

LEADERSHIP UPDATE

Volume 6

A publication for Alberta's school administrators

Number 4



Parents, teachers and trustees form common front to oppose education cuts

The threat that the Alberta government may cut more than \$300 million from education next year, on top of the \$80 million in cuts already announced, has galvanized key stakeholder organizations to take action together.

The Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA), representing parents, and the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA), representing the province's school trustees, are joining the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) in a joint campaign to raise awareness of the threat to education among the public and to encourage Albertans to take their concerns to provincial politicians.

The three organizations are sponsoring an intensive television and radio campaign highlighting the impact that a reduction in education funding would have in the classroom. The cost of the campaign will be largely borne by the Association but, as President Carol Henderson observes, "The participation of our two partners is critical; our work together will show the government and citizens of Alberta the depth and breadth of our shared concern for the future of public education in this province."

The advertising campaign will run even as officials are assembling budget and business-plan proposals for consideration by their political masters. "If we want to make a real difference, then we cannot wait for the budget to be handed down in the spring" says Henderson. "Parents, teachers and trustees must act now to make their message heard."

The ATA president remains hopeful that the three education partners can still stop the cuts. As evidence, she points to the partners'

successful efforts in the past to restore funding for kindergarten and to replace a half-baked performance pay proposal with AISI, the internationally recognized Alberta Initiative for School Improvement. "We have moved this government before and we can do it again," she says.

Henderson says that ultimately the three partners have a shared understanding of the importance of education. "Alberta is a world leader in education because the province has made sensible investments in our schools and it is exactly this type of investment that will equip Albertans to prosper even though the future right now may appear uncertain."

The partners share another thing—a memory of the past. "We all lived through a decade of cuts and underfunding beginning in 1992 and saw the damage done—we are all determined not to relive that experience again."

Questions and answers about the stopthecuts.ca campaign

Is it premature to speculate about and protest cuts to education funding?

If we wait for cuts to education funding to be formally announced in the provincial budget this spring, it will be too late to make any meaningful difference. Supporters of public education must act now, while the 2010/11 budget is being drafted in the back rooms of the legislature, if we are to have any hope of influencing government's spending decisions and limiting the potential damage that could be done to public education.

**Our
ultimate
freedom
is the
right and
power to
decide how
anybody or
anything
outside
ourselves
will affect
us.**

**—Stephen R
Covey**



Are our projections of cuts in the range of \$300 million alarmist?

If anything, our estimates are conservative. As early as July 2009, senior officials of Alberta Education were warning school superintendents to expect cuts exceeding \$212 million in the 2010/11 school year, and the unofficial estimates provided to education stakeholders have done nothing but increase as the months have gone by.

Furthermore, the Alberta government has been resolute in its determination to reduce the gap between its revenues and expenditures by at least \$2 billion and, given the premier's pledge not to raise taxes, it is likely that this will have to be taken out of program spending. Because spending on education accounts for 17 per cent of the government's total expenditures, it's reasonable to project that cuts to education will amount to around 17 per cent of \$2 billion, or \$340 million, in the 2010/11 fiscal year. In fact, the cuts made in the current year were determined in this manner: a total of \$430 million was cut across government, with \$80 million, or 18.6 per cent, taken from education.

Of course, the entire point of our efforts is to ensure that these cuts do not occur. We all want our concerns to be put to rest and would welcome an announcement from the minister of education, the minister of finance, the president of the Treasury Board or the premier that spending on education will not be cut in 2010/11.

Are those who are opposing cuts to education "firmly stuck in the twentieth century"?

Mr Hancock has expressed his disappointment that "the response to

our fiscal challenges by some of our stakeholder organizations is firmly stuck in the twentieth century." The parents, teachers and trustees who have joined together to oppose cuts to education funding have nothing to apologize for. Each one of our organizations is committed to ensuring that the best possible education is provided to Alberta's students, now and in the future.

While the minister likes to talk about "transformational change" and his 20-year vision for education, such change cannot begin with the simplistic assumption that more can be done with less money. While there is value in shaping public education to better meet the evolving needs of our society and economy, those of us doing the real work still have to focus on the present and on meeting our obligations to the students who are in our classrooms today. When we know that we will have the resources we need to do our jobs properly this year and the next, then we will be happy to talk about the future of education.

