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ATA NEWS

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News Publication of The Alberta Teachers' Association



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Class size and complexity issues require political pressure

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Hey, teacher, don't leave those voters alone!

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Class size and complexity issues require political pressure



EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

They gave it their best shot. The Association's Central Table Bargaining Committee (CTBC) heard from teachers through last year's bargaining survey that small class sizes and appropriate supports for inclusion were two of the three biggest priorities for bargaining in this round.

I have no doubt that your representatives on the CTBC shared passionate and eloquent stories at the bargaining table in support of these bargaining objectives.

The CTBC includes five active teachers who are able to speak directly about their own experiences in their own classrooms. Unfortunately, at the end of the day, these stories were unable to convince the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) to include solutions to these issues in a negotiated agreement.

But we cannot let up on these issues. If we are going to get a solution, it will

be because we have effectively used political pressure. We need to expand the storytelling. Instead of having five bargaining committee members telling their stories to a couple of trustees and a few Alberta Education bureaucrats in Edmonton boardrooms, we need thousands of teachers telling their own stories to hundreds of provincial election candidates in coffee shops, on doorsteps and at town hall events across the province.

Here are some helpful hints for effective election advocacy.

1. Prepare your story.

Stay focused on the key issues of class size and class complexity. Talk about how student learning is suffering because of too many students in your classroom or gaps in support for special needs. Avoid disclosing personal or identifying information about individual students, but do speak about specific challenges you are facing. Know what your main points are going to be, but don't be too scripted.

2. Be confident.

You are the subject matter expert. Politicians will be looking at you as

experts on teaching and as well-informed front-line workers with real, lived experiences. They cannot negate your personal experiences — you are living them every day. You do not need to know all the research and data — just tell your own personal story. It is much more powerful anyway.

3. Research your candidates.

A list of nominated provincial election candidates is posted at www.daveberta.ca/alberta-election. Blog host Dave Cournoyer has tracked website and social media links as well, which will help you find out about your candidates and how to reach them.

4. Arrange a meeting.

Contact the candidates and set up a time to meet, or go to an event where they will be attending and find some one-on-one time to chat. Also, have your story ready in case they come to your door. If you get a call from one of their campaign volunteers, ask to have the candidate call you back.

5. Have an ask.

Finish by leaving a clear request. Make it clear that students deserve

better and that teachers need more support in the classroom to do their best work. Tell them that the government needs to provide more funds and better oversight to make sure classes are small and students are supported. Let them know that you will be making your voting choice based on which candidates have the best plans to support student learning.

The data and provincial news about eroding classroom conditions are well-established. Class sizes are the largest they have been in at least 14 years, and the emergence of issues like seclusion rooms is just one indicator of the serious gaps in support for students with special needs.

We now need to take our case and make it local. Let local MLA candidates hear from local teachers about the very real situation in their neighbourhood schools. This election provides the best opportunity we have to push this issue, since pushing it at the bargaining table has not had the desired effect. ■

I welcome your comments—contact me at jonathan.teghtmeyer@ata.ab.ca.

Seclusion rooms a symptom of a broken system



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

Question: I heard that the education minister has banned seclusion rooms. How will this affect the safety of students and teachers?

Answer: On March 1, Education Minister David Eggen issued a ministerial order to ban seclusion rooms beginning on Sept. 1.

Alberta Education defines a seclusion room as a room, structure or enclosure — in a school operated by a school authority — whose primary purpose is the involuntary confinement or isolation of a student where the student cannot leave voluntarily and in which the room's security measures are not under the student's control.

It's important to note that the ban will apply only to rooms that students cannot leave voluntarily, so calming or quiet rooms will not be affected. The order also permits school boards to apply to the minister for exemptions if they can demonstrate support from parents.

Typically, in cases where a student's behaviour is posing a safety risk to others, district or school policy will dictate what steps to take to deal with the behaviour. This could include clearing the room and leaving the child in the room with supervision until the child regains control of their behaviour. It is wise to review the school's policy so you are prepared when a child's behaviour poses a risk or threat.

If you feel that your workplace poses a danger to you, please notify your principal and contact the ATA's Member Services program area. There are also aspects of the *School Act* and the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* that can assist you with an unsafe work environment.

The safety of students and staff must always be top of mind when discussing any issue that affects the classroom. Seclusion rooms are a symptom of a system that does not provide enough support to ensure the safety of staff and students. There is not enough funding or allocation of resources to meet the needs of our students and teachers.

Also, many teachers in Alberta teach in overcrowded classrooms. The issue isn't a lack of training; it's that teachers

are unable to effectively use the skills they already have in large, complex environments.

Of course, inadequate support for teachers in the classroom affects all students, not just those with exceptional needs.

As a result, aggression in schools is an issue that has gained prominence in recent years. Last June the ATA's Provincial Executive Council established the Committee on Understanding Aggression(s) in Alberta Schools and School Communities, which is currently researching the prevalence of aggression in Alberta schools.

As this committee proceeds with its work, this issue is sure to return to the news. The conversation will inevitably turn from what is happening to potential solutions, and it's hard to imagine any solutions that don't involve better classroom supports.

This is what teachers have been seeking for years, and action is long overdue. ■

Questions for consideration in this column are welcome. Please address them to Dennis Theobald at Barnett House (dennis.theobald@ata.ab.ca).

FOR THE RECORD

“
Telling post-millennials to get rid of their cellphones is almost like telling them not to breathe.
”

— University of Toronto professor Charles Pascal, commenting on Ontario's intention to ban cellphones in classrooms



Public education represents hope for the future



VIEWPOINTS

Annie Kidder
People for Education

“... the only thing more expensive than investing in education is not investing in education. Inadequate education produces high costs for society in terms of public spending, crime, health, and economic growth.”

Global Economic Symposium

The health and strength of Canadian society depend on the health and strength of our public education system(s).

Our economy, our environment, our overall prosperity all depend on our next generations. And if we want to thrive — both as a country (or province or community) and as individuals — then there's a lot riding on our schools and our teachers.

I don't think it's an exaggeration to say that the world is a bit of a mess right now. And when you talk to young people, many of them are struggling to find hope. They're worried they won't get jobs, that they won't be able to afford a good place to live and that we are destroying the planet — just to name a few of their worries.

Many of the responses to these challenges lie in our schools, which is why there is actually hope for the future, and why teaching is the most important job in the world.

Teachers' jobs are the most important because they are responsible, along with families, for “building” the next generations of society, and everything depends on how our children turn out — for

each of them individually, and for all of us collectively.

