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ATA NEWS

February 2, 2021 | Volume 55, Number 8

News Publication of The Alberta Teachers' Association

HANDS OFF!

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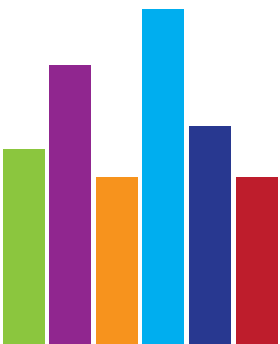
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**Sign on and
stay tuned**
The months ahead will be
busy for the ATA.
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editorial on page 2.*



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Thank you to
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**It's almost
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A look back at last year's
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It Takes a Village
New campaign to support
teachers' mental health.
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Sign on and stay tuned — busy months ahead for the ATA



EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

Despite a global pandemic, much is happening in the world of education in Alberta. And the next few months will be busy.

Teachers continue to push back against changes being made to the investment management of their pension plan. Teachers were incensed to learn of the imposed investment management agreement, but they acted accordingly. You phoned and emailed your MLAs and you participated in the #HandsOffMyPension social media campaign. It is having an effect. The earplugs seem to be coming out, and we are now hearing of MLAs who are actually reaching out to teachers to talk about this issue.

Pensions are just one of the hot issues we are keeping an eye on.

We are expecting an announcement any day now that would release the latest drafts of the new elementary curriculum. We know that much work has been done to revise the previous drafts, and there are numerous signs

that the changes will not be viewed favourably by teachers. The Association is already preparing to respond.

The issue of student and staff safety during the COVID pandemic will also continue to be a priority. Large urban high schools continue to be a cause of concern in this regard. Last month, at least four schools were forced to revert to online learning as a result of a number of positive cases, and massive numbers of students and staff being forced to quarantine for two weeks.

The Association is advocating for teachers and other school staff to be placed on the priority list in phase two of the vaccination rollout. President Jason Schilling has been talking to government officials about this since the fall and recently wrote the health minister to formalize the request. A number of school boards, including four large metro boards, have also joined in on the call.

February 25 is expected to be budget day, and there are lots of reasons to be pessimistic about next year's budget. Government revenue is being hit hard as a result of low oil prices, reduced economic activity and high unemployment. Meanwhile, health care and other costs are dramatically higher as a result of the COVID pandemic.

The 2020 deficit is projected to reach \$21 billion, and an ideologically-driven government, currently plagued by scandal, is likely to take aggressive measures to try to fix that.

Which brings us to teacher bargaining. Things are not likely to move too fast on this front. We have not completed the preliminary phase of list bargaining yet and the matters bargaining at the central table will not proceed quickly. In the meantime, Association bargainers will be working on an opening proposal and will be engaging teachers in consultation on that in the next few weeks and months.

And on the topic of teacher input, PEC elections are underway. Races are underway for vice-president and four geographic districts, including the two large urban districts. Teachers are encouraged to learn more about the candidates and to prepare for the online vote in March.

With all this going on we want to make sure that teachers are kept in the loop.

We know that teachers are incredibly busy and that this year is more exhausting than ever. We don't want to inundate you, but we do want to keep you informed.

Please help us keep you informed by taking a few minutes today to go to the ATA website and do these three quick things.

1. Confirm or create your online account.

Go to teachers.ab.ca and look for the links under My Online Account to either log in to the website or to create an account. If you don't have an account, you will need your teaching certificate number to get started.

2. Update your profile.

Follow the link also located under My Online Account, or go directly to profile.teachers.ab.ca. Please ensure that we have an accurate home email address and phone number in case there is urgent news.

3. Sign up for Members' Updates.

Sign up to receive periodic emergent news from the ATA directly to your inbox. Go to Bit.ly/MembersUpdate or find the link under My ATA > Members Only to sign up for these alerts.

Our members are our strength, and our strength comes from working together, so please sign on and stay tuned. Thank you for all you do. ■

I welcome your comments. Contact me at jonathan.teghtmeyer@ata.ab.ca.

Pension problem calls for political solution



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

Question: So now the Alberta Teachers' Association is planning to sue the government over the pension. Why wasn't this done sooner and what are our chances for success?

Answer: Provincial Executive Council's decision to authorize a legal challenge of changes to the administration of the Alberta Teachers Retirement Fund (ATRF) and its shotgun marriage to the Alberta Investment Management Corporation (AIMCo) was informed by advice from our legal council that the ministerial order, set out on Dec. 23, and other actions being contemplated by unions representing similarly affected employees, opened new paths forward to the courts that did not exist previously.

As to the second question, we believe we have a credible case to advance, but the outcome of legal action is never certain, for either side. More to the point, it would be a mistake to regard this as being primarily a legal matter; it is, in fact, fundamentally political. And that is potentially a good thing because it admits of a political solution.

What teachers need the government of Alberta to do is simply to keep its promise. Travis Toews, finance minister and Treasury Board president, said in the legislature during debate on Bill 22 that "The ATRF board will remain in control of determining how the pension funds are invested at a strategic level as well as retaining ownership of the plan's assets ... That is, AIMCo will invest according to the policies set by the ATRF board." His ministerial order belies that promise.

The minister has said that his order is merely temporary and will be in place only until AIMCo and the ATRF can negotiate an investment management agreement to replace it. But that same order backstops the position that AIMCo took when it walked away from negotiations last November and removes any incentive that the provincial crown corporation and its lame duck CEO Kevin Uebelein might have to arrive at a reasonable solution. Having been handed by Toews a veto on a silver platter, why would AIMCo give it up?

The resulting problem is eminently solvable and at no cost to taxpayers or teachers. First, the government needs to direct AIMCo to return to the table and arrive at an agreement with the ATRF that will preserve a role for AIMCo in managing investments at the direction of the ATRF, but

also allow the ATRF to manage by itself, or through other independent investment managers, investment strategies and approaches that are beyond AIMCo's competence or capacity. The additional costs associated with implementing these specialized strategies could be borne by the ATRF alone and, based on past history, would be more than covered by enhanced returns to the plan.

The second element of a solution is to put the ATRF on the same footing as AIMCo with respect to compensation for its staff. The UCP government changed the application of the *Reform of Agencies Boards and Commissions Compensation Act (RABCCA)* to place the ATRF at an unfair competitive disadvantage by capping the compensation of ATRF staff at well below market rates, while continuing to exempt AIMCo from the same legislation. When the impact of this is fully felt, the ATRF will have difficulty attracting and retaining the specialized investment and risk management expertise that teachers need to ensure that their pension funds are secure now and into the future. It is difficult to see the government's decision to make the ATRF subject to RABCCA as anything other than a deliberate effort to hamstring the ATRF and to compromise the fund's ability to meaningfully provide even the level

of strategic oversight contemplated in Bill 22. Again, any additional resulting compensation costs would be covered by the ATRF, which has consistently outperformed AIMCo.

