



## Substitute Teaching in Alberta: Voices from the Field

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## The Alberta Teachers' Association

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## Preface

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This study, using qualitative and quantitative methods, explores and reports on the lived experiences of substitute teachers in Alberta during the 2019/20 school year. The findings reveal that substitute teachers in Alberta are diverse, with varying motivations for taking on the task of substitute teaching. However, this study also found that these teachers have a strong commitment to their careers in public school education and a keen desire to participate as full members of the teaching profession. The findings also illustrate some of the challenges faced by teachers who substitute teach.

This study contributes to the research literature to help address a gap in our understanding. The experiences of substitute teachers are not well understood; absent that deep understanding, policy proposals intended to improve the lives of substitute teachers may not achieve their desired objective. The Alberta Teachers' Association recognizes the vital contribution that substitute teachers make every day to the smooth functioning of Alberta schools. As Vorell (2011, 479) pointed out, "Substitute teachers provide schools with an essential service that allows them to meet their day-to-day staffing challenges." The importance of their role was brought into sharp focus by the operational demands imposed on schools and teachers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

This research report represents a collaborative and collective effort on the part of field members, Provincial Executive Council, Association staff and a university researcher. The Substitute Teachers Committee members, Darren J Moroz (chair), Cindy Beasley, Sam C Cheng, Patricia A Kolotyluk, Allison E McCaffrey, Jerri A Perrin, Val Peter, Keith W Hadden (secretary), and Michelle Caron and Melody Osterhout (administrative secretaries) provided support, advice and feedback throughout the research process. Lisa Everitt, an executive staff officer with the Association, worked with Jason Daniels, PhD, of the University of Alberta to define the research survey and facilitate three focus groups held at the 2019 Substitute Teachers Conference. Daniels analyzed the data collected via the survey instrument and qualitative data from the focus groups to provide a preliminary report, and Everitt synthesized the results of the report, the data collected and the literature to author this report. Finally, Judith Plumb, Joan Steinbrenner, Joanne Maughn, Alexandra Bowes, and the Document Production team at the Association edited and produced the report in its final form.

Critical to the success of the project were the 44 substitute teachers who participated in the focus groups and the 869 substitute teachers who took the time to complete the online substitute teacher survey. Their responses and comments to the questions posed provided important information about experience of substitute teachers in Alberta schools and provide possibilities for the Association and school jurisdictions to consider how substitute teachers can be supported to do their critical work. This Association research report illustrates the complexity of the role of Alberta substitute teachers and shows the remarkable ways substitute teachers employ their skills, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit to provide essential service to public education, students and the teaching profession.

*Dennis Theobald*  
*Executive Secretary*



## Introduction

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This study examined the experiences of substitute teachers in Alberta during the 2019/20 school year to provide insight into the lived experience of this diverse group of professional teachers, whose service is essential to the smooth functioning of Alberta schools. Pollock (2010, 1) wrote, “Teaching is a unique profession. It is the only profession where absent teaching professionals must be replaced by another teaching professional.” Duggleby and Badali (2007, 22) pointed out that while substitute teachers “fulfill a central role in maintaining the continuity of K-12 education,” there is a significant gap in the educational research about the experiences of substitute teachers. In addition, the Canadian Council on Learning (2008) estimated that over the course of 12 years of public education, a student will spend approximately 1 year with substitute teachers; therefore, it serves the interest of public education and student learning to understand the circumstances of substitute teachers more deeply because “The non-permanent teacher workforce also plays a significant role within the teacher supply and demand cycle” (p 3). Finally, as Lunay and Lock (2006) pointed out,

Relief teachers need to be provided with the tools, opportunities and professional recognition to be able not simply to keep the class occupied for the day, but to *move the curriculum forward* in the same way as the students’ regular classroom teacher. If these tools are provided, not only will the relief teacher be better at their job, feelings of alienation will probably reduce naturally, meaning every educational stake-holder wins. (Conclusion, para 3).

Knowing more about the experiences of substitute teachers is critical to building effective policy supports for their professional lives to enable substitute teachers to better fulfill their essential role within the public school system.

The legal definition of substitute teachers is found in section 208 of Alberta’s *Education Act* (2020),<sup>1</sup> which stipulates

208(1) A teacher may teach without a contract of employment that is in accordance with section 205 only when the teacher is employed

(a) on a day-to-day basis, or

(b) to occupy a vacancy that is expected to be less than 20 consecutive teaching days in duration.

The *Education Act* makes it clear that substitute teachers are not employed on contracts of employment and that their engagement with a school jurisdiction is conducted on a day-to-day basis to a maximum of 20 teaching days. If a teacher absence is expected to be longer than 20 consecutive teaching days, a substitute teacher will be provided with a temporary contract of employment. While

*substitute teacher* is the name referenced in the Alberta legislation, substitute teachers are also called guest teachers, supply teachers, teachers on call, casual relief teachers and occasional teachers in the literature, and the nomenclature of substitute teacher also varies from school division to school division, province to province and country to country (Canadian Council on Learning 2008; Shilling 1991; Uchida, Cavanagh and Lane 2020). The Alberta legislation serves to set substitute teachers into a distinct grouping within the teaching profession, one without the protection of an employment contract. This lack of employment security in Alberta and elsewhere means that “The professional lives of many TTOC [teachers teaching on call] are precarious because they are uncertain and unpredictable” (British Columbia Teachers’ Federation 2016). The uncertain nature of substitute teaching has implications for teachers serving in this role. The precarity of substitute teachers’ lives is explored within this study as well as the existing literature.

As the Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) had not conducted a survey of Alberta substitute teachers for quite some time—nearly a decade—and given the gap in the education literature about substitute teacher experiences, it was determined by the provincial Substitute Teacher Committee that another Alberta research study should be commissioned. The Substitute Teacher Committee and ATA research staff contracted Jason Daniels, PhD, of the University of Alberta to design the study instruments, conduct focus groups and provide preliminary analysis for the data collected. This final report builds on the work of Daniels by connecting the study results with the available literature on substitute teachers. This report includes a review of the literature, the methods used for the study, the context within which the study was conducted, the findings and analysis of the data, and a discussion and concluding remarks.

## Exploration of the Literature

The review of the literature for this study was “oriented toward the exploration of an issue, or explanation of the nature of relationships or conditions that bear on it” (Hallinger 2013, 131) and focused specifically on what substitute teachers experience in their roles. This review was exploratory in nature, conducted by exploring educational databases such as ERIC and searching the academic literature and grey literature using key terms such as *substitute teacher experiences*, *substitute teachers in Canada* and *Alberta substitute teacher*. The websites of Canadian teacher organizations were also searched in an effort to locate credible sources to inform this report. However, as Duggleby and Badali (2007) wrote,

Few studies have documented the experiences of substitute teachers, and even fewer have explored the work in Canadian contexts. The literature on substitute teachers that dates back 40 years is still significant because many of the issues identified then still remain. (p 23)

As a result, the exploration of academic articles for this review did not restrict time frames, though more recent articles were selected where possible. Finally, no matter where articles were located, their reference lists were also mined to expand the number of articles reviewed.

This review of literature addresses three main topics arising from the literature: who are substitute teachers and why do they substitute teach, what are the challenges faced by substitute teachers and what strategies do substitute teachers employ to be successful?

### WHO ARE SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS AND WHY DO THEY SUBSTITUTE TEACH?

Previous studies by the ATA found that substitute teachers are a diverse group of teachers whose career trajectories vary from being beginning teachers to teachers who have retired and choose to substitute teach following their teaching careers (Arkison, Couture and Servage 2010; Alberta Teachers' Association [ATA] 2011). In the first study done by the ATA, Arkison, Couture and Servage (2010) created “three general types of substitute teacher” (p 5) to describe participants who engaged in that research. The first general typology identified was that of a younger teacher who is looking to secure permanent employment with a school district. The second was a teacher who took time away from teaching to raise children and is using substitute teaching to enhance the family income; and the third type of substitute teacher identified is a retired teacher. While these generalizations help us to understand who substitute teachers might be, Shilling (1991) provided a more detailed profile of substitute teachers from his review of the literature. In describing the diversity of substitute teachers, Shilling (1991, 7) identified nine categories of substitute teacher:

- Women teachers who were “combining family responsibilities with waged work” (p 7).
- Part-time teachers who substituted to supplement their earnings.
- Teachers who wish to leave teaching to transition into a new career may substitute teach to supplement their earnings.
- Teachers who have left employment to raise a family or who have been unemployed will often engage in substitute teaching to re-enter the job market.
- Beginning teachers who have not secured contracts of employment will engage in substitute teaching as a means to full-time employment.
- Teachers who have moved to a new location because they have followed their partners who have moved to a new job opportunity. The teachers may engage with substitute teaching to help secure more stable teaching employment.
- Teachers who work in other industries or jobs and for whom substitute teaching works well with their lifestyle.
- Teachers acting as primary caregivers at home but who substitute as a way to break the monotony of domestic life and not for financial reasons.
- Retired teachers who enjoy teaching and return to substitute teach to remain connected to the teaching profession and schools.

Clearly, the ATA studies as well as the literature suggest that there are many different typologies of substitute teachers. Shilling (1991) argued that “the reasons individuals have for supply teaching are likely to affect their *experiences*” (p 7). Uchida, Cavanagh and Lane (2020) found that within the different groups of substitute teachers who participated in their study “there were differences between the groups in how they perceived their work” (p 10). The literature suggests that the career stage, life stage and motivations of teachers who engage with substitute teaching mean that the act of researching the lived experience of substitute teachers is complex and not easily accomplished.

Within the articles reviewed for this study, there were two main approaches to researching the experiences of substitute teachers: one in which substitute teachers were studied as single group with distinctions drawn after the data had been collected, for example, Duggleby and Badali (2007), Lunay and Lock (2006), and Vorell (2011), and the second, in which subgroups within substitute teacher ranks were identified and their experiences examined specifically. There were two main categories of study located that looked at subgroups of substitute teachers: the first an exploration of the experiences of beginning teachers who substitute taught; examples include Driedger-Enns (2014) and McCormack and Thomas (2005). The second was the experiences of internationally trained teachers who substitute taught; examples include Ryan, Pollock and Antonelli (2009) and Schmidt (2015). In spite of the differences among teachers who constitute the substitute teacher labour pool, there are common challenges that all substitute teachers face, though the research also reveals that some groups of substitute teachers are affected more adversely by their experiences than others (Pollock 2010; Shilling 1991).

## CHALLENGES FACED BY SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS

### Uncertainty

“The work carried about by supply teachers also has distinct characteristics: first, supply work can be a highly demanding form of teaching” (Shilling 1991, 5). What causes substitute teaching to be highly challenging? The changing nature of substitute teaching may provide some insight into why it is a difficult way to teach. Vorell (2011) pointed out that “the majority of assignments substitute teachers receive are one-day arrangements that they usually do not know about until a day or two ahead of the job” (p 482). Further, Uchida, Cavanagh and Lane (2020, 11) observed that when a substitute teacher goes to their new assignments, “Each time they enter a new school, CRTs [casual relief teachers] must navigate complex inter-relationships between students, staff, and the wider school community.” The day-to-day nature of substitute teaching creates an uncertain existence, one that requires continual negotiation and renegotiation by the substitute teachers as they go from school to school to perform their work as teachers.

Educational researchers also identify other aspects of substitute teaching that cause uncertainty for substitute teachers. For example, substitute teachers are frequently in new schools and classrooms every day, and research demonstrates that the frequent change of their physical location of work creates challenges. Vorell (2011) asserted that “With every new assignment, substitute teachers encountered a workspace not of their own design that they must learn to use quickly while not changing anything upon their departure” (p 487). The ATA study in 2011 found that substitute teachers were concerned about “school orientation practices [and] access to technology” (p 8). Arkison, Couture and Servage (2010) reported that most substitute teachers participating in their study were satisfied with the lesson plans provided 80 per cent of the time. However, in cases where there were scant or no lesson plans provided, a substitute teacher could be left to quickly plan their day with students while also trying to locate teaching materials and technology to use throughout the day. In summary, the literature explains that for substitute teachers, having access to adequate information about the school, equipment such as technology and materials for teaching is essential for success.

