

PHOTOS WANTED!



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ATA NEWS

**MY ALBERTA
TEACHER
HERO**

Contest ends Oct. 16.
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KIM CLEMENT

A counter-protester holds up a sign during a demonstration outside ATA headquarters in Edmonton on Sept. 20.

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Reasonable parental concerns or poorly disguised hate?



EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

Warning: the content of this editorial describes views and behaviours that may be unsettling to some people.

I've been hesitant to write my editorial about the anti-pride protests that occurred at our office and elsewhere on Sept. 20, partly because I don't want to give them more oxygen, and partly because I know the topic is well covered in this issue. However, I feel compelled to address one particular aspect.

Much of my time has already been dedicated to this issue. From working on the Association's public response to moderating a whole slew of comments on social media, I have been working considerably on this file over the past three weeks.

In that time, I have seen and read

a lot from the protesters and their supporters. I cannot begin to describe how many hateful, hurtful, harmful, bigoted and downright awful things I saw, read and heard at the protests and online in the days that followed. It has been quite disturbing.

But the claim being asserted by many is that their position is not hate and is not anti-LGBTQ. I would like to believe that most who participated would not condone the worst of the actions and words that have come out. No, these people suggest that they have reasonable concerns that just aren't being heard.

They suggest the issue is about parental rights and about the introduction of mature sexual content to vulnerable young students. A flyer put out by protest organizers says that schools are "teaching lessons about sexuality without parental awareness or consent." Often, they will charge that teachers are "sexualizing" students. Taken at face value, these assertions would cause concern for many reasonable parents – which is exactly

what is intended. Unfortunately, the assertions are not true.

First, the *Education Act* requires that school boards provide notice to parents where courses, programs of study or instruction includes subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality. Furthermore, parents then have the right to withdraw their children from that instruction.

But sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) education is not about sexuality. It is about relationships; it is about identity, love and families. These are not mature topics, they are important topics.

2SLGBTQIA+ students are nearly twice as likely as other children to experience daily or weekly bullying. They are seven times more likely to attempt suicide. It is important to note that the heightened suicide risk is not because of their sexual orientation or gender identity but rather because of how they are stigmatized or mistreated.

If we are going to combat bullying related to sexual orientation and

gender identity, and if we are going to combat the stigmatizing and mistreatment of relationship and gender diverse students, then we must build understanding about these identities and relationships among all students. This is not about sexualization or even sexuality, it is about protecting kids and saving lives.

The problem, it is occurring to me, is that these people believe that any talk about gender or relationship diversity is automatically sexual. If you believe that gender or relationship diversity is perverse or fundamentally wrong, then of course you will view teaching children about it as inappropriate, mature or as sexualization.

And that is why despite their efforts to portray this as an altruistic, reasonable effort to simply preserve parental rights and to protect children from mature or inappropriate content, I have difficulty seeing beyond the prejudice and discrimination. Combine that with the awful words and actions I have witnessed, and it really just looks like hate. ■

Issues of safety are nuanced and complex



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

Question: My principal told me to remove the "Safe Space" sticker I have on my classroom door and to put away the Pride flag I have pinned to the bulletin board behind my desk. I am very upset by this direction, as I think it undermines my efforts to welcome all students. What can I do?

Answer: I promise to answer your question, but before I do, I think it's useful to consider the context in which this issue has arisen.

Public schools in Alberta and, indeed, across North America, seem to have been dragged into an emerging "culture war," ginned up by individuals and groups advancing inflammatory claims that teachers are "grooming" children and indoctrinating them to adopt diverse relationships and gender identities. This is, of course, nonsense. But it is dangerous nonsense that is intended to suppress non-cis expressions of gender identity among students, teachers and the general public, and, specifically, to demonize teachers and public education. It places at real risk the safety and security of 2SLGBTQIA+ students and staff. I'll note that there seems to be a fairly straight line between these recent protests, the "Freedom Convoy" and the earlier "Yellow Vest" movement, all being in the service of a broader,

social conservative, agenda. Recently, we got to see some of this close up at a protest staged outside Barnett House, the Association office building in Edmonton.

Framing their protest as a call to protect "parents' rights," the immediate objective of these people is to require teachers to unilaterally disclose any indication made by a student that they may not accept the conventional gender role and identity attributed to them by their parents. It seems to me that if a parent is unaware of their child's emerging sexual and gender identity, and the child is unwilling to disclose this on their own initiative, that suggests there may be other complicating factors in play, possibly including matters of culture, religion and family dynamics. This then creates, at minimum, a moral and professional obligation on the part of the teacher to refrain from any action that might put the student's safety and security at risk, including involving parents or caregivers without the explicit consent of the student. Instead, the role of the teacher is to support the student and assist them to navigate the challenges they are facing.

A second objective of the protesters is to eliminate instruction around human sexuality, particularly any mention of gender diversity, in schools even and especially where this is included in the program of studies.

Now, no one will deny that parents have a moral right to be informed about their child's progress in school and about social, emotional, behavioural and wellness issues that might emerge from time to time. Parents, however, must recognize that, like all rights, their

right to be informed is not absolute and that students also have a superseding Charter right to security of their person that must be respected.

