

Spring has sprung!

Teachers share how to make the most of the warming weather. See Tale End, page 16.



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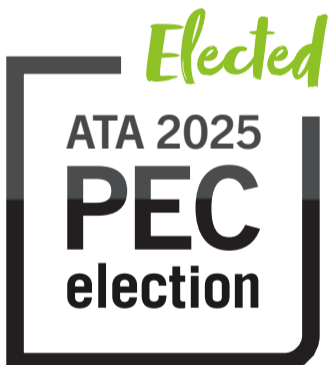
News Publication of The Alberta Teachers' Association

Stay tuned for more information



BARGAINING Central Table 2024

Members are encouraged to keep informed on central table bargaining. See story on [page 5](#).



The results are in!

See who will be representing you on PEC. See [page 4](#).



Jason Schilling



Greg Carabine



Allison McCaffrey



Talking politics

How to navigate political differences at work. See [page 2](#).



Strikes come to an end

Education support worker settlements reached. See [page 5](#).



Public education = public good

Digging into the privatization playbook. See Viewpoints, [page 3](#).



Taking leave

What you need to know about leaves. See Q&A, [page 2](#).

Navigating political differences at work



EDITORIAL

Kristine Wilkinson
ATA News
Editor-in-Chief

Teaching is a collaborative profession, but what happens when you and your colleagues have vastly different beliefs? In Alberta's diverse public school system, teachers bring a range of perspectives shaped by personal experiences, cultural backgrounds and regional politics. While these differences make for an inclusive and vibrant workplace, sometimes they can lead to tension. Our professional relationships are invaluable, as we work together in our shared goal of supporting students, and so we need to be mindful of how we navigate conversations that bend toward politics.

Education is inherently political — curriculum choices, public school funding and policies often spark debate — and teachers are an engaged and passionate group of people. I do not know of a colleague who doesn't care about the work they do, and that is why their passion around public education emerges. However, the staff room or WhatsApp group shouldn't become a political battleground. When conversations heat up, remember your role in creating a positive learning environment and a positive workplace. Further, remember that fighting among ourselves does not make us "one profession united," and if we are not united, we aren't strong.

Despite political differences, most teachers share core values: a commitment to student success, equity and lifelong learning. Focusing on these commonalities can help build bridges. For example, instead of debating policy positions on standardized testing,

you can discuss practical strategies for student engagement, something everyone can get behind.

Those who know me know that I love a good debate, but I do work to hear both sides of the argument. I seek to understand and to start from a place of respect. When engaging with colleagues, I endeavour to remember that teachers are all in this together and respect that others may have different perspectives. A colleague's opposing view on education policy doesn't make them a bad teacher; it just means they see things differently. At the same time, if you're uncomfortable discussing a topic or the conversation becomes too charged, it's okay to change the subject to a more neutral topic or excuse yourself.

Of course, not everyone wants to discuss politics at work. Thank goodness for that! My family gets pretty tired of me talking politics all the time, so they are a good group to remind me

that not everyone cares about the same topics that I do. I can care, and advocate in a way that hopefully changes the minds of people in the middle, people who somewhat agree with or are open to truly hearing what I am saying. It's hard to remember that arguing with someone who vehemently opposes my opinion is fruitless. (Although that doesn't mean I don't try every once in a while...)

Showing respect, curiosity and open-mindedness can positively influence the culture of your school. When political discussions arise, ask thoughtful questions rather than rushing to debate. Ultimately, a strong collegial atmosphere benefits both teachers and students. By fostering mutual respect, teachers can focus on what truly matters: helping all students thrive. ■

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

Discretionary or not? Understanding your leave entitlements



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive
Secretary

Question: With the current substitute teacher shortage, I feel guilty about having to be absent from school and concerned that my request for leave will be turned down. What can I do?

Answer: Across the province, schools are experiencing a shortage of substitute teachers. In some jurisdictions, job action by education support workers has exacerbated the situation and teachers are under considerable pressure to avoid absences if at all possible.

Provisions for teacher leave are contained in your collective agreement, a copy of which is posted on the ATA provincial website for easy reference. You'll note that leaves typically fall into two categories, discretionary and non-discretionary.

Discretionary leaves are granted subject to restrictions that might be imposed by the employer and would typically include leave for professional development or personal days. While some the leaves, for example sabbaticals, might be entirely at the discretion of the employer, others involve providing advance notice to permit operational planning and may be subject to cancellation or rescheduling for operational reasons, including the availability of substitute teachers. Again, language matters, and you should check the specific provisions in your collective agreement.

Arranging and managing discretionary leaves, particularly in our current circumstances, can pose a challenge. While some leave requests must be forwarded to the superintendent or other central office administrator for approval, in most school divisions the responsibility for managing leave requests has been downloaded to school leaders, including principals, vice-principals and assistant principals. This adds to the complexity of their work because, even as they are responsible for operating the school, these school leaders are teachers' colleagues rather

than managers. Determining whether a teacher can take a leave can create conflict between these colleagues and undermine the collegiality that should be fostered in Alberta schools. At the end of the day, though, if consensus cannot be achieved, the principal must render a decision from a position of authority, and teachers must understand this reality and cooperate.

In contrast to discretionary leave, taking sick leave when necessary is a right established under the collective agreement and, I would argue, a

responsibility of teachers and is not subject to the discretion of the principal or system administrators. Employer approval is not required. Similarly, bereavement and critical illness leaves are also not discretionary.

While collective agreements may require medical documentation for extended absences or to obtain return-to-work clearances, it remains the teacher's responsibility — not the employer's — to determine whether they are well enough to attend work. Teachers should not feel guilty or be made to feel that they are letting

would haul my sorry self into school even when I was quite sick, because I judged it to be less disruptive and less bother than producing lesson plans in the degree of detail needed to keep my classes on track. I could also count on my high school students to be sympathetic and cooperative and help me to survive the day (I have no idea how my elementary and junior high colleagues would survive). This sort of martyrdom was viewed very positively by colleagues and regarded as an unspoken expectation, frequently framed as "professionalism."

Well, times and attitudes have changed, and much for the better. Teachers who report to work while unwell may struggle to meet the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) and risk spreading illness to colleagues and students, further exacerbating staffing issues. Ignoring personal health concerns can also lead to more severe medical conditions and prolonged absences. Teaching while sick or bereaved or while worrying about the health struggles of a loved one is doing no one any favours.

So, if you are a teacher, you should take the leaves set out in your collective agreement when it is necessary to do so. If, as a teacher, you have a question concerning your leave entitlements, or you are a school leader and are being encouraged to pressure teachers into attending work despite illness, please contact Teacher Employment Services for support at 1-800-232-7208. ■

“Discretionary leaves are granted subject to restrictions that might be imposed by the employer and would typically include leave for professional development or personal days.”

their colleagues down by taking sick, bereavement or critical illness leave. Moreover, school leaders should not be placed in a position where they are expected to assess or challenge a teacher's decision to take a sick leave, regardless of the operational difficulties this may cause at the school.

