

Exiting the Teaching Profession in Alberta—A Qualitative Research Study with Actionable Opportunities





The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Foreword

Exiting the Teaching Profession in Alberta is a qualitative study that seeks to shed light on the factors influencing teachers' decisions to leave their profession. This analysis provides important insights into the complex landscape of teaching in Alberta and the current conditions of professional practice and employment that are leading teachers to exit their profession.

The impetus for this study arose from previous Association work that identified that one in three Alberta teachers had reported plans to leave the profession, migrate out of Alberta or retire early. The primary drivers of teachers' decisions to leave included overwhelming workloads, large class sizes and insufficient support for diverse student needs. These issues were exacerbated by increasing administrative demands and a perceived lack of appreciation and support from both the public and governmental institutions.

Through a series of in-depth exit interviews and an intake survey, this study captures the voices of those who have left or are contemplating leaving the teaching profession in Alberta. Their stories reveal a deep-seated passion for teaching and a profound frustration with the current conditions that make it untenable. Teachers yearn for reduced class sizes, guaranteed preparation time and increased support for the complex needs of their students. The data collected underscores the urgent need for systemic changes to improve working conditions and support teacher and school leader retention.

This research, led by Phil McRae and Lisa Everitt, with the expert assistance of Keith Greenawalt Consulting, aims to provide actionable opportunities for policymakers, educational leaders and the Alberta Teachers' Association to address these pressing issues. By understanding the root causes of teacher attrition, concerned parties can develop targeted strategies to foster a more sustainable and supportive educational environment.

I wish to extend my deep gratitude to all who participated in the interviews that inform this study. Their contributions were invaluable to helping the Association understand the lived experience of those of our colleagues who are choosing to leave teaching. I hope this study serves as a clarion call for meaningful action. The future of education in Alberta depends on our ability to attract, support and retain the dedicated professionals who are the backbone of our schools. It is the collective responsibility of the profession, government, employers and the larger community served by public education to ensure that teaching remains a viable and fulfilling career for all who choose it.

Dennis Theobald,
Executive Secretary, Government
Alberta Teachers' Association

Preface

Recent random stratified research studies conducted by the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) highlight the rising concerns among Alberta teachers and school leaders about the growing intensity of their professional workload. Many of these concerns stem from the complexities in supports and resources for the complex and diverse student needs in their classrooms, large class sizes and declining resources.

Consequently, one in three Alberta teachers report plans to either leave teaching, migrate out of Alberta or retire. In preparation for exit interviews in June 2023, an intake survey revealed that nine in 10 teachers exiting the profession of teaching in Alberta identified conditions of professional practice, encompassing work intensification and lack of work-life balance, as their primary reason for leaving teaching. Furthermore, moral distress, arising from the inability to adequately address students' multifaceted needs in a timely fashion, is escalating attrition and impacting teacher retention.

Key findings from the exit interviews emphasize teachers' desire for reduced class sizes, increased supports for complex and diverse student needs and guaranteed preparation time. An overwhelming 91 per cent of those planning to leave the profession indicated that class size and complexity of needs were their top concerns. Notably, there has been a decline in job satisfaction over the past two years, which aligns with increasing challenges.

Some respondents foresee the need for drastic changes, such as teacher job actions or immediate reductions in extracurricular activities, to enhance classroom environments and professional working conditions. While teachers face frustrations such as increasing workloads and challenges with lack of supports and resources for inclusive classrooms, they also grapple with public perception, conflicts with parents and negative public discourse on teaching. Issues concerning work-life balance, bureaucracy, shifting student behaviours and the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic further strain teachers' well-being and job satisfaction. While there appears to be a small divide between school leaders and teachers, with the former offering a slightly more optimistic perspective, school leaders are also struggling and looking for fundamental changes to their conditions of practice.

Overall, while the respondents who exited the profession appreciate the essence of teaching, they were overwhelmed by the deteriorating conditions of professional practice, mounting demands and unsustainable complexities of the work. This ATA research study led by Phil McRae, PhD, and Lisa Everitt, EdD, with the skilled and thoughtful exit interview support of Keith Greenawalt Consulting, seeks to fill the knowledge gap on why teachers leave their profession early and aims to provide insights that could foster retention and support throughout their careers.

This study may be a clarion call for what could be a larger exodus from the profession of teaching.

Background

Across randomized pulse and longitudinal research studies, involving several thousand Alberta teachers and school leaders, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) has been tracking growing concerns with unsustainable work intensification manifesting from challenging conditions of professional practice.

Conditions of Professional Practice

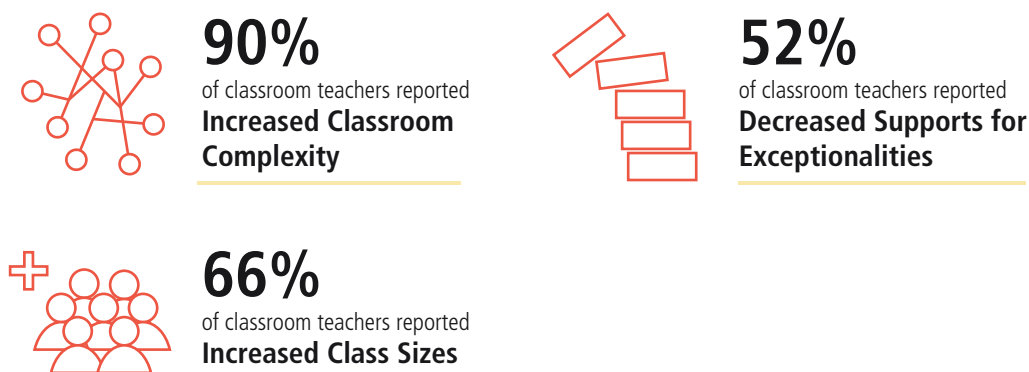


Figure 1. Random stratified membership sample ($n = 2019$) gathered between 2023 02 10 and 2023 03 06
Margin of error ± 2 per cent on all questions (19 times out of 20)

These concerns form the basis for one in three Alberta teachers and school leaders reporting plans to leave the profession of teaching (10 per cent), leave the province of Alberta to teach elsewhere (five per cent) and/or to retire from teaching (15 per cent). Data gathered yields ± 2 per cent margins of error (19 times out of 20).

In particular, the complexity and diversity of student needs in schools and classrooms (eg, socioeconomic, linguistic, behavioural, cognitive, social/emotional), along with growing class sizes and diminished resources/supports, have intensified the work of nine in 10 Alberta teachers across large, suburban and rural school divisions.

When asked about the greatest areas of complexity impacting classes across rural, urban and suburban settings, teachers agreed that social emotional, behavioral and cognitive challenges were most evident. The results broken down by rural, urban and suburban school jurisdictions are shown on the following page.

Growing Alberta Classroom Complexity

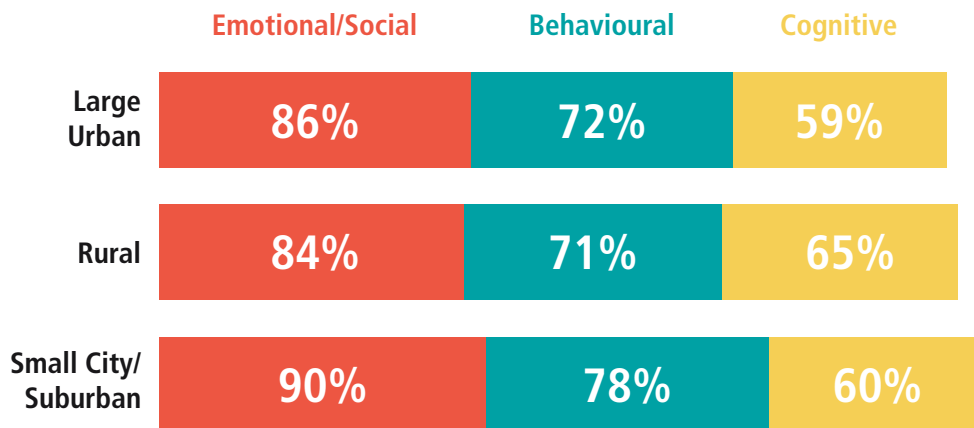


Figure 2. Random stratified membership sample (n = 2019) gathered between 2023 02 10 and 2023 03 06

Margin of error ± 2 per cent on all questions (19 times out of 20)

From exit interviews and intake survey of 65 Alberta teachers and school leaders conducted in June 2023, conditions of professional practice (workload/balance) were identified as the primary driver (91 per cent) for these individuals recently leaving the teaching profession and/or moving away from Alberta to work elsewhere. The intake survey for this study also reinforced that moral distress (81 per cent)—the inability to meet the complexity of students' needs in schools over the last two years—is an accelerating issue for teacher retention.

Executive Summary from Exit Interviews

Overarching Themes

- **Work intensification:** Teachers are overwhelmed with their workloads, often feeling the tasks do not directly benefit students and, in terms of student assessments, have become bureaucratic. Teachers also feel that these tasks have become low value with high impact in terms of work intensification.
- **Lack of inclusion supports:** While inclusive classrooms are philosophically and theoretically supported, in practice, their execution is seen as challenging and poorly supported across most Alberta schools and school communities.
- **Moral distress and compromises:** Many exiting teachers expressed sorrow and frustration over compromises they feel they have had to make to remain in the profession of teaching in Alberta. This is seen in other ATA research as an outcome of growing moral distress.
- **Public discourse and culture wars:** The negative public discourse on teaching and public education has teachers and school leaders feeling besieged.
- **Parent conflict:** Teachers want more school leadership and administrative support, especially in the context of confrontational relationships with parents and/or communities that do not support teachers. As triangulated in various ATA rapid research studies, *challenging parent interactions* has been a growing issue across Alberta school communities.

Focused Areas of Concern

1. Teachers who exited the profession desired changes encompassing reductions in class sizes and guaranteed preparation time.
 - Class size and complexity challenges are by far the most pressing issue (91 per cent) for those who exited (or have been actively planning on leaving) the profession of teaching.
 - Increased preparation time for teachers (eg, curriculum, extra-curricular activities) is seen as diminishing.
 - There is a need for equity in workload across urban and rural areas.
 - Teachers identified a need for dedicated planning time during instructional hours.
2. Teachers who exited the profession had experienced a cascading cycle of decreasing job satisfaction over two years, coupled with increasing challenges as they exit the profession.
 - During the intake survey for this research study, 39 per cent of the 65 respondents indicated that they had left or are considered leaving either the teaching profession (or teaching in Alberta) between one to two years prior. Moreover, 36 per cent of the 65 respondents stated that they had been contemplating their exit strategy two years (or more) before exiting.