Another issue that creates uncertainty for substitute teachers is access to work, particularly for “those geographically restricted in terms of where they can work” (Shilling 1991, 6). Hand in hand with the ability to secure enough work is “the problem of low wages [and] few or no benefits” (McHugh 1997, 6). Other studies confirm that the issue of earning an adequate income for substitute teachers has held consistent over time; for example, the more recent BCTF survey (2016) of substitute teachers found that “Another indicator of the precarious existence of teachers teaching on call [TTOC] is the limited income levels they report. There can be little doubt that some TTOC live in poverty” (p 3). The BCTF report also found that “Over half of TTOC respondents also stated that they felt pressure to accept assignments when feeling unwell, since they have no income if they do not work, and no sick days to use or to bank” (p 3).

In addition to being able to secure enough daily work to sustain their economic lives, for substitute teachers who desire permanent employment, the literature points to a lack of access to the hiring processes employed by school boards. In some cases, substitute teachers find themselves in a double bind situation: if they perform well on a casual basis, school boards are not incented to hire them on contract more permanently. For example, Duggleby and Badali (2007) reported that “The consensus view was that ‘good substitute teachers’ tend not to be offered contract work because they are too valuable as substitute teachers” (p 30). In other cases, substitute teachers identified that a lack of communication about job openings and lack of feedback about why they were not hired for contract work contributed to their uncertainty about why they could not attain more secure employment (ATA 2011; Lunay and Lock 2006; Pollock 2010). The ongoing cycle of hope of more secure employment followed by disappointment in not attaining it can, as Driedger-Enns (2014) wrote, cause a substitute teacher to feel “invisible to those who do the hiring for fulltime contracts although she thought she was doing all the right things” (p 92). The frustration of substitute teachers who wish to gain more permanent work or have more opportunities for daily work can lead to a sense of marginalization and deep frustration among substitute teachers as a group, and also among subgroups such as racialized substitute teachers (BCTF 2016; Pollock 2010; Schmidt 2015).

The employment uncertainty of substitute teachers, combined with low wages and no benefits, may have serious implications on the supply of substitute teachers and on the teaching profession. As McCormack and Thomas (2005) pointed out, “for many beginning teachers the prospect of long term casual teaching does not offer enough continuity or job satisfaction and they will seek a change of career in the future” (p 28). While the previous quote applied to beginning teachers only, the same can be said for substitute teachers of all ages, particularly if those substitute teachers desire more permanent employment or steady, predictable income earnings.

### Professional Status

The literature on professions and the traits of professions is well established within the sociological literature. Larson (2014) wrote

For many sociologists, the central social functions that professions serve explained the attributes that were hashed and rehashed in multiple definitions: the extensive knowledge professionals must acquire, the specificity of their work, the reliable uniformity of their behavior, their privileged social status and the unity of their organized group – the “community within a community.” (p 8)

Wilensky (1964) noted that “the degree of professionalization is measured not just by the degree of success in the claim to exclusive technical competence, but also by the degree of adherence to the service ideal and its supporting norms of professional conduct” (p 141).

The occupation of teaching has generally struggled for recognition as a profession as do other occupations in “human-relations fields” (Wilensky 1964, 145). This may be, in part, attributed to the

fact that teachers are predominantly female and the work involves children, giving the impression to some members of the public that teaching is primarily focused on child care (Larson 2014). In addition, Lortie (1969) pointed out that the perception of teaching as a semiprofession may be connected to the fact that “all high school graduates have spent approximately 10,000 hours in close contact with teachers in the course of their schooling” (p 10). The gendered nature of teaching, the extended exposure of the public to schools and teaching, and the fact that teaching involves working with children all mean that teaching is not always viewed as an occupation conferred with a high professional status.

Given the struggles of the teaching profession to be recognized as a profession in its own right, how do substitute teachers situate within this larger conversation about the status of teaching? The literature would suggest that substitute teachers perceive themselves as “second-class” citizens within the teaching profession. For example, Duggleby and Badali (2007) argue that “Publicly funded schools are hierarchical institutions with many levels or divisions of power. Few members of the teaching profession have less power or authority than substitute teachers” (p 31). McHugh (1997) wrote, “The literature has focused on the professional status concerns of substitutes in that substitute teachers know that they have professional qualifications as teachers and feel that they are professionals but also feel that they are not treated as such in the workplace” (p 28). Substitute teachers, therefore, find themselves marginalized from the teaching profession in spite of holding the same professional credentials in Alberta as every other teacher working in the public system. In the remainder of this section, the issues that inform substitute teachers’ perceptions of themselves as “second-class” citizens within the teaching profession are explored.

### Respect and Support

Substitute teachers have new assignments every day, moving from one grade level to another, from assignment to assignment and school to school. While the constant change experienced by substitute teachers with respect to work can provide a measure of flexibility a substitute teacher may find appealing, it also means that substitute teachers never have an opportunity to establish themselves as legitimate professional teachers in a school setting. The BCTF (2016) illustrated this by noting in its study that students may see substitute teachers “as some form of ‘second-class’ teacher who came in to teach them only when the ‘first class’ teacher was absent from school” (p 4). When students do not respect their substitute teacher, classroom discipline becomes an issue for that substitute teacher. Several studies have documented the struggles with classroom management experienced by substitute teachers (Lunay and Lock 2006; McCormack and Thomas 2005; Pollock 2010; Uchida, Cavanagh and Lane 2020). Duggleby and Badali (2007) observed that “Classroom management tends to be a major issue for most classroom teachers, but for substitute teachers, classroom management was an area that either increased or reduced their performance from a school administrator’s perspective” (p 31). Shilling (1991) pointed out, “Available research suggests that casual supply teachers generally undertake an extremely difficult job in circumstances where they cannot expect the institutional support usually received by full-time teachers” (p 10). These studies note that the

lack of support for substitute teachers to deal with difficulties in student behaviour is, in part, a function of their transience in a school classroom, but it is also exacerbated by a fear that they will be viewed as less capable teachers by school leaders. Consequently, perception by a substitute teacher that they might be viewed as less competent because of challenging student behaviour may translate into a belief that they cannot request support from school administrators. The lack of respect from students coupled with a lack of support for substitute teachers may be contributing to their sense of marginalization within the teaching profession.

### Communities of Practice

According to Wenger-Traynor and Wenger-Traynor (2015), communities of practice are characterized by three essential elements. The first element is the domain of practice, which has “an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and therefore a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people” (p 2). The second element is the community itself, which builds “relationships that enable them to learn from each other; they care about their standing with each other” (p 2). The third element is the practice of those within the community, whereby practitioners “develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, ways of addressing recurring problems—in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction” (p 2).

Whereas substitute teachers share commitment to the teaching profession and hold common interest with other teachers in terms of ensuring that high-quality teaching and learning occur in schools (Duggleby and Badali 2007; Shilling 1991), they experience difficulty finding communities of practice. Communities of practice require the formation of relationships with other teachers; this can be hampered for substitute teachers, due to their shifting assignments. Moving from school to school on a daily basis means that substitute teachers do not have sustained interactions with other teachers to develop a shared repertoire of resources, nor do they have ongoing relationships with other teachers. Driedger-Enns (2014) found that, consequently, “Isolation and longing for connection to the school professional community was a simultaneous storyline” (p 96) in the qualitative research she did with a substitute teacher in western Canada.

The desire to belong to a community of practice at the school level is also mirrored by a lack of contact with other substitute teachers. Duggleby and Badali (2007) pointed out that

Not only are substitute teachers kept on the margins in schools, they also encountered barriers in building communities of support among other substitute teachers. Participants noted that they never felt part of a staff because they were in the school for a such a short time. (p 29)

The Canadian Council on Learning (2008) noted that some “teacher associations have begun to provide training for their non-permanent teachers by developing handbooks and organizing conferences” (p 4) as a means to help substitute teachers connect with each other, but other studies, such as the ATA’s 2011 study, found that substitute teachers did not believe that these measures were

sufficient, and they required higher levels of support to be provided by the ATA. ATA research also indicated that supports from the ATA can be related to both economic and professional concerns. Thus, in addition to not having sufficient access to communities of practice, “Disparities in income, job security and benefits contribute to the feeling on the part of many substitute teachers that they are not respected and recognized for their work” (ATA 2011, 20). Belonging to a community of practice brings a sense of belonging and support for most teachers, but because substitute teachers find it hard to locate a community of practice, they perceive that they are operating from the margins within both school jurisdictions and their professional associations.

### Standards of Practice and Professional Development.

In Alberta, under the *Education Act*, all teachers, including substitute teachers, are required to hold professional teacher qualifications. This means that in addition to their teaching certificate, under the act, substitute teachers are expected to achieve the standards identified under the Alberta Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education 2020) in order to attain and maintain permanent certification. As such, teachers are to be provided with feedback and evaluation about their teaching practice by school leaders, often their principals or vice-principals, in order to demonstrate that they reach the Alberta Teaching Quality Standard. Arkison, Couture and Servage (2010) found in their study of Alberta substitute teachers that “Many of those seeking permanent positions stated that they wanted to be evaluated” (p 8). In addition, the ATA (2011) found that “Some substitute teachers are unable to obtain needed evaluations from administrators” (p 17). This would suggest that challenges exist in Alberta with respect to substitute teachers receiving feedback about their professional practice for the purposes of improvement but also for the purposes of certification and employment. Uchida, Cavanaugh and Lane (2020) also reported similar challenges for substitute teachers in Australia, noting that “The process of accreditation assumes that there is adequate support from executive staff for lesson observations to take place and reports on the teacher’s practice to be signed by the principal” (p 11).

Professionals are expected to have a baseline standard of knowledge and practice in order to maintain their status (Larson 2014; Wilensky 1964). In addition to an expectation that all teachers in Alberta are certificated teachers, the profession of teaching places a high expectation for teachers and school leaders to engage with ongoing professional development and career-long learning. Duggleby and Badali (2007) found that “Substitute teachers were also frustrated with the lack of professional development opportunities available to them” (p 30). Uchida, Cavanaugh and Lane (2020) identified several barriers that substitute teachers encountered when trying to access professional development opportunities, including cost, loss of wages when attending professional development and the applicability of the professional development to their work. The Canadian Council on Learning (2008) observed that “Providing opportunities for non-permanent teachers to attend sanctioned school board or school district professional development is one way to encourage the professional learning of teachers who do not work in permanent teaching positions” (p 4).

## STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS

Researchers have found that substitute teachers employ a variety of personal strategies to attain work and manage their challenging assignments. Building professional contacts and networks was noted by Duggleby and Badali (2007), who stated “With an eye toward full-time employment, all the participants networked with contract teachers and school-based administrators, thereby gaining experience in K-12 classrooms” (p 28). While networking by substitute teachers can mean making an introduction to school administrators, substitute teachers employ other means to “get their names out there” as potential employees. For example, Pollock’s (2010) study about internationally educated teachers (IETs) who moved to Canada and were teaching as substitute teachers found that IETs undertook volunteering in schools because “Volunteering is viewed as a way to make connections, meet teachers and administrators who might recommend the teachers or think of hiring them when there is a need for an occasional teacher at the local school site” (p 11). Finally, Shilling (1991) indicated that substitute teachers who worked in a limited number of schools had the opportunity to overcome some of the isolation that substitute teachers experience, and they were able to establish relationships within these schools. However, it should be noted that if substitute teachers volunteer or restrict their work to only a few schools to concentrate on networking opportunities, they will undoubtedly lose earning opportunities elsewhere.

Duggleby and Badali (2007) wrote that substitute teachers require particular personal qualities in order to be successful. They explained that substitute teachers who were successful in their roles were adaptable, flexible, creative and reliable. Vorell (2011) explained that substitute teachers deal with the uncertainty within their roles by “developing their own systems of rules that they bring from assignment to assignment” (p 486). For example, substitute teachers might bring motivational materials with them to school, they might have lesson plans ready to fall back upon and they become adept at learning student names so that classroom misbehaviour is not anonymized. In addition, Vorell (2011) found that substitute teachers were active agents in their work lives, striving to find important information such as “(a) the physical layout of the school, (b) location of materials, (c) school policy and culture, (d) other organizational members, and (e) other duties expected of substitute teachers” (p 491) when they engaged with a new assignment.

