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Speaking out

Page 5

Working group members open the vault on curriculum

Off Script

with ATA President Jason Schilling

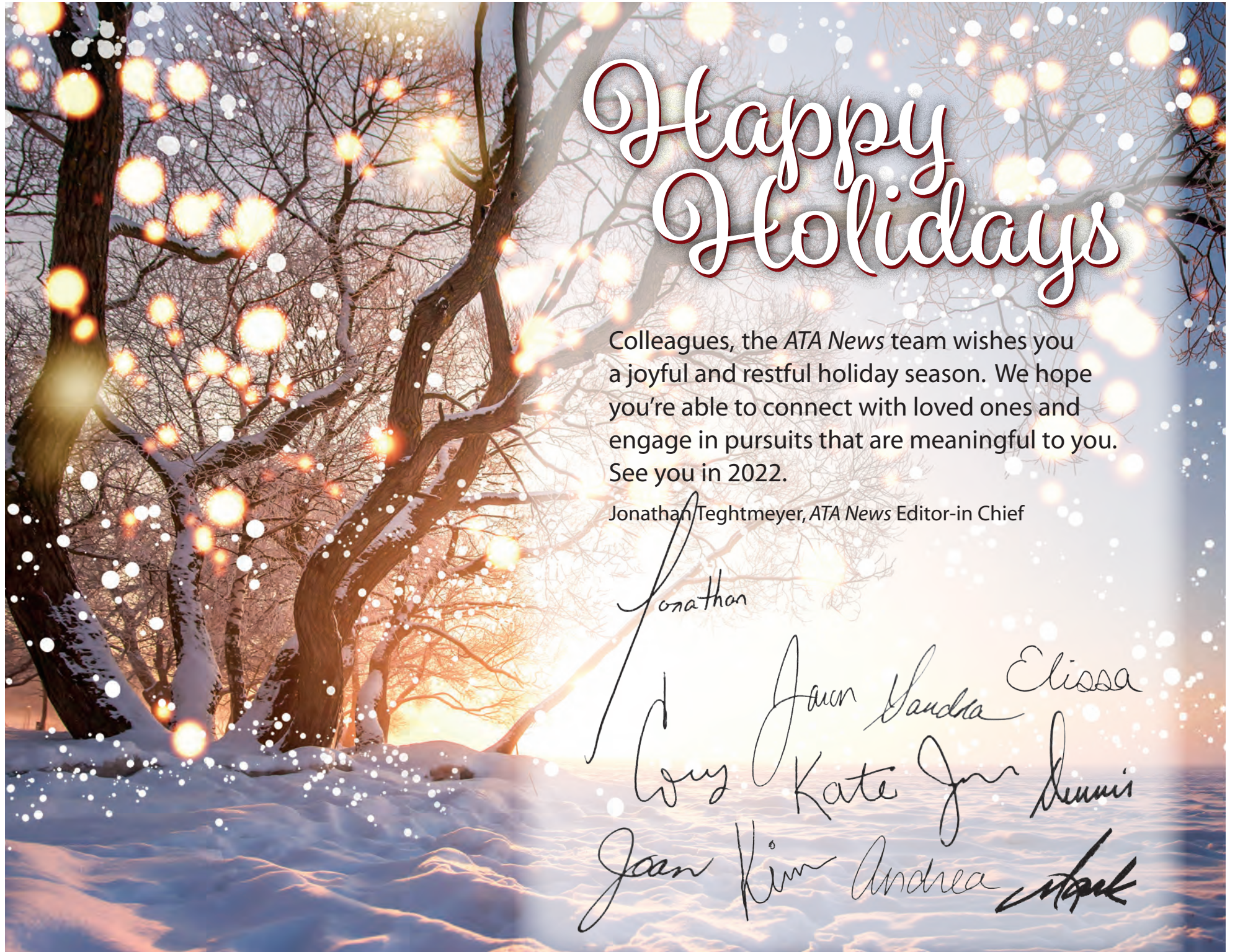


Happy holidays
See page 4.

ATA NEWS

December 7, 2021 | Volume 56, Number 6

News Publication of The Alberta Teachers' Association



Happy Holidays

Colleagues, the ATA News team wishes you a joyful and restful holiday season. We hope you're able to connect with loved ones and engage in pursuits that are meaningful to you. See you in 2022.

Jonathan Teghtmeyer, ATA News Editor-in Chief

Jonathan
Jason Sandra Elissa
Cory Kate Jon Dennis
Joan Kim Andrea



Targeted attack

Government's election spending act is an assault on Charter rights.

Read Jonathan Teghtmeyer's editorial on page 2.



ATA welcomes release of child vaccine

Association urges parents to have children immunized as soon as possible.

See story on page 4.



ATA 101: An introduction to your Association

History lessons from Alberta teacher strikes.

See story on page 9.



Tale End

Teachers share holiday wishes.

Page 12

Bill 81 is a targeted attack on Charter freedoms



EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

In the leadup to the hastily called 2015 provincial election, the ATA put together a campaign to draw attention to issues affecting public education and asked voters to “vote for candidates who support standing up for our students.”

You may remember the innovative peel-down cards that featured a classic school crossing road sign with two stick figures in it, under the word “Perception.” After peeling down the front, the card then read, “Reality” and showed 17 figures crammed onto the same sign, plus one more student hanging from the edge. The punchline read “18,000 more students are added to Alberta’s schools each year. Make sure your vote supports them all.”

Alberta’s chief electoral officer received a complaint that the advertising violated new rules restricting third party election advertising. He immediately wrote a letter to the ATA saying he was launching an investigation under the subject line, “Cease and Desist Letter for Third Party Advertisers who are not Complying with the Requirements of Section 44.8 of the EFCDA.”