Since the COVID pandemic, there has been a signal change in our culture concerning the responsibilities of teachers when they are ill. When I was teaching in the classroom, I

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



Public education is being actively eroded



VIEWPOINTS

Wing Li
Communications director,
Support Our Students Alberta

Public education is not only a vehicle for individual social mobility, but the cornerstone of a healthy democracy. Strong, cohesive societies require an educated electorate because informed citizens also participate meaningfully in democratic processes.

Public education is a public good because it advances the public interest, providing a benefit to all members of society. That is why public schools are governed and administered by democratically elected school boards, and K–12 education is funded by taxes collected from the entire population, not strictly from those who have school-aged children.

The premise of public education is that free, high-quality K–12 education is accessible to every child. Each student receives what they need from the system. The promise of universality also dictates that equitable accessibility is not contingent on financial status (ability to pay), socioeconomic standing, race, gender identity, geography, student ability or other attributes.

However, the current reality of public education access, particularly in Alberta, has diverged severely from the idealized vision.

Too many of our public schools are chronically overcrowded and underfunded. Students are unable to access supportive services, especially if they have complex learning or additional language needs. The system is in severe crisis from cumulative cuts resulting in a shortage of professionals, deferred maintenance deficits and scarcity of school

space. Systemwide, many schools no longer have librarians, psychologists, counsellors, or speech and occupational therapists, which were historically part of the school community to serve students.

Alberta's public schools are frankly unrecognizable from a decade ago. But these systemic challenges are not accidental or coincidental.

Have you heard the age-old mantra “first you break the public system, then you privatize”? This aptly encapsulates the state of public education. Where chronic underfunding leaves gaps of access, private actors are infiltrating these gaps through commodification of education. Proponents of privatization understand that education is a basic need, and are keen to exploit people's lack of access by offering “alternatives” at a cost.

However, private education proponents realize that most people are quite averse to paying tens of thousands of dollars for education programs, and privatizers have enlisted the help of government partners to divert public funds to private institutions under the guise of so-called “choice in education.” The subsidization of private education is the Trojan horse for governments to create and further the crisis of public education, declare the system is failing and manufacture consent to divert financial support to private entities.

Alberta subsidizes private schools at one of the highest rates in Canada. Accredited private schools receive 70 per cent of the per-student instructional grant. While public schools are limited in their revenue through tightly controlled funding envelopes, private schools can top up their government subsidies by charging an unregulated amount in tuition fees. Private schools do not serve the public interest; they serve private interests by catering to families stratified by wealth, religion, background or ability.

Charter schools are also part of this marketization model that does not serve the public interest. Charter schools even receive the full per-student allotment in government funds while being able to pick their students through entry exams, IQ tests and, in some cases, by charging society fees while touting “tuition-free” status. However, charter schools are governed by private boards who are not elected and do not serve a geographic catchment.

Education can be a lucrative business. Parents are told they need an edge for their children and that, therefore, they need to send their kid to a “good school.” The truth is that the free market does not truly create more choice for students if these options are not universally accessible. In practice, “school choice” becomes the “school's choice.”

Alberta is not alone. There is an active global movement to turn education into big private business. It is estimated that the private market for education is worth at least \$50 billion a year worldwide. However, while profit is driven into private hands, societies at large lose valuable returns afforded by universal education access.

The privatization playbook is generally quite unappealing once it is clearly unveiled. This is why it's important to dig deeper and expose how privatization undermines people's basic right to education. Once we can name it, we can resist privatization as a collective. There is no time to waste in reclaiming public schools for the public good. ■

Support Our Students (SOS) Alberta is a grassroots community-driven advocacy organization fighting for universal, barrier-free, equitably accessible public education. For more information, please visit www.supportourstudents.ca.

Opinions expressed on this page represent the views of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Alberta Teachers' Association.

RED for ED

Staff at Iron Ridge Intermediate School in Blackfalds gather, donning their Red for Ed. They were very excited to customize their Red for Ed swag to show their support.



Teachers wore red for the Political Engagement Seminar. See more about the seminar on page 9.



Staff at Visions West School in Rocky Mountain House pose together in their Red for Ed t-shirts.

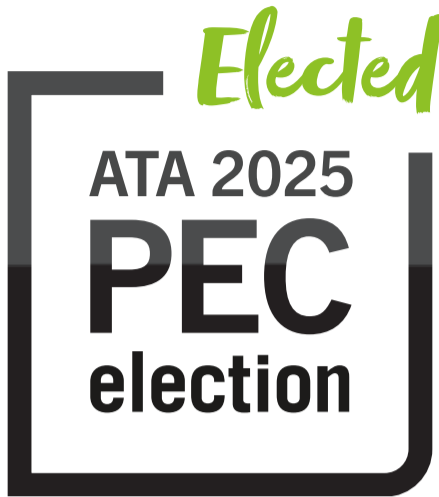


Create your own
“Red for Ed” wear

Visit albertateachersassociation.entripyshops.com to customize and order “Red for Ed” branded apparel — hats, hoodies and more! The online shop rotates graphics every few months, so check out the current styles now.

Want to share how you or your team is supporting public education in Alberta? Let your colleagues know why you wear Red for Ed or how you create moments of engagement or advocacy. Email managing editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

PEC election results announced, Schilling marks historic win



Jason Schilling



Greg Carabine



Allison McCaffrey

Mark Milne
ATA News Staff

The results are in, and Jason Schilling will once again take the helm for the next two years. He'll continue in the role as Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) president for a fourth consecutive term, claiming

5,619 votes to Peter MacKay's 5,263 and Donovan Eckstrom's 663.

Schilling says he's honoured by the continuing support he received from Alberta's teachers to act as their provincial and national representative.

"I have never taken the trust that Alberta teachers put in me for granted. This is serious work," said Schilling. "It takes a lot of time and energy, and I take that very seriously. So, I was grateful to see that teachers still had confidence in my leadership."

Schilling believes he still has a lot of work to do on Provincial Executive Council (PEC).

"We're building a lot of good relationships with other educational partners, and I wanted to see that continue, but at the end of the day, it's really about how can we make life better for teachers and students in this province," said Schilling. "I felt that my work — to contribute, to make positive changes for education — wasn't done yet."

Schilling first joined PEC in 2009 as a district representative (DR) for South West. In 2017, he moved into the role of vice-president and two years later took on the role of president. With this new term, Schilling will become the longest running president in recent Association history.

New and familiar faces on PEC

Greg Carabine, a teacher with the Edmonton Catholic School Division, will be returning for his third term as vice-president. He is set on better working conditions for the members he will continue to serve.