3. For tangible change, and to prevent attrition and enhance teacher retention, some respondents indicated that they believe drastic measures, such as teacher job action or reducing extracurricular activities, will become necessary to improve classrooms and professional conditions of practice.
 - The current governmental direction in curriculum was a touchstone of contention for respondents.
4. Exiting school leaders largely validated teacher concerns from this study but possess a slightly more optimistic outlook on the teaching career.
 - This finding is reinforced by data from the ATA's *Hope: Resilience and Recovery* research study (2023) which identified school leaders as key sources of hope across Alberta schools.

RESPONDENTS' SALIENT ISSUES FOR ACTION

Work Intensification and Working Hours

- Feeling of constant work with little downtime
- Increase in weekly working hours
- Loss of weekends and free time
- Immense workload during early years of teaching
- School leadership work becoming increasingly unsustainable

Work-Life Balance and Personal Sacrifices

- Unsustainable challenges to maintaining a balance between professional and personal life
- Personal sacrifices such as postponing family planning due to workload
- Accepting the demanding nature of the profession given salary or other benefits on the part of some teachers/school leaders, in contrast with others who find it unsustainable and are preparing to leave their vocation

Expectations and Demands

- High demands for immediate feedback on assignments
- Increased emphasis on outward appearances to parents for school reputation
- Adoption and micromanagement of new digital tools
- Increased accommodation needs and responsibilities associated with inclusive classrooms

Role of School Leaders and Work Culture

- There is varied support from school leaders in maintaining work-life balance. Specifically, some school leaders are able to set clear boundaries (eg, email hours), while others promote a 24/7 work culture.

- A shift has occurred in administrative responsibilities and scope of practice, with teachers taking on roles formerly held by other staff.
- A disconnect exists between school leadership and teachers; decisions are often handed from government to school authorities to school leaders to teachers without explanation or discussion of implication(s).
- To prevent teachers from exiting the profession, respondents indicated that school leaders need to truly listen to teachers and to foster school environments where risks are celebrated.
- Removing the mystery from administrative decisions and involving teachers in the process is considered crucial. Teachers exiting the profession report their professional judgement and autonomy has been impacted in Alberta over the last decade.
- There is a need to help school leaders cultivate cultures based on trust, respect and love.

Paperwork and Bureaucracy

- Complaints about unnecessary bureaucratic paperwork and, at the elementary level, literacy and numeracy assessments
- Shifts in responsibilities, leading to more bureaucratic burdens for school leaders and teachers
- Perceived value versus effort in administrative tasks, with some tasks seen as beneficial and others as burdensome

Student Behaviour and Expectations

- Challenges related to student behaviour, such as technology and phone use
- Need to accommodate a growing variety and complexity of student needs
- Expectations to individually fund and provide (digital) resources to support curriculum

Impacts of COVID-19

- Mental health issues and learning gaps were exacerbated and accelerated post-COVID.
- Returning to in-person teaching reintroduced previous workload challenges.
- Structured online teaching provided more time for preparation and student interaction.
- Increased absenteeism and punctuality issues were observed.

Perspective on Teaching Today versus the Past

- Teaching seen as significantly more challenging than in the past
- Schools operating over capacity with large class sizes and more complex and diverse student needs
- Increased complexity in teaching duties and responsibilities, lead to lack of work-life balance

Resources

- There is a desire for the Government of Alberta (or ATA) to provide high-quality teaching resources, such as lesson plans and workbooks.
- Teachers are currently sourcing and personally paying for materials from the internet or creating materials from scratch.
- Resources to support students with unique educational needs are in high demand.

ATA Engagement and Relationship

- There is a perception that the ATA is disconnected from teachers, and many are uninformed about what the ATA offers. Some feel the ATA is not fighting hard enough for teachers' and school leaders' rights.
- There are concerns about the ATA's alignment with members' needs.
- Teachers want to feel valued and desire greater transparency from school leaders.
- Communication gaps exist between the ATA and its members, and this needs to be addressed.

Future Concerns and Considerations

- Mental health issues and the implications of moral distress in the profession of teaching are accelerating quickly.
- This study may be a clarion call for what could be a larger exodus from the profession of teaching and a potential breaking point for a large number of teachers due to increased demands.
- This study amplifies calls to find pragmatic and funded ways to support the teaching process and reduce complexity of needs.

Additional Observations

1. While teachers generally appreciate the core work of teaching (ie, working with students), the main reason for leaving the profession is relief from the growing demands, work intensification and seemingly unsustainable workload of an undersupported and underresourced profession.
2. A significant portion of teachers in Alberta feel trapped, leading to feelings of martyrdom. Financial compensation is a concern, but reducing workloads seems more essential than pay raises for those interviewed. This was validated by the intake survey data showing 25 per cent of respondents stated pay was an issue, with 91 per cent citing conditions of professional practice (workload/balance) as their most prominent concern and reason for leaving the profession.
3. Intergenerational tensions among teachers are prevalent, driven more by school dynamics than perhaps an overall industry trend. The causes of these tensions are varied but growing. More research is needed in this area.
4. Many teachers would opt for another profession if given a chance.

About This Study

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Presently, a gap in knowledge exists in Alberta, Canada, regarding factors that inform a teacher or school leader to exit the teaching profession earlier than originally intended.

For many decades in Alberta, teachers, including school principals, have experienced educational turbulence because of expected changes to curricula, increasing measures for accountability and uncertain government funding. COVID-19 acted as an accelerant to many of the pre-existing complex challenges within Alberta's education system.

Consequently, exploring the lived experience of educators through in-depth interviews is intended to provide crucial insights to assist the ATA, school jurisdictions and policy makers to develop measures, resources, tools and/or solutions to encourage, retain and support teachers throughout the course of their careers and reduce teacher and school leader attrition.

This ATA research study led by Phil McRae, PhD, and Lisa Everitt, EdD, with the skilled and thoughtful exit interview support of Keith Greenawalt Consulting, seeks to fill the knowledge gap on why teachers leave their profession early and aims to provide insights that could foster retention and support throughout their careers.

METHODOLOGY

Intake Survey and Exit Interviews

Using a method of random stratified sampling from our membership, we pinpointed 65 teachers who were either on the verge of leaving or had already left the profession. These teachers had previously indicated a willingness and availability to participate in comprehensive exit interviews.

The intake survey (refer to Appendix B for details) offers deeper insight into the reasons for leaving and the current status of these respondents. For the actual exit interview process, we chose 12 teachers based on a specific profile matrix, considering the constraints of the available sample size. Selection criteria for these interviews also emphasized geographical location (urban, suburban, rural), career phase (early, mid, late) and gender balance.

The qualitative research was built around hour-long, one-on-one interviews with teachers (n = 12) and school leaders (n = 3) conducted by Keith Greenawalt Consulting. The interviews were conducted between May 26, 2023, and June 28, 2023.

The teachers who participated in the interviews were first identified in the ATA’s 2023 Annual Member Opinion Survey as prepared to exit the teaching profession and then further identified for representation through an intake survey in the spring of 2023, where the individuals indicated that they had or were actively considering leaving the teaching in the immediate future.

The teachers interviewed were recruited to provide a cross section of demographics found within Alberta’s teaching profession.

Table 1. Demographic information of teachers selected for exit interviews.

Gender Identification	Female (n = 9)
	Male (n = 3)
School Location	Urban (n = 5)
	Medium (n = 1)
	Rural/Small population centre (n = 6)
School Type	High school (n = 4)
	Middle school (n = 3)
	Elementary school (n = 4)
	K–12/Multiple school type (n = 1)
Teaching Experience to Date	Early career (two to four years)* (n = 4)
	Mid career (five to 14 years)* (n = 4)
	Late career (15+ years) (n = 4)
Age	26–30 (n = 3)
	31–35 (n = 2)
	36–40 (n = 3)
	41–45 (n = 2)
	46–50 (n = 0)
	51–55 (n = 1)
	55–60 (n = 1)

*One respondent who selected “five to nine years” had five years of teaching experience and was reclassified as early career. The response of this participant is noted as early career.

The n = 3 school leaders were recruited with a combination of survey responses and direct recruiting by the ATA. The two male and one female school leaders all worked at urban schools.

As with any qualitative research effort, the findings here are directional in nature and not necessarily representative of the whole populations the interview participants represent. To the extent that this

report refers to teachers and school leaders *in a general sense*, we are referring to the teachers and school leaders who participated in these exit interviews, not all Alberta teachers or school leaders.

Exit Interview Discussion Themes

The following areas were discussed during in-depth 60-minute qualitative interviews with 12 teachers and three school leaders who had exited the profession of teaching.

- **Teacher profile:** What were the personal motivations for the teacher/school leader to enter the profession? What has their Alberta experience been like to date?
- **Catalysts for reconsideration:** How long have they been thinking about leaving either the teaching profession or teaching in Alberta? What were the triggers for the teacher/school leader to start thinking about an exit? What has changed in the last year or two that convinced them to exit?
- **What's next:** What are they planning to do next professionally (inclusive of the decision to leave the profession and focus on raising a family)? What else did they consider for their next step? What are their expectations for what will *be better* about their new path, compared to teaching in Alberta?
- **Opportunities for improvement:** What would have needed to be different in order to keep the individual in the teaching profession in Alberta? Do they have specific tactical ideas for how to create the change that would have kept them in the profession?
- **Peer insights:** The 15 selected interviewees were asked their opinion on how *common* the sentiments regarding leaving the profession or the province of Alberta were among their peer group. Further questions included: (1) What about their personal experience feels unique to them, versus what is being *universally* felt in the profession at large? (2) Is there any context/insight that was not true for them personally but is top of mind among peers?

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

While the findings from this study may be helpful in providing insight into teachers and school leaders' perspectives on exiting the profession, some of the specific comments may not be applicable to other contexts.

The sample size of the intake survey was adequate for selection of exit interviews and identifying common themes and key findings within this population. However, because most of the respondents were self-selected, and the sample size is small, it is not possible to determine with complete certainty that the results are representative of the larger population.

That being said, the fact that the responses from this research study show similar patterns to prior survey instruments does increase confidence in the representativeness of the results. As is often the case with exploratory research, new questions emerged that might become the focus of future research.

The results of this research survey will be further analyzed and weighted with other ATA research initiatives.

Appendix A

EXIT INTERVIEW THEMES AND VERBATIM COMMENTS

Vicious Cycle

Teachers who are considering leaving the profession appear to be experiencing a vicious cycle where they are experiencing less of what they love about teaching at the same time they are facing increasing challenges/negative reinforcement.

