

Revealing

Teachers describe their journeys with mental health.

ATA Magazine

6699

Watch for the spring issue in schools and online at www.teachers.ab.ca.

ATA NEWS

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News Publication of The Alberta Teachers' Association

June is NATIONAL
INDIGENOUS
HISTORY MONTH

[See page 5.](#)



YUET CHAN

Staff of the ATA's Professional Development program area ham it up under a rainbow balloon arch created in recognition of Pride Month. See page 5 for more information about ATA resources related to Pride Month.

What now?

With the election over, the ATA is focused on moving forward.

Read Dennis Theobald's Q&A on [page 2](#).

Listen to teachers

New education minister would do well to avoid predecessor's mistakes.

Read Jonathan Teghtmeyer's editorial on [page 2](#).

New education minister: Demetrios Nicolaides

ATA looking forward to fresh start with new minister.

See story on [page 4](#).

Work in progress

The government's new teacher discipline process is off to a bumpy start.

See story on [page 7](#).

Why did this happen to me?

One teacher's struggle with mental health.

See story on [page 7](#).

Gotcha! Photo Contest winners

Shutterbugging teachers turn heads with photo submissions.

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Advice for the next education minister



EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

When an election is called, the work of government slows down. Politicians rush out onto the hustings, while bureaucrats work on briefing binders to await new ministers.

I hope this editorial hits the pile of reading material gathered for new education minister, Demetrios Nicolaidis.

Alberta has an outstanding world-class public education system. With so much good stuff happening, being the education minister can be a very rewarding experience, but it can also be difficult to manage a wide variety of competing expectations. And if the minister is offside with what teachers want and need, then their job becomes very difficult and unsatisfying.

Coming out of the first four years of UCP government, teachers have a long list of grievances: removing protections for LGBTQ2S+ students; curriculum (leaving out teachers, disastrous first drafts, pushing ahead despite concerns); cancelling class size data collection; the pension hijacking;

new testing; advanced privatization; EA layoffs; the takeover of teacher discipline; attacking teachers who wanted safer classrooms during the pandemic; actions to deprofessionalize teaching; and years of underfunding and budget cuts.

One theme threads this long list together: not listening to teachers.

The previous minister often dismissed legitimate concerns raised by teachers. Sometimes the concerns were undermined by superintendents or trustees and sometimes they were dismissed as partisan attacks. This was a mistake, and I think it allowed the relationship between teachers and government to spiral down.

It is quite possible to look at that long list of grievances and conclude that the relationship is irreparable. This would also be a mistake.

Teachers are nothing if not future focused. They are genuinely interested in achieving the best outcomes for students. We know that students' interests are best served when government and the profession work together. I believe teachers will be interested in turning over a new leaf with a new minister.

This isn't to say you can ignore the history. Rather, build the relationship by acknowledging the past and recognizing how work must be done differently to

avoid the errors. It comes from listening.

If the new minister chooses to take a serious look at unresolved issues and makes a credible choice to engage and listen to teachers on these issues, I think they will find success. There are four big issues that need the minister's attention.

The first is curriculum. Public outrage may have subsided, but teachers remain concerned. The new curriculum is overloaded and overly prescriptive. Only 37 per cent of teachers are satisfied with the ELA curriculum and just 26 per cent with math. Teachers say they do not have the resources required for successful implementation. There is no need to rush implementation; we need to get it right.

The second issue is teacher recruitment and retention. This is an emerging issue that will quickly become critical. Currently, there is a significant shortage of substitute teachers, but with rapid student population growth and a lack of retention, we will soon see many contract positions going unfilled. Teacher wellness and job satisfaction are major contributors to this issue and watering down teacher qualifications will be counterproductive in the long run.

This dovetails with the third issue: class size, complexity and supports for students. Despite the lack of data,

teachers know class sizes have grown considerably. Our larger classes also have more students with diverse backgrounds and diverse learning needs. Students are suffering and teachers are unable to give them the support and attention they require, and this leads to moral distress. Fortunately, the government acknowledged the issue in the last budget, but more is needed.

That brings us to issue number four: funding. Despite being the wealthiest province, Alberta is dead last in the country for per-pupil funding of public education. Per-pupil funding has declined further since that data was last collected. Services get cut, programs close and class sizes grow. The last budget included a boost, but it is just a start. School boards must be pushed to invest the funding in classrooms and the government must follow with more significant increases in the years ahead.

These are big issues, but they also create a focused opportunity for the new minister. With the right attitude and a spirit of collaboration they can get it done and have the very rewarding experience. Alternately, there is a path of conflict and difficulty. My advice: choose the former. As always, we are here to help. ■

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

With the election over, our work continues



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

Question: So, the election is done. What now?

Answer: Well, my crystal ball has been in the shop for repairs ever since the onset of the global pandemic, but with United Conservative Party (UCP) continuing in government, I know that many members are wondering what is ahead for teachers and their Association. So let's take a stab at the question anyway.

To begin with, I think there is room for cautious optimism, and it starts with the fact that Premier Danielle Smith is not Premier Jason Kenney.

When Kenney took office, he had clear plan for the education sector and a ruthless determination to implement it. Central to that plan was the rapid introduction of a radical, highly ideological curriculum. Certainly, that has not gone as planned and actually has become a source of considerable discontent with the government. Recently, the Association's advocacy

has contributed to slowing down the implementation of the curriculum and helped to mitigate some of its worst aspects.

