

IT'S ELECTION YEAR!

See page 11.



**READY...
SET...**

GROW

Your guide to virtual teacher's convention

See page 13.

ATA NEWS

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COOL BREAK



Gerarda Germain, a teacher at St. Gabriel School in Fort McMurray, provided this photo of her family playing pond hockey over the holiday break. See pages 8 and 9 to see what else teachers got up to over their break.

Stand up for teachers

Red for Ed a campaign of solidarity for members fighting recalcitrant school boards.

Read Jonathan Teghtmeyer's editorial on page 2.

Test ahead

The coming year will seriously challenge teachers' resolve.

Read ATA president Jason Schilling's Viewpoints column on page 3.



Doors spring open

Fort McMurray student achieves breakthrough with science video contest.

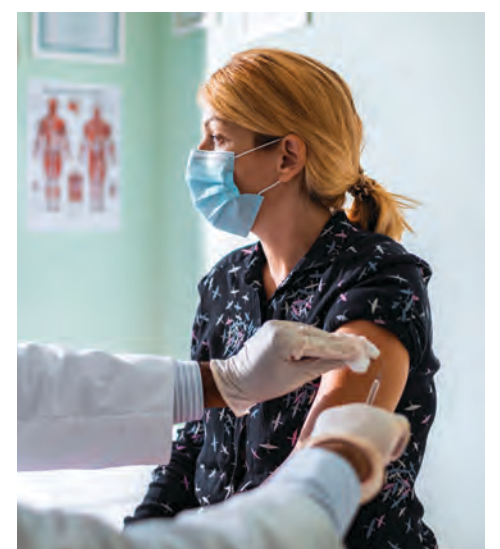
See story on page 4.



Tale End

Offhand tweet leads to PM adventure for Alberta teacher.

See page 16.



Seeking a place in line

ATA president Schilling urges government to prioritize teachers in phase two of COVID vaccinations.

See story on page 5.

Stand up for teachers; wear Red for Ed



EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

Teaching amid a pandemic has been incredibly difficult and stressful for teachers. The situation is compounded for teachers in four school divisions afflicted by added hostility from their school boards.

Teachers working in the Sturgeon, Northern Gateway, Wetaskiwin and CentreNord Francophone school divisions have been working without a finalised collective agreement for more than two years. In those four districts, negotiations have reached an impasse, mediation has failed and teachers have voted to authorise the ATA to request a strike vote.

The problem is recalcitrant boards that refuse to accept terms for settlement that have been achieved in the 55 boards that have already settled.

Simply put, these boards are demanding that their teachers settle for less than what 98 per cent of other teachers in the province already have. To be clear, what is being asked for is not exorbitant or even expensive. As you know, the terms of local

settlements in this round of bargaining are quite modest. Most teachers have obtained access to a wellness spending account to use funds that would have previously been put only in a health spending account and some modest improvements for personal leaves, substitute teachers or administrators.

Yet these four employers are still choosing to prolong negotiations and push teachers to the brink before they will budge an inch. The die is cast; the pattern is clearly established. There are 55 other agreements that could be copied and signed off. But these school boards refuse!

I know from experience how frustrating and demoralizing this is for those teachers. I can only imagine how awful it feels when you are already giving it your all teaching on the front lines of this pandemic.

L'Unite Locale Francophone local president Eric Cloutier says teaching in the pandemic is stressful enough without worrying about negotiations.

"Il y a suffisamment de stress à l'heure actuelle sans devoir se soucier de négociations contractuelles avec un employeur qui refuse des demandes raisonnables qui n'ont rien d'inhabituel compte tenu des ententes en vigueur à l'échelle de la province," says Cloutier.

"Teachers are working exceptionally

hard to keep schools operating and to continue providing outstanding education to kids during the pandemic," says Sturgeon local president Sherri Devolder. "We are doing our best to serve this community and its families, but we don't feel our efforts are recognized or respected."

Teachers in these locals do not want to go on strike. There is much to be lost and little to be gained in striking over these matters, but the employers are leaving them with no choices. Teachers either have to accept that they're willing to be treated as less than teachers working elsewhere, or they have to stand up to their boards and demand to be treated with respect.

