

**Feature:** Women reflect on uplifting each other to carve new pathways forward.



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# ATA NEWS

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NANCY LUYCKFASSEL

Some of Alberta's newest teachers bring energy and enthusiasm to Beginning Teachers' Conference. [See more on page 4.](#)

## Class size matters

Majority of Albertans believe classes are too big.

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## Never enough subs

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## Sending a very strong message

Edmonton Public teachers authorize strike vote.

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## Will the premier be tied in knots?

UCP's AGM policy resolutions could pose a challenge for Smith.

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## A life-changing experience

Teachers share their Project Overseas experiences.

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## AGM outcomes could tie premier in knots



### EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer  
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

Most Albertans couldn't be bothered much by the goings on at a political party AGM. It probably sounds like a snooze fest to the less engaged.

But for the leaders of the political parties, AGM weekends can be angst-ridden.

Premiers Kenney, Redford, Stelmach and Klein have all had notable rough rides at AGMs that effectively led to their ousting. Similarly, Premiers Kenney and Notley have had to manage and then message embarrassing policy debates.

The United Conservative Party's upcoming AGM on Nov. 3-4 could bring fireworks. Smith is not up for a leadership review, but some policy resolutions could be difficult to manage.

The UCP is touting the event as one of the largest political conventions ever held in Canada. Expected turnout has skyrocketed into the thousands and organizers have had to change venues to house everyone.

But the reason for the high turnout may be the exact reason why this event could become Smith's quagmire.

Undoubtedly, numbers are being run up because of the work of the political advocacy group Take Back Alberta (TBA).

"For too long, Alberta's ruling elite have taken advantage of everyday people, thriving on political apathy, censoring those with the courage to speak out, and exploiting the power of big government to restrict our freedoms," says TBA's website.

"It's your province. Take it back."

TBA rose to prominence fighting against COVID lockdowns, mask mandates and vaccinations. They take credit for ousting Jason Kenney as leader and for electing Danielle Smith as the new leader. Last year they overwhelmed the UCP AGM and swept the board elections, taking over half of the board of director positions. This year they plan to sweep the rest.

The party's board of directors don't control the premier, but it has significant sway. If the policy debates don't bite Smith, managing the board afterwards might.

TBA is a divisive group and does

not enjoy unanimous support within the UCP—keep in mind that the votes on Kenney's and Smith's leadership essentially ended as 50-50 votes—but their ability to mobilize support is tremendous.

The lightning rod for TBA's controversy is its leader and founder David Parker. Here are some choice quotes and tweets from Parker:

- "Hate speech doesn't exist, it is a made up term to police YOUR speech. They want to control what you can or can not say. That's the beginning of any totalitarian nightmare."
- "Dear Leadership of Alberta Health Services: We are coming for you, and we will not rest until your evil communist ideology is eradicated from the face of this province."
- "We will drive this toxic ideology out of our schools if we have to fire every principal in the province to do it." (on Pride in schools)
- "The Red Deer County Catholic School Board will be replaced in the next municipal election. Every single trustee will be removed from office, except Monique. Then, we will fire the superintendent. This will happen

in every school board across this province until this woke ideology is eradicated from any decision making role in our schools." (on trustee Monique LaGrange)

- "Dear Public Educators: You work for us, earning our tax dollars, and if you keep up this indoctrination bulls\*\*\*. We will fire you."

The AGM is considering policy resolutions that would introduce school vouchers to fully fund private schools, expand conscience and thought rights, create a parents' bill of rights, ban school resources deemed to be sexual in nature, and restrict students from confidentially using different names or pronouns in schools.

Given the messaging and tone from the leadership of TBA, the results of votes on these issues are bound to create problems for Smith.

She will be sure to say that the board doesn't direct the actions of the government and that party policy positions are not automatically the position of the government.

But still, the outcomes will tie the premier in knots, and that will have an impact on how she governs. We will need to watch it carefully. ■

## Where have all the teachers gone?



### Q & A

Dennis Theobald  
ATA Executive Secretary

**Question:** My district is having difficulty filling advertised teaching positions, and there are never enough substitute teachers available to cover absences. What is the Association doing to address the teacher shortage?

**Answer:** Your experience is not unique, and it seems to be becoming more widespread. There were always challenges filling certain teaching assignments, especially in locations further removed from the major urban centers in the province, but now it seems that the problem is not only more severe and provincewide, but also one being experienced in other Canadian jurisdictions and even internationally. It is complex and multi-dimensional, and I am afraid there are no easy answers. But we can identify some factors that point to potential paths forward.

To begin with, what we may be experiencing is not so much a shortage of qualified teachers, but rather a shortage of teachers who are willing to continue working in the profession. Teachers' professional preparation and classroom experience equips them with a formidable array of knowledge and skills that can be applied to other

occupations. It's always been the case that a proportion of graduates from university education programs never enter the classroom and of those that do, a further proportion will leave after having taught for three to five years, never to return. These individuals are taking other career and life paths. It appears, though, that attrition rates seem to be increasing across all demographic groups, with more experienced teachers deciding to leave the classroom as well, contributing to the staffing challenges facing our schools today.

There are a variety of responses that may help attract new people to teaching and reduce the loss of experienced teachers, including the following:

- **Improving teacher compensation:** With teacher salaries having lost ground to inflation, improving teacher salaries would help make the job more attractive in comparison to possible alternatives. Of course, adjusting compensation is the classic solution to labour shortages in a market environment.
- **Improving classroom conditions:** Students' learning conditions are teachers' working conditions. Increases in class size and complexity are exacerbating existing conditions and imposing new demands on teachers, contributing to moral distress, reduced job satisfaction and the decision of some teachers to leave the profession.

- **Improving support for inclusion:** While teachers overwhelmingly support the principle of including students with diverse learning needs in an integrated classroom, a lack of sufficient support and assistance for teachers working with these students has been identified as a significant source of teacher dissatisfaction.
- **Respecting teacher professional judgment and autonomy:** Teachers are reporting that they are not being allowed to exercise their professional judgment and are being second-guessed when they do. This problem is being made worse by the politicization of education and the attempts of external interest groups to impose their own agendas on teachers' practice.
- **Increasing the focus on student learning and well-being:** Teachers do not teach subjects, they teach students and to do so successfully, students need to arrive at the classroom door healthy, well rested, fed, secure and ready to learn. Teachers cannot solve the systemic societal problems that impede student learning, but are still expected to deal with the consequences of those problems as visited in the classroom. Furthermore, teachers feel great satisfaction and joy when they can foster students' innate curiosity and love of learning, but too often they are saddled with excessive and overly prescriptive standardized curriculum

and assessment that actually get in the way of meaningful teaching and learning.

- **Attracting new recruits to the profession:** The teaching profession does not currently reflect the diversity of the province's population. Part of the problem is that teaching is not necessarily regarded as an attainable or perhaps desirable career option among some underrepresented groups. The profession must find ways to reach out to this potential source of new teachers.

- **Respecting teachers and the profession:** In recent years some provincial politicians, including former minister Adriana LaGrange, have systematically marginalized and denigrated the profession and the Association. Teachers have felt under constant attack and teacher morale has taken a beating.