- Teachers feel like their workload is already overwhelming and is trending in the wrong direction. They feel that there is always more to be done and that teaching and having any semblance of work-life balance is close to impossible (increasing challenge).
- Larger class sizes, the challenges of managing inclusive classrooms and increased nonclassroom responsibilities were most frequently cited as the drivers of this increased workload.
- Almost universally, the teachers we talked to highlighted their relationships with, and positive impact on, students as what they loved the most about teaching.
- Unfortunately, the realities of their increased workload mean that teachers are finding it harder to connect with individual students and have less time and energy to invest in creating those connections (reduction of positive reinforcement).
- And while teachers feel like they are giving all that they can to their profession and students, they feel misunderstood and/or under attack within their schools, communities and society more broadly (reduction of positive reinforcement *and* increasing negative reinforcement).
- Across the interviews, teachers highlighted a lack of support from other teachers, school and system leaders and school authorities, parents and students who do not seem to care about school and do not respect the teacher's expertise and professional autonomy, and Alberta politicians and media painting teachers as lazy and selfish.
- However, for several teachers we spoke with, they may be their own toughest critics. Although they recognize that they need to practice self-care so that they can have energy and enthusiasm in the classroom, they feel guilty and in conflict when that self-care gets in the way of doing all they can for students (increasing negative reinforcement).
- Teachers cited giving fewer assignments to reduce their grading workload, volunteering for fewer extracurricular activities (including collaborating and supporting each other) and reducing their accessibility to students during nonclassroom time as places where teachers feel like they feel forced to make decisions that are not in the best interests of their students. Intuitively, these decisions almost surely result in teachers having fewer of the *see the lightbulb go off for a student* moments that emotionally connect them to this career (reduction of positive reinforcement).

No Easy Answers

Teachers recognize that there are no easy answers in the current, resource-strapped environment. However, when asked where change would have the biggest impact on their experience, most teachers focused on two elements of their working conditions: capping class sizes and ensuring everyone gets dedicated prep time.

- While dealing with high-needs students in inclusive classrooms was seen as a major challenge, most teachers felt that having smaller classes would reduce complexity overall and allow them to accommodate proportionally fewer high-needs students.
- Dedicated prep time was seen as having a number of potential benefits for the experience of teaching, including having time to recharge during the day, reducing the amount of evening and weekend work requirements, creating time where teachers can collaborate and connect with each other and being able to dedicate time to a positive and productive part of their profession by creatively developing lessons that have positive impacts on students.

Firm Action

Relative to the ATA in particular, several interviewees suggested that they believe that more firm action will be required to drive positive change. These teachers felt like parents will need to have *negative consequences*—such as from a teacher strike or a reduction in extracurricular volunteering from teachers (which would reduce extracurricular opportunities for students)—before they would start supporting the need for change in working conditions.

- Among those who are not ready for more *aggressive* steps that might have a negative impact on students, working to create more engagement across the ATA came up frequently. Interviewees mentioned that the ATA membership seems less engaged than teachers in other provinces, and that it will be hard to drive for change without more unity among the membership. In general, the teachers we spoke with do not seem to feel *heard* by the people in their professional lives.
- Some teachers also mentioned that the ATA can help by trying to improve the overall quality of relationships between teachers, administrators and school boards and by investing in *workload-reducing* support for teachers.

DETAILED FINDINGS—VERBATIM AREAS OF FRUSTRATION

Overwhelmed

Teachers are facing a workload that feels overwhelming, impossible without relief in sight.



I knew there would be a lot of work, but I didn't realize it would be almost impossible to get everything done. I am an A-type person—I felt like there was always something more that I could be doing. I felt like I was drowning the first few years. I had to choose things that I was going to not put my energy into—not that they weren't important, but they weren't the most important. Planning for one class is a lot of effort—I think I taught eight subjects in my first year. And I am [also] expected to accommodate students? I couldn't do that. I was barely meeting the needs of kids that were at grade level. [I was] participating in extracurricular—working until six or seven at night. If I did more, I would be working until I went to bed. Marking, sometimes I just said, 'I'm just not marking this.'"



Every year, the workload has increased. When I started my career, I averaged 48 hours per week. Now I'm in the 60s. I don't have weekends any longer. Six to 12 hours grading, Sundays, four to six hours. Also, before school and after school. I never have a chance to have a life. Interestingly, COVID reduced it. When we were fully online, my teaching time was very structured and I could use that other time to prepare, talk to students in an office hour model. My work time plummeted. [But] since we went back to full in person, it's bad again."

No Work-Life Balance

Many teachers expressed their frustration with their workload by describing a complete lack of work-life balance.



Some administrators are good with helping teachers with work-life balance. I have a friend who is a principal and she taught teachers to use scheduled emails so that nothing goes to a parent outside of the core workday. There are no evening emails because as soon as you open the floodgates the water comes through. Some admins set that example, but at my prior school, it was very much a 24/7 culture. Emails from administrators were coming at us on weekends."



I knew that teachers worked after school. I didn't realize how much I would be working after school. Even in year four I was working until six or seven o'clock. I was working for so long trying to [keep up]. There was no way I could start a family. I don't know how people do it."

Nonproductive Tasks

Many teachers specifically pointed to increasing amounts of nonproductive (not directly benefiting student learning) work as a major frustration.



Administrative duties [have been rising]. I register people for their classes. That was the counselor's job. I'm required to have calls home for every student to talk about their grades. The feedback expectations on assignments have tripled. The level of feedback that is demanded even if it isn't helpful. The number of bullshit emails. I spend five hours in meetings that should have been an email that I could read later tonight and be done. I have to have daily posts for my classroom. The level of reporting out. It's all parent optics—making the school look good to parents to keep them from sending their kids somewhere else. We are clinging to the child so that we look better—we need the best sports, the best academics, the best everything to draw kids and keep funding.”



[We have] students who sit on phones, but your teacher has to take on this burden [to accommodate it]. Putting content on Google Classroom, for example. These things are piling up: use Google Classroom, ensure you can accommodate these different needs, record the exam, make sure the EA [Educational Assistant] is prepared.”



I'm happy to mark tests because that's beneficial to the kids. But there's so much paperwork that is unnecessary. Standardized tests, things that we need to submit. Sex Ed forms. Having to send them home and make sure the student understood. I never used to have to do it. We don't have enough staff, so they just throw it to the teachers. My job is not paperwork.”

Inclusion

While the people we interviewed seem to support the idea of inclusive classrooms in theory, the reality of how they are being executed in the current environment is a major challenge.



Behaviours in the classroom and needs have really changed. The kids this year are so dysregulated and almost not capable of learning ... The kids who do want to be there are getting overshadowed. [It] went from one per cent of kids having needs to more like 20 per cent of kids having needs. Then another 25 per cent who don't care. 25 per cent who want to care but are dysregulated and can't sit still. They need constant supervision. And then 25 per cent who want to learn."



I called the office and said this kid was getting violent. What do I do? This is the life of a teacher. I remember going home and thinking, 'This kid needs real help. How am I responsible [for them]?' I just learned how not to trigger him. I had nothing to give this kid. This is beyond the scope of what a teacher should have been responsible for."



Because we deal with so much more for these students, there should be some allowances. Maybe our report cards don't need to be at the same standards. Or maybe different expectations. Or PD days we get to work. We need more allowances because we go through that. There's no acknowledgement. My breaks, my recess, it's all going towards dealing with student behaviour. Logging things, contacting parents, trying to reach out to social workers."

Lack of System Support(s)

Dealing with complex and diverse student needs is not the only area where teachers do not feel like they are getting adequate support from the system around them.



I started the first year of COVID and everyone's been stressed and overwhelmed. Maybe at a different time there would have been more mentoring. I feel like I have not had administrators who look out for me or do anything to help me. I think that's probably one of the biggest parts [of wanting to leave]—feeling like I have to fight against the administrators ... Poor communication. How she's dealt with everything, how I ask for support. I've worked with nine administrators, and it's been a fight. I don't feel like anyone is looking out for me. Really let down by the admins I've encountered."



The perception—it trickles down from the higher ups—that we need to micromanage your time, so that we make sure your time are being utilized appropriately. We don't trust you to do what's best for your kids and classroom. We need to manage that time. So now they assign what they want you to do and then you have to figure out how to do it on your personal time. Mandates from the province and school division ... there is so much politics. That was a big eye opener."



Mostly, I don't feel seen. I have a close relationship with one administrator. She is burned out and doesn't have the capacity to be kind and supportive. I know that she sees me. My principal doesn't respond to my emails. I feel like the division is making decisions that don't benefit us. Parents couldn't care less. I don't know if we're not valued, but I'm not sure that anyone has the capacity to give to each other."

Parents

One area where teachers may be particularly interested in school leadership support is in their relationships with parents—relationships that seem to be getting increasingly demanding and confrontational.



And parents demand unreasonable amounts of things. They demand what they perceive they should have, they believe their kid should have a certain grade, and if it isn't that, the amount of justification I need to get parents to understand, just to justify. I am a professional and I know what I'm doing. I've graded hundreds of exams, but that doesn't matter—my education doesn't matter. There is a devaluing of our professionalism."



[The] relationship with parents was a shock. I wasn't expecting to get bullied by parents. And still not having support from administration in relation to that."



Relationships with parents have gotten more strained. There is a defensive nature—I've noticed it. They are afraid to admit to their own wrongdoing when they approach them with something that has gone wrong—someone hits someone on a recess or an incident in the classroom. I emailed parents, and it became very defensive. Not only do I have to engage [with them] on my days off, [but it's also] a constant. Now this inhibits how I can support this child, when I don't have the support of the parents."

Public Discourse

When combined with this perceived lack of support and confrontational relationships, the generally negative tone of the public discourse around the teaching profession has many of those exiting the profession feeling like they are being attacked from all sides.

“

I've realized how disrespected our profession is. People don't understand what teachers do—public servants, social workers. Even in my own house. My husband doesn't really understand public sector versus private sector. I put three years into it. I had a lot of conversations and tried to do that with people outside of education. Even in the sub-bubble of health care and social work. Anyone outside really has no idea. After a while, it beats you down.”

“

I feel very valued by the students I teach and their parents. I feel lucky [for that]. Do I feel valued by anyone else? No. Supervising an exam of students I don't have in my class? They disrespect me. The students I have in my classroom—they understand that I value them, and they respect me back. Their parents follow that. Do I feel valued by school, district, government, public ... I well know that students who I have good rapport with who are absolute terrors [in other classes]. It's a culture of 'it doesn't matter, who cares.' Some of that is the teenage brain. But it seems like a general lack of respect. Trickles down from government, public profession that we want to teach in front of computers and that we're lazy.”

