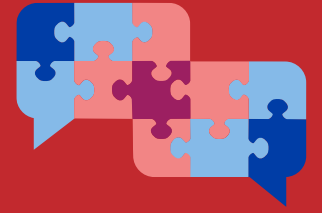


Partial eclipse.

Celestial event has everyone looking up.

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CENTRAL BARGAINING



Teacher unity a key ingredient as negotiation process unfolds.

[See Page 5.](#)

ATA NEWS

April 23, 2024 | Volume 58, Number 12

News Publication of The Alberta Teachers' Association

Record setter



Dedication to fitness propels Alberta teacher to a world record. See story on [page 13.](#)

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Viewpoints

Climate change education starts with teachers.

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Aggression and polarization

The profession is modeling a better way in challenging times.

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Local bargaining

Local agreements reached in last three bargaining units.

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Success Stories

Author event captures students' imaginations.

[See page 11.](#)

Many strategies needed to address aggression



EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

Before I became a teacher, I was a hockey referee.

As part of my referee development, one of the things I was trained in was how to break up fights. As a high school teacher, I wasn't totally surprised to find myself using this training in my work.

One particular day, when I encountered a couple of big, strong Grade 11 boys going at it, I was glad that I had that training.

Rule number one for a ref breaking up fights is to not get yourself injured. So, if the participants are throwing fists back and forth, it's best not to immediately step in.

As I ran toward this fight, I decided to turn my attention to the dozens of students gathered to watch. I knew that the interest in fighting would dissolve much faster if the audience was dispersed, so that is what I first worked on — getting everyone else back into the school.

With the crowd dispersed, my colleague was able to separate the combatants. I did get some ribbing from my Grade 12 boys after lunch for

being too scared to immediately step in. I could take it. After all, I was safe, the rest of the students were safe and they got the message that if they are cheering on a fight, they too could be held accountable for their involvement.

Unfortunately, aggression in schools is on the rise. A recent survey of Alberta teachers found that half of teachers had experienced aggression as part of their work within the first three months of the school year. That number rises to three-quarters for school leaders.

“...half of teachers had experienced aggression as part of their work within the first three months of the school year.”

In this study, aggression is defined to include violence, bullying, harassment and hostility. Two-thirds of teachers say the extent of aggression has gotten worse since the pandemic.

Studies from Ontario and elsewhere in Canada show similar trends.

I think it is important that we not leave the impression that schools are broadly unsafe. I don't believe that to be the case. However, rising incidents of aggression must be addressed in

order to ensure schools remain safe.

Given the national concern on this issue, the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) has launched a webpage and a podcast series to explore this issue and advocate on it. Check out www.ctf-fce.ca/stop-violence-in-schools/ for more.

Right now, the CTF is currently looking at two bills moving through the House of Commons designed to amend the Criminal Code of Canada.

These bills would remove section 43 of the Criminal Code, which allows

house currently need to be amended to include new language that allows teachers to use limited but reasonable physical force, if necessary, to protect the safety of children and others. The CTF has proposed language that would achieve the outcome while still protecting students from unreasonable force and abuse.

Check out the CTF website to learn more and send a message to your member of Parliament.

The issues of aggression and violence in schools are complex. We must approach them with care, thoughtfulness and sound research. The ATA's research on the matter has strong recommendations on how the government and school boards can help support improvements. We need consistent and fair discipline, better reporting of incidents, and more training and supports for teachers.

We also have to address systemic issues in education, like underfunding, understaffing and the erosion of programs and supports for students with complex needs.

Teachers should be focused on learning, not refereeing. Addressing the issues that are causing rising aggression should be everyone's goal. ■

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

What does work-to-rule mean?



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

Question: I read that teachers in Saskatchewan have initiated a work-to-rule job action. Could that happen in Alberta?

Answer: The short answer to the question is “not yet.”

“Work-to-rule” is a tactic used by unions to exert pressure on the employer and entails employees doing only the absolute minimum required of them. For teachers, working to rule might include refusing to facilitate or supervise extracurricular activities or undertake any work outside the school's instructional hours.

In Alberta, a strike is legally defined as “a cessation of work, a refusal to work, or a refusal to continue to work, by two or more employees for the purpose of compelling their employer to agree to terms or conditions of employment.” This definition refers to any departure from normal work practice, like traditional strike action, and includes working to rule.

Therefore, a union can undertake a work-to-rule as a legal strike action only if a number of conditions are met, the most fundamental being that the collective agreement between the union and the employer must be expired and the parties have entered into bargaining. Currently, an agreement is in place on central matters between the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Teachers' Employers Bargaining Association (TEBA) until Aug. 31, 2024 and bargaining is currently in progress.

This means that, at this time, any strike action regarding salary or other matters within the scope of the central agreement would be unlawful, and none of the protections provided for striking workers under labour law would have effect. If a teacher were to decide unilaterally not to perform their regular duties, they could be held by their board to be in breach of the employment contract and would be subject to disciplinary measures up to and including dismissal with cause.

While the Alberta Teachers' Association, in fulfillment of its duty of fair representation, would do its very best to defend a teacher in this circumstance, our options would be very limited and the prospects for the teacher would not be good.

Several teachers taking action in concert could also be deemed to be engaging in an illegal strike. Not only would these teachers run the risk of being subject to sanctions or dismissal individually, the Association, as the teachers' union, would be expected by the Labour Relations Board to take immediate steps to bring the action to a stop. Failure to do so would likely result in the Association being penalized. In the case of widespread illegal action, there is precedent for the courts to impose fines in the hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars in addition to other administrative sanctions on the union involved.

The right to strike is a powerful tool available to unions and is very much an instrument of last resort. The Association is bargaining in good faith and is determined to achieve the best possible outcome for the current agreement, understanding that this will not be easy or without conflict. If the bargaining process should break down, then the members of the Association would decide whether and when to take strike action, and what form that action would take. In such an event, the Association would ensure that members were fully informed before proceeding intentionally, democratically and legally to obtain authorization to proceed.

Working to rule is by no means the “easy option.” Quite apart from the effect it would have on school culture, students, parents and public opinion, working to rule would be personally difficult for many teachers. When the Association last organized a work-to-rule in the unique circumstances following the passage of legislation forcing teachers back to work after the strike of 2002, many members expressed their preference to just walk off the job again, an option not legally available, rather than deprive their students of extracurricular experiences, including team sports, club activities and graduation ceremonies.

If and when the time comes, working to rule, along with other tactics, will be carefully considered from both legal and strategic perspectives, not as ends in themselves, but as means toward achieving a new collective agreement that meets the legitimate economic needs of teachers while improving teaching and learning conditions. How the Association proceeds will ultimately be directed by our members. ■

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



Climate change education starts with teachers



VIEWPOINTS

Jennifer Stevens and
Samantha Gawron

With more wild storms, fires, floods and searing heat, Canadians are increasingly concerned about climate change. But learning how best to respond to Canada's climate emergency remains a challenge. How do we create a climate-literate society that has the knowledge and motivation to act to mitigate and adapt to a changing climate? In the face of these escalating environmental and social crises, education remains a crucial tool to enhance awareness, understanding and action. Traditional teaching methods must evolve to address these complex issues and the eco-anxiety that young people are currently facing.

According to [Learning for a Sustainable Future's \(LSF\)](#) recent national climate change education survey, [Canadians' Perspectives on Climate Change & Education](#), 81 per cent of Canadians agree that climate change is happening, but only 55 per cent understand that greenhouse gas emissions are the primary cause. Only a very small portion of the population (17 per cent) think that the Canadian government is doing a good job addressing climate change. Half of Canadians believe that climate change is either causing mental health issues or making them worse. Students are more likely than any other respondent group to report feeling anxious (41 per cent) or frightened (31 per cent).

There is wide agreement (64 per cent) that the education system should be doing "a lot more" to educate young people about climate change. However, only a third (34 per cent) of educators feel they have the knowledge and skills needed to effectively teach

climate change; they are calling out for more support in the form of more classroom resources, materials and professional development.

