

pop quiz!

TAKE A
BRAIN
BREAK!

[See page 9.](#)

IN REMEMBRANCE

Creating opportunities
for reflection

*See Tale End,
[page 16.](#)*

ATA NEWS

November 19, 2024 | Volume 59, Number 5

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ATWOOD TAKES STAGE

HEATHER GRANT

Renowned Canadian author Margaret Atwood, seen here with moderator Shari Graydon (right), takes the stage at a public forum on education. [See page 9.](#)



Complex understanding

A teacher's perspective on
classroom complexity .

*Read Kristine Wilkinson's editorial
on [page 2.](#)*



Is my pension safe?

A look at what's happening
with AIMCo.

*Read the Executive Secretary's
Q&A on [page 2.](#)*



Do no harm

Concerns raised over
new bill.

See [page 4.](#)



Edmonton District by-election

Meet the teachers running
for Council.

See [page 5.](#)

One teacher, two principals

ATA welcomes three
new staff officers.

See [page 6.](#)

The reality of complex classrooms



EDITORIAL

Kristine Wilkinson
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

In today's educational landscape, the term "complex classrooms" is frequently used by teachers, but its meaning often eludes those outside the profession. Classrooms have changed over the years. Reflecting on my early teaching days, I recall managing a Grade 8 language arts class of 30 students, and none of them had individual program plans. Why? Because we didn't accommodate for student needs. Universally, we did not know why or how. Students with exceptional needs were in an alternative program.

Fast-forward a decade, and the landscape had dramatically shifted. I found myself teaching a Grade 8 class where three students read at a

Grade 3 level. Thankfully, technology helped in bridging these gaps; I used speech-to-text tools and created quiet spaces for students to work without disrupting others. However, these adaptations required an additional hour of preparation each night, on top of my usual grading and lesson planning.

ballooned to 40 students, and the lack of support for those needing specialized assistance was glaring.

An average classroom today would likely comprise a number of students reading below grade level, a few more requiring specialized academic programming due to neurodivergence,

sessions, while another two or three may require behaviour management plans, complete with safety protocols and visual schedules.

The reality is stark: if accommodating just a few students in my previous classes took an extra hour of preparation, what does it look like for a classroom filled with such diverse needs? With only one teacher to manage this complexity, the task feels nearly impossible.

When educators refer to their classrooms as complex, they are highlighting the overwhelming diversity of student needs that must be met with limited resources. It's a call for understanding and support from the community as we strive to provide every child with the education they deserve. The challenges are real, and the need for systemic change in our educational approach has never been more urgent. ■

I welcome your comments. Contact me at kristine.wilkinson@ata.ab.ca.

"If accommodating just a few students in my previous classes took an extra hour of preparation, what does it look like for a classroom filled with such diverse needs?"

As I transitioned into the role of a high school principal, I saw the challenges for classroom teachers intensifying. I had to frequently assist teachers who were managing classrooms where physical aggression was a concern. Class sizes

another few who are English as an additional language learners and a few more who are gifted learners. On top of that, the teacher may have a handful of students who may not attend regularly, necessitating catch-up

AIMCo overhaul: Is my pension safe?



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

Question: What's going on with my pension? (Editor's note: this is an expurgated version of a longer and much more colourful question.)

Answer: Okay, everyone remain calm your pensions are secure. The plan is fully funded and running into surplus. If you are currently employed, you will continue to accrue pension entitlement, and if you are retired, you will continue to receive your benefits.

That important thing now said, you still are entirely justified in wondering what is going on at AIMCo and what potential impact it might have on teachers.

On the afternoon of Thursday, November 7, the government issued a news release announcing that the chair and board of AIMCo, Chief Executive Officer Evan Siddall and several other senior staff of the organization, were being unceremoniously canned. No prior notice appears to have been provided to interested parties, including the institutional clients of AIMCo.

By way of background, AIMCo, the Alberta Investment Management Corporation, was established in 2008 as the crown corporation responsible for investing the province's financial assets. Today, it is the custodian of over \$160 billion worth of financial capital including the \$22 billion Alberta Heritage Trust Fund and \$111 billion

belonging to the province's public sector pension plans, including the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund (ATRF).

This is not the first time that, for all the wrong reasons, AIMCo has been in the news. In 2019, the provincial government passed Bill 22, the *Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act*, which required public sector pension plans to use AIMCo as their exclusive pension manager. While several large Alberta pension plans, including the Public Service Pension Plan, the Local Authorities Pension Plan, the Special Forces Pension Plan and the Management Employees Plan, had previously been required to use AIMCo, the New Democratic government of

After a precedent-setting court action initiated by the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) concerning the scope of the Bill 22 regulations, an agreement was struck that at least provided ATRF and other public sector pension plans with the ability to define investment strategies for implementation by AIMCo. With that, some measure of control was returned to the constituent plans and there was a return to stability.

Still, concerns about AIMCo's performance remained. In 2020, AIMCo experienced a \$2.1 billion loss due to a volatility-based investment strategy known as VOLTS. This substantial loss led to increased scrutiny and criticism of AIMCo's investment practices and risk

materially interested, as contributors to their pension plan, in insuring that the plan assets are managed effectively and efficiently, so as to keep costs down for both pension participants and Alberta taxpayers.

Further, the decision to name the president of the Treasury Board and minister of finance, as well as the deputy minister of executive council, to oversee AIMCo in the immediate future raises the issue of the independence of AIMCo and its ability to operate in the interests of its beneficiaries and clients, free from undue political influence.

Given the UCP government's continuing and quixotic interest in taking over and managing "Alberta's share" of the Canada Pension Plan fund, the continuing instability of AIMCo and the government's willingness to seize the reins will give many Albertans pause about a policy direction that is already deeply unpopular.

The key to restoring confidence in AIMCo among teachers is consultation — specifically, for the government to consult both with the plans whose assets are being managed by AIMCo and also with organizations such as the ATA that represent the ultimate owners and beneficiaries of those plans, the participant members.

In the meantime, the ATA will continue to monitor developments closely and be ready to step in to defend the interests of active and retired teachers. ■

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

"...you still are entirely justified in wondering what is going on at AIMCo and what potential impact it might have on teachers."

