirely of teachers in the province of Alberta, the TALIS results are a snapshot of Alberta’s current teaching and learning environment. Therefore, the TALIS data invite comparisons with recent research focused on Alberta’s education environment. This report accepts that invitation.

This report aims to ascertain how the 2013 TALIS findings compare with the key themes and conclusions of six studies focused on Alberta teachers undertaken within the past three years. The following studies will be analyzed in the context of the TALIS findings:

- *Reflections on Teaching: Teacher Efficacy and the Professional Capital of Alberta Teachers* (Alberta Teachers’ Association [ATA] 2014b)
- *The Future Is Growing Together: Building the Professional Capital of Teachers in Rocky View Schools* (ATA 2014d)
- *The 2011/12 National Study on Balancing Work, Life and Caregiving in Canada: The Situation for Alberta Teachers* (Duxbury and Higgins 2013)
- *Transformation and a Culture of Trust: Leading Our Future Together* (ATA 2013b)
- *The New Work of Teaching: A Case Study of the Worklife of Calgary Public Teachers* (ATA 2012b)
- *Exploring the Development of Teacher Efficacy through Professional Learning Experiences* (Klassen et al 2014).

While the TALIS results and the six Alberta-centred reports cover similar subject matter, reviewing the seven studies together creates an opportunity to better assess the current state of learning and teaching in Alberta for the following reasons:

- *Methodological diversity.* Qualitative methodologies such as those employed in the ATA (2014b, 2012b) studies provide deeper understanding of topics explored quantitatively in the TALIS study.

- *Generalizability.* Overlapping subject matter and similar findings across reports indicate the presence of several trends—TALIS’s large sample lends credence to similar findings that emerge from ATA studies with smaller sample sizes.
- *Ability to “zoom in” on issues.* TALIS highlights key issues that the other studies explore in greater depth. For example, the Duxbury and Higgins (2013) study offers a thorough examination of the work–life balance of Alberta teachers, analyzing more fully a theme that the TALIS report could only briefly address.

With the objective of comparative analysis at its core, the report is structured as follows: an overview of past research, featuring a summary of the six Alberta reports; a comparison of TALIS and the Alberta studies, which examines and compares key themes and findings; and a final section that draws together conclusions and implications.

Overview of Past Research

This section provides a brief synopsis of each of the six studies noted in the introduction, focusing primarily on each study's objective and design, key findings and implications for comparison. Highlights of the studies are consolidated in Table 1.

Table 1. Highlights of the featured studies

Study	Objective	Sample	Instrument	Implications
<i>Reflections on Teaching: Teacher Efficacy and the Professional Capital of Alberta Teachers</i> (ATA 2014b)	To identify factors affecting teachers' efficacy and well-being	138 teachers, provinciewide	Line charts and interviews (quantitative, qualitative)	Efficacy and well-being are linked; both have an impact on teaching and learning
<i>The Future Is Growing Together: Building the Professional Capital of Teachers in Rocky View Schools</i> (ATA 2014d)	To explore the impact of past change initiatives on teachers and administration	553 teachers from Rocky View, ATA Local No 35	Survey, short-answer questions (quantitative, qualitative)	Teachers are unable to achieve work–life balance; they do not feel included in the decisions that affect them
<i>Exploring the Development of Teacher Efficacy through Professional Learning Experiences</i> (Klassen et al 2014)	To explore teachers' perceptions of their best professional learning and factors that impact their individual and collective efficacy	416 Alberta teachers from 10 schools in 5 divisions interviewed; 758 Alberta teachers from five school divisions surveyed	Focus group interviews and surveys (quantitative, qualitative)	Teachers' collaboration with colleagues offers the best professional learning; the teacher community positively influences efficacy
<i>The 2011/12 National Study on Balancing Work, Life and Caregiving in Canada: The Situation for Alberta Teachers</i> (Duxbury and Higgins 2013)	To explore role overload and work–life balance	2,462 teachers, provinciewide	Survey (quantitative)	Teachers' work roles are impeding work–life balance and well-being
<i>Transformation and a Culture of Trust: Leading Our Future Together</i> (ATA 2013b)	To obtain feedback on issues related to teachers' work life	811 teachers from Calgary Public Teachers, ATA Local No 38	Survey, short-answer questions (quantitative, qualitative)	Teaching and learning conditions are worsening; teachers do not feel involved in decisions that affect them
<i>The New Work of Teaching: A Case Study of the Worklife of Calgary Public Teachers</i> (ATA 2012b)	To explore impacts of work intensification, technology and class composition on workload	20 teachers from Calgary	Journal entries and focus groups (quantitative, qualitative)	Work intensification is problematic; technology and discretionary tasks are main drivers

REFLECTIONS ON TEACHING: TEACHER EFFICACY AND THE PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL OF ALBERTA TEACHERS

Objective and Design

Motivated by the continuing intensification of teachers' work, this study aimed to “identify the major factors that influence teachers' sense of efficacy and their ability to achieve a work–life balance over the course of the school year” (ATA 2014b, 19). In order to do so, researchers asked the 138 study participants—all Alberta teachers—to draw two line charts: one illustrating the high and low points of their own sense of effectiveness and impact on student learning throughout the school year, and another showing the highs and lows of their overall sense of well-being over the course of the same year. Participants then identified factors that influenced their highs and lows and described in depth how each factor affected each line. Researchers then asked participants to compare the two lines and explain any similarities or differences.

Key Findings

Overall, perceptions of self-efficacy and well-being did not differ significantly from one another over the course of the year, meaning that the two could be linked. In fact, 77 per cent of participants indicated that their two lines were related. The factors identified as most impactful on both lines fell into one of three categories: practice, personal and students. Notably, factors influencing highs and lows, respectively, were usually the positive and negative outcomes of the same factor; for example, positive interactions with students were noted as producing increases in self-efficacy and well-being, while negative interactions with students produced decreases in each line. Similar relationships appeared in relation to personal factors (such as health) and practice (such as availability or lack of time). Overall, the inability to achieve work–life balance had the largest impact on respondents' line charts.

Implications

Two main implications arise regarding teaching and learning conditions in Alberta: “(1) that teachers' sense of professional efficacy and ability to achieve a work–life balance are inexplicably linked and (2) that teachers who feel ineffective or whose personal well-being is compromised are less able to help their students learn” (p 53). The report's authors recommend solutions—including increasing preparation time, monitoring class composition and size, defining scope of responsibilities, and redesigning or shifting workloads—to reduce work–life conflict and improve teachers' efficacy and well-being, ultimately creating a better learning experience for students.