The need for better climate change education is clear. In order to prepare our young people for a climate-altered future, our school system needs to do more. Canadians overwhelmingly say it is time for education ministries across Canada to incorporate climate change into virtually all subjects and across all grades

“ [Educators] are calling out for more support in the form of more classroom resources, materials and professional development. ”

K-12. This extends past science class, including geography, health, math, art, business and others as well. Climate change connects to everything we learn in school.

For youth to feel capable of addressing complex global challenges, we must first equip educators. Educators need practical professional development that provides tools and strategies to foster critical thinking, engage global citizenship

and reduce eco-anxiety among their students. This needs to be supported with curriculum-connected resources focused on climate change, sustainability and Indigenous knowledge. To address eco-anxiety, students need more opportunities to learn about and take action on climate change.

LSF's [Resources for Rethinking \(R4R\)](#) database supports educators with more than 1,800 free or low-cost, peer-reviewed, curriculum-matched lesson plans, videos, books and other materials, from over 250 publishers. The search tool connects teachers to resources that highlight climate change, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Indigenous Ways of Knowing and more. "R4R is one of the few databases in the world that offers teacher-reviewed and curriculum-tailored content from Canadian perspectives," says Charles Hopkins, the UNESCO Chair at York University. "The R4R database helps educators with teaching content and pedagogy to address these complex sustainability challenges in age-appropriate ways, making them relevant for their students, and moving from teaching about to teaching for sustainability."

By embracing a multidimensional approach to education that encompasses climate change, sustainability and Indigenous perspectives, educators empower students to become agents of positive change in their communities and beyond. It is empowerment to act that will build a foundation of hope! ■

Jennifer Stevens is the director of learning, research and programs and Samantha Gawron is the director of programs, engagement and development for Learning for a Sustainable Future, a non-profit organization whose mission is to "promote, through education, the knowledge, skills, values, perspectives, and practices essential to a sustainable future."

YOUR VIEWS

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Teacher salaries have fallen way behind

Bargaining is underway, and framing the discussion properly is key for teachers, the government and the general public to find fair solutions. Expectations need to be created that align with this framing. Teacher salaries, being publicly bargained and available to view on every district website, are always a difficult area. In discussions with teachers and non-teachers, proper framing has been missing.

To start, Alberta teachers are not among the highest paid in Canada. BC teachers, to use a comparator province, have outpaced Alberta teachers significantly over the past decade and now earn approximately five per cent more. Bargaining needs to take place with the understanding that Alberta teachers are not richly compensated compared to others.

Secondly, teachers have not received significant raises from previous governments. Since 2013, teachers have received 0%, 0%, 2%, 0%, 0%, 0%, 0%, 0.5%, 1.25% and 2%. That includes agreements with PC, NDP and UCP governments. The result is a salary increase of 5.87 per cent over the past 10 years. In that same time frame, inflation in Alberta has been over 30 per cent. When framed appropriately, it is clear that teacher pay has fallen behind inflation significantly. As Alberta's inflation rate is the highest in Canada, teachers continue to fall further behind. Teachers have sacrificed for the good of the provincial coffers for the last decade, and the cost of that must be recognized.

Framing negotiations properly for bargaining needs to reflect these realities. The proper framing is that teachers have fallen 24 per cent behind inflation over the past decade while Alberta has posted the highest provincial income in our history, with the highest resource revenues and largest surplus ever recorded. A fair deal requires this framing to be acknowledged. If how far salaries have fallen isn't adjusted now, when will it be?

Keith Harrison

Teacher, Palliser Local No. 19

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

FOR THE RECORD

“There are concerns that cellphones can be a distraction in educational environments and can sometimes be used inappropriately within classrooms and schools.”

– The introduction to an Alberta government survey into the use of cellphones in schools.

The online survey which can be accessed at your.alberta.ca, closes May 3.



Local bargaining wraps up

ATA News Staff



Bargaining is now complete in the last three ATA locals to be engaged in local negotiations for the round that extends back to September of 2020.

Teachers in two locals, Palliser and Red Deer Catholic, had approved strike votes earlier this year, but both were able to reach agreements before taking further labour action.

"We have not only concluded a very challenging and pressure-filled round of local bargaining, but we have also witnessed a remarkable display of resilience," said Sean Brown, ATA coordinator of Teacher Employment Services in a speech to delegates at a recent ATA bargaining conference.

Teachers employed by Conseil Scolaire (CS) FrancoSud were the last

to reach an agreement with their board, ratifying a deal on April 10. The board is expected to make its approval official on May 1.

Brown commended FrancoSud for completing their negotiations in just one month.

"This is a testament to their unwavering dedication and hard work, and it is truly inspiring," he said.

Brown added that this most recent round of local bargaining was "undeniably one of the most arduous," as the need for mediation was significantly

higher than in previous rounds.

"The reason for accessing mediation at many tables was not just to finalize the last one or two items, but to address deep-rooted problems with the relationship between teachers and employers," he said.

Strikes averted

On April 8, Palliser teachers voted 64 per cent in favour of a mediator's recommended terms of settlement.

"This was a challenging and protracted round of bargaining,"

said Palliser local president Natalie Townshend. "We are relieved that an agreement could be concluded without interruption to schools, but the school division has some work to do to repair relations with its teachers. The local is prepared to work collaboratively with the board toward this."

The board has also ratified the terms of settlement.

Mediated terms were also needed for an agreement in Red Deer Catholic, but teachers and the board both ratified their agreement in late March.

"There are certainly mixed emotions, I would say," local president Sara Lambert told the Red Deer Advocate. "I think teachers understood that the difference between bargaining and relationship is substantial. It does not alleviate some of the challenges teachers and the board are still facing." ■

Specialist council winds down

Cory Hare
ATA News Managing Editor

The ATA's Alberta School Learning Commons Council (ASLC) has wrapped up its operations.

Provincial Executive Council voted at its April meeting to disband the longtime specialist council because membership numbers were too low for the council to be viable.

Association guidelines require councils to maintain at least 100 active and associate members. Failure to do so for 12 consecutive months results in the council's operations being reviewed. During a review, the council's membership, programs and finances are analyzed to determine whether it makes sense for the Association to continue to fund the council as a stand-alone subgroup.

The review of the ASLC found that the council had not met the 100 member threshold since the 2018/19 school year,

due largely to a sharp decline in the number of teacher-librarians in the province over the past two decades. Although ASLC executive members engaged in recruitment and advocacy efforts at multiple conferences and teachers' conventions, these activities did not result in a sustained increase to council membership.

Councils with small membership have difficulty converting grants provided by the Association into programs and services for members, said ATA president Jason Schilling. The review of the ASLC found that the council had a significant surplus and was having difficulty converting these funds into supports for council members.

"It's unfortunate when a specialist council no longer has the numbers to keep going," Schilling said. "In this instance, PEC made the difficult decision to wind the specialist council up."

Since 1961, a number of specialist councils have been reviewed, merged

and dissolved. Most recently, in 2010, the Gifted and Talented Education Council merged with the Special Education Council (now the Council for Inclusive Education).

The decision to wind up the ASLC doesn't mean that the Association won't provide programs and services to support teachers and school leaders regarding misinformation, artificial intelligence, inclusive text selection, responses to book bans and other areas of concern for ASLC members, Schilling said.

"It simply means that these supports will no longer be provided through the funding of a stand-alone specialist council."

The Learning Commons Council was one of the ATA's 21 specialist councils. The councils are run by teacher volunteers and are organized according to areas of specialty related to curriculum subject areas, grade groupings, and TQS and LQS competencies. Councils organize professional development events,

resources and communities of practice to help their members increase their pedagogical and leadership knowledge and skills.