Kenney succeeded in stripping the Association of its regulatory functions but, again, it is not clear that this has been a big win for the government. Although the commission created to undertake teacher discipline has been operational for less than six months, the officials charged with launching the new system have come to a new appreciation of the efficiency, expertise and experience the Association had developed over the course of many decades. At the same time, the Association will emerge from this experience as a more focused organization with a clear and uncompromised mission to stand behind members in every respect of their work.

Kenney had stated directly to us that removing principals from the Association was a "second term project." Fortunately, he never completed a first term and it seems unlikely that the Smith government shares Kenney's enthusiasm for an ill-considered policy objective that would plunge the education sector into conflict.

If Smith is not Kenney, she seems to me to be a bit like Ralph Klein. While

she does not share his popularity, like Klein, Smith is personally charming and, well, flexible. She changes her mind, her narrative and her policy positions frequently and, like Klein, wants to be liked. She has already taken some steps during her brief tenure to improve the government's relationship with the Association. At the very least, she insisted that the minister of education actually talk to President Schilling.

All this means that there is some room for dialogue and even progress. In the past 18 months, President Schilling has met with members of the UCP caucus who were pursuing the leadership of the party, providing them with what was often their first exposure to the Association. I can tell you that the exercise was eye-opening for many of them, and I believe they left with a very different understanding of the Association and its role in the education sector. Now that several of these former candidates will be influential in the new government, the investment in reaching out to them may be helpful.

Similarly, senior officials of government have discovered that the Association has expertise and institutional memory that department

staff, who increasingly come from outside the education sector, do not possess. I believe we have a shared interest and willingness to foster ongoing conversation at the officials' level on practical issues and program implementation. We at the Association are always willing to provide good, honest advice.

Despite the glimmers of hope I have identified above, I am under no illusion that all before us is sweetness and light. The election campaign cast a light on deep divisions within the UCP and the province generally. Some very ugly beliefs and ideological perspectives surfaced. Many Albertans, including our members, were vilified, attacked and left wondering if this province is a safe and caring space for them.

There is still a war going on for the heart of this province and, critically for us, for the future of public education. I expect that this will play out in several different ways over the next months and years, resulting in considerable political uncertainty and social discord. In this context, our non-partisanship and our successful effort to raise public education concerns to the forefront of public discourse will pay significant dividends.

Q & A continued on page 4



Volatility likely ahead as UCP government settles in



VIEWPOINTS

James Johnson and Heather Feldbusch
Alberta Counsel

The 2023 Alberta general election is finally over. The UCP remains the governing party in Alberta. Currently, the UCP holds 48 seats, the NDP 38 seats, and one independent MLA, Jennifer Johnson, holds Lacombe-Ponoka.

The official results will be announced on June 8, and candidates have eight days following that announcement to apply for a judicial recount to the Court of King's Bench. At this time, we expect the results to remain unchanged.

When we look back at the last year, a UCP victory was anything but a certainty. The NDP lead in public opinion polls for much of the last two years.

In the spring of 2021, Jason Kenney faced an internal leadership review, and even though he did get a slim majority, he chose to resign once a new leader was selected.

With a UCP leadership race, Danielle Smith announced she was in. She had said as much before, but she was largely ignored. With an aggressive populist campaign in place, she was quickly the front-runner.

Winning a party leadership is a different path to victory than a general election. The question remained whether she could adjust and find the support she needed from the public.

The election results indicate that she did. However, she has a smaller team to work with and a much larger opposition in the Alberta NDP. Smith said in the fall of 2022 that she needed to retain the majority of the rural Alberta seats and pick up enough in Calgary to win a majority and she did just that.

There are 87 seats provincially in Alberta – 20 are in Edmonton, 26 are in Calgary and 41 are spread throughout the rest of the province.

The NDP swept Edmonton, the UCP delivered the rest of the Alberta seats outside of Edmonton and Calgary excluding St. Albert, Sherwood Park, Lethbridge-West, and Banff-Kananaskis.

Calgary was the battleground. In the end, the NDP won 14 seats and the UCP 12, giving the UCP the majority of seats in the legislature and allowing them to form government.

“A campaign heavy on personality and light on policy has left many wanting more...”

This campaign was unique. Both parties kept a low profile. They did not release full platforms and seemed to be waiting for the other party to make a mistake.

While the campaign seemed too negative, they both focused on their opponents' pasts rather than their proposed future.

Past comments from UCP candidates drew the most attention from neutral observers. Of all the NDP's promises, the pledge to increase corporate taxes drew the most attention from neutrals. Some think it was the deciding policy of the campaign.

The fate of the campaign seemed to hinge on the leader's debate. The expectation of many was that Smith would falter in the debate, but she exceeded expectations.

Rachel Notley faced a dilemma in the leader's debate. To win the election, she needed to garner the support of moderate conservatives that traditionally voted PC. Her

blue blazer showed as much. She also needed to aggressively confront Smith on many of her problematic comments. Notley chose moderation.

The NDP strategy was a one-two punch – highlight all the terrible statements by UCP candidates and offer moderate policies. The strategy had an impact. The NDP gained 11 seats (from three) in Calgary. With Calgary being considered a conservative heartland, this is impressive.

The UCP strategy was simpler – show a change in the direction of the government since Premier Smith took office in October and show contrition for past statements. With a significant oil and gas budget windfall and a long history of public speaking, Smith and the UCP executed their strategy.

A campaign heavy on personality and light on policy has left many wanting more, including answers on where we go in the next four years. With Smith having made her mandate letters to ministers public, we should have a sense of direction soon.

While the UCP have a four-year term to govern, the next year or so will be volatile. This isn't saying much in Alberta politics, where every day seems to be wild, but both parties will have to decide who leads them into the future.