We live in a world of growing polarization, at a time some refer to as the “post-truth” era, and one in which we seem incapable of ensuring a healthy economy alongside an environmentally sustainable one. The gap between the rich and everyone else continues to increase, young people are struggling to maintain their mental health, the permafrost is melting, growing numbers of species are becoming extinct, and millions of refugees are fleeing war, fundamentalism and various forms of deprivation.

The one place we can have an impact on all those things is in our schools.

In our schools we can teach students how to differentiate between fact and fiction, we can teach them how to *not* get along (as citizenship scholar and UNB professor Alan Sears puts it), and we can teach them to persist in the face of complex problems, opposition and failure. Maybe more important than anything else, we can teach them how to keep on learning.

And that's where the hope lies.

It's not all about the economic benefit, but it's not a bad place to start

It costs about \$12,000 a year to educate a child in most Canadian provinces. According to Nobel laureate James Heckman, we make back 10 times that amount in the long run. He says investing in children and young people results in “increased productivity, higher income, better health, more family investment, upward mobility, and reduced social costs.”

In Canada right now, when the

public is polled about which concerns are top of mind, they put jobs, the economy, health care and the environment (and sometimes government itself) at the top of the list. The question then becomes, how do we get better at connecting the dots between those issues and public education? How do we get better at communicating the long-term societal value of investing in our schools?

There is hope, and it lies in our publicly funded schools

First, we need to be clear that this is not a time for our schools to go “back to” anything. In fact, it's time to focus on the *new* basics — the competencies and skills that young people need to thrive in a rapidly changing world. By doing that, our schools can help to improve the overall economy, prepare young people for jobs that don't yet exist, educate a generation with the imagination and problem-solving skills required to address climate change, and even reduce health-care costs.

We are incredibly lucky to live in a country that supports public education (though we have to be careful not to take it for granted), and where nearly all of our kids go to publicly funded schools. We have to get better at communicating the impact of this amazing public asset.

The evidence is clear — there is no better investment we can make than investing in students' opportunities to learn, in our teachers and in the evolution of the system itself. The world is changing quickly, and within the structure of public education lies the hope for our future. ■

Annie Kidder is executive director of People for Education, a Toronto-based organization that creates evidence, investigates dialogue and builds links so that people can see and act on the connection between public education and a fair and prosperous society.

YOUR VIEWS

FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

On rural–urban education gap

Alan Skinner

I've taught in rural schools for nearly a decade now, and it's frustrating to see the vicious circle. Enrolment drops, so we have to cut staff and programming, and some families decide to send their kids to a bigger place where they have more flexibility. That drops enrolment more and makes the problem worse. Our school board does what they can to help out the more remote schools, but the formula needs to change.

ON TWITTER

On seclusion room ban

Karen P-Bayus @Kpbayus

Misbehaviour is in fact “stress behaviour.” Seclusion rooms serve to increase stress so they increase misbehaviour. Instead, help children build a positive sense of self and feeling that they matter and they belong.

On Ontario's ban of cellphones in schools

Glenn Finockio @gfinockio

Watched several of my students use their phones today to assist in their learning, including reading notes during a structured discussion, looking up the meaning of unfamiliar words and looking up a famous piece of art described in a poem. Glad to see AB taking the mature, reasoned approach rather than driving the use of devices “under the desk.”

On ATA's all-party public education forum

Dan Scratch @DanScratch03

Also, a gentle reminder, education is never objective and neutral. Every decision made in education is political, whether it's about pedagogy, curriculum or even school culture. It's not partisan, but teachers, students and administrators make political decisions every day.

Jonathan Hemphill @MrJHemphill

Inclusion without supports is a circus, not education.

Craig Baskerville @cbaskerville

There was lots of rhetoric from all parties today about finding “efficiencies” in #abed. Albertans deserve more than vague talking points. We need to keep asking questions.

From teachers' convention

Silken Laumann @SilkenLaumann

Loved speaking to hundreds of teachers at #getca conference today. Invest in your own growth and self care and you will inspire the children you lead!

Hayley Wickenheiser @wick_22

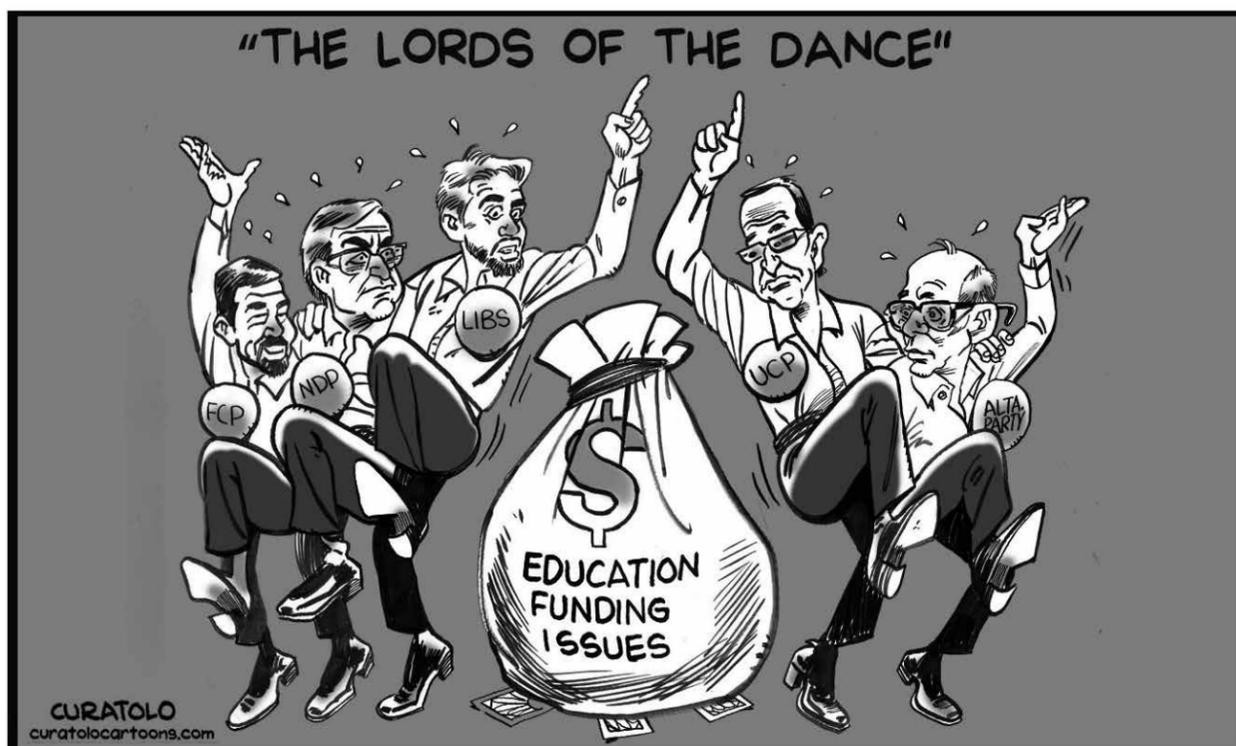
Wow thanks to all the teachers @getca #getca convention for great reception! Loved so many of my teachers! Thx for what you all do!