Compromise and Heartbreak

Some teachers are even attacking themselves in a way. Several teachers expressed feeling negative emotions—using words and phrases like “heartbreaking,” “haunts me,” “difficult to see” and “frustrated”—with the compromises they feel like they have to make to stay in the teaching profession.



[I'm frustrated that] I'm not the teacher I used to be. [Back then,] if kids came to me for help at any time of day [I would do it]. Pre-COVID, class sizes were reasonable; I had prep time—that meant my door was always open ... [Now,] if someone asks for something during lunch, I tell them when my office time is. Because we have all this other stuff to do, I'm cutting my time with the kids. That's the teacher that I've turned into."



There's a saying—do what you can. It haunts me all the time. It's a belief—what happens is you get pressurized into feeling like you have to do more. But the reality is that you can't—there's a right to disengage. But it feels like constantly being dinged when you only do what you can. I'm really good at my job. I like to do things well. I don't know how to reconcile that. I am responsible for little people. They deserve my best. I don't want to do a job I can't do well."



I empathize with the kids who are struggling, [but] we don't have the resources. I don't have the capacity to help them. I am watching them not succeed, knowing that it's my job to help them. Those are the kids I care about the most, but ..."

Notation: Female teachers seemed more likely to express negative personal emotions associated with making these hard self-care decisions (suggested by the language used in the statement above on compromise and heartbreak), while male teachers spoke more to the general difficulty of the circumstances (eg, “it’s impossible to do this job”) and not how it makes them feel personally.

Martyrdom

Given all these challenges that these teachers experience on a daily basis, it is not surprising that when they look at this profession from the outside in, they see a culture of martyrdom.



We get a lot of flak for living outside of the school and for trying to do anything in our lives to protect that. We get shit on for it. There's an expectation that 'you took a weekend off, wow, what kind of teacher takes a weekend off.' The expectation that we are slaves to the job. I put in 60-65 and I am paid for 36.5. No one I know in any profession—I've had people come shadow me for a day. Come and do it for a day. It's martyring that we're expected to do, and it is untenable. On top of all the other things we're supposed to do beyond our job—counselors, support workers, food service protection, reporting on abuse cases. We're doing so much more than our job and then the job gets lost. And then we get criticized for not doing a good job."



Teachers are so taken for granted by other teachers. When I tell people I'm a teacher, they say this is so good and important. But other teachers or administrators it is taken for granted. We are expected to give up our lives. No one has a problem with it. Teachers don't talk about how overworked we are. I don't feel appreciated by the system, by people around me. Everyone's given up so much; everyone's burned out. We're martyrs. People take [the burden] upon themselves, but they are not talking about solutions."



The culture of teachers. Teachers are amazing and they are so giving. They will give up lunches, preps, they won't ask for a raise. If we ask for a raise, it's the most minimal. I think that teachers are those types of people who let themselves get walked all over. That's something that I appreciate—they buy supplies with their own money. It's amazing. But we settle, we are willing to work more hours for the same amount of pay. [Teachers] won't go to their kids first day of kindergarten because they come to work. They are so dedicated, but it's also frustrating. I was that way too, but they just keep asking for more and more. I think teachers are starting to become taken advantage of."

Teaching as a Career

In addition to the above teacher frustrations that are directly connected to the day-to-day, there was one frustration with the career of teaching that came up during several interviews. Teachers expressed a sentiment that managing a career as a teacher was unusually inconsistent, random or arbitrary.



The inconsistency in teaching conditions [are very frustrating]. They vary hugely from board to board and school to school. If we're an association with the same pay, the same benefits, why are conditions so different? Calgary has prep two times a year. They teach 3-4 time. Edmonton is 4-4, no prep time. I know there's the hours thing, but they are getting around it. They shorten classes to create more classes, so teachers teach more kids but spend less time per kid."



There isn't this big picture view of what's happening. So much discrepancy between schools, between principals. It's like going to a new school, and you have to start over. There's no continuity."



[I might stay in the profession if] the permanent contract—knowing that there was a route [to getting one]. It doesn't seem like there's a path; it's very nebulous. Some subs don't want it. There's no path; there's no procedure. They say there is—but actions speak louder than words."

Additional Findings and Observations

- We only had time to speak with a few teachers about how pervasive negativity about the teaching profession was among their peers. Of those we spoke with, they seemed to believe that 50 per cent or more of their peers would choose a different profession if it was offered to them.
- While not explored specifically in the interviews, it would seem that having a large percentage of teachers feeling *trapped* or *stuck* in the teaching profession could be contributing to the feelings of helplessness and martyrdom expressed in the interviews.
- We only had time to explore the topic of intergenerational tensions among teachers with a few teachers. Generally, these tensions seemed to be driven by the dynamics within an individual school rather than an industrywide trend at the moment.

DETAILED FINDINGS—PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

When asked what change would have the biggest impact on the experience of teaching in Alberta, smaller class sizes were most frequently identified by the exiting teachers.

“

Class sizes make a huge difference. I've had 38 and 19 [students]. In the class with 19 I could talk to every kid every day. I made better connections. It's healthier for everyone. Class size is for sure number one.”

“

I think a good starting point is classroom caps. If we can implement them as a starting point. Smaller classes means that everything can get better. We'd have more time to accommodate [needs]. If it's 45 kids in a classroom with no prep, I would have left the profession.”

“

Hard fixed classroom conditions—other provinces have maximum class sizes that have to be followed and there are real consequences. We have guidelines. And students with exceptional needs [should] count more. If you have a group of needy students, you should have less of them ... BC has caps on class sizes and complexity. Ontario has caps on sizes, and they pay more money. Quebec protected planning time at every grade level. Some of the provinces have it figured out.”

Pushing for dedicated prep time was also frequently highlighted as a high-impact area in terms of the teaching experience in Alberta.



I would try to make sure teachers have prep time. At least once a month have the kids go home early. Time where we are supposed to collaborate with each other. That [used to] happen naturally during our prep time. I would try to get administrators to analyze what they are asking teachers to do and whether they are effective. Can we cut some things down? We all want to do more for kids, so are there [administrative] things we can do more efficiently."



I am in a district where we have preps. There are districts where they don't. Our class sizes are big but not crazy. Ensuring that teachers have adequate prep time [would be huge]. Yes, some will misuse it, but I would love more prep time each semester—then I would have energy to help with culture, go out with peers, support with graduations."

Some teachers also identified an opportunity for the ATA (or another body) to invest in developing resources that can help teachers be more efficient and better handle what is being asked of them in their jobs.



I would either want the government or the ATA to provide high quality resources (lesson plans, worksheets, workbooks) for us. Most teachers just get stuff off the internet or buy their own plans. We're scouring the internet or creating things from scratch. There are no cohesive programs that we use. It's on a school-by-school basis. And lots of schools don't want to purchase any program. Do we want teachers to teach or to lesson plan? If we want them to deliver specific content, we should just give it to them. Or, if you want us to figure it out on our own, we can do it, but we need the time."



I would love the ATA to come out with resources to help kids who have unique needs. How to teach kids who are at Grade 2 reading level, basically illiterate in junior high, and kids who need a little extra support. I am seeing more time invested [by teachers] in how to support kids [with unique needs]. Creating grade level resources, investing in technology that would support teachers [would be helpful]."

Some of the teachers we spoke with believe that a change in approach from the ATA and its members will be required for change to happen. These teachers believe that demands for change need to come from the customers of education (parents and students) and not the suppliers (teachers and administrators).

“

At the next round of bargaining I would ask for the sky, and then when they don't, then I would go on strike. BC did it and they have amazing classroom conditions. I feel like the ATA is right in saying, "this is what can happen if we ask for too much," but I think we are at that point. In the 90s they asked for too much and then [the ATA] fought for it. Let's follow BC and Ontario. I'd love to see something radical happen. The profession is losing people. I know people who are really great who are leaving, that's not what people deserve—kids deserve the very best."

“

[Parents don't know] that the teachers who are burning out are still coaching volleyball, doing school plays, hosting lunchtime activities. If we suddenly said, 'we're not having lunchtime activities because we don't have prep time,' or if you don't have people coaching, parents would get vocal very fast. If you go on strike, that's when parents get pissed. [But if] You're still teaching because that's your job. But you're not doing all the volunteer work. We're stopping parents from being vocal [about improving things] because things aren't [getting worse for them]."

“

The negotiations ... the messaging from the ATA was that we've had to settle. I really think they need to change their priorities. I don't think their priorities are right. I think they want to do things better, but I don't understand the execution, what's actually happening. They hired people to run a campaign to encourage people to vote for education and that fizzled out. I don't really understand what their priorities are, they say one thing and that's not how it plays out. Transparency is a huge thing. But I think the results are equally important. They [say they] are there for teachers, but when we have former ATA presidents saying we should strike and the ATA is saying maybe not, and then half of our members are not voting in the negotiation, [that's a problem]. There's a level of disengagement. They are not meeting the needs of the members."

Regardless of the aggressiveness of the next stage of negotiations, most of the teachers we spoke with felt like the ATA should be investing in increasing engagement with its members and helping drive more engagement with the topic of public education with the general population.



More transparency would help. I've been on the union local—seven years trying to get a single rep from every school to attend one meeting, and I have yet to succeed. The same people who refuse to be a part of the process will turn around and attack the union about what the ATA is not doing because they don't know; because they aren't part of a process; because one meeting for an hour is too much to do. There's a fundamental communication gap between the ATA and its members. And without addressing that, nothing will change."



[I'd like to see] ATA engaging more with communities. Until parents buy in, [teachers] will be the problem. People think teachers have it easy: summers off, we're part of a union. Until parents change their attitudes, the government will drive things. Even during the last election—they promised us resources and we never saw it. The campaign started strong and by the time the election rolled around it was gone."



There's a big disconnect that ATA has with teachers. Some teachers aren't participating. There's a disconnect—the politician on the ATA side isn't connecting with the teachers. People aren't voting, they say the ATA isn't listening. They aren't informed about what the ATA does for them. They think the ATA isn't doing anything for me. It's getting worse. Students are coming out of the university, and they don't know about the ATA."

