



# FESTIVE FUN!

Win a Red for Ed prize pack – plus a gift card!  
See Tale End, [page 12](#).



[See page 3.](#)

# ATA NEWS

December 10, 2024 | Volume 59, Number 6

News Publication of The Alberta Teachers' Association



Wishing you a  
restful holiday  
season.

LINDSAY YAKIMYSHYN



## Know your value

Taking time to celebrate teachers' work

See Editorial, [page 2](#).

## "Inherently unfair"

Analysis of private school spending raises concerns

See [page 4](#).



## Unstoppable together

Find strength and solace in our community

See Off Script, [page 5](#).

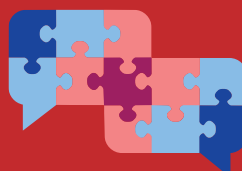
## More curriculum change coming

Junior high curriculum revision announced

See [page 4](#).

## BARGAINING

Central Table 2024



## Bargaining update

Progress made, more work to come

See .

## Valuing ourselves as teaching professionals



### EDITORIAL

**Kristine Wilkinson**  
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

The holidays are coming!!! This winter break lets teachers catch up on sleep and spend some time with family (and possibly top it all off with perpetual marking and planning). By this time of the year, teachers are just plain tired. More than that, they are becoming tired of being told to take care of themselves but not being given the resources to do so. It is disheartening to be told to take time for self care when it just seems impossible to find the time, the energy and the support.

As teachers regroup over the break, it's important for them to hear a few positive sentiments as to what the public believes about the teacher's role and the value of public education. Teachers need to hear a little more about how they are valued.

A recent cross-Canada poll conducted by Abacus showed that

about 90 per cent of Canadians agree (strongly or somewhat) that public education is one of the most important public expenditures. If this is the case, why are teachers not receiving the supports they need so they won't be so worn out by the holidays? Further, if the public thinks education is one of the most important public institutions

“ If the public thinks education is one of the most important public institutions in Canada ... then surely teachers deserve to be compensated for their place in the public system. ”

in Canada, as indicated by this result, then surely teachers deserve to be compensated for their place in the public system. With the cost of living on the rise (an increase of 3.75 per cent this year), an increase for teachers just makes sense.

The polling data from Abacus also showed that the public feels that teachers are the most important stakeholder in education, with 56 per cent replying that teachers play a big role in making a strong public education system. The role of teachers is critical and the public is seeing this.

With the increasing enrolment and

in the province, and this needs to be remembered.

As you talk to family and friends over the holidays, remember the public support for public education. When they ask about how you're doing, let them know. Let them know about your classroom and how much time you can realistically spend with each student in the class during the day. Your working conditions as teachers are students' learning conditions, and the children in our classrooms are not getting the education they deserve because teachers do not have the supports they need.

You are the valued expert — use your clout! One-on-one conversations work, and you have the insights and information to share what is happening in this valued public institution. Teacher wellness will result from public education being valued not only through words, but also by actions.

This holiday season, take time for yourself and value yourself. Happy holidays! ■

I welcome your comments. Contact me at [kristine.wilkinson@ata.ab.ca](mailto:kristine.wilkinson@ata.ab.ca).

## Time to dust off the crystal ball



### Q & A

**Dennis Theobald**  
ATA Executive Secretary

**Question:** Back in the day, you used to present an economic and political scan to local communications and local political engagement officers. I'm curious what you think the future might now hold for Alberta's teachers and schools?

**Answer:** Well, I always look forward to dusting off my crystal ball and taking a gander in the direction of things that might come to be. Of course, if I were really good at this, I would be writing this column on the beach of my private Caribbean island — which, I assure you, I am not. Be that as it may...

In a previous column, I commented on the influence that events and trends in the United States (U.S.) have on Canada generally and on Alberta in particular. So, I think a good place to start is the return of Donald Trump to the presidency after a divisive campaign.

Even though Trump did not win the popular vote, his Republican Party has control of both the House of Congress and the House of Representatives and has been able, over time, to install a majority of sympathetic justices on the Supreme Court. This suggests that Trump will be able to pursue an agenda without the usual constraints.

At the core of this agenda is Trump's consistent campaign promises to expel undocumented immigrants and to raise tariffs. Both of these proceed from a desire to "Make America Great Again" by returning to a time when the U.S. was the world's dominant industrial economy with a thriving middle class employed in manufacturing goods for domestic consumption and to export to the world. All this began to change after the Second World War, as nations and businesses embraced the ideology of global free trade and its promise to provide a better quality of life for all by achieving efficiencies, fostering innovation and allowing people to buy a greater assortment of goods more cheaply.

