



A New MLA's Guide to Alberta's Teaching Profession and the Alberta Teachers' Association



The Alberta Teachers' Association

www.teachers.ab.ca

*Congratulations on your recent election as MLA!
This document is intended to provide you with an
overview of Alberta's teaching profession and the
Alberta Teachers' Association.*



Introduction

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), through the democratic interaction of its members, is the voice of Alberta's 47,000 teachers in matters of education.

Teachers want what students need, and the ATA believes that students, individually and collectively, achieve better outcomes when public education is well supported. We look forward to working with you as you make public education one of your highest priorities.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

The ATA is a proud supporter of Alberta's public education system. In Alberta, *public education* refers to schools governed by public, separate and francophone school boards.

Public education provides students from all backgrounds with learning experiences that allow them to discover and develop their potential, their passions and their gifts and to make significant contributions to their communities.

The ATA believes that public education must be

- free and accessible to every child;
- delivered by certificated, highly skilled and knowledgeable teaching professionals;
- appropriately funded to ensure that every child learns and every child succeeds; and
- a responsibility shared by all Albertans.

About the ATA

MISSION

The ATA, as the professional organization of teachers, promotes and advances public education, safeguards standards of professional practice and serves as the advocate for its members.

HISTORY

When John Walker Barnett—a teacher and a former member of the National Union of Teachers in England—immigrated to Alberta in 1917, he was shocked by the deplorable working conditions for teachers, which included poor wages and wrongful dismissals. Through his efforts, the Alberta Teachers' Alliance was established in 1918.

In 1935, the provincial government passed the *Teaching Profession Act* (TPA), which gave the ATA its legal foundation and its current name. In 1936, the act was amended to require mandatory ATA membership for all certificated teachers employed by public or separate school boards. The act remains in effect today and continues to govern the ATA.

THE TEACHING PROFESSION ACT

The TPA outlines the objects of the ATA, which are to

- advance the cause of education in Alberta,
- improve the teaching profession,
- arouse public interest in and increase public knowledge of education matters, and
- cooperate with similar organizations in Canada and elsewhere.

The TPA calls on the ATA to

- promote recruitment and selection practices for teacher education;
- promote adequate programs of preservice education and internship;
- promote working conditions that support optimal professional service;
- organize groups that improve the knowledge and skills of teachers;
- undertake activities that maintain and improve the competence of teachers;
- assist, advise, protect and discipline members; and
- assess teacher competence through professional practice review.

The TPA and related regulations prescribe conditions related to the ATA's membership, governance and fees. The legislation also outlines how the ATA is to conduct its processes related to discipline and practice review.



HOW THE ATA FUNCTIONS

The ATA is a democratic organization governed by teacher representatives elected from the membership.

Teachers are organized into 55 local associations (based on school jurisdiction). The executive of each local is made up of active teachers employed by the school boards in that local. Most local executives are elected by their colleagues at a general meeting or through in-school balloting and serve one- or two-year terms of office. Their ATA work is done outside of their teaching duties, as most do not have access to release time from their employers.

The Provincial Executive Council serves as the executive branch of the ATA. It consists of fifteen district representatives and five table officers (the president, two vice-presidents, the past president and the executive secretary). The president, vice-presidents and district representatives are elected every two years through direct balloting of active and associate ATA members across the province.

ATA policies and the annual budget are set at the Annual Representative Assembly (ARA), which is attended by approximately 450 teacher delegates selected by their local associations. ARA is held every May long weekend and alternates between Edmonton and Calgary.

What the ATA Does

TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

One of the most important functions of the ATA is to maintain the high regard the Alberta public has for teachers.

This is done by upholding standards related to teacher education, practice and conduct. Alberta's teachers are among the best in the world, and the ATA supports the highest professional standards. Teacher competence, as outlined by Alberta Education's *Teaching Quality Standard*, is upheld by the ATA's practice review process. Standards of conduct prescribed by the ATA's Code of Professional Conduct are enforced through the ATA's discipline process. ATA staff present regularly to teacher groups on professional conduct and competence.

The ATA represents the interests of teachers on issues of teacher education and certification through liaising with Alberta Education and Alberta's universities. It also operates, at arm's length, the Teacher Qualifications Service, which is responsible for evaluating teacher education for salary purposes.



ADVANCING PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Teachers in Alberta are subject to provincial and school board regulations and policy related to teacher growth, supervision and evaluation (TGSE). These policies help ensure that professional practice standards are maintained and that teachers are treated fairly. The ATA supports TGSE policies by offering advice and delivering presentations to teachers and administrators on all aspects of growth, supervision and evaluation.

The ATA also supports teacher growth by providing assistance and resources to help teachers develop professional growth plans and by providing outstanding teacher professional development (PD) opportunities.

Every year, the ATA organizes and hosts hundreds of institutes and workshops; dozens of seminars, symposia and conferences



(including annual conferences for administrators and beginning teachers); and 10 teachers' conventions, which are planned and operated by regional boards of teachers and funded through ATA fees. With the help of teacher instructors and facilitators, the ATA also supports school-based PD by coordinating numerous workshops and events.

The ATA's 21 specialist councils foster the professional development of teachers interested in common curriculum for specialty areas. Through organizing annual conferences, producing newsletters and academic journals, maintaining websites, and offering regional workshops and seminars, specialist councils provide members with opportunities to share ideas and gather new information.

The ATA library houses an extensive collection of books, periodicals, videos and other resources to help teachers advance the quality of their teaching practice.

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING

The ATA is the bargaining agent for all teachers employed by public, separate and francophone school jurisdictions in the province, as well as for school-based administrators and nearly all central-office-based teachers and administrators. Salary, benefits and conditions of practice are negotiated through bilevel collective bargaining with the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) centrally and with individual school jurisdictions locally.