Rachel Notley has led the NDP since 2014 through three general elections. She is well respected and is being given the time to decide her future.

The UCP, on the other hand, change leaders often. They seem to last longer than lettuce but not by much. The UCP will review Danielle Smith's leadership in the next year or two. Like last term, this will determine the future of the UCP and the government of Alberta. ■

James Johnson is the director of public affairs and Heather Feldbusch is the government relations associate for Alberta Counsel, a firm that engages in government relations and lobbying.

YOUR VIEWS

ON TWITTER

Danielle Smith @ABDanielleSmith

I pledge myself as premier to lead the cabinet just sworn in to ensure a stronger, safer, more prosperous province Albertans deserve today ... and that we want our children and grandchildren to inherit tomorrow. And may our province forever remain strong and free.

On the appointment of a new education minister

Demetrios Nicolaidis @demetriosnAB

Truly honoured to be appointed as Alberta's minister of education. I look forward to working with teachers, staff, parents and administrators to strengthen our education system.

Stephen Merredew @smerredew

@demetriosnAB Your first order of business should be to arrange a series of regularly scheduled meetings with @albertateachers president Jason Schilling and our Provincial Executive Council. Would certainly set a more positive and collaborative tone than your predecessor.

Ms O Tweets A Little @MsOTweets77

Well. At least this was a change. I'm willing to give a new minister a shot. But my expectations are high @demetriosnAB.

ASBA @ABSchoolBoards

ASBA extends congratulations to the Honourable Demetrios Nicolaidis @demetriosnAB on being appointed as minister of education. We look forward to collaboration in support of Alberta's locally elected school boards and the students they serve.

Marty McKeever @HotKeever

Well at least we do not have a vote of nonconfidence on him ... yet! His track record with post-secondary isn't great but I agree, if @ABDanielleSmith says she wants the @Alberta_UCP under her direction to be judged for their actions, let's give him a chance before judging.

Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA) @ABSchoolcouncil

Congratulations @demetriosnAB! Welcome to #abed. Parents, families and school councils understand that partnerships are key to supporting students, and ASCA looks forward to collaborating with you.

Blaine Badiuk @BlaineBadiuk

With new minister of education @demetriosnAB, we have an opportunity to chart a new path if the @Alberta_UCP and @ABDanielleSmith are bold enough. Let's start by listening to teachers, rethinking the curriculum and actually funding @AlbertaEd!

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

“Education remains one of the top priorities of government.”

– Premier Danielle Smith speaking to media after swearing in her new cabinet

New minister means new opportunity

ATA News Staff

The appointment of Demetrios Nicolaides as Alberta's new education minister provides a renewed opportunity for government and teachers to build a better relationship and work together to strengthen Alberta's public education system, said ATA president Jason Schilling.

Nicolaides was first elected as the MLA for Calgary-Bow in 2019 and was subsequently named minister of advanced education. Born and raised in Calgary, he holds a bachelor degree in international relations, a masters in peace and conflict studies and a PhD in political science. According to his website, prior to entering politics, Demetrios

worked as the head of the Calgary office for a national communication consulting firm and was a business instructor at the University of Manitoba and the University of Saskatchewan.

In a news release, Schilling congratulated Nicolaides on his appointment.

"Alberta's public education system succeeds when everyone is working together: government, parents and teachers," Schilling said. "I look forward to meeting with Minister Nicolaides and getting to work on solutions to the important issues facing teachers and public education."

Schilling noted that Premier Danielle Smith has outlined on numerous occasions problems that have arisen — particularly on curriculum — as a result

of failures to engage teachers and the ATA. He said he's hopeful that Smith will emphasize relationship-building as part of the new minister's mandate.

During a news conference held after her new cabinet was sworn in, Smith was asked about her plans for addressing increased enrolment in schools.

"We already announced in the previous term 106 new schools and modernizations ... and as the demand increases we're going to keep up with that growth," she said.

"We have an historic level of spending in education, we are providing supports for complexity in the classrooms, for transportation grants, for mental health. Education remains one of the top priorities of government." ■



Demetrios Nicolaides, new education minister

Edmonton principal now an MLA

Peggy Wright joins Janis Irwin and David Eggen as teachers in NDP caucus

Kim Clement
ATA News Staff

An Edmonton principal who is a determined advocate for education has entered the political arena with a resolute mission to address pressing needs and pave the way for positive change. Peggy Wright, a principal at



Peggy Wright, newly elected, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview MLA

Northmount School, was elected as the NDP MLA for Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview and says she aims to represent the voices of teachers and educational staff while ensuring that Alberta's education system meets the highest standards.

"I wanted to be part of a government that strives to build a better future for all Albertans," Wright said. "People are facing the biggest affordability crisis in decades, our health care and education systems are struggling, and we needed a change."

Recognizing Rachel Notley and the Alberta NDP's pledge to engage with Albertans in developing a different path forward, Wright said she felt compelled to be part of this important work.

"I wanted to be part of a government and part of a legislative team that put people first," she said.

Wright has taught for more than 20 years in northeast Edmonton. Having known Notley for a long time, Wright said she trusted the NDP leader to prioritize the needs of students and their families.

"Over the last number of years, I've seen first-hand the effects of cuts to education and education programs — the constant issues surrounding

2 TEACHERS RE-ELECTED

Teachers Janis Irwin and David Eggen were both re-elected as NDP MLAs. Eggen will sit for a fifth term as the MLA for Edmonton-North West and Irwin will serve her second term in Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood.



Janis Irwin, Edmonton-Highlands-Norwood



David Eggen, Edmonton-North West

the new curriculum, the increased complexity in our classrooms, and the way in which educators are treated by the government."