While personal resilience and networking are good individual strategies for attaining employment and success with working with students, the literature does not identify many systemic supports that are available to substitute teachers to help them succeed in their roles. Schmidt’s (2015) study on IETs who were substitute teaching as a way to enter the teaching profession in Canada noted the existence of a bridging program in which “IETs were hired to work in the same school every day to fill in for absent teachers in that school” (p 590). Under this program, IETs were substituting, but had been placed on a contract of employment by the school divisions to fill in positions at one particular school. Participants who eventually secured employment contracts reported that the bridging program was “sensitive to their needs and attributes, and supportive of their success” (p 589). However, as Schmidt (2015) also pointed out, these kinds of programs “required considerable

investment on the part of the school division” (p 590). School divisions experience many demands for scarce resources, and that is a potential explanation as to why more programs that help substitute teachers bridge to more permanent employment or help substitute teachers to access more resources for professional development do not exist.

## Methods

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The design of the research study was guided by Jason Daniels, PhD, of the University of Alberta, in consultation with ATA staff and the Alberta Teachers' Association Substitute Teacher Committee. The study used a mixed-methods approach, using focus groups and an online survey. The first phase of data collection started with focus groups for which participants were recruited during the Substitute Teachers Conference on October 19, 2019. A total of 44 substitute teachers opted to participate in the focus groups during the conference. The focus groups ran for approximately one hour and were guided by open-ended statements and prompts that queried the participants' perspectives on the current context of substitute teaching, what the challenges were, what the positives were and how the participants viewed their relationship with the ATA.

The second phase of the study was on an open online survey that recruited participants by posting the study on the ATA website, in addition to an announcement made at the annual Substitute Teachers Conference in October 2019. The survey was open from December 2 through December 16, 2019, and drew 1,131 respondents with 869 completed surveys. Given this response rate, and based on an estimated population size of 6,712 (ATA 2020), this survey has a confidence interval or margin of error of  $\pm 3.1$  per cent, 19 times out of 20 (Creative Research Systems 2012).

### CONTEXT OF ALBERTA SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS IN LATE 2019

At the time of both the focus groups and the online survey, it was anticipated that the funding for public education in Alberta would be cut, following the release of the Alberta government's "MacKinnon Report" (Alberta 2019), which called for reduced spending across the public sector. When the fall budget was introduced, in late October 2019, the government reduced the funding envelope for public schools by approximately \$275 million, according to Teghtmeyer (2019). Following the provincial fall budget, large urban school divisions indicated that they would be laying off temporary contract teachers and would add these teachers to their substitute teacher roster. For example, Cole (2019) reported that "About 300 teachers on temporary contracts have received notice that their contracts will end as of Jan 2, 2020, Calgary Board of Education Supt Christopher Usih said Tuesday" (para 1). The article went on to report that the temporary contract teachers would be put onto the substitute teacher list following the termination of the contracts.

In addition to the immediate issue of budget cuts in the fall of 2019, the regulatory structures governing the collective bargaining of all public school teachers, including substitute teachers, were substantially amended. Prior to 2015, school boards bargained directly with the ATA to form collective agreements. In the fall of 2015, the Alberta government introduced legislation that required a two-tier bargaining structure: a central table to deal with significant cost items as well as items that affected most teachers,

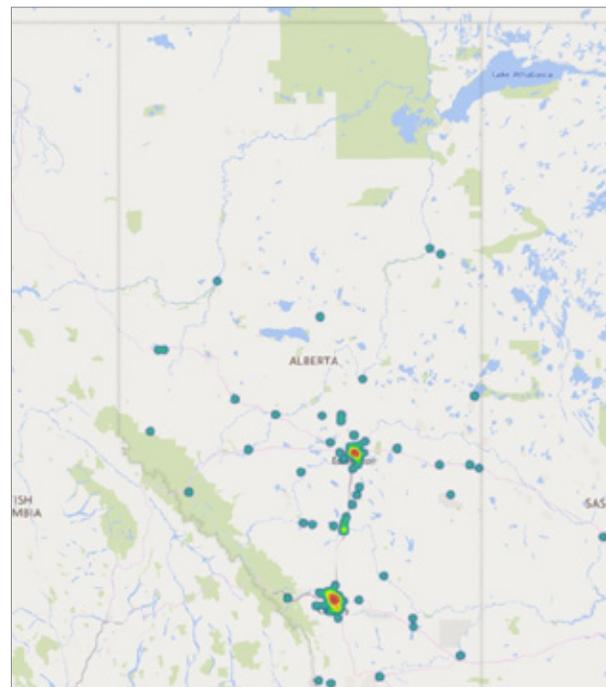
and a local table to deal with issues specific to particular school jurisdictions. Bellefontaine (2015) reported that “The main table will negotiate salary as well as other issues deemed to be provincial in nature. A secondary table will allow local school boards to negotiate with Alberta Teachers’ Association locals on matters that affect their board” (para 3). This changed structure meant that substitute teachers’ compensation is bargained at a central table between the Alberta Teachers’ Association and the Teacher Employer Bargaining Authority. This shift also meant that professional concerns, such as professional development days and definition of the teaching assignment, could be bargained at the local table. Therefore, collective agreements between the ATA and school jurisdictions continue to vary in their provisions, meaning that compensation structures and expectations for professional conditions also vary. Finally, at the time of this research project, teacher collective agreements had not seen salary increases for some time. Hare (2020) reported that commencing in September 2012, “teachers have received no pay increases in seven of the last eight years” (para 5).

## DEMOGRAPHICS

The heat map at right (Figure 1) shows that the respondents to the survey were located primarily in urban centres, though substitute teachers from all of areas of Alberta responded to the survey. Daniels (2020) wrote that the “distribution of responses was proportional to the population of Alberta” (p 5), though, when substitute teachers were asked to identify which school jurisdiction they worked for, roughly 51 per cent of respondents indicated that they worked for Calgary Board of Education. Therefore, the study’s respondents are not an accurate representation of the distribution of the teacher population in Alberta. This is a limitation for this study and may reflect the fact that the Substitute Teachers Conference, where recruiting for the online study occurred, was held in Calgary in 2019.

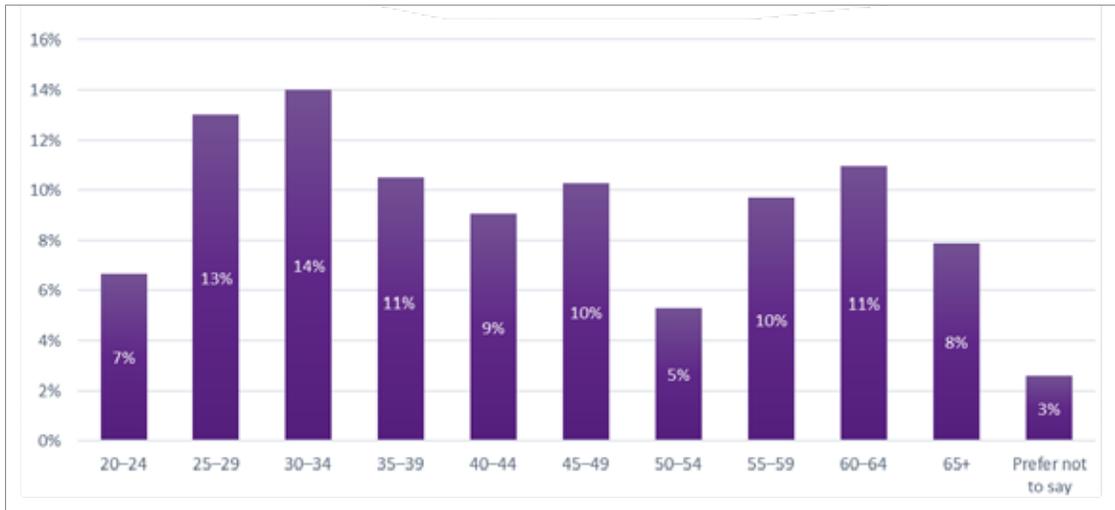
Respondents to the survey were asked to identify their age within a five-year age bracket. There were 885 responses to this question, and the data showed that substitute teachers participating in this survey were younger, with the largest group being 30 to 34 years old (see Figure 2).

Figure 1. Distribution of Responses (n = 1,128)



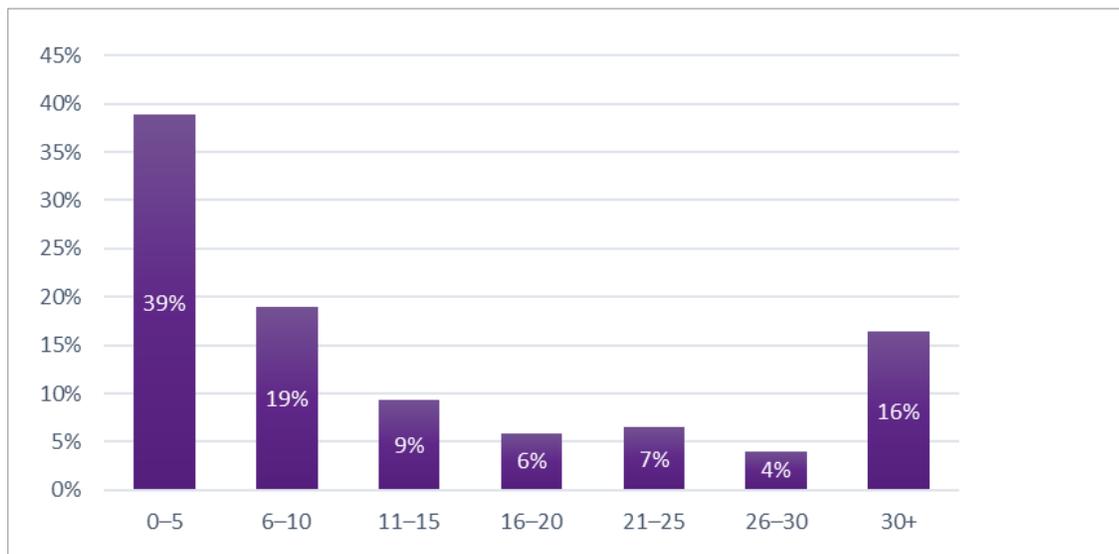
The heat map of responses shows that the majority of respondents were from more densely populated centres in Alberta.

Figure 2: Age of Substitute Teacher Participants (n = 885)



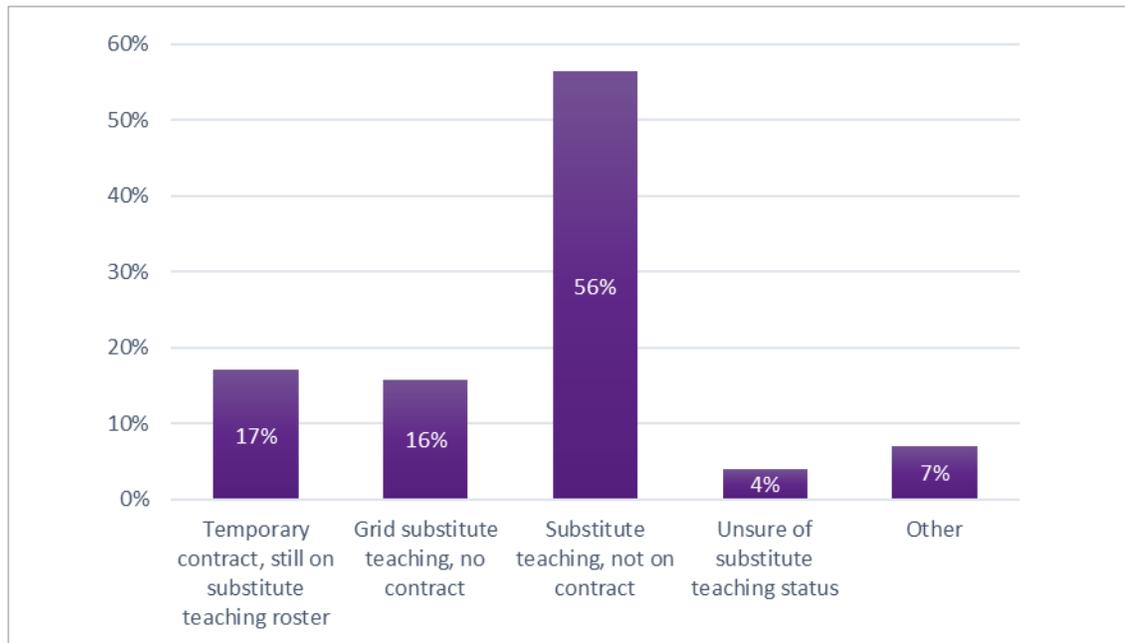
Consistent with the majority of respondents being under the age of 35 years was the finding that the majority of respondents (58 per cent) held less than 10 years of teaching experience (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Years of Teaching Experience (n = 923)



Substitute teachers who responded to the online survey were also asked to identify their current employment status. The majority of respondents (56 per cent) identified that they were substitute teaching on a day-to-day basis only. The remainder of respondents were teaching on a temporary contract, substitute teaching while on a part-time contract of employment, teaching in a position long enough to be put on the teacher salary grid or unsure of their employment status. Figure 4 shows the employment status of those who responded to the online survey.