An attempt to balance these rights and interests is reflected in the legislation governing Alberta schools. Section 33(1)(d) of the *Education Act* explicitly imposes on the province's public, Catholic and francophone school boards an obligation to provide all students and school staff "a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and creates a sense of belonging." Boards are also required in Section 33(2) and (3) to establish policy and a code of conduct to achieve this and that explicitly references prohibited grounds of discrimination as set out in the *Alberta Human Rights Act*. Among these grounds are gender, gender identity and gender expression.

Section 35 further imposes upon principals an obligation to establish, upon the request of a student or staff member, a voluntary student organization to promote a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment, with explicit recognition of the students' right to establish and participate in a gay-straight alliance or queer-straight alliance.

With respect to the rights of parents, Section 58.1 of the *Education Act* establishes the responsibility of the board to "provide notice to a parent of a student where courses, programs of study or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality" and requires the teacher,

upon written request from their parent, to exclude a student from such instruction without academic penalty. It is made clear that these provisions do not apply to "incidental or indirect references to religion, religious themes or human sexuality in a course, program of study, instruction or exercises or in the use of instructional materials." The existence of these provisions cuts against the argument of those who claim that their children are being subjected to "sex education" against the wishes of the parent.

Respectful conversation

With all that by way of prologue, let me turn to your specific question.

I believe the first thing to do in this difficult situation is to have a respectful conversation with your principal to ensure that you understand what they are asking of you and why, and to communicate your own position and concerns. Principals are acutely aware that their schools operate within the larger community and, given the heat being generated around this issue, they may believe the display of such symbols and signage is counterproductive to creating a safe school environment. I'm not saying that this is necessarily correct, but we must recognize the reality that what might be safe and acceptable in one school community may not be in others. Perhaps the conversation will lead to greater appreciation on both sides and, ideally, to a consensus solution.

It is reasonable to ask how the direction being given aligns with the

Q&A continued on page 3



Let's work together toward something better



VIEWPOINTS

Jason Schilling
ATA President

Hate is a strong word. I was raised to avoid the word and rarely use it unless I am talking about mushrooms. On Wednesday, Sept. 20, hate was dramatically personified across the street from the ATA offices in Edmonton. When I reflect on my 27 years in education, I can say without exaggeration that witnessing the protest was one of my worst days as a teacher.

Having been there in person, I will say this protest was not about considering anyone's position. It was not seeking to gain an understanding of what is happening in Alberta classrooms. Nor were the people in attendance interested in having a discussion.

Later that afternoon, I was on the CBC talking about what I had witnessed. The CBC also played clips from the organizer of the protest in Edmonton, who said that the protesters were coming from a place of love and that they wanted healthy boundaries. What I witnessed was not love. It was hatred, pure and simple. The whole event was yelling, swearing, giving people the middle finger, "F" Trudeau flags, mandate freedom flags and a bunch of

other nonsense that had nothing to do with what the organizers said this protest was supposed to be about.

There was no display of respect for basic human rights. It was bigotry toward the 2SLGBTQ+ community. It was wishing a segment of our humanity did not exist and putting those wishes on a protest sign. It was taking this noise and hatred on a march past several schools where students were learning.

Colleagues, bigotry and hatred cannot be left unchallenged.

On Sept. 20, the ATA issued a statement opposing this hatred toward marginalized individuals and the 2SLGBTQ+ community. The statement was strongly worded, and I have received some criticism for that, but I will not apologize for it. We must continue to call out hate when we see and hear it. I believe in standing up for what I value and for what is right. It's how I was raised.

So now what? There are lessons to be learned here. We are teachers, after all, and it all starts with a conversation. There are many parents who have legitimate questions about school and

education. We need to encourage them to seek understanding, not through social media, but by contacting their schools and their children's teachers. We need to work within our communities to help dispel the misinformation and lies about what is happening in our classrooms. What is being spread in certain circles is not the reality of today's classrooms.

We need to share our stories about the needs of our students, but also the successes, to ensure they have the best possible education in a safe and caring atmosphere. For some, school is the safest place for them. We must safeguard that for all our students.

We all deserve to work in a school environment that is safe and caring. Our students, especially those who are marginalized, deserve the same thing. Further to that, we also all deserve respect, and to see our diverse, vibrant lives reflected and celebrated in the places we work and learn.

Sept. 20 was a hard day for many people. I still get emotional when I think about it. However, we are not without hope. Across Canada we saw thousands who stood up in support for the 2SLGBTQ+ community. Hope comes from working together toward something better and brighter, and after the darkness of Sept. 20, I would emphasize the word *together*. ■

See pages 6 and 7 for more protest coverage.

In all of this, it is imperative that teachers recognize and act upon their overarching professional duty to ensure the safety and well-being of the students in their care. In doing so, teachers should be respected and supported by elected leaders and the larger community. ■

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

Q&A

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board's policy and code of conduct, which, in turn, must meet the legislated requirements I have previously described. Again, bringing the discussion back to board policy creates a structure for determining a course forward that is consistent with clearly established principles established

by elected trustees. This, then, invites the question, is the direction being provided intended to guide the teacher's own professional judgment, or is it intended to be a lawful order of the board that the teacher must obey?

These are nuanced and complex considerations. If the problem cannot be resolved among the parties, I would encourage both you and your principal to contact the Association for further information and guidance.



YOUR VIEWS

FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

On the ATA's SOGI statement

Cindy Blinston

Thank you, teachers, for working so hard to create safe and inclusive spaces for all students.