Addressing the biggest issues facing public education from her perspective, Wright emphasizes the need for adequate funding and resources. Alberta currently has the lowest rate of per-student funding in Canada, resulting in significant challenges for the education system.

"The impact is felt in terms of class complexity, class size, resources for teachers, supports and resources for students — our kids and our staff deserve better," Wright said.

Wright also underscored the importance of a modern and inclusive

curriculum that prepares students for the future.

"We need a new curriculum that involves teachers in its inception, and this includes the ATA as our association, along with experts like school board curriculum support teams, academics and researchers — the folks who know about current educational research and best practices," Wright said.

As an advocate for public education, Wright says she is committed to leveraging her experience and contributing to meaningful changes.

"My hope is that I can add my voice and my experience to the discussion as these incredibly important changes are being planned, discussed and made," she said. ■

Q & A

continued from page 2

In the final analysis, though, my optimism is founded on the enduring support that Albertans have expressed for public education. People vote the way they do for many different reasons, and it is important not to take the outcome of this election as a vote of nonconfidence in public education. In fact, the evidence suggests otherwise. First of all, the recent Alberta election was a closer run thing than even the

relatively close outcome would suggest. In this context, the efforts of teachers and their supporters, supported by Association advocacy, most definitely had an effect, raising the profile of education issues including classroom conditions, infrastructure, curriculum and funding. Various polling suggests that education was one of the top five issues of importance to Alberta voters, rising to third place in Calgary. Public education is not a strength for this government, and that is a problem the UCP needs to fix before the next election if it intends to stay in power.

Teachers should take some satisfaction in this result as it suggests

that education will remain a high priority for all parties for the immediate future. It will, however, be important to keep the pressure on government to deliver its admittedly vague promises of significant funding to enable the hiring of additional teachers and adopt a more collaborative approach to curriculum development.

I am also buoyed by my personal confidence in you and in this organization. We will continue to work intelligently, creatively, diligently and relentlessly for our members and we can, with your support, materially improve the working lives of teachers and learning conditions of students.

I want to thank so many of you who chose to involve yourselves in the election campaign, whatever party you chose to support. Preparing students to be active citizens in our democracy is a fundamental mission of public education and, by participating, you were living that mission.

Colleagues, we will keep calm and carry on.

Best wishes for a restful and restorative summer. ■

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



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.



The Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee of Edmonton Public Local No. 38 held a Pride in the Park event on June 3.

June is Pride month

ATA offers resources in support of sexual and gender minority students and teachers

ATA News Staff

Pride Month is observed in Canada each June, with Pride events and celebrations carrying into the summer months. The festivities serve as a reminder of the importance of creating inclusive and safe spaces for our students—and our colleagues.

To celebrate Pride and to promote safe spaces throughout the year, locals, subgroups and individual members can order Safe Space posters (bilingual), pronoun stickers and Pride materials.

The ATA also provides learning materials and workshops on fostering safe learning and working spaces for sexual and gender minorities.



Guides and resources

- Breaking the Silence: A Guide for Sexual and Gender Minority Teachers in Alberta
- GSAs and QSAs in Alberta Schools: A Guide for Teachers

- Establishing A Local Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee
- PRISM: Toolkit for Safe and Caring Discussions About Sexual and Gender Minorities

All available online.

Workshop

- PRISM—Professionals Respecting Individual Sexual and Gender Minorities
To book this workshop, contact pdworkshops@ata.ab.ca.

Further, teachers and school leaders who are part of a sexual and gender diverse community—or who are allies of this community—can also connect with colleagues through their local gay-straight alliances (GSAs), where available, or through the provincial ATAGSA. These groups aim to create a safe and welcoming space for members to build relationships, share their experiences and deepen their knowledge.

More information on supports offered by the ATA is available by emailing dehr@ata.ab.ca.

Walking together

Learn about Indigenous history and perspectives with ATA resources and programs

ATA News Staff

June is National Indigenous History Month in Canada, with June 21 marking National Indigenous Peoples Day. This is an opportunity to reflect on the rich history, culture and experiences of the Indigenous peoples who lived on this land and to carry our learnings into the fall, when the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation is held—and beyond.



Patrick Loyer, ATA staff officer

“There are many steps to truth and reconciliation that one can take. It is important that teachers take at least the initial step to learn about Indigenous culture and history, not only for their own learning but also to provide the best possible learning for their students,” says ATA staff officer Patrick Loyer.

With many teachers and school leaders strengthening their foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit as part of the Professional Practice Standards, access to authentic, up-to-date and relevant resources is essential. To support members in their individual and collective learning, the ATA offers a range of online resources and in-person learning options related

to Indigenous education.

“These resources are authentic and genuine and have been created by Indigenous people who know what they are talking about and are willing to share their knowledge with others,” Loyer says.