Daniel Polsky @mr_polsky

“When was the last time you saw something that made you throw your arms back and say ‘wow!’”? An inspiring talk from @georgekourounis on the power of exploration and embracing the unknown. Powerful lessons for the classroom.

Lisa Bush @purplesemicolon

“You cannot tell a kid how to emotionally regulate. You have to show them. You cannot tell a kid how to calm down. You have to show them.” @JodyCarrington on the need for emotional connections.



See video of the ATA's All-Party Forum on Public Education at vote4kids.ca/video.

Letters to the editor: We welcome letters to the editor. Please limit your submission to 300 words. Only letters bearing a first and last name, address and daytime telephone number will be considered for publication. Teachers are also asked to indicate where and what they teach. All letters are subject to editing for length, clarity, punctuation, spelling and grammar. Email managing editor Cory Hare: cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.

Parties outline views on education

Below is an op-ed piece the ATA News received from Education Minister David Eggen on the government's efforts to rewrite Alberta's curriculum. In keeping with the ATA's policy of remaining non-partisan, the ATA News invited other parties represented in the legislature to submit their views on curriculum or public education in general. The following commentaries represent the views of the respective political parties.

Curriculum is key to students' future success

David Eggen
Alberta NDP/Education Minister



If anyone asks you why we need new curriculum, just tell them this: Alberta students are missing basic elements.

I learned that last fact recently at the Calgary City Teacher's Convention, while talking to a high school science teacher about her support for new curriculum. She pointed out that the periodic table in our textbooks is actually out of date.

In late 2016, the International Union of Pure and Applied Chemistry officially added four new elements to the periodic table. That was just weeks after I announced the beginning of a six-year project to revamp K-12 curriculum. Some of the curriculum was more than 30 years old before five other elements were discovered and added.

Over the past three years, hundreds of teachers and educators like you have worked hard to write new curriculum that reflects a fast-changing world. Thousands of Albertans have taken the time to share insights and feedback on your work. It's been a mammoth task, but also incredibly rewarding and exciting.

We heard a different story earlier this month, when Jason Kenney threatened to throw it all away because of "political agendas and failed teaching fads." The United Conservative Party leader has repeatedly insinuated that there is a political agenda in our new curriculum, and has threatened to throw it all in the shredder. As a teacher, I was incensed. I told

reporters that Kenney was saying two things. First of all, he understands very little about education. Second, he is willing to score cheap political points through open deception about a rigorous process.

Jason Kenney's comments are also a statement about character. To drag Alberta back to an imagined past, Kenney is willing to throw teachers under the bus.

We owe our children more than that. We owe them an updated curriculum that prepares them for success in a fast-changing world. We owe them the latest research, a strong foundation in basic reading, writing and math skills. We owe them an up-to-date periodic table.

We also owe our students more than nostalgia. We owe them the skills they need to navigate a world dominated by misinformation and attempts to manipulate public institutions for political gain.

I know from conversations with many of you that you're excited to bring new K-4 curriculum into your classrooms. I'm excited too. As we move forward with preparations and training, I want to thank you for playing a vital role throughout our development work and your keen insight into what students will need in the future.

As the minister of education, I am proud to be part of a government that is making the choice to invest in the future success of our students.

Just like that periodic table, new curriculum is about building blocks and basic elements. And like most chemistry, its best done through an open and transparent process, backed by rigorous testing.

If Kenney has his way, Alberta students will continue missing basic elements. We can't let that happen. ■

Redesign needs to be open and accountable

Mark Smith
United Conservative Party
Education Critic



The NDP campaigned on a promise to balance the budget this year. Now they tell us to wait until 2023. It seems that for the NDP, the "Path to Balance" is about the journey, not the destination. If we keep going down that road, Alberta's public services will be paying the toll.

United Conservative Party leader Jason Kenney has made it clear that we can get to balance and eliminate the deficit without cutting spending. Contrast his approach with the NDP's reckless drive toward \$100 billion of debt by 2023: Albertans will pay \$5 million in interest on NDP debt every day for years to come. And every dollar spent on interest can't be spent on health and education.

You may have heard that Jason Kenney promised to put the new curriculum "through the shredder." What you probably haven't heard is that he only promised to do that "if the NDP tries to smuggle more of their politics into the classroom." Rest assured, United Conservatives are not going to throw out all the hard work that's already been done just because it was started by our political opponents. We do agree that the curriculum needed to be updated. We are, however, going to look critically at what has been produced to ensure that the content will prepare our next generation for the challenges of the modern economy.

The main reason for a re-evaluation is transparency: this has been the most secretive, inaccessible curriculum exercise in Alberta's modern history.

Curriculum development should not be about inserting any particular ideology into the outcomes of the curriculum. The UCP wants to make sure that the entire K-12 curriculum has the content necessary for our students to succeed, that it encourages critical thinking, and that it truly and fairly reflects the diverse views of all Albertans.

Consider as well the pressure that a rushed implementation will place on educators: as things stand, every single K-4 teacher in the province will be preparing and teaching a new curriculum in every discipline, all at the same time! I don't need to tell you about the challenge that will present.

If elected, the UCP will take the time to ensure that curriculum implementation does not set teachers and students up to fail. We will see to it that when a new curriculum is ready, the rollout will be gradual, measured and properly supported with training, resources and assessments. We owe our teachers and our students nothing less.

The coming election will offer a clear choice to teachers, and to all Albertans: a choice between fiscal responsibility now, or increasing fiscal hardship in years to come; between an open, transparent and accountable curriculum redesign, or a secretive process with a predetermined outcome; between a measured, well-supported roll-out and a mad rush that's guaranteed to fail students, families and teachers. The choices we face today are difficult, especially when the alternatives are presented as easy and painless. But avoiding difficult choices now will only make them harder in the end. ■

Taking action on class size



David Khan
Leader, Alberta
Liberal Party

It was 17 years ago when 21,000 Alberta teachers went on strike across the province. The reasons for that strike were complex, but a major concern was class sizes. After the strike, the Alberta Commission on Learning put forward class size guidelines as a means to address Alberta's overcrowded classrooms.