"Teachers' working conditions have to improve, and our collective agreement is where that has to happen. Meeting teachers where they are, building personal relationships, is the key to the ATA's future," said Carabine. To this end, he says he'll focus his energy and efforts on getting out to schools, ATA meetings and community events.

Newcomer Allison McCaffrey, from

Calgary Roman Catholic Separate School Division, will make her debut on PEC as vice-president. She hopes her successful election campaign will inspire other women to become more actively involved in the ATA.

"While serving a membership comprised of 74 per cent females, our PEC table is represented by only just over 30 per cent women, and our table officers [were] at 0 per cent women," said McCaffrey. "My successful campaign does not eliminate the discrepancy in representation, but my hope is it will help future leaders see opportunities for them at the PEC table and encourage them to put their name forward."

There will also be a few fresh faces filling DR roles.

Returning Edmonton McMurray DRs Carmen Glossop and Jay Procktor will welcome Chandra Hildebrand to their ranks. Hildebrand, who works in Edmonton Public Schools, was acclaimed to her new position as a DR.

Also new to PEC is Janet Westworth, who was elected as DR for the newly renamed Central Prairie Sky (formerly Edmonton District). She is a teacher with the Elk Island School Division.

Down south, Janet's sibling, Wade Westworth will be the new DR for South Central Rockies (formerly known as Calgary District). Wade is currently with the Foothills School Division but has worked in several positions throughout many different school divisions.

Re-elected Kevin Kempt will welcome Kent Kinsman and Alicia Taylor to PEC as his fellow representatives for Calgary City. Both Kinsman and Taylor work in the Calgary School Division and look forward to bringing their experience with the local to the provincial table.

Rhonda Kelly rounds out the elected positions and will be returning for a second term as the DR for North West.

The acclaimed DR positions include returning members Brenton Baum for Central, Murray Lalonde for Central

East, Richard Kremp for Central North, Brice Unland for Central South, Heather McCaig for South East and Katherine Pritchard for South West. Greg Jeffery will remain in the role of past president.

The newly elected council will take office on July 1, 2025. Until then, the current PEC remains in office. ■

2025 PEC ELECTION RESULTS

Those elected are shown in bold and underlined.

President:

Total voters = 11,545*, not including abstentions

- Donovan Eckstrom – 663
- Peter MacKay – 5,263
- **Jason Schilling** – 5,619
- 130 abstentions

Vice-President:

Total voters = 10,924*, not including abstentions

- **Greg Carabine** – 5,448
- **Allison McCaffrey** – 6,604
- Greg Meeker – 4,478
- 751 abstentions

Calgary City:

Total voters = 3,248*, not including abstentions

- Cecil Hall – 1,416
- **Kevin Kempt** – 1,495
- **Kent Kinsman** – 1,695
- **Alicia Taylor** – 1,889
- 178 abstentions

Central Prairie Sky (formerly Edmonton District):

Total voters = 843, not including abstentions

- Carryl Bennett – 418
- **Janet Westworth** – 425
- 54 abstentions

South Central Rockies (formerly Calgary District):

Total voters = 775, not including abstentions

- Karen Nakaska – 379
- **Wade Westworth** – 396
- 17 abstentions

North West:

Total voters = 580, not including abstentions

- Laurie Dirsá – 105
- **Rhonda Kelly** – 475
- 39 abstentions

* The number of voters may vary from the number of votes cast in races where multiple candidates were to be elected.

2025–2027 PROVINCIAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

President

Jason Schilling

Vice-presidents

Greg Carabine
Allison McCaffrey

Past president

Greg Jeffery

District representatives

Calgary City

Kevin Kempt
Kent Kinsman
Alicia Taylor

South Central Rockies (formerly Calgary District)

Wade Westworth

Central

Brenton Baum

Central South

Brice Unland

Central Prairie Sky (formerly Edmonton District)

Janet Westworth

Edmonton McMurray

Carmen Glossop
Chandra Hildebrand
Jay Procktor

Central East

Murray Lalonde

Central North

Richard Kremp

North West

Rhonda Kelly

South East

Heather Dawn McCaig

South West

Katherine Pritchard

ABOUT PEC

The Provincial Executive Council (PEC) leads and transacts the business of the Alberta Teachers' Association on behalf of its 51,000 members. PEC is made up of the Association's five table officers (the president, two vice-presidents, the past president and the executive secretary), plus 15 district representatives.

The president and vice-presidents are elected by a provincewide vote of Association members. District representatives are elected by members in their geographic district. All elected positions are subject to two-year terms.



LINDSAY YAKIMYSHYN

Education worker strikes wind down as agreements secured

ATA News Staff

Thousands of education workers are returning to schools after taking labour action — some for months.

Strikes in eight school divisions ended the week of March 17, as CUPE locals ratified agreements with Fort McMurray Public Schools, Fort McMurray Catholic Schools, Edmonton Public Schools, Sturgeon School Division, Parkland School Division, Black Gold School Division, Calgary Catholic School District and Calgary Board of Education. Education workers in Foothills School Division had also reached a tentative agreement as of March 20.

“Education support workers have shown great courage and determination,” said Rory Gill, CUPE Alberta president. “I’m so happy for them that they have won the respect they deserve.”

Though details on the agreements between CUPE locals and school divisions were not available at the time of publication, CUPE reported that all of the settled agreements extend to August 2028 and include a wage package higher than the caps that had been set by the provincial government.

The recent agreements follow a series of prolonged strikes in jurisdictions across the province.

Education workers in the two Fort McMurray school divisions had been engaged in labour action the longest, since mid-November 2024.

“I’m in awe of the workers in Edmonton and Fort McMurray who stood their ground, in weather as cold as minus 51 degrees, to win a fair contract,” said Gill. “Their fortitude, their determination and their solidarity won the day.”

Remarking on the sacrifice of education workers who had been engaged in labour action, ATA president Jason Schilling said that the agreements will lift the burden placed on support workers, students and teachers and allow schools to move toward normalcy.

“Our schools are not the same without these important co-workers,” Schilling said. “We look forward to having them back.”

Education Minister Demetrios Nicolaidis was also pleased to see education support workers returning to schools, saying that the agreements will provide stability for the next three years.

“Congratulations to the school boards and union locals that have worked hard to arrive at fair deals for their staff,” he said. “The Government of Alberta welcomes the return to normalcy for tens of thousands of students, staff and families.”



YOUR VIEWS

Ahead of International Children’s Book Day (April 2), we asked teachers to share their favourite children’s book for the classroom.

f Erin Krysko
Definitely *The Book With No Pictures*. We read it multiple times a year! I have even had guest readers come in!

f Janel Winslow-Sherwin
The Paper Bag Princess by the one and only great Canadian Robert Munsch. A brilliant mind!

f Cassie Murdoch
Don’t Let the Pigeon Drive the Bus!

o Melanie Martin
The Barren Grounds, a Canadian-Cree take on Narnia. Students LOVE it!

o Kelsey Huculak
The Darkest Dark by Chris Hadfield. It’s perfection!

o Erin Kilbride
Moose! by Robert Munsch

o Caitlin Campbell
The Gruffalo! I use it to teach adjectives, the rule of three and descriptive writing.

o Kate Myszkowski
The *Alpert* series (teaches about character, setting and problem [solving] in such a cute and fun way!)

o Megan Rogall
A Little Spot series! SEL books and curriculum!

o Simona Chalifoux
I Like Myself by Karen Beaumont. It’s a great way to discuss positive self-talk.