Access online resources or book an Indigenous education presentation or workshop here:



Check out the ATA’s offerings available for you and your classroom:

For your reference

- Land acknowledgement resources, including a pronunciation guide video, posters and bookmarks
- *The Stepping Stones* series—concise overviews of such topics as Elder protocol, First Nations traditional plants and uses, the forced relocation of Indigenous peoples in Canada and terminology
- *Honouring the Voices of Indigenous Teachers and School Leaders in Alberta School Communities*—a report on the experiences of Indigenous teachers, school leaders and central office leaders in Alberta’s public education system

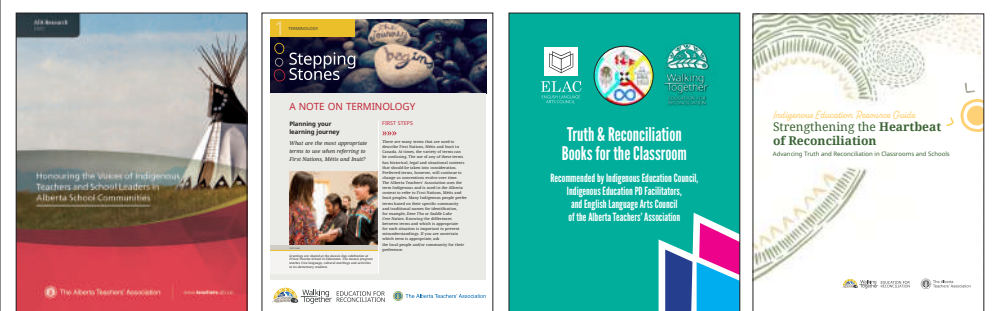
For your deeper learning

New workshops and presentations

- More Than Words: The Significance of Land Acknowledgements on the Journey of Truth and Reconciliation
- *The Indian Act*—Historical and Contemporary Realities
- Indigenous Matriarchy—Balance Through Truth, Justice and Reconciliation
- Engaging in Numeracy and Connections through First Nations, Métis and Inuit Traditional Games

For the classroom

- *Strengthening the Heartbeat of Reconciliation: Advancing Truth and Reconciliation in Classrooms and Schools*
- *Truth & Reconciliation Books for the Classroom*—literature recommendations for kindergarten to Grade 12 (and beyond)
- *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada* (available to borrow from the Association at no cost)



The ATA has a variety of Indigenous resources available for download from its website.

Off Script

with ATA President Jason Schilling

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

We must speak out against harmful lies

Recently we have witnessed two accounts of political party candidates making false, unsubstantiated allegations about things happening in Alberta schools. The Alberta Teachers’ Association, teachers, parents and community members were quick to call out these lies, especially as they were rooted in ignorance and hatred, and the comments were meant to undermine public education while stigmatizing 2SLGBTQAI+ individuals.

We all make mistakes, misspeak or simply comment on topics while maybe not being fully informed of all the facts, but what we saw during the election were lies with intent — intent to harm, intent to discredit.

Unfortunately, in my time as president, I have seen lies perpetuated by all sorts of people on pretty much every topic imaginable when it comes to public education, teacher discipline, and especially the health protocols that were put in place during the pandemic. Many of these lies were created to intimidate with the purpose of silencing people.

There have always been persistent fabrications around public education, some that achieve urban legend status in their ridiculousness. However, if you are like me, you may have noticed a considerable uptick in the quantity and absurdness of lies through the election cycle. There is a lot of “they said, we said” out there right now, especially in the few days following the election.

So, what do we do about it? The answer is simple—we call it out and discredit it when we see or hear it. It’s a daunting and challenging task and could lead to some uncomfortable conversations, but as Winston Churchill said, “a lie gets halfway around the world before the truth has a chance to get its pants on.”

It’s easier to turn a blind eye to what we hear or see, but when lies surface that are meant to harm our most vulnerable, we must speak up, have discussions about the facts and hold people accountable for their words. (This includes empty and worthless apologies.) The lies we have seen and heard have intention, but we should also have intention — to shut it down.



The **spring issue** of the *ATA Magazine* has landed!

Feature

Revealing: Teachers describe their journeys with mental health

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Wellness

Music and wellness: How can you reap the benefits?

Diversity

Unpacking the acronym: The rich meaning of 2SLGBTQIA+

Research Insights

Elementary teachers weigh in on the new Alberta curriculum

Technology

When designing teaching slides, think minimalist and consistency

In Profile

Substitute teaching a natural fit for Calgary's Valsa Peter

Most Memorable Lesson

Two worlds colliding creates connection

Complete our **ATA Magazine survey** and enter to win **\$100**

Survey deadline is June 30, 2023.



<https://surveys.teachers.ab.ca/s3/ATA-News-Reader-Survey-2023>

Spring issue of the *ATA Magazine* now available in schools and online at teachers.ab.ca.



The Alberta Teachers' Association

One teacher's struggle with mental health

Kevin
High School Teacher

It's Friday afternoon and I've just been discharged from the psychiatric ward of Edmonton's Grey Nuns Hospital, where I've spent the last 31 days undergoing electroconvulsive therapy (ECT).

Who can forget the brutal ECT scene in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*? I know I couldn't when my doctor first broached the subject. Thankfully, ECT is nothing like what was depicted in the movie. It's a medical procedure that occurs in the hospital. I'm put under, a doctor induces a seizure, I wake up after 15 to 20 minutes and return home an hour later. In simple terms, my brain gets rebooted. I normally wake up with a slightly sore jaw and a mild headache that can linger until the next day, but for me, ECT's positive effects have been nothing short of miraculous. My family and friends say that my eyes look alive again, and I feel like a giant weight has been lifted. "Gone are the dark clouds that had me blind," as the song goes.

Why did I end up in the middle of a mental health struggle? The simple answer is why not me? You see, like others in our profession (I surprisingly wasn't the only teacher hospitalized in the mental health unit), I've been dealing with the effects of stress for a long time. Talking with the other teachers, I learned my story is far from unique.

In my case, I reached the point where I could no longer deal with the excessive stress of the work environment, and that led to my mental breakdown. I was eventually diagnosed with treatment-resistant depression and major depressive disorder, becoming sick enough that I needed to be admitted to hospital. During my struggle, I also had various doctors and counsellors describe my situation with conditions like burnout, panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder and PTSD.