You see, the new rules required parties that undertook “election advertising” to register with the chief electoral officer, to comply with spending limits and to include specific authorization statements on the ads. The act defined election advertising as advertising that is promoting or opposing a party or candidate, but also included “advertising that takes a position on an issue with which a registered party or registered candidate is associated.”

In a superbly worded response letter, ATA lawyers essentially asked what the point of launching an investigation would be when the subject line of the letter seemed to indicate that the chief electoral officer had already reached its conclusion. But moreover, the letter argued that the Association was not promoting or opposing any particular party (we do not do that), nor was it taking a stance on an issue associated with any party.

“All parties to our knowledge have policies that they say provide appropriate support for schools and the public education system generally,” the letter stated.

The ATA’s letter also noted that if the third-party advertising legislation intended to prohibit the type of non-partisan expression made here, then it “would surely infringe on the Association’s right of freedom of expression under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.”

Nine months later, the chief electoral officer responded to the ATA to state that his office was ceasing the investigation because there were insufficient grounds to warrant its continuation.

Years later, both the chief electoral officer and the ATA submitted recommendations to the legislature that the law should be amended to remove restrictions on this type of issues-based advertising. Bill 81, introduced by the UCP government this fall, proposes that amendment for advertising done outside of an election period, but not for advertising done in the five months leading up to election day.

But that is just the beginning of the issues with Bill 81.

The legislation places extremely low restrictions on how much groups can contribute to political advertising. Furthermore, it makes it so that only individuals can contribute to an advertising campaign held during the five-month pre-election period. These changes would effectively eliminate the possibility that the ATA could fund a third-party advertising campaign on behalf of teachers.

It goes on to state that groups “affiliated” with a political party cannot be third-party advertisers, which seems fair until you see how broadly it defines that affiliation. A whole group could be considered affiliated if it has people

who serve (even in a voluntary capacity on their own time) in a named position on a party or if it has previously made public statements that align with the views of one party or another.

These changes are clearly aimed at knee-capping the ability of the Alberta Federation of Labour, specifically, and all unions more generally, from speaking out against government policy.

There is no way to view them as anything but an undemocratic infringement on the freedoms of association and expression outlined in the Charter.

Unfortunately, successful legal challenges may not even save your freedoms.

Earlier this year, a similar law put forward by Premier Doug Ford in Ontario was struck down by the courts as being unconstitutional. That government responded by reintroducing parts of the law invoking the Charter’s notwithstanding clause, a rarely used power allowing governments to temporarily override rights and freedoms in five-year stints.

Would Premier Jason Kenney do the same thing here to advance this unconstitutional election gag law?

I suppose that depends on whether you think he would stop at nothing to win an election. ■

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

ATA did its job in Michael Gregory matter



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

Question: I heard media reports that the Alberta Teachers’ Association did not report sexual assaults on students to police? What is going on?

Answer: Recently a class action lawsuit was brought against the Calgary Board of Education alleging that the board failed to take action against Michael Gregory, a teacher with the district from 1986 to 2006, who died by suicide after being charged with sexual offences against former students. In the course of reporting and subsequent commentary by the minister of education, the impression was left that the Association was aware of these allegations and failed to act on them.

Nothing could be further from the truth.

To begin with, while allegations of unprofessional conduct regarding Gregory were brought to the Association’s attention 15 years ago, those allegations did not include the

sexual offences with which he was more recently charged. The allegations made in 2006 were serious, were substantiated through our investigation and led to the teacher being charged and ultimately found guilty. However, the complaint at that time did not include the misconduct that is the basis of the more recent criminal allegations.

As well, the notes of the investigating officer indicate that the RCMP was aware of concerns relating to Gregory at the time the complaint of unprofessional conduct was made to the Association. Apparently, these were not sufficient to warrant a police investigation, at least in 2006.

Once the Association completed its process, finding Gregory guilty of unprofessional conduct and suspending his membership in the Association, a full report was sent to the minister of education for action because it is the province that has exclusive control over matters of certification. Copies of the Association Professional Conduct Committee, redacted only to protect witnesses, are matters of the public record and have been shared with media as well. The minister’s deliberations and decisions concerning Gregory’s certification status are not similarly in the public domain.

In the final analysis, the Association did its job to the full extent that it was able. Suspending Gregory’s membership in the Association removed him from the classroom. Without Association membership, he was ineligible to teach in a public, separate or francophone school. Whether the employer or the minister did their jobs is beyond my knowledge.

There are three important points to end on. The first is that, as the situation currently stands, policing teacher conduct is a shared responsibility. Quite apart from the role of the Association in enforcing the Code of Professional Conduct, school boards as employers have obligations relating to the supervision of their employees; the education minister has responsibilities relating to certification; and the police, crown and judiciary have duties relating to the investigation, prosecution and adjudgment of those who may have engaged in criminal conduct. All parties need to do their work. We did.

Secondly, while there is currently no specific legislated requirement that the Association advise police of potential illegal conduct, our processes are typically engaged and concluded only after the employer board and/or the police have already been involved and

completed their work. We routinely ask complainants what other steps they may have taken to engage other processes and, when appropriate, have advised them to contact the authorities. I have done so myself, but I also note that ours is a complaint-driven process and it is difficult to act without the complainant’s cooperation. Furthermore, we have no capacity or authority to direct law enforcement.