Stay informed as matters progress

ATA News staff

The Alberta Teachers’ Association’s (ATA) Central Table Bargaining Committee (CTBC) and the Teachers’ Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) met on March 19 and 20 for scheduled mediation, working toward an agreement that supports Alberta’s teachers and the learning conditions in their classrooms. Conversations have been productive and are continuing, and the CTBC remains committed to advocating for teachers’ needs and improving conditions for both educators and students across Alberta. More substantive communication will be forthcoming, and teachers are advised to visit the Association website frequently for updates.

An information embargo has been in place during the mediation process to support open and productive discussions and to enable the negotiators the opportunity to brief and take advice from their respective

representatives. As a result, the CTBC has been limited in its ability to provide detailed updates about developments at the table. The CTBC remains committed to sharing as much information as it can with members as soon as possible.

Members are encouraged to stay connected and united as the bargaining team works through this critical process. Undoubtedly there will be unhelpful rumours and conjecture circulating on various platforms. As always, the most complete and accurate information can be found in official Association channels including the Members Only section of the ATA website, the *ATA News*, periodic Member Updates and official ATA social media.

Sign up to receive the latest updates for members here:



FOR THE RECORD

“When we ensure that students have access to the classrooms they need, we are setting up the next generation to succeed. Our team is committed to working with everyone involved to turn permits into progress and get students into well-built and well-maintained schools as soon as possible.”

— Martin Long, Minister of Infrastructure in news release on new school builds for Edmonton and area, Mar. 19.

Opinions expressed on this page represent the views of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Alberta Teachers’ Association.



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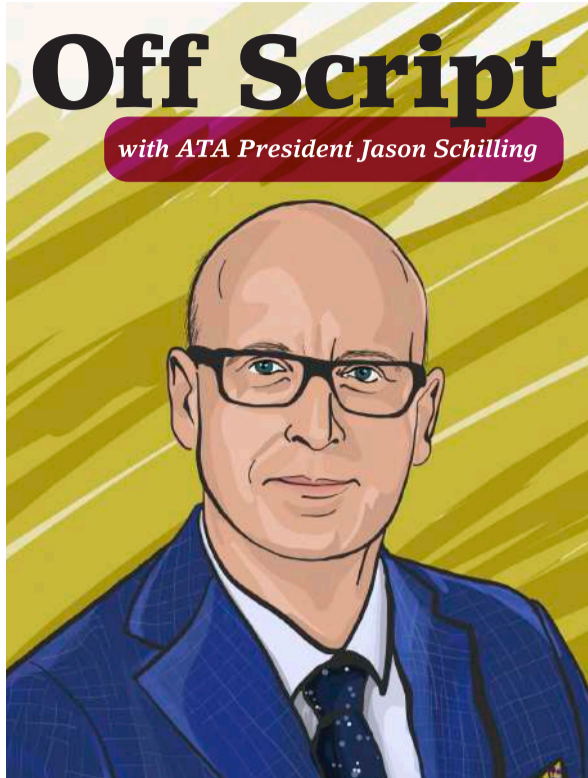
AT A TIME LIKE THIS, WE KNOW YOU'RE WONDERING: DID I BOOK A PHYSIO APPOINTMENT?

ASEBP's MyRetiree Plan: designed to support Alberta's education workers.

Learn more at MyRetireePlan.ca



Five years later: Remember your resiliency



I have been reflecting a lot in the last few weeks about the fact that it has been five years since teachers, school leaders and students all shifted to an online emergency remote teaching situation. I remember thinking at the time that we had a real opportunity when we came out of COVID restrictions to address the systemic issues we were dealing with in education at time — class size, complexity, food insecurity and access to technology being among the issues.

The spring of 2020 was extremely challenging, to say the least. It was often a struggle to stay informed on what was even happening, as advice and the direction of government seemed to change hourly. What we thought and what we were told to expect would quickly spiral into something else until it was hard to know what would come the next day, the next week, the next month.

My hopes of addressing the issues plaguing the profession were dashed, as COVID dragged on for a lot longer than many of us anticipated. We all had to be in survival mode, to pivot to the ever-changing situation and make the best of it for ourselves, our students and our communities. Despite the dark days we all experienced, the one thing that never wavered was my admiration for and pride

in teachers and school leaders whose resilience, bravery and creativity were on display daily.

As you know, the mood and sentiments of society changed dramatically over the course of the pandemic. Society as a whole became more divided on issues. The banging of pots on our balconies to celebrate the public servants who were working to keep things going quickly turned to finger-pointing and upside-down Canadian flags. Unfortunately, the provincial government passed several policies that seemed to add fuel to the unrest. Again, things were challenging, and we found the divisions in society were creeping into our schools and classrooms — and why would they not? Our classrooms mirror what we see in society.

Here we are five years later, marking this strange, somber anniversary, staring down more issues and policies that could lead to more difficult times.

It's important as we work through the next few months that we remember who the antagonist of the story is, who is served by division. There will be attempts to pit us against each other. We will need to remember the resilience and creativity we had in the early days of the pandemic. Let us stick together and keep our focus on the things that matter most to us, as professionals and as a profession. ■

New ad campaign shows impact of underfunding

Cory Hare
ATA News Staff

Our kids deserve better than classrooms that are beyond overcrowded, fewer supports than ever before and record numbers of teachers leaving the profession due to increasingly challenging conditions.

That's the central message of a new advertising campaign that the Alberta Teachers' Association has created that is now appearing in various media outlets around the province.

Entitled "Take a Number," the ads show worried-looking students in a crowded classroom waiting for their number to be called so they can be helped by the overworked teacher. The video ads are now appearing on television, in movie theatres and on YouTube, while still versions are being shown on billboards and in weekly newspapers.

"We want to increase Albertans' awareness of the consequences of chronic underfunding of education in the hope that they will hold their MLAs to account," said Andrea Berg, the ATA staff officer who oversaw the ad's creative development and filming.

Slated to run until late May or early June, the campaign is a follow up to the "The Least" ads that have been airing since the fall. Whereas "The Least" was meant to educate the public that Alberta has spent the least per student on public education in all of Canada, "Take a Number" aims to take the conversation a step further by showing the effects of chronic underfunding on classrooms and students.

Within three days of sharing on social media, the ad had received more than 90,000 views and many positive comments, Berg said.