Beginning in the 1970s, there emerged a neoliberal, rules-based system of free international trade that delivered on these promises. The problem was that the benefits and costs of this transition were not evenly distributed. Even as we and our American friends were all able to buy vastly improved televisions and smart phones more cheaply than could ever have been imagined, the simultaneous hollowing out of American manufacturing and extractive industries has had a devastating effect, economically and psychologically.

Trump's solution is to scapegoat those who are seen to be taking the jobs of "real Americans." These are first and foremost immigrants, and particularly those whose legal status in the U.S.

is questionable. While the threat of mass expulsions and to end birthright citizenship may not come to pass, there will undoubtedly be new barriers to migration.

Of much greater concern to those of us on the northern border is the threatened imposition by the U.S. of sweeping tariffs or taxes on imported goods and services. Making imports more expensive presumably bolsters the viability of domestic American companies whose products would become more price competitive in comparison to those produced abroad. There is no such thing as a free lunch, however, and average Americans will pay for such a policy in the form of increased prices, resulting in a growth of general inflation and a higher cost of living.

But I think there is more to Trump's tariff policy than simply shifting the terms of trade.

Trump wants to deliver sweeping tax cuts. To do this, he needs to reduce government programs, hence the establishment of the new "Department of Government Efficiency" to implement cuts, potentially in the trillions of dollars. I believe that the second element of the strategy is to substitute revenues from tariffs for revenues from taxation, effectively imposing a sales tax on imports.

From an historical perspective, this is not new. Before the Second World War, national governments' largest source of income was tariff revenue. This was

also an era marked by constant trade wars and a power-based international order where larger economies set the rules to maximize their own advantage at the cost of others. Occasionally when they got things especially wrong (homework: look up the *Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act* of 1930), they plunged the global economy into depression.

The imperative of maximizing government income from tariffs also undermines Trump's assertion that his trade policy is in direct response to the uncontrolled flow of illegal immigrants and fentanyl over U.S. borders. By claiming that these problems constitute an "emergency," Trump is cynically setting himself up to trigger a clause in the 2020 USMCA free trade treaty between the U.S., Mexico and Canada that would allow the U.S. to revoke the terms of the agreement that currently govern trade between the three countries. Those who believe that all we need to do to make this go away is to strengthen border control (looking at you Premier Smith) are in serious denial.

So, what does all this mean in practical terms for teachers and schools in Alberta? I'll take a look at that in part two of this column in the next issue of the *ATA News*. ■

Questions for consideration in this column are welcome. Please address them to [Dennis Theobald](mailto:dennis.theobald@ata.ab.ca) at [dennis.theobald@ata.ab.ca](mailto:dennis.theobald@ata.ab.ca).



# Let's have another look at the shop class



## VIEWPOINTS

**Warren Boyd Ferguson**  
Teacher, administrator  
and researcher

Have you ever wondered what goes on in the shop class at the far end of the hall? It is commonly known that students are building something with their hands in there, but what else happens in that learning space? How does the teaching and learning that is occurring there fit into your school's overall culture?

When I taught mechanics, I became an alternate expert in practical physics, chemistry and applied mathematics. My students saw shop class as a respite from the core subjects, but I found ways to connect what I did to those subjects. For example, a student was struggling with fractions, but our work together with micrometres made things clear for him. This shows the potential for us as teachers to work together – regardless of what we're teaching – to ensure student success.

We all know that students develop varying kinds of work skills in career and technology foundations (CTF) and career and technology studies (CTS) classes, but is there something going on that is more complex and nuanced? I think so.

Here are a few relevant points to know about CTF/CTS:

- There is a bit of a needless academic and vocational divide in schools. CTF/CTS teachers are sometimes

sensitive about their courses being seen as "options" and prefer the term "complementary courses." They want to be included in cross-curricular activities because they often feel isolated "down that hall." Look for connections.

- These courses are well-positioned for experiential learning and occupational skill development. The problem-solving skills fostered in these classes enriches the overall learning experience of students, and those skills are transferable to all classrooms.
- While it is true these programs routinely serve marginalized and "less academic" learners, the new pedagogical paradigm is inclusive of all students. At the same time, the vocational identity and skills built in shop class served to keep students who are at risk in school, allowing them to dream of a positive future.
- Not all students are university-bound but at the same time, I had students who took mechanics so that they would be well-rounded mechanical engineers. That means CTF/CTS courses offer a distinct and broad opportunity for all learners.
- Career and technology teachers bring a wealth of higher learning and industry experience to the classroom. They are real teachers with the same teaching degree. (That's a sensitive topic, so forgive my candour.)
- Increasingly, women are teaching CTF/CTS courses, contrary to the stereotype of the space being male dominated. The student demographics are seeing a similar trend. Vocational and STEM education for young women are distinct focus areas in contemporary education.