The Association is working on all these issues though collective bargaining, policy, advocacy, outreach and public promotion and we will continue to do so going forward. The good news is that Minister Demetrios Nicolaidis and senior officials of Alberta Education have recognized teacher recruitment and retention as a critical issue and have begun working with the Association and other stakeholder organizations to seek solutions. It will not be an easy fix, but at least we now have some partners willing to work with us on it. ■





# YOUR VIEWS

## FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

### What fills your bucket?

Honestly...being part of committees and attending ARA. It's nice to be in the same room as like-minded folk, working toward the betterment of teachers lives. That's hugely cup-filling, motivating and inspiring.

**Jensen Evtuz**

I am a retired teacher, but I loved teaching (most of the time) and I still enjoy being involved with my grandchildren's classes. Children are my biggest sources of joy and motivation.

**Bruce Plante**

I just began teaching in a Life Skills program this year and I love going back to the very basics and teaching these students how to be independent adults in a few years. They are open, honest and kind with each other.

**Lorelei Gertz-Cummins**

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

“We are not pompom-wearing cheerleaders or advocates for the Alberta Pension Plan. We are asking Albertans what they think.”

– Jim Dinning, chair of the Alberta Pension Plan Report Engagement Panel, during an interview on CBC's *West of Centre*



# Five things you should know about the APP proposal



## VIEWPOINTS

**Michel Leduc**  
Global Head of Public Affairs and Communications, CPP Investments

There's a word for the proposal to pull Alberta out of the Canada Pension Plan (CPP) and build a smaller, from-scratch provincial pension plan.

The word is risky.

Teachers, of course, appreciate the importance of words. And of math. And of taking the time to learn about important issues like the security of our collective retirement income.

Albertans have every right to decide about future participation in the CPP. To do so requires additional information about the potential risks.

Accordingly, here are five things the more than 45,000 members of the Alberta Teachers' Association will want to know about the risks of breaking up the CPP:

### 1. Will contributions go down with the Alberta Pension Plan (APP)?

Not necessarily. A report commissioned by the government claims Alberta could leave with \$334 billion from the CPP— more than half the fund's overall value—to launch its new plan and keep premiums low. But that claim is based on calculations that no other CPP participant will accept. Most pension experts and academics have disagreed with the report's conclusions.

The actual amount Alberta might leave with will likely be unknown for many years and only after tough negotiations occur. Without a large asset

transfer, many of the purported advantages of an APP wither away and the risks increase, including demographic risk. Bottom line: don't count on premiums falling under an APP.

### 2. Do Albertans pay more and get less from the CPP?

No. Albertans pay precisely the same premiums and receive exactly the same benefits as people in every other province that pays into the CPP. Sometimes advocates of an APP say the CPP is a raw deal for Albertans. The truth is the CPP is the same deal for everyone, everywhere.

### 3. Could Alberta come back to the CPP after leaving?

The legislation governing the CPP does allow for a province to withdraw. Many of the terms of that departure are unstated and entirely subject to discussion with the other participating provinces and governments. But one thing is crystal clear: the legislation makes no provision for a province to return after withdrawal. Breaking up with the CPP is a divorce, not a trial separation.

### 4. Would an APP be portable with the CPP?

A new APP would have to be relatively harmonized with the CPP (same benefits for example) and any major differences between the plans could compromise portability.

The Alberta government would also have to convince other CPP-participating governments, as well as Quebec, to recognize its new plan and set up mutual systems to ensure everything works seamlessly. What would be the chances of that after Alberta threatens to take more than half of the CPP's accumulated value?

For a country like Canada, labour mobility is extremely important. If a teacher from Ontario, for example, spends years working in Alberta and paying contributions into an APP but then moves away, will their benefits be protected? Will there be an APP for them? Or a CPP waiting? These are profound risks that individuals would bear under Alberta's go-it-alone scheme. This decision not only affects Albertans, but every Canadian who has worked in Alberta and has pensionable earnings in the province dating back to the 1960s.

### 5. Is Alberta better off going it alone?

Clearly not. There is hardly a pension expert alive who believes leaving the CPP is the better option. Keep in mind what withdrawal would unleash—arguments over who owes what, the high costs of setting up and paying for a brand new bureaucracy and establishing a new pension plan with less size, less scale and more vulnerability to interference from politicians.

The CPP offers less risk and more reliability. The APP, on the other hand, is one giant question mark.

Alberta's teachers, like all Albertans, have a right to decide for themselves the best way to protect the security of their retirement income. But the debate that surrounds that decision should be open, honest and informed.

People will want to do their homework before deciding. And who knows more about homework than our teachers? ■

*Michel Leduc is the Global Head of Public Affairs and Communications for CPP Investments, leading the team responsible for the organization's overall communications program and global public affairs.*



# Edmonton Public teachers authorize strike vote

ATA News Staff

Teachers employed by the Edmonton School Division have voted 97 per cent in favour of authorizing the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) to request a government-supervised strike vote.

This action followed the rejection of a proposal by a third-party mediator to settle local negotiations in Edmonton Public. Teachers who gathered at the meeting held Oct. 22 voted 91 per cent in opposition to the mediator's recommendations.

"[The] turnout of support for the bargaining team sends a very strong message to the school division," said Heather Quinn, president of Edmonton Public Teachers' Local No 37, "When the board has the ability to improve

working conditions, like they do with online teachers, and refuses to do so, teachers feel undervalued. Last night our members indicated that we stand united with them."

“ [The] turnout of support for the bargaining team sends a very strong message to the school division. ”

Quinn said the mediator's recommendations were turned down because they did not offer enough improvement for teachers working in online learning or for those teaching

summer school and night school. The position of the school division to treat different types of teacher work as less valuable than others is seen by teachers as being quite disrespectful.

"The solutions required to get an agreement are not complicated and they are not expensive. This is about respect," Quinn added, "If the school division was willing to treat teachers fairly and with more respect for their work, we would have an agreement."



Heather Quinn, president of Edmonton Public Teachers' Local No 37

At this time, a strike vote is not being scheduled and could not be held until at least two weeks after the mediator "writes out" of the dispute. Despite a strike vote being authorized, both sides are hopeful that an agreement can be reached.

"While we do not comment about ongoing negotiations, we remain committed to working collaboratively with the teacher's bargaining committee to reach an agreement," said Veronica Jubinville, spokesperson for the school division.

Similarly, teachers are still hopeful for a negotiated settlement. Quinn said the votes provide a very strong mandate for teacher negotiators to go back to the bargaining table and to fight for further improvement for members. ■

# Thank you, colleagues, for re-filling my bucket



As a teacher, we all have those days where things just do not seem to go to plan. Usually they are Mondays, when you forget your materials at home, the photocopier jams and you spill your coffee. Normally, when I've had one of those days where everything seems to go wrong, my students and their desire to learn would help to turn the day around and remind me why I got into teaching in the first place. Thanks to them, my Monday scowl has been replaced with a smile (even if I still have coffee stains on my shirt).

While in my current role I don't have a classroom filled with students to help conquer my Monday Malaise, I now find renewed energy through my teaching colleagues across the province.