Robin Stevenson

Thank you for standing up for inclusive schools and for the rights and well-being of all your students! As an author who often visits schools and talks to LGBTQ+ students, I know how important this is and I am so glad to see you take a strong stand.

Stasia Uhlmann

Yes! For all my 2SLGBTQ+ students who live with nearly daily bullying, who don't feel safe in their schools, their communities, and sometimes their homes. The ones who put on a brave face and tell me "it's okay." For them we must be strong and never give up, and never give in.

Heather Morigeau

Thank you for making space for 2SLGBTQIA students to feel safe and wanted. I never did as a kid and I'm glad that's all changing.

On the ATA's support for education workers' Paint AB Purple campaign

Randi Lee Armstrong Stecyk

Thank you to the ATA for supporting support staff. We work together to benefit students, as a team.

ON X

On World Teachers' Day

Demetrios Nicolaidis @demetriosnAB

Thank you #AlbertaTeachers! Today and every day, your hard work is appreciated across the province. #WorldTeachersDay is an opportunity to celebrate the thousands of dedicated educators who make a tremendous impact in classrooms across Alberta. Teachers inspire, motivate, and change lives as they prepare students for success—inside and outside of the classroom.

Justin Trudeau @JustinTrudeau

Teachers do so much more than deliver lessons. They counsel. They coach. They mentor. And they challenge students to explore, to question, and to learn. For all that they do, I want to say thank you—from one teacher to another. Happy #WorldTeachersDay!

ASBA @ABSchoolBoards

Today on World Teachers' Day, ASBA extends our thanks to all Alberta's teachers for their passion, dedication and leadership in supporting student success!

Alberta Retired Teachers' Association

@ARTABenefits

Saluting the heroes of education on #WorldTeachersDay! Your commitment to nurturing young minds and igniting curiosity is awe-inspiring. Thank you for being the guiding lights in our educational journey!

FOR THE RECORD

“ We will drive this toxic ideology out of our schools if we have to fire every principal in the province to do it. ”

— David Parker, leader of Take Back Alberta, speaking about sexual orientation and gender identity in schools during a demonstration in Calgary on Sept. 20

Local bargaining hits the halfway point

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

With only a year left in teachers' four-year collective agreements, nearly half of ATA bargaining units are still engaged in local negotiations.

Local bargaining couldn't begin until the last school year after central bargaining faced delays related to the pandemic, and then arbitration to determine which matters to negotiate centrally versus locally. After the first year of bargaining local agreements, 36 units have now settled, with 25 remaining.

ATA's chief negotiator Sean Brown is not worried about the pace of bargaining, so far.

"We are on track, similar to past rounds," says Brown, the ATA's associate coordinator for collective bargaining. "Our initial settlements have been more challenging than expected in our first 20 units. We already have several units in mediation, which has not been the typical experience for the first settlements in the past."

Units that have settled so far have been able to secure meaningful improvements for teachers, including long service incentives, professional development gains and advancements for substitute teachers and administrators. Big-ticket items like salary, benefits and high-profile working conditions are not being bargained at local tables, since they were bargained centrally.

Brown says there will be some school divisions where local bargaining will encounter difficulties.

"In some units there are a lot of discussions around the level of respect felt by teachers from their employers," says Brown. "Where respect is a concern, it is much more difficult to reach a settlement."

Calgary Catholic teachers authorize strike vote

Teachers with Calgary Catholic School Division voted 97 per cent in favour of authorizing a government-supervised strike vote at the end of June. Actions by the employer there also resulted in a complaint of unfair labour practice to the Alberta Labour Relations Board.

"Calgary Catholic teachers are frustrated by the stubbornness and lack of respect shown by the employer during this round of bargaining," said Calgary Catholic Teachers' Local president Allison McCaffrey, at the time of the vote.

Since the summer, negotiations resumed in Calgary Catholic, and a strike will likely be averted as the third-party mediator has written recommended terms of settlement. In mid-October teachers and the board will vote on the recommendations, which, if approved, will form an agreement.

"Ultimately, our teachers wanted to be respected at the bargaining table, and they wanted to be treated fairly relative to the rest of the province," said McCaffrey.



BARGAINING

We are ATA

The Alberta Teachers' Association

Calgary Catholic won't be the only sticky point, Brown says. Despite this, he is hopeful that local bargaining could conclude in all 61 school divisions by spring.

"As the process proceeds, members will get updates from their local bargaining committees. I would encourage everyone to reach out to their Teacher Welfare Committee representative or their school rep for more information."

Central and local bargaining will overlap in some areas

Teachers' current collective agreements are set to expire on Aug. 31, 2024, so Brown and his team will also be preparing for the next round of central table bargaining. Beginning in January, the first phase of bargaining will involve the ATA and government/school board representatives discussing which matters will be bargained centrally and which will be bargained locally in the next round.

"We are actively in the planning phase right now," says Brown. A survey has been sent to teacher welfare committees asking for input on the list

bargaining phase. But this work must be done simultaneously with the wrap-up of local bargaining.

"This is the fourth round of central bargaining since the process changed in the winter of 2016, and each time, there have been challenges around the simultaneous bargaining at the local and central tables," says Brown. "Understandably, this process can confuse members since the next round seems to start as soon as one round is completed. It has felt like perpetual bargaining since the 2016-18 round."

"We will do our best to differentiate our communication to not conflate the two different rounds, but it will be important for members to engage in both," says Brown.