Figure 4: Current Employment Status (n = 994)



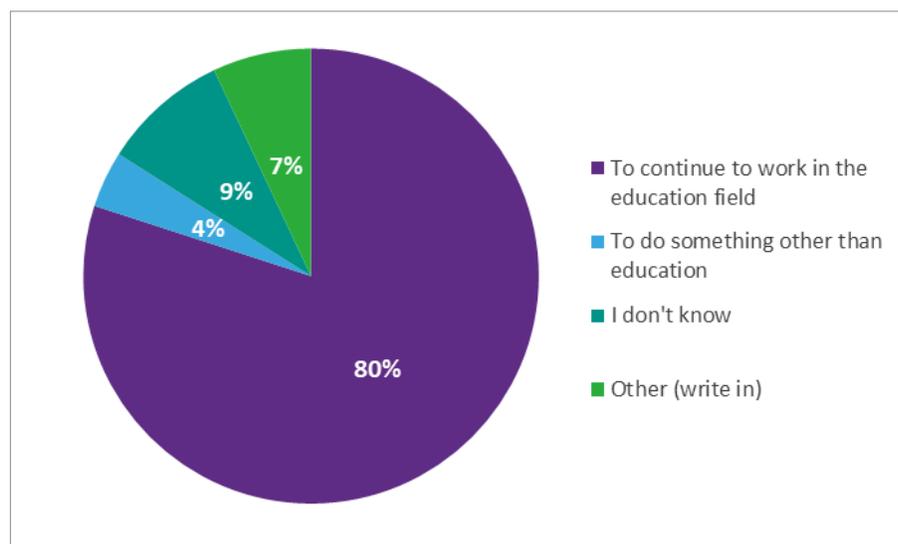
In addition, while 22 per cent of participants indicated that they were retired teachers, a clear majority of participants, or 78 per cent, reported that they were not retired. As was the case in previous ATA research (Arkison, Couture and Servage 2010; ATA 2011), the respondents to this survey represent a diverse group of teachers at varying stages in their teaching careers. It is not clear how representative these demographics are in terms of Alberta substitute teachers, because there is no provincial database that identifies the ages and teaching experiences of substitute teachers and because of previously reported limitations. Even with these gaps, by age and teaching experience alone, it is obvious that, as was the case in the literature (Shilling 1991; Uchida, Cavanagh and Lane 2020), substitute teachers in Alberta constitute a varied group.

## Data Analysis and Findings

### CAREER PLANS AND ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Substitute teachers who participated in the online survey were asked about their future career plans. The majority of respondents indicated that their intention was to pursue a career of some kind in education. The results are shown in the graph below.

Figure 5: Future Plans (n = 935)



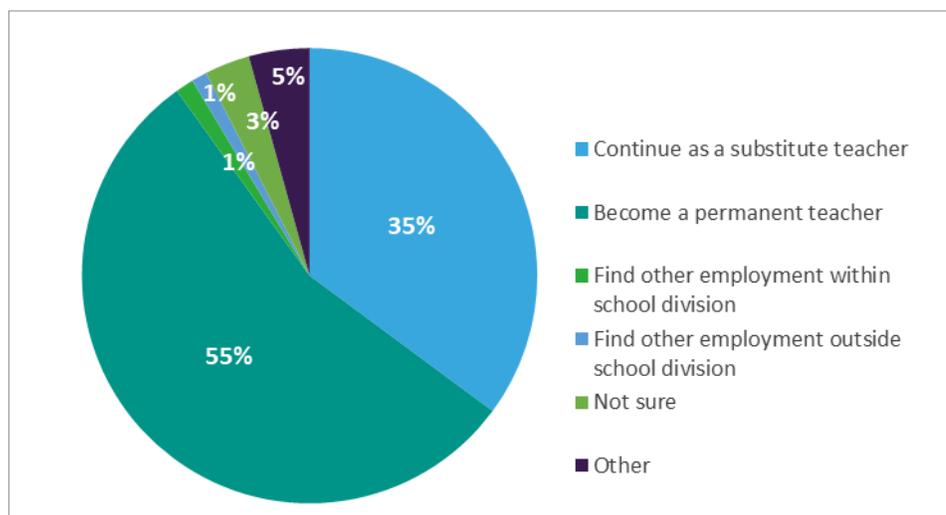
Seven per cent of respondents selected *Other* with respect to their future plans for their teaching careers. The selected comments below help illustrate that for many substitute teachers, their plans to continue in the field of education were affected by the inability to secure permanent and secure work, other work opportunities and interests, or a transition to full retirement. The comments below are revealing in that many of the respondents demonstrate a high degree of commitment to their careers in education, but illustrate that other circumstances such as employment insecurity may impact their ability to remain in education.<sup>2</sup>

- I would like to be on a contract. I have worked for this board for 10 years now without a permanent position and now [that] I have started a family, it is not financially stable for me to continue going from contract to contract with subbing in between. I have been evaluated about 10 times, all with great success and positive results. I have been recommended for both probationary positions and continuous positions, but never been offered either position at a school.

- I had planned to be in education until I retired. But, now that I am being laid off because of cutbacks, I may have to look at other options.
- Offer mindfulness education programs to schools and corporate workplaces.
- I'm retired, so substitute teaching is an extra activity I love to do.
- After six years and over 200 applications, I am considering leaving education due to no prospects of a continuous contract. Young, recent graduates are more popular for interviews.
- Continue subbing while pursuing other passions on the side.
- Fully retire from subbing five years after leaving my full-time position.
- Unable to get teaching work for 15 years, going back to university.

Participants who indicated that their future plans were to continue to work in education were also asked about what role they hoped to fulfill going forward. While the majority of respondents indicated that they wished to become permanently employed as a teacher (55 per cent), a significant portion of respondents (35 per cent) indicated that they wished to continue in their role as a substitute teacher. Daniels (2020) found that within the group that wished to continue to substitute teach, there was not a significant difference between the number of retired teachers (48 per cent) and the number of nonretired teachers (52 per cent) in the group. A smaller group of respondents indicated that they planned to find other employment within the field of education, either within the school division they currently worked for or for a different division. The 5 per cent of participants who filled in the *Other* option all referenced retaining some connection to education, either as a substitute teacher who fulfilled temporary contracts, part-time teacher who substituted, substitute teach until their children were grown and so on. The responses in the *Other* option reflected an amalgamation of the other categories that could be chosen.

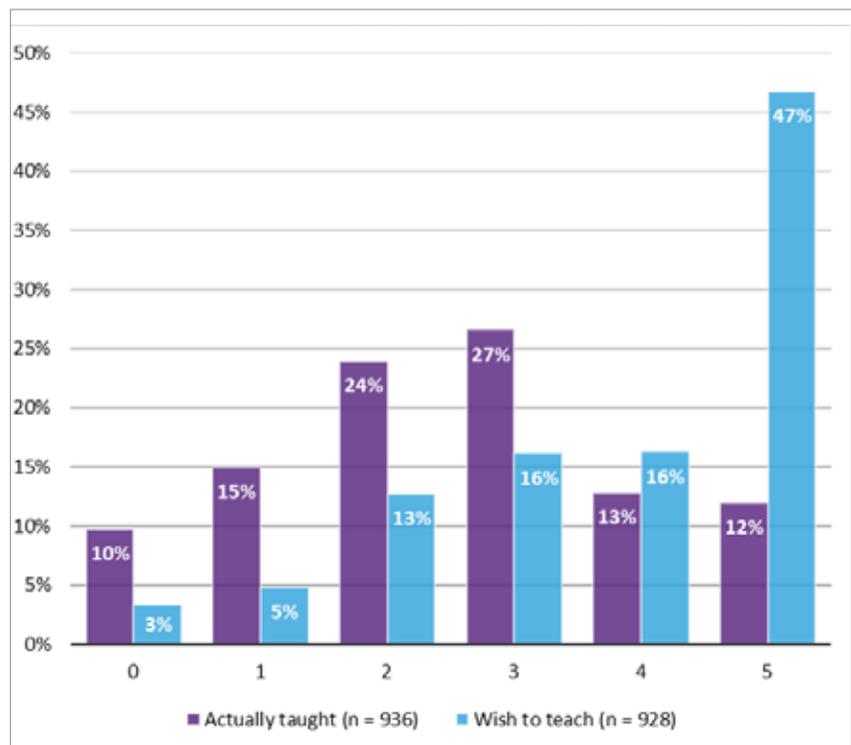
Figure 6: Future Plans in Education (n = 735)



The future aspirations identified by respondents to this survey affirm that substitute teachers in Alberta are a diverse group who hold different motivations for substitute teaching and who, for the most part, are highly committed to the field of education as a career, either as a substitute teacher, a permanently employed teacher or a combination thereof.

The online survey and the focus groups also explored the issue of access to and attainment of employment opportunities for substitute teachers. The graph below shows a comparison between the number of days in a typical week that substitute teachers worked compared to the number of days in a typical week that substitute teachers wanted to work. The data from the participants illustrates that, for the most part, substitute teachers wish to work more days than they are currently working. For example, 47 per cent of respondents wished to work five days a week, but only 12 per cent report actually working five days a week. These results imply general agreement among the substitute teacher participants that they desired more work. However, when the results were explored in more detail, there was a clear split between participants. For example, when participants were asked if they were substitute teaching as often as they wanted to, 43.6 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they were, while 41.2 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed and 15 per cent were neutral. The focus group discussions helped to shed more light on the perceptions of substitute teachers and the issue of access to employment opportunities.

Figure 7: Days Taught Compared to Days Desired Employment (n = 936)



All three focus groups revealed that the availability of substitute teaching opportunities may be variable across the province. Participants from rural, remote and northern communities advised that there were not enough substitute teachers to fill positions, whereas urban areas tended to have a sufficient or oversupply of substitute teachers. The participants in the focus groups also noted that with budgetary pressures coming to bear on schools, school leaders in some school divisions are being pressured to contain costs at the school level. Therefore, in order to avoid the additional expense of hiring substitute teachers, some teacher absences are being filled using internal coverage where possible. This means that less daily work would be available to substitute teachers in some, but not all, school divisions.

Participants in this research project revealed a remarkable agency in marketing themselves to schools and school divisions. When participants were asked about strategies they used to secure work, Daniels (2020) identified four major strategies from 823 qualitative responses. First, and most frequent (427 comments), substitute teachers identified the importance of networking to procure future opportunities for day-to-day work as well as contract work. Participants shared the importance of cultivating the connections they had from substitute teaching or contract experiences. Participants indicated that they made connections with teachers and school leaders by introducing themselves in person, by e-mail or even by joining social media groups. Participants also indicated that they grew their networks through volunteering or coaching (22 responses) or attending professional development events like teachers' conventions (9 responses). Representative quotes from those who used networking as a strategy to gain future employment included the following:

- I am in contact with schools where I did my field experiences while finishing my BEd. I am on the preferred sub list at a school that is large. I also have built interpersonal connections through my specialization which helps to get as many jobs as I can. I also e-mail teachers my sub notes instead of leaving a note, which allows for easier communication and other job opportunities.
- When I'm in teaching in a school, I make sure to try to connect with other teachers at that school in staff room, offering to cover supervision, etc, to make future work contacts.
- I have prior contacts that come to me directly to secure job positions. I get very few sub jobs from [substitute call out system]. 95–98 per cent of my work is from word of mouth and direct communication between me and the teacher.
- Texting and e-mailing teachers and principals to let them know I am available.
- Try to connect with teachers in schools that I have substituted for before. I send an e-mail at the beginning of the year reacquainting them with me. I now have a small network of people I love subbing for and schools that I enjoy going to.
- Meet new teachers, use the contacts I already have, mingle and mix in.
- Distribute resumes personally. Volunteer my time on my days off. Continue to network as much as possible. Go above and beyond expectations as a substitute teacher.

