



A display created by students at Thickwood Heights School in Fort McMurray depicts the experience of Chanie Wenjack, a 12-year-old boy who died in 1966 while trying to walk home after fleeing a residential school in Ontario. See page 16 for story and photos.

SUPPLIED



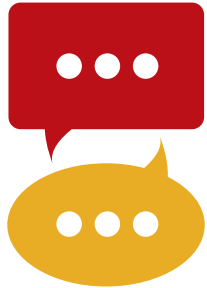
**Under the stethoscope**  
The idea of merit pay for teachers has reared its head again.  
*Read Jonathan Teghtmeyers's editorial on page 2.*



**Students First Act**  
Discipline changes a benefit to teaching profession despite minister's incendiary messaging.  
*See story on page 5.*



**Off Script**  
Hope lies in taking positive action.  
*See story on page 4.*



**Pitfalls and Precautions**  
If you have an issue with a colleague, address it with them first.  
*See story on page 10.*



# Merit pay goes under the stethoscope



## EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer  
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

My wife is six seasons into rewatching the entire 90s medical drama ER, and as a result, I have caught a few episodes and parts of episodes while passively watching.

It happened that a particularly sad episode about a child with cancer was unfolding on TV when I came across news that the United Conservative Party AGM would feature debate over merit pay for teachers — an issue that continually and periodically rears its head.

Upon reading this resolution, I became so enthralled by the prospect of using outcome-based measures to determine teacher pay that I felt it should be applied to all professions. Given my newfound status as a medical expert — having watched at least five cumulative hours of medically-related television, here and there, over the past few weeks — I decided to direct my energy toward evaluating merit pay for doctors.

So I got out my pen and paper and pieced together a rationale for this fantastic idea.

“We need to create a system where excellence is rewarded, and where consequences are expected when performance is poor,” my rationale began, borrowing the inspirational words that supported the merit-pay-for-teachers argument advanced by UCPers in Edmonton-Manning.

Much like the Manningite United Conservatives, I then turned to definitive objective evidence produced by the completely unbiased Fraser Institute.

“Data suggests that Canada has substantially fewer human and capital medical resources than many peer jurisdictions,” says their recent report comparing health-care performance among countries. “After adjustment for age, it has significantly fewer physicians, acute-care beds, and psychiatric beds per capita compared to the average of OECD countries included in the study.”

“While Canada does well on five indicators of clinical performance and quality (such as rates of survival for breast, colon and rectal cancers), its performance on the seven others examined in this study are either no

different from the average or in some cases — particularly obstetric traumas and diabetes-related amputations — worse.”

From this I came to one clear and undeniable conclusion: Alberta’s health-care system is a complete mess and that must be blamed on no other factors except the poor performance of doctors. At this point, my pen became a blur moving across the paper as brilliant rationale positively flowed from my fingertips.

“We need a system based on the idea that the feelings of medical professionals should never come before the needs of patients.”

Given my desire to pass this resolution based on misinformation as opposed to facts, I continued writing.

“This is only achievable if the Union is reeled in by allowing Alberta Health Services to evaluate their doctors rather than the Union.”

That ought to work.

When you’re on a roll, you’re on a roll. I came up with criteria.

Let’s base physician-evaluation criteria on a number of outcomes related to each physician’s patients: life expectancy, incidence rates of various diseases, levels of obesity, heart-attack

survival, blood pressure, medication utilisation, return visits. What could go wrong?

Sure, the American College of Physician Ethics may express concern. They may say that such pay-for-performance schemes related to specific conditions may lead to “neglect of other, potentially more important elements of care for that condition or a comorbid condition.” They may say that, “the elderly patient with multiple chronic conditions is especially vulnerable to this unwanted effect of powerful incentives.”

But who are they? Just some special interest group — pffffff!

Some argue these programs could result in the deselection of patients, physicians who play to the measures, or increasing distrust between patients and doctors, but these are minor side effects compared to the incredible advantage of a system that truly incentivizes strong performance from doctors.

Because if the prospect of earning more money doesn’t motivate our doctors to do great work, I seriously question what would motivate them. ■

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

# Bill 85 will open up possibilities



## Q & A

Dennis Theobald  
ATA Executive Secretary

**Question:** What does the government Bill 85, the Students First Act, mean for teachers and the Alberta Teachers’ Association?

**Answer:** For the vast majority of teachers who are active members of the Association, the provisions of Bill 85 should have a minimal if any effect, although the bill does have the potential to change some limited aspects of the Association’s procedures around its professional regulatory and discipline function.

Before I go any further, I should note that while Association and government staff engaged in some very useful discussions while the legislation was in development (hey, collaboration—what a concept!), the actual bill was not provided to us in advance and, as this column is being written, we are still in the process of unpacking Bill 85 and coming to an understanding of all of its implications.

That said, taken as a whole, Bill 85 can be viewed as mainly an effort to

address long standing deficiencies in the government’s own discipline processes for dealing with private and charter school teachers, central office administrators who have elected non-membership in the ATA, and school superintendents and their chief deputies who are excluded by statute from having active membership in the ATA. The bill will also establish processes for the College of Alberta School Superintendents which will be taking on regulatory responsibilities for its members.

The most notable differences in the way the Association and government handle discipline cases concerns the relative transparency of the two processes. While hearing reports of teachers who are brought before the Association’s Professional Conduct Committee are a matter of the public record and are released to anyone requesting them, the government’s parallel process is shrouded in secrecy and its findings and penalties have never been made public.

Similarly, while a decision of the Association’s Professional Conduct Committee to suspend or cancel a teacher’s membership (and the ability to teach in a public, separate or francophone) is public, the minister’s decision on a recommendation that

the teacher’s certificate be suspended or cancelled (a matter solely within the minister’s control) has not previously been made public.

Bill 85 makes provisions to address these issues through the creation of an online public database that would record the certification status of all teachers and also record whether they had ever had their certificates suspended or cancelled with a report of the circumstances under which that occurred.

I’ll note here another difference between the Association and the government’s processes that gives rise to confusion. When the Association suspends a teacher’s membership for a set period of time, once the term of the suspension has concluded, the teacher remains on suspension but may then make application through a fairly exacting and onerous process, including an additional hearing, to be reinstated to membership. This has happened exceptionally rarely and usually when the issue is the failure to pay a fine that was part of the penalty.

Effectively this means that the Association’s suspension of membership is functionally not much different from a cancellation. In contrast, it appears that suspensions of certification by the minister are

time-certain, with the certificate being restored, effectively automatically, once the suspension has expired.

But the most significant and positive change enabled by Bill 85 is the facilitation of additional front-end approaches to managing complaints that may avoid the need to undertake a full investigation when one is not required and provide additional alternatives to proceeding to a professional conduct hearing. Currently our process is a lot like a judicial proceeding (and sometimes even more exacting). Every complaint must be investigated thoroughly and the process that leads to a hearing, and potential appeal, is very lengthy and resource intensive. Oftentimes, it does not satisfy either the complainant or the respondent.

Bill 85 will open up the possibility of developing and implementing new approaches that might better respond to members and the public while enhancing confidence in the Association’s commitment and ability to uphold high standards of professional conduct and practice. ■

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





# New trustees were elected to protect public education



## VIEWPOINTS

Julie Hrdlicka  
Special to the ATA News

In the most recent municipal election, Calgarians voted overwhelmingly in support of public education and public schools. They did so by showing up in force — voter turnout in public school trustee races increased by almost 10 per cent overall over 2017. In one ward, the voter turnout grew by almost 20 per cent.

Equally important, of course, was who was voted into office. On the campaign trail, most successful candidates clearly stated the need to both strengthen and protect public education.

This is important because we have a battle ahead of us. And we need strong leaders in public education to stand up against a hostile, out-of-touch provincial government.