In the past few weeks, my bucket

was filled by attending the Beginning Teachers' Conference (BTC) in both Edmonton and Calgary and the Substitute Teachers' Conference (STC)—events brimming with enthusiasm for the work we do.

We all remember our first few years of teaching and how isolating those years can be when you are eyeball-deep in imposter syndrome. In my remarks to the BTC, I encouraged our newest members to connect with their colleagues, either in a formal or informal mentorship program. Teachers in their first years of practice have questions, need advice and could use a few tips on how to best navigate a jammed photocopier. So, I encourage my more "seasoned" colleagues to be there for our newest colleagues. Help foster that energy and creativity they bring to the profession.

The STC was another great opportunity for professional learning and connections. For me, the STC also was an opportunity to thank our substitute teacher colleagues for their support of classroom teachers when they are absent. Last year, Association research showed that the average student will spend the equivalent of one entire academic year with a substitute teacher by the time they graduate. Particularly given the substitute teacher shortages we have seen these last few years, it is important that we honour these professionals for the vital work they do.

You never know where you will find inspiration to get through the hard days. However, after a few tough weeks, I was reminded of why teaching is such a great profession. And I owe that all to you. ■

# Play to learn, learn to play

Research project on play-based curriculum nabs ATA Educational Research Award

Lindsay Yakimyshyn  
ATA News Staff

Dr. Robbin Gibb, full professor at the University of Lethbridge, has been awarded the 2023 ATA Educational Research Award for her project "Building Adolescent Executive Functioning Through a Play-Based Curriculum."

The ATA Educational Research Award is presented annually to an Alberta academic engaged in research directly related to school and classroom practice in the Alberta context. This year's award-winning project explores how play affects brain development during adolescence and whether introducing a play-based curriculum would help build adolescents' executive functions.

"One of the most effective ways to learn new things is through play," said Gibb, "It builds relationships between students and teachers as well—play to learn, but also learn to play."

The award panel, which included two ATA field members and a retired faculty of education professor, was impressed with Gibb's research project given its pedagogical implications and the tools that will be developed from the research. In particular, Gibb's research not only demonstrates the value of play in developing adolescents' executive functioning, but also seeks to identify interventions that Alberta teachers can easily access and implement in their classrooms.

"The research leads to practical recommendations for play-based curriculum for youth," the award panel noted, "This was seen as particularly important because play-based curriculum is not readily accessible for secondary school teachers and curriculum leaders."

With students' executive functions being critical to student success, this research study suggests that teachers can use play-based learning to both reach curricular outcomes and make students more excited about coming to school every day.

"It is my hope and ultimate desire to remind people that humans are built to play," Gibb said, "Not just in preschool and kindergarten but all the way through life." ■



Dr. Robbin Gibb

## Beginning Teachers' Conference

Our newest colleagues came together this fall at Beginning Teachers' conferences in Edmonton and Calgary for professional learning and networking.



One new teacher is all smiles at BTC.



ATA Professional Development staff team.



Participants give thumbs up for professional development.

PHOTOS: NANCY LUYCKFASSEL



# Class size issues top of mind for Albertans

Jonathan Teghtmeyer  
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

Class size was the most cited issue facing education in Alberta according to a recent poll conducted by the Alberta Teachers' Association. When asked what the top issues were in education, one in four responses cited class size.

The poll of 900 randomly selected Albertans also found that 72 per cent of Albertans believed that class sizes in Alberta's public schools were "too big," with 20 per cent saying that class sizes were "about right" and just two per cent believing that class sizes were "too small".

The survey, conducted by Janet Brown Opinion Research, was in the field from Aug. 11 to 28, 2023, before classes resumed for this school year and before several news articles came out citing significant increases in class sizes this fall.

"The proportion of Albertans who agree that class sizes are too large is the highest recorded since this question was first asked in 2012," said pollster Janet Brown. "It's also noteworthy that agreement that class sizes are too large is strong across all regions of the province, and among both parents of school-age children (74 per cent agree) and non-parents (71 per cent)."

Many school boards, particularly in urban and suburban areas, are experiencing significant enrolment growth this fall, within a funding model that doesn't fully fund enrolment growth until three years later. Edmonton Public Schools is estimating an increase of 5,000 more students in their school division, while Edmonton Catholic is expecting an increase of about 2,000 more students. Calgary Public and Catholic school divisions are expecting 7,000 and 2,000 additional students, respectively.

In a statement sent to media, the office of Education Minister Demetrios Nicolaides said this year's education budget increased by 5.2 per cent, including \$820 million earmarked to hire more than 3,000 teachers and education workers over the next three years.

"We are working hard to keep up with the enrolment pressure by increasing funding and building new schools," said Nicolaides in a statement to media. "My

mandate letter from Premier Smith calls upon me to continue to significantly expand school builds in our growing communities."

Critics are concerned, though, as school builds are years behind and the weighted moving average provides only 50 per cent of funding for new students in their first year of enrolment, transitioning to full funding only by year three.

"I expect we will have more than 20,000 additional students in schools this year, but schools will only be funded for 10,000 more—that's a lot of students that need to be taught without funding," said ATA president Jason Schilling. "The crisis of class size and complexity has existed for years, but we are still years away from solving it, unfortunately."

Anecdotally, many Alberta teachers are reporting class sizes in the mid-to-high 30s with a few reports of class sizes over 40. A report on class size from Edmonton Public School Board last school year showed that their largest elementary core subject class had 36 students in it, with an average of 3.5 students with special needs and 7.5 ESL students included. The largest junior high and high school core classes had 46 students enrolled. The report also showed that average elementary class sizes had grown by 7.5 per cent over the previous two years and secondary classes grew by nearly 5 per cent.

The publication of complete data on class sizes for all Alberta school divisions was discontinued by the government in 2019.

## Public education underfunded; charter schools overfunded

Despite viewing public education as being underfunded, Albertans perceived public schools to be of high quality.

Sixty-eight per cent of Albertans believe that the Alberta government is not spending enough on public education, compared to just four per cent of respondents who say the government is spending too much. For private schools, 29 per cent say too much is spent, compared to 13 per cent who say funding is not enough. For charter schools, the too-much-spending sentiment rises to 39 per cent.

When asked to grade the quality of schools on a scale of zero to 10, 53 per cent of respondents gave a

“Many school boards ... are experiencing significant enrolment growth ... within a funding model that doesn't fully fund enrolment growth until three years later.”

rating of seven or more to public schools. The average rating of 6.5 was on par with the 6.6 average rating given to the quality of private schools and a bit ahead of the 6.3 rating given to charter schools.

The survey responses also gave failing grades to the government's new elementary school curriculum. Albertans were asked whether they agreed that the proposed curriculum would provide students with the knowledge and skills they would need for success in life: 54 per cent of Albertans disagreed, including 33 per cent who strongly disagreed. Only 30 per cent agreed.

Overall, 53 per cent of Albertans said they disapproved (29 per cent strongly disapproved) of the government's handling of K-12 education, whereas 42 per cent said they approved of the government's performance in education.

Schilling says the polling helps to bolster the Association's messages and advocacy for improved classroom conditions.