Rachel Notley had opened the door to their using other fund managers. That door was slammed shut by Bill 22. Of more direct concern to teachers was a new requirement that forced the ATRF to transfer the assets that it had been managing independently to AIMCo, despite the ATRF consistently outperforming AIMCo. At the time, Alberta teachers decried the unilateral actions of government, characterizing the government's passage of Bill 22 as a "hijacking" of teacher pensions.

management, ultimately resulting in the "mutually agreed upon" departure of the CEO of the day, Kevin Uebelein.

The current shake-up also appears to arise from continuing concerns around the performance of AIMCo, which has seen rising costs, as well as an expanded staff, even though the total assets under its management have fallen.

There are several reasons why teachers should be legitimately concerned about these developments. Of course teachers are directly and



Why and what?

CTF/FCE’s International Development Cooperation Initiatives



VIEWPOINTS

Beverley Park
Director, International and Social Justice,
Canadian Teachers’ Federation

When the Board of the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF/FCE) meets and shares examples of realities in the classrooms across this country, there is no shortage of stories about insufficient resources, supplies and tools, not to mention the shortage of teachers. It is fair to say that our education systems here in Canada have their challenges. Why, then, would the CTF/FCE or any other teacher organization in Canada spend money and invest time in planning and carrying out programming in other parts of the world?

The short answer is because we can and because we should. We do it because it is the right thing to do. In fact, it is part of the CTF/FCE stated purpose that “as a federation of member and associate organizations, the CTF/FCE promotes and supports quality inclusive publicly funded public education, in all its forms. Further [...] we uphold teaching as a profession and advocate for adequate resourcing, labour rights and social justice, across Canada and around the world.” So, in short, the “why” is simply that it is part of our mandate and our purpose as an organization. But it goes well beyond that.

The very basis of unionism is solidarity. While we have issues to confront, we also have the privilege of living in a country where (for the most part) human rights are respected, where basic education is available to all, and where we can openly meet as members of a labour organization and express our opinions, freely. That, sadly, is not the case in all parts of the world. We cannot and should not forget that while we are citizens of whatever province or territory we happen to live in, we are also citizens of this country and members of the global community. It was just a few decades ago when former prime minister Pierre Trudeau declared himself to be a global citizen, and it was perceived as an announcement of some exotic reality. Today, it is simply a matter of fact. With over 100 armed conflicts happening in the world right now, we would be naïve to think we can live unaffected by what is “over there,” “across the ocean” and “outside our borders.” We not only have to be aware of what is going on in the world, we have the responsibility to do our part to mitigate the damage being done to our fellow citizens, whether that be an erosion of rights, a loss of dignity or an injury to humanity. That is also why we do the work we do.

And what is it that we do in international and social justice work? Through the support of member organizations, like the Alberta Teachers’ Association, we provide financial and technical support in three core areas: (1) Teachers’ Action for Teaching, focusing on the professional development of educators; (2) Teachers’

Action for Gender Equality, fostering the empowerment of girls and women; and (3) Teachers’ Action for Teaching Organizations, helping to develop the organizational capacities of teacher unions and their leaders. In all contexts and in all cases, when determining where to work and what specific work to support, we consider the needs, priorities and capacities of our international partner organizations.

While we do not impose our values and we respect cultural norms, we work, for example, to influence attitudes and propose alternatives to corporal punishment in schools, to stop school-related gender-based violence and to promote more child-centered pedagogy. We assist unions to build their capacity, to learn skills like negotiating, advocacy and member recruitment, engagement and retention. We help our partners to find ways to empower girls and women to take their place not only in their unions but in society. We fund research and we share our knowledge and experience with under or unqualified individuals who have taken on the responsibility of teaching.

We have been doing this work for years and there is no quick fix. While there will always be work to do, there has been amazing evidence of progress and reciprocal learning.

We are proud to teach, and we are humbled to learn as well. The significant lessons for us? That tools and resources will never replace what matters most for quality education – a qualified teacher. That while underfunding to some degree can go unnoticed or be covered up, chronic and sustained underfunding will have harmful and irreparable societal impacts. We see things as they could be, as they should be and as they are, which is not what they ought to be for a quality, inclusive, publicly funded public education for all (our ultimate goal).

This work is like the journey of a nomad travelling on a camel across the desert. The child on the saddle behind asks innocently and hopefully, “Are we there yet?” The answer is, “We’re nomads, child, we will be continuously on our way.” The journey is sometimes more important than the destination.

The great challenges we face – climate, migration, security, health and, yes, education – can only be addressed if we cooperate with other countries. International development cooperation is an investment in our well-being and the future for us all. ■

Beverley Park has worked with the CTF/FCE for seven years and, before that, worked with one of CTF/FCE’s member organizations for over 20 years. She has an enduring passion and relentless energy for all that is education and education for all.

YOUR VIEWS

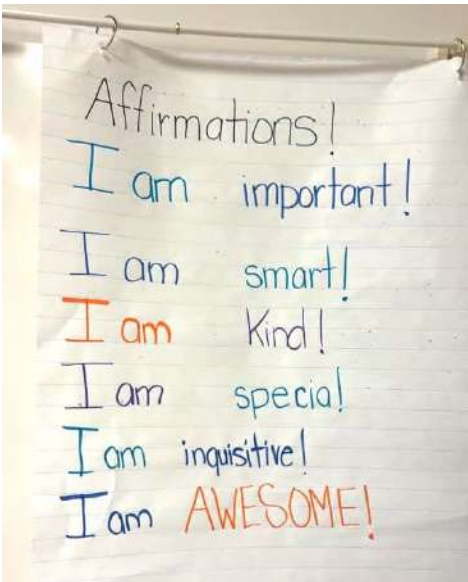
Teachers were asked to share an encouraging message, some words of wisdom or a little note to let students know they are seen and supported.

Denyse Boyd
Our motto is: We can do hard things!

Vikki Lynn
I always like to tell my students not to give up when faced with challenges; we are built to do hard things!

Andrew John
I have been hollering “make good choices” at my kids on Friday afternoons for so long, it has become my unofficial catchphrase. One of the kids got it put on a mug for me one year.

Laurie Jean
This is how we start every day!!