"Wetaskiwin teachers just want to be treated similarly to the more than 98 per cent of teachers who have settled their agreements," says Wetaskiwin local president Morgan Spruyt. "We are not making unreasonable demands; we just want to be treated fairly."

Northern Gateway's local president Katrina Zack spoke to parents like her in a column recently printed in the *Whitecourt Press*. She said that teachers and parents are both incredibly challenged by the pandemic, but that they have come together to put kids first. The board seems to be out of step with this spirit of collaboration.

Zack says teachers want an agreement, but they need a board willing to treat teachers respectfully and fairly.

"Right now, Northern Gateway is not that school board," Zack writes. "As a parent, I'm frustrated, and I wouldn't blame you if you were too. This is about priorities, and it's not clear what priorities the board has."

What the boards seem to be missing is the long-term impact that this behaviour has on their employees and the relationships between teachers and the board. It is absolutely demoralizing to have your own employer see you as worth less. The situation breeds contempt for the school board that will last for years. Students definitely don't benefit from that.

Teachers across the province will want to show support for their colleagues at this time. To do so, the Association is promoting the Red for Ed campaign, which encourages all teachers to wear red on Fridays to send a message of solidarity and to let others know that teachers will not be divided and will support each other when it's time to take a stand.

Share your pictures at #RedForEdAB. I look forward to seeing them! ■

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

Convention attendance is mandatory but you can choose your location



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

Question: With teacher's convention being virtual this year, I've been told that I will be required to attend from my school rather than home. Is this correct?

Answer: No. Teachers' conventions are recognized in statute as being authorized and under the control of the Alberta Teachers' Association, not the Government of Alberta and certainly not employer school boards. The Association has imposed no requirement that teachers attending convention virtually this year must do so from their school or any other location that might be stipulated by your school board or school administration. To be clear, teachers do still have professional and contractual obligations to attend convention, and failure to do so may constitute

unprofessional conduct and be subject to sanction.

While teaching at Tofield School in 1993, I missed attending one day of the North East Central Teachers Convention in Edmonton to attend the birth of my daughter Siobhan. When I explained this to the Battle River Convention chair, she looked at me over her glasses and noted that I was not actually the person in labour and that my presence at the labour and delivery room was hardly essential to the successful conclusion of the process. She still generously decided to forgive my absence for that day, but I had the sense that it was a close decision.

It is possible for a teacher to attend a previously approved alternative professional development event that is taking place on the same two days as the teacher's designated convention. In normal years, a teacher might also seek to attend a convention other than the one to which they are assigned if, due to some unavoidable conflict, the teacher's attendance at their usual convention is not possible. An exemption is also available for

a teacher who is coaching a school team at a provincial finals competition organized by the Alberta Schools' Athletic Association or a similar provincial school athletics body; however, with all conventions being conducted virtually and COVID-19 restrictions being in place, the latter two provisions are likely moot.

If you are thinking of attending alternative professional development, it is imperative that you apply for approval in advance. This can be done by accessing the website <https://ata.smapply.ca>.

This year there is good reason to attend convention from the comfort and safety of your own home, and you are perfectly free to do so. It may improve your online experience if you download any convention material in advance to minimize bandwidth requirements during convention. Some teachers, especially those lacking reliable internet connections at home, may prefer, and their employer might allow them, to attend at a school using school infrastructure, but the decision to do so ultimately rests with the individual teacher.

For more than 100 years now, teachers have attended teachers' conventions in Alberta. Originally organized by the Department of Education, teachers' conventions provided opportunities for school inspectors to meet with teachers in each community. Over the years, the role played by the Alberta Teachers' Association in the annual teachers' conventions gradually increased.

In 1942, the Department of Education agreed to grant the Association the responsibility for organizing conventions consistent with its legislated mandate to improve the teaching profession by organizing and supporting groups that advance the knowledge and skill of teachers.

Even in these rather unusual times, teachers continue their professional development, including convention attendance, so that they might continue to improve their teaching practice and the learning experience for their students. ■

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

Take note: 2021 will test us



VIEWPOINTS

Jason Schilling
ATA President

As we turn the calendar, we reflect on the past year and look toward the year ahead. The year 2020 was a struggle for many of us, both professionally and personally. I believe no one is immune to the pressures of the pandemic, but teachers have shown great resiliency and commitment to their profession and their students. I have never been prouder to be a teacher than I was this last year, as difficult and weird as it was.