Ever since this government was elected, they have made clear they are prioritizing private interests over the public good. They are working to systematically dismantle and defund the public education system as we know it.

Here are a few recent examples:

- Removing the word “public” from the names of public school boards. This can be viewed as blurring the line between public and private schools.
- Cutting the CBE’s (and many other boards’) budget in the middle of a school year, an action that has never been done before in Alberta.
- Introducing a new funding formula based on a weighted moving average. The new funding formula depends on a lagging indicator. It means that funding doesn’t keep pace with enrolment growth in school districts while other school districts — often in rural centres — do not immediately feel the impact of their shrinking student enrolment.

As Noam Chomsky reminds us, “That is the standard technique of privatization: defund, make sure things don’t work, people get angry, you hand it over to private capital.”

In Alberta, the private capital comes in the form of “choice in education.” This leads us to the game changer on the government’s road to privatization of public education — the *Choice in Education Act*, which came into effect in September 2020.

The name of this legislation is absurd. Albertans have a lot of publicly funded choice in education, in fact, more than any other province. Public, separate, francophone, charter, home school and private schools are all funded through the public purse to some degree.

So what is the *Choice in Education Act* actually about? It states support for creating new charter schools and protecting the status and funding of independent schools.

The biggest game changer here is the elimination of the cap on charter schools. Up until now, charter schools were capped in Alberta at 13 and

not a threat to public schools. The elimination of the cap and the removal of the authority of local school districts supports the proliferation of these schools.

Charters celebrate that they offer choice, yet we already have choice in the public system. For instance, the Calgary Board of Education offers a girls’ program, a boys’ program, a science program, an arts program and French immersion, to name just a few examples.

Of course, the government is not talking about choice in public schools. The idea is to strangle and defund the public school system so they can no longer offer this choice, and that is where private schools and charter schools come in.

We are already seeing examples of this; for instance, the 2019–2029 CBE System Accommodation and Facilitation Strategy highlighted that in the next 10 years, the CBE will need to close 16 community elementary schools to address utilization requirements. These sites are prime picking for charter and private schools to make their way into what was once community schools.

Once “choice” grows in the charter and private schools, it is no longer accessible to all.

Charter schools were originally supposed to operate for a five-year period, after which they and all of their innovation would come back into the public school system. That did not happen. Instead, charters remained and became fixtures on the terrain.

There is only one pot of money. The government invests more than \$8 billion each year through the provincial education budget. In an era of fiscal restraint, there is a finite amount of funding for education. We cannot let public school dollars be washed away to private and charter schools.

Teachers are caught on the front lines, but you are not alone. As a trustee from 2015 to 2021, I was inundated with emails and phone calls from people concerned about this government’s actions. Parents, public education organizations and community members who don’t agree with this government’s direction are mobilizing.

Albertans want public education to be strengthened not weakened. They want it protected from the cuts, the proposed curriculum and inadequate protection of students from COVID-19. Albertans are standing right beside you. This is not your fight. This is our fight.

As for new trustees who were voted in to stand up for public education, they must do their part and strongly advocate for funding to go to public education and public schools, where the majority of Calgarians and Albertans choose to send their kids. ■

*Julie Hrdlicka served as a trustee for the Calgary Board of Education from 2015 to 2021.*

# YOUR VIEWS

## FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

### On the *Students First Act*

**Andrea Willman**  
Once the ink dries, can there be a follow up for matters related to student/parent conduct? TikTok challenges aside, the public should have confidence that matters related to teacher safety have been handled effectively and appropriately by the Association.

**Al Zhang**  
Do it for all public employees and that will be fair.

**Rose Howitt**  
It’s a distraction from something else they are pulling, or the Nazi content that was removed from her curriculum. This came out of nowhere. I don’t trust LaGrange, she doesn’t care about our kids, teachers or public education.

**Michelle Poulin**  
Whatever happened to some confidentiality in life ... what other profession has this posted all over for anyone to see?

### On the Nov. 2 editorial suggesting an end to standardized tests

**Tee Smith**  
Yes!! Standardized tests create additional stress for students, their families and teachers.

**On the Stand For Education advertising campaign**

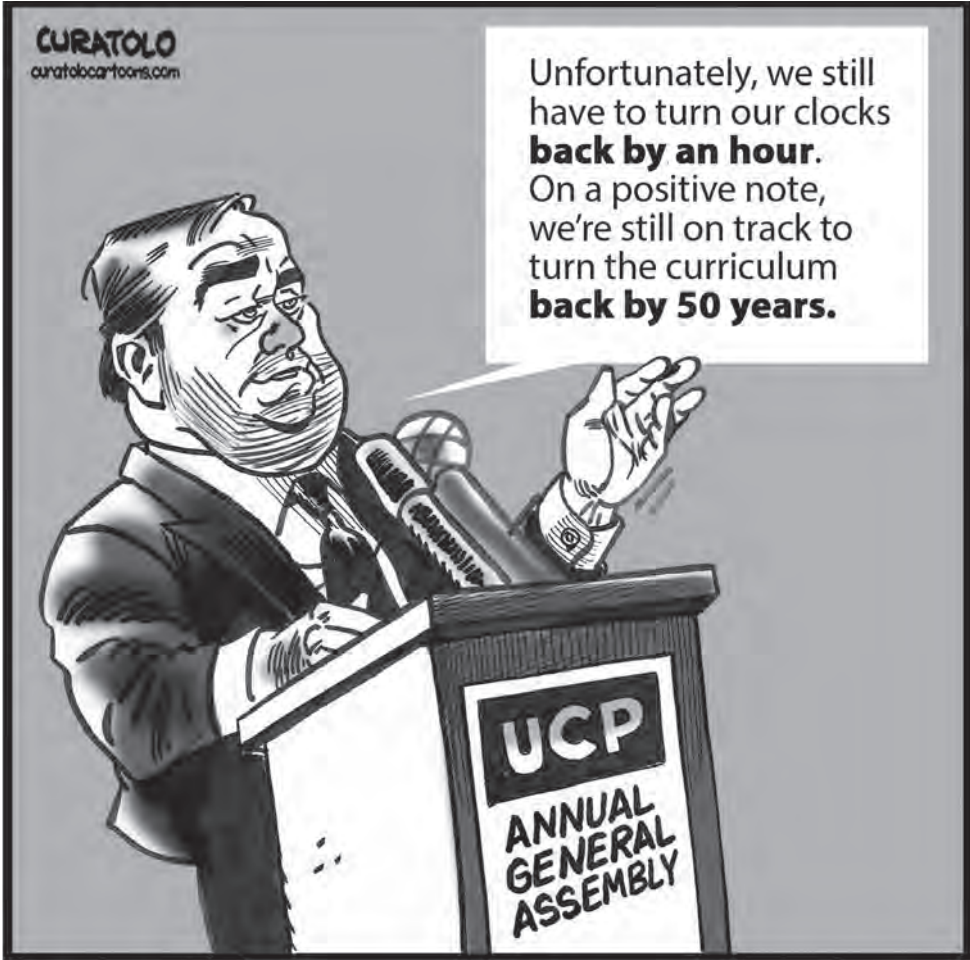
**Patricia Goertzen Cole**  
Because there has been an integrated classroom with extreme varying needs, it’s imperative to have smaller manageable class sizes. Larger class sizes inhibit learning on many levels. As far as curriculum goes, I’m still reading.

**Rachael Robinson**  
This draft curriculum cannot go through ... fight harder!!

**Joanne LaBrash**  
Keep religion out of education and politics!!

**Mary Lynn Maher**  
Ads are not enough.

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

“ In my opinion, none of her decisions to date have put children first. ”

- Letter to the editor published in the Red Deer Advocate following Education Minister Adriana LaGrange’s tabling of her *Students First Act*.