"Albertans share the same concerns that teachers have about our education system," he said. "Public education is incredibly valued and respected, but it needs to be supported better."

"This polling shows me that our messaging has worked in the past and that as we continue to push, Albertans will have our back."

Poll respondents were initially contacted by phone (including 60 per cent cell phones) and then given the opportunity to complete the survey over the phone or online. A sample size of 900 respondents provides a margin of error of plus or minus 3.3 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. ■

## What drives perceptions of Public Education in Alberta?



### COMMENTARY

Janet Brown  
Pollster and political commentator

As a pollster, it has long been my view that if you want to know *what* people are thinking, you should do a poll. If you want to know *why* people are thinking what they're thinking, you should do focus groups. And the best research projects are usually a combination of both polling and focus groups.

I had the opportunity to do a poll for the Alberta Teachers' Association in August that explored *what* Albertans think about public education. In September, I had the opportunity to follow this up with a set of focus groups and one-on-one interviews to find out *why* they feel the way they do.

One of the most interesting things we discovered through the polling was that the strongest predictors of a person's overall impressions of public education is how well they think public education is doing at

- preparing students to be successful in life,
- providing students with a nurturing and supportive environment,
- attracting and retaining high-quality teachers,
- providing diverse program opportunities, and
- ensuring students in rural areas have access to high-quality education.

We used the focus groups and interviews to further explore what these statements mean, and why they are so important to Albertans.

### Preparing students to be successful in life

Research participants had a broad definition of what constitutes a successful life. They mentioned

the importance of preparing students to be able to contribute to society, achieve personal goals (both in terms of further education and employment), support oneself and one's family, and be happy. When asked to dig into how public schools can achieve these goals, participants mentioned having a curriculum that emphasizes life skills (such as financial literacy, problem solving and conflict resolution), offering a range of programs (including both practical and creative courses), and ensuring students have access to up-to-date technology. Participants also stressed the importance of the complementary roles that teachers and parents play in ensuring students are prepared for life after graduation.

### Providing students with a nurturing and supportive environment

For many, there is a delicate balance between being supportive of students, but not coddling them. This involves allowing students to face real-world issues, while still ensuring they have the tools to overcome failure and other life challenges. Key to feeling supported at school are students feeling safe (both emotionally and physically); having engaged teachers; having a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom; having adequate resources (such as textbooks and computers); having individualized attention; and having good communications between teachers, students and parents.

### Attracting and retaining high-quality teachers

When asked to identify the attributes of a high-quality teacher, research participants mentioned passion, empathy, intuition and good training. When asked to identify the main challenges that are undermining the teaching profession and driving good teachers away, participants mentioned large class sizes, challenging parents, the inability to effectively

discipline students, extracurricular responsibilities (such as coaching and field trips) and government interference in the development of the curriculum. The keys to attracting and retaining teachers were believed to be adequate compensation and benefits, work-life balance, respect and autonomy in the classroom.

### Providing diverse program opportunities

Diverse program opportunities were defined by participants as programs that cater to a variety of interests, address different learning styles, foster character development and broaden the horizons of students. They expressed the belief that students need to be exposed to a variety of programs so they can discover their own interests and potential career paths. Many recognized that students have varied learning styles (and in some cases, specific learning disabilities) and the need for specialized programs to help students reach their potential. And beyond the standard school curriculum, participants see value in the benefits that can be gained through extracurricular activities.

### Ensuring students in rural areas have access to high-quality education

One of the focus group sessions conducted was composed of Albertans who live in small towns and rural areas. This group, in particular, stressed the importance of ensuring that all Alberta students receive a high-quality education, regardless of where they live in the province. But they also acknowledged the unique challenges of providing a high-quality education in a rural setting, where student enrolment numbers are low and the distances students travel to attend school are far. They stressed that the province should set a minimum standard for education, and ensure every student—in every region of the province—has access to this standard. ■



# CROSS-ALBERTA SNAPSHOT

ATA News Staff

## Data won't tell us how crowded Alberta's schools are anymore — so we went asking

CALGARY

Alberta does not require school boards to report class sizes, though the professional association for the teachers of Alberta says it has heard from its members that many urban jurisdictions are seeing massive growth in class sizes right now.

In 2019, the provincial government ended a practice of publicly reporting how many students were in each class at each public, charter and separate school in the province.

Calgary parent Misty Russell has two kids, aged six and eight, who attend school in the southeast. For her, the biggest concern she has about class sizes involves the limited amount of attention a teacher is able to provide.

"When there's so many [more] kids-to-teacher ratio, the kids don't necessarily get the things that they need, right?" she said.

One Calgary elementary school teacher says these are the worst conditions she's ever seen at work. As of right now, her classes this year will have 35 students in them — the biggest size of her career.

Edmonton Public Schools says it is experiencing significant enrolment growth and increased utilization of schools, with around 5,000 more students expected, bringing its student population to more than 114,000. That will put utilization around 85 per cent across the division. Over the last 10 years, the division's utilization rate has risen 14 per cent from 68 per cent to 82 per cent.

—CBC News, Joel Dryden, Nathan Godfrey, Carla Turner, Sept. 6

## Thousands of Calgary Catholic School District students head back to class

CALGARY

With Calgary's population growing rapidly, so too is student enrolment.

The CCSD saw an increase of 2,154 in enrolment for the 2022-23 school compared to the prior school year, well above the district's prediction of 1,400 new students.

CCSD superintendent Bryan Szumlas says the Catholic school board is increasing its teaching staff to deal with the influx.

"We had to replace about 150 teachers that retired in the spring, and then, as we go forward here into the fall, we're looking at hiring approximately ... just under 100 teachers as we go forward."

The increased enrolment brought the average school utilization rate up to 84.26 per cent, which is still just below the provincial benchmark of 85 per cent.

Tuesday also marks back-to-school for Rocky View Schools (RVS), which has recently seen some of the most significant jumps in student enrolment.

—CTV News, Kevin Green, Sept. 5

## 'Significant' hiring taking place at schools: minister; Alberta working to fill gaps amid population surge, Nicolaides says

EDMONTON

As Alberta kids enter K-12 classrooms facing unprecedented growth, Education Minister Demetrios Nicolaides says the government is doing its best to accommodate the surge in enrolment.

"We're starting to see some significant new hiring happen across the province," said Nicolaides, who added that other provinces are experiencing difficulty filling education positions.

Edmonton Catholic Schools spokesperson Christine Meadows told Postmedia in an email that preliminary estimates put its enrolment at more than 47,000 students — about 2,000 more than this time last year, or more than four per cent — and new schools are "urgently needed."

Edmonton Public Schools expects to have more than 114,000 students — approximately 5,000, or about four per cent — more than last year. Its operating budget of \$1.2 billion last year has increased to approximately \$1.3 billion this year.

When asked what he believes an appropriate class size might be, Nicolaides said the government is focused on getting staffing levels up to snuff and making sure school boards have the cash they need.

—Edmonton Journal, Lisa Johnson, Sept. 7

## Fall hiring blitz results in addition of nearly 600 new teachers to Calgary public schools

CALGARY

Public school officials have completed a fall hiring blitz with the addition of nearly 600 new teachers, with expectations that some temporary vacancies may still have to be filled throughout the year from the substitute roster.