"We are very pleased with the reaction," she said. "We're hoping the message resonates with average Albertans and that they make enough noise that the government has no choice but to listen and dedicate more funding to public education." ■

Watch it

View the ad on the ATA's YouTube channel, [albertateachers](https://www.youtube.com/albertateachers).

Act on it

Learn more and take action at stoptheexcuses.ca.



Can We Talk? addresses need for mental health supports

The ATA has also launched its annual Can We Talk? campaign, aimed at highlighting the importance of supporting students' mental health.

Slated to run throughout the province in the lead-up to Mental Health Week (May 5–9), the ad depicts the strain on students when underfunding prevents them from accessing the mental health supports they need.

"We know that young people were among the most heavily impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and their mental health has really been challenged

by the tumult arising from that time and into today," said Lisa Everitt, an ATA staff officer and researcher who oversaw the commercial's production.

"With Alberta spending the least per student of any public school system in Canada, it is urgent to highlight the need to support our young people with professionally trained counsellors and mental health experts," Everitt said.

"We can support a better and brighter future for young people by supporting their mental health with wrap-around services at school."



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OR

EDU 595 Kodály Level III

Prerequisite:

successful completion of Kodály Level II

July 21 – August 1, 2025

EDU 595 Orff Level I

OR

EDU 595 Orff Level II

Prerequisite:

successful completion of Orff Level I

August 5 – 9, 2025

EDU 595 Dalcroze Eurhythmics: Movement-Based Education

GCES Indigenous Education

Part of the Summer Institute in Teaching Foundational Indigenous Knowledge

Application Deadline: APRIL 30

July 7 – 11, 2025

EDU 562 Indigenous Land Teachings: Transitioning Towards Common Ground in Education

OR

July 7 – 25, 2025

EDU 595 nehiyaw kiskeyihtamowin: Cree Educational Psychology & Epistemology

July 28 – August 15, 2025

EDU 561 Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Foundational Indigenous Knowledge and Knowing

OR

EDU 595 Indigenous Pedagogy in a Western Education System

GCES Indigenous Language Sustainability

Offered in conjunction with the CILLDI Summer Program

Application Deadline: APRIL 30

July 7 – 15, 2025

EDU 595 Exploring Ideologies for Indigenous Language Sustainability

AND/OR

EDU 595 Linguistic Analysis for Indigenous Language Sustainability

Complete the certificate in Summer 2026 (dates TBA):

EDU 595 Teaching and Learning for Indigenous Language Sustainability

AND/OR

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Political Engagement Seminar includes a stark warning

Kim Clement
ATA News Staff

More than 100 teacher representatives at the Alberta Teachers' Association's (ATA's) annual Political Engagement Seminar were in for a thought-provoking weekend. During the seminar, held in Edmonton on March 14 and 15, professor of political science Duane Bratt delivered a stark warning about the consequences of Donald Trump's foreign policy.



KIM CLEMENT

Speaker Duane Bratt warned of rising economic concerns and geopolitical instability.

Bratt argued that Trump's "America First" approach has had impacts on the country already, including increased isolation, strained alliances and economic uncertainty.

"Trump promises America First, but what it really means is America alone," he said. He further spoke on how the post-World War II global order, largely shaped by the United States (U.S.), is unraveling.

"The order that we have known in the world since roughly the end of World War II is over," Bratt said, citing the weakening of international institutions, shifts in trade policy and the erosion of diplomatic norms. Bratt pointed to Trump's withdrawal from key global agreements, his combative stance on trade, and his admiration for authoritarian leaders as indicators of a global shift.

"Trump doesn't just tolerate authoritarian leaders; he wants to be one," Bratt noted, specifically referencing Russian President Vladimir Putin. "There has been a lot of discussion over the last decade about whether Trump is a puppet of Putin. If he was, how would he act any differently than he is now?"

Beyond economic concerns, Bratt warned of rising geopolitical instability, including the potential for increased nuclear proliferation and threats

to territorial integrity. However, he also noted resistance from U.S. allies, particularly Canada and Europe.

"The world is not taking this lying down," he said.

Bratt's lecture was one of several presentations at the seminar.

The seminar also featured a polling presentation by pollster and political commentator Janet Brown, who offered valuable insight into the political landscape through her update on Albertans' sentiments on a range of topics. The program included

a school board trustee panel as well, which addressed the importance of the trustee election set for this October and highlighted the ATA's efforts to encourage members to help identify and support strong trustee candidates.

The Political Engagement Seminar is an annual event that brings together local delegates from across the province, including local political engagement officers, to deepen their understanding of key political issues that affect public education in Alberta. ■



KIM CLEMENT

Teacher representatives from across the province gathered for the Political Engagement Seminar.

Two new executive staff officers join ATA's TES team

Lindsay Yakimyshyn
ATA News Managing Editor

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) is pleased to welcome Amanda Freeman and Kim Zapesocki as the two newest executive staff officers. Both Freeman and Zapesocki will join the Teacher Employment Services program area this spring.

Freeman joins the ATA after serving as assistant principal with the Edmonton Public School Board. She began her career teaching in prekindergarten program unit funding (PUF) programs, kindergarten and Grade 1. After 15 years teaching students in these programs, Freeman took on an administration role at Svend Hansen School, a large K-9 school. She holds a bachelor of education degree, as well as a master's of education in curriculum and pedagogy.

Like Freeman, Zapesocki comes to the ATA after working in administration. Her most recent role included serving as an assistant



Amanda Freeman



Kim Zapesocki

principal, music teacher, librarian and Indigenous lead education teacher at Fort Saskatchewan Elementary School in the Elk Island Public School Division. Before beginning her teaching career, she completed a bachelor of music degree, followed by a bachelor of education degree. She also holds a master's of education focused on leadership and Indigenous studies.

Though starting new roles with the ATA, Freeman and Zapesocki are not new to the ATA's work.

Freeman's experience with the ATA started with her volunteering as a school representative. She also

served on her local's negotiating subcommittee and teacher welfare committee (TWC). Freeman found herself becoming more involved and saw herself working at the ATA one day.

"Following my first TWC meeting I knew I wanted to one day work at the ATA," she recalled.

For Freeman, her new role means having the chance to hear from and support teachers across the province.

"I am most excited about speaking with and learning the stories of teachers in parts of the province with which I am not yet familiar," Freeman said. "I have not been north of Cold Lake before!"

Zapesocki has also been actively involved in the ATA, having served

in local executive roles such as secretary, professional development chair, Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee chair and, most recently, as chair of her local's Women in Leadership Committee. With this experience under her belt, Zapesocki looks forward to joining the ATA.

"My work with the local executive, combined with my administrative experience and teaching, developed my desire to work for and support teachers across Alberta," Zapesocki said. "I'm excited to focus my efforts on supporting members so they can continue doing their best work in schools."

Freeman will start her new role on May 1, while Zapesocki is set to join the ATA on April 7. ■

5 MORE THINGS

about Amanda

What makes you the most excited to start working at the ATA?