THE FUTURE IS GROWING TOGETHER: BUILDING THE PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL OF TEACHERS IN ROCKY VIEW SCHOOLS

Objective and Design

The 2013 survey of Rocky View Schools teachers at the heart of the ATA (2014d) report is an extension of a 2011 survey by Rocky View Local No 35. The local re-administered the 2011 survey in 2013 to collect longitudinal data, aiming to assess the impact of the school board's past change initiatives on teachers and administration. The report's comparison of the 2011 and 2013 data paints a picture of declining teaching and learning conditions, with class sizes growing and workloads intensifying.

Key Findings

The 2013 survey presents some discouraging findings with respect to morale and commitment to teaching. Only 50 per cent of respondents said that teaching brings them satisfaction (down 14 per cent since 2011), while more than one-third would change professions for similar pay and benefits. Increasing dissatisfaction with classroom characteristics, size and composition appears to contribute to teachers' growing disillusionment, as declines in satisfaction regarding class size (down 14 per cent), classroom composition (down 13 per cent) and support for students with special needs (down 11 per cent) have been noted since the 2011 study. Workloads are also on the rise. Eighty-one per cent of the 2013 study participants reported working at least 50 hours per week (up 5 per cent from 2011), while at the same time expectations with respect to communication and digital assessment and reporting have increased. In addition, teachers appear to be dissatisfied with professional development opportunities, with a decline in the perceived usefulness of workshops offered. Further, less than half of surveyed teachers felt that they had a high degree of autonomy over the development of their own careers. Despite the increasing levels of dissatisfaction noted in some areas, teachers' reports of positive relationships with students did not decline.

Implications

The report findings resonate with other studies profiled here. To the detriment of their own well-being, teachers are becoming less able to balance their workloads and their personal lives. Moreover, teachers feel that they are not included in decision making with respect to systemwide changes that affect their lives.

EXPLORING THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEACHER EFFICACY THROUGH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Objective and Design

This study aimed to better understand the relationship between teacher professional learning and teacher efficacy. The research was carried out from 2011 to 2013 in Alberta districts and schools where professional learning had reportedly made a difference in professional practice. The researchers employed a mixed-methods design: 758 teachers in five school districts were surveyed (four surveys conducted) and 416 teachers from two schools (one elementary and one secondary) in each of the five districts were interviewed. Of the 10 schools in which interviews were conducted, four were rural, four were located in medium–large cities, and two were located in smaller cities. The smallest school had a teaching staff of fewer than 10 teachers; the largest school had a staff of more than 50 teachers. Eight schools were public schools; two schools were Catholic separate schools.

Key Findings

The findings hone in on the relationship between the kinds of professional learning activities and how these activities influence the sources of self-efficacy. Using Bandura’s four sources of self-efficacy—mastery experiences, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and affective state—the study finds that verbal persuasion was the highest source of efficacy reported through collaborative activities, such as professional service and professional learning communities. As well, collaboration and verbal persuasion (ie, encouragement) were sources of efficacy. Mastery experiences and affective states were the highest sources of efficacy when professional learning was considered teacher-initiated. Further, teachers overwhelmingly prefer collaborative professional learning activities.

This study found that mid-career teachers reported highest levels of efficacy; this finding corroborates previous research. Notably, efficacy was significantly lower in later career teachers. The study also found that professional learning activities moderately influenced teacher efficacy. Specifically, teacher-initiated activities influenced self-efficacy and professional learning communities enhanced collective efficacy.

Implications

This study’s findings provide greater insight into how to engage teacher professional learning at the school, district and organizational levels. Collaboration was an especially powerful tool contributing to teachers’ collective efficacy, and this study underscores the importance of building a sense of collective efficacy through whole-school collaborative activities. The study suggests that, if teachers engage in successful professional learning, their sources of self- and collective efficacy in turn influence the climate of the school, the engagement levels of teachers, and the learning of students.

THE 2011/12 NATIONAL STUDY ON BALANCING WORK, LIFE AND CAREGIVING IN CANADA: THE SITUATION FOR ALBERTA TEACHERS

Objective and Design

In 2012, 2,462 ATA members were surveyed as part of a larger national study that explored, among other topics, work–life balance (Duxbury and Higgins 2013).¹ The study was built on the premise that people play many roles in their lives (for example, parent, sibling, child, spouse, worker), often concurrently. Because roles often overlap, when a person is overloaded in one or more of his or her roles, overall work–life balance is likely to suffer.

Key Findings

The analysis indicates that role overload and lack of work–life balance affect Alberta teachers. ATA members in the study's sample had many roles, with 35 per cent taking on two or three roles and 41 per cent taking on four or five roles. For instance, 75 per cent reported having eldercare duties, while 59 per cent were responsible for child care. Work demands appear to be particularly onerous: the sample of Alberta teachers averaged about 60 hours of work per week (the national average was about 50 hours), and 71 per cent of the sample indicated being overloaded by their work role. Family role overload, at 28 per cent, was much less common and was consistent with the national sample. In all, over 80 per cent of the ATA sample reported high levels of total overload (more than double the national sample).

The report's authors find the total overload reported by participating Alberta teachers troubling because overload can ultimately affect organizational outcomes in the following areas:

- *Commitment.* Only about half of ATA members are committed to their organization, and about a third have high intent to leave their organization.
- *Job satisfaction.* About 60 per cent are dissatisfied with their workload and hours.
- *Absenteeism.* Almost half (45 per cent) have missed a day of work as a result of fatigue.

About 75 per cent of the sample of Alberta teachers indicated that their work life impedes their home life, with many respondents reporting high levels of perceived stress (70 per cent, compared with 57 per cent of the total sample) and high levels of depressed mood (47 per cent). Stress and depressed mood are known outcomes of role overload. In addition, data indicate that organizational culture may be exacerbating the problem, as half of the sample indicated a belief that their organization expects them to be available 24/7 and to keep their work and home lives separate.

Implications

Alberta teachers are overloaded at work, and this appears to be reducing their overall work–life balance, which has led to negative outcomes such as stress and depression. The report proposes that the province's school boards work to adopt a culture that better facilitates work–life balance (this mirrors the conclusions of the ATA's [2012] study on Calgary public teachers).

