

Coming to a ZOOM channel near you:
Member information meetings



Schedule
on page 8

**A fight for
our profession**



Read Dennis
Theobald's
perspective
on page 3

ATA NEWS

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News Publication of The Alberta Teachers' Association

Defend your profession

An important message from ATA president Jason Schilling

DEAR COLLEAGUES,

Public education is under attack in Alberta.

Though current circumstances are very difficult, as you work tirelessly to keep schools open and afloat during this pandemic, we must unite to defend our public education system for the sake of our students, our profession and each other.

Throughout the entire duration of the COVID-19 pandemic, we teachers have faced repeated threats of deprofessionalization, including a disastrous curriculum, funding cuts, increased class sizes and the outright dismissal of the profession's concerns about the handling of Covid in schools. Now we're facing yet another critical threat – an attempt to take the disciplinary function away from the ATA.

Colleagues, while this change might sound harmless, it is actually very serious. This is an attack on our very profession. If this removal of the ATA's professional function occurs, I have absolutely no doubt that we will see further erosion of our profession, our association and, thus, of our public education system.

As teachers, we fight for what we value: our students, our profession and public education. When they weaken our association, they weaken our voice. Together we need to defend our association, because it is this profession that is leading the fight for students and public education in this province.

United in strength
and solidarity,

**One
Profession
United**



**5 reasons to
defend one
profession
united**

See page 4.

The B.C. experience

Deprofessionalization brings management-labour dynamic to schools.

See page 7.

**FAQ: I'm exhausted
... why should I care?**

Losing this battle would have an irreversible impact.

See page 8.

Teachers are under attack!

The education minister intends to take the teacher discipline function away from the ATA.

We have no choice but to respond. To ignore this threat would mean allowing irreversible changes that will dramatically alter public education in the province.

“It's all about payback and diminishing the role of teachers and the teaching profession. The minister does not see teachers as self-actualized professionals who are skilled practitioners and who maintain high standards.”

– Gordon Thomas, former ATA executive secretary 2003–2018

“The current attempt at deprofessionalizing the teaching profession in Alberta is both concerning and infuriating. Not only has this government tried to take away our own self-governance and disciplinary functions, but it is also trying to change the nature of how students are taught in this province as a whole – not for the better.”

– Mark Melenberg, teacher, Edmonton



Our dignity and quality of life are at risk



Q&A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

Questions: So the minister of education wants to take over teacher discipline: Why should I care? Why should anyone care?

Answer: Good question. While it may not be immediately apparent, if the government proceeds to strip professional discipline from its mandate, the Alberta Teachers' Association and the entire culture of teaching and public education in Alberta will be fundamentally and irrevocably diminished.

Since its creation in 1918, the Alberta Teachers' Alliance, later Association, conceived of itself as a professional organization promoting teacher professional development and a code of ethics. The drive to be recognized as a profession, with the rights and obligations that derive from that, were reflected in our motto, *Magistri Neque Servi*, Masters not Servants. After decades of struggle, the passage of the *Teaching Profession Act* in 1936 formally charged the Association with the responsibility of upholding the professional practice and conduct of teachers.

If the government succeeds in its radical plan to strip the Association of its professional regulatory role, we teachers will be diminished as a profession and our focus and role in public education will be fundamentally altered. Our relationship to parents and the public will be changed, as we will necessarily become more narrowly focused on our own immediate interests and less concerned with promoting the greater public good.

We will become a union, plain and simple – not that there is anything wrong with that. We are a union currently, but much of our success in promoting the interests of teachers and students has come due to the respect we command in our larger role as a professional organization with regulatory functions.

If we do not regulate ourselves, then we will be regulated by others. Those others will not necessarily be motivated by a larger concern for public education or informed by an understanding of the lived realities of teachers in the classroom. Do we have confidence in the minister of education to undertake this important task fairly and effectively?

“This is a fight for our profession and for the culture of public education that we have helped to create in this province.”