Those who have worked with me know that I take copious notes in meetings and am a bit of a list maker, a habit I picked up when I was a local president. It's still how I try to organize the details that cross my desk. Last year, I filled four 200-page notebooks and created a list of 53 issues that I addressed in media interviews.

As you can guess, the pandemic was the number one issue that consumed most days and several sleepless nights. Along with the pandemic, this last year saw the ATA tackle issues like the pension hijacking, the arbitration ruling, budget cuts and a myriad of concerns around curriculum redesign — just a few of the 53.

The last year also saw our relationship with government, and specifically the education minister, become more tenuous. This tumultuous relationship came to a head in the summer as the ATA struggled to get a meeting to discuss our ongoing concerns with the government's re-entry plan. This frustration spilled over into social media, with members voicing a strong undercurrent of discontent throughout the summer.

It would be easier to walk away from trying to mend this, but I have always been taught to lean into problems. Under much media scrutiny, we finally scheduled a meeting and began regular meetings involving ourselves and the other education partners. These meetings are by no means perfect, but they are a start.

So what lies ahead for 2021? Hopefully we will see the pressures of the pandemic ease and eventually end. Alleviating the constant demands of the classroom and health protocols will be a great relief for teachers, administrators, students and their parents.

In late winter we should finally get to see the draft K-6 curriculum from Alberta Education. Teachers and the ATA have essentially been shut out of this process. We have expressed our grave concerns about the entire process to date, specifically the "advisors" such as Dr. Champion, along with the lack of transparency.

The Association will be watching for plans and details around field testing implementation, professional development support, resourcing of materials, funding and assessment. (It makes no sense to me to create a new curriculum then overlay it with an antiquated assessment structure.) Though the ATA's involvement in the process has been diminished, this won't stop us from voicing the concerns of the profession. Teachers have a strong connection to the curriculum they teach, and we need to ensure that government gets it right. We don't want to see this fail or stall again.

Another issue on the horizon is central table bargaining. We are currently list bargaining, which has been delayed a few times due to the pandemic. As their top issues, teachers have identified class size and complexity, along with wages.

The ATA will provide updates to the bargaining process through our website, Council members and local teacher welfare chairs. It will be up to all of us to remain engaged in this process. We cannot let bargaining become a wedge issue for government; it is one area where we all must stand together as one big bargaining unit.

The provincial budget will have implications for teachers, our classrooms and our schools. We have all witnessed the downward spiral of our economy during the pandemic. This will affect education, especially since last year the funding formula was significantly changed to a weighted rolling average. Education has been chronically underfunded for years, and the government cannot

keep asking schools to do more with less.

Of course, this is a short list — not quite your average to-do list — but it is definitely a list that requires our attention as an association and as a profession. These issues hit the very core of what it means to be a teacher: curriculum, class sizes and funding for our students.

I always say that we fight for what we believe in and that we each have an important role in advocating for our public education. And I predict that 2021 will seriously challenge our resolve in this regard. ■

“ I always say that we fight for what we believe in and that we each have an important role in advocating for our public education ... I predict that 2021 will seriously challenge our resolve ... ”

YOUR VIEWS



On school re-entry and the ATA's eight-point plan for keeping schools safe

Rozanne Leigh

What happened to phase two? Why are we jumping straight back to "business as usual?" My husband and I are both teachers. My dad died from COVID, my husband got COVID at school (we suspect, as that's the only place he was going) and is still struggling from the effects of it. I'm seriously concerned for our safety.

Sandra Poyhia

I'm still confused as to why it seems to be OK for me to spend a full day with 60 different students but I can't have my two parents over for dinner.

Cl Barchuk

I wonder why there is never any mention of the teachers who work in specialized programs, whose students are unable to distance or wear masks, but the teachers and EA's have close daily physical contact with them. I love the eight-point plan, but I've never seen a plan for us.

Darren Robson

There should be a ninth point about maintaining good airflow. Ensure all classrooms have windows that can open, and clear out the stale air two to three times an hour.