- Providing timely, relevant and ongoing teacher professional development (PD) with real applications is essential. Consider whether your school's PD addresses the specific needs of these teachers to ensure they are supported in their professional development.
- School leaders can continue to learn about what happens in these classes, socially, culturally and pedagogically. That is not to suggest administrators aren't already doing this work. I have heard that support from leaders is quite good, and very much appreciated. At the same time, schools can continue to find ways to share how CTF/CTS teachers contribute to the school and its culture.

I recently spoke with a group of CTF/CTS teachers who shared the following suggestions for their colleagues: "Build relationships with [CTF/CTS] teachers. There is something that happens here that doesn't happen anywhere else," said one teacher. Another offered, "Come down and see what we do. Struggling students can really shine!"

Teachers of CTF/CTS want other teachers to know what they do, and how their work connects with their professional colleagues as part of schoolwide learning. I invite you to visit and connect with these colleagues. Drop by your school's shop class, check it out and have a chat.

*Warren Boyd Ferguson has been teaching for over 20 years in Alberta and is currently a PhD student at the University of Calgary. He is passionate about transformative school leadership that considers CTF/CTS as a valued part of a school culture.*



## FOR THE RECORD

“  
We'll dream, soar into  
the blue, rise up to  
a new reality because  
defending the good  
is how we defy gravity.  
”

– From American poet  
Amanda Gorman's spoken word poem  
inspired by the musical film *Wicked*



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

Want to share how you or your team is supporting Red for Ed? Email managing editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at [lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca](mailto:lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca).



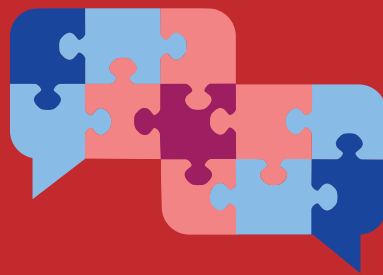
Teachers at Lillian Osborne High School showed their support for properly funded public education by wearing red on Friday, November 15. The school held a "Red for Ed" brownie contest – the department with the greatest percentage of staff wearing red won homemade brownies (the physical education department took the win). One staff member, away on an extended fall break, even participated from Lisbon!



**Win a "RED FOR ED" PRIZE PACK by entering the festive fun trivia contest! See Tale End on page 12.**

# BARGAINING

## Central Table 2024



We are ATA.



## Progress made in bargaining

ATA News Staff

The ATA's Central Table Bargaining Committee (CTBC) and the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) met on November 26–27 for a central bargaining session, continuing their efforts to reach a resolution that supports Alberta's teachers and students.

### Mediator selected

Following consultation with the Provincial Executive Council (PEC), a joint request was submitted to the director of Mediation Services for

a government-appointed mediator. Deborah Howes, a highly regarded mediator familiar to the ATA, was appointed with the support of both parties. Howes played a key role in resolving Edmonton Public Teachers' most recent local bargaining dispute and is known for her fair and impartial approach. The CTBC and TEBA are currently coordinating mediation dates for January, which will be shared with members once confirmed. While the CTBC will continue to share as much information as possible, the mediator may require an embargo, which will limit the CTBC's ability to be as detailed as members would like and expect.

### Member information meetings

On November 18–20, the ATA held virtual member information meetings (MiMs) to provide updates on the bargaining process and allow teachers to ask questions about mediation. Recordings of these sessions are now available to watch on the Members Only section of the ATA website.

### Stay connected and engaged

Teachers can access information on bargaining, including the initial proposal and the latest bargaining updates, through the Members Only section of the ATA website. Members

are encouraged to stay connected and united as the bargaining team works through this critical process. The CTBC remains committed to advocating for teachers' needs and improving conditions for both educators and students across Alberta.

Bargaining updates



Subscribe now



## Government announces junior high curriculum revision

Heather Grant

ATA News Staff

Changes are coming to the curriculum for junior high students.

The Alberta government recently announced that the junior high curriculum will be updated, with the changes affecting mathematics for grades 7 to 9, social studies for grades 7 to 9, physical education and wellness for grades 7 to 10, and career and life management (CALM).

The province said that teachers will be involved in the revision process, although it is not clear to what extent. So far, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) has submitted one nomination for each of the four Teacher Curriculum Consultation groups for engagement with the province.

"It's our hope that teachers'

experiences and insights are included at the curriculum writing table and not brought in as an afterthought," said ATA president Jason Schilling.

According to the province, school authorities will then have the option to pilot the draft curriculum in 2025/26. While the need for some updates is clear (CALM has not been revised since 2002), some have expressed concerns with the timeline for the pilot.