Finally, we are constantly re-evaluating our professional conduct processes and recognize that as society evolves, expectations and norms change. Recently, Provincial Executive Council authorized a review of the Code of Professional Conduct, noting in particular that the Code does not adequately reflect current standards for dealing with allegations of workplace harassment. Any proposed changes arising from this review will ultimately be brought to the Annual Representative Assembly for approval as bylaw amendments and then must be signed off by the provincial government, specifically the Lieutenant Governor in Council, before coming into effect. ■

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



Tackling climate change begins in the classroom



VIEWPOINTS

Sam Hammond
CTF/FCE President

Earlier this year, Alberta premier Jason Kenney and his Canadian Energy Centre drew ire from many for the way they used the province's tax dollars to fight the release of a children's movie that showed the fictional destruction of the pristine Alaskan wilderness by an evil oil and gas company. Now, as much as I would prefer the premier of Alberta to spend less time on fighting Netflix children's movies and invest more resources to support his public sector workers, Mr. Kenney and his government were right in understanding one thing – children get it when it comes to climate change.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE) has numerous commitments, set by our membership, regarding climate change. As educators, we recognize the value in teaching K–12 students about the negative impacts of climate change and the best way to mitigate them.

“Teachers have led the way before on issues that governments found themselves lagging.”

Teachers have led the way before on issues that governments found themselves lagging. The profession has often empowered those seeking social justice and equity, helping to solidify and amplify their voices far and wide.

Now, we must do the same for climate justice. As is the case with education in Canada, the power lies with the provinces and territories. Right now, there are few jurisdictions with formal climate change education as part of their curriculum – this needs to change. We see how much teachers, students and their families care about the air they breathe, the water they drink and about an uncertain future.

In September 2019, during what now seems like another reality, millions of Canadians, many of them students, marched to push for systemic change regarding climate change. A majority of Canadians who voted in the 2021 federal election supported parties with climate change commitments at the core of their platform. We know that this is critical. That's why it's imperative that climate change education must be an integral part of formal curricula in every jurisdiction in Canada.

As I have learned during my time as a leader, a top-down approach doesn't work. The CTF/FCE recognizes the

commitments highlighted by Canada at COP26 and we celebrate them. Capping emissions is a start, but a real commitment to setting a more sustainable, long-term path forward begins by educating people on the challenges that climate change brings and the kinds of actions and shifts in thinking we need to address the reality of a warming planet.

As our attention shifts from Glasgow to Parliament Hill, I'm hopeful that climate change continues to be a priority focus for all Canadians. There needs to be a serious plan put forward by provinces and territories regarding climate change education in collaboration with Indigenous leaders and knowledge-keepers, climate scientists, students and educators leading those conversations. We encourage the federal government to find ways to work with premiers and ministers of education to incorporate the realities of climate change and how to mitigate it into day-to-day learning.

Teachers have an altruistic commitment to equipping their students with the best tools to tackle an uncertain future. Unfortunately, we have already let our children down with the way we have mishandled the climate crisis up to this point, so now our focus must turn towards providing them with the knowledge and abilities to avoid the mistakes of previous generations.

Having an environmentalist as Canada's Minister of Environment and Climate Change is a start; an indication that the federal government is taking the threats of global warming seriously. And as the latest oilsands news makes clear, the PR war to silence citizens' voices is losing ground while public support is only getting stronger. But the pathway to a sustainable future travels through the classroom.

It would be difficult to find schools where teachers do not address climate change and environmental challenges, most of the time at their own initiative, and increasingly at the initiative of their students. But the success of any change to a curriculum comes down to the teacher's ability and freedom to integrate it into the lesson plan.

At the CTF/FCE, we know that teachers must be given both the professional space and teaching and learning tools to not only include sustainable development lessons, but to properly adapt them to their own methods and geographic realities across this vast country.

The moment to shine a light on the importance that education plays in not only preparing the next generation to live with a rapidly changing climate, but to hopefully empower them to alter our ways to live a more sustainable existence on Earth is now. ■

YOUR VIEWS

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

GSA pioneer will be missed

Lindsay Thurber High School in Red Deer has a strong tradition of opposing prejudice and being a place for everyone.

Many years ago we had a student group called STOP It stood for Students and Teachers Opposing Prejudice. This group was led by Darren Lund, as he was an English teacher at Lindsay Thurber. These students were positive rebels who decided to bring attention to the prejudice that existed in central Alberta at the time. They protested, invited guest speakers and threw punk rock gigs in Red Deer to raise money for their cause.

Many of these students went on to careers involving human rights, justice and service to others. In the late 1990s, the group evolved into Alberta's very first gay-straight alliance (GSA), thus beginning the legacy that we can trace back to Darren Lund's vision and willingness to be the voice of justice to represent marginalized people. The GSA participated in community events and tried to spread awareness and kindness through education.

More recently, our students changed

the group name to a queer-straight alliance (QSA) in an effort to be more welcoming to trans and non-binary people. The QSA has hosted guests, participated in community engagement at the city level, partnered with community LGBTQ+ groups, and been a super awesome place for students to feel safe and be their authentic selves. We have always had queer and straight people as part of this student group, so that allyship continues.

After teaching at Thurber for 16 years, Darren went on to become a professor at the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, where he continued to be an award-winning champion of human rights.

It is with great sadness that we acknowledge Darren's death on Nov. 10. I am one of many colleagues who continue to mourn his loss, but it is good to know that his legacy and work for human rights and justice continue on with our students.

Trina Penner
Grade 9 LAT

Lindsay Thurber High School, Red Deer

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

“Out of the mountain of despair,
a stone of hope.”

– Martin Luther King Jr.