Finally, the premier and Toews have said that the teachers' pension is guaranteed by the provincial government and so teachers should stop worrying. Well this isn't true — since the pension agreement of 2007 dealt with the unfunded liability of the pension plan, risk was transferred to and internalized in the plan. But if the government really wants to put taxpayers back on the hook, then we can discuss the legislation and/or regulations that need to be passed to make that happen. Or government could just let the ATRF do its job.

At the end of the day, these solutions can be implemented and this entire problem can be made to go away. The best way of achieving this is not through a lengthy court process but through concerted political action. You can help by phoning the Honourable Mr. Toews at 780-415-4855 and saying politely to him or his staff that it is time for the minister to keep his promise and to let the ATRF do its work for teachers and taxpayers. ■

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



The Alberta Teachers' Association

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AIMCo takeover is political interference



VIEWPOINTS

Greg Meeker
Former chair, ATRF board

As I am sure most teachers are aware, the Government of Alberta has unilaterally imposed an investment management agreement (IMA) between the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund (ATRF) and the Alberta Investment Management Corporation (AIMCo). I am outraged, as are many other people. The ATRF and three other pension plans spent a year trying and failing to negotiate an agreement with AIMCo. If you recall, the odious Bill 22 forced the ATRF to exclusively use AIMCo as its investment manager.

Parts of this imposed agreement range from troubling to heinous. It is worth pointing out that the ATRF is a joint enterprise between the government and the ATA, while AIMCo is a corporation solely owned by the government — and that teachers make the majority of contributions to the plan.

I spent 12 years on the ATRF board, so I feel qualified to point out that this board is the trustee and has a fiduciary duty to plan members. That duty requires the ATRF board to act in the best interest of plan members, which includes seeking the most cost-effective investment strategies and managers for the plan. There is no logical explanation as to why the minister would supplant the board's judgment with his own. This decision negated the hard work and dedication of the ATRF board, which for decades has provided the most cost-effective investment management possible.

May I remind you that the minister of finance appoints half of the ATRF board. AIMCo has been in existence for about 10 years. During that time the

ATRF has always had the opportunity to use them as an investment manager. They never did. I think long and hard about that every day.

The imposed agreement gives AIMCo control in some areas that it should not have. It can decline to implement changes to the investment policy that the ATRF board orders if it affects AIMCo's "economies of scale." This is a commercially unreasonable provision. It also flies in the face of the many UCP MLAs who insisted that the ATRF will retain "strategic control" of its assets under Bill 22.

The imposed agreement dictates that the costs charged by AIMCo "should" be less than private investment managers. But the investment costs charged by AIMCo could be far more than current costs.

It is my considered opinion that AIMCo did not really try to negotiate an agreement. The negotiation framework was tilted heavily in AIMCo's favour. If no agreement was reached, they knew that the government would impose an AIMCo-friendly agreement, one that is supposed to be temporary but has no termination date.

The ATRF assets are held in trust. They do not belong to the government. They imposed commercially unreasonable contracts on a joint pension plan. This does not affect the benefit paid, which is defined under law, but it could affect the cost of the plan in the long run.

Teachers will not ever forget elected representatives interfering in the financial future of their pension plan. Workers do not take kindly to this behaviour, particularly ones that are on the front lines of a pandemic. After all, the assets are the deferred wages of teachers held in trust for a time when they cannot work. This plan is worth fighting for. ■

Greg Meeker is principal of Coronation School in Edmonton.