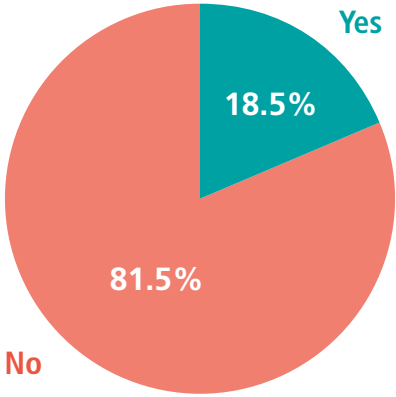
Appendix B

INTAKE SURVEY DATA

Response Counts

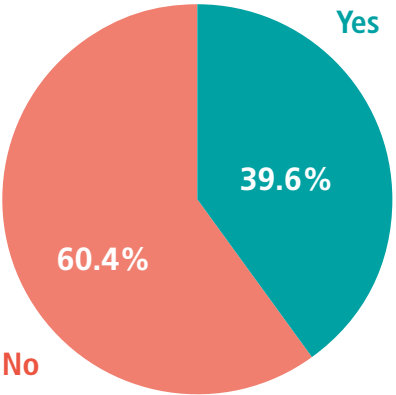
Total Respondents: 65

1. Have you already exited the profession of teaching or left the province of Alberta?



Value	Responses
Yes	12
No	53
TOTAL: 65	

2. Will you be exiting the profession of teaching or leaving the province of Alberta at the end of this school year?



Value	Responses
Yes	21
No	32
TOTAL: 53	

3. Which of the following are/were drivers for your decision to leave the teaching profession in Alberta? (Please check all that apply).

Value	Percent	Responses
Conditions of professional practice (workload/balance)	90.6%	58
Political environment (government rhetoric/job security/funding cuts)	85.9%	55
Inability to meet all the students needs in my class or school	81.3%	52
The changes to curriculum and other new requirements in Alberta	59.4%	38
Frustration with parental expectations	45.3%	29
Loss of autonomy in my work	42.2%	27
Concerns about aggression in schools	35.9%	23
Other—Write In	29.7%	19
The challenging experience of teaching during the COVID-19	28.1%	18
Health considerations	26.6%	17
Low pay	25.0%	16
Better financial opportunities were available	15.6%	10
Reasons unrelated to teaching (eg, moved to be closer to family)	12.5%	8
Chose to stop working entirely to care for children or a family member	3.1%	2
Ready to retire	3.1%	2

Notation: While it did not seem to be a top-of-mind priority for the people who participated in the exit interviews, the question of financial compensation is clearly a factor for many teachers who talked about making less than people doing other jobs, or the misperception in the public that Alberta teachers are highly compensated.

4. Are you leaving for professional, personal and/or other reasons? (Please check all that apply).

Value	Percent	Responses
Personal	85.7%	18
Professional	81.0%	17
Other (Please specify.)	9.5%	2

5. If possible, please share what you are planning to do after leaving teaching in Alberta.

Response
Not sure just yet. Hoping to have children right away, to give myself time to figure it out. May start my own business [...].
Private sector
I have signed a contract to work for a private business
Technical work
Move and teach in a different province.
Starting my own business.
I have a part time job (small business), and I am going to work that for a while until I can decide what I want to do instead. I am taking a one-year unpaid leave of absence.
Continuing to work in education with [my school division] in [another province].
Unsure so far ... I have a temporary job [for the time being], and the election will determine if I choose to go back or not.
Relocating back to [...] to advance and continue my career.

6. What has changed your mind about leaving teaching in Alberta?

Response
My mind hasn't changed. But I am actively exploring leaving the province. I just do not have a concrete plan at this point. Part of my hesitation is linked to the current provincial elections and frustration in navigating the teacher certification systems in other provinces.
Other opportunities did not materialize.
I am planning to leave at the end of next year.
Class sizes, current conservative government, assignable time, substitute teacher shortage, new curriculum workload, admin support.

Response

The near impossibility of changing to a job with similar pay and benefits is the only thing stopping me from leaving the profession.

My mind has not changed. I am leaving as soon as I can. But I have to find a comparable job, economically. I'm too tired. I can't keep this up. It gets harder, and more layers of work get placed on every year. [My school division] is all talk about mental health and about "reduced teacher workload." But it is just talk. This year's *mental health* PD was to literally blame you for not taking the time for self-care. This is why we are unhealthy: because we don't look after ourselves. Could it be because the workload is too big, the government has no respect for us, the public would like us to stop whining and the kids are the worst I have ever seen them? Could it have anything to do with the amount of work I have to take home? Might I have more time for a life and self-care if I wasn't a teacher? I want to find out.

Not much at this point; it is still a consideration. I have hope that a new opportunity will be possible and improve things. If not, serious consideration will be given to leaving.

I won't be able to afford to quit this year with inflation but would absolutely love to be done.

Teacher burnout and lack of support and not feeling as though I have a voice. I left a profession where my monthly net pay was over \$11k a month—so teaching comes in at less than half of that—because I felt that this work would be more meaningful. And in the classroom with the students, it is! However, the way teachers get treated by admin, and sometimes parents, makes it feel very thankless, and the headaches from bureaucracy within the board isn't worth it.

Family reasons

The UCP defunding public education to fund private and charter schools.

Hoping things get better.

I will still leave if I can find a different form of employment during the summer months.

I am trying a new school next year in the hopes that a new admin team will be able to balance the demands on our time and resources with the mandate they operate under with less money. I have explored postsecondary opportunities and will head that route if the issues and demands remain the same. I am the ever hopeful but increasingly jaded teacher. I would enter the private sector again no problem either.

Looking at options with better compensation and work-life balance.

7. Using a sentence or two, can you explain your personal motivations for entering the teaching profession?

Response

I wanted to help children find their voices and discover their passions. To help children avoid falling into the endless trap of rig life and the toxicity that goes with it.

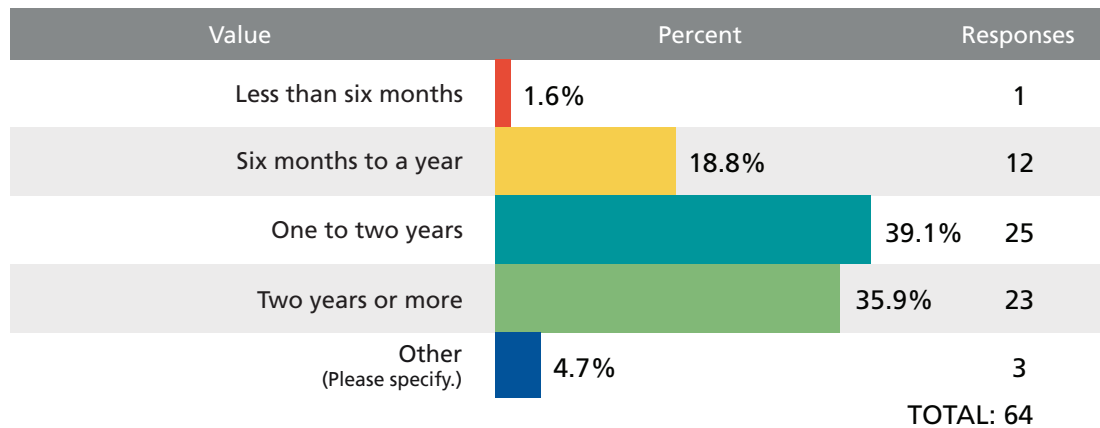
Seemed like a good and enjoyable job.

I'm definitely good at it. I have a lot of experience working with vulnerable populations, and I felt called.

Response
Private sector was slow, and there was an opportunity.
I was [an instructor in a different sector], and I was good at it. I wanted to work with kids everyday and make a difference in the world.
I couldn't imagine not being in a school every day. I love learning, and I loved school.
Passion for sharing science with kids.
The path to probationary or continuous contract is difficult and not transparent. I am an active teacher, actively getting my name out with probationary recommendations almost every year and still no probationary contract that will [lead] to continuous. Furthermore, having work every day as a sub and getting around 40,000 dollars a year does not help to support a family[...]. Hence, I have to do something about this and [try a different line of work].
I always wanted to be a teacher.
I wanted to help prepare students for the real world and instill knowledge and skills that would lead to their success after graduation.
Using my strengths to teach children how to learn. Making a positive impact on future generations.
I love learning and helping others to love learning too and wanted to share that passion and excitement. I also originally had dreams of making change in the/my world and in the lives of the people I was working with. And I also just really value education as a whole and wanted to be a part of supporting the next generation in growing and learning.
I wanted a steady job where I worked with young people, and I was leaving my job as a [...] and could use my science degree toward a BEd after degree. I wanted to feel like what I did on a daily basis at work was improving the future.
Enjoy working with children and enjoy sharing the stories of history.
It is the only thing I considered doing!
At 14, I knew I was called to teaching. I wanted to help students to know that they are valuable and loved and important and to help each one reach their full potential. Really ...
To help children feel more confident and more authentically themselves.
I don't think that teaching was the correct match for my skillset and interests. I think I am more effective in technical or analysis-heavy roles.
I'm passionate about creating environments in which children feel a sense of belonging. I love problem solving, learning and making people happy.
Passion for a job well done and wanting to share a strong sense of accomplishment with young adults.
Love for my subject matter and passion for working with young people.
To work with young people to explore the meaning of literature and art in our lives.
I believed as a young person that teachers have the greatest power to influence the lives of students and to make them better. I wanted to be that teacher that kids remembered long after they graduated as that adult in their life that truly cared about their wellbeing.
Teaching is in my family. I have always wanted to be a special education teacher.

Response
To have an occupation that supports my family but also makes a difference.
I have a gift with youth, to help them believe in themselves, be themselves and still reach personal academic success.
I loved learning, and teaching brought me joy in helping others learn. The security of the job was attractive [too].
I enjoyed working with children and thoroughly enjoyed my subject area of expertise. My father was a teacher and always spoke fondly of the career.
I love teaching and working with students, knowing that I can help students evolve and grow into self-confident, self-motivating adults.
To share my knowledge with younger generations using efficient, scientifically backed instructional methods.
I was a camp counsellor [...] for a summer. I survived 24/7 with a cabin of 13-year-old teen girls and as a teacher of six sessions a day for K-10 every day with lesson plans and whatnot, and I figured, I should probably go into teaching, so I quickly finished my degree and got an after degree while working at an afterschool daycare [...]. It was the lightbulb moments you could see in their eyes when they got it with something they were struggling with.

8. How long have/had you been thinking about leaving either the teaching profession or teaching in Alberta?



9. If possible, please share any specific short-term (one-year) or medium-term (one to three year) ideas about what would have kept you in the profession of teaching in Alberta?