The changes come as teachers are struggling with a lack of resources and overcrowded classrooms. Given this — and having seen the challenges and strain experienced by teachers implementing the new K–6 curriculum in six subjects over the last two years — the ATA is urging the government to pause and to include teachers in the full process, from drafting to implementation, to avoid a repeat of the recent shortfalls.

"It's a teacher's job to set students up

for success, and the only way they can do that is if they have a say in what is being taught," Schilling said.

For the K–6 curriculum overhaul, teachers expressed frustration that instead of being included at the drafting table, they were able to provide feedback only on the already assembled draft. Further, there were concerns about the draft social studies curriculum that went unaddressed. Despite the ATA and teachers urging the government to delay the piloting of the K–6 social studies curriculum given their concerns, the curriculum was launched in classrooms in September.

Terra Kaliszuk, ATA executive staff officer, said that although the social studies pilot is ongoing, she is receiving feedback already.

"Teachers find the content load of the curriculum overwhelming," she said.

The ATA will be undertaking research this school year to gather information

about teachers' experiences with the pilot. For Schilling, the feedback from teachers on the social studies pilot must inform the process for updating the junior high curriculum.

"A curriculum needs to be viewed as a staircase," Schilling said. "Our concern with the social studies pilot is that steps were missed."

To prevent this from happening again, the ATA is advocating for teachers to be meaningfully involved in the curriculum revision process from the very beginning. When it comes to the junior high curriculum update, teachers' involvement will serve all students well by helping address the shortfalls that remain in the K–6 curriculum, Schilling said.

"We need to understand and address the learning gaps in the elementary curriculum before we move to junior high, otherwise you're creating a system of upwards failing." ■

## "Inherently unfair": Concerns raised over private school spending

ATA News Staff

Unlike public, separate, francophone and charter schools, private schools in Alberta are not required to publicly disclose their audited financial statements, despite receiving substantial public funding. This lack of transparency creates challenges in determining per-student spending in Alberta's private schools. However, a window into these expenditures exists.

Many private schools are registered charities, requiring them to submit an annual Form T3010 filing with the Canada Revenue Agency. These filings — which are publicly accessible — offer key insights into a charity's revenue and expenditures.

ATA economist Neil Hepburn recently conducted an analysis of private school finances and was unsettled by what he found.

"I took this on to get a better understanding of per-student funding and expenditures in Alberta's schools," he explains. "What the numbers show

is that many of Alberta's private schools spend more than twice per student than public schools in the same area."

Hepburn included in his analysis all the private schools that are registered charities. He focused on 15 private schools with per-student expenditures exceeding \$20,000 per year. He excluded Parkland School in Red Deer, Foothills Academy and Calgary Academy in Calgary from the analysis, as these schools focus on students with complex needs and do not represent typical school operations. Schools were also excluded when school functions could not be disentangled from other charitable functions (most notable in a few church-affiliated schools).

Using the T3010 filings and enrolments from Alberta Education's student population statistics, Hepburn determined that the per-student expenditure at these 15 private schools ranged from \$23,254 to \$39,501. In comparison, public schools in the competing areas spent \$10,905 to \$11,667 per student.

"That is a huge discrepancy," Hepburn

said. "A difference of more than \$28,000 in one case."

Each of these private schools received public funds through the Alberta Education Funding Manual, as Alberta Education grants are provided to accredited private schools. Private schools in Alberta are funded at a rate of 70 per cent, the highest in Canada, and are also able to charge tuition.

ATA president Jason Schilling said that this analysis is an important impetus for a conversation around private school funding and equitable opportunities for students.

"What these numbers scream to me is that choice in education does not mean equal opportunity for students," Schilling said.

The higher level of spending in private schools provides those students with access to more staff supports, newer technology, specialized facilities and unique excursions. Schilling commented that all students in the province should have equitable access to such supports, programs and tools.

"Most schools across this province, when given the proper funding and

supports, can do creative and innovative work for every kid in this province," Schilling said. "Why would we select only a few schools to do this work and let the rest just get by? It's inherently unfair."

Schilling added that now is the time for teachers, parents and other public education supporters to talk to their MLAs about the issue of funding for private schools. The province's budget survey, he said, represents an opportunity for everyone's voice to be heard.

"The public should be paying to support the public system not private schools, so that we can create opportunities for every single student across the province." ■

Take the government's budget survey now at [your.alberta.ca/budget-2025/surveys/public](https://your.alberta.ca/budget-2025/surveys/public).





# Off Script

with ATA President Jason Schuing

## Finding strength and solace in our community

Often when things get busy and feel overwhelming, I find myself reading or, in this case, rereading essays from people I find inspirational.