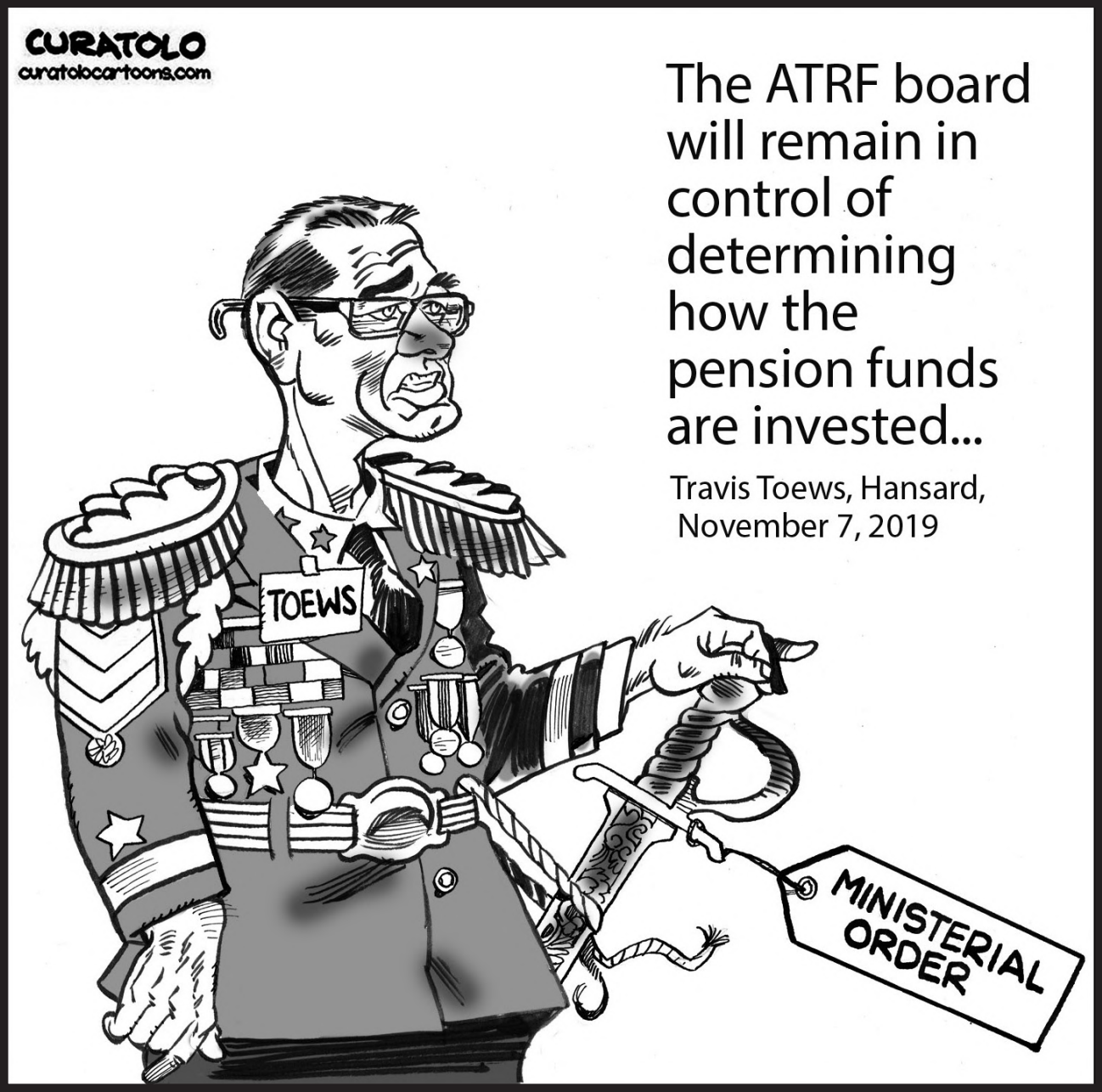
YOUR VIEWS

FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

- On the ATA pursuing legal recourse on pension management**
- Elaine Merriman**
Great to hear that action is being taken. Bravo! I'm here to support my pension people.
- Cathy Fox**
Happy to hear this. It's time this gov't faced some opposition over their unilateral decision making.
- Sheila Mackay**
Thank you!
- Sue Ngary**
And here we go again – the ATA in a lawsuit with a conservative government over the pension. Thank goodness the ATA is doing this, but my goodness what a lot of time, effort and money these governments waste. Good thing we are tenacious and resilient.
- Maura ODonoghue-Will**
Yes!!!! Let's fight.
- Chris McLean-Sleger**
Good job. Thank you.

- On ATA News article about making teacher vaccinations a priority**
- Carolyn Korstanje Kruisselbrink**
Thank you for advocating for us ... it is easy to feel forgotten in the face of everything ... we want to stay healthy and most of all, stay IN school with kids!
- JoAnne Thaxter**
Keeping schools open keeps families able to work and know their kids are safe. That means we need teachers in classes teaching in front of the kids.
- Tania Bourgeois Richmond**
Thank you for initiating this. Ontario has already published their vaccination roll out and educational staff are in the top portion of that map. It is concerning but certainly not surprising that Alberta has not deemed school staff as a priority.
- On Centre-Nord teachers approving strike action**
- Chris Ferguson**
We stand with you!

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



FOR THE RECORD

“They’re just sort of dropping off the face of the Earth.”

Darrel Robertson, superintendent of Edmonton Public Schools, talking about students not attending online classes they are registered for.



Strike averted in Centre-Nord

ATA News Staff

Less than a week after teachers employed by Conseil Scolaire Centre-Nord (CSCN) voted 94 per cent in favour of taking strike action against their employer, a memorandum of agreement was signed by the parties.

Facing mounting pressure from parents and the community, board negotiators reached out to resume negotiations in the days after the strike mandate was announced. Saturday bargaining concluded an agreement that will now go back to the membership for ratification.

Éric Cloutier, president of L'Unité locale francophone No. 24, says he is relieved that an agreement was reached.

"Teachers preferred to stay in the classroom, but they weren't prepared to be treated as second rate compared to the rest of the teachers in the province," Cloutier said. "The teachers felt they had no other

choice but to take a stand, and now their resolve has paid off."

Teachers vote on ratifying the agreement on Feb. 3 and the board will vote on Feb. 10. If both sides approve, the 2018–2020 agreement will be finalized. A negative vote on either side means the strike mandate remains in place.

Cloutier is hopeful that teachers will support the efforts of their team to get this agreement, but says work will now be needed to repair the relationship between the board and teachers.

"I believe this is a fair deal," Cloutier said. "But teachers remain frustrated that for two rounds in a row, negotiations have been very frustrating, and CSCN has been one of the very last boards to settle in local negotiations."

If the CSCN agreement is approved, there will be only three school boards in the province that have not reached a local settlement for the 2018/19 and 2019/20 school years: Sturgeon, Wetaskiwin and FrancoSud. ■



Arbitration ahead for list bargaining

ATA News Staff

List of all matters (LAM) bargaining was completed on Jan. 27 following a two-day meeting between the Central Table Bargaining Committee (CTBC) and representatives of the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA).

Agreement was reached on several items but, despite the best efforts of the CTBC, a significant number of items remain outstanding, said CTBC chair Peter MacKay.

"We strongly advocated for the interests of teachers in the discussions but over time it became

clear that TEBA's mandate in list bargaining was strongly predisposed toward placing items on the central list," he says. "Eventually, both parties agreed that negotiations had been exhausted and that the remaining matters should be decided by an arbitrator."

CTBC and TEBA will now notify the minister of Jobs, Economy, and Innovation in writing of the need for arbitration and mutually agree on an arbitrator, who will establish dates for the arbitration to be heard.

Teachers wanting more information are encouraged to speak to their Teacher Welfare Committee (TWC) representative. ■



Thank you to Dr. Saxinger

Throughout the pandemic, the Association has been working with Dr. Lynora Saxinger, an epidemiologist from the University of Alberta, because it was important to us to make sure the information we were including in our advocacy work around the return to school was rooted in science and the most up-to-date research. Dr. Saxinger has been involved with the COVID townhalls the ATA hosted for teachers and parents that helped to answer questions about the virus. Dr. Saxinger recently helped the ATA and me with information about the importance of vaccinating school staff. The insight she provides to the ATA on a regular basis is invaluable.

It's important to me to make sure we are using credible information when advocating on the many issues that are facing public education and teachers today. People often send me articles to read, sometimes dozens a day. It's important to ensure that what we're reading is credible and legitimate. This was often a focus of a lesson in my English classes when doing research work. I always encouraged my students to be critical of what they were reading and to look carefully at the sources of articles.

We too often witness the spread of misinformation or half truths on social media, which leads to even more misunderstandings. It's a cycle that just seems to perpetuate itself and can be extremely frustrating for people, especially during a pandemic where everybody is already experiencing high levels of stress.