ATA welcomes release of child vaccine

Association urges parents to have children immunized as soon as possible

Mark Milne
ATA News Staff

Elementary classrooms will soon be a lot safer for Alberta's students, teachers, staff and their families. That's because over half their students are expected to receive the first dose of the pediatric COVID-19 vaccination within the next few weeks.

On Friday, Nov. 19, Health Canada approved a version of the Pfizer vaccine that is safe for kids aged five to 11. Alberta Health Services began rollout of the pediatric vaccine a week later, predicting a participation rate of at least 50 per cent.

Alberta Teachers' Association president Jason Schilling welcomed the announcement of this new vaccination.

"Teachers, like many parents, are relieved to see that vaccines can finally become safely available for students of all ages," said Schilling. "Vaccines still remain the safest and most effective tool to minimize the spread of the COVID-19 virus in our schools."

While the government intends only to offer the vaccinations through 120 AHS clinics and four pharmacies throughout the province, Schilling said he would like to see the government implement a school-based rollout as well.

"Schools have traditionally provided an extremely safe, convenient and accessible location for parents to have their children vaccinated," said Schilling. "It's been successfully done in the past and, logically, is the best option for an equitable and widespread distribution of this new vaccine to all corners of our province."

Schilling expressed concern that rural families may have to travel to larger centres to access the new vaccine. He believes this may be difficult for some working parents or those who are experiencing transportation issues.

"We have to remove as many barriers as possible for parents to access this vaccination for their children," said Schilling. "Those kids are already in class. With an in-school clinic, all that would be required from parents is consent."

However, Health Minister Jason Copping believes there would only be a limited uptake of in-school clinics for this round of vaccines. He said that of the 1,300 schools that offered clinics for the regular Covid vaccine, only 591 opted to take part and only 4,000 doses were administered.

"Given the scale of the (pediatric vaccine) program, we're going to use what is tried and true, which are the AHS clinics," Copping said. "If we distribute it out to



ISTOCK

The Alberta Teachers' Association is encouraging parents of children under 12 to have them vaccinated as soon as possible to help make schools safer for everyone.

all schools, there is a risk, if we don't have the uptake, there could be some wastage."

At the news conference announcing the new vaccine, Premier Jason Kenney asserted that vaccinations would not be mandatory for student attendance at school.

"That would contravene the *Education Act*," Kenney said, "which requires that students be able to access the schools regardless of their health status."

Schilling points out that access to learning, whether it be online or face to face, has been consistently

available to students throughout the pandemic, thanks to the hard work of teachers.

Schilling sees the pediatric vaccine as a welcome step towards a more normalized learning environment, but only if there is a strong parental buy-in.

"We encourage all parents to have their children immunized as soon as possible," Schilling said. "We need to move past the disruptive impacts of COVID-19 that have plagued the schooling experience for nearly two years." ■



Rest and stay safe

If you are like me, time has been a weird, fuzzy notion during the pandemic. Meetings, conversations, emails are all jumbled up – "did I talk to you yesterday or three weeks ago?" Hard to tell some days. I attribute it to the stress the pandemic has placed on our personal and professional lives, along with the constant pressure of the president role.

When ATA News staff told me this was the last Off Script for 2021, I was lost for a moment. How did we get to the end of 2021? Throughout my time as president, I have been logging the issues the ATA has been dealing with. It's an interesting exercise to sit down and reflect on what a challenging year it has been. My issues and concerns list topped off at 50, but I suspect that will change as there is still another month left. There is never a dull moment, which is another reason why time seems fuzzy.

I've always believed that teaching is a reflective practice – we are constantly evaluating our lessons, what worked and what didn't work. When I reflect on the issues on my list from this year, four major themes emerge: Covid (vaccines), curriculum, collective bargaining and our students' learning needs. I don't need to go into detail about these here as you have

been living these issues day in and day out. But let's just say this last year has been relentless, though not everything has been negative. It's important when we reflect that we don't just focus on the negative or the things we did not succeed at. There have been moments of laughter, joy and kindness as well.

Teachers have done amazing work this year and you need to recognize how much you have been through. Teaching during a pandemic is not easy, but teachers and administrators have tackled it with unquestionable professionalism. You've dealt with many things you probably never imagined you would have to deal with in your lifetime. I am still searching for that mythical *How to Handle a Pandemic* handbook in my office.

One other theme I will note from this last year is just how much we as a profession have lifted each other up. You are the best part of someone's day, the shoulder they needed in moments of weakness and the source of inspiration when you probably didn't even realize it.

You have made a difference and that is not lost on me. As we enter a holiday period, I wish for you a time of rejuvenation with your friends and family. Stay safe, colleagues, and happy holidays. ■



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.

Curriculum consultation 'a nightmare'

Working group participant speaks out after gag order expires

Jen Janzen
ATA News Staff

What Marliiss Visser remembers most clearly from her time as part of the social studies curriculum working group was the feeling of pressure.

The group, made up of 15 teachers, had two working days — a Thursday and Friday — to provide feedback to the Alberta government.

It was, Visser said, not nearly enough time.

"They kept saying 'we have to keep moving, we have to keep moving,'" she recalls. "[I was thinking] how are we supposed to go through every single point and make changes and additions? It's just too much."

Compounding the frustration of that brief window of feedback was the non-disclosure agreement Visser and the other participants had to sign, which promised that they would remain silent on the contents of the draft curriculum until Oct. 31.

"It was so frustrating to have the non-disclosure agreement while we were listening to the news," she said, noting that Education Minister Adriana LaGrange kept repeating that teachers were involved in the draft curriculum.

"Our names are being published, and oh my goodness, nobody's going to know we actually fought really hard these last two days to the point where teachers were crying," said Visser, who has 23 years of experience in both social studies and learning support.

