

# Foundational Framework for Long-Term Direction

## Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the Alberta Teachers' Association's (ATA's) strategic framework is to energize a vibrant teaching profession in Alberta and, with education partners and the involvement of the public, to support great schools for all through thoughtful strategic actions.

Certificated Alberta teachers, which includes teachers in leadership roles in schools and school systems, have the focus and passion to ensure that children and youth get the education they need to succeed in life. Doing so secures the long-term resilience, hope and success of families, communities and Alberta, an intention shared by all.

The strategic framework that follows is a living document, designed as a beacon to direct dynamic short-, medium- and long-term strategic actions.

## Current and Future Context

Making progress on the ATA's strategic directions means that all members of the ATA, individually and collectively, must navigate the changing environment at hand, through the next year, the next two years, the next five years and so on. Each part of the ATA's strategic framework thus includes how it relates to individual teachers and to the collective of teachers that is the ATA.

The current context is dominated by economic, social, environmental and technological volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity. The teaching profession must proactively engage with many strong forces of change to make dynamic progress toward its strategic aspirations.

This strategic framework provides teachers, specialist councils, locals, bargaining units and Provincial Executive Council with an opportunity to articulate how they intend to contribute to the building of Alberta's current and future prosperity.

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At the heart of the strategic framework is an understanding that teaching and learning are about relationships. The highly relational activity of learning exists within and among students, their families and their communities. Professional teachers and school leaders bring learning to life every day.

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# Strategic Directions, Grand Challenges and the Strategic Framework

## Strategic Directions

» The ATA's **strategic directions** are based on the objects of the ATA, as set out in the *Teaching Profession Act*.

### ■ Nature of Learning

Understand the nature of learning to enhance professional practice and policy

### ■ Teachers

Improve the professional lives of teachers

### ■ Profession

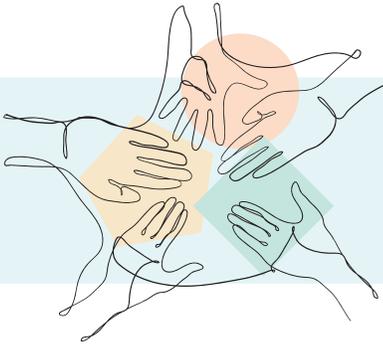
Continually advance a vibrant and trusted teaching profession

### ■ Public and Partners

Deepen and expand public and partner commitment to create great schools for all and help shape a robust and resilient public education system

### ■ Association

Create Association structures, roles and programs for the profession that are responsive to changing learning conditions and open to a more complex society



The ATA's Strategic Planning Group was established to develop the capacity for strategic actions in the teaching profession in Alberta. It advises Provincial Executive Council on long-term directions for the Association.

## Grand Challenges

» The **grand challenges** identify major long-term challenges for Alberta society that the public education system plays an important part in resolving.

### ■ Creating Futures

Vibrant communities and societies need great schools and communities of learning for all students, teachers and parents. Creating those schools and communities includes nurturing networks and partnerships between systems, parents and school boards in a diverse public education system. Through their work, teachers seek to inspire Albertans and create a resilient and vibrant society.

### ■ Innovating Collaboratively

Continually developing individual, interpersonal and organizational capacities contributes to a vibrant Alberta in a dynamic and ever-changing world. Public schools and teachers transform these capacities and adapt and reinvent them in communities, industries and across systems.

### ■ Fostering Resilience

The ATA contributes to society's resilience by supporting teachers, students and families, as well as ATA programs and structures, to continually foster their resilience. Resilience involves emotional, social, economic and physical dimensions in individuals, groups and organizations. Fostering resilience helps us all to recover and regenerate from disruptions in ways that support our day-to-day lives and the major aims of the ATA and public education.