Heathe Rz

This is bad. I feel like an absolute guinea pig today. Not safe to open business, but totally fine to pack classrooms again.

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

“ The decision to resume in-class learning on Jan. 11 is based on carefully considering the importance of attending school in person as well as the latest evidence of cases dropping in all school-related age groups in December. ”

– Premier Jason Kenney, Thursday Jan. 7

Video contest a life-changer for Alberta student

Teacher credited with helping cultivate student's love of science

Cory Hare
ATA News Managing Editor

It's a cliché that you find in stories everywhere: a plucky young student enters a prestigious contest "just for fun" but surprises herself by defying the odds and winning the darn thing. A surge of accolades and affluence ensues and her life is forever changed.



SUPPLIED

Fort McMurray student Maryam Tsegaye is Canada's first ever recipient of the prestigious science video contest Breakthrough Junior Challenge.

Well, this time it's not a fictional account starring Anne Hathaway or Hilary Duff, but rather the real life of Maryam Tsegaye, a Grade 12 student from Fort McMurray.

Last month Tsegaye learned that she'd won the Breakthrough Junior Challenge, a global contest that requires entrants to create a video explaining a science phenomenon of their choosing.

The win comes with a \$250,000 post-secondary scholarship, \$100,000 for a science lab at Tsegaye's school and \$50,000 for her chosen teacher.

"It took me a while to absorb that it was happening to me," Tsegaye said during an interview held several weeks after she learned of her win. "Now it's sunk in a bit and I'm working on making use of the opportunity."

With her winnings in her back pocket, Tsegaye is now researching and applying for post-secondary programs that were previously out of reach due to financial constraints.

"It definitely feels like a lot of doors have been opening up for me," she said.

Positive role model

A student at École McTavish Public High School, Tsegaye created a three-minute video explaining quantum tunnelling.

An aspiring scientist, Tsegaye listed her science teacher Kathy Vladicka as a major influence. Prior to becoming a teacher, Vladicka was a biological researcher at the University of Alberta.

"I knew I liked science and I wanted to become a scientist of some sort and contribute to science in some way, but I'd never seen a scientist or even knew what it was like," Tsegaye said.

Last year she connected with Vladicka and adopted her as a go-to person for science questions.

"She's given me insight about post-secondary, research work. I'm very grateful to her," Tsegaye said.

Vladicka said her involvement in Tsegaye's video project was minimal. And during the past year she's been challenged to keep up with Tsegaye's endless supply of questions.

"Maryam is unique in how curious she is about the world and how much she explores on her own and how much she thinks and tries to form connections," Vladicka said.

"It's really cool to be part of somebody's journey where their whole world just opens up and they have so much potential."

Principal Scott Barr noted that the award will have a longstanding impact at McTavish.

"Her legacy here is going to live on. She's going to forever change kids' lives in this building," he said.

Approachable approach

Tsegaye's video is a casual three-minute explanation of quantum tunnelling, a phenomenon whereby matter can pass from one side of a barrier to another. It's a phenomenon that only came to Tsegaye's attention by happenstance while she was researching other ideas online.

"It's not a rare thing that happens in the world. It happens all around us," she said. "I was quite surprised that it's that fundamental."

Her approach to communicating the complex science was to avoid all use of math, jargon and formulas. Instead, she used dice and the concept of probability to convey the concept in lay terms. Her video includes simple graphics, offhand humour and unbridled enthusiasm that jumps off the screen.

"I wanted the whole video to come off as informal and very, very approachable," she said.

While videos submitted for the contest often focus on high production values, Tsegaye concentrated on simple and effective communication.

"I made my video on a broken computer with my friend on his shattered iPad using Google slides, so it doesn't take very fancy software or technology to get it done. You just need proper science and a good science explanation," she said.

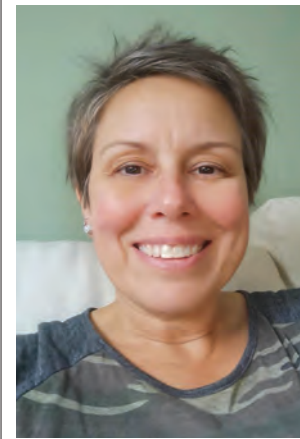
Tsegaye was born in Ontario after her parents emigrated from Ethiopia about 20 years ago. For the last 10 years the family has lived in Fort McMurray, where her father has supported the family by working as a civil engineer, first for Alberta Transportation and then for the city of Fort McMurray.