Brown says he has been at some tables where employers believe that teachers received enough improvements at the central table. As a result, local bargainers are struggling to get employers to make moves to address the local concerns raised by teachers.

"If an employer is unwilling to make changes or additions to local provisions, then local teachers will need to decide what they are willing to do to effect change." ■

ORANGE SHIRT DAY

Teachers, school leaders and students throughout the province showed their support for reconciliation by donning orange shirts on Sept. 30.



Members of Edmonton Public Teachers No. 37

WENDY O'BRIEN



Students and staff from Isabel Campbell Public School in Grande Prairie

SUPPLIED

Your pension, your choice

UCP government seeks input on Alberta Pension Plan

Lindsay Yakimyshyn
ATA News staff

Would the Alberta Pension Plan (APP) benefit you? The premier says so, but others aren't so sure.

The Alberta government recently released a report that outlines the opportunities and risks of Alberta withdrawing from the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) to start a provincial plan.

"This report shows a made-in-Alberta pension plan could put more money in the pockets of hard-working families and business owners and improve retirement security for seniors," said Premier Danielle Smith in the press release.

The messaging emphasizes the positives for Albertans: more stability, larger pension benefits for seniors, bigger paycheques, savings for businesses, portability and Alberta-centric gains. These possibilities, however, are rooted in estimates and assumptions that are being questioned.

Critics suggest that these estimates and benefits are built on a faulty premise — namely, that Alberta would be entitled to a \$334 billion asset transfer from the CPP in 2027. The calculation is an interpretation of what Alberta is owed given Albertans' contributions, which have historically exceeded the pension benefits paid to Albertans. At the same time, this amount represents more than half of the CPP's current value, leaving some to question the math.

"Claiming that Alberta can withdraw over half of the CPP fund is laughable," said Brad Lafortune, executive director of Public Interest Alberta, in a statement. "This politically motivated report is classic 'decision-based evidence-making.'"



The report, as well as messaging from the provincial government, clearly states that the APP would provide benefits comparable to the CPP. In fact, it would be obligated to under the CPP Act. However, whether an APP would put more money in Albertans' pockets remains to be seen.

"There are too many questions, too many unknowns," said ATA president Jason Schilling, "If this was an assignment, I'd hand it back to the student to fill in the gaps."

How would an APP affect teachers?

Pensions have been a heated topic for teachers in recent years, particularly following the 2019 passage of Bill 22, Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act, which handed over responsibility for investment

management of public sector pensions — including the Teachers' Pension Plan (TPP) — to Crown corporation Alberta Investment Management Corporation (AIMCo). That move was made without consulting teachers.

"Trust is a factor," said Schilling. "Does the government have our best interests at heart?"

It would take time to unpack the potential impacts of a transition to an APP on working and retired Albertans, including teachers, Schilling said. He noted that it's important for teachers to remember that their ATRF pension plan is in addition to the CPP and would be unaffected by a shift to an APP.

The CPP is an important facet of teachers' retirement income. Teachers contribute to the CPP and receive payments just like other workers in the province, and so they also have a stake in what comes next.

Time to be heard

A move to an APP is not definite. Now that the APP report has been released, Alberta's current and retired teachers, among other Albertans, have a chance to be heard. While teachers were not consulted about their TPP in 2019, they can now share their voice through the province's engagement and consultation process.

"We want to hear from you because it's your pension, your choice," Smith said.

An online survey on the APP is live, and an engagement panel will begin hosting engagement sessions in October. Criticizing the government's survey as biased—as it does not ask whether respondents support the notion of an APP—the New Democratic Party (NDP) also launched a survey to gain insight into Albertans' perspectives on the pension plan.

Schilling encourages all teachers to raise their questions on the APP, whether through these surveys or to their MLAs.

"Teachers need to use their voice in this process," Schilling said. "This is something that affects us all." ■

COMPETING PENSION SURVEYS

The government's survey is available at survey.alberta.ca.

The NDP's survey is found at albertasfuture.ca.

CTF/FCE CORNER

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www.ctf-fce.ca



Three education unions share CTF award

Education unions in Burkina Faso, The Gambia and Uganda are joint recipients of the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE) Norm Goble WTD Award.

Created in 2014, the Norm Goble Award is offered annually to support the World Teachers' Day (WTD) initiatives of various CTF/FCE foreign partners. Below are this year's winners:

- The Gambia Teachers' Union (GTU)
- Le Syndicat national de enseignants du secondaire et du supérieur (SNESS – Burkina Faso)
- The Uganda National Teachers' Union (UNATU)

These organizations proposed various activities to highlight the teaching profession in their country and communities on WTD.

One criterion of the award is that plans relate to the CTF/FCE 2023 WTD theme: "Teachers: making sense of our world." The CTF/FCE will provide each of these national teacher organizations with C\$1,500 to support their WTD activities.

Word Teachers' Day activities planned in Burkina Faso, The Gambia and Uganda

The SNESS hosted a public conference in Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, to highlight teachers and the important role they play in the nation's current struggles against violent extremism and ongoing insecurity. The conference underscored how the teaching profession will continue to adapt its practices to foster critical thinking skills, to further engage parents and communities to respond to urgent needs, and to sharpen its focus on inclusive education.