### ■ Identifying a Grand Challenge

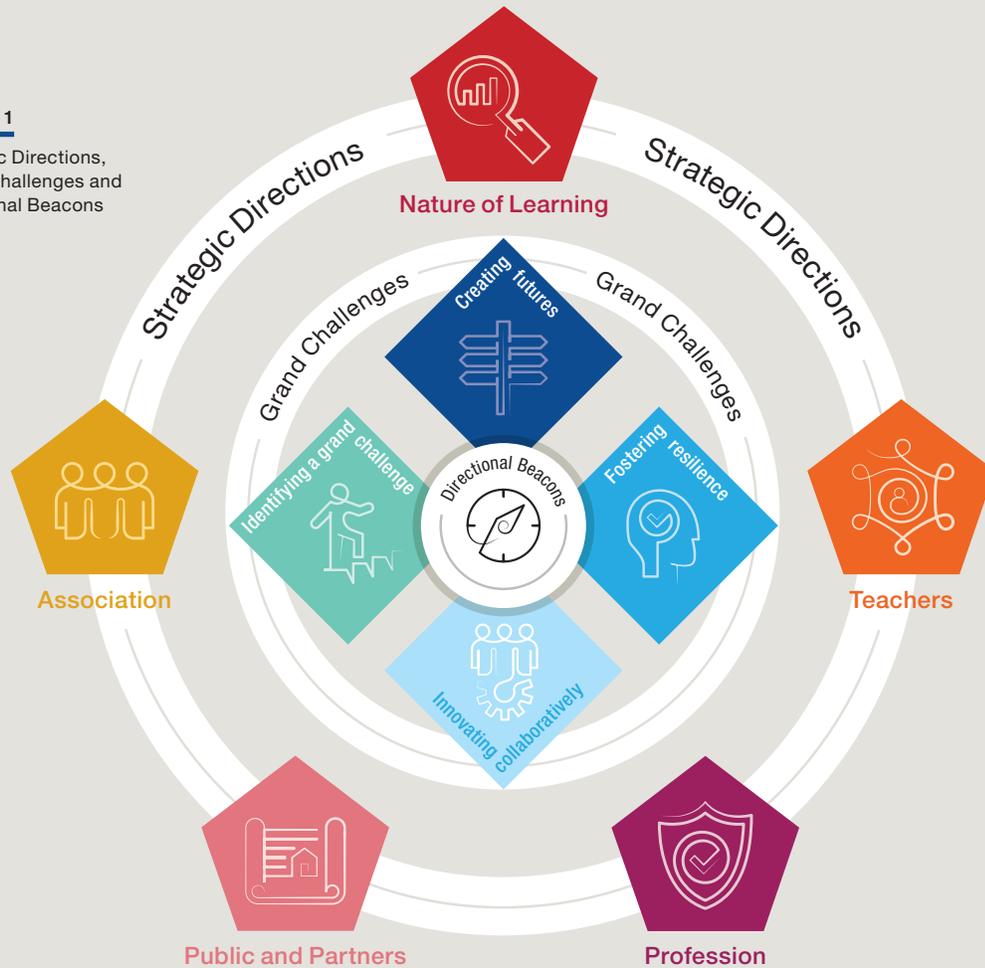
A grand challenge may be specific to a particular classroom, school or community, or it may be one shared by teachers in a particular local or across the profession. It may also be one that is aligned with one of the societal challenges identified above, which teachers and the public education system both contribute to resolving.

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.”

– Lao Tzu

**FIGURE 1**

Strategic Directions, Grand Challenges and Directional Beacons



The **strategic directions** and **grand challenges** are the core elements of the strategic plan.

They identify the **why** and the **how** of any action.

**Identifying a grand challenge** is one way to focus attention on the arc of change required for desired long-term impact, while still responding to the pressing demands for short-term action in the present. It is the why of our action, coupled with the how of the strategic directions.

An individual teacher, a local, an ATA program area or other group may have a frustrating, continuing challenge that always gets in the way of the impact they want to have.

The grand challenges are interdependent, not separate. Addressing any one of the challenges provides the foundation for addressing the others.

The portfolio of strategies addressing a grand challenge may require actions in one or more of the strategic directions, as illustrated in a matrix (see appendix).

Some strategies will be realized through individual action; others will require group or collective action. Resources from the ATA support such action, for example, the Strategic Planning Grant program.

## The Strategic Framework

- » Realizing the **strategic framework** requires communication, mobilization of ATA members and the infrastructure to support this important work.

### Communication

Communicating the strategic framework in ways that help people see the relationship to the landscapes for teachers and the ATA into the future.



by example, this also includes individual teachers, specialist councils, teachers' convention associations, bargaining units and locals.

### Mobilization

Mobilizing multiple groups to actively align their work and thinking with the strategic framework in keeping with the way they operate. While Provincial Executive Council sets the tone and leads



### Supports, Programs, Roles and Services

The provincial Association supports Alberta teachers through the Teacher Employment Services, Professional Development and Government program areas at Barnett House and the Southern Alberta Regional Office.



# Foundational Framework for Long-Term Action

## Strategic Directions and Directional Beacons



» **This framework of strategic directions** describes the actions ATA members employ to contribute to the desired long-term impact of the ATA's mandate.