TRANSFORMATION AND A CULTURE OF TRUST: LEADING OUR FUTURE TOGETHER

Objective and Design

This ATA (2013b) report summarizes the 2013 member survey completed by 811 members of Calgary Public Teachers Local No 38. The survey and related report aim to improve understanding of the issues that affect teachers' work life. As part of the analysis, the report compares the survey responses with data from the 2010 iteration of the survey. The comparison points to increasing dissatisfaction in most areas covered by the surveys. Presenting findings from the 2013 survey—particularly those that indicate deteriorating conditions and teachers' increasing perceptions of isolation from the government and the school board—this report works to build a case for rethinking the province's transformative change processes. Re-examination of these processes, the report's authors suggest, could ultimately lead to a more sustainable implementation process that includes the input of all stakeholders and uses relevant and multifaceted data for evaluation and planning.

Key Findings

Teaching and learning conditions appear to have deteriorated greatly; in comparison to the 2010 data, the 2013 results show more dissatisfaction on all measures. Teachers participating in the 2013 study were more likely to report working longer hours (81 per cent work 50+ hours a week, up from 63 per cent) and to report not being able to achieve work–life balance (63 per cent were dissatisfied with work–life balance, up from 37 per cent). Also, teachers' overall and economic well-being dropped. Dissatisfaction with expectations related to student reporting grew, while at the same time the perceived effectiveness of reporting practices was in decline. Moreover, data indicate that teachers feel left out of the change process: only 0.74 per cent of the sample agreed strongly that their school board values teachers' opinions when making policy decisions and almost three-quarters (71 per cent) either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Similarly, 45 per cent of the 2013 survey participants rated the province's attitude toward teachers as being a high stressor, while another 35 per cent rated the school board's attitude similarly.

Implications

Conditions are worsening, and teachers feel excluded from decision making. To make changes that will be widely accepted and ultimately beneficial to the state of teaching and learning conditions, the report argues, teachers must be involved in the change process. However, communication and trust must be established before true collaboration can occur.

THE NEW WORK OF TEACHING: A CASE STUDY OF THE WORKLIFE OF CALGARY PUBLIC TEACHERS

Objective and Design

To further explore the issues of work intensification, the impact of technology on teachers' work and the impact of class composition, 20 Calgary teachers were asked to keep 24-hour journals for one week in the spring of 2011 (ATA 2012b). Participants recorded any work activity—whether it took place during traditional work hours, on weeknights or on weekends—in 10-minute blocks to provide a snapshot of a teacher's work life.

Key Findings

The study found that, on average, participants worked about 55 hours per week. They spent most of their time (almost 80 per cent) in the diarized week performing what the study classifies as instructional duties. These duties include instruction (19 hours per week), planning (7.1 hours per week), assessment (9.5 hours per week) and reporting/communication (8.2 hours per week). The most time-consuming duties classified as non-instructional work activities were clerical work (3.3 hours per week) and supervising students (2.9 hours per week). The duty of extracurricular activities was the only one in the category of discretionary work activity to consume more than an hour of the average described workweek. Demonstrating that work and home are not necessarily separate realms for teachers, study participants brought home, on average, about 20 hours of work on weeknights and over the weekend. Participants also indicated that multitasking occurred frequently, meaning that estimates for time spent working both at school and at home were likely underreported. Focus groups concluded that multitasking was at times detrimental to the tasks and people involved and that organizational culture was a driver of “involuntary” discretionary work.

Implications

The study demonstrates that work intensification is occurring, that multitasking reduces focus and leads to substandard results, and that technology has increased the pace and intensity of work. The authors conclude that, to improve teachers' work-life balance, workloads should be reconsidered. Further, they suggest that school leaders can enable improvements by leading change in the current culture of overwork (such as making it okay to say no to voluntary tasks).

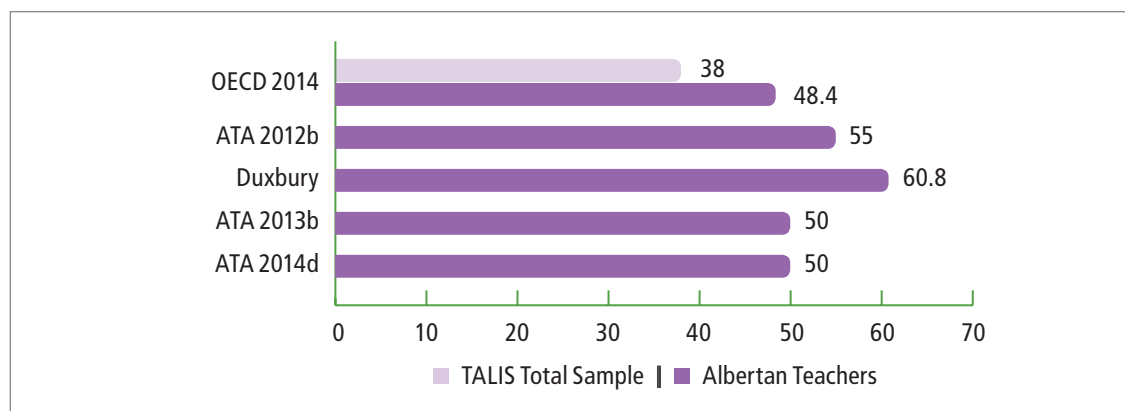
Comparison of TALIS and Alberta Studies

Because the Canadian sample of the TALIS report on teaching and learning conditions (OECD 2014) consists exclusively of Alberta teachers, the report allows for productive comparison with similar research recently undertaken in the Alberta context. Below is a comparative analysis of the studies' findings, with particular attention paid to the overarching themes of workload; classroom composition; professional development; and job satisfaction, well-being and morale.

WORKLOAD

Workload was at the forefront of all the studies profiled here, with five of the seven calculating the average amount of hours worked per week by participants. Figure 1 represents the hours that the studies' participants reported working.