"To date, we have placed teachers in all continuous and probationary teaching positions," said Joanne Anderson, spokeswoman for the Calgary Board of Education.

Anderson confirmed that CBE budgeted for 774 additional staff hires throughout the system, totalling 587 teachers and 187 "non-teaching staff," most of which are educational assistants who support teachers in classrooms with complex learners.

CBE now has 25 schools "at capacity," meaning they are full and can't take in more students. Those who arrive in the community midway through the school year are sent elsewhere to "overflow" schools with lower capacity.

Education Minister Demetrios Nicolaides has admitted Alberta is seeing unprecedented levels of population growth and says he is working closely with the premier to specifically expand schools in growing communities.

—Calgary Herald, Eva Ferguson, Oct. 11

## Overcrowded schools see kids sharing desks, learning in hallways

CALGARY

As the reality of unprecedented enrolment growth hits schools this month, students and teachers are facing overcrowded classrooms and learning spaces spilling into hallways, libraries, gyms and staff rooms.

The province has argued it is funding for growth, even as more than 7,000 new students arrive at Calgary's public schools this fall, on top of last year's 5,000.

"Teachers are seeing class sizes in the high 30s, sometimes even the low 40s, across all grades. And this is very problematic, with more of these students arriving with complex needs, many having to learn English as a second language," said Jason Schilling, president of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

"After four years of the UCP, Alberta's per-student funding has gone from the third highest in the country to the lowest. That says a lot about how much they value our kids," NDP education critic Rakhi Pancholi said.

"And Alberta teachers report the largest increase in class sizes in the country."

—Calgary Herald, Eva Ferguson, Sept. 16

## Red Deer public and Catholic divisions see enrolment increase

RED DEER

Student enrolment at Red Deer Public Schools was up 2.4 per cent from last year with 11,424 students registered in the division. That's an increase of 270 students from last school year.

Student enrolment increases were seen across elementary (55) and middle (110) and high (160) school levels throughout the division, with the biggest school increases at Lindsay Thurber Comprehensive High School (62), Eastview Middle School (43) and Central Middle School (39).

Red Deer Public also welcomed 101 tuition paying international students this fall, with 30 international students expected to arrive in the New Year. This year, the top countries students are from include Brazil, Belgium, Spain and Germany.

Overall, the Catholic school division has 325 more students with 10,723 enrolled for the 2023-24 school year, up from 10,398 in 2022-23.

—Red Deer Advocate, Susan Zielinski, Oct. 3

## Foothills School Division enrollment down a bit

OKOTOKS

The Foothills School Division has fewer students this year than last year.

Assistant Superintendent Drew Chipman said they were expecting more students at the Foothills Composite High School in Okotoks.

Chipman says Foothills Comp is often full so some students may have looked elsewhere.

"So, a little bit of a decrease from last year, that's probably due to the fact that we were expecting more students at Foothills Composite High School. I think we can probably attribute it to the fact that school is quite full, so people look at other options."

However, he says there are still a lot of students back in class.

"From K to 12 we have 8,064 students with about another 72 in junior kindergarten, which is a voluntary program which we've been running for a number of years."

—Okotoks Online, Kevin Wallace, Oct. 16



# Ed Trust helps teachers develop their careers

## Board members eye expansion and growth

“This allows me to continue improving my professional knowledge and practice while reducing the financial impact on my family. It proves the ATA’s commitment to ongoing learning and growth.”

“Thank you so much for the support in completing my graduate studies!”

“This bursary has allowed me to continue my graduate studies while taking maternity leave. Being immersed in the world of education while being away from the classroom temporarily was an absolute blessing!”

“This has allowed me to afford a conference I have wanted to attend for many years.”

“This bursary allowed me to focus on my own education, and being the best teacher to my students, rather than worrying about costs.”

“Quite simply put, without the support of this grant, I would not be able to attend conferences like this. Thank you!”

**Cory Hare**  
ATA News Managing Editor

Did you know that the ATA has a trust that’s set up to help teachers engage in meaningful professional development?

In operation since 1978, the Educational Trust program provides funding for teachers through four distinct bursary/grant programs. What’s common between the four programs is that money is available for teachers to learn and grow in their careers.

“With the cost of everything being so high coupled with no money in schools, it’s hard to do PD nowadays,” said Ed Trust’s board chair Melissa Morton, a teacher with Edmonton Public Teachers Local No. 37. “This is a great way for people to get some funds that they wouldn’t normally have access to.”

Each year, the Ed Trust disperses between \$60,000 and \$65,000. The majority of the funds come from donations from ATA locals, which pledge their support every year at the ATA’s Annual Representative Assembly in May. This funding is stable and predictable, but isn’t enabling the trust to grow, Morton said.

Many of the Ed Trust programs have a cap on the number of recipients and so choose their recipients by random draw, which means that some eligible applicants

go without each year. For example, the Dr. B. T. Keeler Continuing Education Bursary had 200 applicants last year but is capped at 70 recipients.

“It would be nice to bring in more donations to be able to provide more of the grants and bursaries for applicants,” Morton said.

With most of Ed Trust’s money coming from locals, the system is a closed loop in which the teaching profession is indirectly paying for its members’ professional development, Morton said. There is a hope among the board that, with a recent influx of new board members, there will be ideas for tapping into new donation streams, enabling the program to grow.

“It would be nice to be able to grow it and to provide more opportunities for more people,” Morton said. ■



SUPPLIED  
Melissa Morton,  
Ed Trust board chair



The ATA Educational Trust

## What is the ATA Educational Trust?

As a separate legal entity from the Alberta Teachers’ Association, the ATA Educational Trust is a registered charity that provides bursaries to encourage teachers to advance their knowledge and skills and grants to help teachers attend professional development activities and events.

## Donating to the trust

The ATA Educational Trust receives ongoing support from the ATA, ATA locals, the Alberta Retired Teachers’ Association and private individuals.

Bequests in memory of a favourite teacher, donations to celebrate a colleague’s successful career in education and individual donations are all gratefully accepted. Tax receipts will be issued.

## Contacting the trust

For more information about the trust and its award programs, visit [teachers.ab.ca](http://teachers.ab.ca), call 780-447-9498 or 1-800-232-7208, ext. 498, or email [educational.trust@ata.ab.ca](mailto:educational.trust@ata.ab.ca).

## PROGRAMS

The trust has four ongoing programs, each with its own awards and eligibility criteria.

### 1 Dr. B. T. Keeler Continuing Education Bursary

This bursary provides funds to certificated Alberta teachers for teaching-related courses at a university or professional program of education.

**Funds available:** \$700 per recipient

**Deadline:** May 1 annually

**Selection:** The name of each eligible person is entered into a draw.

### 2 Morgex/Johnson Insurance Centennial Fund for Teacher Development

This grant enables a teacher to attend a non-ATA professional development event:

- conference
- institute
- workshop
- symposium
- seminar

**Funds available:** \$600 per recipient

**Deadline:** Sept. 30 annually

**Selection:** The name of each eligible person is entered into a draw.

### 3 ATA Specialist Council Conference Grants

This grant provides support to a teacher attending an ATA specialist council conference.