## Progress at the central table

Cory Hare  
ATA News Staff

Central table bargaining continued in early November with two full days of negotiations taking place and negotiators signing off on a minor change to the collective agreement.

Following two previous meetings in September and October, the Central Table Bargaining Committee (CTBC) met with the Teachers’ Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) on Nov. 8 and 9.

“In addition to the good conversation, I can say that some measurable progress has also been made, as we signed off on a minor change to the collective agreement,” said Carmen Glossop, CTBC member and district representative for Edmonton–McMurray.

Glossop is the author of the latest Bargainer’s Blog, which is now available in the “Bargaining Updates” section of the ATA website. The blog post outlines the need to avoid sharing details about

the changes that have been agreed to thus far.

“We’re making progress but, in order to maintain confidentiality at the table, we can’t share specifics at this time,” Glossop says.

With this round of negotiations, CTBC has taken a more interest-focused approach than it has in previous rounds. This process allows for a more thorough and deep understanding of the issues and interests of the other party, but progress can take longer.

“The interactions at the table continue to be positive and good dialogue is occurring on significant issues to teachers,” Glossop says.

One more bargaining date is scheduled to take place before the Christmas break and dates have also been confirmed for the new year.

As bargaining continues, teachers will continue to receive regular updates through the Bargainer’s Blog and emailed member’s updates. Anyone with questions is encouraged to reach out to your local Teacher Welfare Committee representative. ■



## Hope lies in action

The other day I was listening to a speaker talk about hope and resilience, and how as a society we need to examine them in the midst of cascading crises in our world. There are many challenges facing our profession: COVID, curriculum, collective bargaining, funding and op-ed articles that purposely misrepresent teachers. So how do we stay hopeful, especially since the pandemic keeps delivering setback after setback, stress after stress?

The first step is to be honest about what we are facing and move away from saying “it’s not so bad.” We need to then seek out allies, and with them, create a vision of the future we want to see, not the one that is being handed to us. This gives us agency to work toward that future, because if we don’t work together, we can’t address our concerns together. The speaker went on to comment that we need to challenge our way of thinking about hope. That we need to change our stance of saying “I hope that,” which is passive, to a stance of saying “I hope to,” which is more active, as the phrase “I hope to” is usually followed by a verb.

This comment really stuck with me, and I spent a lot of time reflecting

about it and how I can incorporate it into my own thinking. Instead of saying something like “I hope that the government listens” to whatever issue is of great concern (and there is a lot out there), it would be more effective to say something like “I hope to act on that issue.”

Let’s take the curriculum as an example. We could hope that the government listens to reason and to the majority of Albertans who say they oppose this draft and want to start over. But, as the speaker noted, that’s passive and leads to hopelessness, especially as we have seen the government not move off its plans. Instead, what if we changed it to something more active. I suggest that changing “hope” to “plan” makes it even more active, so the statement becomes “I plan to email my MLA this week about curriculum, or “I plan to read the ATA’s critical analysis of the curriculum and share it with one other person.”

It’s a small change but one that is more attainable especially in our busy lives. One small action at a time. One thing we can move toward. We know that many small things add up. One hopeful action at a time. ■

# Long-time coach the ATA’s newest staff officer

Jen Janzen  
ATA News Staff

With 30 years of experience in teaching and leadership with the Calgary Catholic School District, Richard Svoboda is the newest executive staff officer to join the Alberta Teachers’ Association.

Svoboda was appointed to the ATA’s Government program area, where he’ll specialize in conducting investigations as part of the discipline process. It’s an opportunity that suits his vast experience from teacher to principal, various central office roles to his last position as superintendent of human resources.

Svoboda said he’s excited to be involved in the ATA’s discipline process because the teaching profession is a position of trust and is called to a high standard.

“The discipline process creates accountability and public assurance to all parents that the ATA wants the best possible teachers in front of their children,” he said.

Forming relationships will be central to his new role, Svoboda said, adding that he’s learned the value of relationships through his extensive background in sports and coaching. Svoboda has coached high school football and basketball, and was assistant coach for the University of Calgary’s men’s basketball program and for the Alberta men’s under-17 basketball team.

“People don’t care what you know



Richard Svoboda is the ATA’s newest executive staff officer.

until they know you care,” he said. “I value being part of a team and being a contributing member to that team. In this role, you are dealing with people in their most vulnerable state, so fostering positive relationships goes a long way in conducting investigations.”

Svoboda holds degrees in physical education and education from the University of Calgary as well as a masters of educational leadership from Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington. He also holds a human resources certificate from Mount Royal University.

Beginning work on Nov. 1, Svoboda is based at the Southern Alberta Regional Office in Calgary. ■

## 7 MORE THINGS

### about Richard

- Who or what inspired you to be a teacher?**  
Originally I was going to be a physiotherapist, but through my phys-ed degree I started coaching, and I learned the enjoyment you get out of working with students, which has never left me. It also allowed me to follow in the steps of one of my heroes — my mother.
- What makes you the most excited to start work at the ATA?**  
The opportunity to make a difference in the lives of teachers creating the best possible conditions for students to learn.
- Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give yourself in your first year as a teacher?**  
Always focus on students and what is best for them. There are a lot of distractions in our world, but if you focus on your core purpose, everything else will take care of itself.
- What is the greatest life lesson teaching has taught you?**  
Perseverance — not everything in life is easy, but keep learning from the rollercoaster you are on and enjoy the ride. You only get to do it once.
- Favourite song to put you in a good mood**  
Most country music because it tells a good story
- Favourite COVID-safe winter activity**  
Working in the garage or watching basketball and football
- What kind of projects do you have on the go in your garage?**  
I like to work on cars doing detailing and minor body work.

### 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](mailto:cory.hare@ata.ab.ca).



# ATA supports proposed discipline changes

*Education minister's messaging misses the mark, says ATA president*

ATA News Staff

An online registry being proposed by the education minister would allow members of the public to see when teachers have been found guilty of unprofessional conduct.



FILE

Proposed amendments to the Teaching Profession Act will create an online record of teachers' certification status.

include some measures that the profession has been seeking for a number of years, but ATA president Jason Schilling is concerned with the minister's messaging.

"The public should have confidence that matters related to teacher conduct have been handled effectively and appropriately by the Association," says Schilling. "We have had a process that for years has ensured that teachers who behave inappropriately are dealt with and that teachers who have committed gross acts of misconduct are removed from the profession."

Schilling says the minister's recent op-ed column that appeared in several newspapers prior

The proposed change is part of a series of amendments to the *Teaching Profession Act* that Education Minister Adriana LaGrange has introduced via a bill she's calling the *Students First Act*.

Among other things, the changes would introduce an online registry that would share the certification status of teachers and teacher leaders.

The Alberta Teachers' Association welcomes the changes, which

to the legislation being announced amounted to grandstanding and didn't serve to support public confidence in the profession.