Letters to the editor: We welcome letters to the editor. Please limit your submission to 300 words. Only letters bearing a first and last name, address and daytime telephone number will be considered for publication. Teachers are also asked to indicate where and what they teach. All letters are subject to editing for length, clarity, punctuation, spelling and grammar. Email managing editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn: lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.



FOR THE RECORD

This is what makes people give up on vigilance – ‘It’s all going to be fine, I don’t have to do anything because it’s bending toward justice all on its own.’ ... That’s not real. There is no yellow brick road.

– Margaret Atwood at public lecture in Calgary on Nov. 12

Concerns raised over new bill

Kim Clement
ATA News Staff

The Alberta government has unveiled Bill 27, the *Education Amendment Act*, 2024, which proposes significant changes in schools, including parental notification for pronoun use, opt-in requirements for instruction on human sexuality or gender identity, and approval from the ministry of education for third-party materials on these topics. Premier Danielle Smith announced the bill on October 31, fulfilling a pledge she made earlier this year.

Three key changes proposed in Bill 27

Parental notification for pronoun use:

Schools would be required to inform parents and obtain permission if a student under 15 requests to be referred to by a different pronoun or name. For students aged 16 and 17, parental notification would still be necessary for such requests.

Parental opt-in for sex education:

Parents would be required to provide explicit consent for their children to participate in formal education on topics of gender identity, sexual orientation or human sexuality. This is a shift from the current opt-out system to an opt-in approach, including a minimum 30-day notice. This does not apply to incidental or indirect references to the above topics.

Ministry approval of third-party teaching materials:

Any third-party learning and teaching resources related to human sexuality, sexual orientation, or gender identity would require approval by the ministry of education.

“Parents have the right to care for, teach and protect their children,” Smith said at a news conference following the tabling of the legislation.

Under the bill, schools must inform parents and seek consent if a student under 15 requests to be called by a different pronoun or name, while students aged 16 and 17 would require parental notification for such changes.

Jason Schilling, president of the Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA), voiced strong opposition to the legislation, stating the bill could erode trust between students and teachers.

“This legislation is unnecessary and hurtful, and distracts from the real crisis — Alberta’s lowest-funded school system, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of resources and mental health supports,” Schilling said.

Critics warn the bill could endanger vulnerable students, who may not have supportive home environments, and create administrative challenges. Additionally, educators argue the shift from an opt-out to an opt-in system for sex education would strain already limited school resources.

“These added responsibilities will divert time and resources away from teachers’ primary role — teaching and supporting students,” Schilling said.

Schilling emphasized that teachers are committed to fostering inclusive environments.

“Legally and ethically, teachers are required to create a welcoming and caring space that supports diversity and belonging for all students,” he said. “This is not just a professional obligation but a moral one.”

Concerned about the implications of the bill, Egale and other advocacy organizations are preparing legal actions in response to the bill.

Bennett Jensen, director of legal at Egale, a 2SLGBTQI advocacy group, condemned the bill, calling it illegal and unconstitutional.

“[It] will cause severe harm. We will be challenging it in court,” Jensen stated.

Harini Sivalingam, director of the



CHRIS SCHWARZ/GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Premier Smith announces legislation affecting children and youth.

equality program at the Canadian Civil Liberties Association, expressed support for legal challenges.

“Restricting access to comprehensive sexual education is dangerous. Young people need vital information for developing healthy, safe, consensual relationships,” Sivalingam said.

Premier Smith defended the bill as necessary for consistency and parental involvement. “For a child’s mental health, parents need to know what’s going on,” she said.

The timing of Bill 27’s announcement, just days before Smith’s leadership review at the United Conservative Party’s annual general meeting, has raised speculation about its political motivations. Observers suggest it aims to solidify support among party members awaiting key campaign promises.

The legislation, if passed, is set to take effect on September 1, 2025. ■

Learning during emergencies

Bill 27 also addressed matters related to education during emergencies, with the following included:

- in-person learning should be prioritized during an emergency and the shifts from in-person learning to at-home learning should be strictly limited
- the education minister may make regulations during an emergency, including ones that respect the wearing of face masks or other face coverings, and respect notification and consent relating to health measures

UCP AGM passes resolutions on education

Mark Milne
ATA News Staff

Education was on the minds of the United Conservative Party (UCP) as it held its annual general meeting (AGM) on November 2, 2024, in Red Deer, Alberta.

Addressing approximately 6,000 attendees, Premier Danielle Smith — who received an overwhelming 91.5 per cent approval from party members in a leadership review — delivered a keynote speech that touched on key issues such as healthcare, energy policy and education. The premier unveiled a series of ambitious education policies aimed at reshaping Alberta’s educational landscape.

One of Smith’s key announcements was the government’s massive school construction initiative, which she described as the largest in Alberta’s history. The plan aims to build new schools across the province to accommodate growing student populations and improve access to quality education.

“Every child in Alberta deserves a

modern, safe and inspiring place to learn,” said Smith.

Smith also emphasized the importance of parental choice and accountability in education, signaling a significant shift in the province’s approach to schooling.

While policies passed at the UCP AGM are not guaranteed to become provincial legislation, this year’s meeting saw several resolutions closely resembling the direction the government has recently taken in the legislature.

Bill 27, the *Education Amendment Act*, 2024, which was introduced on October 31, mirrors several of the resolutions put forward at the UCP AGM that are outlined below.

- Require teachers and school boards to obtain opt-in informed written consent from the parent(s) of a student to any instance when a teacher provides formal, informal, or incidental instruction or extracurricular activities on subject matter involving sexuality, sexual orientation and gender identity. At the parent’s written request, the teacher of the student shall permit the student to leave the classroom without academic penalty or other censure.

- Require that all third-party resource materials or presentations related to gender identity, sexual orientation, or human sexuality available in Alberta classrooms be pre-approved by the ministry of education.

- Maintain and defend its constitutionally mandated jurisdictional authority over all decisions affecting Albertans regarding provincial, national or international emergencies, treaties or other agreements. This includes but is not limited to medical, financial, economic, security, natural resources, education, safety, and social issues and circumstances. Provincial authority may include a variety of communications, actions, responses, treatments, procedures, rules, regulations, fees, taxes, policies, protocols, legislation or mandates of any kind.