**Funds available:** up to \$500 per recipient

**Deadline:** September 30 annually

**Selection:** The name of each eligible person is entered into a draw.

### 4 Orest and Francina Lazarowich Bursary in CTS Technology Education

This bursary is funded by the trust and administered by the University of Alberta. It is awarded to a U of A student enrolled in the faculty of education with preference given to a student enrolled in the third year of the career and technology studies (CTS) program, majoring in technology education.

**Funds available:** up to \$2,000 per recipient

**Deadlines:**  
Dec. 15 (fall term)  
April 30 (winter term)  
June 15 (spring or summer term)

**Selection:** One recipient is awarded each year, on the basis of demonstrated need.







The Alberta  
Teachers' Association



The **fall issue**  
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## Feature

The look of  
leadership:  
Women carving  
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### Technology

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### Diversity

Diversity leads work with students to celebrate diverse cultures

### In Profile

Dedication to learning leads to unexpected discovery for teacher Abi Henneberry

### Research Insights

Educational exchanges open doors and create connection

### Most Memorable Lesson

Healthy classroom relationships made to endure





# Project Overseas delivers a life-changing experience

*This past summer, 10 Alberta teachers participated in Project Overseas. Here are some first-person accounts of their experiences.*



Joan Aja, a gender officer for the Ugandan National Teachers' Union, leads a session on gender equality in education.

## Solidarity in Uganda

Stephanie Clements

President, Calgary Public Teachers Local No. 38

This summer two teams of Canadian teachers including three ATA members partnered with the Ugandan National Teachers' Union (UNATU) to lead professional development workshops in two different regions of Uganda through the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) Project Overseas.

Participants engaged in programming that included leadership development, classroom management, learning modalities and instructional strategies. Canadian teachers co-facilitated the workshops while paired with a Ugandan teacher trainer (called tutors) from a local teacher college.

In a country with half of its 45 million inhabitants under the age of 14, public schooling is a major focus. Schools in Uganda have very large class sizes, with an average of 84 students per teacher. The team visited a local public school where there were over 200 Grade 3 students in a single classroom. Nationally, the goal is to have class size targets closer to 53 students per teacher.

By the end of the workshops, all participants appreciated having the time to come together as professionals and collaborate on ways to build on practices to support all learners, in Canada and in Uganda.

## A life-changing experience

Jenn Hummel

Heloise Lorimer School, Airdrie

I feel so fortunate to have participated in CTF's Project Overseas during the summer of 2023. I was selected to be one of four teachers who travelled to the Caribbean island of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This was an experience of a lifetime and working with the teachers of this beautiful island was life changing.

The executive team of the St. Vincent and the Grenadines Teachers' Union was so welcoming and inviting. My purpose was to team up with my co-tutor Kemarri and deliver eight days of technology workshops. We focused on showing the teachers tools that they could use in their learning environments. I found the experience incredibly rewarding, as the recipients were so passionate about learning and improving their public education system. In turn, they taught me so much about problem solving, relationships and resilience. They continued to surprise me with their enthusiasm, ideas and willingness to continue learning.

My experience provided many highlights but the one that stood out for me was the cultural exchange day. We showed our Caribbean colleagues some important facts about Canada, and in exchange we got to see the exquisite costumes, singing, dancing and drumming of the island of St. Vincent. It was breathtaking and really showed the beauty of the people of this country. Last, we participated in Vincy Mas, a two-day celebration that takes place across the entire island, with cultural music, dancing, food and drink.

This was an experience that I will cherish forever.



Caribbean teachers sample Canadian culture through table hockey.



Alberta teacher Kiara Smyth prepares for a session in collaboration with co-tutor Joseph.

## Project Overseas a learning experience

Kiara Smyth

St. Francis Xavier Catholic High School, Edmonton

In heading to Uganda this past July with Project Overseas, I was very excited but also worried about facilitating professional development for teachers who work in a context that is very different from my own. This worry was alleviated when my team and I met our co-tutors, the expert Ugandan teacher-trainers with whom we would be working to plan and facilitate this professional development. My co-tutor brought experience in the areas in which I had gaps, and I used my experience to bring some new ideas and perspectives. Together, we built sessions that asked teachers to grow and take risks, but in a way that was meaningful for their Ugandan classrooms. I am proud of the professional development that we created through collaboration and solidarity, which was well-received by participants.

Another highlight of this experience was that the Ugandan teachers had so many different ways of showing appreciation, from a round of applause, to giving imaginary flowers or sodas, to singing a song. They consistently took time to appreciate, not only us as facilitators, but each other as colleagues. This appreciation wasn't just for a completed task, but also for those who spoke up or took a risk, regardless of the outcome.

Many of the 80 Ugandan teachers who participated in the PD sessions had travelled a significant distance to be there and spent the week away from their families and classrooms. These teachers were open to the new ideas presented during the PD sessions, but also demonstrated strong teaching practices that they already use in their classrooms.

I saw these practices in action when I visited Ugandan schools, where teachers have limited access to instructional materials and classes of over 100 students. Despite these obstacles, these teachers showed that they appreciate professional development opportunities while already employing strategies to move education forward in Uganda.

Although I was in Uganda to co-lead professional development, this experience ended up teaching me so much, and I give endless appreciation to the teacher participants for that.

**PROJECT OVERSEAS**  
continued on page 11

## WHAT IS Project Overseas



A joint endeavour by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) and its member organizations, Project Overseas provides professional assistance to fellow teachers in developing countries. The project takes place during the months of July and August.

Started in 1962 with one program in Nigeria, Project Overseas has helped teacher organizations in more than 50 countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the South Pacific. Since its inception, more than 1,800 Canadian teachers have participated in the program. Currently, approximately 50 volunteers are sent each summer to about a dozen countries.



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## PROJECT OVERSEAS

continued from page 9

### 'I left part of my heart in Ghana'

Adrienne Peoples-Sprecker  
Ecole Plamondon School, Plamondon

My adventure started in February, when I learned I had been placed on Team 1 for Ghana. Over the next few months I worked with four other team members from all across Canada. As our team lead was able to co-ordinate with the Ghana lead, we learned we would be delivering the topics of inclusive education, gender and equity, technology, and classroom management. I lead the inclusive education team.

After 24 hours of travel, we arrived in Ghana, meeting our contacts Ernest and Kwame. Our hosts were fabulous. On the first night, they'd organized a seamstress to measure us for opening ceremony uniforms, then provided a delightful supper, featuring some familiar and unfamiliar tastes. We then fell into our beds as we had an early wakeup the next morning for a special book launch event.

The morning came early, but we were in great spirits as we learned that the Ghana National Association of Teacher's (GNAT) book launch was in honour of the 60 years of partnership with the Canadian Teachers' Federation. The book was authored by Dr. Linus Linnaeus Tannor and details the achievements of previous GNAT/CTF cohorts. As I read about the many initiatives that prior teams had accomplished, I felt such pride at this legacy.