One author I admire is Margaret Wheatley, whom I had the immense luck to hear speak at an ATA curriculum event several years ago. As I sat down and found myself once again leafing through her writing, I came across a quote that captured my present sentiment: "There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about."

We have seen our communities come together in times of trouble and rally around those who need support time and time again. Unfortunately, we have also seen the opposite occur when people fail to seek to understand the positions of others. The world can be a pretty hard place sometimes, which is even more reason to resist divisiveness and look for what we have in common.

Over the last several weeks, I have been travelling across the province attending ATA and education partner events. At these events, I was witness to people who share common values when it comes to public education and the greater good. At the Rally for Respect in October, I saw several Alberta unions joining voices to demand respect for their work and fair bargaining. Later in the month, I proudly stood

with my colleagues at a rally in support of our trans youth, their families and their rights. At the ATA's public lecture featuring Margaret Atwood, I heard the cheers and applause as a community showed their support and gratitude for teachers.

But Jason, these events are disparate, you say? What do they have in common, you wonder?

As I looked at all the faces in these crowds, I saw passion and concern. I saw hope and worry and a desire to connect and find communities of support.

As teachers, we belong to a large, diverse and beautiful community, one that day in and day out works to make a positive difference. We are a community that knows that you need to fight for what is right—what is right for the teaching profession, for public education and for our students. It is what we care about.

Wheatley reminds us, "Relationships are all there is. Everything in the universe only exists because it is in relationship to everything else. Nothing exists in isolation." We are unstoppable when we come together.

So as winter break approaches, I encourage you to take strength and solace in your community. Become rejuvenated by those who inspire you. Most of all, enjoy your well-earned rest. ■

## YOUR VIEWS

With the countdown on until winter break, we asked what is getting you through the last few weeks?

**f Tammy Trevor**  
My amazing team of colleagues!

**f Dwayne Wenaas**  
Coffee through an IV and chocolate. Plus a stubborn disregard for sleep.

**f Laurie Jean**  
Pajama Day!!!

**f Christine Gonkowicz**  
I'm keeping things simple: a touch of decorations in the classroom, planning simple activities and lessons. Scheduling personal downtime, focusing on eating nutritious foods and prioritizing sleep are also essential.

**f Lisa Dunne**  
Advent and hope, joy and anticipation of more time with family.

**f Teresa York**  
Theme days and school festivities.

**f Landen Blize**  
Language Arts 7 and 8 playing dungeons and dragons.

**f Kamal Johal**  
The joy of spending time with family and friends over the holidays and the opportunity to recharge are keeping me motivated. I'm also energized by the small moments, like seeing students' progress, celebrating their achievements and creating festive crafts while decorating our door.

**f Mee Lee**  
Coffee, great grade partners and colleagues!

**f Lori Karoly Szmul**  
The fact that it's my last December teaching!

## DEHR chairs connect at first annual training event

Lindsay Yakimyshyn  
ATA News Managing Editor

The ATA welcomed local Diversity, Equity and Human Rights (DEHR) chairs from across Alberta for their first annual training session. Held in Edmonton, the two-day event focused on enhancing the understanding of DEHR-related issues in the profession.

The session began with a plenary address by Kathryn Oviatt, KC, chief of the Commission and Tribunals of the Alberta Human Rights Commission. Commenting that the ATA has always been a great champion of human rights, Oviatt said that this new training for DEHR chairs is an example of how the community can lead the way on human rights issues.

"We all have a responsibility to nurture and cultivate human rights, whether that be in our schools for our precious students, for each other in our workplaces, or even within our own homes and communities," Oviatt said.

Acknowledging that the work of fostering equality and reducing discrimination is not easy, Oviatt urged participants to remain diligent and hopeful in their work to nurture equity and inclusion in their schools and communities. She also encouraged them to focus on sources of hope, including their students, colleagues and communities.

"Be kind and inclusive and prioritize equality, knowing that although there are challenges, there are also champions and heroes among us."

In addition to the plenary session, participants received a taste of ATA workshops on gender bias and on culturally responsive teaching and information

on Indigenous education resources. Participants also engaged in strategic planning to connect and share their ideas for starting and sustaining change in their local contexts.

Andrea Berg, executive staff officer, said that the event served as a milestone in the ATA's commitment to equity and professional collaboration, setting the stage for ongoing dialogue and shared learning among diversity leaders.

"This was an exciting opportunity for DEHR chairs to learn from each other and to plan together," Berg said. "This is just the first of many steps in supporting this vital work in locals."

Planning for future annual training sessions and for the DEHR Conference is already under way, promising even greater opportunities to empower diversity leaders and strengthen community connections. ■



DEHR chairs collaborate and share their strategies.