Over the last few months, she and those speaking for her have consistently misled Albertans about Association professional discipline processes. I'll be frank – she has been spreading myths and misinformation to advance crass political ends and to distract from her government's mishandling of a series of issues, including the rollout of a flawed curriculum and an inadequate response to the challenge of COVID-19 in schools. What is maddeningly ironic is that the process her own department administers for teachers who are not active members of the Association lacks the transparency and accountability of the Association's own process.

Attempts to deprofessionalize the Association are not new. In my 20-year tenure at the Association, it has been seriously attempted twice before: by Lyle Oberg and Alberta's Commission on Learning in 2003 and by Jeff Johnson and his Task Force on Teaching Excellence in 2014. We know from these prior experiences that removing teachers' ability to self-regulate is only one part of a constellation of destructive ideas, which typically include:

- removing principals and school leaders from membership in the Association, a goal that Premier Kenney has specifically endorsed;
- removing certificated staff in central offices from membership, a process being facilitated by the government's creation of the College of Alberta School Superintendents as a professional regulatory body – giving to superintendents precisely what they are trying to take away from us;
- diminishing teacher engagement in activities central to teaching, including the development of curriculum;
- taking control of teacher professional development, including, potentially, taking over teachers' conventions; and
- favouring the creation of and providing preferential treatment and funding to private and charter schools, both of which are very much defined by the fact that teachers in these schools are precluded by law from having active membership in the Association.

These ideas all spring from a common ideology and related beliefs – that teachers are not really professionals, that teachers do not deserve autonomy and do not have the capacity for self-direction, that teachers should do as they are told and don't need to be worrying their pretty little heads about matters that are better left to their bosses and betters to decide.

We must fight back against this attack on our professional regulatory processes, not just because of the threat it poses to teachers' professional identity directly, but because this may be our last chance to deter the government from advancing other policies that are equally if not more destructive of our status, our dignity and the quality of our working lives.

This is a fight for our profession and for the culture of public education that, over more than a century, we have helped to create in this province. ■

Attacking teacher professionalism is nothing new

ATA News Staff

The claim by Education Minister Adriana LaGrange that the ATA has a conflict of interest respecting teacher discipline is neither original nor new. It's hardly the first attempt by a minister to undermine the teaching profession.

Most recently, in the fall of 2013, then education minister Jeff Johnson launched the Task Force for Teaching Excellence without informing or engaging the Association. At the time, Premier Alison Redford was embroiled in numerous scandals that ultimately lead to her resignation in March 2014, but the work of the task force continued. Its final report, released in May of 2014, included recommendations to remove the Association's professional functions in policing teacher conduct and competence as well as removing principals from membership in the Association. In September, under a new premier, a cabinet shuffle brought in a new education minister and ultimately ended the threat of the task force.

In the two decades prior to Johnson's tenure, the profession found itself under attack on a couple of occasions. In the 2000s, the Alberta Commission on Learning recommended a number of professional changes, including the end to legislated teacher conventions and the removal of principals from the Association. Daunted by ATA resistance, the government did not proceed with the changes. In the 1990s, Innisfail-Sylvan Lake MLA Gary Severtson twice brought forward unsuccessful private members' bills to end the Association's "dual function."

In the 1980s, Education Minister David King took two cracks at the ATA. In 1981, he proposed breaking up the Association, separating the union and professional regulatory functions, but the proposal was dropped after significant outcry from teachers. He tried again in the aftermath of the scandal involving notorious Eckville teacher Jim Keegstra (he taught students that the Holocaust had not happened), which raised charges that the ATA had a conflict of interest in policing teacher conduct.

The government struck the Committee on Tolerance and Understanding chaired by MLA Ron Ghitter. The Ghitter Report made powerful recommendations on how teacher discipline should look going forward post-Keegstra, but did not recommend the removal of the discipline function.

In fact, the report suggested that the ATA be granted the capacity to certify and decertify its members, rather than leaving that power in the hands of the education minister.