FACT

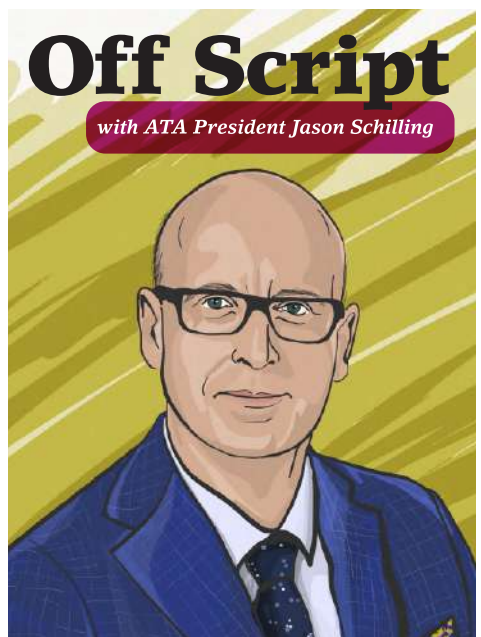
History

The ASLC was first founded in 1965 as the Learning Resources Council. It became the Alberta School Library Council in 2006. It became the Alberta School Learning Commons Council in 2016.

Membership

In 2003/04, 12.7 per cent of Alberta schools had a designated teacher-librarian. Currently, there are only between 10 and 20 teacher-librarians employed in Alberta schools. Of the 103 members the ASLC had in 2014, 58 have retired.

The profession is modeling a better way



Results regarding the increase in aggression in classrooms across the province. The research, from our latest pulse survey, highlights the experiences of teachers and school leaders who have seen these increases for a variety of reasons.

Aggression in schools impacts pedagogical and leadership practices. In fact, 75 per cent of our survey respondents indicated that polarization on gender, race, Covid and the climate is affecting how they teach. I'm concerned that we will see these numbers increase over the next few years to the detriment of our students. They deserve to have classrooms where they can safely study topics that relate to their lives.

Recently, I attended a session

about anti-racism at the 2024 ULead Conference put on by the Council of School Leaders. In this session the presenter, Matthew Martin, stressed how students need to see themselves and their lives reflected in the curriculum and the resources they use in schools.

With all the controversy around certain subjects, government policies like those in the works regarding gender, and the failure of the government to include teachers and underrepresented groups in curriculum development, I think we will continue to see a chilling effect on our classrooms.

So what do we do about it? We continue to advocate for our most vulnerable students and for our students who do not have a voice. We need to continue to understand the issues that affect

our students inside and outside the classroom.

The ATA will also concentrate on its advocacy work around curriculum development and implementation. This includes resources, professional development and assessment. It makes entirely no sense to me that teachers are continually asked for their opinion after the fact. Teachers need to be consulted about curriculum, the topics being taught and their sequence from the very beginning.

I also believe teachers need to be given permission and the professional autonomy to address topics in a respectful and mindful way. One of my top priorities continues to be addressing these concerns head on.

There is a better way. It's up to us to continue to shine a light on it. ■

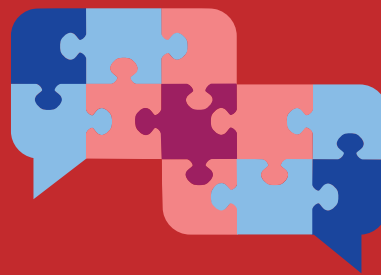


STORIES AND PHOTOS WANTED

If something newsworthy is going on in your school, district or local, please let us know. We will also consider articles, photos and cartoons. Please email tips and submissions to managing editor Cory Hare: cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.

BARGAINING

Central Table 2024



We are ATA.

Central bargaining calls for openness and determination

Next round an opportunity to secure a just agreement for current and future teachers



EXECUTIVE REPORT

Sean Brown
Chief Negotiator, ATA Central
Table Bargaining Committee

The following is an excerpt of a speech delivered at the ATA's Collective Bargaining Conference on April 18. The event was attended by members of teacher welfare committees from bargaining units across the province.

Good morning colleagues,

The road ahead is not easy. We are at the precipice of a challenging round of collective bargaining with the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association and the Government of Alberta. Members face significant demands and stressors, and the obstacles we must overcome are daunting. But let me be clear: in the face of adversity, we stand united, resolute and unwavering in our commitment to securing a brighter future for ourselves and our colleagues. After all, a teacher's working conditions are a student's learning conditions. It is a hand-in-glove relationship; a benefit to one is beneficial to both.

I want to share some insights gained from the 2024 Central Table Needs Bargaining Survey that underscores our membership's depth of commitment and engagement. These results are derived from an online survey conducted between January 29 and March 1, 2024. Through diligent outreach efforts, we garnered an impressive 19,799 responses. Of these, 14,679 were complete responses, demonstrating members' dedication as they stayed with the survey until the end and pressed submit. This level of participation and engagement speaks volumes about the passion and commitment of our membership.

Comparatively, in the previous round of central bargaining in 2020, where we had two surveys for members due to the pandemic, the response rate was consistent with previous rounds, with approximately 8,000 to 9,000 members completing the survey. The increased participation in this current round demonstrates the dedication of our membership in actively participating in the bargaining process, underscoring the importance and significance of our collective efforts.

Three fundamental pillars lie at the heart of our aspirations: salary improvements, classroom complexity (including classroom size and composition) and the protection of group health benefit premiums. These are not mere bargaining chips but essential components of a thriving education system that empowers teachers and nurtures every student's potential. Yet, we must also be aware of the challenges that frame our negotiations. The path to progress may be fraught with challenges, but in moments like these, the strength of our unity, determination and collective action shines brightest.

In our quest to understand the convictions of our members, we delved into the very environments where they dedicate their time, passion and expertise. The insights gleaned from our inquiries reveal a sobering reality: safety and respect within our classrooms are not progressing as we had hoped. Indeed, the data paints a concerning picture, indicating a decline in the perception of a generally safe work environment since 2020.

Specifically, it's disheartening to note that nearly six percent fewer teachers reported feeling their work environment was generally safe compared to the previous survey cycle. This downward trend is troubling and demands our urgent attention and concerted efforts to reverse it.

Among the most alarming findings is the revelation

that a significant proportion of our educators have experienced threats of violence, with a staggering 31 percent reporting such instances. Even more distressing is the fact that some of these threats involved weapons, a reality faced by approximately six percent of respondents. The safety of our teachers should never be compromised, and these statistics serve as a stark reminder of the challenges we must confront head-on.

Despite these challenges, it's heartening to note that most respondents did not miss school due to issues related to the school environment. However, this should not diminish the gravity of the problems highlighted. Instead, it underscores the resilience and dedication of our members, who persevere in the face of adversity to fulfill their mission of educating and nurturing the next generation.

Safety first

As we reflect on these findings, it becomes abundantly clear that creating safe and respectful work environments must be a top priority. Our teachers deserve nothing less than environments where they feel valued, supported and protected. This is not just a matter of policy or procedure; it's a moral imperative that speaks to the very essence of who we are as educators and as a society.

“ Together, we are a force to be reckoned with, capable of effecting meaningful change and shaping the future of education in Alberta and beyond. ”

Making a difference, especially with high aspirations, will require members' significant conviction and willingness to take action, potentially including the complete withdrawal of labour from the system. Understanding our members' convictions is paramount and serves as the compass guiding our collective actions and decisions. Within this understanding, we find the strength to navigate the challenges ahead and forge a path toward a brighter future for all educators.

The information from the survey and through conversations with members at conventions offers a glimpse into the commitment levels of our members across various demographics, from big urban centers to rural communities to rural and remote. While we acknowledge that these levels may not yet meet the threshold required for potential labour action, they are a testament to our colleagues' unwavering dedication and determination.

Indeed, the data presented reveals commitment levels that surpass those of the previous bargaining round by a significant margin. This is a cause for both celebration and reflection. Celebration because it demonstrates the growing solidarity and unity among our ranks, and reflection because it underscores the urgency of our mission to advocate for the rights and well-being of every teacher.

Our members' increased conviction is a powerful catalyst for change, propelling us forward as we strive to achieve our shared goals.