Tsegaye said it's a relief to her family that financing her post-secondary education is no longer a concern. Vladicka said she finds it extra gratifying to see someone from a modest background achieve such great success.

"She didn't come to this with all sorts of privilege," Vladicka said. "This shows you what public education in Alberta can do." ■

New executive staff officer joins TES and collective bargaining

ATA News Staff



Kristine Wilkinson is the ATA's newest executive staff officer.

Wilkinson will assume her role in Teacher Employment Services and Collective Bargaining on Feb. 1.

She said the role means being able to give back to her colleagues across Alberta.

"I am excited to promote and support the teaching profession

through my work at the ATA," Wilkinson said. "I am so proud to be a teacher!"

Wilkinson has been living and working in the Sturgeon School District since 2005, most recently as the principal of Sturgeon Composite High School in Namao. She has also worked with the ATA as an associate instructor since 2017. Wilkinson brings to the Association extensive experience with her local teacher welfare committee as well as a background in educational psychology (school counseling) and school administration.

As well as a bachelor of education from Concordia, Wilkinson has a masters of education in school counselling from the University of Alberta. ■

5 MORE THINGS about Kristine

Who or what inspired you to be a teacher?

I knew I wanted to help teens, and after doing some work in group homes, then moving to a job as a teacher assistant, I decided to head back to school for an after degree in education at Concordia, and the rest is history.

Knowing what you know now, what advice would you give yourself in your first year as a teacher?

New teachers need to know that as teachers, our work never seems to be done. You need to set limits on work, as it can burn you out very quickly. Teaching is certainly not a nine-to-five job, but try to have hobbies and a life outside of work too. It only makes you more interesting.

What is the greatest life lesson teaching has taught you?

Through teaching I have learned that kids learn so much more than curriculum in school, and teachers play a huge role in shaping society ... but ... don't take yourself too seriously.

Favourite song to put you in a good mood

My go-to song right now is *Bad Guy* by Billie Eilish.

Favourite COVID-safe activity

My favourite COVID activity is spending more time with my husband and two boys; family time has been an upside to COVID.

Watch for yourself

Information about the award, including Maryam Tsegaye's winning video, can be found at breakthroughjuniorchallenge.org.



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.

Prioritize school staff for vaccination, says ATA president

ATA News Staff

As COVID-19 vaccinations ramp up in Alberta, ATA president Jason Schilling is calling for teachers and other school workers to be treated as a priority group in phase two.

"The government has prioritised keeping schools open and the continuation of in-person learning for the benefit of student well-being and supporting the economy," Schilling said. "It only makes sense that the desire to keep schools open would be supported by getting teachers vaccinated as soon as reasonably possible."

Schilling says that school staff should be queued up after front-line health-care workers and those who are medically vulnerable to face worse outcomes if they contract COVID-19.

"We are in awe of the sacrifices, commitment and hard work exhibited by those working in health care and long-term care settings. These are the heroes of the pandemic and we are grateful to them," he said.

He added that, after those workers and the patients that need protecting, teachers should be a priority.

"Teachers are in close contact with large numbers of people for extended periods of time. We have seen how disruptive and costly it has been when teachers and classes have had to isolate. Vaccinating school staff will go a long way to keep schools open and operating stably."

He also notes that none of the currently approved vaccines for COVID-19 have been approved for use on children, which should elevate the importance of vaccinating the adults who come in contact with them on a regular basis.



ISTOCK

Schilling's request echoes a similar statement released by the Canadian Teachers' Federation regarding teachers across the country.

"Given how essential it is that school buildings remain open for all students to learn to the best of their ability and for the economy to recover, and considering the actual working

conditions for teachers and education workers, it is imperative that teachers and education workers be prioritized to receive the coronavirus vaccine," says CTF president Shelley Morse.

Schilling said he has spoken with the deputy minister for education directly about this request. The government has stated that no decisions have yet

been made about priorities for phase two vaccination, which is set to begin by April.