Despite these guidelines, Alberta's students and teachers continue to face overcrowded classrooms. This is a generational problem that no government has been able to fix.

The benefits of smaller class sizes are clear. They improve academic performance and the learning experience for students, and they improve working conditions for teachers. Our education system is critical to the future of our economy. In

an increasingly competitive and dynamic global market, it is imperative that we give students the best education possible.

This election, the Alberta Liberal Party will be running on a plan to provide a significant boost to education spending in order to fund the implementation of class-size caps.

We are prepared to fund the hiring of every new teacher needed to keep class sizes under the cap. We will begin by focusing on K-3 education, where smaller class sizes have the biggest impact on education. We will also, on the recommendation of the auditor general, introduce stronger reporting and monitoring mechanisms to track spending on class size initiatives so we know the money is going toward the desired outcomes.

We cannot afford another generation of Albertans crammed into overcrowded classrooms. That is why I, as leader of the Alberta Liberal Party, support taking bold action and disrupting the status quo on class sizes. Whether in government or in opposition, the issue of class sizes will be a top priority for the Alberta Liberals. ■

Creating a better future for Alberta's children



Stephen Mandel
Leader, Alberta Party

One consistent theme for my family is the recognition that hard work tomorrow is nothing without the right investments in education today. This commitment to my grandson's future is what brought me back when I thought I had finally escaped the political bug.

First off, I want to thank you for your time and commitment to our children. You do an outstanding job under often challenging conditions. You are all focused daily on ensuring that each child receives a world-class education, whether it's in our urban classrooms, which are bursting at the seams, or in the rural classrooms, which are facing the pressures of declining enrolment, and regardless of where students live or their parents' economic circumstances.

You have also been consummate professionals in the development of a new K-4 curriculum and the ongoing work to roll out an updated curriculum for the later grades. I want to thank you all for this.

The Alberta Party also recognizes that you face significant pressures on a number of fronts. We commit that our government would continue to fund growth and develop a new formula to address declining school enrolment in predominantly rural schools. We cannot make education a have/have not issue. Our party will also focus on moving mental health and wraparound services funding from AHS to your school boards. Some of you are already experiencing the impacts where your boards are doing this at the local level, but it is being done by using your classroom funds. We need to stop this and get classroom money back where it is needed, while ensuring the funding to address mental health and support issues is made available to assist you where it matters most. ■



CORY HARE

Participants share a rare moment of levity during a sometimes contentious all-party forum on public education held at Barnett House on March 2.

Political hopefuls share ideas at ATA forum

Cory Hare
ATA News Managing Editor

Money, curriculum and the future of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

Those were among the topics of discussion during a political forum hosted by the ATA on Saturday.

"We have to understand that the NDP's reckless tax and borrow and spend policies have placed future governments in a very difficult position," said Mark Smith, education critic for the United Conservative Party.

"We're going to have to grow an economy to make sure that it can provide the revenue to pay for schools and teachers and aides and inclusion support," he continued. "The United Conservative Party is going to be willing to hold the line on the budget. We're going to maintain current funding."

Representing the NDP government, Education Minister David Eggen emphasized the government's track record of funding for enrolment growth, which is expected to be 15,000 students in each of the next two years. He attacked the UCP's promise to "freeze" spending at current levels.

"A freeze is a cut. That means that 650 teachers would not be hired for those students," Eggen said. "Our government will be there to make sure there will be funds for enrolment."

The forum was part of a political engagement seminar that took place at Barnett House, in Edmonton. Also appearing during the 90-minute forum were Alberta Party leader Stephen Mandel, Alberta Liberal Party leader David Khan and Freedom Conservative Party candidate Jeff Rout.

Khan attacked the government's position of only funding for enrolment growth.

"Minister Eggen talks about properly funding enrolment but a 1.8 per cent increase in funding is a cut when there's a 3.5 per cent increase in population growth plus inflation, so let's talk about reality and not about platitudes here," Khan said.

All the representatives agreed that class sizes and complexity were real issues that need to be addressed. Mandel said there may have to be spending reductions in other areas in order to allow education issues to be properly funded.

"The reality is we are in financial challenges but that doesn't change the fact that we have to have priorities," he said. "Our priority is education ... not necessarily balanced budgets."

Rout, the Freedom Conservative Party's candidate in Leduc-Beaumont, pitched a Sweden-inspired approach that would enable the private sector to invest in school infrastructure, freeing up public money for operational spending.

"We want to keep funding the operating costs but allow more money from the private sphere to enter for the capital costs," Rout said.

"That way there's more teachers, there's fewer students per class and more opportunities for all Albertans."

Curriculum

The representatives were asked to outline their party's stance on the curriculum rewrite that is currently taking place. All five agreed that the rewrite was long overdue.

The UCP's Smith said his party has heard from principled experts who have stopped working with the curriculum working groups because they felt there were serious problems.

"Those are the people that we've been talking to; those are the people we've listened to," Smith said.

He said the UCP is not convinced that the curriculum is as balanced as it needs to be but leader Jason Kenney does not intend to scrap it entirely if the UCP forms government.

"Mr. Kenney has said that if we find that this is an overly ideological curriculum then we're going to make changes," Smith said.

Several of the reps criticized the UCP for playing politics with curriculum.

"What's not normal about this whole process is that the UCP, Jason Kenney chose to use the curriculum as a political tool to score cheap political points," said Eggen.

"When somebody is running for the highest office in the land, and they're willing to try to deceive people for the sake of gaining political points, that tells you about somebody's character."

"We see no reason to scrap it, unlike Mr. Smith's leader, who says alternately that he'll scrap it, then not scrap it," said Khan.

Mandel challenged Smith to provide examples where the curriculum is falling short.

"Give me a couple of those things that he says are so damaging that we need to know."

Mandel said the Alberta Party supports the new curriculum, but more time may be necessary to roll it out effectively.

"Nothing is more important than getting this correct. If it takes more time, let's just do it," he said.

The FCP would like the curriculum to focus on core elements like literacy, numeracy, finance, voting process and government, said Rout.

"Every year these things should be tweaked a little bit so we're going to be constantly monitoring it."

Parties support dual-function ATA

All the party representatives expressed support for the ATA as a dual-role organization with both union and professional functions. This included the UCP, even though a policy was passed at its AGM last year suggesting that the ATA should be split into two separate and independent organizations.

Smith said his party has other priorities.

"Our members have consistently told us that their highest priority is fixing the economy of Alberta. If we don't get the economy going and moving properly, we will not have the capacity to pay for all of the things that we want to do in education," Smith began.