Two other resolutions dealing with education and the teaching profession also made it to the floor:

- Advocate and champion the skilled trades and professions by integrating the journeyman and apprenticeship

skilled trades education track within the grade 7–12 education system.

- Make membership in the Alberta Teachers’ Association optional for all teachers employed in public, separate, Francophone, charter and independent schools in Alberta and ensure comparable supports, benefits and pension opportunities are available for those who opt out.

Delegates also overwhelmingly passed a resolution to address the use of cell phones in schools, which closely resembled a set of standards that was introduced by Education Minister Demetrios Nicolaides in mid-June and came into effect on September 1.

All of the 35 resolutions put before the delegates were passed. Each one received overwhelming support with the notable exception of two: the resolution calling on the government to implement Smith’s promised income tax cut, and the resolution calling for an opt-in system for sex education. While these were still approved and a ballot count was not necessary, these two policies did not receive the same enthusiastic approval as the others. ■

EDMONTON DISTRICT BY-ELECTION

Meet the candidates

ATA News Staff

Nominations for the 2024 Edmonton District by-election closed October 31, with two members now vying for the vacant spot on Provincial Executive Council.

Two candidates are running for the position of district representative, Edmonton District: Carryl Bennett and Deneen Zielke. Read on to learn more about these two teachers who want to represent their colleagues in the Elk Island Public, Elk Island Catholic, St. Albert Catholic, St. Albert Public and Sturgeon locals.



Carryl Bennett

Our profession is a mix of unique challenges, joys and complexities. To ensure that every teacher’s voice is heard, we need a strong provincial ATA that values our diverse community of educators. Recent issues like new curricula, provincial bargaining, underfunded support systems and rising mental health concerns have created significant challenges for us. I am dedicated to addressing these issues and making sure that all concerns — big or small — are acknowledged and addressed.

With my varied experiences both in and out of the classroom, I believe I am well equipped to support the teachers in the Edmonton District. My passion for advocating for ATA members, my flexibility in tackling challenges

and my determination make me a strong candidate for the role of district representative.

I have taught Grades 4–12 in a variety of settings, including suburban and rural districts, English and French immersion schools, and both public and Catholic systems. Currently, I am a Grade 8 homeroom teacher in St. Albert Catholic.

My involvement with the ATA began in my second year of teaching when I attended Summer Conference and became secretary of Wolf Creek Local No. 3. Over the past 23 years at the local level, I have served in various roles, including secretary, Economic Policy Committee chair, Annual Representative Assembly representative, Negotiating Subcommittee (NSC) chair, Professional Development chair, local communications officer and North Central Teachers’ Convention Association (NCTCA) representative. I have been local president since 2013.

At the regional level, I have been part of the NCTCA executive since 2017, serving as both secretary and president. At the provincial level, I have been actively involved with the ATA Science Council since 2013, holding positions such as assistant conference director, conference director, president, vice-president and past president.

Currently, I am the local president of Greater St. Albert Catholic Teachers’ Local No. 23, and president of the NCTCA.



Deneen Zielke

I was born in Viking, Alberta, home of the Sutter brothers, which strongly contributed to my love of hockey and cheering for the home team. I enjoyed many things about small-town rural life.

My teaching career began in Sherwood Park. I quickly became a school representative and have since been involved in the work of the ATA. As Teacher Board Advisory Committee chair, I met the superintendent to discuss teachers’ concerns. This led to a role on Teacher Welfare Committee and becoming NSC chair, leading our teachers as we negotiated at the local level.

As local president, I am so proud of the work our local has accomplished. Our executive is an amazing group of professionals. Supporting these local

leaders and our school representatives in the work they do is key to our success.

At the provincial level, in addition to supporting my executive at their scheduled seminars, I was selected to serve on the provincial Committee on Coordinating Communications to Members to support member engagement.

- I intend to demonstrate integrity by*
- building strong collaborative relationships based on trust and confidentiality with the Provincial Executive Council, school districts and members;
 - striving for respectful and open communication when sharing teachers’ concerns and opinions; and
 - working diligently to support teachers as they navigate the tumultuous environment in education.

- I intend to represent teachers by*
- strengthening relationships through intentional listening to understand, value and embrace diverse opinions;
 - bringing members together to become actively involved in the collective bargaining process; and
 - advocating for a fully funded, inclusive public education system.

- I intend to use my leadership skills by*
- creating open lines of communication between members and the provincial Association;
 - working collaboratively to make sure teachers’ concerns are at the forefront of decision making; and
 - supporting members to develop their leadership skills and take on roles within the Association. ■


Who can vote?

To be eligible to vote, you must be either an active or associate ATA member as of the first day ballots can be cast, as follows:

- active members employed by
 - Elk Island Catholic Separate School Division,
 - Elk Island Public School Division,
 - Greater St. Albert Roman Catholic Separate School Division,
 - St. Albert School Division and
 - Sturgeon School Division.
- associate members living in these same areas.

How do I vote?

Voting takes place online. If you haven’t already, set up an online ATA account so you can place your vote. Check out the ATA website to learn more.



When can I vote?


Voting opens December 9 at 8 a.m. and runs through to December 12 at 5 p.m.

When will the results be announced?

The results of the by-election will be shared on the ATA website and on social media on December 13, as well as published in the next issue of the ATA News.

Off Script

with ATA President Jason Schilling



I welcome your comments. Contact me at jason.schilling@ata.ab.ca.

What are the problems being fixed?

Flooding the zone. Drinking from a firehose. Or even the old-time circus midway game of whacking moles. These can sum up what the last few weeks have been like in public education in Alberta.

The government has made several announcements, either in the legislature or by social media, that directly affect teachers or compound the stresses already being felt in classrooms and schools. It can be a lot, and at times overwhelming, especially since the government tends to make major changes or policy announcements on a Thursday or Friday afternoon, often with no news conferences or time for people to respond.

I have seen it time and time again. The clock is pushing toward quitting time and bam! The whole AIMCO

board has been fired. No warning, no press conference, no accountability. We saw a similar modus operandi just one week earlier, when the policies around transgender students were tabled in the legislature. At least we knew these were coming; however, tabling them late on Thursday when the house doesn’t sit for several more days is bad governance in my opinion.