The GTU organized and hosted radio programs in seven regions throughout The Gambia to celebrate teachers, advocate for quality, equitable, publicly funded education and better working conditions, to establish an environment more conducive to teaching and learning. They also held tree planting activities in four regions to raise awareness about the importance of trees and their role in maintaining an ecological balance, to combat pollution and to provide climate change mitigation. The GTU aims to raise awareness about the role teachers play in shaping the future, and

to honour the teaching profession while ensuring that teachers receive credibility, respect and recognition for the work they do.

In Uganda, the UNATU held a national celebration to advocate for increased access to mental health and psychosocial support for teachers. Events included a media campaign, and television and radio talk shows to complement annual weeklong "Appreciate My Teacher" events that began in 2021, involving teachers, students, ministry officials, community members and various stakeholders.

The CTF/FCE WTD award is named after Dr. Norman Goble, who served as the CTF/FCE secretary general from 1970 to 1982, and the general secretary of the World Confederation of Organizations of the Teaching Profession from 1982 to 1988. Among many other accomplishments, Dr. Goble is credited for his work to create WTD.

Oct. 5 was selected as the date to celebrate teachers because on that same date in 1966, a special intergovernmental conference adopted the UNESCO recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers. In adopting this recommendation, governments unanimously recognized the importance for society to have competent, qualified and motivated teachers. ■



YUET CHAN



KIM CLEMENT

More than 1,000 protesters and counter-protesters gathered outside the ATA's Edmonton headquarters on Sept. 20 to voice their opinions about sexual orientation and gender identity in schools.

ATA Pride flag destroyed by protesters

Teachers' building the site of boisterous Edmonton demonstration

Cory Hare
ATA News Managing Editor

Protesters who gathered to voice their displeasure about sexual orientation and gender identity in schools removed and destroyed a Pride flag that had been affixed to the side of the parkade at the Alberta Teachers' Association headquarters in Edmonton.

As part of an orchestrated, nationwide effort dubbed by organizers as the 1 Million March for Children, more than 1,000 protesters gathered outside the Edmonton ATA headquarters on Sept. 20. Hours after the protesters had concluded their demonstration and march around the neighbourhood, and most of the protesters had left the area, Association staff witnessed a small group of individuals running away from the ATA's parkade dragging along the Association's 20-foot long Pride flag, which had been affixed to the parkade. The perpetrators ripped the flag apart, stomped on it, then threw it in the garbage.

The following week the Edmonton Police Service posted a news release seeking information about two suspects in the "mischief incident believed to be hate-motivated." No further information was available as of press time.

Competing messages

The protest attracted hundreds of counter-protesters. Separated by

dozens of police officers, the two groups occupied opposite street corners and spent upwards of two hours engaging in sign waving, shouting matches (even some shoving) and, in the case of the protesters, amplified speeches. The scene elicited horn honking from passing motorists and backed up traffic as participants spilled over into the driving lanes.

Protest signs included messages such as "Let our children stay innocent," "Education not indoctrination" and "Uphold parental rights." Counter-protest messages included "Protect our trans children," "Don't be your child's first bully" and "Keep hate out of schools."

Protest co-ordinator Benita Pedersen emphasized the protesters' message about parental rights.

"What we need the schools to do, again, is respect the preferences of the parents," she said.

Counter-protest organizer Julia Clifford expressed regret that such a protest could be happening in this day and age.

"It breaks my heart that we are still, in 2023, fighting for all our children to be honestly truly who they are."

Nationwide protest

Organized by the groups Family Freedom and Hands Off Our Kids, similar protests took place in dozens of communities across the country.

In Calgary, 2SLGBTQ+ advocate Reanna Teske commented that protesters and counter-protesters had similar messaging.

"Maybe they have a different definition of what love and support is, because obviously we're both screaming 'leave our kids alone' and that's why I really think that it's misinformation, and we really have to challenge that."

Most protests across the country took place at or near government buildings. The Edmonton protest was different in that it targeted the headquarters of the provincial teachers' organization. Veteran ATA staffers recalled that the last time the Association was the target of a protest was in 2002 during a provincewide teachers' strike.

ATA president Jason Schilling described the Sept. 20 protest as an example of homophobia and transphobia.

"Using parental consent as camouflage, this rally was part of a co-ordinated strike across North America to promote misinformation, intolerance and hate toward the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, as well as toward teachers, who work to protect the safety and well-being of all students," Schilling said in a statement.

"We must demonstrate collective and unwavering support to keep schools safe for all kids." ■

Peeling back the curtain of the 1 Million March for Children

A Q&A with political scientist Duane Bratt, Mount Royal University, Calgary

Is populism an appropriate term to describe the actions and messages of 1 Million March organizers and Take Back Alberta?

While populism is often seen in economic terms, a broader definition would see the 1 Million March as a populist movement.

What are the defining characteristics of populism?

Populism is a perspective that advocates putting power in the hands of the people rather than the elites who control politics and society. It focuses on the differences between two homogenous and antagonistic groups, the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite." Elites mean something different to different people. In this case, teachers, principals and the "left" are the elites.

What is behind terms like "parental rights"?

It is code. Who can be opposed to parental rights? It is really an attack on the 2SLGBTQ+ community.

How can populism be effectively countered?

It can be difficult. Populism divides society and creates "good" and "evil" — offering simplistic solutions. It can be countered through truth and evidence (which in a world of misinformation and alternative facts is tough), standing up for the rights of minorities and withstanding pressure from a small and vocal group.

