



# Memorandum

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The Alberta Teachers' Association



## **INFORMATION AND ACTION MEMO**

**[VIA—E-mail]**

**Date** 2017 11 30

**To** ATA Local Presidents

**From** Gordon R Thomas, Executive Secretary

**Re** TALIS 2018 Important Information for Alberta Teachers and Principals:  
Implications for Assignable Time and Voluntary Participation

The government is seeking participants to volunteer their personal time between March 1 and May 31, 2018, for an international benchmarking survey called TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey).

TALIS is a comparative international benchmarking instrument of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and is *not sanctioned or sponsored* by the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). While of potential benefit, for over a year the Association has been attempting to address the following significant concerns with the government on the TALIS survey:

### **1. BURDEN OF TIME AND RESOURCES**

Once again, Alberta is the only province that is recruiting teachers and distributing this research survey on behalf of the OECD. All other provincial governments across Canada elected not to fund or distribute this research survey in both 2013 and 2018. Alberta carries the burden, both financial and human, to gather a large enough sample to represent the nation in this international benchmarking activity. That means hundreds of teachers and principals are being asked to participate. In addition to this, the OECD requires participating nations to pay for the privilege of doing this survey. In so doing, Alberta Education is using precious finances and resources from the education system that could otherwise be directed to supporting more complex classrooms and teachers' growing work intensification.

### **2. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION**

The Alberta government is stating that this is a *voluntary* survey, and teachers and principals are under no obligation, ethically or legally, to participate or even recruit participation in this international survey. Activities that are truly voluntary in nature allow teachers and principals to participate or not without any reward or consequence, stated or implied.

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Participation in circumstances that are not voluntary brings the validity of the survey results into question. As a result, school boards should not be making survey participation compulsory.

### **Advice for Principals**

*If principals believe that the expectation to facilitate participation and assist with the coordination of the TALIS survey in their schools is not being presented as an entirely voluntary activity, for both themselves and their teachers, they have every right to challenge the request. Furthermore, they have the right to ask whether the work related to the participation in TALIS 2018 is a lawful order of the board. If TALIS survey completion is being assigned separately or as an activity in a staff meeting or PD event, it must be counted as assigned time. If teachers are given time to complete the survey if they so choose, or do a different activity during that time, it would also be assigned time.*

### **Advice for Teachers**

*If teachers believe that participation in the TALIS survey is not being presented as a voluntary activity, they have every right to challenge the request, ask whether completion of the survey is being assigned to them, and to expect that if the answer is yes, to have that time included as part of their assigned time. If teachers are told that they can use part of a staff meeting or PD activity to complete the survey, or do other work if they choose not to complete the survey, this would also be considered assigned time. As participation is voluntary, teachers should be able to withdraw their participation at any time.*

## **3. ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION (ATA) NOT CONSULTED**

The Association is the legislated voice of the teaching profession in Alberta and, as such, should have been involved in the decision to participate in TALIS 2018 and invited to assist with the analysis of the data coming from this research activity. In a previous analysis of TALIS in 2013, assertions were made by Alberta Education officials indicating that there was little relationship between class size and teacher job satisfaction.

As with other international benchmarking activities undertaken by the Alberta government in recent years, without consultation with the profession, the Association has expressed concerns about the rationale for participation in these large-scale testing activities as well as the commitment of teachers' time, public finances and human resources required to conduct this research.

## **4. ETHICS AND BEHAVIOURAL DATA COLLECTION**

The Association has raised questions with regard to any intent by the OECD to collect data on *how* teachers participate in this digital survey (eg, keystrokes, speed of response to questions and/or any other raw data on behaviour while taking this digital survey). While the Association has openly shared Alberta teachers' ethical concerns regarding the need for

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informed consent to gather this type of process data, or paradata, on numerous occasions, we were recently notified that paradata was indeed collected in prior TALIS survey activity in Alberta. This is raising new concerns for how the OECD will obtain informed consent to gather behavioural data on those participating in digital survey activity and, perhaps more important, how this data will be shared or used by third parties. Further, it raises ethical questions about the administration of the survey overall, calling into question the validity of the instrument and its results, but also the intent behind the data collection.

### **ASSOCIATION RESOLUTIONS**

In the context of the above concerns Provincial Executive Council has repeatedly sought clarification from government officials regarding participation in the TALIS 2018 program. While participation is voluntary, it is also worth noting that the following resolutions related to TALIS and other activities were adopted by the 2017 Annual Representative Assembly:

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Alberta Teachers' Association urge the Minister of Education to cancel Alberta's planned participation in the 2018 administration of the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS).

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Alberta Teachers' Association urge the Department of Education to meaningfully involve the Association in the development of Alberta's representations to agencies or bodies responsible for developing and administering national and international assessments or research studies in which the province's students and/or teachers are expected to participate.

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Alberta Teachers' Association urge the Minister of Education to withdraw Alberta from participation in future iterations of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Alberta Teachers' Association urge the Department of Education to inform participants in surveys, tests and examinations of any intent to use paradata or process data (data that captures users' actions) prior to the collection of that data and to seek informed voluntary consent for paradata or process data capture and use.

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While the administration of TALIS lies ahead this spring 2018, the Association continues to await a full review of the government's participation in international benchmarking activities. For other information and background, please consult <http://edmontonjournal.com/news/local-news/teachers-association-wants-alberta-out-of-gamed-international-exams>.

Members with questions should contact J C Couture at 780-447-9462 or by e-mail at [JC.Couture@ata.ab.ca](mailto:JC.Couture@ata.ab.ca).

GRT/bld

cc Provincial Executive Council  
Executive Staff Officers  
Economic Policy Committee Chairs