Now that the non-disclosure agreement has expired, Visser is free

to speak her mind on the draft K-6 social studies curriculum. She is one of six working group participants to sign an open letter to Albertans outlining their concerns with the curriculum and the process used to create it. Visser also shared her story during a curriculum panel session hosted by the ATA on Nov. 26. The event was attended by ATA local communications officers (LCOs) from around the province.

During her presentation, Visser didn't mince words, saying that the draft is terrible.

"Some of the comments I heard [from other participants] were 'I feel like I'm in the 1950s,' and 'we're going backwards, not forwards.' We really felt it wasn't addressing anything that's happening currently and it would not prepare our students moving forward. We were actually quite shocked."

The working group had Thursday morning to review the draft on their own, and then they came together in the afternoon with a notetaker who was responsible for capturing their feedback. At each statement in the draft, working group participants would state if they agreed with the statement or not. It was so bad, Visser said, that some of the teachers were talking about walking out of the group altogether.

"[We thought] maybe it would be a better stance than trying to attack this and be held to a gag order. How are we going to get this communicated that this curriculum is awful?"

The group was supposed to finish its work on Friday afternoon, but many members continued working over the

ensuing weekend to get their feedback in.

After all of their work, Visser says the new version of the draft isn't much of an improvement.

"Maybe the things that weren't true were taken out, but not a lot was changed," she said.

Visser told the LCOs that she wanted them to know that the group was united in their attempts to express their negative opinions of the draft, and they worked hard to make improvements.

"It was a nightmare and I hope we represented you well." ■

AN OPEN LETTER

Lacking authenticity

Dec. 7, 2021

Dear Albertans,

As members of the Government of Alberta's curriculum working groups in December 2020, we are teachers who were selected to provide feedback on the draft K-6 curriculum that was publicly released in March 2021.

We were prohibited from speaking up before now due to nondisclosure agreements, and we honoured those agreements. However, due to questions about this draft curriculum and how it was developed and comments from the government that misled the public about how they have "consulted with teachers," we feel a professional obligation to speak up.

From our perspective, as some of the few teachers who were provided an opportunity to give feedback on the draft curriculum before public release, the government's consultations with teachers lacked authenticity and meaning. It was a performative, two-day meeting seemingly designed just to check the box for teacher consultation.

We took the responsibility of reviewing the curriculum seriously, and were prepared to offer constructive, useful feedback on the draft in the two days we had available to us. Unfortunately, the process made it difficult to do so.

There was too much content and too little time to thoroughly review it. Most of us did not have access to the materials until the day of the meeting, and technical issues prevented many from reading it until later in the day. Each group was assigned to review the K-6 draft outcomes for one of the six subject areas under review; the volume of material required us to review up to 100 pages in just a few hours. When we got into the drafts, some subject material contained a large number of mistakes or errors that needed to be addressed, which further inhibited our ability to meaningfully discuss the merits of the content.

Our ability to discuss this volume of material with any level of detail was very limited. However, because we know the importance to our students and colleagues of a quality curriculum, we persisted and set out to offer the best feedback we could. That feedback, however, was not adequate to address the concerns many of us identified with the drafts.

Most of us have been left with the impression that the government wasn't really interested in constructive feedback. The experience was deflating and disappointing to the point that some of us requested that our names be removed from connection with this curriculum.

When we look at the drafts that were released publicly against the ones that we viewed in December, it is clear that much of the feedback was not appropriately considered. We are hard-pressed to identify any significant changes that were made as a result of the feedback we provided. Yet government officials regularly pointed to our work as validation for the draft, which was especially frustrating given that we continued to be under a nondisclosure order.

Although there are some positive changes in several subject areas, overall this curriculum is not up to the standards that students deserve and that teachers and Albertans expect. No curriculum will be usable by teachers or ready for students unless the teaching profession is appropriately and genuinely consulted.

We care about students and about developing a curriculum worthy of them. As professionals and colleagues, we are prepared to participate in such consultation, but it must be authentic, it must be comprehensive and it must be meaningful. This, unfortunately, was not.

Valerie Browne, science working group member

Gillian Dunn, social studies working group member

Alex Funk, English language arts working group member

Annie Greeno, social studies working group member

Deborah Hawkins, fine arts working group member

Cammie Kannekens, social studies working group member

Sam Livingstone, English language arts working group member

Marliiss Visser, social studies working group member

A teacher from the fine arts working group



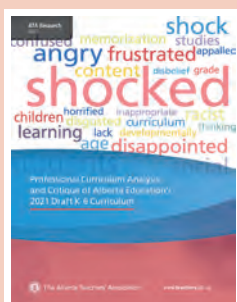
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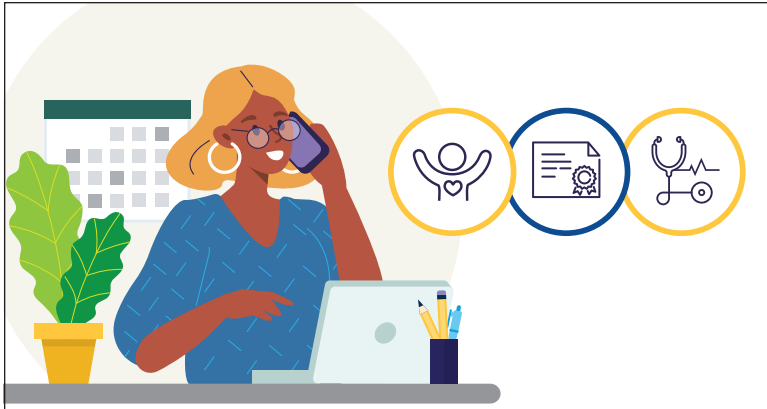
Teacher Marliiss Visser speaks to attendees of a virtual curriculum panel hosted by the ATA on Nov. 26. Visser was one of several speakers who spoke of their experience participating in an Alberta Education curriculum working group last year.