"It is time teachers have control of their own profession," the report stated, calling for an ATA that would be recognized as "more than a union."

The report asserted that the public would benefit by knowing, once and for all, exactly who is responsible for the discipline and decertification of teachers: the ATA. However, the government chose to stick with the status quo, leaving discipline with the ATA and certification with the minister. ■

“What makes the ATA such an effective organization? Simply, it is a unified professional association.”

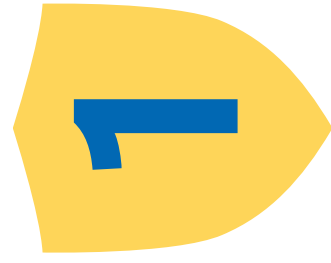
– Frank Bruseker, former ATA president 2003–2009

5 reasons to defend

Opinion

Profession

United



Teachers are professionals first.



The ATA is more than a union.



Our system and our culture make us a global leader.



Students are best served when we all work together.



This change would be irreversible.

Covering common ground

Governments hostile to public education often use the same playbook to undermine the professional status of teachers and diminish the influence of the profession. Let's look at how the membership and functions of teacher organizations changed in Ontario and B.C.

Ontario

1994

The Ontario Teachers' Federation (OTF) is created to serve the dual role of regulating teacher discipline and being an advocate for the profession. Ontario has five (eventually four) teacher unions that are affiliates of the OTF.

1996

The Mike Harris government establishes the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), which removes professional regulatory functions from the OTF, drawing a line between professional advocacy and professional discipline, with OTF filling the former role and OCT the latter.

1997

The government creates the Ontario Principals' Council (OPC), removing principals and vice-principals from membership in the teacher federations, prohibiting their right to unionize or be included in a bargaining unit.

“ I feel confident in saying there is probably no minister of education, in any other province, who would say the outcome of separation has been good for education. ”

– David King, former Alberta education minister 1979–1986

Memories of Ontario's 'Common Sense Revolution'



COMMENTARY

Sam Hammond
CTF/FCE President

Looking back on the so-called “Common Sense Revolution,” led by then Progressive Conservative (PC) leader Mike Harris, two things are evident today. One, the revolution was devoid of any common sense, and two, the damage it inflicted along with the ripple effects it created continue to plague the province of Ontario to this day.

The revolution's legacy fractured public education and set the stage for decades of labour unrest. But history shows a different beginning and lesson of how bad intentions can tear a functioning system apart, leaving a trail of destructive consequences.

From 1944 to 1998 there were five teacher union affiliates representing teachers, principals and vice-principles in Ontario. However, in 1997, growing solidarity among teachers resulted in the merger of two of these unions and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) was formed in 1998.

Unfortunately, at the same time that teacher union solidarity was growing, Mike Harris and his PC government struck a royal commission on learning that proposed a number of educational reforms harmful to teachers. They introduced and passed legislation that would change the landscape of education in Ontario for decades. The *Ontario College of Teachers Act* removed professional disciplinary functions from the OTF in 1996. Then came Bill 160, which halved the number of school boards, mandated ongoing teacher testing, transferred control of school board funding from trustees to cabinet, attacked collective agreements and allowed noncertificated instructors to teach some programs.

Numerous attempts to work with the PC government to make changes to Bill 160 failed, and on Monday, Oct. 27, 1997, teachers shut down every school in Ontario. For 10 days 126,000 teachers protested Bill 160 and held information pickets across the province.

From day one of this protest, principals and vice-principals, who were members of the five teacher affiliates, supported teachers by joining them on the street. In response, the Harris government introduced an amendment to Bill 160 that removed principals and vice-principals from the Ontario Teachers' Federation, from their unions, and stripped them of their collective bargaining rights.

Ontario's publicly funded public education system has faced an uphill battle ever since, in search of common sense. ■

Sam Hammond is the former president of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO).

1917

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) is established as the organization that represents all public school teachers in the province of British Columbia.