David Parker speaks out

Take Back Alberta sets sights on superintendents and principals

ATA News Staff

Take Back Alberta bills itself as a grassroots organization that is aiming to take political power away from the ruling elite that "have taken advantage of everyday people."

Leader David Parker was involved in organizing the Calgary 1 Million March for Children. Here is a portion of a speech he delivered during the protest on Sept. 20.

"I tell you this: give me 10,000 people who are willing to sacrifice their time and we will take back all of Alberta. We will drive this toxic ideology out of our schools if we have to fire every principal in the province to do it. We will drive them out of our school administrations. We will drive them out of our bureaucracy and we will not do it violently. We will do it with democracy."

Parker says his organization intends to take over the UCP board at the party's upcoming convention and also has its

sights set on the municipal elections of 2025, during which it intends to populate Alberta school boards with its own candidates. ■





Discussing sexual orientation and gender diversity in schools – Q&A

What do I do if administrators, colleagues or parents feel strongly that we should not be discussing sexual orientation and/or gender diversity?

Remind them about the professional, ethical and legal responsibilities of Alberta teachers to ensure that all classrooms and schools are safe, caring and inclusive environments for all students regardless of differences. All school administrators and teachers have a professional obligation to become knowledgeable and informed about sexual minority educational issues.

What if people say that I am advocating a homosexual agenda by discussing these issues?

Administrators and teachers who address sexual minority educational issues are not advocating or promoting a homosexual agenda. They are

creating a safe, caring and inclusive environment in which all students and their families can expect to be treated with dignity and respect.

What do I do if parents complain about the inclusion of SOGI issues in our school?

School administrators should consider holding an information session for parents to explain the nature and purpose of these sexual minority educational initiatives. This information is designed as a part of ongoing teacher professional development initiatives that emphasize the importance of creating safe, caring and inclusive learning environments for all students. As professionals, teachers have an obligation to meet the needs of their students. These needs include the concerns of sexual minority students and their families. ■

Source: *Prism Toolkit for Safe and Caring Discussions About Sexual and Gender Minorities*, <https://teachers.ab.ca/advocacy/diversity-equity-and-human-rights-dehr>

What is SOGI 1 2 3?

SOGI stands for sexual orientation and gender identity.

SOGI 1 2 3 is a program operated in B.C. and Alberta by the ARC Foundation, a Vancouver-based organization whose mission is to foster awareness, respect and capacity through SOGI-inclusive K-12 education.

The program helps educators make schools inclusive and safe for students of all sexual orientations and gender identities. In its fifth year in Alberta, SOGI 1 2 3 has six Edmonton-area divisions participating in the Alberta SOGI Educator Network, which provides teachers with resources to help them engage with students in a safe and inclusive manner.

The SOGI 1 2 3 website states “SOGI-inclusive education is about treating everyone with dignity and respect. All students need to see themselves

and their families reflected in lessons, language, and practices. Like other forms of inclusion in schools, the goal of SOGI-inclusive education is for everyone to understand the diverse society that we live in and to feel safe, valued, and respected.”

SOGI 1 2 3 provides ready-to-use, grade-appropriate SOGI-inclusive lesson plans that align with that curriculum. Teachers can adapt or adopt SOGI 1 2 3 lesson plans to meet the needs of their classrooms.

The program operates with support from the Alberta Teachers’ Association, the Stollery Charitable Foundation, the Edmonton Community Foundation and the Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Fund. ■

More information is available at <https://ab.sogieducation.org/>.

The Alberta Human Rights Act

The *Alberta Human Rights Act* prohibits discrimination on these grounds:

1. race
2. religious beliefs
3. colour
4. gender
5. gender identity
6. gender expression
7. physical disability
8. mental disability
9. age
10. ancestry
11. place of origin
12. marital status
13. source of income
14. family status
15. sexual orientation

The Education Act

Section 33 of the *Education Act* requires publicly funded school boards to provide students and staff with “a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and creates a sense of belonging.”

Section 58.1 of the *Education Act* requires that parents be provided with notice where courses of study, educational programs or instructional materials, or instruction or exercises, include subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality.

Where a parent makes a written request, a student shall be exempt, without academic penalty, from such instruction, course of study, educational program or use of instructional material.

ECS to Grade 12 Guide to Education, Alberta Education



Sign displayed by a counter-protester on Sept. 20.

Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers and Teacher Leaders

Alberta’s Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers and Teacher Leaders states, in part, that

1. In relation to students,
 - (a) the teacher or teacher leader shall respect the dignity and rights of all students and persons without prejudice as to the prohibited grounds of discrimination set out in the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and with regard to rights as provided for in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and be considerate of the circumstances of students and persons.
 - (b) the teacher or teacher leader is required to demonstrate a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and nurtures a sense of belonging, which students are entitled to under the Act.
 - (c) the teacher or teacher leader shall not
 - (i) intentionally harm or abuse a student verbally, psychologically or emotionally, or
 - (ii) harm or abuse a student physically or sexually.
2. In relation to parents of students, the teacher or teacher leader shall
 - (a) respect parents and be considerate of their circumstances,
 - (c) be respectful in communications with and about parents.

What does Alberta’s curriculum contain with respect to sexual orientation and gender diversity?