Working alongside and learning from so many people I admire.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give yourself in your first year as a teacher?

Take every opportunity that comes your way; you never know where it will lead.

What is the greatest life lesson that teaching has taught you?

Teaching is meant to be messy and experienced in different ways. Let the students lead whenever possible.

Favourite song to put you in a good mood?

"This is Me" from *The Greatest Showman*.

Favourite activity/hobby/project on the go at home?

Visiting local coffee roasters with my husband, trying to find the perfect cup of coffee.

5 MORE THINGS

about Kim

What makes you the most excited to start working at the ATA?

Being an assistant principal has given me a deep understanding of and insight into both the amazing work happening in classrooms and the challenges faced, and I'm looking forward to bringing that experience to my new position, supporting members across the province.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give yourself in your first year as a teacher?

The ATA slogan "Teachers want what students need" is foundational to my approach and my "why." It's the reason I do this work. I encourage new teachers to know and be able to verbalize their values, their non-negotiables, their "why," and to stay committed to their "True North."

What is the greatest life lesson that teaching has taught you?

Prioritizing our time around our values and setting firm boundaries between our work and personal lives is essential for maintaining a healthy work-life balance and ensuring long-term career satisfaction and longevity.

Favourite song to put you in a good mood?

Garth Brooks' "Ain't Goin Down 'til the Sun Comes Up." And, if you ever find yourself at an ATA event, you just may find me at the karaoke area, singing a duet with past president Greg Jeffery!

Favourite activity/hobby/project on the go at home?

When I'm not working, you'll likely find me playing guitar, singing and songwriting. I'm also an avid non-fiction reader, as I love diving into books that cross my radar and pique my interest.

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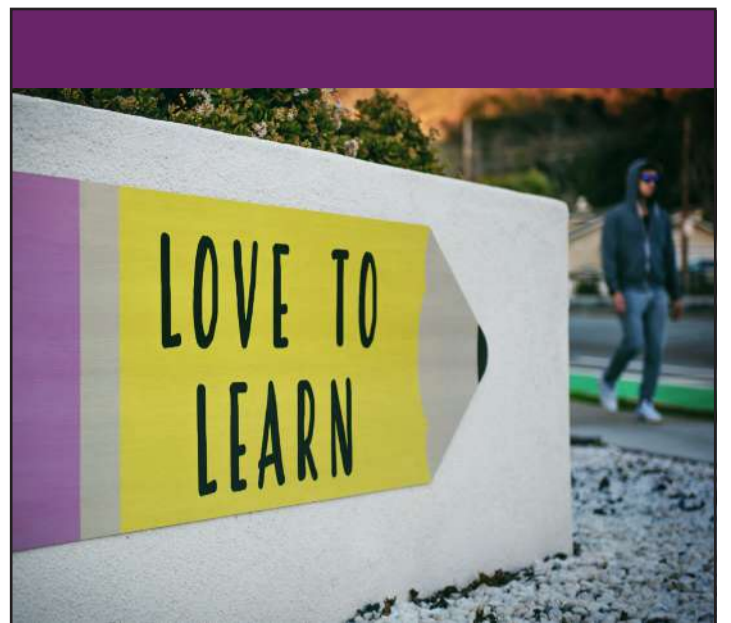
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Association instructors facilitate a variety of workshops for school and district-based professional development events, teachers' conventions, and specialist council conferences - both in-person and online.

The Alberta Teachers' Association is seeking outstanding classroom teachers and school leaders from across the province for immediate appointments to begin May 2025.

The application process has three parts:

1. Download and complete the application form on the Alberta Teachers' Association website (see below for website information)
2. Provide a letter of interest, including the following information:
 - Areas of interest and expertise (referencing the competencies of the Teaching Quality Standard)
 - Experience leading professional development (online and in-person)
 - Reasons for applying
3. Provide a resume outlining education, work experience, leadership experience, publications, presentations, and volunteer experience.

Successful candidates are expected to deliver 7-10 workshops per year and are required to attend two training sessions per year. The Association covers release time and associated expenses; as well, an honorarium is provided for workshops delivered. As a courtesy, please advise your superintendent and principal that you will be applying prior to doing so. All applicants must be active or associate members of the ATA, have a minimum of 5 years of teaching experience, and hold an Alberta teaching certificate.

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS APRIL 4, 2025.

Send your letter of interest, resume, and completed application form to Terra Kaliszuk, Executive Staff Officer, Alberta Teachers' Association, terra.kaliszuk@ata.ab.ca

For information or to download an application form, visit www.teachers.ab.ca/Advocacy/Volunteer.



The Alberta Teachers' Association

PD-192 2025-02

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Celebrating neurodiversity: Resources and supports available

ATA News Staff

Neurodiversity Celebration Week, taking place this year from March 17–23, is an opportunity to promote neuro-inclusion in Alberta schools and foster a deeper understanding of neurodiversity. The Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) offers a range of resources and supports — now and throughout the year — to help teachers create inclusive learning environments across the province.

Professional development

The ATA provides professional development workshops and resources designed to equip teachers with effective strategies for supporting neurodiverse students. These workshops, which can be booked through the ATA’s Professional Development program area, include “Addressing Diverse Learning Needs in Classrooms,” “Winning Strategies for Classrooms,” “Care and Connect

— Social and Emotional Learning,” and “Executive Function — Essential Skills for Deep Learning and Emotional Regulation.” Resources addressing such topics as supporting inclusion as a school leader and student assessment in an inclusive classroom are available on the ATA’s website, as well.

Support network for teachers

Recognizing the importance of peer support, the ATA continues to host online listening circles for teachers who identify as living with a disability, including those who identify as neurodivergent. These listening circles provide a safe space for teachers to share their experiences and strategies working in the profession. The next session is scheduled for April 24, with access links available on the ATA’s Facebook and Instagram pages.

Inclusive education podcast

The ATA’s Council for Inclusive Education (CIE) also offers a variety of resources for teachers to

promote inclusion. Among these is the podcast “Inclusive Chronicles: Tips and Tricks for Inclusive Education in Alberta,” a valuable tool for teachers seeking practical strategies for fostering inclusivity in their classrooms.

Launched by CIE in 2024, the podcast has quickly gained traction among Alberta teachers, offering actionable insights and bridging the gap between theory and practice. According to Kelsey Bagnall, communications officer for the CIE, the podcast has been instrumental in providing meaningful support to teachers.

“The podcast’s success lies in its focus on delivering practical, real-world strategies,” Bagnall said. “Each episode offers something new and actionable, making it a go-to resource for teachers.”

The podcast will be recording live at the CIE’s upcoming annual conference, which will include a keynote presentation focused on neurodiversity. The conference will be held May 23–24 in Calgary.