For the next two days we planned in partnership with the Ghana leads. This was the most ambitious project yet, with the most teachers participating, so we had a tight schedule. After we'd completed our planning, we travelled to Cape Coast, where we delivered two projects to a total of 400 teachers. Then, after another day of travelling, sightseeing and learning the history of the different regions of Ghana, we completed two more sessions in Kibi (pronounced Chi-bi) with 200 members in each session.

Throughout the process, we presented to 800 teachers, with the hope that many of those teachers would be able to share information and train others at their school sites. Some of the topics we covered included definitions of inclusion, how to recognize exceptionalities such as learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, hearing and vision, and gifted students. We then shared some corresponding strategies for each exceptionality.

In Ghana, teachers face many challenges with inclusion due to societal pressures, class size and lack of specialized materials, but it was so heartwarming to see the participants take on the challenge as they moved back to their different schools.

Collaborating at an international level with other teacher's associations was an incredible opportunity and experience that I will never forget. I left part of my heart in Ghana with all the wonderful GNAT staff and teachers we met along the way.



Project Overseas participants stop for a photo-op in front of the Benin Amazone, a statue built in homage to the world's only all-female army.

### West Africa provides inspiration

Heather Skerry  
École Coloniale Estates School, Beaumont

Upon meeting "Team Bénin" for the first time in person before heading to Bénin, West Africa, I was amazed at how well we all got along and complemented each other. Each of the four members on our team brought different experiences and talents to the group. Together, we began the long journey to West Africa (and a quick tour of Paris on a nine-hour layover!).

Our team of women stayed and worked in the country's largest city, Cotonou. We were in awe as we drove by the 30-foot bronze Amazon statue, called the Benin Amazone, built in homage to the world's only all-female army. Our hosts, representatives from the national teachers unions Synaem-Benin (Syndicat national des enseignants des écoles maternelles) and SNEP (Syndicat national de l'enseignement primaire public), ensured that we were well taken care of, including hotel accommodations, daily meals and tourist activities on the weekend.

Then came the work: 50 participants each week from all over the country of Bénin, all coming to Cotonou to learn and share teaching strategies and pedagogy. Our Canadian team co-lead carousel sessions on classroom management, differentiation, inclusion, gender equity and many more topics.

I was touched by the dedication and engagement of the participants, who not only travelled from afar to join us, but who were willing to stay after the allotted time to continue discussions.

We were welcomed into this country with open arms. The pride and dedication of the teachers we met was unparalleled. The openness of sharing of culture, especially the love of music and dance, was inspiring.



Participants from Canada and St. Lucia come together to share about their respective countries on Cultural Day.

### What an opportunity

Tamara Franko  
Kildare School, Edmonton

What an opportunity to learn from others, to be fully immersed in another culture — an opportunity for adventure, learning and lifelong impact. While interacting with my Canadian colleagues, I was immediately drawn to the feeling of learning from our differences and yet feeling so connected. I learned about teaching environments, work schedules, and the energy and demands of the teaching job. I learned that sometimes when we think things are greener on the other side, we should maybe look instead at what might be better for me on my side.

As we met with our Canadian colleagues in Ottawa, I was so impressed with the level of professionalism and excitement from the teams. It was thrilling to be in a space of teachers where I could tangibly feel a desire to do their best.

St. Lucia was mind opening. The people have an energy that is almost tangible. My thoughts going in were that we were there to teach people who maybe didn't have the skills or knowledge that Canadian teachers have. I quickly learned how wrong I was.

The teachers of St. Lucia have tenacity, strength, love of families and children, and so much knowledge about teaching their children. I was there simply to facilitate learning in a new way, someone to maybe regenerate some ideas, a new shiny object that might bring some excitement.

This was an equal learning opportunity where I learned just as much as I supported the learning of others. It was a privilege to learn from all the teachers that I encountered. There was a dedication to education and unions, regardless of the struggles or disadvantages that we think a developing country might encompass — each day fresh, each day ready, each participant there to learn.

I am so thankful to have had this opportunity to work with a brilliant CTF team, amazing teachers in St. Lucia, and thankful to the ATA for this magical opportunity that unites teachers worldwide.



Project Overseas participants show off the uniforms that were made on the spot shortly after their arrival in Ghana.

**Project Overseas  
application  
deadline  
approaching**

**Nov. 15 is the application deadline  
for Project Overseas.**

**More information is available  
on the ATA website.**

**PROJECT OVERSEAS  
continued on page 13**





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## SEEKING FURRY SUBMISSIONS!

The ATA News is seeking entries for Teacher's Pet, which profiles teachers' furry, feathered or even scaled friends.

If you have a cuddly companion that you'd like to share with your colleagues, please send us a picture, along with the following required information:

- Your name, grade, school and the subject(s) you teach
- Your pet's name and breed

Also, please answer these two questions:

- 1) What makes your pet special?
- 2) How does your pet help you in your profession?

A selection of entries will be published in an upcoming issue of the ATA News.

**Please email your submissions to [cory.hare@ata.ab.ca](mailto:cory.hare@ata.ab.ca).**

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Collaboration on action plans and incentive strategies to promote school attendance and achievement are other components of this teaching tour, with the overall goal being to enhance the quality of education offered to the marginalized Miskito indigenous population of Nicaragua's BOSAWAS Biosphere Reserve.

Travel and living expenses are covered by the ATA. Some pre-departure supply and in-country meal costs outside of BOSAWAS will be the responsibility of the participants.

To apply, visit [teachers.ab.ca](http://teachers.ab.ca)

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## PROJECT OVERSEAS

continued from page 11



Dans le cadre du projet outre-mer, les enseignants de l'Alberta ont découvert la créativité inégalée des enseignants togolais malgré le manque de technologie et de ressources.

Through Project Overseas, Alberta teachers learned about the unparalleled creativity that Togolese teachers are able to employ in the absence of technology and resources.

## Au Togo, on collabore à gogo

Monique Wilson

Aurora Academic Secondary School, Edmonton

Le Togo est un pays francophone d'Afrique de l'Ouest qu'on appelle aussi « le sourire de l'Afrique ». Dès l'arrivée de mon équipe de professeurs canadiens, nous avons constaté qu'il porte bien son nom!

Mon équipe du Projet outre-mer (PO), composée d'une enseignante du Yukon, de deux enseignants de l'Ontario et de moi-même dans le rôle de cheffe d'équipe, est arrivée à Lomé, capitale du Togo, le 6 juillet. Nous avons tous été accueillis avec le sourire! Lors de notre première réunion avec le personnel de la Fédération des syndicats de l'éducation nationale et les co-formateurs, nous nous sommes immédiatement sentis à l'aise. J'avais aussi participé au PO en 2019, à Sainte-Lucie, mais le Togo est complètement différent. Ce n'est pas un pays touristique; il s'agit d'un des pays en développement de la région. Cependant, le pays a une riche histoire. Il a notamment déjà été une colonie allemande, puis française; son passé a également été marqué par la traite des esclaves.