Of course, this is all done by design and has been the way the government has operated for years. It is common for me to do press interviews on four or five different topics in one day. This is also done to distract us from the bigger issues in education. As I have said repeatedly to reporters, “What is the problem the government is trying to fix?” I can guarantee you that the majority of teachers in our overcrowded

classrooms are definitely not asking for “opt-in” procedures when it comes to instruction on gender. Teachers want their class sizes addressed, resources for their students and respect for the work they are doing, day in and day out.

Through all of this, we need to make sure we keep our focus on the major issues in education and not get distracted. That being said, we also need to react to the surprise terrible policy choices coming down. As your Association, we will continue to do that. It is important to share the perspectives of teachers and our own sound policy, especially in an era of misinformation and mistruths. Though it can be exhausting, we are fighting the good fight for the right reasons, and, soon enough, the flood zone will become nothing more than a trickle. ■

Two principals and a teacher join ATA staff

Cory Hare
ATA News Staff

Three new staff officers will soon be joining the executive ranks at the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). Tiff Pino, a teacher for 20 years with Edmonton Catholic Schools, will join the Professional Development program area in December. Jeff Spady, principal of Fultonvale Elementary Junior High School in the Elk Island Public School District, will join Teacher Employment Services (TES) at Barnett House in December, and in January, Leanne Watson, principal of Stavely School in the Livingstone Range School Division, will join TES at the ATA's Southern Alberta Regional Office.



Jeff Spady

Spady has worked for Elk Island Public Schools for 23 years, gaining experience in elementary, junior and senior high schools in a variety of teaching and leadership roles, including a secondment to the division's human resources department. He has been active in the ATA's Council for School Leadership and was involved in the ATA's Finland-Alberta partnership FINAL 2.0. He said he's grateful, excited and a little nervous to be joining ATA staff. "Also, very sad to leave the school that I'm currently at ... shoutout to Fultonvale!" he said.

4 MORE THINGS

about Jeff

- What is the greatest life lesson teaching has taught you?** With the right support, a positive environment, and a whole lot of patience, human beings have the capacity and innate resiliency to make massive changes in their life for the better.
- Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give yourself in your first year as a teacher?** Don't sweat the small stuff. Focus on your process and being consistently patient and great things will come.
- What is your favourite song to put you in a good mood?** *It's a Great Day to Be Alive* by Travis Tritt
- What is your favourite activity/hobby/project on the go at home?** Anything to do with golf. I run a small side hustle regripping golf clubs. Puts me into Zen mode!



Tiff Pino

Holding bachelor's degrees in education and kinesiology, Pino has taught grades 7 to 12 English language arts, science, biology and physical education in traditional and outreach schools and served as a learning coach and graduation coach. As a changemaker and advocate for inclusion, Pino has shared her lived experience as a queer person, participated in equity, diversity, inclusion and antiracism committee work, represented Alberta teachers in the Canadian Teachers' Advisory Circle at the Museum of Human Rights, and facilitated workshops provincially and nationally. Her Association roles include GSA co-chair, council of school representatives and executive liaison for member services. She has also represented members at the Annual Representative Assembly and attended Summer Conference. Pino also served as an Association instructor, providing professional development for teachers across the province. "I feel incredibly honoured and excited to be appointed to the ATA staff," she said. "I have always loved supporting other teachers, and having an opportunity like this to extend my reach across the province is amazing. I am very proud to take this next step in my career, and I cannot wait to begin working with such a talented and hardworking team to support our Association members."

about Tiff

- What is the greatest life lesson teaching has taught you?** Despite not being able to control many things in this world, we do have power over how we show up for one another, show compassion, and share kindness and support. This can be done through grand gestures or small acts, and both can have significant impacts on the lives of others. When someone feels safe and supported, it's amazing how they can grow and thrive.
- Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give yourself in your first year as a teacher?** Find colleagues who support and lift you up. Being able to visit after school, decompress after a hard day, laugh about silly things together, share resources, lean on each other and learn from each other will be what sustains you, nurtures your spirit and reminds you why you chose this rewarding profession.
- What is your favourite song to put you in a good mood?** *Shake It Off* by Taylor Swift
- What is your favourite activity/hobby/project on the go at home?** I love cooking and sharing food with others because it's my way of showing care and love to my friends and family. Whether I'm creating old family recipes or trying out new ones, I enjoy it all.



Leanne Watson

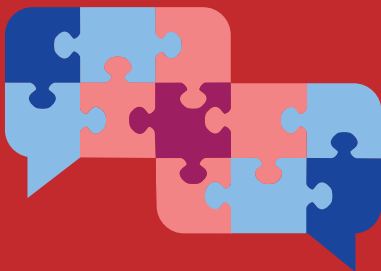
As principal of Stavely School, Watson brings a unique perspective informed by her rural teaching experience and a diverse background that includes professional coaching and presentations with the Alberta Assessment Consortium. Watson holds bachelor's degrees in science and education, and a master's degree in education, focused on curriculum and assessment. She has taught at the elementary, junior high and senior high levels and served as an academic advisor. Watson has also been a district school improvement coach, a contract presenter with the Alberta Assessment Consortium, and has led various professional development sessions with a focus on pedagogy and assessment. Her ATA involvement includes serving on the Women in Leadership Committee and the School Leaders Issues and Concerns Committee, reflecting her commitment to supporting educational leadership and advocacy. She said she is thrilled to be joining ATA staff. "Words really can't explain my excitement," she said. "My mission and vision align perfectly with the ATA's commitment to supporting teachers, advocating for quality education, and enhancing the profession. This role is an opportunity to contribute to the ATA's goals in a meaningful way, and I'm eager to support and inspire educators across the province."

about Leanne

- What is the greatest life lesson teaching has taught you?** The importance of building strong connections with the school community, from parents/guardians to our local volunteers. Teaching isn't just about what happens inside the classroom; it's about engaging with students, families and the wider community to create a supportive environment where children feel valued and understood.
- Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give yourself in your first year as a teacher?** Develop a consistent reflection practice for your lessons and then a week reflection. It is a powerful tool for improvement. Also, focus on building strong relationships with your students and colleagues. They are the foundation of everything you'll accomplish.
- What is your favourite song to put you in a good mood?** *Seminole Wind* as sung by my favourite band, Buckinghorse Moon.
- What is your favourite activity/hobby/project on the go at home?** Camping off-grid in our 1986 VW Vanagon is one of my favourite activities. I love being outside on the ranch, golfing, swimming, skiing, playing ukulele and piano, taking photos and playing games with my family.