LINDSAY YAKIMYSHYN

### RIGHTS MENT

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Plenary speaker Kathryn Oviatt speaks on the importance of tending to human rights.

LINDSAY YAKIMYSHYN

**Nominate**  
**ATA 2025 PEC election**

**WANT TO RUN FOR PROVINCIAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL?**

**Nominations are now open!**  
 Nomination Deadline is January 14, 2025.

 The Alberta Teachers' Association

**The holidays are almost here!**

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*Happy holidays*



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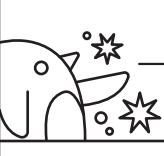

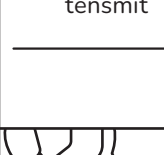
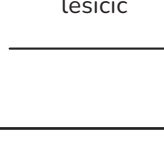

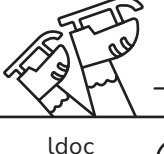
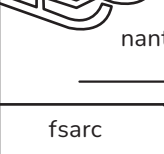
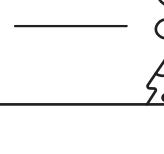

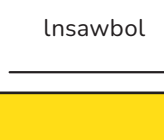
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# Calgary student sets new world record

Lindsay Yakimyshyn  
ATA News Managing Editor

Excitement filled the gym at Citadel Park School as student Theo Begin set a new world record.

With his classmates cheering him on, Begin, a grade 5 student at the northwest Calgary school, threw a frisbee 27 feet on November 25. He is now the World Flying Disc Federation record holder for the farthest distance a child in a wheelchair has thrown a frisbee.

Begin's journey toward the record began in June when he met Rob McLeod, also known as Frisbee Rob, at school. A Guinness World Record Holder, McLeod worked with students at Citadel Park School as part of a residency there. When McLeod told Begin that he could attempt a world record of his own, Begin was immediately on board with the idea.

"Once he said that, I just said, 'Yes I'll do that,'" Begin explained.

With the support of his classmates and assistant principal Alison Bates-Church, Begin trained hard throughout the fall. He gave up his lunchtime recesses to practice his frisbee tosses in the gym.

"I tried throwing the frisbee different ways to see what would make it go the farthest," he said.

Bates-Church, an ultimate frisbee player herself, was impressed by Begin's determination.

"He never gave up even when his shoulder was getting tired," she said. "He would say, 'Just five more tosses, Mrs. Bates.'"

She added that the event was memorable for the school community, commenting on how Begin was able to bring everyone together.

"The celebration that the students had and the pride that they all showed in Theo was amazing," Bates-Church said. "Their posters and the cheering and support that they gave him was just amazing."

Begin was excited to see so many people supporting him. When he came back to class as a newly minted record holder, he received a standing ovation from his classmates.

"It's like I'm a famous person — I came in like a celebrity," Begin said with a smile.

For Bates-Church, the response to Begin's accomplishment showed the



Student Theo Begin setting a new world record

SUPPLIED

impact a simple, positive action can have on a community. It also reminded Bates-Church of the important role teachers can play in helping students achieve their goals.

"It brings back that passion and spark, and it helps you remember why we came into this profession and the difference we really can make." ■

# Research on digital platforms in education nabs ATA award

Mark Milne  
ATA News Staff

A project on education's brave new digital frontier has captured the 2024 ATA Educational Research Award.

Robert LeBlanc, PhD, from the University of Lethbridge (U of L) was selected as this year's winner of the award for his groundbreaking work on the impact of the digital world on today's classrooms.

 SUPPLIED  
Robert LeBlanc

LeBlanc's research, "Digital Platforms and Education," takes an in-depth look at how the use of rapidly developing technology is transforming classroom teaching and learning.

"The COVID-19 pandemic sent schools across the world into online learning," said LeBlanc. "This put the mediating role of digital platforms front and centre."

LeBlanc, an associate professor and board of governors research chair in literacy studies at the U of L, noticed that digital platforms were suddenly an

unavoidable dynamic in schools, thus worthy of more investigation.

"Suddenly, everyone was adopting and navigating digital platforms like Google Classrooms, Skype and Zoom, Moodle and Zotero, and other learning management systems, often on the fly."

Through his research, LeBlanc identified several areas of concern as schools move to a more digitally based classroom.

"The major findings of the study revealed that there are some major gaps in the current research examining digital platforms in schools," said LeBlanc.

He noticed that many of the platforms being used to augment and evaluate content were typically limited to providing only technical feedback, such as grammar, punctuation and layouts. They lacked the dynamic input that a human can provide when they review content.