The Alberta government is facing a \$7 billion deficit. Aren't cuts to education unavoidable?

The Alberta government has \$44 billion in assets and no debt. The government proclaims regularly how strong Alberta was going into the recession and how strong it will be coming out.

The government has chosen to spend billions to subsidize experimental carbon sequestration and to forgo collecting resource royalties. This summer, the premier chose to repeal new liquor taxes, forgoing \$180 million worth of revenue, and then declared that taxes would not be going up in Alberta. To be sure, there are

arguments that can be made in support of each one of these choices. But they are still choices. Ultimately this is not a question of whether Alberta can afford to pay for public education; it is more a question of whether we will choose to make investing in public education and in our own future prosperity a priority.

What effect will cuts to education funding have in schools?

Frankly, it is difficult to be certain about the impact of cuts, but we could expect to see increases in class size, elimination of programs and reductions in support services for some groups of students with special needs, reductions in professional development, and the laying off of teachers, classroom aides, support staff and custodians. If cuts were made straight across the board, we would likely lose more than 2,000 full-time teaching positions, a burden that would be felt disproportionately by university students who aspire to be teachers and by those new to the profession.

Do our e-mails make a difference?

Sending an e-mail using the stopthecuts.ca website is an easy way to send a message and it does make a difference. It shows your MLA, the minister of education and the premier that you are concerned about public education and the threat posed by funding cuts. Of course, this should not be the end of your dialogue with your elected representative. Follow up with a personalized e-mail, a phone call, a letter or a meeting. If the supporters of public education across Alberta act together, we can stop the cuts and preserve public education.

For more information on Stop the Cuts, contact Dennis Theobald at 780-447-9400.

ATA web services

The ATA website offers a number of services that can be accessed only through the member log-in system. These services are available across the province to all active members of the ATA including substitute teachers. One of the most popular features of the website is the online library, with access to more than 3,000 educational publications and journals. The online library offers a search function and allows for full-text articles to be printed or downloaded to your computer at no cost. The conditions of the licence agreement require that access to these resources is limited to registered ATA members and therefore this service is only available by logging into the provincial website.

Active members of the ATA are also entitled to one annual specialist council membership at no cost through the ATA website. Currently there are 22 different specialist councils serving Alberta teachers; each offers publications, websites, provincial conferences and regional workshops. Each specialist council has an elected executive with representation from across the province. The Association relies on the specialized knowledge of members of the specialist councils to

provide advice on curriculum and policy in response to requests from Alberta Education. Every teacher and school administrator is encouraged to activate the no-cost annual membership and become involved in the professional development activities offered by specialist councils.

Visit the ATA website at www.teachers.ab.ca and click on the Log In button on the top of the page to request a username and set your personal password. You will be required to provide your teaching certificate number but if you are unable to locate your teaching certificate number you can call the Association for assistance. The first step in the website log-in is to verify or update your personal contact information. The Association needs your correct contact information to provide you with better service. This ensures that you receive your communication, publications and ATA election ballots. The school information in your profile allows the website to provide specific links to your local, teachers' convention and specialist council.

The ATA website is currently being redesigned to provide additional web-based services. Watch for more information about the website in the ATA News. In the meantime, encourage your staff to get a username and password to access the valuable no-cost services available on the ATA website.

Workforce Planning update

For the past two years, the Association has participated on a Workforce Planning Committee. The committee is charged with the task of responding to the perceived impending shortage in the teacher workforce. This perception is based upon a forecast planning model that shows that student population in Alberta will steadily rise over the next ten years, requiring more teachers in classrooms while the number of graduates from teacher preparation institutions will basically remain the same. Currently, 26 per cent of new hires are from out of province, with some districts experiencing over 60 per cent. On average, 70 per cent of the graduates from a faculty of education enter the teaching profession. Added to that is a five-year retention rate of approximately 72 per cent, which means that roughly 900 people out of a cohort of 2,000 remain in the profession five years after graduation.

In its work the committee focused on three strategic themes: Attract, Develop, and Retain. As a result the *Education Sector Workforce Planning Framework for Action* was developed. The framework includes 13 strategic actions that fall within one of the strategic themes:

Strategic Action 1: Elevate and promote the status of the teaching profession and related careers within the education sector workforce.