Response
The entire system needs a massive overhaul. It starts with fully funding the system, including cross ministerial funding, so that education dollars are spent on education and not on health. It also needs a radical reshaping of what realistic expectations are for the job, so that a work-life balance is possible. It will also require the government to stop ideologically steering education against what we know works well.
Looking for a lateral move in pay or similar lifestyle.
Short term, work part-time teaching in private industry while on an unpaid leave. Long term, be so successful I never have to go back to teaching.
Administrators that aren't nuts about adding workload.
Better work conditions, more autonomy and being treated like a professional, equitable and transparent hiring practices, recognition of seniority, better treatment when returning from maternity leave, more funding, better leadership and more cohesion in schools, more support from administrators, hiring of school counsellors and more respect.
More planning time and less complex classes. Less make-work documentation, in which I am redocumenting the same information through several platforms. Unnecessary or irrelevant meetings that take my time away from things that I actually need to get done, or meetings that I still need to have to meet the needs of my students or position.
A different government, huge increase on funding, class size, learning supports in collective agreement to guarantee funding when government changes. Better support from the ATA. I feel really let down during the last negotiations; it was like you were not willing to fight for us, and we're pushing the easy way out.
Maybe getting a temporary contract, but a probationary contract would be better.
Higher pay, smaller classes.
Support from my administrators, not having to teach more than one high school course at a time, boundaries with parents, strict cell phone policy within the school and division.
(1) Short term: quality division with high expectations of staff; elimination of incompetent teachers and principals—the ATA needs to do better with this; protecting bad teachers is not helpful to anyone. (2) Medium term: pay increase, stable position, more built-in time to do work.
Short term: the only thing that <i>may</i> have changed my decision is if I had been given the opportunity to teach high school instead of elementary school; however, there is no way to request moves, and I was unsuccessful in interviews, citing "not enough high school experience"; also potentially more stable and positive administration and district level support (my last year of teaching was wild in this regard), and with that perhaps being valued for what I brought to the school in that time (specific shady situations were very unfortunate).
If there was a chance for me to have more work-life balance and meet the needs of my students while also meeting my own health needs and having time with my own child, I would stay longer. As things stand currently, I will likely leave within the next four years—as soon as I can financially do so.

Response

Better support for students. Aide time in social studies, science, options, and PE. More time to get paperwork done. Smaller class sizes. Get rid of PTAs [Parent Teacher Associations]. And *get rid of LaGrange*. Give us an education minister who likes teachers.

Proper funding for class sizes, not adversarial with government and substantial increase in mental health support.

Long term: different pension options. Short term: (1) smaller class size, (2) recognition of high needs in each classroom and the demand that places on teachers outside the academic arena, (3) freedom.

Listening to what I had to say about my neurodivergence and support where I need it.

I don't know that I would have stayed even with these changes but, short term: (1) clear and consistent behaviour expectations and consequences at the school level, (2) administration who were present and engaged and worked to support teachers. Long term: (1) smaller classes: my classes always had 30 to 34 students, (2) more support in classes: I usually had seven or eight IPPs [Individualized Program Plans] in each class and five to six ELL [English-language learner] students and was afforded no extra in-class support.

The love for my program, and the *Ah-ha!* moments with students.

Smaller class sizes, less expectations for teachers outside of class. Protocols that do not make sense (for parents, students, and teachers).

I am still currently teaching in Alberta, but I am open to other possibilities that may be available. However, I would be happy to remain in the profession with more consistent support for teachers, particularly in relation to students/parents.

The new curriculum came too hard, too fast. I can't keep my head above water with them, and I don't like to work a job where I feel ineffective or where the work I am creating is of poor quality. The constant personal attacks from the government made me realize I'm working too hard to pay taxes. My family will just spend less, and we will all be happier for it.

Pay increase. I now only make \$1,700/year more than [I did years ago]. That's a pay cut [...].

More prep time. Support for students with high needs. Smaller class sizes.

(1) Having teachers properly at the table when discussing curriculum, (2) parents actually being the primary educator of their children, diminution of parental capacity and effectiveness, (3) not switching physical classrooms nine out of 10 years of teaching, (4) getting to stay in the same grade for more than a year at a time, (5) being treated with the same respect as teachers with kids, (6) I don't want my [child] making the sacrifices I made for my mom's teaching career, (7) if people in my profession actually stood up for themselves and their bargaining, (8) consultant culture, bad PD about self-care with no meaningful changes, and all the experts haven't stepped foot in the classroom in 25 years. Shitty educators rise to leadership.

Implement collaboration time during the workday for staff each week. Being able to share the load in a formal manner would do a lot to cut down on isolation of individual staff and allow some out-of-classroom workload to be shared.

Classroom conditions and having a world class curriculum designed in collaboration with teachers is the top of my list. Having my profession continually attacked and decimated by the UCP and our education minister has been demoralizing. Having a profession and Education Minister understand what a good education looks like is foremost. Being recognized for the good we do as a professional body would also help keep myself and other teachers in the profession.

Response
There have been too many students in classes, too many emotional, social and academic needs in classes. Classroom makeup is exhausting, and it is impossible to meet all the needs of the students. Behaviours, attitudes and entitlement of students; disrespect of parents and students; destruction of teachers personal classroom items; demands from admin for meetings and paperwork that is <i>not</i> important to teachers; central office hiring more and more people when there is a shortage of teachers and EAs in school; decisions being made that are not in the best interest of the students; lack of professional courtesy by admin making decisions about placement/ movement of classroom EAs, without letting classroom teacher know; no consultation with teachers about events happening in the school—the education system is broken where I teach. It is also frustrating that the education minister does not have a background in education. Teachers are exhausted but are continuing to juggle everything on their plate to the detriment of their physical and mental health and the health of their families.
Teacher and student supports, actions instead of words, accountability at school/district/ government levels.

10. Did you leave for professional, personal and/or other reasons? (Please check all that apply).

Value	Percent	Responses
Personal	58.3%	7
Professional	83.3%	10

ALREADY LEFT THE PROFESSION

If possible, please share what you are doing now that you have left teaching in Alberta?

Response
I'm subbing for [my school division].
I am happy! I am living with less stress! My job? I am an office manager/project administrator for [...] company.
Recreation coordinator at an old folks' home
I do bookkeeping for three companies, clean houses and substitute teach from time to time.
I am in grad school [...] focusing on adult education and community development, as well as doing educational programming and event consultation and support as an independent contractor in the public health field.
I did not leave teaching; I left the ATA. I am working for a charter school.
I completed an MA in Public Policy at the University of Calgary over the past school year. I am currently working [...] with the Government of Canada.

Response

I [now work] for a nonprofit organization in [...]. I hope to pursue a MEd in the near future and work at a postsecondary institution.

I am on [leave] trying to recover from the extreme stress and abuse suffered while teaching.

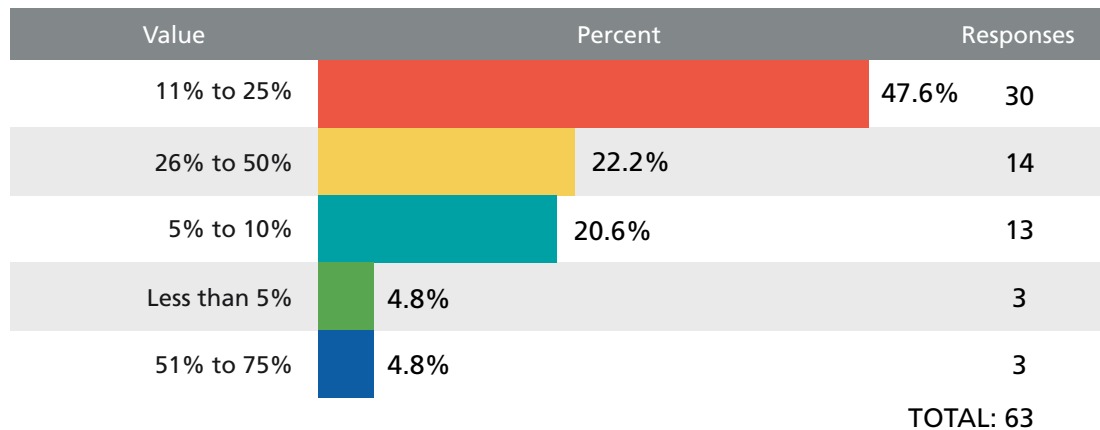
Joined my husband in running a local [small business] that we purchased 1.5 years ago.

I am currently substitute teaching but will be looking for other work as subbing is not sustainable.

Trying to get everything promised in the *Education Act*, section 11—board policies and admin procedures—for my kid with two codes (but we only write IPPs for one of them). I’m asking questions and pushing harder than I would if I were still employed by the board. Thinking of leaving the province too if the UCP win next week but realistic that it would be at least another year of being a royal pain in the ass lobbyist for my own kid but all kids—and I may be willing to run for trustee in a possible by-election in the fall.

ARE YOUR COLLEAGUES CONSIDERING LEAVING?

- From your perspective, what percentage of your present/former colleagues are also considering leaving the teaching profession at this time?



2. Which of the following drivers seem prevalent among your colleagues who are also considering leaving the teaching profession in Alberta? (Please check all that apply).

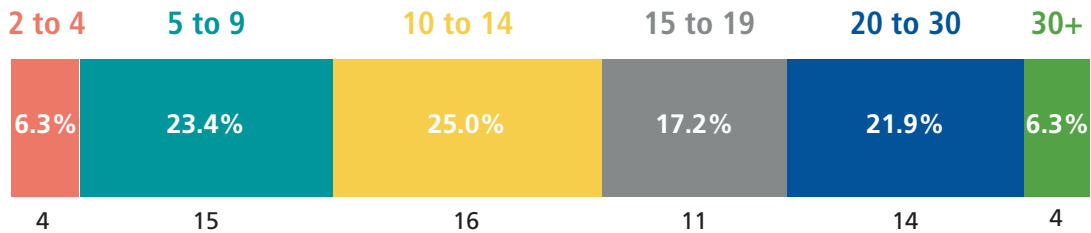
Value	Percent	Responses
Conditions of professional practice (workload/balance)	93.7%	59
Inability to meet all the students' needs in their classes or school	74.6%	47
Political environment (government rhetoric/job security/funding cuts)	73.0%	46
The changes to curriculum and other new requirements in Alberta	61.9%	39
Frustration with parental expectations	42.9%	27
Concerns about aggression in schools	41.3%	26
Loss of autonomy in their work	36.5%	23
The challenging experience of teaching during the COVID-19	30.2%	19
Low pay	27.0%	17
Better financial opportunities were available	23.8%	15
Health considerations	22.2%	14
Ready to retire	22.2%	14
Other—Write In	7.9%	5
Reasons unrelated to teaching (eg, moved to be closer to family)	6.3%	4
Chose to stop working entirely to care for children or a family member	3.2%	2