LeBlanc also points out the emergence of new issues surrounding intellectual property that did not exist when education primarily relied on teaching tools such as textbooks, reading projects and handwritten assignments. Digital platforms, while offering a unique network of connectivity for both teachers and students, become problematic when

dealing with data security, privacy and copyright.

A major goal of the research was to provide teachers and administrators with concrete principles for choosing and using digital platforms in their classrooms.

"Digital platforms have become something of an infrastructure for a lot of day-to-day instruction — they aren't going anywhere any time soon," said LeBlanc. "I'm hoping my research can help teachers and administrators think through and make decisions around key issues like security, privacy and data harvesting when weighing the payoffs of adopting a digital platform with the significant investment of time and money."

LeBlanc's research has garnered attention in scholarly and professional resources. It is published as an article in the esteemed *Review of Research in Education* and in a widely disseminated research policy brief. LeBlanc is now interested in continuing his inquiry into digital platforms, by examining their intersection with the administration of the Alberta diploma exams.

"In addition to some of the obvious technical challenges, I'm also curious about the impact of this digital

infrastructure on teachers' day-to-day instruction as they prepare students to take the exam."

The ATA Educational Research Award is awarded annually to recognize Alberta-based research that relates to classroom teaching and learning. The 2024 award panel, comprised of four Association representatives and one retired faculty of education professor, reviewed four applications from Ambrose University and the University of Lethbridge.

"After careful consideration, the panel selected Robert LeBlanc's project for its high quality, originality and direct applicability to improving professional practice in Alberta schools," said panel member Lisa Everitt, PhD. "His dedication to enhancing teaching and learning through informed and critical examination of digital platforms has earned him this well-deserved recognition." ■

More information about the ATA Educational Research Award is available on the ATA's website.



# So what's new with you?

Did you know that the *ATA Magazine* has a section dedicated to sharing information about teachers' extracurricular endeavours and adventures?

Yes, it's true. It's called **Who's Out There?** and we're currently seeking submissions.

The section highlights new projects or accomplishments by Alberta teachers who are also

- authors
- musicians
- visual or performing artists
- podcasters
- athletes
- volunteers
- entrepreneurs



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# One step forward for ATA Diversity Equity Networks

## PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka  
ATA News Staff

### Highlights of the emergent Provincial Executive Council meeting held November 22, 2024, Fantasyland Hotel, Edmonton.

1. Approved the Association’s nominee to the Alberta Teachers’ Retirement Fund Board for advancement to the president of the Treasury Board and cabinet appointment.

### Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held November 28–29, 2024, Barnett House, Edmonton.

1. Approved in principle the structure, guiding principles, processes, pilot and validation plan for the Diversity Equity Networks.

2. Authorized a winter holiday charity donation in the amount of \$2,000 to the Alberta division of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

3. Authorized that the *ATA News*, until central table bargaining is completed, dedicate significant space in the first



three pages of every issue to highlighting field member support for collective bargaining and the work of teachers in the field who are activating and engaging their colleagues in this cause.

4. Approved a communications plan be created to engage school representatives with the NOW Communications skills and tools to effectively communicate one on one with members.

5. Referred 10 recommendations from the Committee on Coordinating Communications to Members to staff for further costing.

6. Approved in principle and referred to Resolutions Committee for preparation a resolution that category 3.2.1.0, Principles of Test Design, Development and Administration, be retitled, “Principles of Assessment Design, Development and Administration.”

7. Approved in principle the transfer of the Office Staff Pension Plan to the Local Authorities Pension Plan, commencing January 1, 2025, subject to Finance Committee’s approval of the memorandum of understanding.

8. Authorized that the competition for Associate Coordinator, Teacher Employment Services, be restricted to current members of executive staff, approved the proposed timelines for recruitment of the position and appointed members of Council to the selection committee.

9. Authorized that the competition for Coordinator, Government, be restricted to current members of executive staff, approved the proposed timelines for recruitment of the position and

appointed members of Council to the selection committee.

10. Amended Administrative Guidelines pertaining to teacher education program MOUs, council attendance at events, the Bargaining Advisory Committee and the duties of staff advisors and PEC liaisons on specialist councils.

11. Amended the Teacher Education and Certification Committee, Area Field Experiences Committees, Edmonton Area Field Experiences Committee, Curriculum Committee and Strategic Planning Group frames of reference.

12. Rescheduled the January meeting of Council to January 23–24, 2025, and authorized that the February meeting of Council be held in person rather than virtually.

13. Rescheduled the Student Local Conference to the weekend of September 19–20, 2025.

14. Approved the name of a field member to serve on the School Leaders Issues and Concerns Committee. ■

## Leaders’ Speaker Series creates opportunity for reflection and growth

ATA News Staff

The 2024/25 ATA speaker series for school leaders kicked off with presentations in St. Albert, Red Deer and Lethbridge in the first week of December.