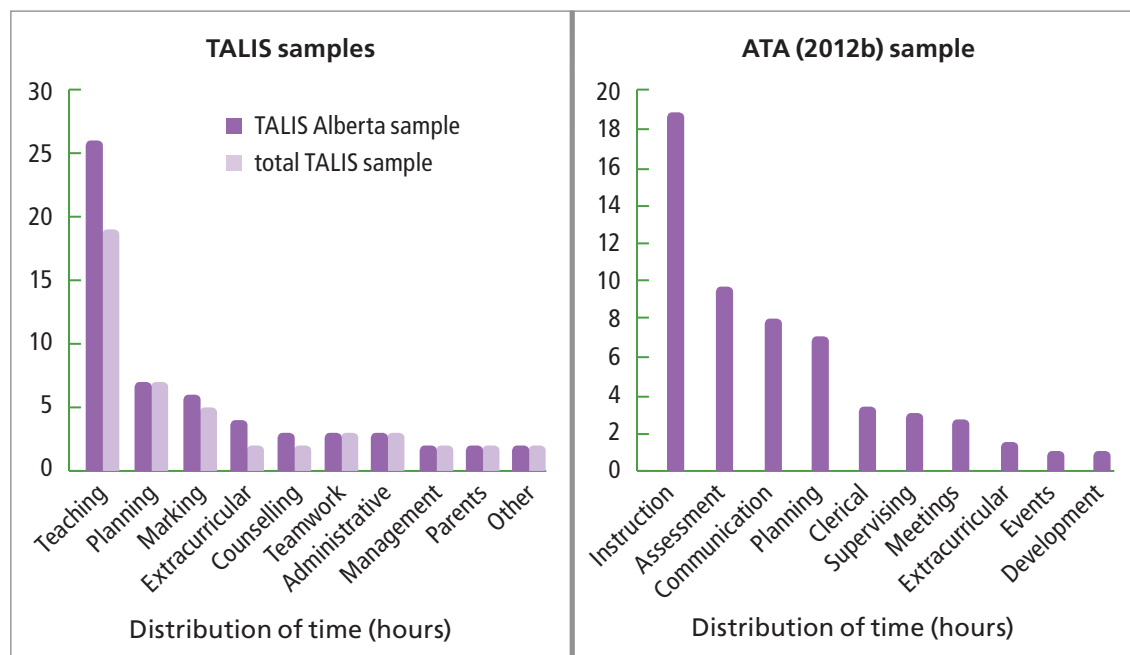
Figure 1. Average hours per week worked by study participants.



TALIS respondents from Alberta indicated that they worked, on average, about 48 hours per week. This represents fewer hours than Alberta teachers in the other four studies reported working. Nonetheless, it amounts to a full workday more than the 40-hour workweek and is about 10 hours more per week than reports from other TALIS jurisdictions. Further suggesting that Alberta teachers' workload is notably high, the 60.8 hours reported by Alberta teachers in the Duxbury and Higgins (2013) sample is 10 hours more than the study's national average. Given this, it is not surprising that participants in the ATA's 2012b study reported spending upwards of 20 hours on work activities outside of regular working hours. As work hours are often underreported, due in part to multitasking as respondents often neglect to "clock in" for all tasks (ATA 2012b), the data from the five studies could be understating the situation.

Several of the studies classified work activities to determine how the participants spent the hours they worked. Although the TALIS report and the ATA's 2012b study use slightly different terminology to classify work activities, the distribution of teachers' time in the two reports is similar (see Figure 2). However, respondents in the ATA's study reported eight hours of communicating with parents, while those in the TALIS study reported two hours. Notably, the ATA study noted as a stressor increased expectations surrounding e-mail correspondence. Another discrepancy arises in relation to time spent teaching: TALIS's Alberta sample reported teaching more (26 hours) than the ATA's sample (19 hours) and the TALIS sample as a whole (19 hours). Also, TALIS's Alberta sample spent more time marking, counselling and in extracurricular duties than the greater TALIS sample.

Figure 2. Distribution of work hours: TALIS Alberta sample and total sample (left) versus ATA (2012b) (right). Note: TALIS scores are for an average week, while the ATA responses are from a particular single week.



While some studies paid attention to distribution of work hours, the Duxbury and Higgins (2013) study queried into teachers' satisfaction regarding workload. The study indicates that only 28 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the number of hours they work and 28 per cent were satisfied with their current workload. Across the studies discussed here, several factors that influence workload emerged from participants' responses, including increasing use of technology for reporting and communication, as well as growing class size and more complex classroom composition.

CLASSROOM COMPOSITION

The Alberta studies under consideration, as well as the theoretical literature, often tie classroom composition (size and complexity) to increases in workload-related stress. Based on the TALIS findings, Figures 3 and 4 indicate that Alberta classrooms are larger and more complex than those in the greater sample.

Figure 3. Comparison of class size: average number of students in TALIS’s Alberta and greater samples (OECD 2014).

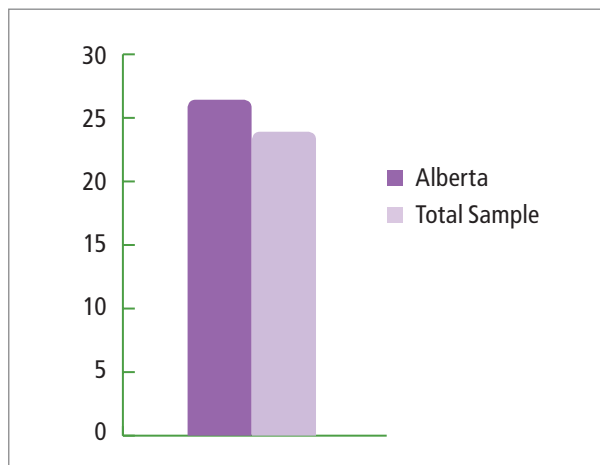
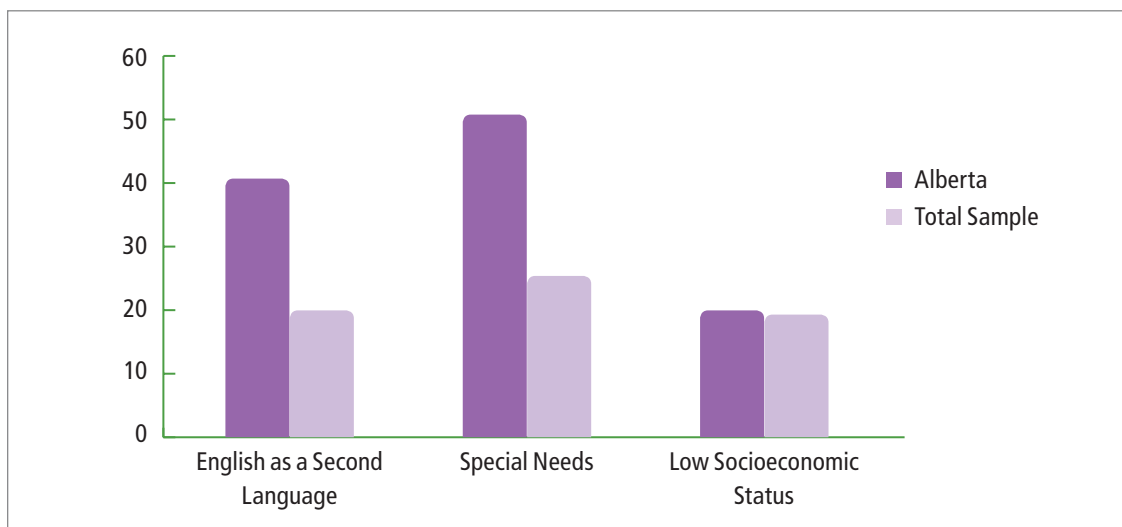


Figure 4. Comparison of class composition: percentage of teachers at schools with a significant population of students with English as a second language, special needs or low socioeconomic status in TALIS’s Alberta and greater samples (OECD 2014).