DETAILED ANALYSIS

Earlier this year, the Alberta Teachers' Association engaged 6,500 teachers to analyze and critique the draft K-6 curriculum. The study concluded that the draft does not meet Alberta Education's overall vision, guidelines and considerations for curriculum development. Among other concerns, the study found that the curriculum is not logically sequenced, is developmentally inappropriate and contains twice as many learning outcomes as the current curriculum while lacking in Indigenous and francophone perspectives.

Details are available at www.teachers.ab.ca > News and Info > Issues > K-6 Draft Curriculum







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 and click on Update your Profile.

 **For more information on leaves of absence,** visit www.teachers.ab.ca and click on My ATA > Pay and Benefits > Leaves of Absence.

COMM-287 2021 08

 The Alberta Teachers' Association



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 > My ATA > Programs and Services > Grants, Awards and Scholarships > ATA Educational Trust

AR-ETF 30a 2020-08



DIGITAL NEWS

The ATA News is available in a digital format.

For the latest issue, visit www.teachers.ab.ca > News and Info > ATA News. Subscribe to receive an email when a new issue is available.



The Alberta Teachers' Association

VIRTUAL EVENTS



SCHOOL LEADERS SPEAKER SERIES

SAVE THESE DATES

2022—**JANUARY 13, MARCH 16 AND MAY 2**

For more information visit www.teachers.ab.ca and click on My ATA > Professional Development > Conferences and Events > Virtual School Leaders Speaker Series.

Sustainable Development Goals in Alberta Schools

Youth Perspectives for a More Sustainable World

Video Conference Series



The Alberta Council for Global Cooperation, TakingITGlobal and the Centre for Global Education are leading a provincial youth dialogue called "SDGs in Alberta Schools: Youth Perspectives for a More Sustainable World."

Become one of 12 schools across Alberta (students ages 12–18) that will develop a deeper understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and empower them to self-advocate around key global issues.

Participating students will engage in a series of four video conferences, accompanied by associated learning activities that create spaces and opportunities to reflect on how their communities can better engage with and enact the SDGs in their schools and communities.

CONTACT

Thomas Coldwell at thomas.coldwell@acgc.ca to express your interest and join this initiative.



COMM-293 2021 11



Like us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/ABteachers

Communities hold many lessons

Pandemic prompts teachers to find learning opportunities in their own backyards

SUCCESS STORIES

Gillian Kydd, Margeaux Montgomery
and Linda Hut

Special to the ATA News

During pre-Covid times, each year hundreds of teachers in Calgary and Edmonton were able to move their classrooms for a week to sites like the Calgary Zoo, Alberta Legislature, Calgary Science Centre and Edmonton's Citadel Theatre. This was thanks to two innovative programs: Inquiring Minds in Edmonton and Campus Calgary/Open Minds in Calgary.

The two programs have been operating for more than 25 years and are an integral part of the four school districts operating in the two cities. The basic idea is that children need interesting experiences and time to slow down to learn in deep ways and to learn to focus on the world around them. Each week is personalized for the needs of the individual teacher and is the catalyst for a long-term interdisciplinary study.

The programs had to adapt quickly as the arrival of Covid brought an end to bus trips and the limit for walking field trips was two kilometres. The result was a blend of virtual visits by site co-ordinators and experts, and teacher-led first-hand exploration of each individual school's community.

Margeaux Montgomery is a teacher with the Calgary Board of Education, and the co-ordinator of the division's 2School: An Urban Experience program. The program normally hosts classes downtown for a week of urban exploration, but during Covid times Montgomery instead conducted research on the communities of the participating schools, and with the classroom teacher, planned five-day field studies. Each day included a mixture of virtual visits and walks to sites.

For example, Grade 7 students from Queen Elizabeth High School questioned the role that diversity plays in their community through the lens of history, architecture, design and demographics. Grade 7s met with representatives from RNSQR Developments to examine the impact of housing developments in established communities. First-hand they observed housing options from townhouses to low-rise apartments, examining the needs of citizens, allowing all ages to live in a community.