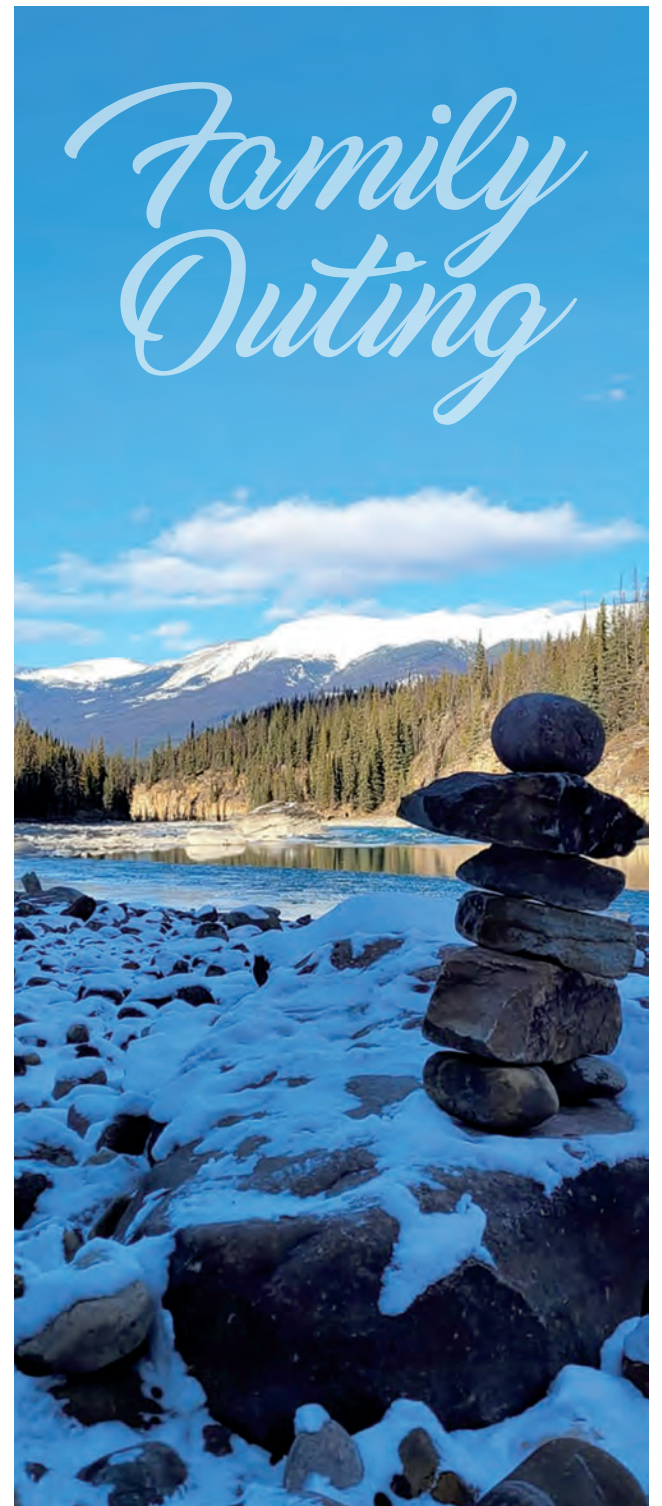
"It is unfortunate that the minister would choose to highlight, without context, a case in which she disagreed with the finding and penalty imposed by an independent discipline committee. That's fine; that is her right in legislation as the granter of teacher certificates, but her column was inflammatory and included many misrepresentations of how teacher conduct matters are handled in this province."

The ATA's process has included many measures to ensure openness and transparency, including hearings that are open to the public and hearing reports that are publicly available upon request. Additional transparency measures, like the online registry, were not possible without legislative or regulatory changes.

Schilling says many of the outstanding concerns related to teacher discipline matters relate to how the Government of Alberta handles the discipline of members not governed by the ATA. He says the process that has been used for superintendents and teachers in private and charter schools is much more secretive than the processes used by the Association, and he is hopeful that this legislation and associated regulations will resolve these issues.

For a considerable period of time now, the Alberta Teachers' Association has been interested in making changes to its decades-old professional conduct process that would create efficiencies and align them with the current standards and practices of other professional regulatory bodies.

"We hope the changes being proposed will enhance our processes to ensure the profession's ability to uphold high standards of conduct, protect the public interest and contribute toward public assurance," says Schilling. ■



ELIZABETH LING

Valerie Ling, a substitute teacher with the Sturgeon School Division, visited Athabasca Falls near Jasper during fall break. Her daughter took this photo after walking to the bottom of the falls and finding an inuksuk by the water's edge.

## Let's rebuild public education to build a better Canada



Sam Hammond

President, Canadian Teachers' Federation

When the pandemic closed schools and forced everyone to mask up and begin living and working remotely nearly two years ago, the biggest concern at the time was the virus itself. Little did we know the larger toll Covid would take in our communities in the months and perhaps years to follow.

Even as our country begins to emerge from under the Covid cloud — with the help of vaccines and ongoing safety protocols — this is certainly a new normal, what I've heard referred to as the *pandemic era*. As we know all too well, public education has been at the epicentre of Covid upheaval. In an instant, our understanding of teaching and learning was thrown into turmoil. The daily routines of students, parents, teachers and administrators were thrown by the wayside both in and out of the classroom.

The country was struck by a paradigm shift that pulled back the curtain showing deep cracks in our social systems. Issues ranging from poverty, gender equity, mental health, truth and reconciliation, and racial discrimination were left exposed for everyone to see, now impossible to ignore. It quickly became clear that the role of publicly funded public education wasn't solely preparing future generations for the future, but also helping to address serious social challenges.

I know how trying this pandemic has been on teachers, support personnel, students and their families. In too many parts of the country, the burden, from trying to keep everyone safe to attempting to

make distance learning workable, has been placed on the profession's shoulders, something for which we are all proud and willing to bear, but it isn't reasonable, and it isn't sustainable. The truth is, it hasn't been sustainable for a long time.

What we see across the country is an exhausted profession coupled with public education systems teetering like houses of cards as the virus and the scourge of declining mental health have collided head on with chronic underfunding, understaffing and increasing class sizes. It should not be this way.

Some groups go so far as to say that public education spending is too much. When we see how poorly supported and overworked teachers and educational staff are, you can't help but ask what these people think public education would look like with less. Publicly funded public education has been neglected for too long by governments, leaving teachers and school staff to continually apply bandages to keep the bleeding at bay. The pandemic ripped them off, exposing education's and society's cracks for all to see. It was time to act, and that is exactly what the CTF/FCE did.

Before the latest federal election, we knew that we had an opportunity to make public education a ballot issue. We asked Canadians what they thought, and what they told us humbled and invigorated us. Those polled overwhelmingly shared their support for publicly funded public education, including 90 per cent who consider public education as one of our most important public institutions. And an incredible 91 per cent want the federal government to ensure that access is made possible.

With these polling results in hand, we launched an advocacy campaign to put key federal issues facing

## CTF/FCE CORNER

f CTF-FCE @CanTeachersFed www.ctf-fce.ca

teachers, education support workers, students and their families on the ballot. Now, with the election settled, this is the moment to beginning fixing the cracks and strengthen our public education systems, which is why the Federation is calling on the federal government to create a national table for public education to speak with one unified voice.

The teaching profession, academics and civil society will be seated at that table to work with provinces and territories to tackle key issues, such as

- establishing national guidelines for publicly funded public education;
- developing national standards for emergency preparedness;
- implementing legislation to stop the privatization of publicly funded public education;
- protecting and promoting the French language in minority settings; and
- coordinating national programs aimed at poverty alleviation, anti-racism, and truth and reconciliation.

With the full weight of CTF/FCE's membership, we can begin to right the ship. Although public education may not be in the federal jurisdiction, it certainly is in the national interest. Together we can make our publicly funded public education systems stronger and more inclusive to create equitable education conditions across the country, and, in doing, start to rebuild what we have lost. ■

To learn more about the campaign's priorities and more, and to find out how you can encourage your provincial and territorial governments to take action, please visit [www.voteeducation.ca](http://www.voteeducation.ca).



# ATA 101

AN INTRODUCTION TO  
YOUR ASSOCIATION

## The history of unions



ATA 101 is a feature series aimed at informing members, both new and experienced, about various aspects of the Alberta Teachers' Association. This instalment provides a brief glimpse of the history of unions in North America and beyond. Watch for additional instalments in upcoming issues of the ATA News.



**Alvin Finkel**  
Special to the  
ATA News

Rebellions by working people denied means to protest their grievances against employers have ancient roots. Slave rebellions in the Roman Empire and strikes by day labourers in medieval cities are examples. But it took the Industrial Revolution of the late 1700s and gathering large groups of workers in factories to create the ongoing collective organizations of workers that we now call unions. The grim conditions of work that Charles Dickens portrayed convinced many workers that they could achieve more by combining their forces than as individuals.