As of Jan. 6, 33,864 doses of COVID-19 vaccine have been administered in Alberta, which has received about 60,000 of the 549,000 doses of vaccine secured by the Government of Canada. ■

Student and teacher mental health among top concerns revealed by survey

ATA News Staff

The ATA's ongoing pulse survey program continues to highlight areas in which Alberta students and teachers are feeling challenged.

Results of the most recent survey, released in December, show that 73 per cent of teachers are concerned about their students' mental health and 62 per cent are "extremely concerned" about teacher mental health.

Other findings include

- 64 per cent of teachers feel that many of their students are struggling with learning;
- 75 per cent of Alberta classrooms have had students moved into quarantine and/or isolation due to COVID-19;
- one in three teachers has been quarantined and/or isolated due to COVID-19 infections or exposures;
- one in four school leaders has been quarantined and/or isolated due to COVID-19 infections or exposures;
- 77 per cent of Alberta school leaders indicated some level of discomfort with taking on contact tracing activities;

- half of Alberta school leaders have had to directly contact families in their communities due to COVID-19 exposures;
- 82 per cent of teachers state that student assessment practices are a challenge during the pandemic;
- nine in 10 teachers don't think that Alberta schools will be ready to

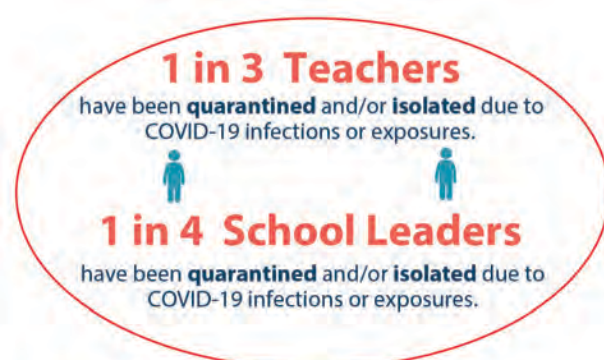
implement new programs of study in September 2021; and

- nine in 10 teachers have no confidence in Alberta Education's new processes for curriculum development.

The Association's pulse surveys, which began last fall, are 10-minute surveys intended to gather a quick pulse of the profession and measure

the impact of school re-entry during the pandemic.

The surveys follow more than 1,500 teachers and principals and allow further insight into the complexities of teaching and learning conditions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The most recent survey took place in late November and the next one is planned for March. ■



HALF of Alberta **school leaders** have had to directly **contact families** in their communities due to **COVID-19** exposure(s).

77% of **school leaders** indicate some level of **discomfort** at being asked to take on **contact tracing** activities.

64% of teachers state that **many students** in their **classes** are **struggling with learning**.

82% of teachers state that student **assessment practices** are a **challenge** in the pandemic. Online teachers--> strong agreement (**91%**).



9 in 10 Teachers ...**do not** think that Alberta schools will be ready to **implement** new programs of study in September 2021.
...have **no confidence** in the new processes for **curriculum development** just introduced by the Minister of Education.

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CROSS-CANADA SNAPSHOT

ATA News Staff

Education workers converge on Ontario legislature to demand more support for families

Education workers converged on Queen's Park in their cars on Saturday (January 2), honking their horns and driving around the legislative grounds as part of a caravan that demanded more pandemic support for families.

Ontario Education Workers United, a grassroots group that says it is determined to fight for a strong, publicly funded education system from kindergarten to Grade 12, organized the afternoon demonstration.

The group wants the province to provide financial help to parents, students and workers who will be struggling when public schools close as part of the provincial lockdown starting on Monday.

"The only way this lockdown will keep us all safe is if families and workers throughout the province get paid sick leave, easy-to-access rent and income support for caregivers, a ban on evictions and status for all migrant workers," said Melanie Wilson, a teacher at Bloor Collegiate in Toronto.

The group noted that school closures will also mean significant layoffs for occasional teachers who are already some of the most precariously employed education workers. ■

– CBC News, Jan. 2

Study highlights need for better STEM prep in northern B.C.

A new study urges northern and remote Indigenous high schools to better prepare their students to carry on to their post-secondary science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) studies.

Indigenous people make up more than 4% of adults in Canada, but only fewer than 2% of Indigenous people are working in STEM-related jobs.