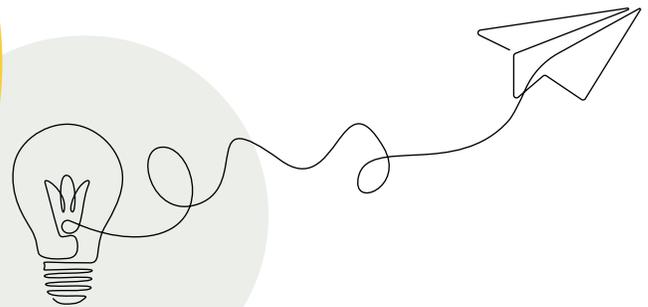
» **The directional beacons** guide the ATA's progress toward the desired outcomes over time. Like the North Star, they serve as a navigational aid that allows the ATA to adapt its journey to different conditions on the ground.

### Actions

Specific types of action will be taken within each strategic direction, including routine programs and actions that change slowly, crisis response to emergent issues, quality improvement or more disruptive innovation. Actions may take the form of teaching students, delivering programs or services, or influencing or strengthening the actions of others, as well as modelling desirable action.

Actions in a strategic direction will address one or more of the grand challenges.

Since limited resources (time, skills and funds) are a reality, mobilizing action in each strategic direction will require a transparent "portfolio" of actions of these types. The aspirations of any year's activity can then be matched with a realistic assessment of the resources available to achieve them. The most immediate priorities can be balanced with actions that provide a medium- or long-term building block or outcome.



## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

### Nature of Learning

Understand the nature of learning to enhance professional practice and policy

#### ■ Directional Beacon

Professional practice, public policy, and ATA structures and roles are founded on the learning sciences and evolving knowledge of teaching and learning at all levels, relevant to diverse contexts across Alberta.

#### ■ Background

- » The phrase *understand the nature of learning* involves the multidisciplinary nature of the learning sciences. Teaching includes those practices aimed at inclusive learning, supports for all students and the important work of helping students optimize their potential. It also includes questions about what influences a group's or an individual's ability to learn. These questions apply to both children and adults since a student's learning space is also a teacher's working and learning space.
- » Moving from research or other explorations into practice or policy requires repeating a cycle of steps: exploring or discovering; developing and testing prototypes to ensure robust mobilization and applicability to diverse Alberta contexts; and transferring the findings into common practice, with action learning throughout to improve the next iteration of the cycle.
- » Teachers individually stay current with evolving knowledge of the nature of learning through life stages and in diverse and changing contexts. They continually adapt and regenerate their teaching practice to support their effectiveness.
- » Teachers come together through various ATA mechanisms (including specialist councils, locals and Provincial Executive Council) to ensure that the design and operation of policy, structures and roles are founded on the learning sciences.
- » *Knowledge*, in this context, includes experiential lived and experiential professional knowledge, as well as explicit and implicit knowledge. Participative action research will best enable the broadest development of knowledge across the ATA membership.
- » *Professional practice and policy* relates to multiple levels (whether written or understood through history and social norms) at multiple levels (individual teachers, schools, school boards, ATA policies, Alberta Education policies, and policies in sectors that influence students' and teachers' ability to learn). Aligning policy or weaving references to policy based on understanding the nature of learning requires the development and testing of prototypes to ensure applicability to diverse Alberta contexts.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

### Teachers

Improve the professional lives of teachers

#### ■ Directional Beacon

Teachers, individually and collectively, have the skills and resources to continually improve their practice, their conditions of practice, their working conditions and their personal well-being, as well as their engagement in the profession and in policy development. In so doing, they continually enhance the diverse learning conditions they create for all students.

#### ■ Background

- » Teaching is a highly relational activity. Teachers must continually bring the best of themselves to highly challenging practice environments. The diversity of teachers and Alberta contexts demands resources aligned with teachers' particular situations and issues.
- » The reputation of, and confidence in, individual teachers are informed by the behaviour of the collective (the profession), so this strategic direction is interdependent with the next strategic direction.
- » ATA union and professional functions seek to achieve this strategic direction. Individual teacher engagement is aligned with hallmarks of the profession in Alberta. These include a code of professional conduct, continuous learning, research and a defined knowledge base (learning sciences).
- » Actions in this strategic direction include continued ways to sustain the high quality and exceptional calibre of Alberta teachers in current and future environments. Those actions, which include the recruitment of diverse, highly competent teachers, may involve influencing postsecondary teacher preparation programs and continuing competence.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

### Profession

Continually advance a vibrant and trusted teaching profession

#### ■ Directional Beacon

Members come together and engage in a variety of ways to create a vibrant, trusted teaching profession that maintains and enhances a reputation for focusing on critical issues affecting children and learning.