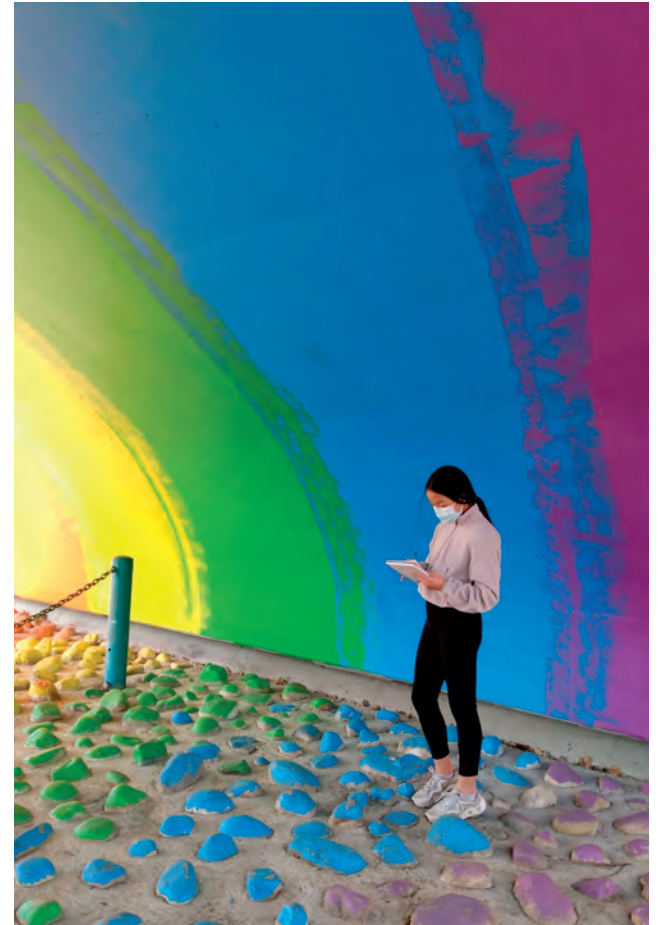
Inspirational connection

In Edmonton, Linda Hut is the co-ordinator of City Hall School and a seconded Edmonton Public teacher. She also switched gears during Covid. Instead of holding a class at city hall for a week, Hut and participating teachers planned a mixture of virtual visits and excursions into their own communities.

For example, after a class from Steinhauer School had a virtual session about urban isolation, they partnered with a nearby seniors' home and conducted a fall visit, during which they dropped off gratitude letters and drew messages of hope on the sidewalk. This inspirational connection during the Covid time of disconnect was so rewarding that the class has planned more visits throughout the year.

Other sites in the two programs also made creative shifts in their work with students.

While classes might be able to return to site visits beginning in January, there has been some important learning from this Covid shakeup. Program co-ordinators hope that the teachers who witnessed



A student writes notes in her journal during a visit to the underside of a C-train bridge in the Hillhurst/Sunnyside neighbourhood of Calgary as part of the Campus Calgary/Open Minds program.



Grade 3 students from Virginia Park School check out the texture of rainbow Swiss chard during a visit to an urban farm as part of the City Hall School program in Edmonton.

**FOR MORE
INFO**

**Campus Calgary /
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operates at 13 sites.
See <http://cbe.ab.ca/ccom>.

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See ourinquiringminds.wordpress.com.

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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.



Bargaining yields grievance changes

ATA News Staff

Bargaining continued between Central Table Bargaining Committee (CTBC) and the Teacher's Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) on Nov. 30, with the parties successfully negotiating new language for a streamlined grievance procedure.

According to Murray Lalonde, member of CTBC and ATA district representative for Central East, the

change is a good and important improvement to the grievance procedure.

"From our perspective, this brings school divisions to the table on all grievances," he said. "As a result, both parties are interested in using the improved process right away."

Lalonde added that CTBC and TEBA have agreed to have the new language come into effect before the negotiations on central terms have completed.

"A new grievance procedure was only part of

the issue we identified in the initial proposal," said Lalonde. "As a result, discussions are ongoing regarding an expedited arbitration process, and we will make sure to update members, when and where we can, as those conversations continue."

Members can see a full update on the Bargainer's Blog on the ATA website.

Bargaining will now take a pause for the holidays and resume in January 2022. ■

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ATA 101

AN INTRODUCTION TO
YOUR ASSOCIATION

History lessons from Alberta teacher strikes



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 six of the most significant teacher strikes in Alberta history. Watch for additional instalments in upcoming issues of the ATA News.

For the Alberta Teachers' Association, as with most labour organizations, going on strike is an act of last resort, to be carried out only after all other efforts to reach a collective agreement have been exhausted.

Throughout the ATA's 103-year history, its locals have been involved in 52 strikes. In the past two decades, there have only been two strikes — those coming in smaller locals. Most of the 52 work stoppages lasted a few days but some endured for a week or two and some very rare cases lasted for many weeks.

Here is a summary of six of the most historically significant teacher strikes in Alberta history.

1921 Edmonton high school teachers

This year, 2021, marks a century since Alberta teachers took their first strike action. In 1921, Edmonton's high school teachers took strike action on two principal issues.

First, teachers were demanding their employing board recognize their new professional association, the Alberta Teachers' Alliance, founded in 1918. More importantly, the second issue focused on teachers' professional right and responsibility to be consulted on all matters touching upon public education under the auspices of the board. Put differently, teachers would not be silenced and were insisting on exercising their right to fully and meaningfully practice their profession.

The board responded by hiring replacement staff, prompting creative responses from ATA members. Replacement staff in one school could not locate a single student ledger, which had all been carefully put away for safe keeping. In another case, the principal instructed students to co-operate with an entire replacement staff but was quick to predict that students might find it difficult to stay disciplined with an entire new group of utter strangers at the front of classrooms. The principal's prediction turned out to be accurate.

The strike led to the establishment of the first ATA strike fund.

1942 Vegreville

In the fall of 1942, Vegreville teachers took prolonged strike action when the employing school board reversed its acceptance of an arbitration award. Following a near unanimous vote, 62 teachers took to the picket lines on Nov. 10, 1942, and stayed out of their classrooms for a full 33 days.

School did not resume until January, 1943, and only opened following intervention by the department of

education, which imposed a settlement that closely mirrored the original arbitration award. This strike was a test case in the application of labour legislation. Moreover, it demonstrated solidarity among ATA members outside of Vegreville, who supported their colleagues with a voluntary contribution of \$1 per member per month during the strike and for one month following, providing the striking teachers with income during the work stoppage.

1957 Normandy

May 23, 1957, marked the first time in ATA history that a local rejected a conciliation award. That day, Normandy School District teachers voted to strike despite the provincial ATA's advice that the employer's offer was favourable compared to other jurisdictions.