In short, I am thankful for individuals like Dr. Saxinger and many others who regularly share information about the science behind COVID, and for the support she has provided for the teachers of Alberta. ■

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

NOTICE

On Sept. 10, 2020, a hearing committee of the Professional Conduct Committee established under the *Teaching Profession Act* found that Allison Patricia Prystai engaged in unprofessional conduct. The hearing committee ordered that Prystai's membership in the Association be cancelled effective Sept. 10, 2020.

On Sept. 29, 2020, a hearing committee of the Professional Conduct Committee established under the *Teaching Profession Act* found that Norman Joseph Howes engaged in unprofessional conduct. The hearing committee ordered that Howes's membership in the Association be cancelled effective Sept. 29, 2020.

On Oct. 8, 2020, a hearing committee of the Professional Conduct Committee established under the *Teaching Profession Act* found that David Matthew Belke engaged in unprofessional conduct. The hearing committee ordered that Belke's membership in the Association be cancelled effective Oct. 8, 2020.



STORIES AND PHOTOS WANTED

If something newsworthy is going on in your school, district or local, please let us know. We will also consider articles, photos and cartoons. Please email tips and submissions to managing editor Cory Hare: cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.

ATA to challenge pension order in courts

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

The Alberta Teachers’ Association is launching a legal challenge of a government ministerial order that reduces teacher control of their pension plan’s investments.

The Association is acting on legal advice that identified new avenues for a legal challenge as a result of a ministerial order signed by Finance Minister Travis Toews on Dec. 23. The order imposed an investment management agreement on the Alberta Teachers’ Retirement Fund (ATRF) and the Alberta Investment Management Corporation (AIMCo).

“This offensive and over-reaching ministerial order, which negates promises made by government officials when passing Bill 22, needs to be stopped, and we will turn to the courts to do so,” said ATA president Jason Schilling.

The ATRF was informed of the imposed agreement on Jan. 4 and the ATA’s Provincial Executive Council voted unanimously on Jan. 21 to

initiate legal action. The Association’s law firm is now working on the court application.

Control of their pension plan has been an issue for teachers ever since the government introduced Bill 22 in November 2019. The bill requires that the ATRF use the government-owned AIMCo as its exclusive investment manager. The bill specified that the ATRF would still retain control of the plan’s investment strategy, according to an agreement that the ATRF and AIMCo were to negotiate by June 30, 2020. To date, the sides have not been able to agree on terms.

According to the ATRF, the agreement imposed by Toews includes a recognition that the ATRF board will establish the investment policy to direct how plan assets are managed, but the full discretion of the board in establishing and executing the investment policy is restricted.

“Specifically, AIMCo is not required to implement ATRF’s investment policy if, in the sole opinion of AIMCo, it would threaten to compromise AIMCo’s economies of scale or operational efficiencies,” says the ATRF release.

“Such decisions by AIMCo are not subject to appeal or arbitration.”

The imposed terms contradict statements made by Toews in the legislature at the time Bill 22 was being passed.

“The ATRF board will remain in control of determining how the pension funds are invested at a strategic level as well as retaining ownership of the plan’s assets,” said Toews on Nov. 7, 2019. “That is, AIMCo will invest according to the policies set by the ATRF board.”

The Association has launched a new email tool and social media campaign for teachers to express their frustrations directly to MLAs.

“Teachers were betrayed by their MLAs, the minister and the premier when this imposed agreement failed to live up to the promises made to respect the ATRF’s ability to direct the investment of teacher pension dollars,” Schilling said. “We will fight the order in court, but there still needs to be political accountability for the broken promises.”

The court action will be filed when it is ready. The foundations and basis of the Association’s challenge will be revealed in due course before the courts. ■

Is my pension safe?

The ATRF says that teacher pensions remain secure and that benefit entitlements are not impacted by the change in investment management.

These recent developments remain deeply concerning for teachers, as lower than expected returns on investment could result in future contribution rate increases or underfunded liabilities for the plan.

Some teachers talk about taking their money out of the plan, but this is generally not a good idea. You receive the best value by staying in the plan. On average, retired teachers receive eight dollars in benefit for every dollar that they contribute into the plan. If you are thinking about pulling your contributions out of the plan, contact the ATRF or Teacher Employment Services for advice before making a final decision.

The AIMCo pension takeover – a timeline

Oct. 24, 2019 – Provincial budget

Government of Alberta tables 2019 budget with line buried on page 120 that reads the ATRF “will be expected to transfer funds to AIMCo for management, reducing redundant administration.”

Nov. 1, 2019 – HandsOffMyPension.ca launched

ATA launches a website where members and supporters can email MLAs to express opposition to the pension takeover. Fifteen thousand emails are sent over the first weekend, and a total of 30,000 are sent by the time Bill 22 passes.

Nov. 6, 2019 – ATRF data

The ATRF sends a letter to Minister Travis Toews showing that the ATRF outperformed AIMCo over the past six years. ATRF annualized returns averaged 9.5 per cent, while AIMCo’s comparable assets averaged 8.7 per cent. The data is disputed by government spokespeople.

Nov. 18, 2019 – Bill 22 introduced

Finance Minister Toews introduces omnibus Bill 22, *Reform of Agencies, Boards and Commissions and Government Enterprises Act*, 2019 in the legislature. Bill 22 amends the *Teacher Pension Plans Act*, requiring the ATRF board to use AIMCo as its exclusive investment manager. The bill requires the ATRF and AIMCo to negotiate an investment management agreement (IMA) to take effect by June 30, 2020, and to establish a plan by December 31, 2020, for the

transfer of investment management to AIMCo. The bill allows the finance minister to extend deadlines and to impose an IMA, if needed.

Nov. 18, 2019 – AG urged to weigh in

The ATRF files a formal request for the auditor general (AG) to assess the proposed transfer and provide independent analysis. The ATA also reiterates the call for AG involvement. By Jan. 2020 the AG responds to say such a review is not within their mandate.

Nov. 21, 2019 – Bill 22 passes

Despite the overwhelming and well-documented objections of teachers, retired teachers and others, the government pushes Bill 22 through the legislature at breakneck speed. Using closure three times in just 16 hours, the bill passes through all stages of debate in just over a day and a half.

Jan. / Feb. 2020 – Process of transfer begins

The ATRF and AIMCo establish working groups to discuss and oversee all of the elements of the transfer.

Apr. 2020 – AIMCo’s \$2.1 billion volatility loss

News that AIMCo lost at least \$2 billion when an investment bet against market volatility is lost as a result of COVID-related market fluctuations renews uproar among teachers and teacher pensioners about the AIMCo takeover. The ATRF is unaffected as no assets had been transferred yet. News stories state

TIMELINE continued on page 9

POINT/COUNTERPOINT

MLAs have started to respond to teacher concerns with a new set of talking points, but the new government messaging needs to be refuted. Here’s what they are saying along with our responses:

POINT:

“The fund is still 100 per cent backed by taxpayers.”