Strategic Action 2: Develop a bridge program to attract increased numbers of journeymen tradespersons, health care and information technology (IT) professionals to careers in teaching.

Strategic Action 3: Create bridges to employment for teachers trained in jurisdictions outside of Alberta or those Alberta-trained teachers who have been outside the workplace for some time.

Strategic Action 4: Consider financial incentives to attract people to studies in education and to employment as teachers in rural and remote Alberta locations.

Strategic Action 5: Increase the number of educators in Alberta schools with the knowledge, skills and attributes necessary to support FNMI student success.

Strategic Action 6: Develop a provincial data collection system to improve the ability of the government and school jurisdictions to adequately describe education sector workplace characteristics and needs.

Strategic Action 7: Support beginning teachers through the development and implementation of a provincial program of staged transition (induction program).

Strategic Action 8: Establish an educational partners research initiative to measure principal and teacher engagement in the workplace and develop a report to provide insight and recommendations for the education system.

Strategic Action 9: Develop comprehensive and coordinated professional development planning and continued education supports for teachers and other education sector workers.

Strategic Action 10: Develop a school leadership framework to attract, prepare, retain and engage leaders within the education sector workplace.

Strategic Action 11: Conduct research to assess the extent of early career transition by teachers, and develop a report to describe the reasons for such attrition and inform possible interventions.

Strategic Action 12: Develop an action plan to encourage extended participation in the workplace by “mature worker” teachers and other education sector staff.

Strategic Action 13: Consider incentives to encourage improved teacher retention in remote Alberta locations.

Some significant initiatives have already arisen from the work of the committee through initiatives to support the Framework for Action. Some of the more notable include the following:

- The creation of a Northern Student Teacher Bursary Program: Fifty bursaries of up to \$8,000 per year were made available to individuals who were in their second last or last year in a teacher education program. Bursary recipients will be expected to provide three years of service to a northern board upon graduation. More than 160 applications to the program were received.
- Community-Based FNMI Teacher Education Program: More than 40 people of FNMI background have been accepted into programs leading to a BEd. Cost-of-living and tuition supports are provided to candidates based on a cost-sharing relationship between the Province and school jurisdictions.
- Northern Tier Teacher Induction Program: Eleven northern jurisdictions have submitted proposals aimed at providing a comprehensive program of support for beginning

teachers and their mentors. More than 160 new teachers in northern school jurisdictions will be participating. It is anticipated that the pilot will inform future provincial support for the induction of teachers new to the profession and/or new to the province.

- The CTS Bridging Program: The program is designed to help people who have certification in the trades, health care and information technology transition into the teaching profession. The attainment of an Alberta teaching certificate is a key requirement of the program. Individuals who are recommended for and accepted into the program could receive up to 30 semester hour credits for their prior learning. They would then complete a preteaching program of a minimum of 25 semester hour credits that includes at least a 10-week practicum. Upon completion, they would receive a restricted Letter of Authority that would enable them to teach only in their area of specialization while under an increased level of supervision from a mentor. They must also take at least 6 credits per year until interim certification is achieved.

It is encouraging to see that the collaborative work of the committee has resulted in specific actions on the part of the provincial government. More information can be found at <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/workforce.aspx>; or contact Marv Hackman, Executive Staff Officer in Member Services, at marvin.hackman@ata.ab.ca, or Mark Yurick, Executive Staff Officer in Professional Development, at mark.yurick@ata.ab.ca, or call 780-447-9400.

Tools for Alberta teachers and parents to create digitally literate young people

Digital literacy is an essential life skill in the information age, and as educators and parents we need to empower young people with the critical thinking skills and knowledge they require to move beyond technological proficiency towards becoming creative, reflective, evaluative and responsible e-citizens. Teaching digital literacy skills in homes and schools is becoming increasingly important as young Canadians turn to the Internet as one of their main sources of information, entertainment and communication. While many young people are competent and sophisticated online users, they need a whole range of new literacy skills for accessing, evaluating, repurposing, creating and distributing media content to successfully navigate their digital world. How do they find, evaluate and make sense of online information? Do they know how to protect their privacy online, stay safe using social networks and be good digital citizens?