The truth is that teaching is a wonderfully rewarding and noble profession, but it can also be grinding and exhausting. In my 35-year career, I've been fortunate enough to have coached numerous teams, sponsored everything from peer support to coding clubs, acted as a mentor teacher several times, and I was president of my local for ten years. I accepted multiyear roles such as a new curriculum lead in my division, department head, webmaster, grade coordinator, technology lead teacher and department lead teacher at my school. I felt lucky to spend time in front of kids and loved every minute of it.

The year I became sick, I had my dream schedule, and I was sponsoring a multidisciplinary robotics club that had amazing student buy-in and achievement. During what I considered to be the very best year

of my career, I also had to deal with some things completely beyond my control. I had a sick child at home, my workplace dynamics were becoming increasingly unbearable, and we were first hit by the uncertainties of a global pandemic. The stress grew until I reached a breaking point with what I considered an unsafe re-entry plan. In the first days of the new school year, for the first time in my life, I suffered successive panic attacks that were severe enough to put me on sick leave. I sent in three days of lesson plans and crawled into bed, into the darkness, unable to sleep, eat or breath. Ten days later, while recovering but still on sick leave, I received a formal reprimand (another first for me), for not having provided more lesson plans.

Being reprimanded crushed my soul. I was utterly devastated and instantly disenfranchised. I am my own harshest critic, and receiving such a letter left me completely in shame. I snapped and then broke, falling into a deep and consuming depression caused by the uncertainty of "am I worthy to be a teacher?" My breakdown occurred three years ago, and I haven't been whole since.

My journey to mental health is not over. I'm slated to continue ECT treatments, three times a week for the next month. Realistically, I could be receiving ECT much longer as my doctor "tapers" the frequency over the months to come. I will also need to continue psychotherapy and taking a daily cocktail of meds that paradoxically range from amphetamines to keep me awake and alert during the day to strong benzodiazepines that help calm me down sufficiently enough to function. But thanks to all these therapies and my positive response to ECT, there's now a glimmer of hope for me to eventually be well again and have a successful return to work.

"Mental health in the workplace" is getting a lot of ink these days. Some employers respond with blanket emails about exercise, proper diet and mindfulness—although well intentioned, wellness is truly about so much more. To me, wellness in the workplace is about feeling heard and having a sense of belonging; it's about feeling valued, appreciated and supported; it's about recognizing limits and lightening the load before the weight is too much to bear. What does it mean to you? What does "supporting mental wellness" really look like in action? I hope that sharing my story sparks conversations that seek to answer these questions so that fewer people find themselves asking, "Why did this happen to me?" ■

Editor's note

The ATA News is withholding the contributor's identity to protect their privacy.



New discipline process off to a bumpy start

Mark Milne
ATA News Staff

Teacher discipline in Alberta will soon be entirely in the hands of the government. At the end of June, the transition of professional conduct from the Alberta Teachers' Association to Alberta Education is expected to wrap up.

The government took over the responsibility of teacher conduct and competency on Jan. 1, 2023, and over the last six months, the ATA has been finishing off the investigations it had started prior to the change-over. As of July 1, 2023, all teacher and teacher leader complaints will be handled by the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission.

July 1 will also see the full launch of the ATA's new Regulatory Affairs and Membership Support (RAMS) unit, dedicated to providing advice and support to any member who is facing a complaint filed with the commission.



Tim Jeffares,
ATA Regulatory
Affairs and
Membership
Support (RAMS)

Tim Jeffares is an associate co-ordinator with the ATA and will be heading up the new branch. He says he's confident that the wealth of information and experience ATA staff have, having worked in the regulatory field for decades, will ensure that members receive excellent representation should they find themselves the subject of a complaint.

"We all have discipline experience and expertise. We're just on the other side of the equation now," Jeffares said. "We're the defender."

Jeffares said the last five months have been a bit of a bumpy ride for all parties involved.

"The commissioner's processes are still very new. They started on January 1st and you can tell that their processes are still evolving," said Jeffares.

"We've pushed back an awful lot on procedural fairness issues, timeline issues and other sorts of things, and it seems to be making a difference. But there are still lots of processes that need to be improved before we can actually say it's a fair, just and effective system. It's just not there yet."

Positive signs

Since January, ATA officials have seen some improvements in the commission's processes, Jeffares said.

"In some instances, it appears as though the advice we provided prior to the transfer, and even in meetings since, has been considered and implemented, which is a really positive sign," he said.

At the time of writing, an estimated 205 complaints have been registered with the commissioner's office.

Jeffares said it is difficult to determine exactly how many of the new complaints filed with the commission deal specifically with ATA members, as the commissioner also handles discipline for all certificate holders, including superintendents and teachers in charter and private schools.

He did confirm, however, that the ATA is currently working with approximately 109 of its members who are facing a complaint filed with the commission. There may be more who haven't contacted the ATA yet. It's up to the member to approach the Association for help and advice.

"We would hope that every Association member would phone us immediately," Jeffares said. "However, that may not always be the case. Sometimes they contact us mid-stream because what started as a seemingly insignificant complaint has morphed into a much larger issue. They've found themselves too deep in a difficult process and now want some assistance."

Jeffares strongly recommends that even those who are facing false, frivolous or vexatious accusations should seek advice from the Association.

"You should be represented to make sure your rights are protected and the process is fair." ■

CALL IMMEDIATELY!

The Association encourages all members who have had a complaint filed against them to immediately call 780-447-9400, explain their situation and ask to speak to an intake officer with RAMS.