"Splitting the ATA into two separate functions is not going to be in our platform. It's not something that we'll place a priority on as a government," he added.

"We look forward and we are committed to working with the ATA from day one in a constructive way to solve the problems in education." ■

Teachers respond

"This is my first forum so it was great to hear what they had to say live, and get the reaction that they had to each other's questions. It solidifies my thoughts and feelings on issues and which party I think would best support education."



"I don't think it's in the media enough what their views are on education. That's why I wanted to come to this ... [Education] is one of the biggest budget items for any government, so it should be one of the forefront issues that they're discussing."

- Renée Shevalier-Lavin, Edmonton Catholic Local No. 54

"I would recommend to anyone if they could get out to listen to these candidates face to face, to do it, to really form a solid opinion for themselves."



"My opinions haven't changed, just perhaps a little clearer."

- Randy Morrow, Foothills Local No. 16

"It did touch on more general issues that everyone has. I work with a Catholic board so one of the issues that we wished was more discussed was their stand on whether or not they want to keep Catholic education. We were able to talk to a couple of party members about that, so it was good to have that opportunity afterward."



- Jennifer Parkin, Christ the Redeemer Local No. 29



See the video

Video of the forum is available for viewing at vote4kids.ca/video.

No risk, no reward?

Are our playground rules too restrictive?

The following is an observation by two Alberta teachers of how risky play is handled in Iceland, followed by two examples of programs that are allowing for the return of some risk — albeit highly controlled — to Canadian schoolyards.



SUPPLIED

In Iceland, “risky play” is a way of life, with students actively encouraged to engage in a variety of outdoor activities such as climbing on rocks near bodies of water.

Risky play part of the Icelandic way

Andrew Spelrem and Sarah MacFarquhar-Sudar
Special to the ATA News

Risky play is a prominent buzzword among educators, parents and physical literacy advocates. A quick Internet search will certainly outline the premise of this topic and its many perceived benefits. Having recently traveled to Iceland as part of an ATA exchange program, we immediately saw that risky play is a way of life for Icelandic children.

We observed students having supervised snowball fights (gasp!) and playing among jagged rocks, bodies of water, free-standing play structures, and some gym equipment that no longer exists in most Canadian schools. We asked our Icelandic colleagues whether they were worried about the safety of their students, and it was apparent that access to risky equipment and environments was neither questioned nor an area of concern. Through our observations, it was easy to tell that Icelandic children

We observed students having supervised snowball fights (gasp!) and playing among jagged rocks, bodies of water, free-standing play structures, and some gym equipment that no longer exists in most Canadian schools.

felt comfortable, moved with ease and demonstrated the physical literacy required to maneuver such precarious apparatus and environments.

In Canadian schools, we often remove elements of risky play for fear of what could happen. In an effort to protect our students, are we also removing appropriate development of risk assessment and adventurous play? ■

Andrew Spelrem and Sarah MacFarquhar-Sudar are teachers at Banded Peak School in Bragg Creek.



SUPPLIED

Students at St. Teresa of Calcutta School in Edmonton engage in Loose Parts Play, a program aimed at fostering free play and creativity.

Canadian schools loosen up

ATA News Staff

Edmonton’s St. Teresa of Calcutta School recently began a program called Loose Parts Play, which encourages children to use everyday objects for free play with minimal adult involvement.

“We’re hoping that the kids learn to just play,” said assistant principal Kelly Laxdal.

Her school now has a shed full of loose parts like car tires, lumber, tarps, ropes and old pots and pans. Students get a turn playing with the items in an designated outdoor area. Teacher involvement is restricted to supervising and intervening if it appears that something unsafe is taking place.

“The basic rules are you have to always think: am I safe and are people around me safe?” Laxdal said.

The program is offered through Ever Active Schools and has participating schools throughout Alberta.

“There are elements of risky play and that’s why there still is supervision and we really instill in the kids, ‘are you

safe?’” Laxdal said.

She added that the program isn’t really about risk but rather about inspiring creativity and innovation in the students.

“We are also trying to promote socialization between similar and different grades,” she said. “We are hoping that our little learners become engaged learners through invention and imagination.”

Rough and ready in Quebec

Some schools in Quebec are loosening up their playground rules by instituting areas where roughhousing is encouraged.

At Cheval-Blanc Elementary School in Gatineau, children will be allowed to jostle one-on-one in the snow. Prior to participating, students will be trained in specific moves by phys-ed teachers, who will also supervise the activities.

“The students can’t kick, push, bite ... so it’s really mostly about grabbing each other and trying to bring them down in the snow,” said principal Patrick Courville in an interview with the CBC. ■

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Details to come at
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2019
got a no!
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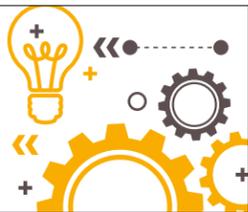
Cash prizes available!



Entry deadline 5 P.M.
May 14, 2019.
Contest rules online at
www.teachers.ab.ca.

This...

from ATA president Greg Jeffery



Hey, teacher, don't leave those voters alone!



I hope you have been hearing a great deal of conversation about class size the past while, as it is an important issue for us as the teachers of Alberta. Both our Member Needs Survey and our bargaining survey identified the issue as being top of mind across the membership.

I feel a little strange promoting small class sizes because, throughout my career, I worked actively to increase the size of my classes. Imagine being thrilled with a Grade 8 class of 52 or celebrating that both my children were once in separate high school classes of 95. What needs to be known here, of course, is that I am a band teacher and these classes reflected very healthy programs. Most of my band colleagues across the province would agree with my thinking, I believe. That being said, we all also know the many benefits of smaller class sizes almost everywhere else.

Ask the candidates questions, and if you need a little help, go to Vote4Kids.ca and look for talking points under our election banner.

Research shows us that smaller class sizes allow for higher levels of student achievement, increased time with the curriculum and more opportunities for us to focus on the individual needs and interests of our students. We also know that the payoff from class size reduction is greater for students from low socio-economic status homes, as well as from minority and other vulnerable populations.

The biggest gain in my mind, however, is the ability to build teacher-student relationships more quickly and more deeply. We all know the relational nature of teaching, and how teaching and learning happen more readily when these relationships exist.

Currently, only five of our 61 boards are meeting the targets for K-3, and class sizes have been rising steadily since 2009 after six years of decline. It would take about 2,100 additional teachers to return us to the 2009 levels.