BARGAINING

Central Table 2024



We are ATA.

Mediator engaged as talks continue

ATA News Staff

The Alberta Teachers' Association's (ATA) Central Table Bargaining Committee (CTBC) recently spent two full days negotiating with the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) on October 28 and 29. While discussions remained professional, it became apparent that the two sides would need support to address those issues with significant cost and complexity from the initial proposal. To bridge this gap, both parties agreed to bring in a mediator for assistance on these crucial items.

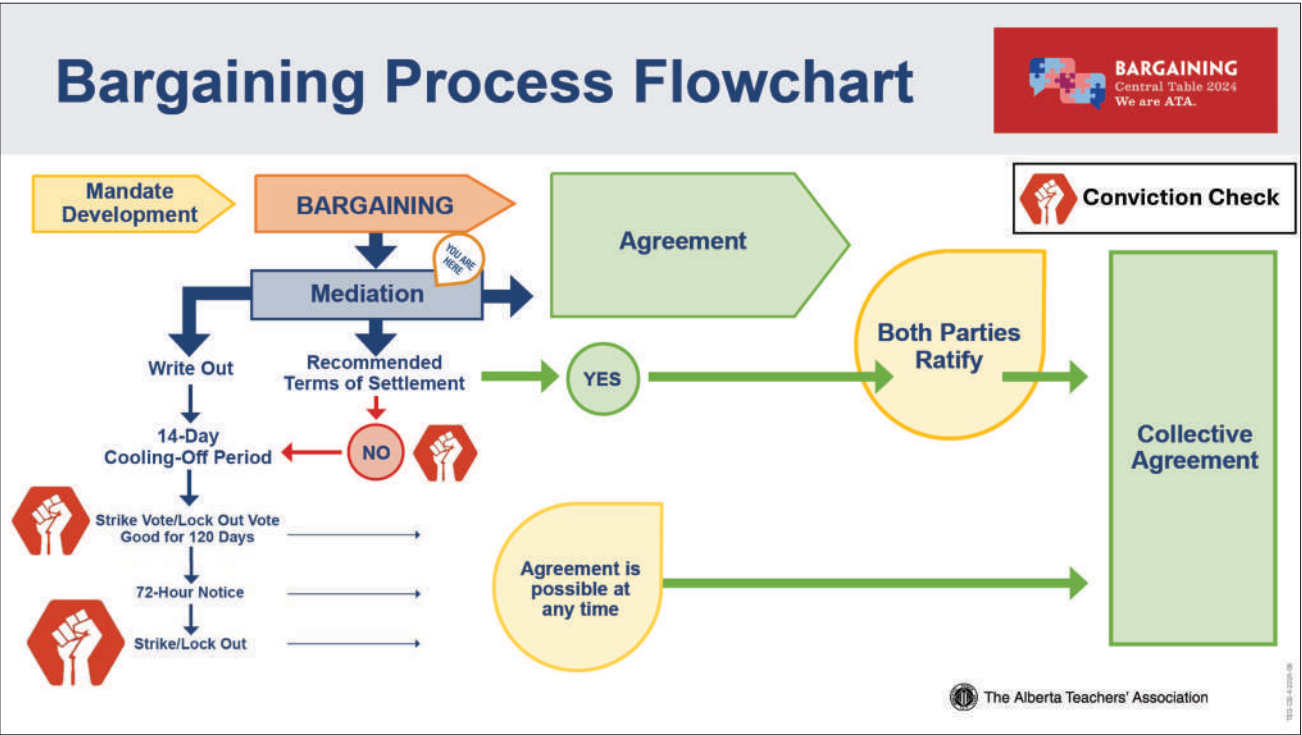
Why mediation?

Mediation is a standard tool in labour negotiations and does not indicate that talks have failed. Both the ATA and TEBA remain committed to reaching an agreement, with additional meeting dates scheduled for late November and early December. The role of a mediator is to attempt to help the bargaining teams to resolve the major items in dispute, while other issues may progress through further direct discussions between the two parties. This approach reflects a joint effort to keep negotiations moving and avoid any potential impasse.

Bringing teachers' stories to the table

Bargaining discussions focused on significant proposals related to assignable/instruction time, inclusion, classroom complexity (class size and composition), administrators and substitute teachers. To underscore the realities teachers face, five educators — representing a range of roles, from classroom teachers to administrators — recently shared their experiences directly with both the ATA and TEBA. These educators voiced their daily struggles with passion, courage and conviction, emphasizing that current conditions are unsustainable, and that change is necessary.

Where are we on the path to a collective agreement?



Stay informed and united

The ATA encourages all members to remain informed and united. Virtual Member Information Meetings (MiMs) took place on November 18, 19 and 20 and gave teachers an opportunity to receive updates on the bargaining process and ask questions about mediation. These sessions aim to keep members engaged and informed every step of the way. Teachers can also stay informed online, with the initial proposal and bargaining updates available in the Collective Bargaining section of the ATA website. The bargaining process remains ongoing, and the CTBC remains committed to advocating for teachers' needs and improving conditions for both educators and students across Alberta.

Bargaining updates



Subscribe now



Teachers are invited to show their support and solidarity with the bargaining team by wearing red on Fridays and on negotiation days.

Want to share a snap of your own team donning "Red for Ed"?

Email managing editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.



Teachers at Argyll Centre show their support for the bargaining team.