NOTICE

On Thursday, Jan. 12, 2023, a hearing committee of the Professional Conduct Committee established under the *Teaching Profession Act* found that Adam William Urkow engaged in unprofessional conduct. The hearing committee ordered that Adam William Urkow be permanently ineligible for membership in the Association effective Jan. 12, 2023.

More teachers have shared stories of their mental health journeys in the spring issue of the *ATA Magazine*, which has been distributed to schools. You'll also find tips and information about dealing with mental health problems in an education setting.

We have your back.

Have you received notice of a complaint from the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission?

Help is available to Association members but timelines are tight.

Please contact us immediately!

professionaldiscipline@ata.ab.ca

780-447-9460



The Alberta Teachers' Association



DIGITAL NEWS

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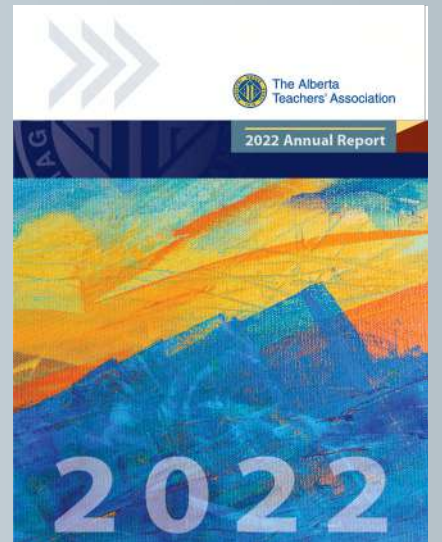
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2022 Annual Report of the Alberta Teachers' Association

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ATA Magazine designer earns silver award

ATA News Staff

The *ATA Magazine* took home a silver award for best illustration at the annual Alberta Magazine Awards hosted by the Alberta Magazine Publishers Association (AMPA) in May.

ATA graphic designer Gela Cabrera Loa earned the second-place finish for an illustration that appeared in the *Unsung Hero* section of the magazine's fall 2022 issue. Cabrera Loa's illustration depicts Michelle Ranger, a principal credited with advancing Indigenous education within the Calgary Board of Education.

Cabrera Loa said the assignment enabled her to learn and illustrate at the same time, which was a tremendous honour.

"The real inspiration came from Michelle's story and her contributions to the community, education through Indigenous studies and her Métis identity," Cabrera Loa said. "I'm very thankful to have a great, supportive and creative team of editors and designers that helped me to get into the AMPA spotlight this year." ■



ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

Graphic designer Gela Cabrera Loa earned a silver award for best illustration from the Alberta Magazine Publishers Association for her artwork depicting Alberta principal Michelle Ranger, which appeared in the fall 2022 issue of the *ATA Magazine*.



Record your weekly hours in case you need EI

ATA Teacher Employment Services

Canada's Employment Insurance (EI) program provides temporary income support to unemployed workers while they look for employment or upgrade their skills. In the case of teachers, EI could come into place for those whose contract has ended and who have not received a new one.

There are also special benefits for specific life events such as

- illness,
- pregnancy,
- caring for a newborn or newly adopted child,
- caring for a critically ill or injured person, and
- caring for a family member who is seriously ill with a significant risk of death.

Service Canada provides the following services:

- Timely and accurate EI benefit payments and services
- Support for EI clients through each stage of their claim
- Benefit information
- Responses to enquiries
- Assistance to employers
- Claims processing and direction to appeal decisions
- Client authentication and identification
- Prevention, detection and deterrence of fraud and abuse

Substitute and contract teachers

Keeping a work log may help you qualify for regular EI benefits when your employment comes to an end. Qualifying for regular benefits under

EI regulations is contingent upon the following criteria:

1. Your employment contract as a teacher has ended and you are not in receipt of an employment offer for the next school year or benefit premium contributions for the summer.
2. You have not worked for at least seven consecutive days.
3. You have the required number of insured hours accumulated in the past 52 weeks to qualify for EI.

The number of hours required depends on your teaching status and location within the province. It also depends on whether you are new to the workforce and if you've filed a previous EI claim. Check EI's website for the required number of hours in your particular circumstance. Generally, you require approximately 600 hours

of employment, however, this can change depending on your individual circumstances.

Unless you are extremely short on hours to qualify (100 or more), the Alberta Teachers' Association usually recommends applying regardless, as waiting too long to apply can be another reason your claim could be denied. ■

WHAT TO DO

Apply for benefits online through the Government of Canada website: www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/ei/ei-regular-benefit.html

Contact Teacher Employment Services at 1-800-232-7208 for assistance with questions that are not readily available on the Government of Canada website.

Council readies for annual assembly

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held May 11 and 12 at Barnett House, Edmonton.

1. Approved, for submission to the 2023 Annual Representative Assembly, the following resolutions:

a) That the Association urge the Government of Alberta to require that instructing, supervising and/or monitoring of student instruction in the areas of career and technology studies, off-campus programming and dual-credit programming be the exclusive responsibility of fully certificated teachers.

b) That the Association urge the Government of Alberta to mandate frequent on-site monitoring and

reporting by certificated teachers of all off-campus education programs to ensure student safety and adherence to established standards for delivery of instruction in these settings.

c) That the Association urge the Government of Alberta to provide additional, targeted funding for Career and Technology Studies classrooms and Career and Technology Foundations classrooms to ensure class sizes do not exceed maximums required to provide for student safety and adequate teacher supervision.

d) That the Association urge the Government of Alberta to address shortages of skilled tradespeople by funding the expansion of post-secondary institutions' capacity to provide access to programs supporting apprenticeship training and trades certification.

e) That the Association assert as a fundamental belief that the purpose of career, skills and technology courses and programming within

the primary education system is to provide students with opportunities to broaden their learning and experiences with a well-rounded program of study.