Comparatively, the contrast is striking when we look back at the 2020 round of central table bargaining.

The conviction demonstrated by our members today is more than double what it was during that pivotal moment in our collective history. This growth, this evolution, is a testament to the resilience and determination of our community. It speaks to our unwavering commitment to securing a better future for ourselves, our colleagues and the generations of students who depend on us.

In essence, the data before us is more than just numbers on a page; it reflects the passion, dedication and unwavering belief in our cause that define us as teachers. It reminds us that our collective strength, even in adversity, knows no bounds. Together, we are a force to be reckoned with, capable of effecting meaningful change and shaping the future of education in Alberta and beyond.

Increased focus

Informed by our survey results and various outreach efforts, the CTBC has been hard at work crafting the language for the initial proposal to be shared with TEBA before the end of the school year. Before that happens, however, there will be opportunities for members to provide additional feedback. At the Provincial Executive Council's most recent meeting on April 10 and 11, CTBC shared what we lovingly refer to as the drafty draft of the initial proposal. This document was very fulsome and contained language suggestions to address the members' priorities highlighted in the survey. More work still needs to be done, not the least of which is paring the proposals down to reflect the expectation of survey respondents that the initial proposal be more focused. With over 80 per cent of respondents supporting a more concentrated initial proposal, with a limited other category, the expectation of members is clear — like a prize fighter, this document needs to “make weight.” But to do that, we need to start with all the possibilities.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of our challenges. But let me remind you, we are not alone in this struggle. We are part of a larger community of educators, advocates and allies who share our vision for a more equitable education system. Together, we possess the power to effect change, challenge the status quo and build a brighter future for generations to come.

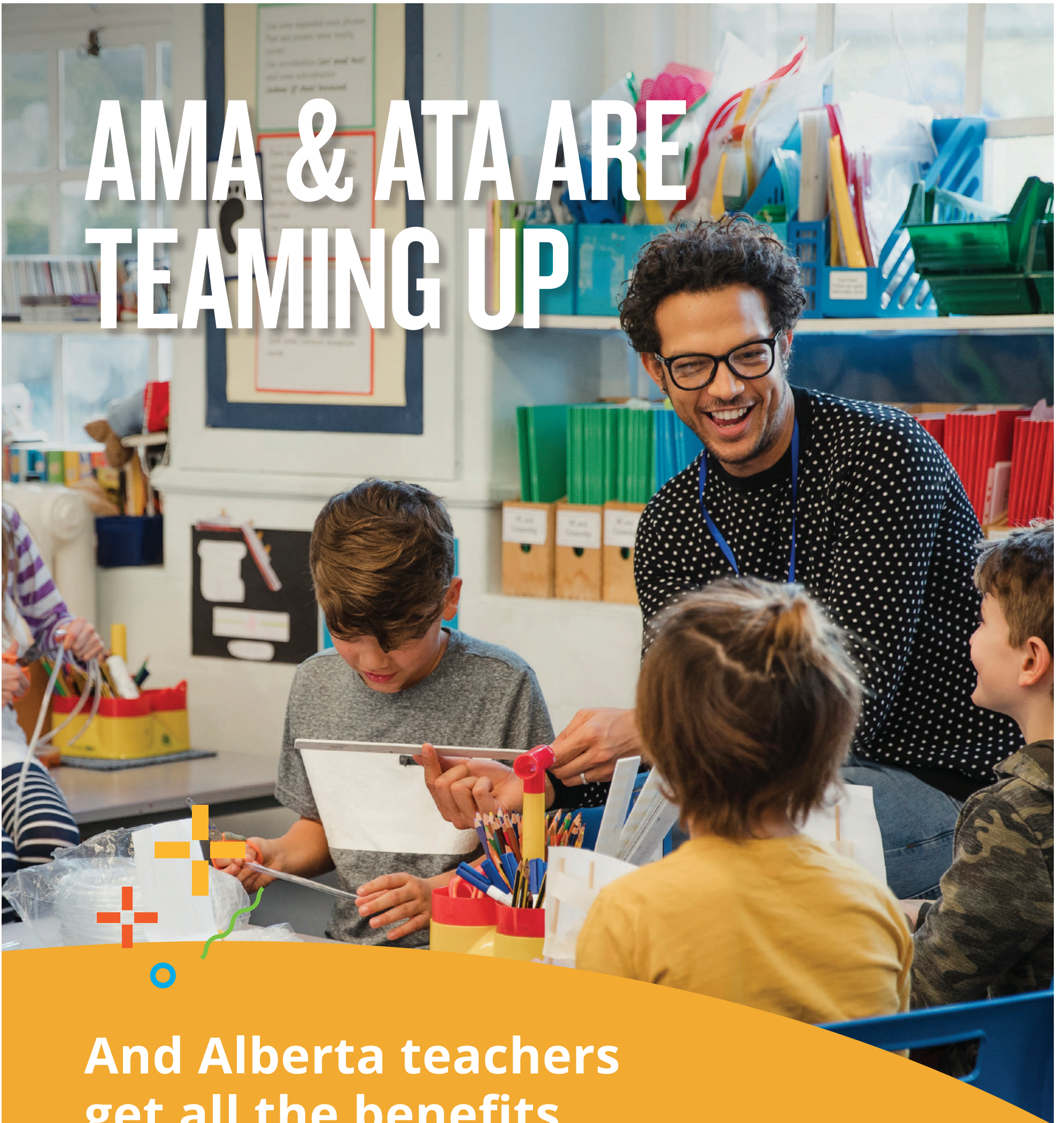
As we prepare to commence central table bargaining, let us do so with a spirit of collaboration, clarity of purpose and steadfast determination to secure what we rightfully deserve. Remember that our voices matter, our actions carry weight and our unity is our greatest asset. Let us use what we learned from the last round as a call to action and a rallying cry to redouble our efforts to advocate for safer, more supportive work environments for all educators. Together, we can and must work toward a future where every teacher can thrive, and every classroom is a sanctuary of learning and respect.

Let us always remember the profound impact our work has on the lives of our students. Each day, we have the privilege of shaping the next generation's minds, hearts and futures. This responsibility is not taken lightly, and it is a calling that drives us to strive for excellence in everything we do. Our working conditions are their learning conditions. The system only continues to function as it does on the backs of you in this room and your colleagues. Expectations continue to increase, and teachers only have so much to give.

In closing, I express my deepest gratitude to all of you for your tireless dedication, unwavering commitment and steadfast belief in the power of education to transform lives and our collective solidarity to make a difference. Together, we are stronger than any obstacle that stands in our way. Together, we can achieve greatness.

Thank you, and may we embark on this journey with courage, conviction and unwavering determination. ■

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Financial aid supports war-impacted colleagues

ATA News Staff

Teachers have once again answered the call for international aid. The Alberta Teachers' Association recently contributed \$1,500 to show support and solidarity with teacher colleagues affected by the conflict in Gaza. The donation was made to Education International (EI) through the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF).

As of the end of March, more than 5,800 students and 264 teachers have been killed in the Gaza war zone. Over 625,000 students have found themselves without schools and denied the right to an education. That's nearly 80 per cent of the entire K-12 student population in Alberta.

Jason Schilling, president of the ATA, says that when the call to help their colleagues comes in, teachers respond.

"When we see our fellow teachers struggling under intense circumstances, wherever that may be, and we have the ability to help, then we help as best we can," Schilling said. "Teachers have made it a priority in our budget to set

aside funds to help our colleagues who may have lost everything. I am proud that my colleagues recognize that when we have the opportunity and ability to provide some assistance, we do."

EI is the world's largest representative group of teacher organizations and education employees, consisting of 32.5 million union members from 384 organizations in 178 countries and territories. The CTF is one of those member organizations and often looks to its own national membership when the request for international aid comes in.

Thanks to the support from EI members around the world, the General Union of Palestinian Teachers has provided direct financial assistance to more than 1,077 teachers in Gaza and the West Bank.