- I connect with teachers with special needs classes so they know that I am able to work in their classes.
- I try and attend events and be involved in things like conferences and social media pages. I let other educators know I'm available to sub. I leave my card with people I sub for and receptionists in schools.
- I have built up a great rapport with one school in particular, and they regularly contact me to take sub shifts. This keeps me somewhat busy, which I love.
- I have left follow-up notes in all schools where I thought I would be a good fit for permanent staff. I have presented at teacher conferences to get my name out there. Participation in all PD activities for electives and CTF to again get my name out there.

The second most frequent strategy substitute teachers reported employing to attain future employment was the use of business cards. There were 276 respondents who indicated that to help with their networking efforts, they provided a business card to school leaders, teachers or the front office in an effort to attain work. Representative quotes included the following:

- Leave my business card with teachers/staff room/main office, leave a note with the teacher, connecting on the Facebook group.
- I maintain good relationships with teachers and principals I know. I take assignments at unfamiliar schools to expand my client base and leave business cards where I'd like to be asked to return. I go out of my way to do the best job possible on every assignment and communicate with the teacher in a variety of ways. I give teachers the option of contacting me via e-mail, text or phone.
- 1. I e-mail all the teachers that I substituted for in the past at the beginning of each semester to inform them that I am still on the sub roster. 2. I pass out business cards to other teachers on site directly. 3. I speak to administrative secretaries and provide a business card for any future work. 4. I make myself very accessible to teachers via text, e-mail or phone and respond immediately to teachers.
- Drop off cards and resumes with schools that I am interested in. Passing out cards to schools where I enjoyed subbing.

The next strategy identified by Daniels (2020) was to be effective as substitute teachers and do good work in order to secure work. This strategy garnered 77 responses, and representative quotes include the following:

- Build good relationships with students, staff and parents. Leave detailed notes. Be trustworthy. Know the material well.
- Networking. Be your best—each and every assignment. The teacher who is away always comes back and just continues as if they were never away.

- I focus on excellence whenever I teach. In other words, I arrive early, stay until the assignment is complete, and provide a detailed digital report on the progress of each class and class attendance, as well as notes on anything exceptional that may have happened during the day. Consequently, all of my assignments are requests from teachers for whom I've substituted in the past.
- Be a great sub!
- I do my best as a sub in any setting. Having good relations with students and staff results in teachers specifically calling me to sub.

The last strategy, while listed explicitly by only 12 participants, related to how substitute teachers present themselves when they are in a new school. The importance of being friendly and professional is demonstrated by the following representative quotes:

- I always introduce myself in a strong and friendly way. I do leave cards, though I know these are not always useful—they need to go home but are usually on a teacher's desk. I ask teachers to text me before going to the sub booking system—more likely to get me. Leave my number on the day plan. I am always positive in my notes. I always sit with/interact with students in some way. Limit my computer time when all is going well.
- I make sure to be flexible, friendly and helpful.
- Be friendly and professional to all staff.

At the focus groups held at the Substitute Teachers Conference, participants affirmed that, consistent with the online survey, they used the four strategies to gain further employment, but they also shed light on the variation of techniques that school divisions employ when contacting substitute teachers for work. It was noted that in many instances, substitute teachers are booked directly by either teachers or principals, while in other cases, substitutes were called to work using an electronic call-out system based at central office. As well, the data from this study showed that in other cases, there was flexibility to book substitute teachers directly even if an electronic call-out system was in place. The different methods used to engage substitute teachers caused confusion for some of the participants; one focus group participant noted that they did not know about the ability to request a particular substitute teacher and in their case, it led to them being double-booked one day. The lack of clarity with respect to school board hiring processes led one focus group participant to observe, "School jurisdictions are more like [a] family business—it is hard to get into the circle [and] this is a concern." Another survey participant noted with respect to hiring for permanent positions, "I try to connect with principals, vice-principals and staff to build a rapport and hopefully get a permanent contract. I'm finding it very difficult to get a permanent position. I find other teachers who have done their practicums, or make personal connections with administration, get hired on sooner." Both these representative comments illustrate that the hiring processes used by school divisions for hiring substitute teachers for day-to-day assignments as well as employment contracts are not transparent, and the prospects for more secure employment appear to be hit and miss.

While a minority of substitute teachers work without concern for attaining permanent employment, the ongoing requirement of having to promote oneself as a candidate for employment is a pressure that is unique to substitute teachers within the teaching profession. In addition, substitute teachers who volunteer or attend professional development days are incurring opportunity costs that are also financial and time costs, as these may mean that the substitute teacher has to turn down work in order to attend these opportunities. The precarious employment position of substitute teachers combined with the enormous energy required to market themselves may lead to frustration and eventually cause them to leave the field of education. This was evidenced in the data from this study as well as in the literature. In spite of this, the respondents to this survey indicated a high affinity for the teaching profession and great commitment to being teachers in public education.

## PROFESSIONAL CONCERNS

### Compensation and Benefits

The precarity of work and the economic pressures experienced by substitute teachers are deeply intertwined. Substitute teachers, like their permanently employed counterparts, invest significant time and resources to attain their bachelor of education degrees and teacher certification. With the possible exception of substitute teachers who are retired on full pension, substitute teachers experience financial pressure due to compensation and benefits structures in place in Alberta collective agreements, unless they supplement their substitute income with other employment.

Substitute teacher participants expressed considerable concern about their compensation. The data from the qualitative comments on the survey as well as the focus group discussions made it clear that compensation was a key concern of Alberta substitute teachers. Daniels (2020) analyzed 326 open-ended qualitative comments and found that there were 46 comments from participants expressing concern about pay and 20 comments expressing concern about benefits. The issue of compensation was also discussed in all three focus groups held in October 2019. There were three main ways that substitute teachers talked about compensation: pay and pay issues, benefits, and pension.

There was general agreement among participants who commented about pay that the daily rate for a substitute teacher was too low and that the economic status of substitute teachers needed to be improved through increased pay. In addition, participants noted that the impact of seven out of eight years of 0 per cent increases in teacher collective bargaining was significant in terms of the daily rate. Those who had experience in other provinces noted that daily rates out of province were significantly higher than those in Alberta. In addition, substitute teachers shared concerns about half-day substitute rates at 50 per cent of the daily rate, given that mornings and afternoons in schools were rarely equal in length. Survey participants and focus group participants also noted that the substitute grid rate, unlike the teacher salary grid, does not recognize the years of experience many of them brought to their role as a substitute teacher. Finally, the comments provided by respondents and focus group participants revealed concern about attaining grid position. This concern was expressed

in two main ways. The first concern was the number of consecutive days required to be placed on the salary grid: some collective agreements require five days of teaching in the same position before being placed on the grid, whereas others will place a substitute teacher on the salary grid on the second consecutive day in the same assignment. The second concern was the perception that a substitute teacher may be replaced by another substitute teacher in order to avoid placing the first substitute teacher on the salary grid. Representative comments about substitute teacher pay were as follows:

- Substitute teachers' work is not valued within the profession. Pay should be on grid to recognize the experience that teachers bring to the class when guest teaching.
- Years of experience should count for subs—maybe there should be a grid for subs' daily rate. You bring that experience with you, and it should be recognized in terms of compensation at the daily rate.
- We need to make \$300 a day. (Sask.) Better benefits please.
- Substitute teachers have not gotten a base pay raise in almost a decade. Is the union usually only fighting for contracted teacher raises?
- Not paid enough. For example, several of my friends have cleaning ladies who make at the very least \$30/hr. Kids try to cause trouble, other teachers are not helpful—subs should be paid more.
- Sub pay is low. Going on the grid is next to impossible. It should start on the second or third day.
- The disparity in pay between Alberta and Saskatchewan substitute teachers is significant, that is, over \$70. Because of my location close to the border, I often hold out for a Saskatchewan day because of this.
- Pay on half-days really an issue—not fair or past 12:30 times and you are sent home when you've worked four hours.
- Change the policy for cancelling subs the morning of, and ensure schools are using subs two+ days instead of constantly changing subs so they don't have to pay grid pay!!!
- Schools are sending us home earlier on Friday early dismissals. I'm not pleased because I am leaving the students before they leave. I know they don't want to pay us for a full day when we leave early. Maybe they should keep us longer and do clerical work for them so we are paid for a full day on early dismissals.

Linked to their concerns about salary and pay was a lack of access to quality benefit plans and automatic accrual of pension benefits. While substitute teachers can purchase benefit protection from the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan or through private benefit plans, the coverage available to substitute teachers is not as robust as the plans that teachers on contract have access to. In addition, substitute teachers in Alberta do not have access to employer contributions for benefit plans, unlike teachers on contract. As well, substitute teachers, because their incomes are sporadic and unpredictable, will have difficulty purchasing income replacement plans, like long-term disability, that take effect when a substitute teacher becomes disabled. Finally, while substitute teachers can

purchase pensionable service for the days they work from the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund (ATRF), this is not automatic, nor is the government contribution guaranteed unless the service is purchased in 186-day blocks (ATRF 2015). The representative comments below illustrate the concerns of substitute teachers about their total compensation, including benefits and pension.

- I wish that there were better health and dental benefits available to substitutes and their families. Now that I am a single parent, I really wish the benefits I pay for out of pocket would cover what we really need, like dental crowns, eyeglasses, and a higher percentage of physio and massages. Each [is] on a regular basis.
- I wish to have retirement benefits and health benefits for substitute teachers.
- We also need better Blue Cross benefits. I pay a huge amount per month and need a crown, and my benefits don't cover any portion of this. It's hard to save up money for this when you are not getting regular work, especially when they over-hire teachers! Talk to any sub and you'll get the same from them. It's extremely frustrating.
- Thanks for your support. New subs need to be better aware of the benefits they can access, such as the optional ASEBP (but short time to join), pension purchase with matching of 50:50 by the employer (maybe deductions should be automatically made). Conferences and PD opportunities.
- I do wish compensation was better and benefits were an option.

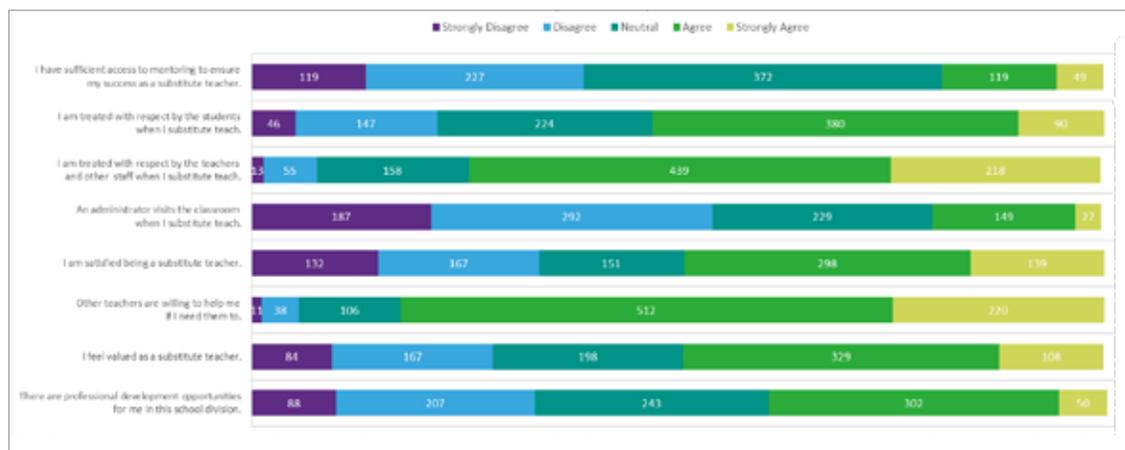
To illustrate the precarity of substitute teachers who rely solely on substitute teaching, it is helpful to investigate where Canada's poverty lines are. According to Wilkins and Kneebone (2018), Statistics Canada identified the poverty line for income in Calgary, in 2016, for a single person at \$20,215, a parent with one child at \$28,588 and a couple with two children at \$40,430. Edmonton's poverty line is slightly lower, at \$19,268 for a single person, \$27,248 for a parent with one child and \$38,535 for a couple with two children.