As the provincial election rolls out, the focus of the Alberta Teachers' Association will be on the issue of class size, and I'm hoping you will see the value in this. Please take part in the activities your local organizes and in election forums as well. Ask the candidates questions, and if you need a little help, go to Vote4Kids.ca and look for talking points under our election banner.

Hang in there. Spring break is just around the corner. Come back ready to inform Alberta voters about the value of reducing class sizes in our province. Let's show Albertans that teachers want what students need. ■

I welcome your comments — contact me at greg.jeffery@ata.ab.ca.

NOTICE

On Jan. 24, 2018, a hearing committee of the Professional Conduct Committee established under the *Teaching Profession Act* found that SR engaged in unprofessional conduct. The hearing committee declared that SR is ineligible for membership in the Association, effective Jan. 24, 2018. ■

In this case, initials are used instead of the teacher's name to comply with a publication ban ordered by the Court of Queen's Bench of Alberta. The ban does not expire.

Education in the news

ATA News Staff

In the lead-up to an anticipated provincial election, the *ATA News* is tracking news coverage related to education, in an effort to help members stay abreast of the various parties' views. The following excerpts, slightly modified to fit this context, are from stories that made headlines in late February and early March.

NDP limiting school choice by refusing charter school applications, UCP says

A United Conservative Party government would debate changing Alberta's charter school regulations, which spell out standards, application requirements and limit the number of schools to 15.

UCP education critic and Drayton Valley-Devon MLA Mark Smith said in an interview the NDP government has obstructed education choices in the province by refusing to approve applicants who believed they met all the requirements to found new charter schools.

There are 13 charter schools currently operating in 23 buildings in the province, most of which are in Edmonton and Calgary. In an email, Education Minister David Eggen said there is no need to lift the cap since the number of schools hasn't reached the limit.

Charter schools must offer a unique program unavailable in public schools.

Edmonton Journal, March 4

Alberta Party wants mandatory vaccinations

The Alberta Party wants to make vaccinations mandatory for children enrolled in publicly funded schools.

"We send our kids to school to learn, not to get sick," said leader Stephen Mandel, who rolled out the party's latest election platform promise.

An Alberta Party government would force parents to prove they have followed the Alberta Health Services' routine immunization schedule in order to register children in school. The rule would apply to any school board receiving public funding, including public, Catholic, francophone, private and charter schools. The province doesn't think it's fair to penalize students for decisions made by their parents, said Leah Holoiday, the premier's director of communications. She referenced NDP legislation passed in 2016 that aims to help schools respond faster to vaccine-preventable outbreaks.

UCP Leader Jason Kenney said his party believes all children should be vaccinated unless they have a medical exemption, but stopped short of saying the UCP would institute mandatory vaccines.

Calgary Herald, March 4

Eggen issues order to ban seclusion rooms in Alberta schools

Education Minister David Eggen has issued a ministerial order banning the use of seclusion rooms in Alberta schools starting Sept. 1. School boards will be required to report all existing rooms to the province. Alberta Education will do inspections and ensure schools are complying with the order. However, Eggen is allowing schools to apply for an exemption on a case-by-case basis only, if the parents of the child support it.

A review was launched after a Sherwood Park couple sued the government. They say their 12-year-old son was found covered in his own feces when he was locked in a seclusion room. Inclusion Alberta, an advocacy group for people with disabilities, had called for a ban. The group is pleased with Eggen's ministerial order but wary about his decision to allow exemptions.

CBC News, March 1

Education minister cancels high school credit clawbacks

Alberta's education minister has cancelled an \$11.3-million clawback from 59 school boards whose students took too many high school credits last year. Frustrated school board trustees and superintendents said they may cancel programs and limit options for high school students after receiving notices saying Alberta Education was holding back funding for every student who earned more than 45 credit enrolment units during the 2017/18 school year. The education minister reversed course on Friday, saying the move had "unintended consequences" and was now under review.

The new 45 CEU cap took effect in September 2017. Previously, the government funded high schools for students to take up to 60 credits in a 12-month period. Edmonton Public Schools was set to lose \$2.1 million after 10 per cent of high school students earned more than 45 CEUs. Edmonton Catholic Schools had more than 1,000 students exceed the cap, and was about to lose \$803,000 this year.

School boards and district leaders, who have raised concerns about the lower credit cap since its introduction, were placated by the move.

Edmonton Journal, Feb. 20



Solidarity in pink

Teachers and students around the province took a stand against bullying by sporting pink on Feb. 27, a.k.a. Pink Shirt Day.

Top: Students from St. Sebastian School in Calgary

Bottom: Staff from Poplar Ridge School in Red Deer County

PHOTOS SUPPLIED



Welcome to convention

Above: Comedian Rick Mercer shares his observations of Canada during a keynote speech at the Greater Edmonton Teachers' Convention on March 1. Below: Calgary City Teachers' Convention in February delivered moments ranging from goofy to reflective.

PHOTOS BY CHRIS BOLIN



Physical contact with students always problematic



PITFALLS AND PRECAUTIONS

Cory Schoffer
ATA Secretary to Professional Conduct Committees

Pitfalls and Precautions is a series that aims to educate teachers on professional conduct issues by highlighting situations addressed by the ATA Professional Conduct Committee.

At a recent hearing of the Professional Conduct Committee, a teacher was charged with butting his head against a student's head, thereby failing to treat the student with dignity and respect.

The hearing committee heard that the teacher, who was covering a class for a colleague, directed a student to stop fooling around with a ball. When

the student refused to follow the teacher's direction, the teacher approached the student and placed two hands on the student's head and slammed his forehead against the student's forehead. The student fell out of the chair and struck his head on the floor. The student immediately tried to contact his mother on his cellphone, but the teacher yelled at the student, then swore at the student when the student refused to surrender the phone.

The student was ultimately diagnosed with a mild concussion. The teacher apologized to the student.

The teacher was found guilty of

unprofessional conduct, and was subject to employment action undertaken by his employer. The teacher was deemed to have failed to treat the student with dignity and respect. The teacher was declared ineligible for Association membership for a period of one year, and a recommendation was made to the minister of education to suspend the teacher's certificate for a one-year period.

Teachers are regularly advised and cautioned not to make physical contact with students. This is always problematic, and is more significant when that physical contact is due to anger. In this case, the teacher was responding to a defiant reaction from the student, and acted out in a physical way. This is unprofessional. Teachers are expected to provide an environment where students feel safe. The teacher did not provide a safe environment for this student, or others in the class. He failed to treat the student with dignity and respect. ■



Are you a teacher running for MLA?

The ATA News is inviting all teachers who are running in the 2019 provincial general election to submit their information for publication in an upcoming issue.