The report from the Conference Board of Canada in partnership with the Future Skills Centre found that these Indigenous high schools do not prepare their students to transfer into post-secondary education (PSE) in STEM.

Unfortunately, Indigenous learners are still constrained by the lack of broader education system reforms in K-12 schools," said Jane Cooper, senior research associate at the Conference Board of Canada in a news release.

The report believes that having Indigenous people guide the learning process can lead to powerful educational outcomes for Indigenous learners as well as make science courses more relevant and meaningful for all learners.

The study concluded that it is the responsibility of governments and school boards to find ways to deliver better STEM programs to northern and remote schools if more Indigenous students are to succeed in these fields. ■

– Winnipeg Sun, Nicole Wong, Jan. 3

ETFO asking for extension of remote learning

ETFO (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario) president Sam Hammond says they have issued a request to all of the medical officers of health in the province to do what they have been entrusted to do, to prioritize community health and safety over politics.

"Despite repeated calls for adequate safety measures, the government has refused to implement them in a misguided effort to save money, jeopardizing the health and safety of students, educators and their families," said Hammond.

Hammond says we must do what we can to protect those who are most vulnerable.

The ETFO is calling for the at-home learning to continue unless urgent and immediate actions are taken to implement a safety plan. They want that plan to include smaller class sizes, improved ventilation and asymptomatic testing when in-person attendance resumes. ■

– 104.7 Heart FM News, Ontario, Jan. 6

Parents worry as Quebec considers extending school closures past Jan. 11

As Quebec COVID-19 cases continue to soar, the government is weighing new measures to slow contagion. Among them, keeping schools closed for a week longer than planned this holiday break, according to Radio-Canada.

Infectious diseases specialist Dr. Matthew Oughton says inconsistent health guidelines, such as the different rules about masks in schools — a vivid example of how policies have shifted — have contributed to the spread of the virus.

On Monday evening, the English Parents' Committee Association (EPCA) of Quebec launched an online survey to assess whether parents preferred their kids to continue distance learning.

Out of the more than 5,000 responses, 62 per cent were in favour of extending online learning beyond Jan. 11, according to EPCA president Katherine Korakakis. ■

– CBC News, Jan. 5

Chilliwack Teachers' Association wants foundation skills assessment scrapped

Chilliwack – The president of the Chilliwack Teachers' Association, Ed Klettke, and the BC Teachers' Federation are calling on Education Minister Jennifer Whiteside to end the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA).

Since 2000, the FSA has been a required assessment by the Ministry of Education. The results have been misused by the Fraser Institute to rank schools on a very narrow measure. The data does not result in additional funding or support for students, and rankings are published

BCTF blasts 'one size fits all' school COVID plan

On the heels of a series of new outbreaks and exposures announced in schools province-wide, the B.C. teachers' union has asked the government to increase COVID protection measures in schools.

In a letter sent to staff Monday (Jan. 4), B.C. Teachers' Federation president Teri Mooring said she had met with newly appointed education minister Jennifer Whiteside over the winter break to brief her on teachers' concerns.

Although public health officials have repeatedly said that the risk of in-school transmission is low, Mooring said that the current strategy doesn't allow teachers, support staff or parents to assess their own personal risk and safety levels.

"Withholding data has also created a sense of mistrust and a great deal of online speculation that doesn't help keep anyone safe," Mooring said.

The province does not currently release data on the number of school students who have been infected with the virus.

In a 12-page brief prepared for Whiteside, the BCTF brought forward 30 recommendations largely stemming from transparency issues, the need for more protective measures and how to make sure that no students are left behind. ■

– Goldstream News Gazette, Katya Slepian, Jan. 5

Teacher shortages leave Regina divisions uncertain as classes resume

After the first four months of classes showed that the name of the education game during a pandemic is flexibility, Regina's school divisions are looking ahead to the second half of the year with few answers to the challenges posed by the first half.

Ongoing challenges with high numbers of staff and students self-isolating and a shortage of substitute teachers continue to make daily operations difficult. Between Nov. 16 and Dec. 10, Regina Catholic School Division was averaging 3,500 students missing from in-person classes each day, approximately 30 per cent of its 12,000 students.