Teachers can access a comprehensive bilingual Web Awareness Workshop Series developed by the Media Awareness Network (MNet), a Canadian not-for-profit centre for media and digital literacy. The Web Awareness program focuses on a wide range of digital issues, including cyberbullying and online ethics, Internet safety, authentication of online information, electronic privacy, and online marketing and consumerism. The workshops are supported by an extensive array of digital literacy

classroom resources, including lesson plans, backgrounders, interactive games and teacher's guides—which are freely available on the MNet website, www.media-awareness.ca. MNet also releases new versions of the Web Awareness resources annually with updated research and emerging trends to reflect changes in the digital environments and technologies students use.

To reinforce the importance of the home-school connection when educating children about wise Internet use, MNet is launching two new digital literacy programs for Alberta parents in 2010. Through a partnership with Bell, MNet is currently redesigning and updating www.bewebaware—an Internet safety resource for parents—as part of Calgary's Internet Safety Week, in February. Also aimed at encouraging parents to be involved in their child's online activities is a new interactive workshop—e-Parenting Tutorial: Keeping up with Your Kids Online. This web-based tool will lead parents through a variety of scenarios that children can encounter online, while offering tips for teaching digital literacy skills in the home. The tutorial is being developed in partnership with the Alberta School Councils' Association, the Alberta Library and Bell.

For further information on MNet please contact Dr Philip McRae at 1-800-232-7208 or 780-447-9400.

Web Awareness Workshop Series is available through a provincial licence agreement to all Alberta K-12 schools until 2011. To access the Web Awareness program, log in to the Learning Resources Centre's (LRC) website at www.lrc.education.gov.ab.ca (if you currently have a valid user ID), or send an e-mail to lrc.support@gov.ab.ca indicating your name, title and school name, or contact the LRC Support Centre at 780-427-2767 (toll free by dialing 310-0000 first) to obtain a user ID.

Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation

Teacher Growth Supervision and Evaluation Policy 2.1.5 reflects a major change in philosophy about supervision and evaluation. It now reflects a professional model based on teacher growth rather than teacher deficiency. The policy takes seriously the professionalization of teaching, in which all teachers are responsible for students' learning within a model of collegial collaborative work to share teaching practices in professional learning communities.

You are invited to attend a **Teacher Growth, Supervision, Evaluation and Practice Review workshop, on January 14-15, in Calgary.**

If you are interested in attending, please e-mail Marilyn Terlaan in Member Services at marilyn.terlaan@ata.ab.ca.



Q & A
GORDON THOMAS,
Executive Secretary

Q: As the principal of the school can I ban people from coming onto the school property?

A: Sections 27 and 277 of the *School Act* make it illegal for persons to disrupt school proceedings, school meetings or board meetings, or trespass or loiter on school property. That said, what does that really mean, and who gets to exercise that power?

There are two ways to exercise section 27: a school board, and the principal as an agent of the board, can use that provision as support to ban someone from a school; and section 277 provides that a contravention of section 27 can be an offence (which would be prosecuted through the *Provincial Offences Procedures Act*, RSA 2000, c P-34).

Before you, as the principal, decide to do either, the person should be notified that he or she is acting in contravention of section 27, and that he or she is to cease acting in contravention of section 27. A decision to ban someone from entering the school, especially a parent of a child attending that school, must be made judiciously and with reasonable care, and after an investigation of all circumstances, if possible—that is, if safety is an immediate concern, other factors will be less important to consider.

Although parents likely do not have a *right* to be on school property, given the express right and responsibility of parents to make decisions respecting the education of their children acknowledged in the *School Act* preamble, any decision to ban a parent must be made only in the clearest of cases. The test appears to be whether the person on school property, be it a student, parent or otherwise, is present in a manner consistent with the purpose for which the school is maintained, or whether his or her presence is an interruption or disturbance of proceedings.

Courts have upheld that the school is a public place and that the actions of those who enter the school must be considered in order to determine whether they are trespassing. So, when issuing a section 27 letter under the *School Act*, the principal must ensure that his or her decision has been made judiciously and with reasonable care, and only after an investigation of all circumstances has occurred. Therefore, every person requires permission (express or implied) from the school board to be present on school property. Accordingly, it is a school board's (or principal's, as agent of the board) power as property owner to exercise, not something an individual teacher should or can employ.