Opening proposals for collective bargaining are developed through teacher consultation and are approved by democratic votes. The bargaining teams include elected teacher representatives, and all collective agreements are subject to ratification by a direct vote of

teachers. The ATA's democratic focus on collective bargaining ensures that the process is driven by the voice of teachers.

The ATA also represents teachers on the boards of the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) and the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund (ATRF), ensuring that teacher pension and benefit plans are responsive to teacher needs.

REPRESENTING TEACHERS

The ATA represents teachers individually and collectively.

ATA staff offer advice to teachers on all matters related to their professional lives, including certification, contracts, evaluation, medical issues, maternity, benefits, retirement and PD. If requested, staff will also represent individual teachers in meetings or hearings on any employment-related issue, including disciplinary matters, transfers and terminations. The ATA will obtain legal advice or assistance for its members, if necessary.

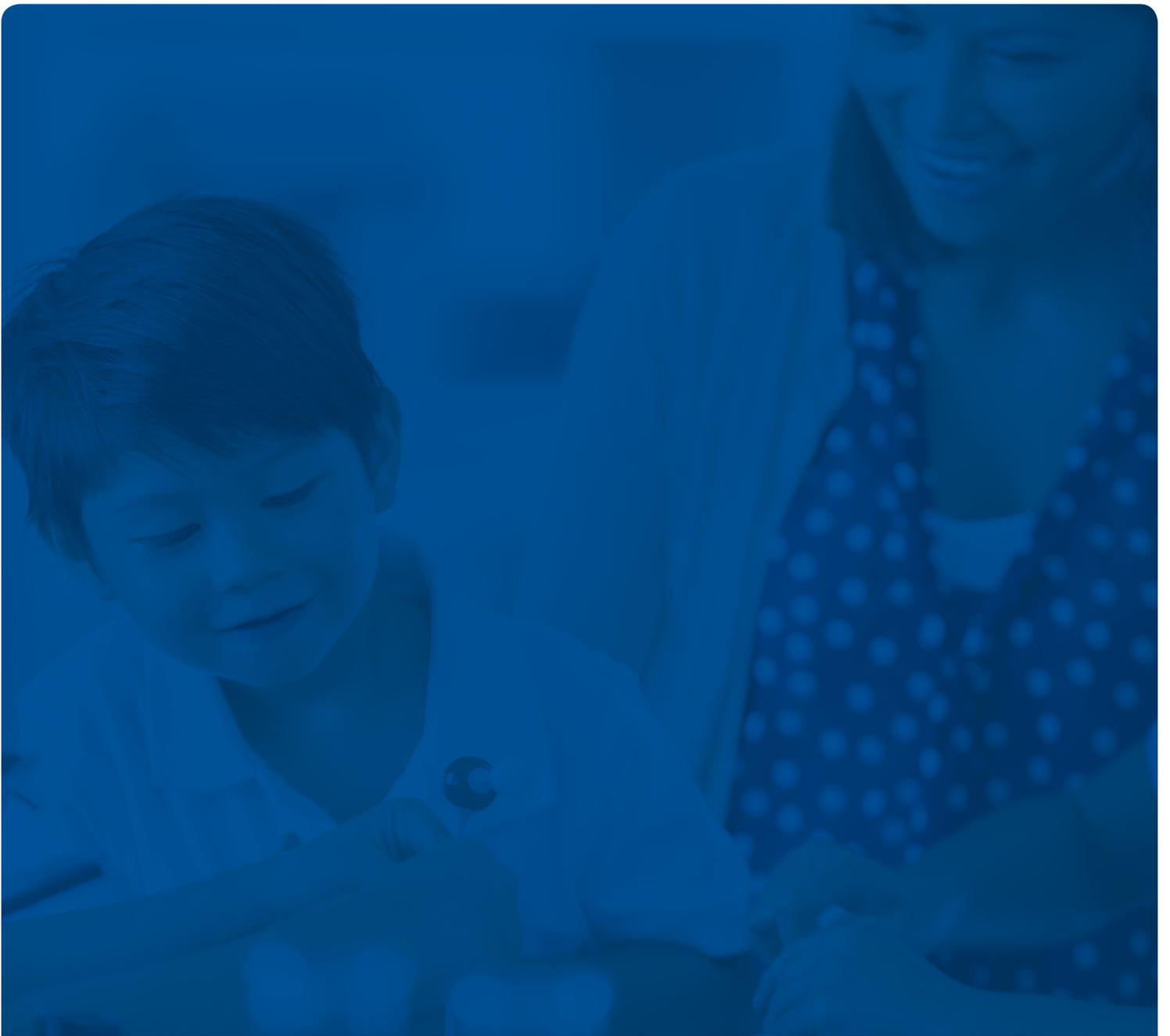
The ATA also acts as the voice of the teaching profession in Alberta and advocates on behalf of teachers and students. To ensure that the profession speaks from a position of knowledge and authority, the ATA conducts research on a variety of issues related to education, teaching and learning. Its advocacy work includes public relations and political engagement activities to promote public education and the professional role of teachers. The ATA is, however, nonpartisan and approaches political engagement with a focus on awareness of education issues rather than endorsing or supporting particular parties or candidates for office.

To keep members informed and up to date on education-related professional, legal and political issues, the ATA produces many publications, including the *ATA News*, a newspaper published every three weeks; the *ATA Magazine*, a quarterly magazine; and scholarly journals and education research monographs. It also maintains an informative website at www.teachers.ab.ca.

Conclusion

Alberta's teachers, through their professional association, look forward to working with you on supporting quality public education in Alberta.

Again, congratulations!



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