Using Calgary as an example, in 2016, the daily rate for a substitute teacher in Calgary Public Board of Education (CBE) was \$220, and \$222 in Calgary Catholic Separate School Division (CCSSD). The *Education Act* stipulates that the number of teaching days in a calendar year cannot exceed 200; typically, school divisions allocate at least 10 days in the school calendar for professional development or division inservice/staff meetings. This means that approximately 190 days, or 38 weeks, in the school year will be available for substitute teaching. In the 2016/17 school year, in order for single substitute teachers who rely on daily work to reach the poverty line in Calgary, they had to work at least 92 days in either CBE or CCSSD. For a parent with one child who substitute teaches it would be 130 days for CBE and 129 for CCSSD, and for a couple with two children, it would be 184 days for CBE and 183 days for CCSSD. The majority of respondents to this study reported that they worked 3 days a week; if the estimated number of weeks in a school year is 38, then the average number of days worked by Alberta substitute teachers is 114 days. The BCTF report (2016) stated that it was likely that some substitute teachers in British Columbia were living in poverty. Given the exemplar of Calgary, but noting that many other communities in Alberta have similar poverty line thresholds and similar

substitute teacher pay, it could be suggested that some Alberta substitute teachers live at or near the poverty line, even though their credentials are the same as permanently employed teachers. The following comment from the online survey illustrates the heavy impact of the economic pressure that some substitute teachers live under.

Substitute teaching is extremely discouraging and harmful to my mental health. I have had a teaching degree for 15 years and have never had a permanent position. I have no retirement, no benefits, and make \$20,000 per year with 7 years of education. I deal with students on their worst behaviour and am paid 1/5 of what I would make as a teacher. I have had my glasses broken by students, have [had] them play pranks on me, and am exhausted every time or crying at the end a quarter of the time. I cannot do this much longer and have applied to go back to university in the fall to find other employment. I cannot support my family on this income and it has been extremely detrimental to my health as I now suffer from depression and anxiety.

Figure 8: Professional Concerns (n = 890)



## Communities of Practice

Wenger-Traynor and Wenger-Traynor (2015) define three elements that must be present for a community of practice to exist: a shared domain of interest, a community in which members contribute and support each other, and a shared practice. In this study, there were three main themes that emerged from the survey and focus groups from participants that relate to how substitute teachers situate themselves within professional communities of practice. The first was respect and acknowledgement for the work that substitute teachers provided, given their status as certificated teachers. Second, participants noted concern about the absence of mentoring and feedback for their practice. The last issue was access to professional development opportunities, in both content and opportunity. These three themes illustrate the experiences of substitute teachers as they establish themselves within communities of practice at schools and the ATA. Notably, there are mixed results in terms of participants' agreement or disagreement in terms of each issue queried and the qualitative

comments and focus group results. In the discussion that follows, the three themes will be explored in further depth.

While the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were respected by their colleagues (74 per cent) and by their students (53 per cent), only 49 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they felt valued as a substitute teacher. Further, only 49 per cent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they felt satisfied about their role as a substitute teacher. The lack of agreement about the perceptions of respect and worth suggests that while many substitute teachers experience respectful relationships with teachers, and to a lesser degree with students, there are other factors that influence substitute teachers' perceptions of their role as substitute teachers. Consistent with Shilling (1991), substitute teachers' view of whether they are respected as members of a community of practice may be changed by their career aspirations, including whether they wish to remain substitute teachers (35 per cent) or if their goal is to be a teacher on permanent contract (55 per cent). The representative comments from participants help illustrate the complexity of how substitute teachers perceive and experience their treatment in schools, how they view themselves within the teaching profession and whether their role as professional teachers is respected.

- I miss being part of the staff. There is not much collegiality between staff and substitute teachers.
- I feel that the terminology of “substitute” or “temporary” teacher is degrading. We are teachers. Teachers are teachers. “Temporary” feels disposable—just as the [school jurisdiction] disposed of their “temps.” I feel less valued than a “real” teacher just because of the name.
- At the end of the day, it makes my day when the kids go out and thank me.
- I started teaching after having kids; my pension is small. I like being in the classroom—I’m here for the younger kids. There’s lots of complexities in the classroom.
- Admin should acknowledge subs. Had one who welcomed me and showed me around (one time in four years). Some don’t even introduce you. This sets the tone.
- I also think permanent staff members at schools need to undergo some kind of workshop or talk about supporting substitutes—at some schools when I have asked for help or support I have been brushed off or treated like a burden, or else teachers have left no plans or failed to mention students who exhibit behaviours that can make people feel unsafe.
- Subs are not respected in the field and their voice seems like it doesn’t matter. We provide duty of care to those teachers while away and are very important in this system. Subs that work full-time would like the opportunity to do so (five full days per week) so we can make a living and save for retirement.
- Love the role of substitute teaching—ideal to be called to familiar schools and those [where] you have gotten to know both staff and students. Be flexible and keep expectations realistic!
- We need more respect. Both at the provincial ATA level and in my local.

- I love my job now as a sub and have a school that treats me wonderfully. I worked very hard and went to many schools that did not make me feel this way over the years. I am so happy with what I have now and hope it never changes.
- Subs are treated like we are second-class citizens in schools. I am constantly in a state of panic not knowing student rules, classroom expectations, student names and safety precautions. Some teachers won't give us the time of day if we ask them a question, and until you start to know a school, you feel like an outsider.
- I find that sub teaching can be very lonely and isolating. We are not offered much of the support that contract teachers are, and I feel excluded from much of the information coming out of the [school division name] because of my temporary status. I think it would be helpful to have more events or opportunities for sub teachers to meet each other and connect with contract teachers in order to build more interpersonal connections. It sometimes feels like we are teachers, but also "just" subs.

The comments above illustrate that the experiences that substitute teachers have in their daily work vary significantly, and these experiences influence feelings of respect and belonging to their professional communities of practice. The comments from participants suggest that attention could be paid to create a more inclusive, supportive environment for substitute teachers in schools, as well as to how to support substitute teachers along their career paths according to their professional goals.

Only 19 per cent of respondents to this survey agreed that there is sufficient access to mentoring opportunities as substitute teachers. Focus groups and qualitative comments also identified that mentorship for substitute teachers is a serious gap; there is no preservice preparation for beginning teachers, nor is there much opportunity to partner with more experienced substitute teachers to learn the skills to be successful in many different and complex classrooms. Smith and Ingersoll (2004) defined mentoring as "the personal guidance provided, usually by seasoned veterans, to beginning teachers in schools" (p 683). Given the uncertainty of their employment and employment location on a daily basis, the ability to partner beginning substitute teachers with seasoned substitute teachers to provide guidance presents a serious challenge in terms of time and location. In addition, in regular mentorship scenarios between teachers on contract, there is often system-level support for the mentors and protégés; this is generally not the case for substitute teachers.

The issue of mentoring is important to the process of professional growth and is an important feature of professional communities of practice. Substitute teachers who responded to the survey gave ideas about what mentorship could be for them. The areas of mentorship that participants identified included improving pedagogical practice, including classroom management; career coaching and how to attain employment; professional development aimed specifically at substitute teachers; establishing substitute teacher cohorts; assigning a "go-to" teacher at every school; classroom observations and feedback; and specific subject area professional development. The comments below

illustrate the feedback that participants provided to help them develop within a shared community of practice.

- Having the opportunity for groups of teachers that teach the same subject areas as I do, so I can call on someone should I get sick last minute. A cohort of sorts that allows me to ask sub questions of others who are also subbing (and have had more experience subbing than me). A space in schools for me as a sub to facilitate interactions with other teachers (for example, most schools don't have a coat hook for me or a spot for my bag, let alone a chance to gather with other teachers).
- I love when I have the opportunity to observe experienced teachers instruct their classes and when teachers share their classroom management tips and tricks with me.
- Someone to approach with questions who is not the sub desk or the substitute orientation number. It is better to have a more personal connection with someone and not have to wait days for a reply.
- When I was starting out, shadowing a confident sub would have been very beneficial.
- I think central office and principals should meet with all of us substitutes who are looking for continuous contracts, and provide feedback about what we need to be doing to get considered for interviews. It would be beneficial for those individuals to meet us face to face and understand our frustration when we are looked over for fresher faces.
- Unsure. Any mentoring at all would be helpful, but I haven't heard of any opportunities.
- It would be great for a first-year sub teacher to be paired up with an experienced sub teacher, especially if the first-year sub teacher is right out of university. What we learn in university about teaching in a classroom is totally different when you are a sub teacher teaching in a classroom. Plus, there are things one learns along the way as a sub that I would gladly pass along to the next sub teacher. Does any school division have mentoring programs for subs, or just [for] teachers with a home classroom?
- I would love to have more ideas on how substitutes handle classroom management and how they handle having new students every day whom they do not have a bond with. I find that I struggle going into new schools because I do not know the routines or anything in each different school.
- More professional development opportunities aimed specifically at substitute teachers so we can learn from one another.
- I would think that, in the first five years of a new substitute teacher in a board, being connected with a seasoned substitute teacher to answer all questions and concerns. The mentor should have a small financial benefit for this assistance. The mentorship could be even done online. Also, mentorship relationships must be confidential, unless there is indication of harm being done to a child, self or another person.
- Opportunities to compare notes with other substitutes. A comprehensive manual/guidebook.
- It would be nice to almost be paired with a few schools and then be able to form a relationship with those principals. Not just schools that you've had contracts at or randomly get called to.

- Mentoring in subjects I am interested in teaching but have little experience in (such as home ec, cosmetology, fashion etc), at least one other teacher as a contact (especially for new teachers from outside the city), more straightforward information on upward movement in the organization.
- PD that is accessible in schools regularly. While you are substituting it is difficult to stay current.

Participants in this survey were also asked about positive mentoring they had experienced as a substitute teacher. There were 78 qualitative comments analyzed from the survey; the vast majority of positive mentoring referenced by substitute teachers was the opportunity to collaborate with other teachers, but it was noted that mentoring often occurred at the request of the substitute teacher and was not a formalized support that substitute teachers could access. The data from the comments revealed that the majority of participants (42 comments) found that mentorship occurred by being directly supported by other teachers and administrators in the schools they worked in. The next most frequent mentoring experience (9 responses) was having a specific person that helped the participants with navigating the complex world of substitute teaching. The qualitative comments are consistent with the survey results—83 per cent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that other teachers would help if they requested it. Finally, and quite importantly, the focus groups and the survey asked about whether substitute teachers were observed by administrators. The survey found that 20 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that administrators visited their rooms when they were substitute teaching. The focus groups and qualitative comments revealed that participants were concerned about being able to obtain feedback about their teaching practice from school leaders, the instructional leaders in schools.

The finding that school leaders do not generally provide feedback or potential formal evaluation of the work of substitute teacher is a concern in terms of mentoring as well as for the purposes of attaining permanent teaching certification. Figure 9 on page 32 shows that only 56 per cent of survey participants had permanent Alberta certification, while 44 per cent of respondents did not. The pathway to earning permanent certification requires a certain number of days taught in combination with supervision and evaluation by a school leader. If a substitute teacher is not able to attain permanent certification, their career prospects as a teacher are most certainly ended unless they can extend the period of time allowed for their interim teaching certificate. Therefore, the issue of mentorship, supervision and feedback for substitute teachers about their professional practice is an important consideration for the teaching profession and the issue of teacher retention.

Professional development was also identified by survey respondents and focus group participants as being an area that could be improved. From the survey, only 40 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that professional development was readily available for substitute teachers in the school divisions they served. In addition, participants were asked how often they attended professional development opportunities in a year. The majority, or 58 per cent of participants, indicated that they attended professional development at least once a year, but there were also a significant number of substitute teachers who did not. Figure 10 on page 32 shows in more detail how much professional development substitute teachers report attending.