1987

The BC College of Teachers (BCCT) is created by the provincial government to set standards and regulate professional conduct, qualifications and education for teachers. The move removes professional functions from the BCTF, establishing it as a pure teachers' union.

The BC government removes principals and vice-principals from the teacher bargaining unit, making them part of the management structures in school districts.

1988

Originally established as a specialist association of the BCTF, the BC Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association (BCPVPA) splits off and becomes an autonomous professional association.

2011

The BCCT fails to gain the respect and confidence of teachers. The government disbands the college after a review identifies it as "dysfunctional" and lacking credibility. The Teacher Regulation Branch of the BC Ministry of Education takes over functions of discipline and certification, significantly diminishing the role of teachers in governing their own profession.

Across Canada, the group(s) responsible for handling teacher discipline differs from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Teacher association/federation

- Alberta
- Manitoba
- New Brunswick
- Newfoundland & Labrador
- Yukon
- Northwest Territories
- Nunavut

Independent college/board

- Saskatchewan
- Ontario

Government/school boards

- British Columbia
- Québec
- Nova Scotia
- Prince Edward Island

A perspective from B.C.

Contrasting experiences highlight need to preserve Alberta's system



COMMENTARY

Brett Cooper
Assistant Superintendent
Pembina Hills School Division

For me, the notion that the government is taking over the investigative process for teachers in Alberta is all too reminiscent of a challenging experience I had in B.C.

I do not want to engage in fear mongering, but Jason Kenney made it clear in 2019 that he was very interested in removing principals and vice-principals from the ATA. So when Education Minister Adriana LaGrange announced her intention to remove the teacher discipline function from the Alberta Teachers' Association, it made me worry that Kenney's stated interest could come next. It's within that context that I share my experience.

I began my career in northern British Columbia, where I spent seven years as an associate principal. I distinctly recall when my principal informed me that I was the successful candidate for the job of associate principal at my first 8-12 school. "Starting tomorrow, people will treat you differently!" he said.

I thought he was a bit crazy to say that. The teachers in my school were my close colleagues — we socialized together, played recreational sports together — how could becoming an administrator change that? Well, I was shocked. It changed all right, instantly and dramatically.

You see, in B.C., the relationship between administrators and teachers is based on a separatist approach. That is, administrators don't belong to the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), which functions solely as a teachers' union. So as soon as I became an associate principal, I was no longer viewed as a colleague. Rather, I was now "one of those administrators."

In this environment of "unions" and "management," it was very difficult to build true collaboration and collegiality — not impossible, but there were distinct barriers. It does not create a culture of school improvement for students, and effecting real change in student learning becomes a significant challenge when "two sides" are represented in the school.

Compare this to my last 20 years in Alberta (I moved back in 2002), where there is a true culture of teamwork between administrators and teachers. Yes, problems exist, but they are handled effectively with the support of the ATA, and many problems are resolved quickly and effectively. If administrators and teachers are truly among the most important change agents for improving student learning, then creating a divide between them is counterproductive to advancement in education.

I lived through this reality while working in B.C. As an administrator in both provinces, I can say that my involvement with teacher investigations, marginal performance or misconduct have been supported by a collaborative and professional relationship with the ATA. Their stance on professionalism and setting high standards for their members is second to none.

As an assistant superintendent of human resources for the past five years, I can say that the ATA's collaborative approach to challenges has always supported the fair treatment of the teacher, respecting their dignity, and yet holding them accountable for any confirmed wrongdoings.

From my perspective, maintaining the ATA's dual role is central to protecting our public education system and the collegial approach that makes our profession so special in this province. ■

Brett Cooper is the assistant superintendent of human resources for the Pembina Hills School Division. He's been a classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal, director and assistant superintendent. He started his education career in the Dawson Creek area of northern British Columbia and has been with Pembina Hills since 2002.

“I have taught around the world and Alberta teachers are highly regarded and sought after because of their professionalism. Deliberately trying to weaken and undermine an outstanding association hurts Alberta.”