The term “trade union” emerged because most workers who initially combined their forces in Europe and then European colonies were trade-based. These were skilled workers who demonstrated solidarity within their trade via unions. Unions sought to bargain with employers on behalf of their members to improve wages and working conditions.

Until the 1870s, such efforts were considered illegal. In Britain, for example, combination laws from 1799 until the *Trade Union Act* of 1871 defended the right of employers to deal with each worker as an individual, labelling organizations that wanted

collective negotiation by workers as “combinations in restraint of trade.”

Though collective bargaining and strikes were illegal, a general strike in Scotland in 1820 involved 60,000 workers. The state crushed their revolt. Other illegal strikes followed, and on the continent, the unions played important roles in the attempted overthrow of monarchies in 1848. With bans unworkable, governments eventually passed legislation that gave trade unions a legal status but constrained their operations so that the union’s institutional funds could be seized if an employer’s interests were harmed by workers’ actions, including strikes.

While unions had varied ability to force employers to bargain, most also became member insurance organizations. They used union dues to aid workers and their families without income because of illness, work accidents or temporary unemployment. Unions also lobbied for all workers, or at least male workers, to be enfranchised since most countries restricted the vote to entrepreneurs and homeowners.

### Repression and politics

By the late 19th century, the relative success of trades in improving their status encouraged many less-skilled, easily replaceable industrial workers such as coalminers and railway labourers to form industrial unions that organized all workers in a workplace or industry into one union. Governments and employers responded with repression. That encouraged unionists to sponsor socialist parties that called for the replacement of private ownership of enterprises with public ownership. In turn, the threat that an organized working class posed for owners of capital drew concessions from otherwise conservative governments in favour of blue-collar workers.

That began in Germany in the 1880s, where Chancellor Otto Von Bismarck had initially responded to worker

*Among groups that began to unionize during the First World War were white collar workers, including teachers. Teachers had many complaints. School boards often dictated what they could wear and how they ran their personal lives. Pensions were unknown. Teacher pay was poor and female teachers were paid far less than male teachers.*



activism by banning the Socialist Party and placing unions under government surveillance. When he recognized that such measures increased the restiveness of workers, Bismarck introduced sickness insurance, accident insurance, and old-age and disability insurance to persuade workers that the system could respond to their needs. Only blue-collar workers were covered, though over time, pressure from other workers made these programs universal.

In North America, where industrialism came later than in Europe, both governments and employers proved more resistant to worker-friendly changes. The *Canadian Trade Unions Act* of 1872 legalized unions but not collective bargaining. Employers faced no legal requirement to bargain, and contracts signed with unions were unenforceable.

Until the Great Depression, North American unions were heavily weighted to the trades. High unemployment before the First World War prevented most Canadian workers from unionizing. A major issue for workers who did unionize was to reduce the workday, which was often 10 hours, six days a week to nine hours, five days a week. The concept of a “weekend” was unknown in the 19th century before union struggles gradually made it a reality for their members.

During the war, labour shortages removed workers’ fear of dismissal. Production workers and civic employees alike opposed high wartime profits that came at the expense of wages that failed to match inflation. Not only did workers threaten strikes to get concessions from employers, but they successfully persuaded unionized workers in other workplaces to also threaten to strike in a show of solidarity that might cause their employers to pressure the recalcitrant employer to accept union demands.

In September 1918, Calgary freight handlers, facing threatened federal back-to-work legislation, persuaded half the city’s unionized workers to join them



Between 1914 and 1920, teacher organizations formed in all of Canada’s provinces. Pictured here is the first board of the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, which formed in 1920.

ATA ARCHIVES



in a general strike if the government failed to quickly come to an agreement. They did. One month later, the Edmonton local of the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees (CBRE) was only able to reach a settlement with the railways after the unions belonging to the Edmonton Trades and Labour Council threatened a solidarity strike if the railway companies did not settle with the CBRE.

As the war ended, and unemployment returned, Canada's vastly expanded union movement confronted employers determined to reverse workers' wartime gains. The continuing erosion of workers' wages by inflation and the lack of social policies to protect unemployed or ill workers created militancy across a wide spectrum of the working class.

In 1919, metalworking and construction unions in Winnipeg, stymied by obstreperous employers, decided to strike and asked other unionized workers to join them. On May 15, when the strike started, many were surprised when 35,000 Winnipeg workers walked off the job, two thirds of whom were not even unionized. They stayed off the job for six weeks until the federal government used force to end the strike. The Winnipeg General Strike had echoes in other cities, including Calgary and Edmonton, where many unionized workers went on strike for about a month. Everywhere the demand was for employers to accept the right of workers to unionize, to bargain collectively and to strike when agreements could not be reached.

### Teachers join the movement

Among groups that began to unionize during the First World War were white collar workers, including teachers. Teachers had many complaints. School boards often dictated what they could wear and how they ran their personal lives. Pensions were unknown. Teacher pay was poor and female teachers were paid far less than male teachers. The Saskatchewan Union of Teachers,

formed in 1914, led the way in the formation of provincewide associations. The BC Teachers' Federation, whose first convention was in 1917, was second, followed the same year by the Alberta Teachers' Alliance. Several associations were formed in Ontario, beginning in 1918. When the Canadian Teachers' Federation was founded in 1920, every province had at least one provincial organization of teachers. The first teachers' strike in Canada occurred in Victoria in 1919. It was a successful two-day strike to win pay hikes.

Union membership across North America dipped precipitously after the First World War in the face of an employer assault and high unemployment. Pro-union legislation promoted by President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s countered employer resistance, allowing industrial unions to establish in manufacturing plants.

More conservative governments in Canada deterred similar successes here. Only Nova Scotia and Alberta, in 1937 and 1938 respectively, passed legislation before the Second World War to legalize and enforce collective bargaining contracts. During the war, with unemployment again vanquished, the Canadian union membership doubled and the labour movement successfully pressured first the federal government and then all provincial governments to legislate collective bargaining procedures.

Until the late 1950s, the Canadian labour movement consisted mostly of male blue-collar workers. But white-collar workers had begun to unionize as well, including supermarket employees and municipal workers. In the 1960s they were joined by provincial and federal employees, including professionals in female-dominated sectors such as nursing, teaching and social work.

Until then they had been low-paid workers with little control within their workplaces. They were members of associations that had earlier downplayed collective bargaining, regarding strikes

as uncouth. Now they demanded to be treated as highly trained professionals who merited pay and decision-making participation befitting their credentials and challenging work. They raised such issues as understaffing, overwork and opportunities for professional development. Like blue-collar workers before them, white-collar professionals demanded decent benefits, paid vacations and ample old-age pensions. They were willing to strike to achieve their demands.