TALIS findings show that Alberta teachers work in larger classes than the overall sample (26 versus 24 students). Teachers in Alberta also work in more complex settings than others in the sample, as a higher percentage of the Alberta sample work in schools with more than 10 per cent of students with a first language other than the teaching language (41 per cent versus 21 per cent) and with special needs (51 per cent versus 26 per cent). A slightly higher percentage of Alberta teachers work in schools in which at least 30 per cent of the student population is considered low socioeconomic status in comparison to the TALIS average (20.3 per cent versus 19.6 per cent).

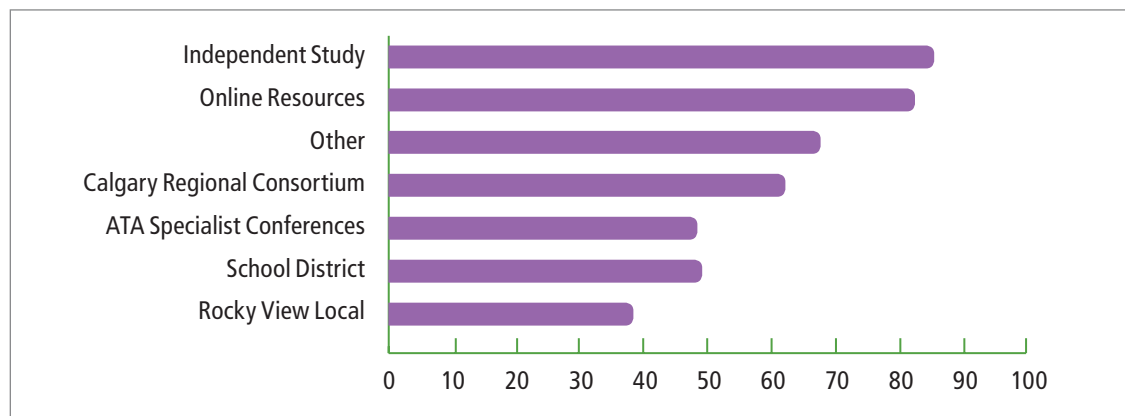
Data from the ATA's (2014d) study of teachers in Rocky View Schools suggest that teachers are becoming more disheartened by class size and composition, as only 37 per cent were satisfied with class size and 36 per cent were satisfied with composition. The increasing dissatisfaction is likely due to inadequate support for the new context: while 25 per cent were satisfied with support for students with special needs, only 20 per cent were satisfied with support for teachers in the inclusive classroom model. The TALIS findings also indicate that Alberta teachers feel inadequately prepared for the complex institutions in which they work. For instance, according to the ATA study, only 20 per cent of Rocky View respondents indicated that they had participated in professional development activities aimed at teaching in a multilingual or multicultural environment (the TALIS average was 16.4 per cent). In addition, only 60 per cent of those who underwent such training indicated that they felt the training had either a moderate or a highly positive impact (the TALIS average was 76.7 per cent). Although Alberta's participation in such training is slightly higher than that of the broad TALIS sample, the Alberta context more clearly calls for such training related to more complex needs, as Figure 4 suggests.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Professional development and learning opportunities determined by teachers themselves garnered attention in several of the studies under consideration, signalling their importance in terms of teachers' perceptions of efficacy (Klassen et al 2014) and autonomy.

The TALIS study found that 98 per cent of Alberta teachers (versus 88 per cent of the total sample) had participated in professional development in the year prior to taking the survey. The majority of the professional development took the form of courses, workshops, education conferences or seminars. However, the data also indicate that Alberta's teachers are not entirely satisfied with the professional development opportunities offered or the system. For example, only 44 per cent of the Duxbury and Higgins (2013) sample indicated that professional development opportunities were satisfactory. This dissatisfaction could be linked to the TALIS finding that less than half of Alberta teachers received training in the content (44 per cent) and pedagogy (49 per cent) of their assigned courses. Although Albertans appear to be taking advantage of professional development opportunities, the data in Figure 5 demonstrate that the professional development offered is not necessarily as efficacious as teachers expect, especially given the lack of autonomy in determining the professional learning provided to them.

Figure 5. Perceived usefulness of professional development opportunities offered by a variety of sources: percentage who answered "useful" or "very useful" (ATA 2014d).

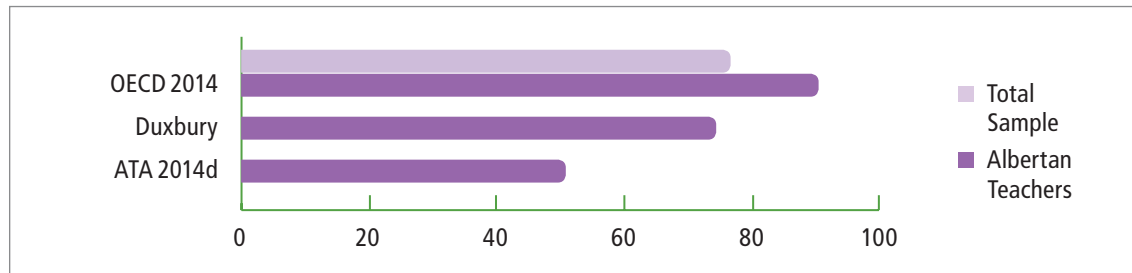


The ATA's (2014d) study of teachers in Rocky View Schools suggests that independent study and online resources—the tools over which teachers have the most control—are perceived to be the most useful forms of professional development. Only 44 per cent in the ATA sample reported high levels of autonomy over professional development, leading one respondent to describe development as “dictated by administration” (p 19). Another respondent said that externally driven professional development opportunities often “involve issues that we never broach again,” adding that “more professional development that is used for organizing and planning our daily lesson plans would be greatly valued as an educator” (p 17).