Track record

This isn't the first time Alberta teachers have stepped up when the need for international aid has arisen.

In recent years, the ATA has made significant donations to EI for the 2023 Morocco earthquake, the 2023 Turkey and Syria earthquake, the 2021 Haiti earthquake, the Trade Union of Education and Science Workers of Ukraine, and the Free Trade Union of Education and Science in Ukraine, and financially supported an application with Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada for an at-risk Afghan colleague and their family.

The Association also undertakes non-monetary aid initiatives. In October of 2021, a written letter was sent to Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran,

expressing Association support for Iranian teacher colleagues.

Assistance for our colleagues here at home also remains strong. When a call to billet teachers and their families fleeing from the Northwest Territories wildfires went out last summer, ATA members responded in astonishing numbers.

Schilling says that while teachers may face professional challenges here at home, they recognize the value of education everywhere and how students and society benefit from a well-supported and well-funded public education system.

"Every student and teacher deserves to work in a safe, caring and respectful place," said Schilling. "Alberta teachers understand that as a core belief of our public education system." ■



Education International
Internationale de l'Éducation
Internacional de la Educación
Bildungsinternationale



CTF/FCE



ISTOCK

Teachers oppose use of constitutional override

ATA News Staff

The Alberta Teachers' Association is concerned that the government is jeopardizing student safety and wellness through its continued interest in anti-inclusion legislation.

The government announced on April 9 that it would apply for intervenor status in a court case in Saskatchewan where parent rights legislation is being challenged on constitutional grounds.

Saskatchewan's *Parents' Bill of Rights*, which became law in October, requires parental consent for children under 16 who want to change their names or pronouns at school. The Saskatchewan Court of Appeal recently ruled that the law

could be challenged even though it's protected by Section 33 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the so-called notwithstanding clause.

Earlier this year, Premier Danielle Smith announced that the UCP government would introduce similar legislation in the fall. Then, on April 9, Alberta Justice Minister Mickey Amery said in a statement that the government is now seeking intervenor status in the Saskatchewan case because it has the potential to impact parental rights across Canada as well as the application of the notwithstanding clause.

"Saskatchewan and Alberta agree that the ultimate authority figures in children's lives are their parents, and our provinces are both committed to supporting families and kids so

they can work through their child's unique needs together," Amery said in a statement released jointly with his Saskatchewan counterpart Bronwyn Eyre.

"Notifying parents and requiring their consent before a child's name or pronouns can be changed in schools and before classroom discussions about gender identity and other sensitive subjects occur ensures the parent-child relationship is respected and paramount."

Putting kids at risk

The government's move raises concerns about its willingness to protect vulnerable young people, said ATA president Jason Schilling in a prepared statement.

"We are worried that laws like [the one] Saskatchewan has passed and Alberta is now proposing put the safety of vulnerable kids at significant risk. These laws inhibit the ability of schools to provide safe, welcoming, caring and respectful learning environments and will have a chilling effect on schools by reducing the opportunities for all students to learn about diverse families and identities," Schilling said.

"The use of the notwithstanding clause to override the human rights of vulnerable children is unjust, unreasonable and excessive," he added.

"Alberta teachers will continue to work respectfully with parents to protect the safety and dignity of students. Teachers also hope our government will reassess its priorities." ■

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Nova Scotia teachers vote 98% in favour of strike mandate

ATA News Staff

Nova Scotia's teachers and educational specialists have voted 98 per cent in favour of strike action.

The Nova Scotia Teachers' Union (NSTU) is calling the result "a resounding wake-up call to government that it can no longer continue to ignore the many crises boiling over inside our public schools."

The strike vote involved more than 10,000 and took place on April 11.

"Teachers are frustrated by rapidly declining conditions inside their schools, and by the government's lack of action to provide safe and healthy learning environments for students," said NSTU president Ryan Lutes.

"Teachers want the escalating levels of violence they are witnessing addressed. They want to see resources allocated to help solve the mental health crisis inside schools. They want to see a plan to end the teacher shortage that focuses on retention and ensures that our substitutes aren't among the lowest paid in Canada. Teachers want the government to come to the table and be prepared to negotiate a fair contract in the best interest of students, teachers and families, but so far that just hasn't been the case."

Lutes said teachers would prefer not to strike, but will take action if this government doesn't start taking the challenges facing students and their teachers seriously.

"What teachers are saying with this vote is that the status quo is unacceptable and unsustainable, and they aren't prepared to sit idly by while the situation grows worse. It's time to fix our schools. Our kids and their teachers deserve better. It's my sincere wish that government will see this result and come back to the table prepared to engage in meaningful discussions."

Talks between teachers and government are scheduled to continue with the assistance of a conciliator. The NSTU is hopeful that the government's negotiating team will approach these talks with a mandate to address the needs of the education system. ■



SUPPLIED

John Antenucci (second from left), Calgary Separate Local No. 55

Winners announced in Rinkside Snaps Contest

In March we launched our Rinkside Snaps Contest, challenging members to capture a selfie with one of the rink-board ads from our "Great Things Happening in Alberta Schools" campaign. The ads were located in 47 community rinks across Alberta, and the contest received more than 50 entries.

From these entries, we randomly selected two winners, who each received a pair of tickets to a Calgary Flames or Edmonton Oilers home game.

Congratulations to our winners!



SUPPLIED

Jenna Arcand, Trumpeter Local No. 26



Follow us on Instagram: [abteachers](#)

2024 gotcha! PHOTO CONTEST

Cash prizes available!



The ATA News invites you to get your camera out and start shooting those award-winning photographs.

1st place: \$100 2nd place: \$200 3rd place: \$50

GOTCHA! Contest rules

- 1 Photos taken by active, associate and student ATA members of education- or school-related activities are eligible. (Hint: photos depicting action are best.)
- 2 Entries must be submitted by the member who took the photos.
- 3 Photos taken between Sept. 1, 2023 and May 15, 2024, are eligible.
- 4 Please email photos to cory.hare@ata.ab.ca. Entries must be received by 5 p.m. on May 15, 2024.
- 5 Each entry must be accompanied by a description of the activity; the names (if possible) of the people in the photo; the date when the photo was taken; and the photographer's name, school and contact information.
- 6 Cash prizes will be awarded to entrants whose photos place in the top three, as follows. First place: \$200; second place: \$100 and third place: \$50
- 7 Each winner will also receive a certificate of merit, as will those receiving honourable mention.
- 8 Up to 20 additional entries may be selected for an award of honourable mention.
- 9 Each entrant may submit up to five photos but no entrant can win more than one top-three prize.
- 10 A panel of individuals with photography, publishing and teaching experience will judge the entries. The decision of the judges is final.
- 11 Winning photographs will be published in the ATA News.
- 12 Photos submitted for the contest may be published in the ATA News, the ATA Magazine or other Association publications.
- 13 Please read carefully. Failure to comply with any of these rules may result in disqualification.

Get snapping and good luck!

COMM-65-1 2024.05



Palliser District Teachers' Convention Association

WE ARE HIRING

Convention Board Executive Assistant

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- Prepare, receive and track contracts
- Support with Sched and planning
- Coordinate Financial Records

Requirements :

- Familiarity with website management
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- Understanding of basic accounting principles
- Ability to work collaboratively and remotely

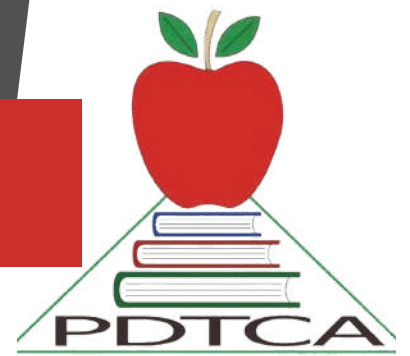
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Theory and Practice in Educational Leadership



Dr. Scott Morrison



Valerie McDougall



Gary Strother

St. Mary's University Faculty of Education is offering two 3-credit online courses for aspiring school administrators and teacher leaders!