Figure 9. Do you hold a permanent teaching certificate in Alberta? (n = 933)

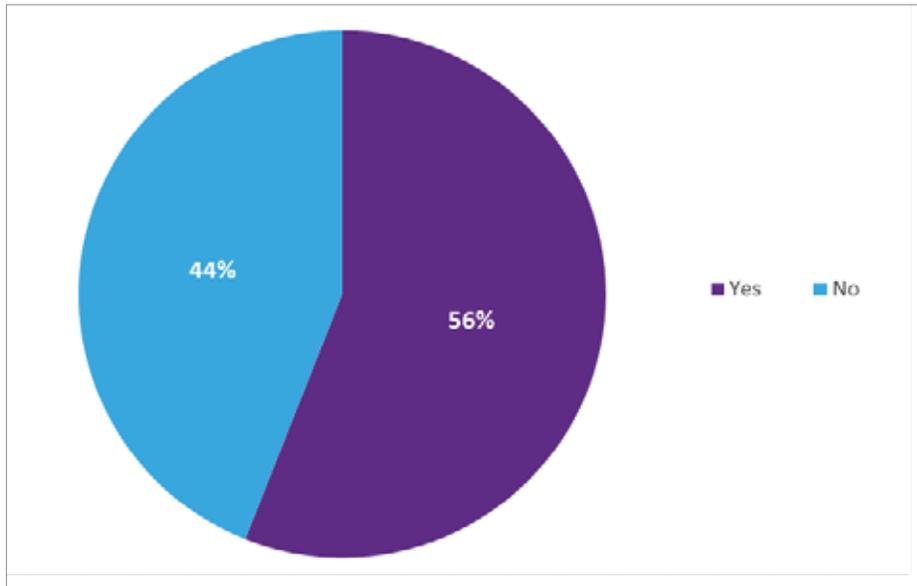
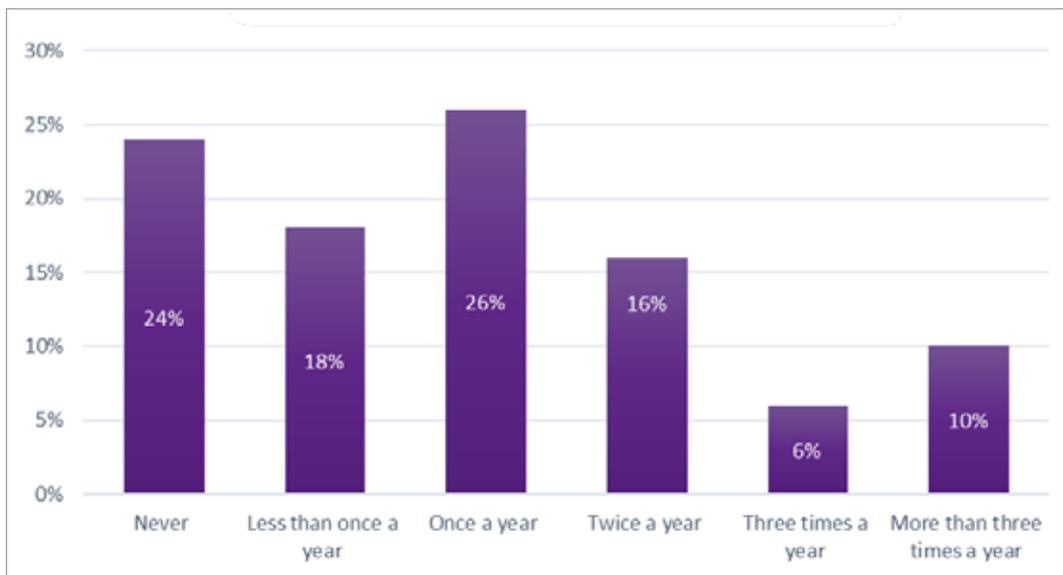


Figure 10: How often do you attend professional development activities? (n = 865)



Daniels (2020) thematically analyzed 312 qualitative comments from participants to better understand the barriers substitute teachers in Alberta experience in accessing professional development. The largest theme revealed in the responses from participants was a lack of awareness about the events and how to access them. Approximately 33 per cent of respondents indicated they were unaware of professional development opportunities that were available to them, and another 13 per cent stated that they were not invited to professional development events. Sixteen per cent of respondents indicated that they found the cost of professional development a barrier, and 9 per cent of comments concerned the opportunity costs associated with forgoing paid work to attend professional development. Finally, 9 per cent of respondents indicated they were not motivated to seek out professional development for a variety of reasons, and 4 per cent identified child care obligations as a barrier to accessing professional development. The representative comments below illustrate the barriers that participants identified.

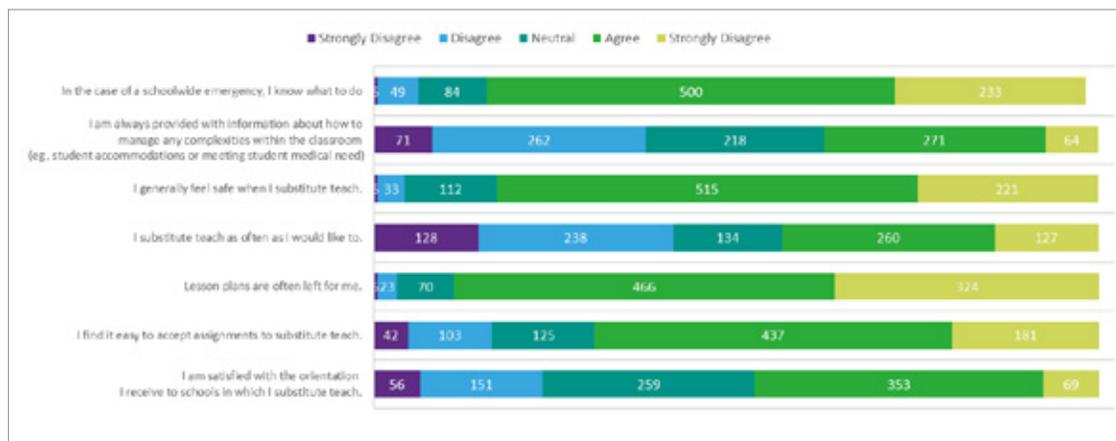
- I don't know how to access PD events that are offered to subs.
- Not knowing when they take place and where to find that information—not mentioned during orientation.
- Don't know if I am welcome to attend them or not.
- Attending PD events means that I have to forsake a potential day of work and pay out of my own pocket. This is a problem because even if I subbed every possible day for the full school year, I would barely make enough money to get above the poverty line. Districtwide PD days are not open to subs/we receive no information about them.
- Not usually interested in the PD events offered.
- I have a 2-year-old and my husband works long hours.
- Ones that are of interest, cost.
- They do not pay for PD for subs. Subs are also not invited to attended school or divisional PD events.

## CONDITIONS OF PRACTICE

Study participants shared, in detail, their experiences working in schools and their conditions of practice as substitute teachers. In the survey and focus groups, respondents identified the strategies they engaged while substitute teaching in order to be successful. In addition, this study sheds light on some of the challenges experienced by substitute teachers while performing their assignments and provides insight into what substitute teachers view as potential solutions to those challenges. Figure 11 below shows the level of agreement that survey respondents indicated for each statement regarding their conditions of practice.

The qualitative comments from both the survey and focus group participants provided data that helps to illustrate the experiences of substitute teachers in relation to their conditions of practice and the responses shown in Figure 11 (see page 34). In terms of professional conditions of practice, three main elements emerge: administrative processes for job placement, orientation processes and classroom conditions. These are addressed below.

Figure 11: Professional Conditions of Practice (n = 890)



### Administrative Processes for Job Placement

This study found that 70 per cent of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it was easy to accept assignments that were offered, and 44 per cent agreed or strongly agreed that they worked as much as they wanted to. However, qualitative comments from the survey and focus group discussions revealed that there is no standard practice provincially for hiring substitute teachers for either daily assignments or longer-term placements. Participants indicated concerns ranging from the technology used to inform substitute teachers of job placements through location of job placements, inconsistent expectations from school divisions about the number of days expected to be available to work and the size of the substitute rosters, to the posting and hiring for contract work. In addition, differences among substitute teachers emerged about the issue of job placement, including generational differences, motivations for substituting and amount of work desired. The comments below help represent the diversity of experiences of substitute teachers as they navigated the issue of accessing and accepting placements for work.

- I sub in a K–12 school, so being flexible helps as I can be in multiple grades in one day. Also being proficient with technology such as Google Drive, Classroom and so on is beneficial. Love the easy connect system! Makes accepting sub jobs seamless!
- With regard to the automated system, it would be helpful to have an “Other” option for declining jobs, as sometimes the reason for declining is not one of the listed options.
- It is so disheartening that we are not allowed to apply for jobs—I am in my sixth year subbing, and I think it shows a real lack of respect from management that a new teacher coming into the [school division] has more opportunity than I do to apply for jobs.
- The [name of the automated system] can be very frustrating. The emphasis on the phone calls makes it so that we need to be constantly alert to our phones between the key hours every day, and there’s no realistic way to get a job otherwise.

- Retired teachers should not be given first-priority hiring status in schools, and should only be hired after November 1 each year, in order to give teachers, especially new teachers, a better chance.
- At the [school division], I would like fewer substitute teachers in the pool so I can get more hours. Otherwise, I am currently happy as a substitute teacher.
- I work in a rural school division and often receive requests to travel up to 1.5 hours away. I regularly travel half an hour a day each way. Some schools have difficulty getting subs because people do not want to travel that far at their own cost.
- Districts need to allow the use of apps for picking up jobs!
- I rarely choose to accept random call assignments as I have two elementary-aged kids at home and I cannot arrange childcare for 7 to 9 AM when the call comes in at 6:30 AM. I also substitute for a local private school. I have been lucky this semester and picked up one long-term absence (nine weeks) and two short-term absences of one week each.
- Can't have too many declinations or you won't get called.

### Orientation Processes

The qualitative comments and focus groups revealed that when teachers apply to and are accepted on substitute teacher rosters, there are a variety of practices when it comes to orienting substitute teachers to school division expectations and school-based practices. When asked whether they agreed with the statement “I am satisfied with the orientation I receive to schools in which I substitute teach,” only 48 per cent of participants agreed or strongly agreed that their orientation was sufficient. How, then, could substitute teachers be better supported in terms of orientation to schools and school jurisdictions? The qualitative comments from the survey and the focus groups helped to identify areas that could help substitute teachers as they enter new school divisions and new schools.

First of all, participants noted that it would be helpful for all substitute teachers to have identification tags that were professionally rendered and reflected their status as professional teachers. The quote below illustrates the importance of substitute teachers being recognized clearly as division employees.

I would like to suggest professional, district-based ID tags for all substitute teachers. Some schools will give a temporary ID tag to subs along with keys upon check-in (for example, “Guest Teacher”), but they are often flimsy and impersonal. I feel these ID tags, even if provided by the school day-to-day, are not regarded with the respect and sense of security a contract employee ID tag (with photo, first and last name visible) garners from students and staff. I have a personal ID tag obtained from a temp contract position that is unattached to a specific school, and I feel it is invaluable as an identifier for students and staff. Otherwise, the only identifying factor as a sub in a school may be a school-based lanyard with keys and possibly a “guest” tag.

In addition to proper identification, participants noted that it is useful for substitute teachers to know the physical layout of the schools they work at. For example, participants noted that it would be helpful to receive a folder of information about the school along with keys to their classroom when they reported to the school office for an assignment. The lack of consistency between schools about physical layout and where resources are located was noted as problematic. This suggests that improvements could be made to help substitute teachers feel welcome in schools as well as to be informed about each school where they work. The inconsistency of substitute teachers' experiences school to school was well summarized in this comment from a survey participant: "Certain schools do not give sub teachers adequate welcome and/or information, like a staff parking lot map, map of school, class list, access to coffee or tea."

The experience reported by Alberta substitute teachers is consistent with the educational literature. The literature highlights the importance of access to information about the school environment, including access to equipment and resources (Duggleby and Badali 2007; Lunay and Locke 2006; Vorell 2011). The following qualitative comments illustrate further how Alberta substitute teachers experience gaps in resources and access to facilities as well as what might be done to ameliorate their experiences.

- My greatest frustration is not always getting the keys that I need to access areas such as the PE equipment room, computer lab and/or a pass to re-enter the school if I take children outside.
- Encourage all schools and all teachers to have substitute teacher handbooks/folders with all pertinent info available for all subs coming in. I was involved in creating template that just required each school to plug in their site's info ... having the same format [for] each school in the division made it easy for subs to use—everything from where to park to where to get Chromebooks or substitute log-ins ... ready-made template available to classroom teachers as well.

While a strong majority of respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed they felt safe while subbing (83 per cent) and they would know what to do in the event of an emergency (84 per cent), the challenges noted by respondents about their orientation to schools and school jurisdictions raises questions about preparedness in the event of a crisis or emergency. One participant stated that "Incomplete orientation to the school and emergency procedures worries me." The perceptions of survey respondents can only be tested in actual events; fortunately, there are few schoolwide emergencies on a daily basis, so there is little empirical evidence regarding the experience of substitute teachers during an emergency situation. Beyond welcoming substitute teachers to schools by providing information about the physical layout of the school, restroom and staff room facilities, technology access, and student lists, substitute teachers should have access to procedures and emergency response plans in every school.