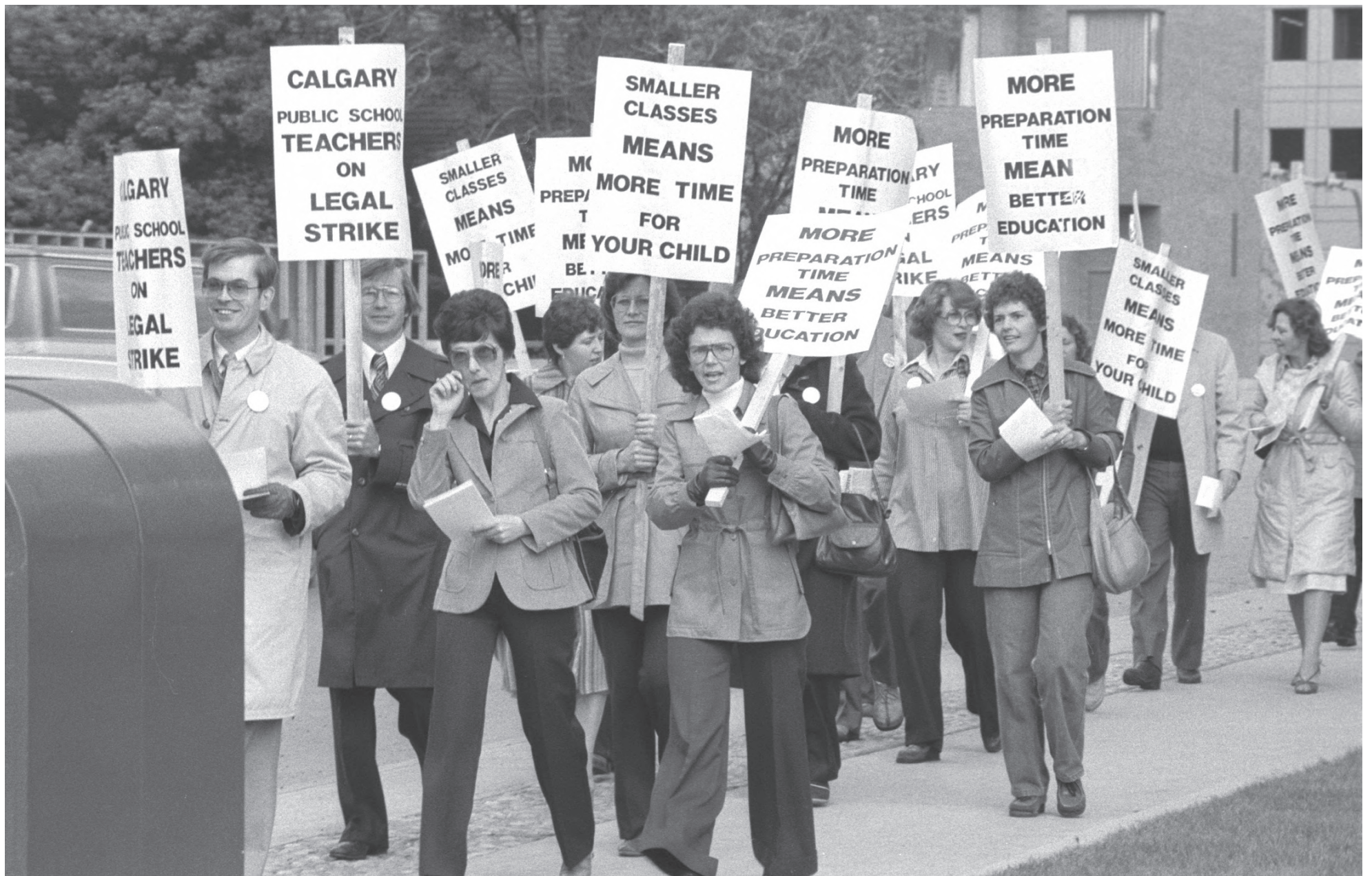
The labour movement had always been involved in politics, lobbying for union-friendly legislation and for social programs of benefit to working people. Union pressure was a key factor in winning universal medicare in Canada. Lobbying for healthy social programs became even more important as public sector workers became the majority of trade unionists.

In 2020, 31.3 per cent of Canadian non-farm workers were covered by a collective agreement. That represented

a 6.4 per cent decline from a peak in 1981. Declining employment in the manufacturing sector, austerity campaigns in the public sectors, and the prevalence of precarious/casual employment in the burgeoning, largely non-unionized service sectors, all present challenges to a Canadian labour movement that is nonetheless almost three times as strong as its American counterpart thanks to somewhat more labour-friendly legislation. Studies showed that the "union effect" for workers includes better occupational health and safety provisions, better wages and benefits, better opportunities to launch successful grievances against employers and an additional year of life expectancy. ■

*Alvin Finkel is author, co-author or co-editor of 13 history books, including Working People in Alberta: A History. He is president of the Alberta Labour History Institute and professor emeritus of history at Athabasca University.*

*The labour movement had always been involved in politics, lobbying for union-friendly legislation and for social programs of benefit to working people. Union pressure was a key factor in winning universal medicare in Canada. Lobbying for healthy social programs became even more important as public sector workers became the majority of trade unionists.*



ATA ARCHIVES

The first teacher's strike in Canada occurred in Victoria in 1919. Here teachers from the Calgary Public local walk the picket line during a 1980 strike that resulted in 41 school days lost.



# Who's who – Provincial Executive Council members and local presidents 2021/22

## TABLE OFFICERS



**JASON SCHILLING**  
ATA President



**GREG CARABINE**  
ATA Vice-President



**JENNY REGAL**  
ATA Vice-President



**GREG JEFFERY**  
ATA Past President

## NORTH WEST



**PETER MacKAY**  
District Rep



**MYRNA McLEAN**  
Fort Vermilion  
Local No. 77



**RHONDA KELLY**  
Grande Prairie and  
District Catholic  
Teachers Local No. 42



**MICHAEL ALDRIDGE**  
Greater Peace  
Local No. 13



**JENNIFER TAYLOR**  
High Prairie  
Local No. 62



**DEBBIE HARRIS**  
Northern Spirit  
Local No. 6



**KRISTEL LADEROUTE**  
Northland  
Local No. 69



**DOUGLAS TORDOFF**  
Trumpeter  
Local No. 26

## CENTRAL EAST



**MURRAY LALONDE**  
District Rep



**STEPHANIE CUMBLETON**  
Aspen View Local No. 7



**KARIN BRUSSÉ-PATERSON**  
Battle River Local  
No. 32



**LEON WARD**  
Greater St. Paul Local  
No. 25



**LYNNÉ VINING**  
Lakeland Catholic  
Separate Local No. 30



**MARJORIE CHARLES**  
Northern Lights  
Local No. 15



**BRIAN SKINNER**  
Park Plains East  
Local No. 31

## CENTRAL NORTH



**RICK KREMP**  
District Rep



**JESSIE SMEALL**  
Evergreen Local  
No. 11



**VANESSA AMYOTTE**  
Evergreen Catholic  
Local No. 44



**KATRINA ZACK**  
Northern Gateway  
Local No. 43



**SARAH CRESSWELL**  
Parkland Teachers'  
Local No. 10



**MICHELLE SAVOIE**  
Pembina Hills Local  
No. 22



**KIMBERLEY NAHIRNIAK**  
Woodland Rivers  
Local No. 40

## SOUTH EAST



**HEATHER McCAIG**  
District Rep



**BRENT MEYER**  
Grasslands Local  
No. 34



**ALLAN THOMPSON**  
Medicine Hat  
Local No. 1



**DEANNA BURZINSKI**  
Medicine Hat Catholic  
Teachers Local No. 39



**DOUG LERKE**  
Prairieland Local  
No. 36



**STUART SHIGEHIRO**  
Prairie Rose Local  
No. 2



**MICHAEL ROBERTSON**  
Three Drums of  
Wheat Local No. 20

## SOUTH WEST



**KATHERINE PRITCHARD**  
District Rep



**JOHN TEMPLIN**  
Holy Spirit Catholic  
Local No. 5



**WALTER PLUMTREE**  
Horizon Local No. 4



**DEREK RESLER**  
Lethbridge Public  
School Local No. 41



**RON GILLESPIE**  
Livingstone Range  
Local No. 14



**NATALIE TOWNSHEND**  
Palliser Local No. 19



**STEPHEN GIBBINGS**  
Westwind Local No. 12







# Have an issue with a colleague?

*Teachers’ code of conduct requires that you address it with them first*



## PITFALLS AND PRECAUTIONS

**Chris Gibbon**  
ATA Secretary to Professional Conduct Committees

*Pitfalls and Precautions is a series that aims to educate teachers on professional conduct issues by highlighting situations addressed by the ATA Professional Conduct Committee.*

Concerns with a colleague? The parking lot or your classroom is not a place to raise the issue, especially when your colleague is not present and instead you are venting to other colleagues or staff members. Teachers have an obligation under the Code of Professional Conduct to raise concerns with their colleagues first before going to proper officials. A teacher found themselves in front of a hearing committee of the professional conduct committee for failure to observe these two sections of the code. Instead of going to their colleagues first, this teacher chose to speak with a central office staff member about several of their school leaders, past and present, before raising their concerns with the individual teachers. The teacher made allegations that were critical of many administrators and their competence to act in a leadership role.