2. Authorized an overexpenditure of up to \$18,000, allocated across 2022/23 and 2023/24 fiscal years, from the Diversity Equity and Human Rights Initiatives budget line to facilitate the creation of a new resource to assist teachers in promoting the success in school of Ukrainian students who are immigrants or from families temporarily displaced by the war in Ukraine.

3. Approved Council committee and representation assignments for 2023/24 and appointed Council members to the Interpretation Committee Under Collective Agreement and the Subcommittee on PEC Member Orientation.

4. Approved the Association's nominees to the Canadian Teachers' Federation Advisory Committee on the Teaching Profession, Advisory Committee on the Status of Women,

Advisory Committee on Diversity and Human Rights and Advisory Committee on Indigenous Education.

5. Received the report of a hearing committee that found a teacher guilty of two charges of unprofessional conduct for viewing inappropriate content on a personal computing device that was viewable to a student and for lying to the teacher's employer about travelling overseas while on medical leave. The hearing committee ordered a penalty of a single letter of reprimand to address both charges, a fine of \$200 for charge one, and a fine of \$200 for charge two.

6. Approved the draft Association calendar for 2023/24 and provisionally approved for finalization by staff the draft Association calendars for 2024/25 and 2025/26.

7. Amended the School Leaders Issues and Concerns Committee frame of reference by including the duty to promote and discuss services the Association provides for school leaders. ■



**ENJOY YOUR
SUMMER BREAK!**

Congratulations to the 15 winners of our E-Bike contest:

- Angie Elsinga
- Juliet Lidstone
- Jolene Robinson
- Pam van Baars
- Leanne Ryder
- Rebecca Jabour
- Lisse Gratton
- Deb Yawney
- Jeff Hillaby
- Leslie Whipple
- Bruce Campbell
- Francois Rolland
- Stephanie Gabel
- Kevin Williamson
- Lezley Lischynski

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Become a Professional Development Facilitator!

PD facilitators assist ATA professional development staff with the delivery of programs and services to local PD committees.

The Alberta Teachers' Association is seeking outstanding classroom teachers representing all grade levels and subject areas. The three-year appointments for these assignments will begin September, 2023.

The application process has three parts:

1. Provide a letter of interest.
2. Download and complete the [application form](#) from the ATA website.
3. Provide a resumé.

Successful candidates are expected to attend training sessions throughout the year and the Fall and Spring Professional Development Conferences. The ATA covers release time and associated expenses to complete the work and provides an honorarium.

As a courtesy, please advise your superintendent and principal that you will be applying. All applicants must be active or associate members of the ATA and hold an Alberta teaching certificate.

APPLICATION DEADLINE IS JUNE 30, 2023.



The Alberta Teachers' Association

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

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2023 gotcha no! AND THE WINNERS ARE...

PHOTO CONTEST

The 2023 Gotcha! Photo Contest drew dozens of submissions from Alberta teachers. Here are the judges' top-three picks along with some honourable mentions.



1

FIRST PLACE | ALL THAT JAZZ

Jasmine Fillatrault plays Velma in a teen edition of Chicago.
 Photographer: Lesley Young, Hunting Hills High School, Red Deer
 Date of photo: March 29, 2023

Judges' comments: This photo captures an evocative pose and facial expression, makes effective use of light and shadow and isolates the main subject amid a busy background. All these elements combine to make an image that is dramatic and visually striking.



2

SECOND PLACE | BALL HAWKS

A McNally Tiger player returns a kick against St. Albert Catholic High School at Edmonton's Clark Stadium.

Photographer: Clay Haman, Clover Bar Junior High School, Sherwood Park
 Date of photo: Sept. 15, 2022

Judges' comments: Successfully incorporating blur into a photo can be a challenge. This photo earns marks for having a main subject that is somewhat clear while the blur around him conveys the speed and frenetic energy of football.



3

THIRD PLACE | BALL SKILLS

Kindergarten students Forrest and Riley work together on their gross motor skills.

Photographer: Michelle Dickie, Varsity Acres School, Calgary
 Date of photo: Dec. 1, 2022

Judges' comments: The students' facial expressions bring this photo to life. The lines on the gym floor and blurred background help draw the eye to the main subjects.



HONOURABLE MENTION | GETTING AWAY

A high school rugby player evades a tackle at the annual Cougar Classic tournament in Red Deer.

Photographer: Lesley Young, Hunting Hills High School, Red Deer
 Date of photo: May 13, 2023

Judges' comments: The frantic action of rugby presents significant potential and challenges for photographers. Here, the shooter has done a good job of isolating a battle between two opponents. The photo's visual appeal is heightened by the fact that it has captured the would-be tackler in mid-air, seemingly hovering just inches above the turf.

HM



HM

HONOURABLE MENTION | SNOWY RECESS

Little Red Riding Hood (Skylar) and the Big Bad Wolf (Tianna) take a recess break from working on twisted fairy tales.

Photographer: Jennifer Cheung, River Valley School, Calgary
 Date of photo: Jan. 27, 2023

Judges' comments: Snowflakes the size of pie plates captured in mid-air lend an extra air of whimsy to this image of a schoolyard blizzard juxtaposed against fairy tale characters.

The contest judges were Yuet Chan, veteran ATA News photographer and graphic designer, and Cory Hare, ATA News managing editor.

Prizes are awarded as follows:

FIRST	\$200
SECOND	\$100
THIRD	\$50