Though Neurodiversity Celebration Week may provide an impetus to learn more about and celebrate neurodiversity, teachers can access resources year-round to help them foster more inclusive learning environments for all students and for their colleagues. ■



ADOBE STOCK

Find the ATA’s “Common Threads for Inclusive Education” series here:

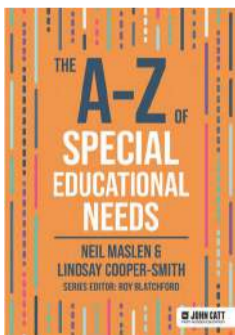


Find information on booking a professional development workshop here:

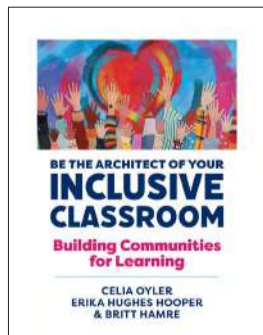


CHECK ME OUT!

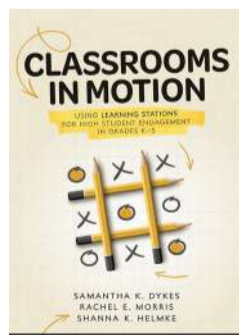
Some of the ATA Library’s newest reads:



The A-Z of Special Educational Needs by Neil Maslen



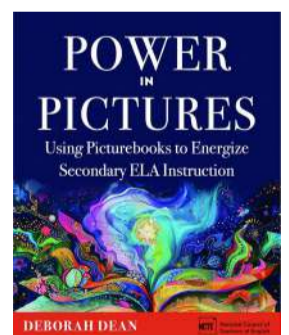
Be the Architect of Your Inclusive Classroom: Building Communities for Learning by Celia Oyler



Classrooms in Motion: Using Learning Stations for High Student Engagement in Grades K–5 by Samantha K. Dykes



The Big Book of Tasks for English Language Development, Grades K–8: Lessons and Activities that Invite Learners to Read, Write, Speak, and Listen by Nancy Akhavan



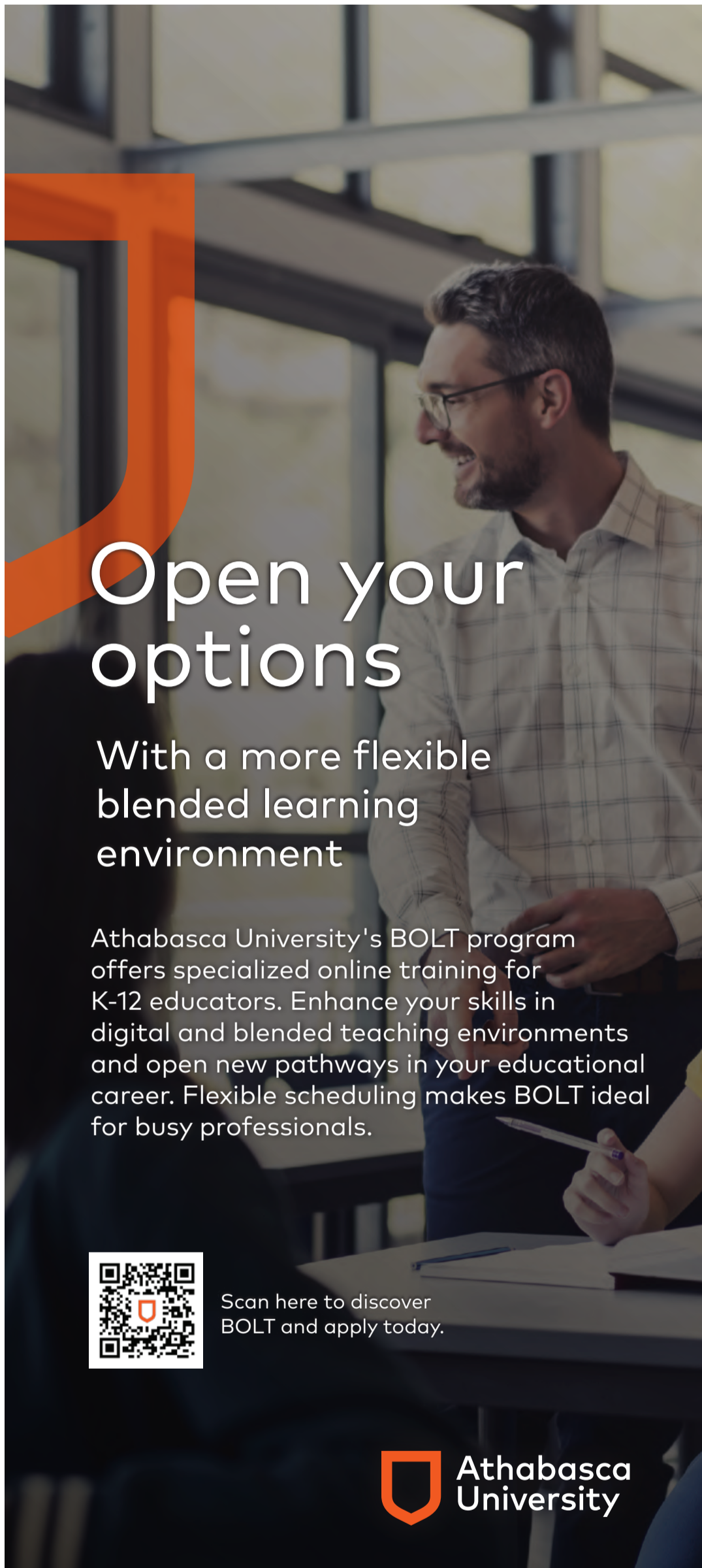
Power in Pictures: Using Picture Books to Energize Secondary ELA Instruction by Deborah Dean

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DIGITAL NEWS



The ATA News is available online.

For the latest issue, visit www.teachers.ab.ca/news.
 Subscribe to receive an email when a new issue is available. <http://bit.ly/ATAeNews>

2025 gotcha! PHOTO CONTEST



The ATA News invites you to get your camera out and start shooting those award-winning photographs.

- Cash prizes available!**
- 1st place: \$200**
 - 2nd place: \$100**
 - 3rd place: \$50**
- 

GOTCHA! Contest rules

1. Photos taken by active, associate and student ATA members of education or school-related activities are eligible. (Hint: photos depicting action are best.)
2. Entries must be submitted by the member who took the photos.
3. Photos taken between Sept. 1, 2024 and May 15, 2025, are eligible.
4. Please email photos to lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca. Entries must be received by 5 p.m. on May 15, 2025.
5. Each entry must be accompanied by a description of the activity; the names (if possible) of the people in the photo; the date when the photo was taken; and the photographer's name, school and contact information.
6. Cash prizes will be awarded to entrants whose photos place in the top three, as follows. First place: \$200; second place: \$100 and third place: \$50
7. Each winner, as well as those receiving honourable mention, will receive a certificate of merit.
8. Up to 20 additional entries may be selected for an award of honourable mention.
9. Each entrant may submit up to five photos but no entrant can win more than one top-three prize.
10. A panel of individuals with photography, publishing and teaching experience will judge the entries. The decision of the judges is final.
11. Winning photographs will be published in the ATA News.
12. Photos submitted for the contest may be published in the ATA News, the ATA Magazine or other Association publications.
13. Please read carefully. Failure to comply with any of these rules may result in disqualification.