The teacher again behaved poorly when they sent emails to other teachers and support staff in which they were critical as to how their principal both managed and operated the school. They also went so far as to canvas other teachers to bring forward any complaints or concerns they had about their principal.

### Code of professional conduct

#### Section 13

The teacher criticizes the professional competence or professional reputation of another teacher only in confidence to proper officials and after the other teacher has been informed of the criticism, subject only to section 24 of the *Teaching Profession Act*.

#### Section 14

The teacher, when making a report on the professional performance of another teacher, does so in good faith and, prior to submitting the report, provides the teacher with a copy of the report, subject only to section 24 of the *Teaching Profession Act*.

As a result of their actions, the teacher received a letter of severe reprimand from the Alberta Teachers’ Association. While some may say that it’s “just a letter,” keep in mind that if a teacher applies to work for another school division, employers will ask on their application form whether they have ever been found guilty of unprofessional conduct.

The hearing decision is also sent to the registrar, so even moving out of province will not protect a teacher from having to disclose their sanction from the Association, as other jurisdictions will check with the registrar in Alberta prior to granting certification in that province.

Teachers have a responsibility under the code to raise their concerns with their colleagues first before bringing their concerns forward to the proper officials. In this case, the teacher failed to honour the code. ■

# Council approves ongoing support for ASCA

## PEC POINTS

**Audrey Dutka**  
ATA News Staff

### Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held Oct. 28–29, 2021, via Zoom.

1. Approved in principle and referred to Finance Committee for costing a proposed list of programs on which the Association should focus in 2022/23.
2. Approved the Association’s 2021/22 capital budget.
3. Amended Administrative Guidelines to update the capitalization threshold for capital expenditures to more closely reflect industry standards.
4. Authorized a financial contribution of \$3,500 for disbursement to the Education International Solidarity Fund, through the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, to assist trade unionists and teachers affected by the earthquake in Haiti.
5. Authorized an expenditure of \$35,000 for disbursement to the Alberta School Councils’ Association (ASCA) in the 2021/22 fiscal year and that a similar amount of ongoing support to ASCA be built into the Association’s prognosis for consideration in future budget years.
6. Approved the name of one teacher for addition to the Association Instructors Name Bank. The bank is

used as a source of appointments to the Association Instructors corps as the need arises.

7. Authorized the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee to endorse the Vote Housing campaign.
8. Amended the Model Teacher Welfare Committee frame of reference to include that, wherever possible, given their role as the spokesperson for the local during negotiations and disputes, the local president should not be a member of the Negotiating Subcommittee.
9. Amended the frame of reference for the Grande Prairie Public School Division Teacher Welfare Committee.
10. Named a field member to serve on the Campus Saint-Jean Area Field Experiences Committee and authorized the name of an individual as the Association’s nomination to the Canadian Teachers’ Federation for appointment to the National Advisory Committee on Inclusionary Policies and Practices.
11. Amended the frame of reference for the Indigenous Education Committee to include a non-voting representative from the Alberta Native Friendship Centre; amended the frame of reference for the Benefits, Insurance and Pension Committee to reflect changes to the Alberta Teachers’ Retirement Fund Board representative; amended the frame of reference for the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights (DEHR) Committee to include that it promote and showcase the work of local DEHR committees; and amended the frame of reference for the Communications, Advocacy and Public Education Committee to include that it showcase the work of locals in public relations throughout the province. ■



## SEEKING FURRY SUBMISSIONS!

**The ATA News is seeking entries for Teacher’s Pet, which profiles teachers’ furry, feathered or even scaled friends.**

If you have a cuddly companion that you’d like to share with your colleagues, please send us a picture, along with the following required information:

- Your name, grade, school and the subject(s) you teach
- Your pet’s name and breed

Also, please answer these two questions:

- 1) What makes your pet special?
- 2) How does your pet help you in your profession?

A selection of entries will be published in an upcoming issue of the *ATA News*.

**Please email your submissions to [cory.hare@ata.ab.ca](mailto:cory.hare@ata.ab.ca).**

**DEADLINE: DEC. 14**



## The ATA Educational Trust

The ATA Educational Trust is a charitable organization that has been supporting public education and providing grants to advance teaching practices in Alberta for over 30 years.

**Apply for a \$700 Dr B T Keeler Continuing Education Bursaries** for teachers wishing to advance their knowledge and teaching skills in a subject area through taking courses.

**Application deadline: May 1, 4:00 PM**

[www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) > My ATA > Programs and Services > Grants, Awards and Scholarships > ATA Educational Trust





# Announcing: The Launch of “The Building Futures in Alberta” Program

A program of the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education (CFEE) funded in part by Alberta Education to improve the financial literacy of Alberta youth



The “**Building Futures in Alberta**” website - [www.buildingfuturesinalberta.com](http://www.buildingfuturesinalberta.com) - has a host of free resources to help teachers provide financial education for Alberta students.

Teachers will find lesson plans linked to Alberta curriculum learning outcomes from grade 7 through 12 and a new online, interactive self-instruction program “**FinLit 101.**”

“**Talk With Our Kids About Money Virtual Money Fair Challenge**” provides an opportunity for students ages 8-14 to win up to **\$5,000** while learning valuable lessons about money.

“**My Money, My Future Challenge**” provides an opportunity for students ages 15-18 to win up to **\$10,000** as they create new resources to help other youth learn about money.

“The *Building Futures in Alberta*” program aims to provide fun, engaging, and participatory opportunities to learn about money and to help our youth build a successful financial future.



Additional funding provided by:



CFEE IS A NON-PROFIT, NON-PARTISAN, CHARITABLE ORGANIZATION ABLE TO PROVIDE FREE RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND YOUTH WITH SUPPORT FROM PARTNERS SUCH AS CIBC, NATIONAL BANK, AND IG WEALTH MANAGEMENT.





## You Teach to Make a Difference. So Do We.

**The Post-Graduate Certificate in Special Education for Alberta Teachers** delivers the in-depth theory and practice you need to ensure positive learning experiences for students with Special Education needs. Consisting of 3 core courses and 2 electives **offered fully online**, the certificate covers Special Education policies and practices in Alberta, as well as the cognitive, academic, and social-emotional implications of various learning needs. Through collaboration, discussion, and instructor engagement, you will be given the tools and resources required to lead successful delivery of Special Education. The Post-Graduate Certificate in Special Education also grants you advanced standing in our Post-Graduate Diploma, and Professional Masters of Education.



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[www.cisgz.com](http://www.cisgz.com)



Canadian International  
School of Phnom Penh  
Nursery to Grade 11  
[www.cisp.edu.kh](http://www.cisp.edu.kh)

How to apply?



Scan to see available positions or check school websites  
for vacancies and application details.