- In the final Physical Education and Wellness K–6 curriculum, the topic of puberty is first discussed in Grade 4. There are no specific references to 2SLGBTQ+.
- In the new social studies draft curriculum that is now being shared, there are outcomes focused generally on diversity and wellness. The areas of diversity mentioned are cultural, ethnic, religious and gender. One instance of gender diversity is found in the kindergarten curriculum.
- A thorough list of what topics are covered regarding human sexuality in which grades in Alberta curriculum can be accessed at teachingsexualhealth.ca.

Nancy Luyckfassel, ATA co-ordinator of Professional Development

Council prepares for a busy year

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Association administrative guidelines provide for the attendance of observers at selected portions of Council meetings. Association members who are interested in observing selected portions of Council meetings at their own expense are advised to contact their district representative.

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meetings held Aug. 14 at Banff and Aug. 22 to 23 via electronic mail.

1. Amended Council committee and representation assignments for 2023/24 and named field members to Association committees.

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held Sept. 14 and 15 at Barnett House, Edmonton.

1. Amended the Declaration of Rights and Responsibilities for Teachers by removing reference to the Association's code of professional conduct and replacing it with the Government of Alberta's code of professional conduct for teachers and teacher leaders.

2. Approved the final form of four electoral ballots proposed by local associations and one Council-sponsored electoral ballot for distribution to the membership.

3. Approved a statement of Association program emphases for 2023/24.

4. Authorized disbursement of the 2023/24 international co-operation budget for international goals, including Project Overseas, Change for Children PD by Alberta Teachers, Tools for Schools Africa Foundation and Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan.

5. Approved a \$2,000 donation to MediaSmarts in support of Media Literacy Week, taking place Oct. 23 to 27.

6. Purchased a table of eight for the Friends of Medicare Fundraising Gala, taking place on Oct. 25.

7. Directed the Resolutions Committee to review Association policy to ensure policy related to 2SLGBTQIA issues is appropriately reflected and strengthened where needed.

8. Directed staff to collect and report to Council information on policies, procedures and practices relating to current and past dangerous behaviours exhibited by students in their care and implications for safety of staff and students.

9. Approved the name of one teacher for inclusion in the name bank from which Association instructors are selected and approved the names of four teachers for inclusion in the name bank

from which professional development facilitators are selected.

10. Received the report of a hearing committee that found a teacher guilty of four counts of unprofessional conduct for exposing students to risk of injury by placing them on a raised automobile hoist for purposes of a group photograph; for transporting students in the open box of a pickup truck, thereby placing them at risk of injury and contravening Alberta traffic laws; for attending and participating in a protest rally in a manner that failed to uphold the dignity of the profession; and for maintaining relationships with students that failed to respect the boundaries of a teacher-student professional relationship. The hearing committee imposed a penalty of fines totalling \$2,250 and a letter of severe reprimand. Received the report of a professional conduct appeal committee (PCAC) on the decision of a hearing committee of the professional conduct committee (PCC) that found a teacher guilty of three charges of unprofessional conduct. The PCAC found the decision made by the PCC hearing committee on guilt and penalty on one of the charges to be reasonable and, as a result, the appeal on that charge was denied. The PCAC further found the decision made by the PCC hearing committee on guilt and penalty on the other two charges not to be reasonable or sustainable and found that they contained errors in principle. As a result, the appeal of the two charges was allowed and the findings and orders of the PCC hearing committee were quashed with regard to those charges.

11. Amended the administrative guidelines relating to procedures for known, extended and approved absences of district representatives and directed table officers to consider guidelines for extended absences of vice-presidents for Council's consideration.

12. Approved, as the position of Council, recommendations on the six-year review of policy (as amended) and authorized that locals be informed accordingly.

13. Approved, for submission to the 2024 Annual Representative Assembly, the proposed Disposition of Immediate Directives.

14. Approved four executive resolutions for submission to the 2024 Annual Representative Assembly.

15. Approved proposed timelines and appointed Council members to a selection committee for the recruitment of the position of executive staff officer, Teacher Employment Services.

16. Amended the Standard Local and Sublocal constitutions and the Standard Student Local Constitution to include implementation to give force and effect to the Human Rights Statement.

17. Named field members to field experiences committees and amended the Resolutions Committee frame of reference. ■



Are you interested in facilitating Indigenous education workshops?

BECOME AN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION PD FACILITATOR!

The Alberta Teachers' Association is seeking outstanding classroom teachers representing all grade levels and subject areas from across the province. The three-year appointments for these assignments will begin in the 2023/24 school year.

The application process has two parts:

1. Provide a letter of interest, including the following:
 - Areas of interest and expertise in Indigenous education
 - Experience leading professional development
 - Reasons for applying
2. Provide a resumé outlining education, work experience, leadership experience, publications, presentations and volunteer experience.

Successful candidates are expected to deliver 7–10 workshops per year and are required to attend two training sessions per year. The Association covers release time and associated expenses and provides an honorarium for workshops delivered.

As a courtesy, please advise your superintendent and principal that you will be applying prior to doing so. All applicants must be active or associate members of the ATA, have at least five years of teaching experience and hold an Alberta teaching certificate.

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS OCTOBER 18, 2023.

Send your letter of interest and resumé to Indigenous education, Alberta Teachers' Association, 11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton AB, T5N 2R1 or e-mail information to walkingtogether@ata.ab.ca.