COUNTERPOINT:

This is false. Teacher pension benefits are backed by the value of the fund itself and its contributors. This is at the core of the problem with the AIMCo takeover. The post-1992 fund is [96 per cent funded](#), meaning that there is essentially enough money in the fund to pay out the benefits on currently earned service. If investments fail to generate the expected return on investment, contributions will have to increase, thereby creating higher costs for both teachers and government.

POINT:

“Once the parties agree to a final investment management agreement (IMA), the ministerial order will no longer be in effect. We are confident that the ATRF and AIMCo will be able to come to an agreement.”

COUNTERPOINT:

In negotiations, AIMCo has not been willing to give the ATRF full

control over how pension funds are invested. Why would AIMCo move on this now, knowing that their position is backstopped by the ministerial order?

POINT:

“Similar IMAs have long been successful in the responsible management of pensions for other Alberta public service employees.”

COUNTERPOINT:

The finance minister imposed new IMAs on other pension boards too. And [those workers also feel](#) that their ability to direct investments is being eroded.

POINT:

“The ministerial order was necessary as a temporary measure to ensure that the pension plan remains appropriately managed.”

COUNTERPOINT:

The ATRF has very effectively managed teacher pension investments for over 80 years. There was no need to rush the transfer by imposing an IMA now.



"There is no impact on the ATRF board control over said pensions."

- Joseph Schow, MLA Cardston-Siksika

Global News, November 21, 2019

#HandsOffMyPension

Joseph Schow
cardston-siksika
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HandsOffMyPension.ca

The Association has launched a new email tool and social media campaign for teachers to express their frustrations directly to MLAs.

Teachers and retirees are encouraged to continue their advocacy with MLAs by using the MLA email tool and the broken promises social media cards available at www.handsoffmypension.ca.

Connect With Us

We're here for you remotely. Our pension counsellors are here to answer any of your questions all year round. Set up your personal interview by calling our office, or sending an email to member@atrf.com.



2020 Annual Report and Highlights now available online.

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NOTICE AND EVENTS

Climate Action Youth Leadership Forum

Learning for a Sustainable Future (LSF) is hosting a virtual Climate Action Youth Leadership Forum for teachers and students in grades 7–12. The forum aims to give students the opportunity to be climate leaders by hearing from experts who bring real-life context to issues of climate change! The forum will take place from Feb. 17 to April 8. Students and teachers will have the opportunity to connect, learn and share meaningful ways to take climate action.

The forum includes five interactive student workshops and two PD sessions for teachers. These will be available both live or recorded for future viewing. Funding of \$400 per school is also available to support the implementation of an action project. In the PD sessions, teachers will explore LSF's newest resource *Empowering Learners in a*

Warming World: A Climate Change Inquiry Guide for 7–12 Educators. More information is available at <https://lsf-1st.ca/>.

Code-cracking challenge launches

A new challenge invites Canadian youth from six to 18 to get first-hand experience learning to code. The Crack The Code Challenge enables participants to earn points by completing coding journeys, "liking" participant projects, and by creating and submitting their own app. The challenge is free to enter. Prizes will be awarded at the end of each round and include Chromebooks, laptops and gaming laptops. A panel of judges will use a scoring rubric to score the applications/games. To view all rules and regulations, visit www.codingville.ca/crack-the-code.html.



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Applications are now being accepted for the following:

ATA Doctoral Fellowships in Education

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- For members entering or in first year of a doctoral program in education

Nadene M Thomas Graduate Research Bursary

- One award of \$5,000
- For a member enrolled in a graduate program in education
- A research focus on teacher health issues and/or teachers' working conditions

John Mazurek Memorial—Morgex Insurance Scholarship

- One award of \$2,500
- For members who pursue relevant professional development

For more information and to apply

- Visit www.teachers.ab.ca > My ATA > Programs and Services > Grants, Awards and Scholarships
- Contact Jessica Grayson, jessica.grayson@ata.ab.ca, 780-447-9499 (Edmonton area) or toll free 1-800-232-7208

Application deadline:
Monday, March 1, 2021



The Alberta Teachers' Association

PD-3-9 2020 09

DEHR =

SPEAKER SERIES
ANTIRACISM AND ANTIOPPRESSION

Farha Shariff PhD

How did we get here and where do we go now?
Critical engagements for antiracist classrooms

Saturday, March 6, 11:00–12:00

For access, visit <https://sched.co/gimt>.



The Alberta Teachers' Association

PD-80-55g1 2021-01-21





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Your emotional support bucket isn't bottomless

Conversations, preventions and supports key to managing emotional labour, compassion fatigue, burnout and stigma

A message from the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) and the Alberta Teachers' Association.

As members of a school or district education community, your role is rooted in building, maintaining and strengthening relationships with students, parents, colleagues and leaders. Managing these relationships involves collaborating as you navigate different learning styles, student needs and now, how to work in a pandemic environment. All of this takes a sizable amount of emotional labour, defined as how you manage what you feel internally and how you express (or suppress) those feelings.

While emotional labour is often viewed as "part of the job" in the education sector, it can come at a personal cost. For instance, if there is an imbalance over a prolonged period between your internal feelings and those you express, emotional labour can negatively affect your work and personal life, leading to compassion fatigue or burnout.

Prior to 2020, there was limited research on the personal costs of emotional labour to Alberta's education workers. What was clear, though, was that many within the educational community were experiencing more challenges and



The ATA is partnering with the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan to create It Takes a Village, a year-long campaign to support education workers in their mental health.

stress because of an increasingly complex work environment, such as diverse student needs and fewer resources.

This environment was resulting in high stress levels with demonstrated signs of compassion fatigue (emotional and physical exhaustion). For some, compassion fatigue felt like burnout because of their emotional investment in a student, class or the community, while for others it presented a serious struggle to find balance between work and home. This was the catalyst for a partnership between the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP), the ATA and the University of Calgary on a study to understand the relationship between emotional labour, compassion fatigue and burnout within our school communities.

Open, honest conversations

Phase one of the study, initiated in early 2020, included an online survey of more than 2,500 education workers. In late 2020, the partners shared their [phase one findings in a report](#)

that addresses the realities of how educational workers are managing emotional labour, compassion fatigue and burnout. The report also notes that the stigma surrounding burnout, particularly in teachers, is a reality that requires us to have open, honest conversations about pressures facing this part of the workforce.