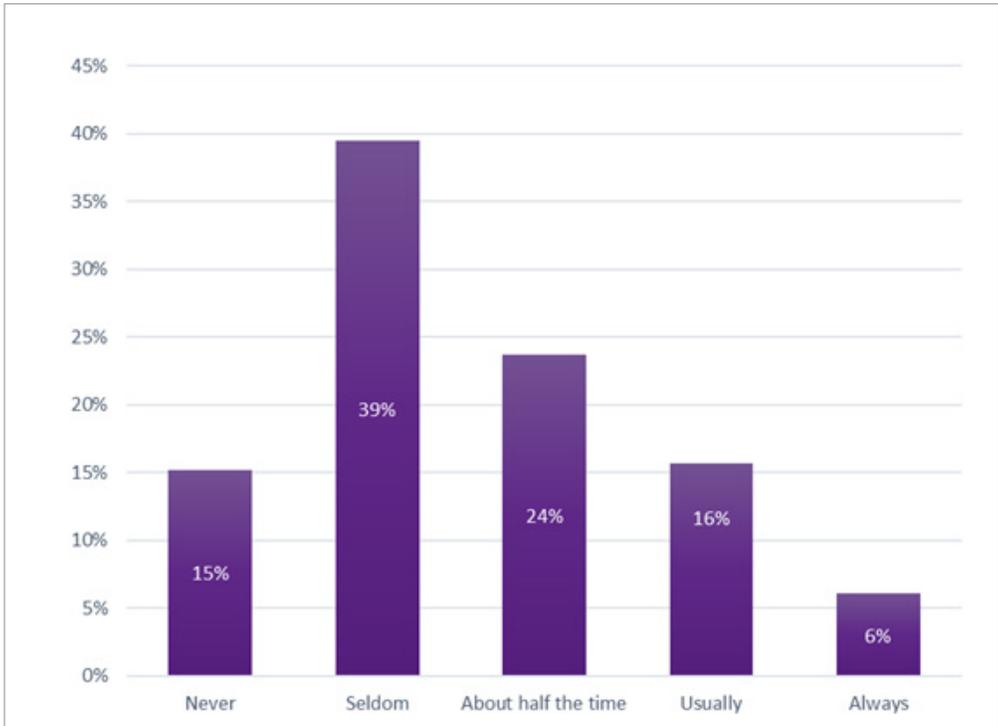
Basic information about the school and emergency response plans are important for substitute teachers to be able to adapt to every new assignment. In addition, substitute teachers who participated in this survey noted that there is a murkiness with respect to what is expected of substitute teachers from school to school. Orientation sessions for substitute teachers at the division level may provide a solution to

addressing these concerns. Where school divisions do provide orientations and substitute teachers are able to access them, participants noted, these were well received. One participant said that the school jurisdiction they worked for “has a mandatory substitute teacher orientation prior to start of school year, which is very practical and beneficial for participants.” While an orientation once a year may prove helpful to substitute teachers, regular inservice sessions provided by school boards would also assist substitute teachers, particularly in the area of technology and policy for technology use. As one respondent pointed out, “I would like to see a proper orientation for new substitutes in terms of how to use the technology in the classrooms—for example, the Smart Boards, laptops, Smart Board projectors. Subs need to be filled in and updated on technology and policies such as cell phone and other device use by students and teachers.”

### Classroom Conditions

A substantial majority, or 89 per cent, of substitute teachers agreed or strongly agreed that they were provided with lesson plans when they substitute taught. In addition, 85 per cent of participants indicated that their supervision schedule was included with the lesson plans provided. However, there was considerable variation reported by participants in terms of whether the supervision schedule stayed the same. Figure 12 below illustrates that the majority of substitute teachers never or rarely had changes to their supervision schedules, but 46 per cent reported frequent changes to the supervision schedules of the teachers they are covering.

Figure 12: Supervision (n = 857)



Qualitative comments revealed that where substitute teachers are called upon to do extra supervision or cover other teachers' classes during preparation periods, there is a sense that the contribution of a substitute teacher is not being valued or respected. To illustrate, one participant wrote, "I am finding that schools are piling work on to substitutes. In most buildings, except for the building where I was a full-time teacher, I am expected to do lunch hour supervision as well as cover another teacher's class." There was considerable discussion in the focus groups about how the treatment of substitute teachers might run the risk of violating Alberta's *Employment Standards Code*,<sup>3</sup> which mandates breaks for employees after a certain time period. However, participants, particularly in the focus groups, advised that not all substitute teachers were prepared to stand up for their rights because there was a fear they might lose potential work.

Participants in both the survey and the focus groups stated a desire for more specific details about how to manage complex needs of students within classrooms. Only 38 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I am always provided with information about how to manage any complexities within the classroom." The data from this survey indicated that substitute teachers identified information that would be helpful in assisting them to be effective, such as expectations and norms regarding proper student behaviour, strategies for managing specific students' behaviour or information about medical needs of students. The importance of specific information regarding complex classrooms was illustrated by a participant in one of the focus groups. The participant shared a story about how they had substitute taught in a classroom where a student had a severe reaction to an allergen and they did not know where the epi-pen was kept. Fortunately, there was an education assistant in the classroom who was aware of where the epi-pen was kept, and the medical emergency was averted, but the participant described the incident as "terrifying."

In the absence of specific details about their daily assignments, participants described a variety of strategies they employed to ensure success in their assignments. Participants explained that they were active agents in terms of gathering information about their new assignments. Daniels (2020) analyzed 533 qualitative comments and found two themes that were apparent in terms of information gathering. The first was to arrive early to review lesson plans or class lists and talk with other staff, such as partner teachers. The other theme from the data was information collected quickly about students. The participants said they would learn the names of students quickly, establish connection with students as they came through the door and observe the group dynamic within the classroom. For example, one participant stated that they used these strategies concurrently and added, "[I] arrive early. Leave detailed notes for the teacher. Ask neighbouring teachers for assistance/student information, if needed. Get support from admin, if needed."

In addition, Daniels (2020) identified two other strategies employed by substitute teachers to ensure success in their assignments. The first was to prepare extra activities for students to work on if the lesson plan was finished early. In addition, substitute teachers reported that their preparations included bringing their own materials and technology to their daily assignments. One participant stated, "I bring extra activities in my bag for each grade I teach. I have bookmarked many activities,

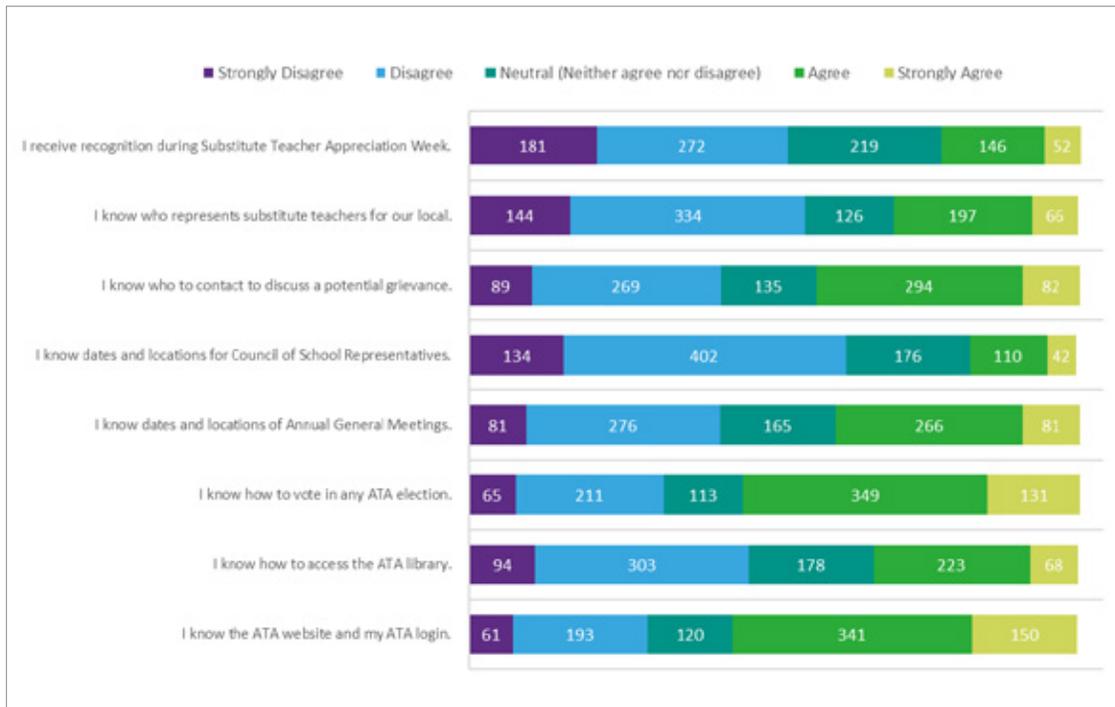
stories, body breaks and games on my phone and use the classroom AirPlay. I have a motivational classroom management strategy that I use daily, which helps a lot to keep students focused and on task.” Finally, participants shared that it was important that they exercise a flexible approach in their new assignments and with students. What works in one context may fall flat in another, and substitute teachers recognized that success with varying groups of students may require an adaptive approach to classroom dynamics, individual learning styles and behaviour management. The following comment illustrates the flexibility and adaptability that substitute teachers adopt with respect to their work: the participant wrote that their approach depends “on the demographic of the school. I have different strategies for different schools and age levels.”

## CONNECTION TO THE ATA

This study examined the relationship of the participants to their professional association, the Alberta Teachers' Association. The areas explored included knowledge about the ATA and its services, including access to the ATA publications and library, involvement in their locals, professional development, and collective bargaining. Figure 13 below shows the level of agreement with each statement. The data from this chart shows that substitute teachers hold a variable relationship with the ATA. While a majority of substitute teachers agree or strongly agree that they are able to log onto the ATA website and can vote, there are other aspects of the ATA services that are less well accessed or used by respondents. The data showed that there is less agreement among participants that they have knowledge about aspects of the ATA, including accessing the library, avenues for involvement in the ATA, and the activities designed to recognize the substitute teachers. The results from this survey suggest there is work that can be done by the ATA to build pathways for substitute teachers to engage with the teaching profession and the supports the ATA provides.

Participants provided suggestions through this study about how to improve connections between the ATA and substitute teachers. In particular, substitute teachers declared that they thought the ATA could improve communication with substitute teachers, raise the profile of substitute teachers in the teaching profession and be more effective in advocating for improved total compensation and better professional development opportunities.

Figure 13. Connection to the ATA (n = 890)



## Concluding Thoughts

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The following quote from a survey participant helps illustrate why, in spite of the many challenges they experience, substitute teachers enjoy their work and essential role within the public education system.

I love subbing in that I have met so many fantastic students from all different economic situations and all grade levels. It's fun teaching such a variety of age groups. I also have, even when I was teaching full-time, come up with freebies for students. I believe life is just an attitude, and it's vital that we dress and act as professionals. I have also learned a lot from other teachers, but especially from the students. Thank you.

This survey was conducted a few months prior to the declaration of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. The issues raised by participants at the time persist and have been exacerbated by the pandemic. At the time of the drafting of this report, the third wave of COVID-19 is spreading quickly in Alberta, and school jurisdictions are dealing with many students and staff that have been exposed to COVID-19 and now have to isolate for the mandated period of time. On April 1, 2021, Edwardson reported that in Calgary alone, "More than 13,000 students and nearly 700 teachers are in isolation due to COVID-19 exposures at Calgary's two public school boards." School boards are reporting that it is very difficult in these times to find enough substitute teachers. The pandemic exposes the vital importance of having enough substitute teachers and the necessity of ensuring that they are properly compensated and protected in the event of illness or exposure to disease. The conditions highlighted by the pandemic were also present prior to the pandemic, and this study illustrates the importance of advocating and advancing the status of professional substitute teachers in Alberta. In addition, this study affirms the importance of continuing to conduct research that explores the lives and experiences of substitute teachers in order to gain insights that might generate policy recommendations to improve the professional lives of substitute teachers.

## Notes

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1. *Education Act*, SA 2012 c E-0.3. Available at [www.qp.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=E00P3.cfm&leg\\_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779817665](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=E00P3.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779817665) (accessed April 29, 2021).

2. Editor's note: minor amendments have been made to quotes from study participants in accordance with ATA style.

3. *Employment Standards Code*, RSA 2000, c E-9. Available at [www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/E09.pdf](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/E09.pdf) (accessed May 4, 2021).

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