#### ■ Background

- » An individual teacher's reputation is founded on the reputation of and public confidence in the profession, so this strategic direction is interdependent with the previous strategic direction.
- » Hallmarks of a profession in Alberta include a code of professional conduct, continuous learning, research, a defined knowledge base (learning sciences) and standards of professional practice.
- » Teachers who model the hallmarks of the profession and are actively engaged in the profession, individually and collectively, send an unambiguous message to the public and partners. They support the ongoing resilience and trusted relationship with the public. Members send a compelling message about the importance of public education to the future of Alberta and share factual information about schools, learning, professional standards and the need to ensure that all students have a good learning environment.
- » The ATA's role in recruitment and professional standards supports the sustainability and resilience of the profession.
- » The ATA's assurance functions and communication about the rigour of the process support continued trust in the profession and in individual teachers.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

### Public and Partners

Deepen and expand public and partner commitment to create great schools for all and help shape a robust and resilient public education system

#### ■ Directional Beacon

Albertans and partners have confidence in and commitment to working collaboratively with the ATA to advance Alberta's public education system and learning environments for all students.

#### ■ Background

- » A robust and resilient public education system is the foundation of a prosperous and vibrant Alberta.
- » Public and partner commitment is transformed at all levels, individually and collectively, through individual teachers' networks in their schools and communities, locals' connections with other professions and organizations in their regions, specialist councils' connections to others who share their particular area of interest, and the relationships of Provincial Executive Council and staff with other provincial agencies and the public.
- » *Schools* is used here to represent learning environments, while recognizing that learning environments may evolve in the future.
- » Actions in the other strategic directions support the willingness of the public and partners to trust the ATA and invite the ATA to work together on issues of mutual interest:
  - Understanding the nature of learning
  - Advancing the professionalism and competence of teachers, who collectively model the hallmarks of the profession
  - Demonstrating a commitment to assurance
- » Potential partners include those with an explicit education mandate; those in the broad human sector; and those in the business, nonprofit and volunteer, environmental and economic sectors.

## STRATEGIC DIRECTION

### Association

Create Association structures, roles and programs for the profession that are responsive to changing learning conditions and open to a more complex society

#### Directional Beacon

ATA members, individually and collectively, are effectively supported in advancing the ATA's objects in a continually changing and complex society.

#### Background

- » The structures, roles and programs included in this strategic direction are the various mechanisms for collective action—ATA locals, committees, specialist councils and communities of practice, as well as Provincial Executive Council and staff.
- » A main goal of the ATA is to be a healthy, diverse and equitable organization that is responsive to members while also serving as their collective voice. Given the nature of teaching, to which teachers and other staff bring their whole selves, achieving this strategic direction requires creating a partnership between individuals, groups and the ATA.
- » Such an organization balances actions that are reliably routine with those that are agile and quickly responsive to changing conditions. It explores various ways of organizing work (hierarchical or networked organization structures and processes). It also has an eye to both the immediate and the long-term future and to both the nuanced particular and the big picture.

### Take Your First Step

You may be an individual teacher, a local, an ATA program area or other group. You'll contribute to the aspirations of the strategic framework by aligning your work and thinking in a way that suits your particular situation and passion. You'll be making your own specific plan for the actions you'll take going forward, adapting and reinventing as you go.

You can locate your particular focus for action (your grand challenge) using the matrix of strategic directions and grand challenges below. Together they combine the why and the how of your action. Using both will help you to engage additional partners.

### EXAMPLE—CREATING FUTURES

**A** A specialist council wants to focus on improving the capacity of the public education system by creating communities of learning aligned to needs of students, families or communities with particular characteristics. This contributes to the Grand Challenge Creating Futures.

The specialist council then starts a small project that involves actions based on two strategic directions:

- Exploring how the Nature of Learning influences the strategies used
- Exploring how that could be enhanced by engaging Public and Partners

**B** As a second stage, the council might add strategic actions from as many as all five ATA strategic directions:

- The strategies developed in the first project translate to all Teachers in a local to improve their professional lives.
- The improved experience can contribute to the Profession by increasing the ways the teaching profession is trusted.

The council's internal ways of conceiving and leading such a strategic approach relate to the Association's strategic direction.

### MATRIX OF STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS AND GRAND CHALLENGES

		GRAND CHALLENGES			
		Creating Futures	Fostering Resilience	Innovating Collaboratively	Identifying Your Grand Challenge
STRATEGIC DIRECTIONS	Nature of Learning	A			
	Teachers	B			
	Profession	B			
	Public and Partners	A			
	Association	B			



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The future is not some place we are going,  
but one we are creating. The paths are not to be  
found, but made. And the activity of making them  
changes both the maker and the destination.

—John Schaar, *Legitimacy in the Modern State*

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