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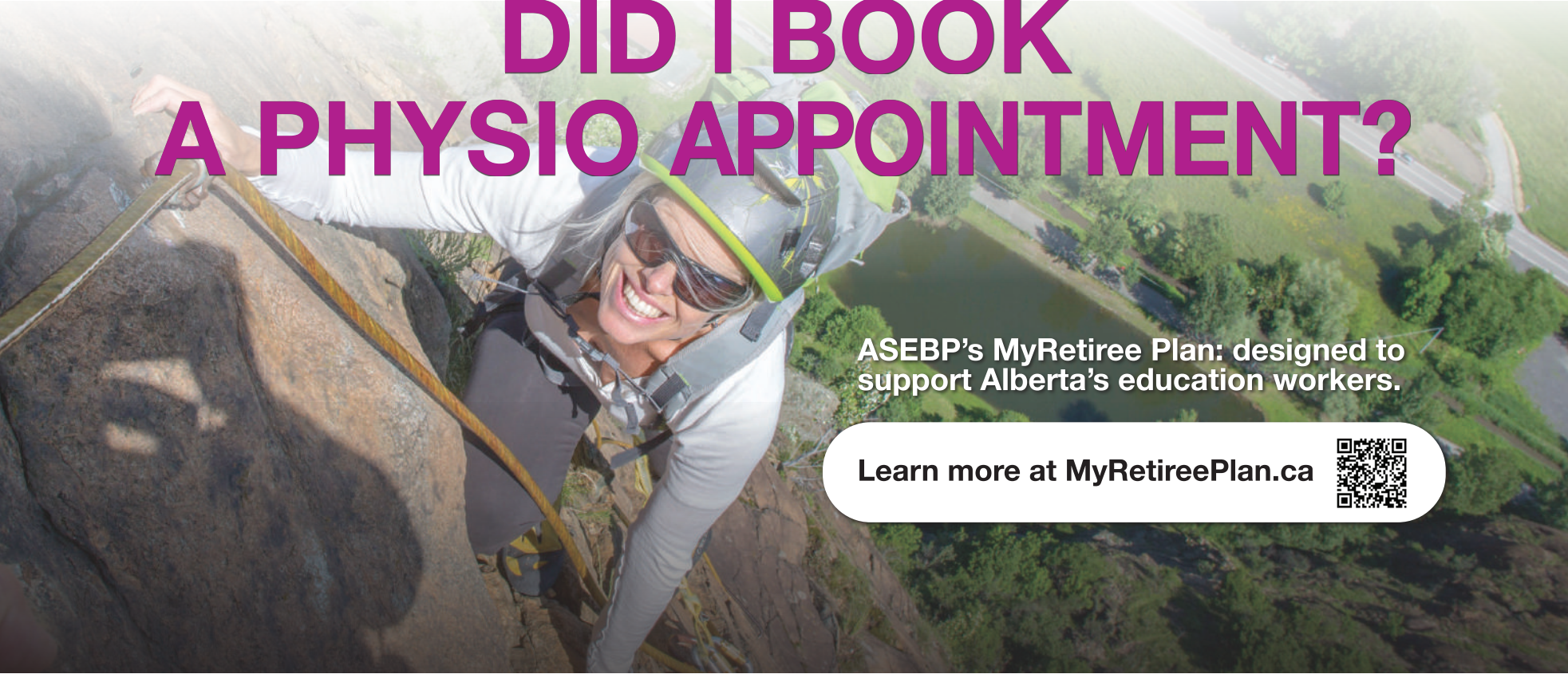
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Margaret Atwood (centre) poses with the local presidents from Calgary Catholic and Calgary Public.

Margaret Atwood presents on politics and public education

Heather Grant
ATA News Staff

Calgary’s Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium was buzzing when Margaret Atwood took the stage. On November 12, the renowned Canadian author presented a public lecture on “Democracy, Public Education and the Common Good,” hosted by the ATA in partnership with Calgary Catholic Local No. 55 and Calgary Public Local No. 38.

Nearly 2,500 people packed the auditorium, with hundreds more from across the world watching via a livestream. The public lecture was moderated by author and speaker Shari Graydon, who opened the discussion by asking Atwood about her favourite teachers growing up.

“From high school — it was my exemplary teacher, Miss Bessie B. Billings,” Atwood recalled. “It was she who decided that I had some talent as a writer.”

When asked about getting students engaged with subjects like history and science, Atwood’s suggestion was simple: make it interesting.

“We’re living in a world where we are overwhelmed by information, social media, misinformation and living in news bubbles,” which makes getting through to kids, and their parents, more crucial — and difficult.

On the current context

The public lecture delved into important topics concerning the current landscape of public

education in Alberta. After being asked about some of the policy and outside influences affecting public education in Alberta, Atwood commented that resisting the pressure from such influences rests in the hands of voters.

“Do you want to let somebody influence your public education system in a direction of saying there shouldn’t be a public education system?” she mused. “That seems to me to be pretty self-defeating.”

Atwood also commented on the recent U.S. presidential election. When asked about the result, Atwood turned to humour before predicting Donald Trump’s win means a return to speaking openly about class, something she says hasn’t been widely discussed since the 1940s.

“Public education has to do with class,” Atwood said, “Because if you can’t afford it, public education is your only resource for your kids. So, there’s home schooling, of course. But guess what? In a lot of families, both parents have to go to work.”

The nature of public education was raised throughout the evening. Following a question from the moderator, Atwood spoke on public education as a pillar of democracy and whether we must come close to losing it to really understand its value.

“I don’t think you’re close to losing it yet, but you’re closer than you were. It used to be something that people took for granted.”

Atwood left the audience with a powerful reminder: society is more united than it appears, even if human nature distorts that view.

ATA library offers refreshed K–6 curriculum guides

Lindsay Yakimyshyn
ATA News Managing Editor

Could you use a helping hand with implementing the new K–6 curriculum? The ATA Library is here to help!

The ATA Library team recently curated a collection of online materials that align closely with the updated K–6 curriculum, making it easier for teachers to find engaging content that meets their students’ needs.

“Our goal is to make the new curriculum as manageable as possible for teachers,” said Sandra Anderson, ATA librarian. “We brought together online resources that can support teachers in sparking student engagement.”

Each guide has been organized by grade and subject, covering a diverse range of topics and learning objectives. Whether you are teaching Grade 4 science and need resources on Earth’s spheres, or working with Grade 2 math students and want an interactive 100 number chart, the ATA Library has you covered. You’ll find a variety of formats, including videos, interactive tools, articles and worksheets.