School leaders from around the province were invited to hear from Cale Birk, a former head of innovation from British Columbia and co-author of *15 Fixes for PLCs and Navigating Leadership Drift*. As part of the Leaders’ Speaker Series, his talks aimed to advance leadership excellence and help school leaders navigate the challenges associated with their role.

In his presentations, Birk shared his insights from his more than 25

years as an educator and high school principal and encouraged school leaders to recall when they were first pursuing leadership. Specifically, he challenged them to remember what they said during their interview for leadership.

“We would have never said we wouldn’t make time for classroom visits, for building relationships or instructional leadership,” Birk said. “We know that there will never be enough time for everything, but how are you spending the time you have to make an observable impact in your school?”

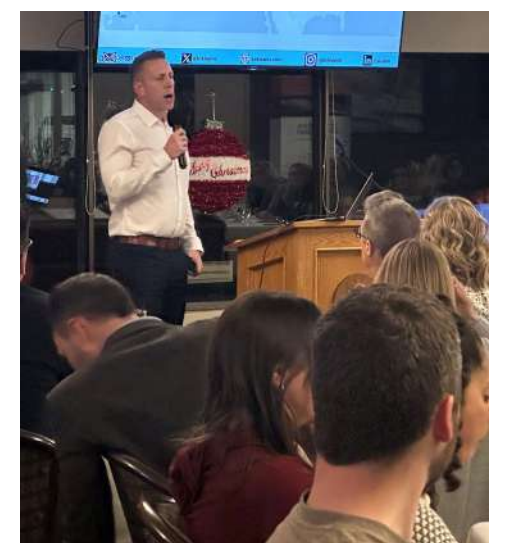
He presented tools school leaders could use to develop and maintain a healthy personal mindset as a leader, as well as strategies to nurture a strong culture for learning. Tanya Thiessen, ATA executive staff officer, commented

that Birk’s talks – as part of the Leaders’ Speaker Series – are aimed at providing ongoing professional development (PD) to teaching colleagues in leadership roles.

“The role of a school leader is nuanced and complex,” Thiessen said. “The speaker series is an important opportunity for members of the profession to gather for a great meal, networking, learning and laughter. The speaker series evenings are meant to bring joy and learning together in one space.”

The Leaders’ Speaker Series will continue in spring 2025. Watch for details on the speaker and dates, which will be announced in January.

More information on the speaker series and other PD opportunities for school leaders is available at [www.tiny.cc/ATALeadersPD](http://www.tiny.cc/ATALeadersPD). ■



TANYA THIESSEN  
Cale Birk presenting to school leaders in St. Albert

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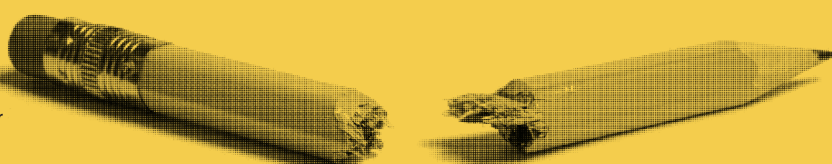
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The Alberta Teachers' Association


# TALENTED

December 10, 2024 | Volume 59, Number 6

## FESTIVE FUN!

## Test your holiday knowledge and win “Red for Ed” gear!

### HOW TO ENTER

1.  Go to <https://survey.alchemer.ca.com/s3/50289518/ATA-News-Festive-Fun-Quiz>.
2. Enter your answers to the trivia questions.
3. Provide your name and contact information.

**All entries must be received by JANUARY 1, 2025.**

### HOW THE WINNER WILL BE CHOSEN

Those with the most correct answers will be entered into a random draw, and one lucky winner will be selected!

### THE PRIZE

The winner will receive a “Red for Ed” prize pack plus a \$50 gift card!

1. Which holiday tune was the first song played in space?
2. “Carol of the Bells” is based on traditional folk songs from which country?
3. When is winter solstice?
4. For how many nights and days is Hanukkah celebrated?
5. Which sitcom-based holiday includes the airing of grievances and the feats of strength?
6. Which country receives credit for starting the Christmas tree tradition?
7. Which seasonal song was written in 1934 by Felix Bernard and Richard Bernhard Smith?
8. What are the seven principles of Kwanzaa known as collectively?
9. When did Adam Sandler debut “The Chanukah Song” on *Saturday Night Live*?
10. What dessert is traditionally made with dried fruits and often set on fire in the UK during Christmas?
11. When was the pumpkin spice latte invented?
12. What is one of the traditional Advent candle colours?