JOB SATISFACTION, WELL-BEING AND MORALE

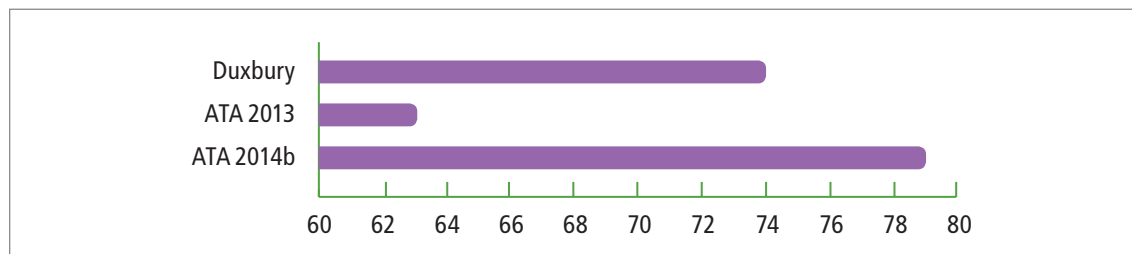
Only three of the studies explicitly asked teachers about job satisfaction. Though responses varied, at least half of the teachers in each study's sample reported being satisfied with their current job (see Figure 6). Despite this apparent level of satisfaction, some data highlight trends that may indicate underlying problems related to overall job satisfaction.

Figure 6. Percentage of teachers satisfied with their job.



Whereas Alberta teachers seem mostly satisfied with their jobs, overall life satisfaction and well-being appear to be on the decline, as increasing workloads are affecting work–life balance and employee well-being in general (see Figure 7). In fact, 74 per cent of the Duxbury and Higgins (2013) study sample indicated that work interfered with life; 63 per cent of the ATA (2013b) sample and 79 per cent of the ATA (2014d) sample responded similarly. Qualitative reports from the ATA (2012b) study of teachers—who, the study suggests, are bringing upwards of 20 hours of work home per week—reinforce these findings. Duxbury and Higgins (2013) point to decreasing work–life balance as a cause of higher levels of stress (57 per cent) and depression (47 per cent), among other negative personal outcomes. Given the findings related to lack of work–life balance, it is unsurprising that more than one in three (38 per cent) of respondents in the ATA (2014d) study said they would change jobs for similar pay and benefits and that 30 per cent of the Duxbury and Higgins (2013) sample thought of leaving their position at least once a week.

Figure 7. Percentage of respondents unable to achieve work–life balance.



Reviewing all seven studies together points to another factor that could be undermining teachers' well-being: a lack of respect for the teaching profession. Only 48 per cent of the ATA (2014d) sample and less than 1 per cent of the ATA (2013b) sample felt that they were being included in the school's decision-making processes. Forty-five per cent of participants in the latter study felt increased levels of stress due to the province's attitudes toward teachers, while 35 per cent felt similarly about the school board's attitude toward teachers. These findings align with the TALIS data's indications that 47 per cent of teachers from the Alberta sample do not feel that the teaching profession is valued by the public. Combined, the findings of all seven reports under consideration suggest that—at least according to teachers' perceptions—a lack of respect for teachers may be built into the system. For example, the ATA (2013b) study focuses on teachers' exclusion from the change process, as well as a need to build lines of communication and trust, while another study by the ATA (2014d) highlights a lack of control and autonomy with regard to professional development. These findings correspond with those of TALIS, which suggest that more involvement of teachers in the decision-making processes that affect them is likely to increase their perception of being valued.

Capitalizing on Change: Alberta's Global Leadership Opportunity

The staggering truth is, almost everything that we've accomplished in the 20th century can be attributed to our public education system.

—Lois Hole, former Lieutenant Governor of Alberta

The OECD's (2014) TALIS report, alongside other research efforts by policymakers to attempt to understand the complex variables that sustain high-performing jurisdictions, comes at a time when the global education environment has been subject to increased economic and political volatility and uncertainty. Globally, game-changing innovations are transforming digital technologies and the energy sector, while many OECD countries continue to slowly make their way back from the 2008 economic meltdown.

With the precipitous fall in oil prices threatening to disrupt many of Alberta's long-standing assumptions about its place in the world, there is a real risk that the volatility and uncertainty ahead will distract the government from a commitment to sustain the province's vibrant public education system. Along these lines, Pasi Sahlberg (2015) has cautioned policymakers about the temptation to embrace the simplistic approaches advocated by the global education reform movement (GERM), including focusing on marketization, competition and narrow accountabilities; privileging technology "solutions"; and undermining public trust and support for the profession of teaching.

For the past four years the Alberta Teachers' Association has taken up this challenge through its educational partnership with Finnish high schools—a school development network that was crucial in developing the Association's comprehensive framework for educational development in the province, *A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta* (ATA 2012a).

By investigating teaching and learning conditions across the world, the TALIS survey has identified some revealing data with respect to teacher workload, classroom conditions, professional development opportunities, job satisfaction and other outcomes. To gain a better understanding of the overall teaching and learning environment in Alberta, this report engaged in a comparative analysis of the TALIS findings and six recent studies on Alberta teachers. The conclusions stemming from this analysis—as well as their implications for teachers and the education system—reinforce the need for government to remain forward-thinking and committed to the three strategic policy directions outlined below.

I. Focus on equity by responding proactively to the growing diversity and complexity of Alberta's schools and communities.

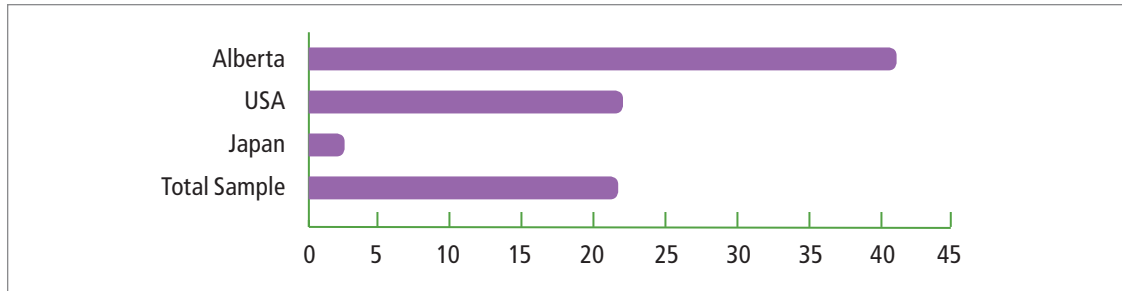
This report's analysis of the Alberta studies points to teachers' frustrations with growing class sizes and classroom complexity resulting from poverty, the number of students with English as an additional language and students with special needs. The fundamental problem is the lack of appropriate government support for coping with increasingly complex school communities (ATA 2012b, 2013b, 2014b).