Send your name, party affiliation and riding to managing editor Cory Hare: cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.

Deadline: March 28

This invitation applies to

- active Association members in good standing,
- incumbents who were active Association members in good standing at the time of their election to the legislature,
- Association life members and
- other members who have maintained the highest level of membership available to them.

Council readies for ARA

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held Feb. 25–26, 2019, at Barnett House, in Edmonton

1. Approved one recipient of the Public Education Award, which recognizes individuals or groups that have given outstanding support to public education in Alberta other than through teaching.
2. Authorized staff to investigate and report back by the May meeting of Council the expenses and savings associated with installing solar panels on Barnett House.
3. Approved the revised Standards for Writing and Classifying ATA Administrative and Education Policy for submission to the 2019 Annual Representative Assembly (ARA).
4. Approved 16 Council resolutions and 44 local resolutions for presentation to the 2019 ARA. The package of resolutions will be sent to locals, which will be asked to vote on whether they agree with Council's position on each resolution.
5. Approved, for presentation to the 2019 ARA, resolutions to approve the Schedule and Process for the Periodic Review of Policies, the Disposition of Immediate Directives and the Proposal for Advancing Specialist Council Resolutions.
6. Approved, for presentation to the 2019 ARA, a resolution to increase the 2019/20 proposed budget by \$5,000 to provide for a subsidy to Summer Conference delegates whose attendance causes them to incur expenses for the care of an adult dependent. Approved

an overexpenditure of \$5,000 to provide this subsidy to 2019 Summer Conference delegates.

7. Approved, for presentation to the 2019 ARA, a resolution urging the Government of Alberta to ensure that, if school jurisdictions are allowed to have one divisional health and safety committee under occupational health and safety (OHS) legislation, oversight measures are put in place to ensure that all workers can be meaningfully involved in OHS matters.

8. Approved, for presentation to the 2019 ARA, a resolution that the Association host a women's leadership symposium in the 2019/20 school year, with a proposed budget of \$50,000, to promote gender equity and women's participation in all aspects of employment and Association life.

9. Received the report of a hearing committee that found a teacher guilty of two charges of unprofessional conduct. The first charge was for undermining the confidence of students in other teachers by speaking to students about the teacher's conflict with another teacher. The second charge was for criticizing the professional competence or reputation of another teacher by speaking to parents about a personal conflict with a teacher and that teacher's lack of support. For the first charge, the hearing committee imposed a penalty of a letter of severe reprimand and a \$200 fine; for the second charge it imposed a letter of severe reprimand and a \$300 fine.

10. Received the report of a hearing committee that found a teacher guilty of five charges of unprofessional conduct for inappropriately touching five students on five different occasions, contrary to section 23(1) of the *Teaching Profession Act*. As a penalty, the hearing committee declared the teacher ineligible for membership in the ATA for two

years and recommended to the minister of education that the teacher's teaching certificate be suspended for two years. Encompassing all five charges, the penalty considered that

- the teacher's actions exploited the trust and innocence of multiple students,
- the teacher's actions caused long-term mental health impacts for a number of the victims,
- the teacher had a fiduciary obligation to protect students and not exploit their vulnerability through the teacher-student relationship,
- there was no evidence of a criminal investigation or conviction and
- the hearing committee was unable to determine sexual intent.

11. Received the report of a hearing committee that found a teacher guilty of eight charges of unprofessional conduct. Two of the charges stem from the teacher failing to treat students with dignity and respect or in a manner that is considerate of their circumstances — through actions, comments and treating students differently based on their academic abilities. The teacher was also found to have made critical comments about the professional performance and/or reputation of administrators and made statements about administrators using an approach, inaccurate content and language that were unbecoming of a professional teacher. Additionally, the teacher was found to have refused to address caregivers' legitimate concerns about the treatment of their children in the teacher's classroom and retaliated against caregivers for raising these concerns. Lastly, the teacher made false allegations against their principal without advising the principal and sent anonymous correspondence to the superintendent and/or trustees, in which the teacher made inflammatory

and highly critical comments about the school administration and the school librarian.

Two of the charges resulted in a letter of severe reprimand. Each of the other charges resulted in the teacher being declared permanently ineligible for ATA membership and a recommendation to the education minister to cancel the teacher's teaching certificate. Each charge also resulted in a fine, with all the fines totalling \$32,500.

12. Approved and chartered, effective Feb. 1, 2019, the Education Students' Association of St. Mary's University, Student Local No. 14, and approved its constitution.

13. Ratified the memorandum of agreement on central terms for the Southern Francophone Education Region No. 4.

14. Approved, in principle, entering into a memorandum of understanding with the Council for School Leadership, the Queensland Teachers' Union and the New South Wales Teachers Federation to establish an exchange network on school leadership.

15. Authorized Public Interest Alberta to request Association representation on the Government of Alberta Child Care Liaison Committee.

16. Named six members of Council to two staff selection committees for the positions of executive staff officer, Teacher Welfare, and executive staff officer, Member Services/Government-Discipline, with both positions commencing service at mutually agreeable dates after June 1, 2019.

17. Approved the development of an administrative guideline on flag and banner protocol to address requests to display flags and banners additional to the national, provincial, Treaty 6, Treaty 7, Treaty 8 and Métis flags. ■

CLASSIFIEDS

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JULY 2 – 11, 2019
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Additional information at the CRTED website:
crted.ualberta.ca/content/about

CONTACT
Remonia Stoddart-Morrison
(remonia@ualberta.ca)
or the CRTED (780-492-7770)

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email: advertising@ata.ab.ca.

Next Deadline
Thursday, March 28, 2019, 4 P.M.
(publication date April 9, 2019)

Please note: advertisers are encouraged to book their advertisement space early—space is limited.

Cost
Classified ads: \$1 per word plus GST (\$15 minimum); *Display ads:* varies according to size

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EVERYLIVINGTHING.CA/VIDEOCONTEST

Entry Deadline: **May 15 2019**

Alberta Advisory Committee for Educational Studies

Descriptive or Experimental Studies
APPLICATION FOR GRANTS

Deadline: May 1, 2019, 4:30 P.M.
Applications will be accepted by e-mail; however, they must be received as a single attachment to the e-mail.

The Alberta Advisory Committee for Educational Studies (AACES) invites applications for grants to support descriptive or experimental studies in education.

Grants in excess of \$6,000 are awarded only rarely because of limited available resources. Grants cannot be given for travel unrelated to the proposed research project.

Note: The application to the Ethics Review Committee must be initiated and a copy of the submission to that committee must be included with the proposal.

Online applications and the guidelines for grant applications are available at www.teachers.ab.ca>Public Education>Education Research.