— Tara Vandertoorn, teacher, Calgary

FAQ

I'm exhausted and there is so much other stuff going on. Why should I care about this?

We understand the pressure teachers are under now. We did not choose this fight, the minister did, knowing full well that teachers are feeling overwhelmed during the pandemic. Unfortunately, if we lose this battle it would have an irreversible impact on the culture of public education in our province.

■ If the ATA were to lose that disciplinary role, who would take on this function?

The minister has not been clear about what her plans are. In other provinces, this is done by the government, and in a couple of places, an independent college or regulatory body has been set up to perform this role.

■ Will my ATA fees change?

The exact impact is uncertain. Currently, the ATA incurs expenses to conduct investigations and to administer the discipline process, but we do not defend teachers in unprofessional conduct cases. In a revised system, the ATA will need to begin doing that, which will be costly. Teachers may also be required to pay fees for a regulatory college on top of their ATA dues.

■ Can we fight this in court?

It is unlikely that this is something

that could be challenged in court, but it depends on how the legislation is structured. Currently the ATA is governed by an act of the legislature and the government is able to make changes. Provincial governments have the legal authority to govern professions.

■ What can I do about this?

The first, most important thing is to help your colleagues understand why this matters. Share information and draw their attention to this issue. After that, we need to have passionate and persistent contact with MLAs. The ATA will be launching tools to help with this.

■ Where can I get more information?

Look for the One Profession United brochure, which should be available from your ATA school representative. You can also find more at www.teachers.ab.ca, by clicking on the One Profession United graphic. ■

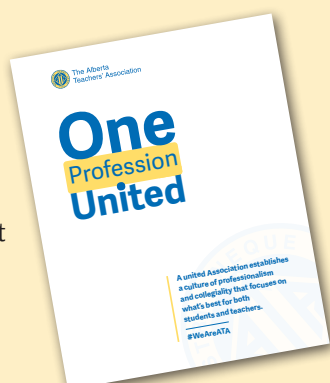
What else is happening?

A series of virtual member information meetings (MIMs) has been scheduled to inform members about this issue and its critical importance. Members will be able to ask questions, discuss the issue and learn about the next steps in the ATA's One Profession United campaign. We will also be using this chance to talk about pressing concerns related to operating schools during COVID.

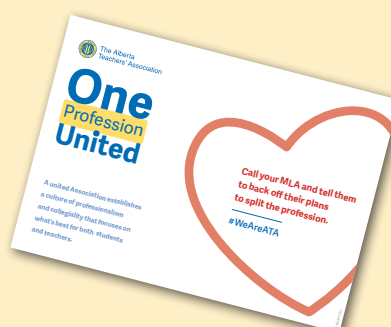
Members are encouraged to attend the meeting that pertains to their teachers convention region but may attend another session if they can't attend their "home" meeting. Go to www.teachers.ab.ca and click the "One Profession United" graphic to access the Zoom links for these meetings.

Date	Time	Region
Mon, Jan. 24	4 p.m.	Mighty Peace & Endless Skies convention regions
Mon, Jan. 24	7 p.m.	Greater Edmonton convention region
Tues, Jan. 25	5 p.m.	Southeast and Southwest convention regions
Tues, Jan. 25	7 p.m.	Palliser District convention region
Wed, Jan. 26	5 p.m.	North Central convention region
Wed, Jan. 26	7 p.m.	Calgary City convention region
Thurs, Jan. 27	4 p.m.	Francophone session
Thurs, Jan. 27	7 p.m.	Central Alberta convention region

A special One Profession United pamphlet containing myths and facts was sent to every school in the province.



Next month, special Valentine's postcards will be available for you to send to your MLA.



All available information is contained in one place on the ATA website www.teachers.ab.ca > [Newsroom](#) > [Issues](#) > [Pages](#) > [Proposed Teacher Discipline Process Changes](#).