Alberta's current student population is expected to grow from 500,000 to 700,000 by 2022, resulting in even greater classroom diversity and complexity. According to TALIS, Alberta's classrooms are already larger and more complex than those in the total sample. See Figure 8 for a comparison of the complexity of classrooms in Alberta and two other jurisdictions that participated in TALIS: the United States and Japan.

While the TALIS and Alberta studies indicate that the province's classrooms are both growing and becoming more complex, they do not speak to the intensity or underlying causes. Figures 9 and 10 have been included to more thoroughly illustrate the changing nature of classroom composition in Alberta.

The complexity in Alberta's classrooms has increased in part due to Canada's consistent recent growth in inflows of temporary and permanent foreign populations.² Compared with more populous countries, such as Japan and the United States, growth in immigration will have a greater impact on the overall population of Canada, due to the country's relatively small size. This is an issue not fully addressed in the TALIS report.

Figure 8. Percentage of teachers working in schools with more than 10 per cent of students whose first language is different from the language of instruction (OECD 2014).



Further demographic comparison suggests that Alberta's teachers encounter a wider variety of languages and cultures than do teachers in the two countries used here for comparison (see Figures 9 and 10). In Alberta and the United States, the dominant language is spoken as the mother tongue by roughly the same proportion of residents (78 per cent and 80 per cent, respectively). The distribution of the remaining 20 per cent or so differs, however. In the United States, 12 per cent of the remaining 20 per cent speak Spanish at home. In contrast, in Alberta, the remaining 22 per cent are grouped more heterogeneously, representing a wide variety of languages, with none reaching more than about 2 per cent of the total population.

Figure 9. Language distribution as percentage of population for Canada,³ Japan⁴ and the United States.⁵

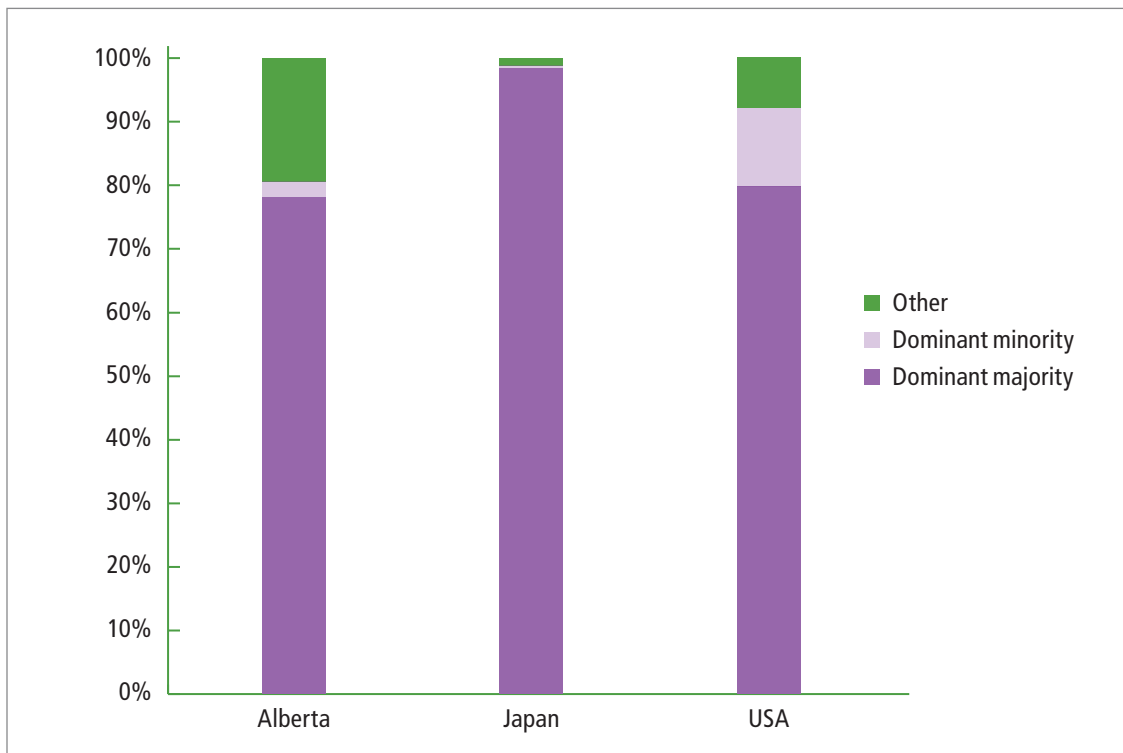
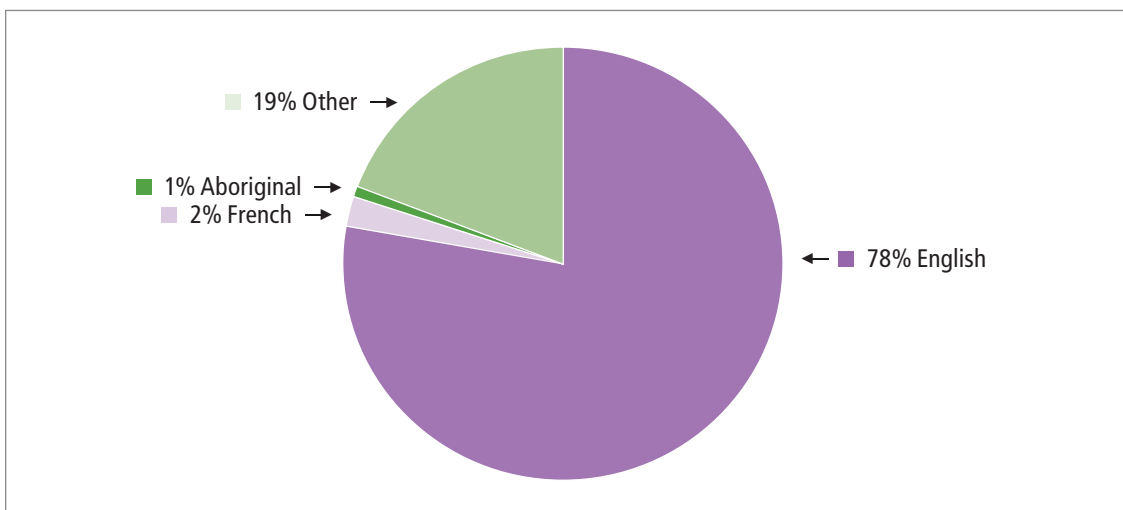