An important first step is to recognize that education workers are not superheroes and the bucket of emotional support that they provide to others is not bottomless. The report also highlights that professional development, self-care, positive workplace culture and mentorship can provide individuals with support and a network to lean on during difficult times.

We at ASEBP and the ATA are listening to how educational workers are feeling. In response, ASEBP has created a year-long mental health campaign entitled It Takes a Village, where we and our partners will support you in managing your well-being.

We're all familiar with the adage "it takes a village to raise a child," but it's also important to have a village

to help you get through life's ups and downs. As part of your village, ASEBP provides benefits coverage for health services that can allow you to decompress, reset and take care of yourself. The health benefits that we provide include speaking with a registered psychologist, seeing a chiropractor or seeking nutritional advice through your Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP). Plus, in the coming weeks and months, we will share information and resources, along with thoughts from specialists on mental health and wellness.

But for us to provide the information that you need most, we encourage you to reach out! Watch for polls, event invites and questions on our Facebook and Twitter (@ASEBP) channels where we encourage you to comment, check in and vote on what you want and need to help you manage any stress, anxiety and fear you're experiencing. Our goal is to increase conversations and reduce mental health stigma, in turn, helping you on your path to healing.

Visit asebp.ca/mentalhealth for more information about your ASEBP benefits and mental health supports and be sure to follow us on Facebook at #YourASEBP and #ThinkShareHeal and on Twitter at @ASEBP for the latest updates. ■

IT'S NOT EASY

If you're struggling to get through the day because you feel overwhelmed, angry, afraid or worried, and if "normal" feels like a thing of the past, know that you're not alone in how you feel. While admitting to yourself and others that "I'm not okay" can be scary, it's important to look to your village for support because no one should have to work through this alone.

TODAY IS THE DAY

Lean on your village — ASEBP, our partners, your community resources, coworkers, family and friends — for support, connection, hope and safe spaces to build, strengthen or maintain your mental health and well-being.

It's almost budget time: a 2020 refresher



ANALYSIS

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

It was either one year ago or one thousand — who even remembers any more — when the government introduced the 2020 budget and a new funding model for education in Alberta.

The emergence of the global pandemic was occurring at the same time and less attention than usual was paid to the fallout of the provincial budget. With Budget 2021 expected by the end of the month, the ATA News

felt it was a good time to review the highlights and lowlights of Budget 2020.

It is important to note that Budget 2020 was built before COVID-19 hit and used assumptions of schools operating completely normally. Unless noted otherwise, all comparisons in this analysis are based on general funding for schools, exclusive of any effects of COVID on funding and/or costs.

Five things you need to know about Budget 2020

1. Overall funding increased, but not restored

Grants to school boards totaled \$6.74 billion in 2018/19. They were

estimated to total \$6.61 billion for 2019/20, a cut of \$126 million. Budget 2020 projected school board funding of \$6.73 billion.

While the government increased school board funding by \$118 million in Budget 2020, the increase did not makeup for the cuts in Budget 2019. Boards were projected to receive \$9 million less for 2020/21 than two years prior, while educating 27,000 more students.

2. Bridge funding

The increase in school board funding was buoyed by \$212 million in bridge funding designed to ensure that no school board would receive a reduction in funding as a result of the new

funding model. The government has been very unclear about the certainty of bridge funding going forward, and the province's bleak fiscal picture created by COVID puts its continued funding in real jeopardy. This is a substantial amount of funding for some boards. It is worth \$47 million per year to Edmonton Public alone; it makes up 15 per cent of Northland School Division's overall funding.

3. Weighted moving averages

The new funding model shifted grant formulas away from using actual student enrolment in a given school year to a three-year average of actual

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ARA 2021 to be held online

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held Jan. 21–22, 2021, via Zoom

1. Authorized the Association’s legal counsel to immediately commence the legal actions necessary to preserve the capacity of the Alberta Teachers’ Retirement Fund to advance the interests of teachers it serves as plan members by managing, without prior restriction, the assets of the pension plan it administers for the benefit of past, present and future teachers.
2. Approved the 2021/22 proposed budget for presentation to locals.
3. Approved that the Annual Representative Assembly (ARA) be held in a virtual format in 2021.
4. Approved that emergent resolutions, courtesy motions and substantive amendments received before the Friday, one week before the ARA, be privileged on the order paper.
5. Approved, for presentation to the 2021 ARA, a resolution proposing a budget that would hold member fees constant at the 2020/21 level (\$1,347 for active members and \$202.05 for associate members).
6. Approved the names of two recipients for honorary membership in the Association, which is reserved for members and other persons who have given meritorious service to the teaching profession, to the Association or to the advancement of education.
7. Approved the name of the recipient to receive the Public Education Award at the 2021 ARA.

8. Approved for submission to the 2021 ARA a resolution urging the Government of Alberta to replace the English Language Arts Authorized Novels and Nonfiction Annotated List with a guide to text selection which reflects diversity, promotes equity and honours teachers’ professional autonomy.
9. Approved for submission to the 2021 ARA a resolution to amend policies 1.3.8.1, 1.3.8.2 and 1.4.4.4 to read, “Unless there is a sound reason to do otherwise, each subgroup maintains an unencumbered accumulated surplus that does not exceed 50 per cent of its annual fee revenue in the case of locals or 50 per cent of its annual expenditures for the previous fiscal year in the case of specialist councils and convention associations.”
10. Approved that the report on resolution 2-5/20 requiring report to the 2021 ARA be published in the *Resolutions Bulletin* and *ARA Handbook*.
11. Approved the report on geographic redistricting be approved for publication in the *Resolutions Bulletin* and *ARA Handbook*.
12. Authorized an overexpenditure of up to \$10,000 to provide for the translation of policy into French.
13. Authorized that dedicated culturally responsive space be established and maintained at the Association’s Southern Alberta Regional Office.
14. Established a selection committee to fill the position of executive staff officer, Teacher Employment Services.
15. Authorized up to \$215,000, allocated from the Beginning Teachers’ Conference budget line, to create videos for beginning teachers and other members.
16. Authorized up to \$50,000, allocated from the Professional Development