“In creating these guides, we really wanted them to be practical for busy teachers,” Anderson said. “We want them to feel confident that they have high-quality resources that are quick to find and use.”

The K–6 curriculum guides have recently had a refresh for math and science. The update for social studies will be happening in the new year. But there are more curriculum guides to explore as the ATA Library provides curriculum guides for all grades and subjects, continually updating resources to ensure teachers can access the latest and best tools with ease.

To explore the updated K–6 curriculum guides and find resources that align with the new curriculum, visit the ATA Library’s website at teachers-ab.libguides.com/curriculum.



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Math Puzzle

Solve the equations.

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DIGITAL NEWS

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Curriculum connections: Fungal Associates, Conservation, Earth Science, Ecosystems, Nutrient Cycling



Doug Smith: Wild Wolves of Yellowstone
MON APRIL 28, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Curriculum connections: Environmental Impact of Species Reintroduction



Andrés Ruza: Hunt for Sleeping Giants
MON JANUARY 27, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Curriculum connections: Impact of Natural Events, Harsh Environments, Earth Science

Kakani Katija: Designed by Nature
MON MAY 26, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Curriculum connections: Biomimicry, Harsh Environments, Biological Adaptations, Ecosystems

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Council adds emphasis on keeping members informed

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held October 24–25, 2024, at Barnett House in Edmonton

1. Amended the 2024/25 program emphases by adding support for racialized teachers in the Provincial Executive Council general election and exploring processes and procedures to inform members about changes to their individual and collective rights, compensation, benefits, working conditions and professional practice arising from the central table 2024 collective agreement.
2. Approved in principle and referred to Finance Committee for costing a proposed list of programs on which the Association should focus in 2025/26.
3. Approved a rule of order and procedure that any resolution proposed for consideration by a representative assembly that is determined by Steering Committee prior to the convening of the assembly, or by the chair of the assembly when in session, to be beyond the mandate of the Association as defined by its objects as set out in the *Teaching Profession Act*, will be deemed to be out of order and not be placed on the order paper. The determination that a motion is beyond the mandate of the Association may be superseded by a three-fourths vote in the affirmative of the local representatives or members present directing that the resolution be brought before the Assembly for consideration.
4. Amended and approved the Association's 2024/25 budget for capital expenditures.
5. Authorized a new advertising campaign to be developed in spring 2025 to follow up from The Least campaign.
6. Named the following individuals to Association positions:
 - Tiff Pino to the position of executive staff officer, Professional Development;
 - Leanne Watson to the position of executive staff officer, Teacher Employment Services at the Southern Alberta Regional Office; and
 - Jeff Spady to the position of executive staff officer, Teacher Employment Services.
7. Approved the hiring of an internal candidate to the position of associate coordinator, Professional Development, to oversee the work of the diversity, equity and inclusion subunit.
8. Authorized the Association to enter formal mediation with the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association and directed the Coordinator, Teacher Employment Services, to apply for the services of a government-appointed mediator.
9. Authorized a one-time contribution to Public Interest Alberta in the amount of \$10,000.
10. Amended Administrative Guidelines to align with the current bargaining model and to update the convention exhibits section to reflect restrictions to competitors of personal travel services and update the current names of the Association's partners.
11. Amended the Standard Constitution for Convention Associations and updated all current convention association constitutions to reflect the amendments made to the Standard Constitution.
12. Amended the Standard Constitution for Specialist Councils.
13. Amended the Political Engagement Committee and the Indigenous Education Committee frames of reference.
14. Appointed a field member to serve on the Edmonton Area Field Experiences Committee and approved a Council member as the Association's nominee to the Canadian Teachers' Federation Work Group on Climate Change. ■

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ATA 2025
PEC
election

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NOTICES AND EVENTS

Call for student applications for the Vimy Pilgrimage Award

Your students can now apply for the Vimy Foundation's Vimy Pilgrimage Award.

This unique nine-day program brings together students, ages 15–17, from across Canada to visit First World War sites and memorials in Belgium and France. Recipients demonstrate an exceptional commitment to their community and a dedication to improving the world around them. Participants gain unique insights into well-known and lesser-known

stories of Canada's involvement in the First World War. They come away with enhanced critical thinking, leadership and communication skills, and a deeper understanding of a major world event.

Encourage your students to apply. The application deadline is November 26, 2024.

wîcihtotân

Let's Help Each Other

wîcihtotân is an ATA program and network for Indigenous teachers and school leaders to listen and learn together. The program connects participants to offer support, guidance and mentorship with each other.

The Alberta Teachers' Association is seeking First Nations, Métis and Inuit teachers and school leaders to **join wîcihtotân** and attend three gatherings throughout the school year:

- December 6, 1:00 – 3:30 pm**, online via Zoom
- March 21, 1:00 – 3:30 pm**, online via Zoom
- May 16, 10:00 am – 2:00 pm**, Edmonton, location TBD

Release time will be provided by the Association.

To Register go to <https://surveys.teachers.ab.ca/s3/w-cihtot-n-Gathering-Registration-2024-2025>

Registration Deadline: November 30, 2024

For More Information
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If something newsworthy is going on in your school, district or local, please let us know. We will also consider articles, photos and cartoons. Please email tips and submissions to managing editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn: lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

TALEND

November 19, 2024 | Volume 59, Number 5



IN REMEMBRANCE

Teachers shared class work that inspired reflection on the sacrifices made by veterans and current service members.



I teach Grade 4 French immersion with Sturgeon Public Schools. I also am the founder and lead of our school Dandelion Club (a support group for students of military and veteran families,) run both of our Remembrance Day ceremonies and help to organize our divisionwide Teal Up For Military Children Day for the Month of the Military Child. I am also the daughter of two 30-year military veterans.

I wanted to share what my students did for Remembrance Day as I think it's really important! Thank you for being invested in seeing what little ones are doing! It means the world.

– Alexandra Lessard



Lorelei Gertz-Cummins



Grade 1 artwork – Jacey Jolene



De Wittal Smith



Painted in memory of my dad, who grew up on the farm and served in WWII. – Heather Dempsey



Grade 2 acrostic “peace” poems and poppy artwork to honor Remembrance Day! – Tracy Jans



Kindergarten loose parts – Michelle Dickie



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