In this case, the employer happened to be the Royal Canadian Air Force, which operated a school district in the Griesbach area of Edmonton. The teachers were dissatisfied with the RCAF's conduct during the negotiations and engaged the strike to signal their disapproval. Schools closed for the last three weeks of June 1957, and the strike extended into the summer break.

During that time, the trustees did away with the designation of vice-principal. In the settlement agreement, teachers demanded that this role be reinstated. The RCAF relented and school did open on time for the 1957/58 school year.

The Normandy job action significantly demonstrated that the ATA was willing to take on any party, even the federal government, which pursued action against teachers that contravened the *School Act*, thus undermining teachers' professional status.

1963 County of Strathcona

Although not the longest strike, the county of Strathcona job action of 1963 was certainly the most acrimonious. At a time when funding for schools was based on local taxpayers, the county was

a particularly affluent area benefitting from very productive farmland and oil and gas development. A previous strike in 1955 had engendered enduring bitterness between teachers and the employing board.

The October 1963 issue of the *ATA Magazine* stated that the county council had arranged a series of meetings at which an official of the Alberta School Trustees' Association and a hired economic consultant had presented material in support of the county's position in the dispute. Meanwhile, teachers felt the proposal was meagre and that the county council's attitude was intransigent. They accused the county of causing interminable delays in the negotiations, engaging in "studied misrepresentation" of the teachers' position and making teachers the pawns in a bigger game being played by the board and its advisers.

Although a settlement was reached in seven days, the strike had significant consequences, including increased animus from government and subsequent attacks on teachers' bargaining rights and statutory ATA membership. These moves against teachers' rights and professionalism have continued periodically over the ensuing decades.

2002 Provincewide strike

Feb. 4, 2002, witnessed the beginning of a provincewide job action in response to years of relentless cuts to education funding by the Conservative government led by Ralph Klein.

With its members facing increasingly untenable working conditions, the ATA had worked over the previous five years to educate parents and the public about the Klein government's deliberate erosion of quality public education.

The seeds of the 2002 strike were sown on Oct. 5, 1997, when 15,000 teachers descended on the Alberta legislature to protest against funding cuts. By 2002, teachers were primed for action and in February of that year 24

locals representing more than 22,000 teachers went on strike.

The sheer reach of the strike and the number of school boards involved put enormous pressure on parents, students, government, teachers and the ATA.

In response, Klein legislated teachers back to work by passing the *Education Services Settlement Act*. Arbitrations followed to deal with individual boards' collective agreements and the government created the Alberta Commission on Learning to address issues raised by the strike.

The commission reported in October 2003. Its recommendations on improved classroom and learning conditions were an important outcome of the 2002 job action.

2007 Parkland teachers

The month-long Parkland Local 10 strike of 2007 was acrimonious. On Feb. 19, 2007, teachers in 22 schools found themselves on the picket line expecting a long-haul labour action. Local 10 president Robert Twerdoclib made it plain to stakeholders that teachers' resolve would not be shaken.

"The pressure on teachers' lives is heavy and mounting," Twerdoclib explained.

Teachers were seeking parity with neighbouring school jurisdictions on hours of instruction provisions. The board refused to co-operate with a disputes inquiry board formed by the provincial government. Twerdoclib and Local 10 teachers were not surprised.

"There is no way we can rely on the trustees and the division's management to institute improvements to teacher workload," he said.

Despite proposals being advanced for a multi-year deal involving workload, salary and benefits, the strike wore on. Two weeks in, the employer brought an application before the Labour Relations Board (LRB) seeking permission to ignore ATA leadership and take their latest offer directly to teachers. The application also asked the LRB to declare the teachers' original strike vote illegal.

Rhetoric was high and inflammatory. The board made threats seeking monetary damages against the ATA and individual teachers. The LRB noted several issues with concern: that the parties had resorted to mediation only three times over several bargaining dates and the board's 16-day delay before objecting to the strike vote, which the LRB interpreted as an apparent attempt to coerce and intimidate teachers into accepting the board's proposal.

The LRB concluded that it made no "labour relations sense whatsoever" to grant the board's application. Local 10's strike was legal.

In the end, the parties submitted to voluntary, binding interest arbitration and the strike was put to bed. Teachers returned to their classrooms with a commitment to ensure students would end their year caught up in their lessons. The 2007 Parkland strike's vitriol demonstrated the vital need for honest dealings between employing school boards and professional teachers. ■



While it's referred to as a provincewide strike, the teacher strike of 2002 actually involved 24 ATA bargaining units, which all went on strike in February of that year. The main issue was budget cuts leading to the erosion of public education.

ATA ARCHIVES



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- Contact Jessica Grayson, jessica.grayson@ata.ab.ca, 780-447-9499 (Edmonton area) or toll free 1-800-232-7208

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TALENT

December 7, 2021 | Volume 56, Number 6

All I want for the holidays is...

Staying healthy so that I can enjoy the downtime of the break

– Leanne Breadner-Rein

For the draft curriculum to be scrapped and an education minister that actually likes teachers

– Tasha Fisher

Smaller class sizes

– Char-Lee Thompson

Quiet time spent with family

– Anne Nicholson

An end to Covid so I can hug my grandchildren again

– Sasha George

Family adventures and lots of sleeping in

– Brichard Paigster

The draft curriculum scrapped

– Janelle M

Piece of mind, restful break, family time and a new minister of education

– Laurie Jean

Peace and family

– Michelle Sherlow

For people to slow down, think and talk with each other again

– Ricardo Alonso

Answers gathered from teachers via social media


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 The Alberta Teachers' Association