L'objectif du PO au Togo est de travailler avec (et non pour) les enseignants de la région sur des dossiers qui leur tiennent à cœur, notamment la gestion de classe, l'éducation des filles et le syndicalisme. L'équipe canadienne a travaillé de près avec l'équipe togolaise. Comme on dit à la FCE, la clé est dans le « co » : co-formateurs, collaboration, co-planification, co-enseignement. Leur gestion de classe, avec des groupes formés de 80 à 115 élèves, est excellente. Leur créativité, une nécessité étant donné qu'ils et elles travaillent sans technologie et avec peu de matériel, est sans pareil. Les conditions de travail que nous tenons pour acquises chaque année doivent être réclamées au Togo, parce que les syndicats composent avec beaucoup d'opposition du gouvernement et l'adhésion n'est pas obligatoire. Par contre, nous avons beaucoup en commun avec nos collègues togolais : les défis, les succès et la joie d'enseigner. Je suis rentrée au Canada ayant noué des amitiés et fait le plein d'énergie pour la prochaine année scolaire!

## Teaming up in Togo

Togo, a French-speaking country in West Africa, is also known as “the smile of Africa.” Upon arrival, my team of Canadian teachers discovered that it truly lives up to its name!

My Project Overseas (PO) team, consisting of a Yukon-based teacher, two teachers from Ontario and yours truly in the role of team lead, arrived in the capital city of Lomé on July 6 and we were greeted by smiling faces all around! At our first meeting with staff from the Fédération des syndicats de l'éducation nationale (the national federation of education unions) and the cotrainers, we immediately felt at ease. I had also taken part in the 2019 edition of PO in St. Lucia, but Togo is a completely different place. The country doesn't attract many tourists; it is one of the developing countries in the region. However, the country has a rich history. It was a German colony before being occupied by the French; the slave trade is also a part of its past.

The goal of PO in Togo is to work with (not for) the region's teachers, focusing on topics of importance to them such as classroom management, girls' education and organized labour. Members of the Canadian team worked closely with their Togolese counterparts. As we like to say at CTF, the key is in the “co”: cotraining, collaborating, coplanning, coteaching. Their classroom management, with groups made up of 80 to 115 students, is excellent. Their creativity, a must given that they work without access to technology and with very few resources, is unparalleled. The working conditions that we take for granted need to be demanded every year in Togo, since unions face a great deal of government opposition and membership is not mandatory. Nevertheless, we have much in common with our Togolese colleagues: the challenges, successes and joys of teaching. I returned to Canada having made new friends and full of energy for the new school year!



Alberta teacher Carole Jean-Baptiste shares some information about Canada during her tour in Uganda through Project Overseas.

## Uganda experience is impactful

Carole Jean-Baptiste

Iron Ridge Intermediate Campus, Blackfalds

In July 2023, I was able to fulfill a lifelong dream of visiting the continent of Africa. I was fortunate to be part of a team of four teachers from across Canada who travelled to the extremely remote northeastern part of Uganda. The purpose of the project was to provide professional development sessions for teachers and administrators in the Karamoja region.

Along with our Ugandan counterparts, we team-taught two groups of teaching professionals over the course of two weeks. Each Can/Ugan pair delivered seven sessions in one of the following areas: leadership in education, classroom management, instructional strategies and learning styles/modalities. While the trip was exceptionally successful in meeting its purpose, the Canadian team also had a truly unforgettable experience.

We were very honoured by the acceptance and eagerness the participants showed us as we shared our professional knowledge, and as we also shared our culture and life experiences. We were equally grateful to learn about Uganda and, in particular, the unique culturally rich Karamoja region. It was clear that everyone shared a passion for education and a desire to improve the environment and quality of the learning process for both students and teachers.

A highlight for the Canadian team was being able to visit some of the schools where our participants teach and seeing them implement some of what they had learned in our sessions the week before. It was eye opening how caring and resilient the teachers are when faced with huge class sizes and very limited resources.

My personal mantra is “make an impact,” and I'm immensely grateful for the impact this experience had on all parties, especially me!

## Visit to The Gambia provides wonderful memories

Kevin McBean

McNally High School, Edmonton

Spend a day in The Gambia and it's easy to see why the smallest country in continental Africa is referred to as “The Smiling Coast.” Rarely can a visitor walk down any beach or into any shop without a local starting up a conversation with a friendly “you are most welcome here!”

As part of a team of four Canadian teachers who traveled to The Gambia this past summer to participate in the Canadian Teachers' Federation's Project Overseas, I was the lucky recipient of this hospitality. Although we were there to work alongside our Gambian Teachers' Union (GTU) counterparts, the true joy of this program was experiencing the daily life of a different culture, learning as much from the participants of our workshops as we were able to share.

The project consisted of two week-long workshops with topics ranging from union advocacy and activism to gender and sex-based violence to technology and classroom management. As the leadership from the GTU explained, professional development is not a typical experience for Gambian teachers, so participants were eager to connect with one another and discuss their ideas and experiences.

The project is careful to ensure that the host country takes the lead, as they are the experts in their own context and needs. Our team appreciated this approach, as we did not want to perpetuate a western-saviour narrative. Instead, we were privileged to learn alongside two groups of smart, dedicated teachers, each of them with a strong desire to improve their classrooms, the lives of their students and their country as a whole. I left The Gambia with a host of wonderful memories and a renewed belief in the importance of unions in protecting and advocating for public education. ■



Project Overseas participants engage in a planning session with Gambian Teachers' Union officials and local co-facilitators.



# NOVEMBER 20-21, 2023



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## 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](http://www.teachers.ab.ca)) under Professional Development > International Opportunities.

If you have questions contact: [internationalcoop@ata.ab.ca](mailto:internationalcoop@ata.ab.ca)

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# TALEND

October 31, 2023 | Volume 58, Number 4

## Thank you subs! (in 17 syllables)

Teachers express in *haiku* form how much they appreciate substitute teachers!

*Un atout pour tous  
Des maîtres improvisateurs  
À notre secours*

Eugénie McCallan  
École Alexandre-Taché, St Albert

*mind full, heart heavy  
you carry the load for me  
not missing a beat*

Tiff Pino  
Cardinal Collins Catholic Academic Centre, Edmonton

*Without you—chaos  
You keep things running smoothly  
We are so grateful*

Faye Swinton  
Hawkwood School, Calgary

*Quickly preparing  
Changing roles at every turn  
A Superhero*

Sandra Fedorak  
Holy Redeemer Catholic Junior/Senior High School, Edson

*Stepping in with care.  
Lessons in fleeting moments.  
Learning carries on.*

Sam Quarterman  
Fort McMurray Public School Division, Fort McMurray

*Important teachers  
Without them there is trouble  
Standing together*

Karlee Hren  
Ellerslie Campus, Edmonton

*Guest teachers are great  
You will save my sanity  
I'm away, you lead*

Erin Krysko  
Our Lady of the Rosary School, Calgary

*We send you much thanks  
Trusted folk in our absence  
The calm when away*

Shannon Rae Dubé  
Fort McMurray Public School Division, Fort McMurray

*I wish there were more  
Amazing people like you  
More precious than gold*

Jennifer Eileen Daniel  
Worsley Central School, Worsley

*Without you we'd cry  
You amaze me every time  
You are my hero!*

Carole Bossert  
South Pointe School, Fort Saskatchewan