In making application to become a Indigenous Education PD facilitator for the Alberta Teachers' Association, you are voluntarily providing your personal information to the ATA. Visit the ATA website for more information.



The Alberta Teachers' Association

PD-WT-36 2023 07

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ARTA can help.

It's important to have a financial plan in retirement, and while it's best to start early, it's never too late to put one in place.

The Alberta Retired Teachers' Association can help by sharing valuable resources on **pensions, TFSAs, estate planning,** and more.

Visit our website to get started, and **build confidence in your finances** as you approach your retirement.

bit.ly/RetirementWellness

arta.net



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conted.ucalgary.ca

CALLING ALL FIELD MEMBERS

Contribute your voice to the Women in Leadership Committee

Apply online now! This committee has one vacancy for a field member. The complete application information is available in the Volunteer section of the ATA website.

If you have any questions, please contact Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca, 780-447-9425 or 1-800-232-7208.

 The Alberta Teachers' Association

Application
Deadline:

OCT 18



Volunteer for Project Overseas WITH CTF IN THE SUMMER OF 2024

CTF needs English- and French-speaking Canadian teachers at the primary, elementary and secondary levels who are interested in volunteering to offer services in a wide range of subjects in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Each year, about 50 Canadian teachers are chosen to volunteer on CTF's Project Overseas. Based on requests from CTF's partners overseas, teams of Canadian teachers are formed in January and inservice projects take place in July and August.

CTF follows strict guidelines pertaining to Project Overseas participant safety and project location.

For more information and to apply, visit the ATA website (www.teachers.ab.ca) under Professional Development > International Opportunities.

If you have questions, contact internationalcoop@ata.ab.ca.

Application deadline:
November 15, 2023.



Project Overseas
Teachers Reaching Teachers



October 5
is World Teachers' Day.

You and your favourite Alberta teacher can win amazing prizes!


To celebrate, send us a 60-second video sharing how an Alberta teacher inspired you. You'll be entered to win one of 25 \$100 Visa gift cards.

Your Alberta teacher will be entered to win one of three vouchers for either **airfare** or the **Apple Store valued at \$3,000!**



Scan the QR code to make your video submission. Send your video by **October 16** to be eligible.

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 The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Dr. Randy Poon, Optometrist



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EEP-T-27a 2022.05

Virtual and in-person short-term exchanges for teachers and school leaders.

Visit teachers.ab.ca, search "teacher exchange" for applications and details.



THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE

ATA Science Council Conference #ATASC2023

November 2-4, 2023 @ the Coast Canmore Hotel & Conference Centre



L.EAD.ME/ATASC2023



Cultivate community service & food literacy!

Join AMA's new School Garden Studio! This fall, be among the first to pilot our tools, curriculum resources, and community connections—all curated to create experiential learning opportunities rooted in sustainability, citizenship, and food security lessons.

If you're a junior high teacher who would like to join the pilot, email robyn.couture@ama.ab.ca and start planting the seeds for a greener future.



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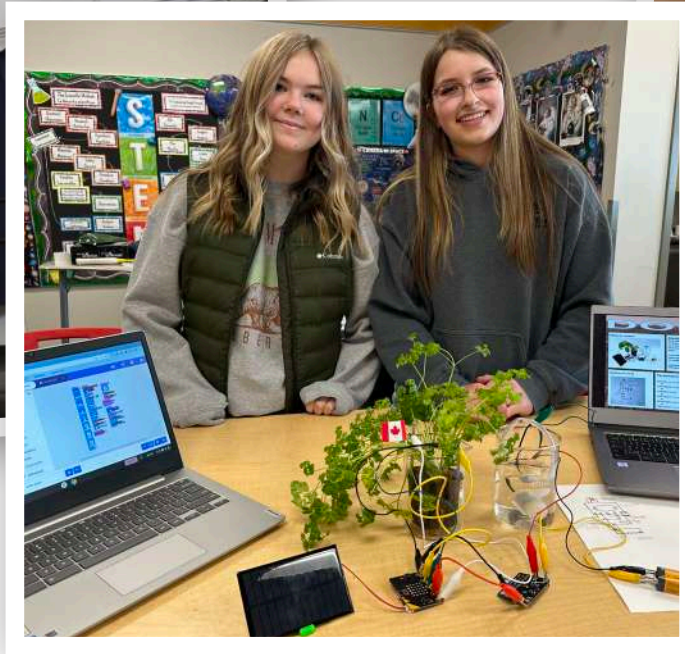
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TALENT

October 10, 2023 | Volume 58, Number 3



The ATA is seeking photos from teachers for its upcoming sponsorship of CTV's weekday weather forecasts.



SUPPLIED

Do you have a photo that shows something great happening in your classroom? Let's share it with Albertans!

Each year the ATA sponsors the weekday morning weather forecasts on CTV Edmonton and CTV Calgary.

This year the theme is "Great things happening in Alberta's public schools," so the ATA is seeking striking images of students of different ages, as well as a variety of subjects and activities, indoors or outdoors. (Teachers may also be in the photos.)

Selected photos may be shown on air during CTV's weekday morning weather report.

The campaign will launch in the coming weeks, but submissions will be accepted throughout the school year. Please contact andrea.berg@ata.ab.ca to request the permission release forms. ■

PHOTOS WANTED!

Great things are happening in Alberta's public schools!

The Alberta Teachers' Association