The St. Mary's Advantage

- The only Catholic University in the province accredited to offer these courses.
- Instructed by recent Catholic and Public School superintendents.
- Study in the comfort of your home.

EDLD 551:

Theory and Practice in Educational Leadership I

Mon/Wed 5:00 PM – 8:00 PM on May 6, 8, 13, 15, 22, 27, 29, June 3, 5, 10, 12, 17

EDLD 552:

Theory and Practice in Educational Leadership II

Mon/Wed 5:00 PM – 8:00 PM on June 19, 24, and 26
 Mon/Wed 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM on July 3, 8, 10, 15, 17, 22
 Wed 9:00 AM – 4:00 PM on July 24
 Mon 9:00 AM – 12:00 PM on July 29



For more information please contact: info@stmu.ca
 For Registration please visit:
<https://stmu.ca/programs/catholic-educators-program/>



DIGITAL NEWS

The ATA News is available online.

For the latest issue, visit www.teachers.ab.ca/news. Subscribe to receive an email when a new issue is available. <http://bit.ly/ATAeNews>

Event helps students find their stories

SUCCESS STORIES

Laura McNabb
Elk Island Public Schools

More than 400 young authors tapped into inspiration and found their voices at the 33rd annual Young Authors' Conference hosted by Elk Island Public Schools (EIPS) on April 13.

The theme of this year's event was "Finding my Story."

"You can tell a story many different ways — writing, drawing, music, comedy, photography, game development — the list is never-ending. We're excited to have presenters from various industries help students find their story and imagine the way they want to tell it," said Kristen Rosato, the division's elementary literacy and social studies consultant.

The Young Authors' Conference is a long-standing collaborative event that welcomes students from both EIPS and Elk Island Catholic Schools (EICS) for a fun-filled day of storytelling. Throughout the day, students hone their skills in writing fluency, idea generation, illustration, expression and communication. Participants are grouped into two streams — grades 4 to 6 and grades 7 to 9 — and attend three breakout sessions led by authors, illustrators and other professionals in the field who share their knowledge, industry know-how and life lessons to encourage students.

New this year, K-12 students in both EIPS and EICS were able to watch a livestreamed event where

award-winning author David A. Robertson discussed his book *On the Trampoline*. The event took place the day before the conference — April 12. Students were also able to attend virtual sessions on the conference day itself to watch and learn from home.

"We wanted everyone to be able to take part in this fantastic opportunity," added Rosato. "By offering several virtual options, more students got the chance to hear from these amazing guest speakers."

Varied lineup

Robertson was the keynote author among a diverse and talented group of presenters. Authors Marty Chan and Karen Spafford-Fitz dove into the world of superheroes and villains. Similarly, Kathy Jessup explored creating great characters. Rita Feutl provided tips for writing realistic dialogue, Sigmund Brouwer taught students about plot twists and Gail Sidonie Sobat delved into world-building.

Regarding genre, Lorna Schultz Nicholson spoke about writing non-fiction, while Mandie Frey emphasized the power of poetry. Lisa Lypowy and Joan Marie Galat also offered sessions from their experiences with storytelling.

Judith Graves, Tamara Martin Spady and Mike Boldt gave their insight from being both authors and illustrators. Gary Delaney and Gerry Rasmussen drew from their experiences as cartoonists, and students interested in the stage heard from playwrights Jonathan Ewing, Amelia Newstead and Tyler Enfield. Gord Steinke shared a journalist's perspective, and Linda Hoang talked about her life as a blogger and social media influencer. Kristopher



SUPPLIED

Author David A. Robertson delivers the keynote address during the Young Author's Conference in Sherwood Park on April 12.

Marks brought his expertise as a public speaker, musician, comedian and podcaster, while John Epler spoke on his career as a game developer at BioWare — a studio known for the *Dragon Age* and *Mass Effect* series. Many sessions included imaginative exercises to inspire young authors in their own literary pursuits. ■

Laura McNabb is the director of communication services for Elk Island Public Schools.

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Success Stories is an ongoing feature that enables teachers and education officials to share their successes with their colleagues. To submit an idea or an article about a new program or approach that you've instituted, please contact managing editor Cory Hare at cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.

Council spearheads diversity initiative

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held April 10-11, 2024, at Barnett House, Edmonton.

1. Approved in principle (and contingent upon ARA approval of funding) a proposed diversity initiative, which includes the creation of Diversity Equity Networks and a Social Justice and Equity sub-program area within the Professional Development program area.
2. Authorized that the creation of a proposed diversity initiative, as part of a comprehensive approach to addressing diversity, be communicated to the 2024 Annual Representative Assembly (ARA) delegates to provide context to resolutions that will be presented at the 2024 ARA.
3. Authorized an emergent in-person meeting of the Status of Racialized Teachers (SORT) Subcommittee to be held in advance of ARA 2024 for the purpose of briefing and seeking feedback from the SORT Subcommittee on the proposed diversity initiative and the responses to the SORT Subcommittee recommendations as proposed by Table Officers Committee.
4. Authorized an emergent in-person meeting of the Diversity, Equity and

Human Rights Committee to be held in advance of ARA 2024 to brief the committee on the proposed diversity initiative.

5. Selected Gordon King as executive staff officer, Teacher Employment Services/Regulatory Affairs and Membership Support, with duties to commence at the earliest agreeable time.
6. Approved the proposed external competition timeline and appointed members of Council to a selection committee for recruitment of the position of Executive Staff Officer, Teacher Employment Services.
7. Approved as interim policy and referred to the 2024 ARA for confirmation a resolution that the Association opposes the use of political party affiliations in Alberta school board elections.
8. Approved for presentation to the 2024 ARA a resolution preserving teacher professional judgment on the use of smartphones by students in Alberta classrooms during instructional time.
9. Approved for presentation at the 2024 ARA a resolution regarding the administration of mandated literacy and numeracy assessments.
10. Amended the 2024/25 proposed budget by changing the full-time teacher count from 34,500 to 34,800; deleting the Teacher Exchange Program estimated at \$28,000; deleting the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion audit estimated at \$50,000; and increasing the Interest Earnings revenue line by \$20,000 to account for the accrued interest of a GIC.

11. Authorized that the Alberta School Learning Commons (ASLC) Council be wound up, appointed an official trustee to wind up the affairs of the ASLC, set the trustee's terms of reference and amended the ASLC constitution.
12. Authorized that the Standard Constitution for Convention Associations be amended to the effect that the assigned staff officer and/or district representative must be in attendance for the convention board to have a legitimate meeting.
13. Authorized staff support and funding up to \$12,000 annually to assist the Alberta Colony Educators with the planning of conferences and other professional development opportunities for members who work in colony schools or Mennonite education programs.
14. Authorized staff to consult with members of the Alberta Colony Educators group to identify specific needs and Association supports for members who work in colony schools or Mennonite education programs.
15. Amended the 2023/24 program emphases, in response to resolution 2-28/23 adopted at the 2023 ARA, by adding to the Cross-Program initiatives the commissioning of a labour market research and workload analysis focusing on the diverse generational cohorts within Alberta's teaching profession.
16. Removed the Association Instructor and Association Administrator Instructor Corps seminar from future Summer Conference programming and replaced it with an intensive 2.5-day

Association Instructor and Association Administrator Instructor Corps summer seminar at an alternative venue, commencing in 2025 on a three-year cycle.

