

Crowded and Complex Classrooms

A look at the state of class size, composition and supports for inclusion in Alberta's public education system.



Crowded and Complex Classrooms

Alberta has a world-renowned public education system. Our teachers and other school staff work hard to provide outstanding educational opportunities.

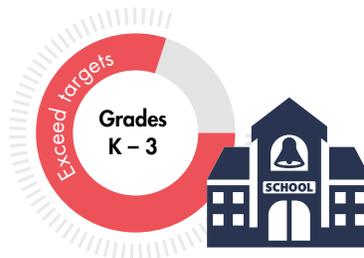
Unfortunately, students and teachers are not provided with the best supports and, as a result, too many children are falling through the cracks. Optimal learning happens when students and teachers have reasonable class sizes and supports are available to assist students with special learning needs.

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Class Size



Only 5 of 61 school boards are meeting the government-approved targets for average class size in K to 3.¹



80% of K to 3 classes are larger than the approved target.²

CLASS SIZES are larger now than 14 years ago, when the government first agreed to tackle the problem.²

RESEARCH CLEARLY shows that smaller class sizes allow for higher levels of student engagement, increased time with the curriculum and more opportunities for teachers to focus on the individual needs and interests of students in the classroom.



The payoff from class-size reduction is greatest for children from low-income, minority and vulnerable populations.



66% of Albertans believe that class sizes are **too big**.³

81% of Albertans would support increased funding to reduce class sizes.³

Class Composition



When compared to classrooms elsewhere in the world, Alberta's classes are

- twice as likely to include a significant number of **students with special needs** and
- twice as likely to include students **learning in a language that is not their mother tongue** (Government of Alberta 2013).



In rural areas, class sizes may be smaller, but classes often include students from multiple grades or courses learning **different programs of study in the same room at the same time.**

Classes are also impacted by effects of poverty, family breakup, mental health, technology, and other social and cultural factors.



TEACHERS ARE less able to address the unique learning needs of a diverse student population when class sizes are large.

Supports for Special Needs

Today's classroom is very different from the classrooms of even 10 to 20 years ago.

Students who have learning disabilities, students who require additional learning supports and students who have complex health and education needs used to be pulled out into their own special classrooms. Now they are included in virtually all classrooms, and teachers try to individualize learning as much as possible.



The ATA's 2014 Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta found that there was **an increased need for supports and services** and that the vision for inclusion in Alberta's schools had been **inadequately implemented** (Alberta Teachers' Association 2014).

THE POLICY of inclusion of students with special needs is a best practice in education, but additional supports for students must be readily available for inclusion to be successful.



In 2017/18, 50 school boards incurred costs related to supporting special needs that exceeded the amount of funding they were provided. **The shortfall in funding for inclusion and ESL supports totalled \$119 million across the province.** ⁴

7 in 10 Albertans

say they are concerned about the amount of **in-class support for students with special needs or English language learners.** ³



81% of Albertans would **support increased funding** to better address these learning needs. ³



In extreme instances, undersupported special needs has resulted in incidences of physical aggression against staff. These incidents are increasing.

Over 55 per cent of K to 6 teachers report having witnessed an act of **physical aggression by a student against a staff member** this school year. ⁵

Teachers want what students need, and we believe that students, individually and collectively, achieve better outcomes when public education is well supported.

Addressing issues of class size, composition and undersupported special needs will help ensure that students succeed and that Alberta's public education system continues to be a global top performer.

Notes

- ¹ www.alberta.ca/class-size.aspx#toc-1
- ² <https://open.alberta.ca/opendata/class-size-by-school-year-jurisdiction-and-grade-alberta>
- ³ Internal ATA public opinion polling conducted by Environics Research, August 2019.
- ⁴ www.alberta.ca/k-12-education-financial-statements.asp
- ⁵ Internal ATA Member Opinion Survey, 2019.

References

- Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). 2014. *Report of The Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools*. Edmonton, Alta: ATA. Available at www.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/News-Room/2014/PD-170-1%20PD%20Blue%20Ribbon%20Panel%20Report%202014-web.pdf (accessed May 27, 2019).
- Government of Alberta. 2013. *Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) 2013*. Edmonton, Alta: Government of Alberta. Available at [www.oecd.org/education/school/Alberta%20\(Canada\)%20National%20TALIS%202013%20report.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/education/school/Alberta%20(Canada)%20National%20TALIS%202013%20report.pdf) (accessed May 27, 2019).