Figure 10. Mother tongue of Albertans.⁶



Further contributing to classroom complexity in Alberta is the ongoing issue of child poverty, as well as its attendant effect upon students' readiness to learn. Despite the national government's promise to end child poverty by 2000, the rate of child poverty has changed little over the past 25 years. Recent reports indicate that one out of 10 children in Alberta lives in poverty; this includes 42,800 school-age children (Hudson 2012, 9). Poverty is costing the province \$7.1 to \$9.5 billion per year, and it is estimated that 50 per cent of this figure would eradicate the issue, with the cost dropping over time (Hudson 2012, 35).

If it is to take full advantage of the province's growth and diversity, the Alberta government must provide the supports required to fully realize its human and social potential. Yet, as the report of the independent Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools concludes, the promises made by government over the past five years to provide specific support for inclusion have been inadequately implemented (ATA 2014c). Drawing on a number of previous research studies and its own analysis, the expert panel reports in compelling detail the impact on students and teachers of the failed promises to create a great school for all students. This failure is particularly galling as the province of Alberta has the fiscal capacity to provide the required supports if it can summon the political will to do so.⁸

II. Ensure optimal conditions for student learning by supporting exemplary teaching practice.

The studies' literature reviews cite the intensification of work, and the data clearly indicate that the work of teachers is in fact (or is at least perceived to be) increasingly intense. Teachers are working longer hours (four of the five studies that kept track of hours noted that teachers work on average more than 50 hours per week). Furthermore, Sahlberg (2015, 89), an internationally recognized expert on school performance, notes that this situation is even more problematic given the fact that there is no evidence that instructional time yields gains in student learning. For example, Finnish teachers actively teach 20.6 hours per week while their peers in Alberta actively teach 26.4 hours per week.

As several of the studies reviewed in this report indicate, technology that was intended to reduce workloads appears to be having the opposite effect, as teachers are facing increased expectations with respect to technology and their responsibilities of communication, assessment and reporting (ATA 2012b; ATA 2014c). Indeed, the deployment and use of digital reporting tools meant to support teaching and learning processes in Alberta schools has been one of the biggest contributors to the increase in teachers' workload (ATA 2014a). In many respects, the additional hours teachers are committing to gathering and reporting student progress represent a case of doing the wrong things better: collecting increasing amounts of data for analysis and review without regard for the school community contexts and the declining supports that would actually help frontline teachers respond to the learning needs of students.

III. Build public assurance through teacher autonomy and collective efficacy.

Across the OECD countries it is increasingly clear that in "educational systems that score high on international rankings, teachers feel that they are empowered by their leaders and other

teachers” (Sahlberg 2015, 138). The ongoing tension that has emerged in this analysis recalls David Livingstone’s (2014) view that teachers are being globally positioned as hybrid professionals. Alberta teachers are forced to reconcile having all of the responsibilities of autonomous professionals while being held to account by a growing bureaucracy armed with regulatory and technological mechanisms of oversight and control that deny their professionalism.

As this analysis has underscored, teachers in Alberta reported a lack of autonomy in a number of areas, but particularly in terms of their own professional and career development. For example, 32 per cent of Alberta teachers report that they have little control over their work lives, and 72 per cent report high levels of conflict between their working life and their personal and family lives. These data and other studies reviewed demonstrate teachers’ perceptions that professional development is too often externally driven and more about compliance and fulfilling a bureaucratic process than internal growth and development. In addition, study respondents felt as though their input, both individually and collectively as a profession, was not valued in decision making at the provincial, board and school levels. Results also show that teachers do not feel that the profession is valued by their employers or the general public (OECD 2014; ATA 2013b, 2014d). These overarching shifts are having a negative impact on teachers’ professional autonomy, well-being and sense of collective efficacy as a profession.

Although many teachers still reported high levels of job satisfaction (the teaching itself still remains rewarding), their personal well-being appears to be on the decline. The majority of teachers indicated being unable to cope with the increasing demands of their work role, with their work lives spilling into their personal lives, negatively affecting both. Reported levels of stress and depression among teachers are increasing (ATA 2014b; Duxbury and Higgins 2013; OECD 2014).

Time for Action

Taken as a whole, the seven studies analyzed in this report, as well as other research referenced, attempt to come to terms with the changes that have affected Alberta’s education system over the past decade. The findings suggest that at least some of the past efforts for change have significantly and negatively affected the lives of teachers across the province.

Together, the authors of the reports would suggest that decisive evidence-informed action is needed if Albertans are to fulfill their aspiration to create a great school for all students. However, without incorporating the input of teachers—those perhaps most affected by change and whose experience and knowledge could be harnessed to effectively assess and address the daily realities of the classroom—creating optimal learning conditions for student learning will remain a distant hope.

As Albertans face the emergent realities and seeming paradoxes of dealing with unprecedented population growth amidst the immediate prospect of economic volatility and uncertainty, we must collectively remain committed to supporting exemplary teachers in great schools where all Alberta students succeed.

Notes

1. More than 25,000 workers across industries were included in the national sample.
2. See the OECD's "Key Statistics on Migration in OECD Countries" at www.oecd.org/els/mig/keystat.htm (accessed December 4, 2014).
3. See Statistics Canada's National Household Survey profile for Alberta at www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=48&Data=Count&SearchText=Alberta&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=48&A1=All&B1=Language&Custom=&TABID=1#tabs2 (accessed December 4, 2014).
4. See *The World Factbook*'s profile of Japan at www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ja.html (accessed December 4, 2014).
5. See the MLA Language Map Data Center at www.mla.org/map_data (accessed December 4, 2014).
6. See note 3 above.
7. See note 3 above.
8. Alberta continues to have the lowest rate of taxation across the country. If Alberta increased its taxation revenues by \$11 billion per year, the province would still retain its position as the lowest tax jurisdiction in the country (Hudson 2012, 35).

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The Alberta
Teachers' Association