**Teacher Pia and Maria**  
*the Radio Play!*

by Bianca Miranda and Joshua Dalledonne  
Directed by Mieko Ouchi

**K-6**

Audio tour available!  
January 24 - February 11, 2022

Study Guide included:  
\$50/classroom or \$300/school

Plays by Patricia Cerra, Marissa Kochanski & Dave Clarke and Mika Laulainen

Digital tour available for schools and families!  
December 11 - 31, 2021  
Recorded in May 2021

ASL Interpretation included:  
\$50/classroom // \$300/school




**K-6**


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The Alberta Teachers' Association



Alberta School Councils' Association



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- Bigger Class Sizes During COVID-19
- A Disastrous New Curriculum

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CALGARY REGION



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- reliable, researched information
- evidence based strategies
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- a professional community dedicated to the success of those with LD or ADHD

LDADHDnetwork.ca





DIGITAL NEWS

The ATA News is available in a digital format.

For the latest issue, visit [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) > News and Info > ATA News. Subscribe to receive an email when a new issue is available.





# Saving money is part of the curriculum

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# Are you interested in facilitating workshops?

## BECOME AN ASSOCIATION INSTRUCTOR!

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 January 2022.

### The application process has three parts:

1. 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
2. Download and complete the application form on the Alberta Teachers’ Association website (see below for website information).
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 and provides an honorarium for workshops delivered. Additionally, new instructors will attend next year’s ATA Summer Conference in Banff, August 8-12, 2022. 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 and hold an Alberta teaching certificate.

### APPLICATION DEADLINE IS NOVEMBER 30, 2021.

Send your letter of interest, resume, and completed application form to Nancy Luyckfassel, ATA Associate Coordinator, Professional Development, Alberta Teachers’ Association, [nancy.luyckfassel@ata.ab.ca](mailto:nancy.luyckfassel@ata.ab.ca)

**For information or to download an application form, visit [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca)** > My ATA > Engage with us > Getting Involved as an Individual > Joining a Corps > Association Instructors.

*In making an application to become an Association instructor for the Alberta Teachers’ Association, you are voluntarily providing your personal information to the ATA. Visit the ATA website for more information.*

## Your ATRF Webinars

ATRF offers a variety of webinars throughout the year. Find one the suits you and register today.

**The seminars below are held on Saturdays at 9:00am:**

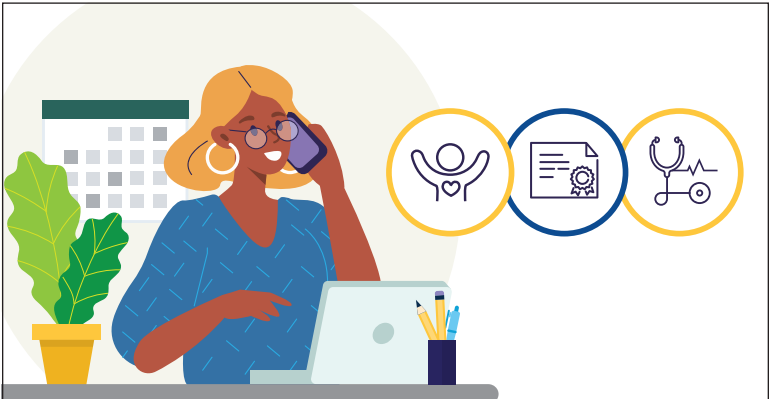
- Steps to Retirement - Nov. 27 & Jan. 8
- Substitute Teachers - Dec. 4
- Your Pension Matters - Jan. 15
- New Members - Jan. 22

Sign in to MyPension to register.



Visit [ATRF.com](http://ATRF.com)






## Planning a leave of absence?


### Make sure your e-mail is up to date!

Effective December 2021, requests for payment will now be sent via e-mail, not letter.


Make sure you maintain your membership status in good standing, by paying your leave of absence fees when you take a leave. The Association invoices teachers on leave twice a year (in September and February).



**To update your membership profile,** visit [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) and click on Update your Profile.



**For more information on leaves of absence,** visit [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) and click on My ATA > Pay and Benefits > Leaves of Absence.

The Alberta Teachers’ Association

COMM-287 2021 08

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## Apply now for an ATA Fellowship or Scholarship

### Applications are now being accepted for the following:

<b>ATA Doctoral Fellowships in Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Two awards of \$15,000</li><li>• For members entering or in first year of a doctoral program in education</li></ul>	<b>Nadene M Thomas Graduate Research Bursary</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One award of \$5,000</li><li>• For a member enrolled in a graduate program in education</li><li>• A research focus on teacher health issues and/or teachers’ working conditions</li></ul>	<b>John Mazurek Memorial – Morgex Insurance Scholarship</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• One award of \$2,500</li><li>• For members who pursue relevant professional development</li></ul>
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**For more information and to apply**

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

**Application deadline:**  
March 1, 2022

The Alberta Teachers’ Association





Students at Fort McMurray's Thickwood Heights School created a series of artistic displays as part of the Gord Downie Wenjack Legacy Schools program.

SUPPLIED

# Walking with Wenjack

## Fort McMurray students connect with Secret Path project

### SUCCESS STORIES

David Parsons and Shirley Oldnall  
Special to the ATA News

As part of the Gord Downie Wenjack Legacy Schools program, students at Fort McMurray's Thickwood Heights School created a very meaningful display for Secret Path Week, which took place from Oct. 17 to 22.

The whole school participated in creating a series of displays in the school gymnasium. The hard work and commitment of the teachers and students was evident in the age-appropriate, deep learning demonstrated in every display.

Paper bag mask lanterns lined the path between each display, evoking yet another settler tradition replacing Indigenous traditions at school.

The kindergarten display of moss bags paid honour to call to action No. 5: *We call on all governments in Canada to help parents in ways that respect their cultures and ways of life.*

Early childhood students laid body shapes on the ground in homage to

### Chanie's story

On Oct. 22, 1966, the body of 12-year-old Chanie Wenjack was found next to the railway tracks. A week earlier, Wenjack had run away from a residential school in Kenora, Ont. He was trying to walk home to his family in Ogoki Post, some 600 kilometres away.

### About the program

The Gord Downie Wenjack Legacy Schools program is a free national initiative to engage, empower and connect students and educators to further reconciliation through awareness, education and action. A *reconciliACTION* is a meaningful action that moves reconciliation forward and aims to bring Indigenous and non-Indigenous people together in the spirit of reconciliation to create awareness, share and learn.

<https://downiewenjack.ca/our-work/legacy-schools-programs/>

those who were lost to the system. Grade 1 students made decorative eagle feathers symbolizing the gift of love residential school children should have received throughout their lives. Patterned footprints along the wall showed that Grade 2 students were "walking with Wenjack."

The grade 2/3s created a display entitled Shannen's Dream, based on the experience of Shannen Koostachin, a former student from Ontario's Attawapiskat First Nation who advocated for equitable education.

That residential students were only numbers and had no names was presented with beautiful art from Grade 3.

A diorama of a residential school and unmarked graves showed that the Grade 4s were able to connect

past events with contemporary news. Grade 5 presented artwork depicting that arduous journey that ended along the railway line. Poetry, artwork and an installation of the nightmare from the book *Fatty Legs* showed the Grade 6's understanding of systemic maltreatment and neglect.

As a concrete "ReconciliAction," Thickwood students made and sold handmade necklaces featuring a carved bone turtle representing the Teaching Truth. The emphasis this year is on always seeking truth with respect, love, courage, honesty, wisdom and humility.

Thickwood raised \$1,000, which has been gifted to the Gord Downie Wenjack Foundation. ■

David Parsons is the principal of Thickwood Heights Elementary School in Fort McMurray.

Shirley Oldnall is a teacher and First Nation Metis and Inuit liaison at Thickwood Heights Elementary School.



SUPPLIED



SUPPLIED

### Call for Submissions

Success Stories is an ongoing feature that enables teachers to share their successes with their colleagues. To submit an idea or an article about a new program or approach that you've instituted, please contact managing editor Cory Hare at [cory.hare@ata.ab.ca](mailto:cory.hare@ata.ab.ca).