17. Awarded the 2024 Alberta Teachers' Association Doctoral Fellowships in Education, the 2024 belairdirect Scholarship and the 2024 Nadene M Thomas Graduate Research Bursary.
18. Amended administrative guidelines to provide a common organizational structure for the ATA Doctoral Fellowships in Education, the belairdirect Scholarship and the Nadene M Thomas Graduate Research Bursary.
19. Approved the names of four teachers to the name bank for possible appointment as Indigenous Education PD facilitators.
20. Approved the names of 12 teachers to the name bank for possible appointment as Association instructors.
21. Amended administrative guidelines pertaining to membership count timelines for student local grants; updates to Summer Conference claims for convention association and specialist council representatives; removal of the Grant MacEwan University Education Undergraduate Society No 11 due to its dormancy; updates to Council attendance at Association-sponsored conferences and events; and removal of outdated language relating to Council elections.
22. Rescheduled the May 2025 meeting of Provincial Executive Council due to a calendar conflict. ■



The Alberta Teachers' Association

The Alberta Teachers' Association invites applications for the position of

EXECUTIVE STAFF OFFICER, TEACHER EMPLOYMENT SERVICES/REGULATORY AFFAIRS AND MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT

Competition: ESO4/24

Location: Edmonton

Position Overview

This position will assist in the work of the Teacher Employment Services (TES) and Regulatory Affairs and Membership Support (RAMS) program areas, potentially supporting both teacher employment, collective bargaining and representation functions as directed by the executive secretary. Duties may include providing the following service to members:

- Handling teacher employment field service requests, acting as a representative of the bargaining agent in collective agreement negotiations, providing support to Association subgroups and acting as Association representative for members who are under investigation by the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission (ATPC)
- Providing advice relating to personnel problems, collective agreement entitlements and legal assistance
- Handling collective agreement grievances and Board of Reference appeals
- Participating in and undertaking presentations and workshops for TES conferences
- Representing members at all stages of the ATPC's processes, including preliminary inquiries, investigations and hearings
- Conducting further investigations as a part of the representation role as required
- Assisting with certification issues that stem from the ATPC's processes
- Serving as Association resource person in specific areas of policy and practices
- Carrying out special projects within the program area and extending across other areas of Association operation

Qualifications

Key requirements:

- Knowledge of ATA mission, objects, program areas and how they contribute to improving the profession and the working lives of teachers
- Understanding of the role of TES and RAMS
- Familiarity with applicable legislation, policy and the *Education Act*
- Experience in bargaining, labour relations, application of collective agreements and conducting investigations are assets
- Coursework in human resources and labour relations and knowledge of pension and benefits are assets
- Demonstrated facility in the French language is an asset
- School leadership experience is an asset
- Human resources training and experience are assets

Additional competencies:

- Problem solving and decision making
 - The ability to analyze problems systematically, organize information, identify key factors, identify underlying causes and generate solutions
- Change agility
 - The ability to embrace change and adapt effectively in response
- Effective communication
 - Regularly seeks feedback to understand other peoples' perspectives and integrates feedback into decisions and to improve service to members
- Accountability and self-awareness
 - Manages professional relationships by performing work in a timely and quality way that enables departmental success
- Commitment to collaboration
 - Works effectively both within the program area/unit and across the organization
 - Contributes to team building and success

In addition, the following are required:

- A valid teaching certificate and a minimum of five years of successful teaching experience in public education
- Proven commitment to public education
- Ability to undertake travel and evening/weekend work

A demonstrated commitment to the profession; service with the Alberta Teachers' Association, its subgroups or other Canadian teachers' organizations; coursework in employee and labour relations; and experience in and/or knowledge of pensions and benefits are considered assets. The Association is committed to reconciliation and a candidate's knowledge of and experience with related issues and/or membership in an Indigenous community are assets. Applications from members of equity-seeking groups are encouraged.

What This Position Offers

Total compensation for this position includes a starting salary of \$138,720, pensionable service under the Teachers' Pension Plan of the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund Board and employer-paid benefits as stipulated in a collective agreement. The initial location will be in Edmonton, but future assignments may be to any present or future Association office. Duties will commence on July 1, 2024 (negotiable).

Applicants should quote position ESO4/24 and include two letters from references who are not Association employees or elected officials of its provincial executive. Applications must be received in **one** file by **4 p.m. on Wednesday, May 8, 2024**, and should be addressed to

Ms Kathryn Dick
Human Resources Director
The Alberta Teachers' Association
11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton T5N 2R1
E-mail: careers@ata.ab.ca

For more information, please see our website at www.teachers.ab.ca.

OP-HR-47e 2024-04

So what's new with you?

Did you know that the *ATA Magazine* has a section dedicated to sharing information about teachers' extracurricular endeavours and adventures?

Yes, it's true. It's called **Who's Out There?** and we're currently seeking submissions.

The section highlights new projects or accomplishments by Alberta teachers who are also

- authors
- musicians
- visual or performing artists
- podcasters
- athletes
- volunteers
- entrepreneurs



Alberta teacher sets world record

Karen Gill
ATA News Staff

What began as a way to stay active after an injury has resulted in a Guinness World Record for an Alberta teacher and grandmother.

Substitute teacher DonnaJean Wilde set a new record by holding a plank position for four hours, 30 minutes and 11 seconds.

The record-setting feat took place on March 21 in front of family, students and friends in the theatre at Magrath High School, where Wilde taught for many years. Wilde's performance surpassed the previous record of 4 hours, 19 minutes and 55 seconds, set in May 2019.

"It was stressful keeping perfect form, and I was emotional seeing all the students there," Wilde said. "I just thought, if they think I can do it, then I could do it, and that helped me focus."



DonnaJean Wilde

Wilde applied to Guinness World Records in January to attempt the plank world record. She worked with Guinness officials in both the US and London offices and was put in touch with an adjudicator, who flew from Montreal to

judge her attempt. A film crew also came to document the entire event!

Every detail had to meet Guinness World Records requirements. Before the event, Wilde had to send a video of herself planking at home so Guinness officials could review her form, and the set-up also had to be arranged to exacting specifications. The plank exercise itself had to be performed in bare feet. Wilde's fingers were not allowed to lock together or touch, and any slip of her toes or sway of her back would have meant instant disqualification.

Long-term dedication

Wilde started planking 11 years ago after she broke her wrist in a fall. With her arm in a cast, she found herself unable to do her typical fitness activities like running or lifting weights, so rather than give up on her desire to keep active, she decided to join her kids, who were doing plank challenges.

"It allowed me to do something productive while I had my cast on," she recalled. "I would plank every day."

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Wilde's dedication to planking reached new heights. Encouraged by her children, she decided to take her planking seriously and discovered that she could sustain planks for hours on end. She used much of this time to complete teacher tasks. With her computer on the floor in front of her, Wilde would grade



SUPPLIED

Last month, Alberta teacher DonnaJean Wilde set a new world record for the longest plank.

papers, mark assignments and answer emails while planking. This dedication eventually led her to apply to Guinness World Records.

In training for the event, Wilde started by planking every other day in January and February, then every day in March. She divided her planking time into blocks of two to three hours to get in a total six hours of planking per day.

For the test itself, since washroom breaks were not allowed, Wilde had to create a diet and hydration plan well in

advance. She avoided drinking anything the night before or the morning of the event, consuming only some energy granola bars before the 7:30 a.m. start.

Now, with a Guinness World Record under her belt, Wilde says she doesn't know what's next for her. She said she's enjoying retirement and substitute teaching when she can. Based on her experience, she encourages others to aim high in their endeavours.

"If you're good at something, go for it and be the best you can be." ■

Highlights from the legislature

Shelley Svidal
ATA News Staff

Alberta's 31st legislature reconvened on April 8 following a constituency week. Here is a summary of the education- and public sector-related business that took place from April 8 to 11.

Rural school construction and modernization

April 8—Amanda Chapman (NDP—Calgary-Beddington) noted that Breton High School, the top priority of Wild Rose School Division, had received design funding in the 2023/24 provincial budget but does not appear on the 2024/25 construction funding list. She asked Minister of Education **Demetrios Nicolaides** when the high school would receive construction funding so that it could be modernized and rightsized. Nicolaides replied that government has 98 school projects under way and is eager to move all of them forward as quickly as possible.

Chapman asked Nicolaides what it would take for him to prioritize a 70-year-old school facility. Nicolaides replied that modernizing and replacing schools in communities across the province is a top priority for government. Chapman asked Nicolaides why the government will not fund construction for Breton High School, allowing the school division to demolish Breton Elementary School. Nicolaides replied that government is committed to modernizing and replacing schools in smaller communities.