MATRIX FOR EXIT INTERVIEW SELECTION

		Regions				Teachers by Experience
		Large Urban 100,000+ people	Medium 30,000 to 99,999 people	Small 1,000 to 29,999 people	Rural	
Years of Experience	1					0
	2 to 4	2		2		4
	5 to 9	10		3	2	15
	10 to 14	5	5	5	1	16
	15 to 19	7	3	1		11
	20 to 30	7	3	2	2	14
	30+	1	1	2		4
Teachers by Region		32	12	15	5	64

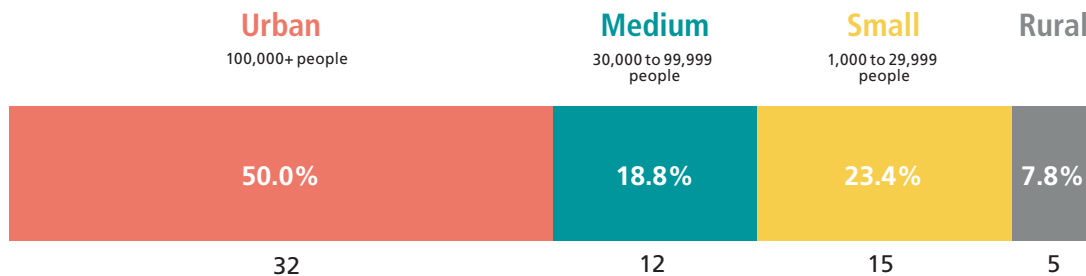
TOTAL

Teachers by Years of Experience



TOTAL: 64

Teachers by Region

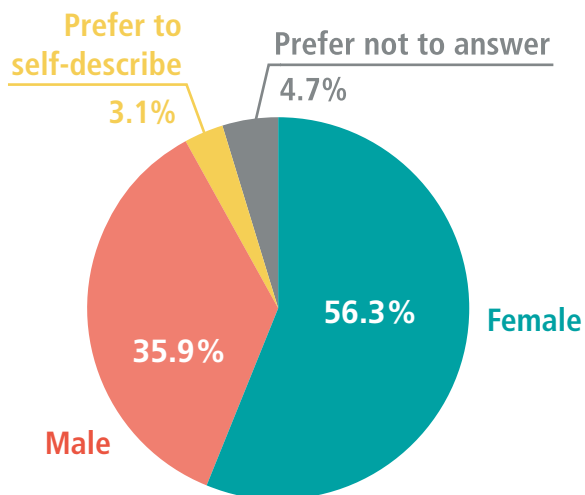


TOTAL: 64

1. Are there any other opinions, comments or questions that we might want to ask those leaving the profession in our live virtual exit interviews?

Response
Is the decision to leave due to regional concerns or due to concerns about the state of education provincewide. Does cost of living in other areas influence where you would consider moving? What about the efficacy of the educational system in those areas or how teachers are treated/perceived in those areas?
What more could the ATA have done to help you stay?
Are you provided any time during the day to engage in your professional growth plan, or are you expected to complete that after hours entirely?
Why are you leaving? What can we do to make teachers' jobs better? What do you want the ATA/ Division to know?
Burnout. We need some kind of solution for this that isn't EFAP [Employee and Family Assistance Program] or a PD session. [We need] real supports for teachers.
There has to be a way to clearly have teachers who want to get continuous get a continuous contract somehow within a certain number of years.
Do you wish you could stay? What parts of your job make you want to stay in the profession? Why haven't you left? And related to the question about coworkers considering leaving, maybe something around the ones who are maybe considering but can't or aren't really considering it for various reasons (thinking about all my past coworkers who are 20 years older than me who tell me that they would leave but at this point can't because of things like pension, <i>golden handcuffs</i> , time out of job market, etc).
What role has mistreatment of you by parents and students (bullying, aggression) played in your decision to leave?
(1) What was the most rewarding part of your career? (2) Did you feel supported as a professional? (Yes—how? / No—why not?), (3) What advice would you give to young people considering teaching as a career? (4) How can the ATA better represent all teachers, not just those with the most currently acceptable views?
What is your opinion on the effectiveness of the ATA?
I don't know. I am very sad about my choice, and I waffle every day. Maybe, will you come back? I'm definitely waiting to see the outcome of the election to decide that.
What could the ATA do as your union to support you and keep you in your chosen career path.
All the questions you just asked me, but mostly I think we want to hear "how are you doing?" No one asks us that ... just keep dumping on us.

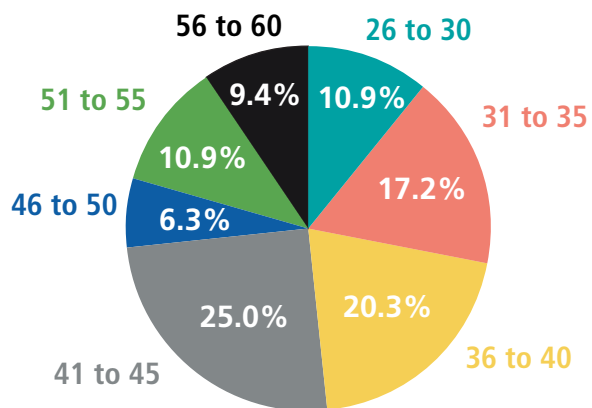
2. How do you identify?



Value	Responses
Female	36
Male	23
Prefer to self-describe	2
Prefer to not answer	3
TOTAL: 64	

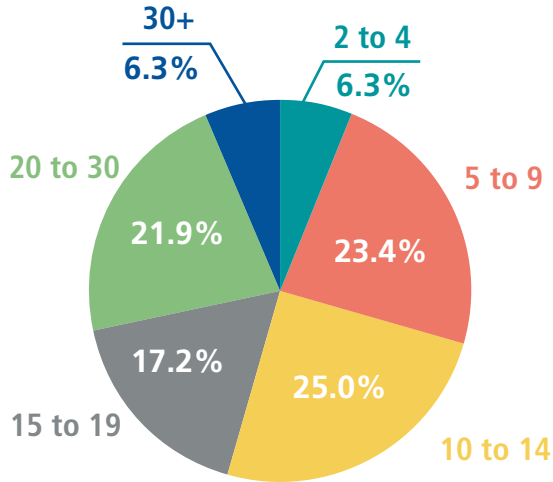
Prefer to self-describe (please specify)	Count
Non-	1
Non-binary	1
TOTAL: 2	

3. Your age



Value	Responses
26 to 30	7
31 to 35	11
36 to 40	13
41 to 45	16
46 to 50	4
51 to 55	7
56 to 60	6
TOTAL: 64	

4. Your teaching experience, including current year.



Value	Responses
2 to 4	4
5 to 9	15
10 to 14	16
15 to 19	11
20 to 30	14
30+	4

TOTAL: 64

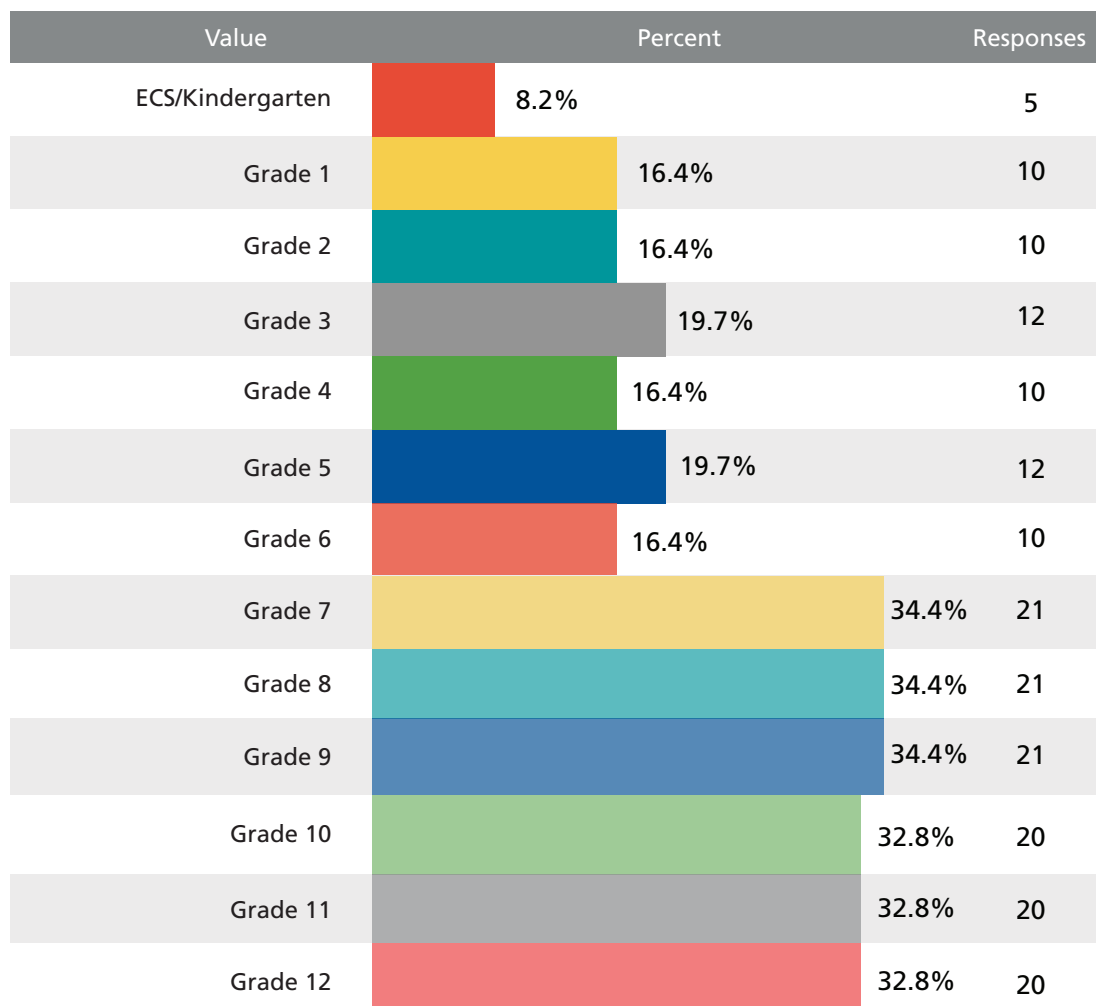
DEMOGRAPHICS

1. Your current assignment:

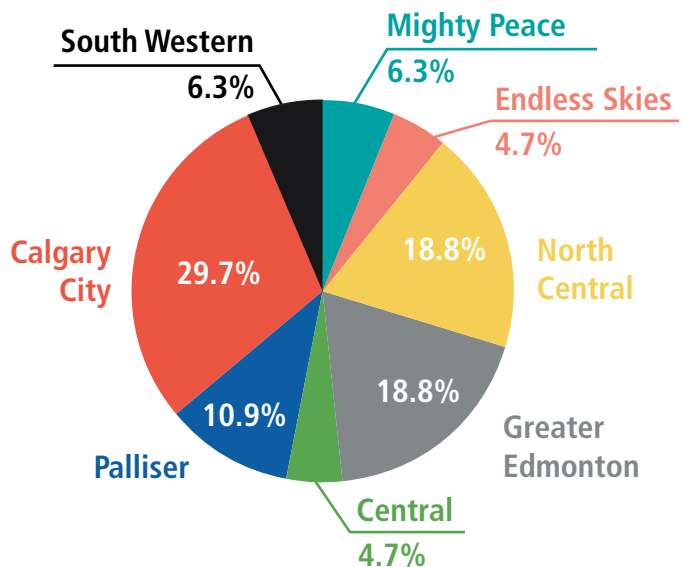
Value	Percent	Responses
Classroom teacher	86.2%	56
Online learning or combined online/offline teacher	1.5%	1
School leader only	4.6%	3
Substitute teacher	7.7%	5