- Area Conference budget line, to host a Curriculum Engagement Seminar in spring 2021.
17. Authorized the 2021 Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Conference be held jointly with the spring Professional Development Area Conference, with a keynote on April 23 and breakout sessions on April 24.
 18. In accordance with section 31(2) of the *Teaching Profession Act*, extended the deadline for the commencement of two hearings of the Professional Conduct Committee.
 19. Received the report of a hearing committee that found a teacher guilty of three charges of unprofessional conduct for making students feel uncomfortable by encroaching on their personal space by regularly touching parts of their person, for using “pet names” or nicknames for a select group of students, and for having some students demonstrate certain physical activities not tied to the content of the lessons being taught and not involving the entire class in the same activities.
The committee imposed a penalty of a letter of severe reprimand for charge one and a letter of reprimand for charges two and three.
 20. Received the report of a hearing committee that found a teacher guilty of six charges of unprofessional conduct for failing to treat students with dignity and respect, for failing to maintain the honour and dignity of the profession and for being critical of a colleague without discussing with them first.
The charges stemmed from the teacher knowingly permitting two students to develop an inappropriate poster for a school project, authorizing an inappropriately themed skit be developed by students and engaging in critical communications about a colleague via email and verbal conversation.

- The committee imposed a letter of severe reprimand and a fine of \$500.
21. Received the report of a hearing committee that found a teacher guilty of one charge of unprofessional conduct for being convicted of a summary offence: possession of child pornography. The hearing committee imposed a penalty of a declaration that the teacher is ineligible for membership in the Association effective immediately and a recommendation to the minister of education to cancel the teacher’s teaching certificate.
 22. In accordance with the direction of the ARA to reduce paper, authorized that *PRECIS* be distributed electronically, commencing after Sept. 1, and amended Administrative Guidelines to reflect this change.
 23. Authorized that *The Learning Team’s* print publication be suspended and moved online, starting in the 2021/22 school year, with a continuation of the established \$10,000 budget.
 24. Named the Association’s nominee, for submission to the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, to be considered as part of the official Education International delegation to attend the virtual 65th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women taking place March 15–26.
 25. Approved dates of key Association-sponsored meetings and Council meetings for the 2023/24 school year.
 26. Appointed field members to serve on field experiences committees, amended the Communications, Advocacy and Public Education Committee frame of reference, and appointed a member of Council to serve as the Association’s representative to the Public Interest Alberta Human Services and Poverty Task Force. ■

TIMELINE

continued from page 5

that AIMCo executives were not fully aware of the risks, and a subsequent independent review finds that AIMCo has an inappropriate risk culture.

May 14, 2020 – AIMCo management would mean \$1.3 billion less for teacher pensions

Based on an analysis of annual report data, the ATRF concludes, in [a letter sent to the ATA](#), that AIMCo management would have resulted in the ATRF assets being worth \$1.3 billion less if AIMCo had managed them since 2013.

June 8, 2020 – Bill 203 introduced

NDP MLA Christina Gray introduces [Bill 203, the Pension Protection Act](#) to reverse the changes made by Bill 22. It is referred to the UCP-dominated private bills committee, which recommends the bill not proceed.

June 2020 – IMA deadline extended

The ATRF and AIMCo jointly request and receive a deadline extension from Minister Toews for reaching an IMA.

The new deadline is Oct. 31, 2020.

Oct. 31, 2020 – IMA deadline passes

Despite significant progress being made, the IMA is not finalized by the time the revised deadline passes. The parties inform government that the agreement is not in place but continue negotiations.

Dec. 2020 – ATRF control over investment policy remains outstanding

[According to the ATRF](#), negotiations continued through November and into December, and the ATRF urges AIMCo to continue participating in negotiations. The ATRF believes they are close to an agreement, but notes they are unable to reach agreement on ATRF’s control over investment policy .

Dec. 23, 2020 – Minister Toews imposes IMA

Minister Toews signs a ministerial order imposing an IMA on the ATRF and AIMCo that will remain in place unless the ATRF and AIMCo are able to agree on an IMA at some future date. The IMA provides AIMCo with a veto over ATRF investment policy that it can use at its sole discretion without process for appeal from the ATRF is not informed of the ministerial order until Jan. 4, 2021. ■

BUDGET

continued from page 7

- and estimated enrolments. In theory, it smooths out the volatility of rapidly changing enrolment numbers; in practice, it allows government to get out of higher cost expectations as a result of rapid population growth.
- COVID has put a big wrinkle into this. Student enrolment is down for 2020/21 across the province by nearly 10,000 students. It appears that many parents decided to hold their children back from starting kindergarten as a result of the pandemic. Meanwhile, it also appears that many students in higher grades may have shifted to online home school programs offered by private schools, because private school enrolment increased by 13 per cent (4,500 students).
- This shift will affect next year’s funding for school boards, even though many of those students are likely to re-enter the public system.
4. PUF funding was eliminated
- Program Unit Funding (PUF) was put in place to address the readiness of young children with social and

developmental delays to begin schooling. In very simplified terms, PUF funded early interventions that helped four and five year olds learn to walk and talk. Service delivery models vary widely and include programs operated by school boards as well as private schools and non-profit societies. However, PUF funding was only eliminated for school boards. The government claims the \$230 million in funding was rolled into the new Specialised Learning Supports (inclusion) funding, but inclusion was already underfunded and those ongoing supports are quite different from intensive early-intervention strategies.

5. RCSD funding eliminated

Budget 2020 also eliminated the \$72 million Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD) funding. This cut is in addition to funding changes noted in point one above. RCSD was funded largely by Alberta Health Services and funded in-school cross-ministry services bringing together education, health, children’s services, community and social services and Indigenous relations. Much of the work supported students with complex needs and included services such as speech-language pathology, physical therapy, occupational therapy and mental health supports. ■



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The Alberta Teachers' Association invites applications for the position of

EXECUTIVE STAFF OFFICER, TEACHER EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Competition: ESO1/21
Location: Edmonton
**Commencement: April 1, 2021,
or to be negotiated**

Applicants should quote position ESO1/21 and include the names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of at least two referees who are not Association employees or elected officials of its provincial executive. Applications must be received by 1600 on Friday, February 12 and should be addressed to

Ms Kathryn Dick
Human Resources Director
The Alberta Teachers' Association
11010 142 Street NW
Edmonton AB T5N 2R1
E-mail: hr@ata.ab.ca

For more information, please see our website at www.teachers.ab.ca.