Application forms may be e-mailed to Jessica.Grayson@ata.ab.ca or submitted to

Alberta Advisory Committee for Educational Studies
c/o The Alberta Teachers' Association
11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1
Telephone 780-447-9499 or 1-800-332-1280

Completed applications received by May 1, 2019, will be considered at the spring meeting of AACES.

MS20 SPRING 2019

Calling all active and associate members—you are eligible to serve on an ATA committee!

The committees

To assist it in the business of the Association, Provincial Executive Council maintains committees that address topics of concern to teachers and carry out various aspects of the Association's affairs. Each year, a number of practising teachers are selected to serve on Association committees as well as to represent the Association on boards and committees of other organizations and provincial bodies (such as Alberta Education and education faculties).

The commitment

Committee members come prepared to speak—from their perspective as a field member—to the forces affecting the respective committee's work.

The term for each of these positions begins July 1, 2019. Standing committee positions are generally three years in length. As a committee member, you would attend the committee's meetings (the number of meetings varies by committee). Travel and incidental costs, as well as release time, are covered to enable committee members to attend meetings.

Check out the list of opportunities on the ATA website. The deadline to apply for a standing committee is April 17.

More information—including the application form—is available on the ATA website.

The deadline for all standing committee applications is **April 17.**



All applicants are encouraged to reach out to their district representative(s) to better understand the work that Association committees undertake.

If you have any questions, please contact Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca, 780-447-9425 or 1-800-232-7208.

Auto for sale

2016 Subaru Forester 2.5i Limited with EyeSight

Features: Leather, heated front seats, navigation screen, back-up camera, panoramic sunroof, remote start, pre-collision braking, lane departure warning, Kenwood stereo; comes with winter tires on rims.

Colour: Crystal White Pearl
Engine: 2.5L 4 Cylinder
Transmission: Automatic AWD
Kilometres: 122,000

This is a sealed bid auction, so please mail your bid letter in a **sealed envelope marked "Attn: Tracy Pohl – Car Bid,"** Alberta Teachers' Association, 11010 142 Street, Edmonton, Alberta T5N 2R1. Bids will be accepted until 5 P.M., **April 5, 2019.**

For more information, contact Tracy Pohl at tracy.pohl@ata.ab.ca or by telephone: 780-447-9482 or 1-800-232-7208 (toll free) ext 482. The Alberta Teachers' Association reserves the right to refuse the highest bid if it is deemed to be inadequate.

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A letter from ATA president Greg Jeffery

March 12, 2019



Dear Colleagues,

The decision is in your hands.

Central table bargaining has reached an important milestone. Your bargaining committee has advanced the objectives of teachers and made a compelling case for the compensation and conditions needs that you have identified. We have engaged a mediator to help sort through unresolved issues, and we now have a package for teachers to consider.

While we wanted to achieve important improvements to class size and complexity issues, we were unable to convince the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) to include those improvements in collective agreements. I want to thank my Provincial Executive Council colleagues on the committee for passionately sharing the personal stories and challenges they encounter in their classrooms every day. I am disappointed that

TEBA did not take these concerns more seriously.

Having said that, we need to evaluate the agreements that the Central Table Bargaining Committee (CTBC) was able to secure and the recommendations that the mediator offers in his report and judge them on their own merits.

I believe that there are some good improvements being offered in this potential settlement. This is being characterized as a harmonization settlement and it will bring improvements to maternity/paternity leave, benefits, health-spending accounts, administrator allowances and substitute teacher pay for areas that have lagged behind the rest of the province.

For that reason, and because it offers a fair arbitration process on general salary increases, your Provincial Executive Council is recommending ratification. But the ultimate decision rests with teachers.

I encourage you to familiarize yourself with the mediator's report, and I look forward to seeing you at one of the 24 Member Information Meetings that we have scheduled around the province over the next three weeks.

I would like to thank Vice-President Jason Schilling, executive staff and all of the members of the CTBC for their hard work, effort and time on this file. I know they have had the best interests of Alberta teachers in their minds, and your voice was carried to the table.

Colleagues, now it is your time. Get informed, get online and vote! It is your collective agreement, and all Alberta teachers have this opportunity to decide.

Sincerely,

Greg A. Jeffery
ATA President

Central bargaining results in mediator's recommendations

Months of bargaining at the central table have resulted in recommendations from a mediator that teachers now have a chance to review, debate and vote on.

The mediator assigned to assist the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) has written a report recommending terms of settlement in order to resolve central table bargaining.

Available at www.teachers.ab.ca, the report outlines the items already agreed to by the parties in negotiations and the mediator's recommendations for how to resolve outstanding issues. If approved, the changes would be made to each of the 61 collective agreements that exist between the Alberta Teachers' Association and each public, separate and francophone school jurisdiction.

Ratification vote to take place online

The recommended terms are subject to ratification by a vote of all teachers covered by the affected collective agreements and TEBA's school board representatives. For teachers, online voting for ratification will be held from April 4 at 8 a.m. until April 7 at 5 p.m.

Teachers will need to be familiar with the mediator's report and its implications in order to cast an informed vote. To provide members an opportunity to learn about the recommendations first-hand, the Association is hosting a series of Member Information Meetings around the province.

MEMBER INFORMATION MEETINGS

Teachers are strongly encouraged to attend one of the Member Information Meetings (MIMs) near them to hear more about the mediator's report, to ask questions and to discuss and debate the recommendations. Members are welcome to attend any MIM they would like, but local area MIMs will provide the best information about how the central agreement will affect your individual collective agreement.

The MIM schedule is as follows. Details are still being confirmed and the schedule is subject to change, so please check www.teachers.ab.ca for the latest information.

DATE	CITY/TOWN	DATE	CITY/TOWN
March 19	Calgary	March 27	Pincher Creek
	Edmonton	March 28	Fort McMurray
	Slave Lake		High Level
March 20	Edmonton (Nisku)	April 1	Calgary
	Peace River		Edmonton
	St. Paul		Drayton Valley
March 21	Grande Prairie		Francophone webcast
	Camrose	April 2	Calgary
	Hanna		Red Deer
Medicine Hat	Hinton		
March 25	Wainwright	March 26	Lethbridge
	Whitecourt		Whitecourt
	Iron River		

Details online

Visit www.teachers.ab.ca for details on the recommendations and next steps. The following resources are available:

- Bargainers' Blog: Decision Time. Now We Vote
- Mediator's Report
- Highlights of the Mediator's Report
- Frequently Asked Questions (coming soon) |

Online ratification vote — April 4 to April 7