April 11—Glenn van Dijken (UCP—Athabasca-Barrhead—Westlock) asked Minister of Education **Demetrios Nicolaides** to elaborate on the government's strategies for providing school facilities throughout Alberta, particularly in rural areas,

and how budgetary allocations are being prioritized to meet communities' needs. Nicolaides replied that building and modernizing schools is one of government's top priorities. "We have a number of replacement and new school projects under way in every corner of the province," he said.

van Dijken asked Minister of Infrastructure **Peter Guthrie** to outline the different stages of school construction and the corresponding timelines for completion. Guthrie identified preplanning, planning, design and tender, and construction as the four stages. He added that it takes three to four years to build a school. van Dijken asked Guthrie to update his constituents on the status of the Mallaig School replacement project, the Barrhead Composite High School modernization and the Holy Family Catholic School (Waskatenau) project. Guthrie replied that all three projects are at the design stage.

School construction in Calgary-North East

April 9—Gurinder Brar (NDP—Calgary-North East) asked Minister of Education **Demetrios Nicolaides** why the government is ignoring Calgary-North East when it comes to school construction. Nicolaides replied by expressing hope that Brar would join him April 12 for the official opening of Prairie Sky School in Calgary-North East. Citing long bus rides, Brar asked Nicolaides why the government insists on letting down northeast Calgary's year after year. Nicolaides replied that government is planning a new high school in Cornerstone, two new elementary schools in Redstone and a junior high school in Saddle Ridge. Brar asked Nicolaides what he would say to students who face long bus rides and overcrowded classrooms because

the government is not willing to build the schools northeast Calgary needs. Nicolaides replied that schools are on their way.

Education funding

April 10—NDP Leader Rachel Notley asked Premier **Danielle Smith** how she can sleep at night, knowing that Alberta has the lowest per-capita education funding in Canada. Smith replied that the education operating budget has risen from \$8.3 billion during the NDP's tenure in 2018/19 to \$9.3 billion in 2024/25. She added that 98 schools are in various stages of construction.

Notley noted that Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School Division had cancelled its LEAD program, which serves students with learning disabilities. She asked Smith why those students are not worthy of the investment they would receive in the rest of the country. Smith replied that government believes in local control and local decision making. She added that government is providing \$1.2 billion to hire additional teachers and support staff and \$1.5 billion to support students' specialized learning needs.

Notley asked Smith what kind of government cuts program unit funding by over one-third, cuts regional service delivery and freezes funding for English language learners. Replied Smith, "The NDP program was to chase people out of the province: 13 consecutive quarters of people leaving. We had to bring in a funding formula... that prevented school boards from losing funding because of declining enrolment. ... Now that we have, fortunately, more people wanting to move to Alberta, we've got more tax dollars coming in. We've got more families coming in. We've got more people coming in. We've got more families coming in, which is why we have to make sure that we have the highest per-capita funding that we have."

April 10—Premier Danielle Smith

introduced Bill 18, *Provincial Priorities Act*. The bill requires school boards and other provincially funded and regulated entities to obtain provincial government approval to receive federal funding.

Provincial pension plan proposal

April 10—Shannon Phillips (NDP—Lethbridge-West) asked President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance Nate Horner whether the government would abandon its plans to establish an Alberta pension plan. Horner replied that government is awaiting a legislative interpretation from the three actuarial firms that the Office of the Chief Actuary is using and expects to receive an asset transfer figure in the fall. Phillips asked Horner whether he would agree with the vast majority of Albertans "and just take this silly APP idea out of the window today."

Replied Horner, "I'd say that it's kind of cute to hear the opposition talk about finances and spending priorities after the budgets that they brought forward but also the budgets that NDP governments continue to bring forward across the country." Phillips asked Horner for confirmation that government would stop gambling with Albertans' retirement. Horner replied that an Alberta pension plan would leave \$5 billion annually in Albertans' pockets.

Access to menstrual products

April 11—Noting that 62 per cent of students have left or missed school because period products were not available to them, **Julia Hayter** (NDP—Calgary-Edgemont) asked Minister of Arts, Culture and Status of Women **Tanya Fir** whether government would provide access to menstrual products to all provincial buildings and schools. Fir replied that she is open to the conversation. ■

IF ALBERTA IS THE RICHEST PROVINCE IN CANADA, THEN WHY ARE WE SPENDING THE LEAST ON EDUCATION?*

*We bet you thought the asterisk would lead to some sort of stat that softens this embarrassing statement. Unfortunately, the truth only gets worse. The latest report on "Education Spending in Public Schools in Canada", conducted by the Fraser Institute in 2023, puts into perspective how poorly Alberta stands against the rest of our country. As much as we hate to reference the Fraser Institute, their study shows Alberta spent the least on a per-student basis for public education in all of Canada in 2020/21. To make matters worse, data shows that from 2012 to 2021 provinces like Quebec and BC have rightfully increased spending by 33% and 13%, respectively. Whereas Alberta has had a shameful decrease of 12% in spending over that same time period. When public education does not receive the proper funding, students' needs are not met. Classrooms are overfilled, diverse programs are being cut, and there is less teaching support for students with complex issues. The compounding effects of these issues have seen distraught teachers in our province leave their chosen profession altogether. It's time to right the wrongs. It's time for solutions. Tell your MLA, "Stop the excuses."

[StopTheExcuses.ca](https://www.stexcuses.ca)



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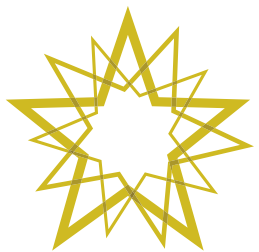
Did you know...

- We have meeting and banquet space available at Barnett House for corporate and private functions?
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- We provide in-house catering to all types of events?

Please email meetingrooms@ata.ab.ca for more information or to book your event or special occasion.



The Alberta Teachers' Association



ATA EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AWARD

Alberta research focused on teaching & learning

The Alberta Teachers' Association Educational Research Award, valued at \$5,000, is presented annually to a faculty of education member or sessional lecturer at an Alberta university or at a university college that the Association recognizes who has undertaken high-quality research on classroom teaching and learning.

Application deadline: May 15, 2024

What Are the Criteria?

The research must meet the following criteria:

- Be directly related to school and classroom practice
- Be focused on school teaching and/or learning
- Be current (either ongoing or completed within the last two years)
- Be related to critical issues in the context of public education
- Have involved classroom teachers and/or students
- Be applicable to the Alberta context
- Be of practical benefit to teachers in improving their professional practice
- Be of high quality in terms of purpose, methodology and originality

Require More Information?

Contact **Dr Philip McRae** by e-mail at philip.mcrae@ata.ab.ca or by phone at **780-447-9469** (in Edmonton) or **1-800-232-7208** (elsewhere in Alberta).

Find details on the award criteria and on the selection and announcement of the recipient on the ATA website.

Application form
www.teachers.ab.ca



The Alberta Teachers' Association

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TALENT

April 23, 2024 | Volume 58, Number 12



Grade 5 teachers Tasha Sim and Melisa McIntosh check out the sun from Aspen Heights Elementary School in Red Deer.

Partial eclipse. Total engagement.

On April 8, the moon passed between the Earth and the sun, creating a solar eclipse across North America. In Alberta, with the proper protective eyewear, the moon could be seen partially covering the sun, creating a partial eclipse. Although the eclipse was not total, it still captured the interest of teachers, students and residents in general.

At Glendale Sciences and Technology School in Red Deer, students in grades 4–6 viewed the eclipse through glasses from Let's Talk Science. The school is piloting the new science curriculum and the activity was a perfect fit with the new space units, said teacher Lindsay Unland.



LINDSAY UNLAND



CORY HARE

Hundreds gathered at Telus World of Science in Edmonton for a glimpse of the eclipse through one of the many telescopes that were set up.