This position will assist in the work of the Teacher Employment Services (TES) program area, supporting both teacher employment and collective bargaining functions. Duties may include the following:

- Being responsible for the organization and execution of field service in Teacher Employment Services, including handling teacher employment field service requests, acting as a representative of the bargaining agent in collective agreement negotiations and providing support to Association subgroups
- Advising members on teacher personnel problems, collective agreement entitlements and legal assistance
- Handling collective agreement grievances and board of reference appeals
- Participating and carrying out presentations and workshops for TES conferences
- Serving as Association resource person in specific areas of expertise
- Carrying out special projects from other areas of Association operation as assigned

Candidates must demonstrate:

- Effective communication, including effective writing and presentation skills
- Strong organizational skills and attention to detail
- Superior leadership, interpersonal and collaboration skills
- Ability to foster effective working relationships with both internal and external stakeholders
- Awareness of where to find and apply legislation, policy and the Education Act; and
- Appreciation of the strategic context of collective bargaining.

In addition, the following are required:

- A valid teaching certificate and a minimum of five years of successful teaching experience in public education
- Proven commitment to public education
- Ability to undertake travel and evening/weekend work

Experience in bargaining, labour relations and the application of collective agreements is considered an asset. Additionally, the ability to work in the French language, a demonstrated commitment to the Alberta Teachers' Association (or other Canadian teachers' organization), course work in labour relations or personnel management, and experience in/or knowledge of pensions and benefits would be relevant. Total compensation for these positions includes a starting salary of \$136,000, pensionable service under the Teachers' Pension Plan of the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund Board and employer-paid benefits as stipulated in a collective agreement. The initial location will be in Edmonton, but future assignments may be to any present or future Association office. Duties will commence on April 1, 2021 (negotiable).

OP-HR-47c 2021.01

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PAGING DOC DEHR LOVE



DEAR DOC DEHR LOVE,

My friend, who teaches Grade 8, says that Valentine's Day is way harder on junior high teachers than on elementary teachers. Is it wrong of me to send him a box of chocolates that only contains the gross cream-filled ones to express my disagreement?

Signed,
Kindergarten Queen

YOUR ROYAL HIGHNESS,

Valentine's Day can be challenging for teachers of any grade.

In elementary school, Valentine's Day is often a big event involving thematic cross-curricular activities, food and the ballyhoo exchanging of cards. There is a lot of planning and pedagogical finesse that goes into managing the day. The concept of love is explicitly taught: it's something we feel towards our family, our friends and our pets.

As kids mature, the focus of Valentine's Day shifts from being about familial and platonic love to being increasingly about romantic and sexual partnerships. Because Valentine's Day activities aren't woven through the secondary school day like they are in the younger grades, students are often left to navigate their inner emotional labyrinths without teacher guidance. The full range of emotional complexity possessed by adolescents of our species comes to junior and senior high school unannounced (but not unexpected) every mid-February.

P.S. No one deserves a box of cream-filled chocolates. Drop them into your coffee one at a time until they're gone.



DEAR DOC DEHR LOVE,

How do I ensure every student in my class gets a Valentine's Day card? I don't want anyone to be left out.

Sincerely,
Ms. Pardee Planar



DEAR MS. PLANAR,

Simply put, you plan ahead. Many teachers will communicate the specific number of students in the class to parents and guardians with the advice that students should only fill out the "From" portion of their Valentine's Day cards, leaving the "To" portion blank. An assortment of extra cards should be arranged in advance for students to give if they don't have access to their own cards from home.

If you're planning ahead, though, maybe you should do away with the exchanging of disposable store-bought cards altogether. They cost money that not all families have, their designs are often gendered (dinosaurs for boys, unicorns for girls), and there is little thought that goes into the whole process.

How could you be more intentional about exploring what caring for others is all about with your students? Could your class find some way to show their love for someone who needs it instead of exchanging cheap cards that will just end up in the recycling bin? Could they celebrate the school caretaker, do something nice for neighbours of the school or show their love to health care workers?

If you can figure out a way to help your students meaningfully express acts of love, no student is going to be left out.

DEAR DOC DEHR LOVE,

I want to do something special for my students on Valentine's Day because COVID has been so hard on them emotionally. Any ideas?

Thanks for your help,
Pensive In Ponoka

DEAR PIP,

The modern orientation of Valentine's Day is outward; it's about giving trinkets, cards, chocolates and diamonds to others. Why not flip the script this year and make Valentine's Day all about students focusing on their own feelings, wellness and self-love? (Give your students a self-care spa day!)

The week before Valentine's Day would be a great time to arrange one-on-one check-ins with your students. Don't talk about anything academic. Just demonstrate what Ted Aoki called "pedagogical love." Show them you care for them by simply listening to them and reaffirming that you're there for them.

Don't forget to put the I in Valentine for yourself too. You deserve a spa day.

YO, DOC DEHR LOVE,

Valentine's Day is a 'fun' day right? I don't have to plan to teach anything serious do I?

E. C. Peasy

DEAR E.C.,

Teaching opportunities are everywhere. Regardless of the grades you teach, Valentine's Day is an occasion your students will pay attention to. Why not use it to your advantage and to their benefit?

Talk about different types of relationships and families that people have. Look for figures of speech in love songs. Use cartoons to explore the concept of consent. Analyze Valentine's Day cards for heteronormative and inclusive messaging and imagery. Arrange guest speakers who can talk candidly about love, break-ups, sexual and gender minorities, and healthy relationships.



Do you hear that knocking, E.C.? There's a teaching opportunity at your door.

DEAR DOC DEHR LOVE,

I know that Valentine's Day can be particularly challenging for my 2SLGBTQ+ students. Is there anything I can do to help them at this time of year?

Allie Ally



YOU'RE RIGHT ALLIE,

Valentine's Day (and all the marketing that comes with it) is saturated with messaging about predominantly heterosexual couples and relationships, which makes it a very hard time for many transgender, non-binary and gender non-conforming youth.

Do your best to ramp up your overt allyship as Valentine's Day approaches. Make sure to use gender-neutral language when talking about relationships and love. Complement your traditional red and pink heart decorations with hearts containing the colours of the various Pride flags. If you have a school GSA or QSA, organize a "found family" event to support students who may not be hearing that they're loved for who they are at home.

Tragically, 2SLGBTQ+ students do suffer from higher rates of depression and suicidal ideation, and Valentine's Day can be triggering. Now is a really good time to remind your students that they can call, text or chat with the Kids Help Phone 24 hours a day if they ever need to talk about anything big or small. If you know you are working with sexual and gender minority youth or students who are emotionally vulnerable, I recommend mentioning the Kids Help Phone every week or so. Check out <https://kidshelpphone.ca/> for specifics. ■

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