TOTAL: 65

2. What grade levels are you currently teaching? (Please check all that apply).



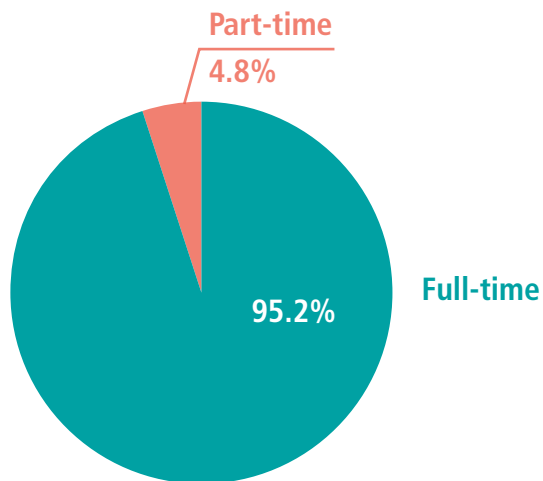
3. Teachers' convention that you attend/attended



Value	Responses
Mighty Peace	4
Endless Skies	3
North Central	12
Greater Edmonton	12
Central	3
Palliser	7
Calgary City	19
South Western	4

TOTAL: 64

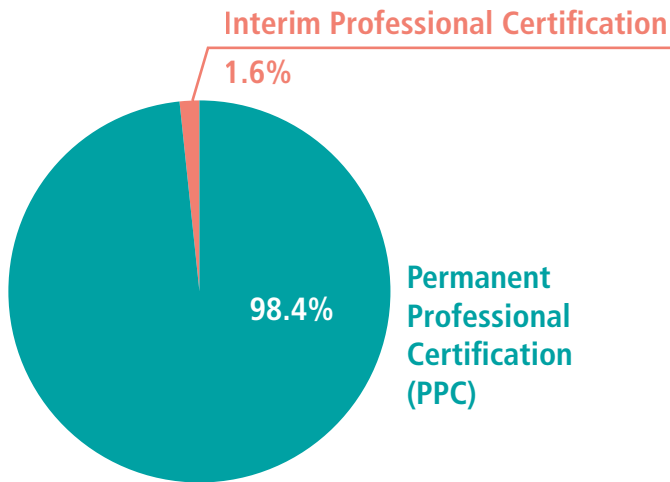
4. You are employed:



Value	Responses
Full-time	60
Part-time	3

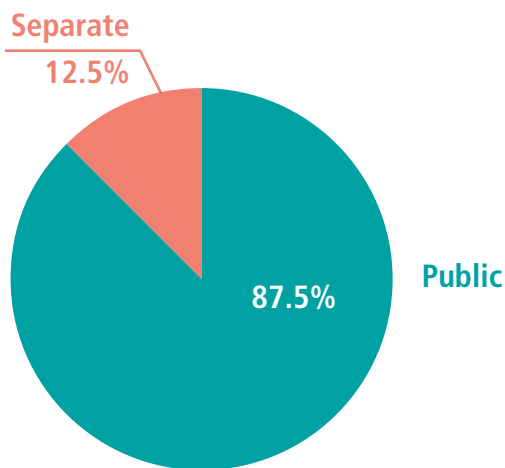
TOTAL: 63

5. Alberta teaching certification:



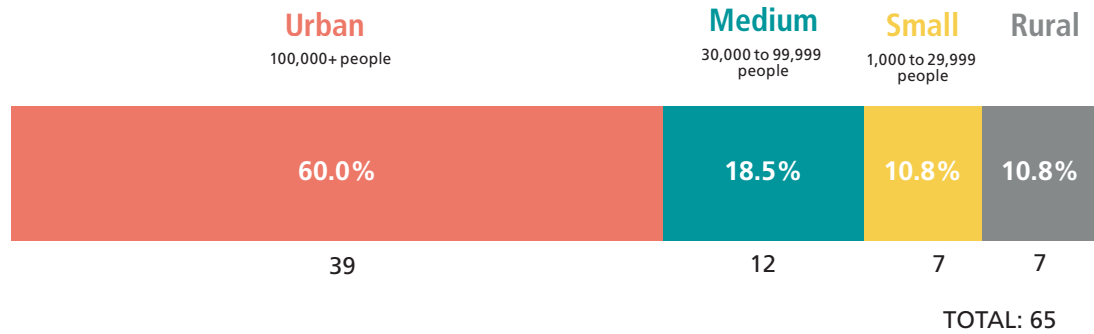
Value	Responses
Permanent Professional Certification (PPC)	63
Interim Professional Certification	1
TOTAL: 64	

6. Type of school authority in which you are/were employed:

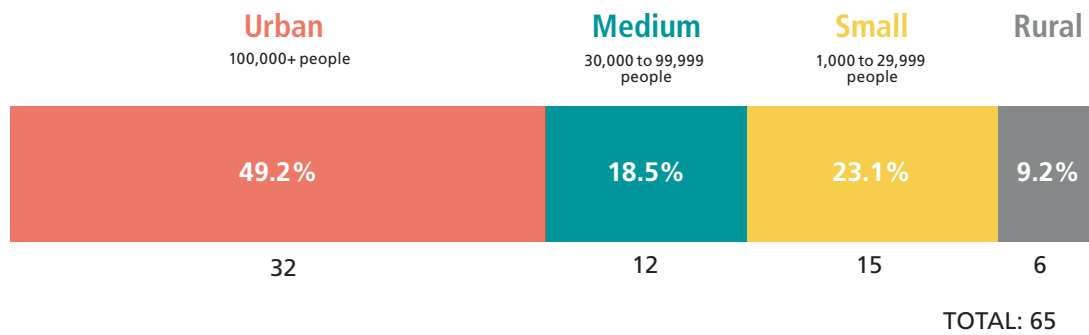


Value	Responses
Public	56
Separate	8
TOTAL: 64	

7. I currently live in a:



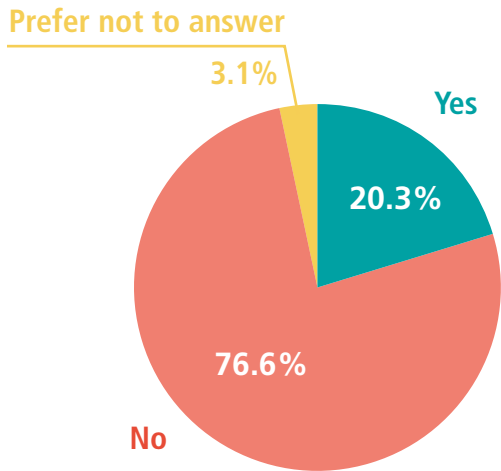
8. I teach (or used to teach) in a...



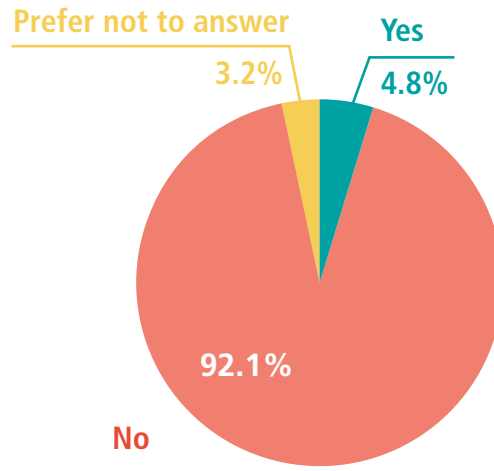
9. The following information will assist the ATA in identifying the extent to which the profession includes underrepresented groups.

Question	Responses			Total
	Yes	No	Prefer not to Answer	
Do you identify yourself as a member of a sexual or gender minority?	13	49	2	64
Do you identify as a member of the Black community or of a community of Colour?	3	58	2	63
Do you identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit ancestry?	2	60	2	64
Do you identify as a person with a disability?	8	53	3	64

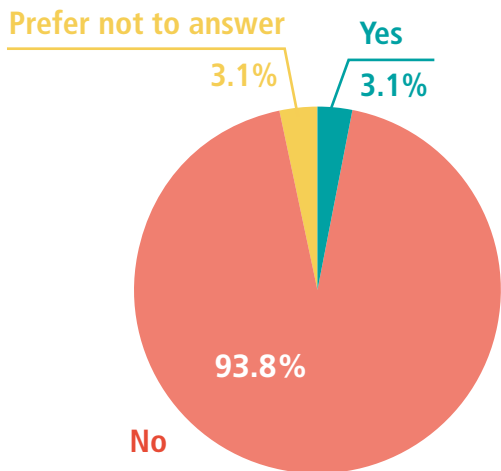
Do you identify yourself as a member of a sexual or gender minority?



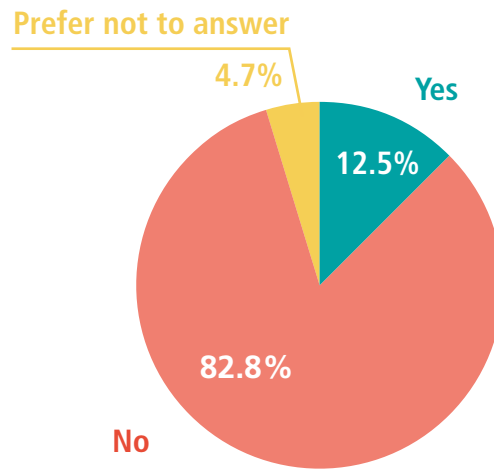
Do you identify as a member of the Black community or of a community of Colour?



Do you identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit ancestry?



Do you identify as a person with a disability?





The Alberta
Teachers' Association