Get snapping and good luck!

Experimental professional learning community results in perspective shift

SUCCESS STORY

Submitted by Kevin Wood, assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge

Every school leader knows that no two days are ever the same. The job is as unpredictable as it is demanding, ranging from moments of joy to moments of frustration when the core focus — student learning — seems to be overshadowed by a cascade of administrative and external pressures. School leaders face constant demands from government, district offices and local communities, all of which expect higher standards with fewer resources. The reality of school leadership means people can feel as if the role itself gets in the way of leading learning.

In response to this dilemma, a group of 10 school leaders in Alberta embarked on a journey of professional growth over the past two years. These leaders participated in an experimental professional learning community (EPLC), a space where they could reflect on and discuss how their leadership was evolving through the process of learning. Their aim was to practice being learners, embodying the principles of learning they strive to instill in their students.

Learning beyond the surface

The EPLC group sought to redefine being a learner in a leadership role. Traditionally, learning is viewed as a linear process, a state of not knowing

to knowing, from unpreparedness to preparedness. However, the EPLC was less interested in knowing and more focused on learning as a dynamic process that flourishes on openness in the moment. As one participant noted, the goal was to go beyond merely understanding learning to live it in their daily practice. True learning, they discovered, requires openness, a willingness to acknowledge moments of uncertainty, an understanding that not every answer is readily available and that leadership requires constant adaptation.

This shift in mindset became particularly evident against the backdrop of Alberta's current education climate, where underfunding and policy constraints make it increasingly difficult for schools to thrive. The EPLC study highlighted how openness to new ways of thinking and working, even in such challenging conditions, is at the heart of leading.

The role of openness

Through their participation in the EPLC, school leaders made two crucial insights.

First, the act of being open, both to learning and to the perspectives of others, was a transformative experience. Leaders who embraced this openness found themselves not only growing in their practices but also cultivating an environment where others could grow as well. One leader in the study shared that reflecting on their practice regularly had made their leadership more intentional and focused, with new questions arising almost daily about how they could improve.



ISTOCK

Second, they found that the very system in which they worked often hindered this openness. The demands of accountability and the expectations of external stakeholders created pressures that sometimes made it difficult for school leaders to engage fully in the process of learning.

This tension became a vital area of focus. By identifying moments when they were able to embrace openness, the leaders realized that these were the moments when they felt most connected to their work, even when their work was more managerial in nature.

Transforming leadership through learning

The participants found that when they embraced learning in their leadership practice, they were better able to model these behaviours. This not only had a direct impact on their own growth but also helped support a culture of learning in their schools. One leader shared that by prioritizing learning in their leadership, they found a renewed sense of purpose and energy. For these leaders, learning wasn't simply about meeting external expectations or ticking boxes; it was

about fostering a deep connection to both growth and those they served. As one participant described, learning helped them become a "better version" of themselves, enabling them to help others grow.

Key takeaways for school leaders

1. Be open: Leaders enriched their practice and themselves when they practiced searching for potential in both the novel and mundane moments of their day.
2. Prioritize learning as a central focus: School leaders should intentionally create space for learning as a way to be.
3. Balance external expectations with internal growth: Leaders should aim to learn even within the constraints of their responsibilities.

The EPLC study demonstrated that leading with a learning mindset is a way for school leaders to navigate the complexities of their roles. By prioritizing learning, fostering collaboration and balancing external pressures with internal growth, school leaders can support the development of both students and educators. ■

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- New graduates are welcome to apply!
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CALLING ALL MEMBERS

Apply to serve on an ATA committee!

The committees

Each year, a number of practising teachers are selected to serve on Association committees as well as to represent the Association on boards and committees of other organizations and provincial bodies. The list of opportunities for 2025/26 is now available at teachers.ab.ca/advocacy/volunteer.

The commitment

Standing committee positions are generally three years in length. Committee members attend the committee's meetings, prepared to speak—from their perspective as a field member—to the forces affecting the respective committee's work.

Travel and incidental costs, as well as release time, are covered to enable committee members to attend meetings.


Find more information on the ATA website.



The deadline for applications is April 7.

The ATA embraces diversity and inclusion and is committed to representing members belonging to equity-seeking groups.

Members belonging to equity-seeking groups are encouraged to apply.



All applicants are encouraged to reach out to their district representative(s) to better understand the work that Association committees undertake.








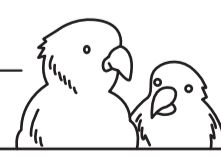

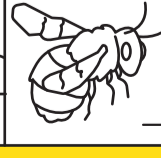
If you have any questions, please contact Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca, 780-447-9425 or 1-800-232-7208.

COMM-209 2024-12

popquiz!

Word Scramble

Unscramble these seasonal words.

 gpsrin	 ubnyn
 iptul	 nereg
 endrag	 gladuby
 tbtuyfler	 sibrd
 arni	 oneebhey

Spring has Sprung!



Teachers told us what they are doing to get students outside as the weather warms up.

We did a week of pond school, where every class went out once a day. They took their learning outside, with sit spots, math, poetry, science and instilling a love of nature.

✿ Tasha Roa-Yaremkowycz

We go to our sit spot in our local park.

✿ Allyson Bertamini

My Grade 1 team walks to the land (Whitemud Ravine) each month to observe seasonal changes through the lens of Indigenous Ways of Knowing. We use the Cree Moon videos created by Etienna Moostoos-Lafferty. In February, mikisiwipisim (Eagle Moon), we walked to the ravine.

There were four eagles soaring above us. Then two eagles started their trust free fall dance, where they grasp talons and fall through the air. It was significant. My thoughts were that when we make the time to go outside, shared experiences present themselves.

✿ Rebecca Robins

Today we are doing outdoor learning and sheep shearing! So excited!

✿ Laurie Dirsra

Nous allons aller dehors pour faire du nos sit spots.

✿ Joty Das

Sidewalk chalk!

✿ Camille Keim

Making natural dyes and colouring Easter eggs.

✿ Megan Fortier

Hatch ducklings!!

✿ Joclyn Beliveau

Doing our daily reading outside.

✿ Lindsay Walker

Seeing the first signs of spring! Buds on trees, green grass, new growth.

✿ Erin McBean

Planting flowers and tracking their growth! Art outside! Bug hunts for science!

✿ Caitlin Campbell

Outdoor education. New life.

✿ Lisa Beneteau