To help address these teacher shortages, the Saskatchewan Professional Teachers Regulatory Board (SPTRB) has begun issuing temporary teaching permits to fourth-year bachelor of education students who have already completed their internship, but not yet convocated.

With teacher shortages and the large number of students missing each day, Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) president Patrick Maze said the quality of education might be suffering somewhat, but he stressed that safety is key. ■

– Leader Post, Lynn Giesbrecht, Jan. 6

in newspapers. The ongoing practice of ranking schools is harmful to students and staff.

Ed Klettke says, "This test adds additional, unwarranted stress and anxiety to students who are already feeling the pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic." Understanding that parents want to know how well their students are performing in school, Ed Klettke adds, "The best source of information about your child's progress is their classroom teacher and not the FSA results." ■

– Fraser Valley News, Don Lehn, Jan. 4

PICS OF THE HOLI DAYS

We asked teachers how they spent their winter break and to share photos of their lockdown holiday adventures. We received 130 posts on our Facebook page! Here are a select few.

See more at facebook.com/ABteachers

My son, who is in Grade 7, spent time on the outdoor rink in our backyard. I spent time taking pictures of him. It was a win-win situation as we both did things we love.
Jaime Erasmus-Perley
Prairie River Junior High, High Prairie





Spending time outside with my family and warming up by binge-watching Netflix.
Jenn Goral, St. Matthew School, Calgary



Winter walks, winter fires and a snow angel.
Donna Knopper-Singleton,
Blueberry School,
Parkland County



Exploring the great outdoors!
Kassidy Danyleyko, La Crete Public School



Knit myself a new sweater.
Rose Lapointe, Cold Lake
High School, Cold Lake



Lots of games!!
Bianca Gonsalves-Reid,
St. Jerome School, Calgary



Ice fishing and was even successful!
Deb Thomas, Nelson Heights
Middle School, Cold Lake



Enjoying the local beauty in Canmore!
Jessica Puurunen, Our Lady of the Snows Catholic Academy, Canmore

NOTICE AND EVENTS

Award program rewards outstanding volunteers

Starting Jan. 4, your students can apply for the 2021 Vimy Pilgrimage Award.

The award recognizes the actions of young people who demonstrate an outstanding commitment to volunteer work through positive contributions, notable deeds or bravery that benefit their peers, school, community, province or country.

There will be 20 awards available. The awards consist of a fully funded, week-long educational program for one to Belgium and France to study Canada's First World War effort. The itinerary includes museum, cemetery, historic site and battlefield visits.

More information can be found at vimyfoundation.ca.

The application deadline is Feb. 15.

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Mount Saint Agnes Academy is an Alberta Accredited International School that provides excellence in private education from the Early Learning Program & Kindergarten through Grade 12. As an Alberta Accredited International School, MSA offers an internationally recognized Canadian curriculum, enhanced by the values of the Catholic faith and culture.

MSA is seeking candidates for the following teaching positions for the 2021-22 school year:

Mathematics and Science teacher – Middle and High School

This position requires the successful candidate to teach middle and high school Mathematics and Science. The candidate will also be required to teach and prepare students for the Mathematics and Science Provincial Achievement Test (Grades 6 and 9), Mathematics and Science diploma courses and the diploma examinations. The curriculum is part of the Alberta Education Programs of Study for Mathematics and Science.

Mathematics and Science specifically Physics – Middle and High School

This position requires the successful candidate to teach middle and high school Mathematics and Science (Physics). The candidate will also be required to teach and prepare students for the Mathematics and Science Provincial Achievement Test (Grades 6 and 9), Mathematics and Science diploma courses and the diploma examinations, including Physics. The curriculum is part of the Alberta Education Programs of Study for Mathematics and Science.

Applicants must:

- Possess proven organizational, interpersonal and communication skills.
- Hold a degree in the teaching subject(s) being applied for and teacher training certification.
- Meet the teacher certification requirements to teach in an Alberta Accredited International School (for more information: www.education.alberta.ca) and meet the requirements for the Bermuda Teachers' License.
- Have proven effective classroom management and knowledge of best teaching practices, including differentiation.
- Have a commitment to being part of a supportive and faith-filled Catholic school community.
- Have proven abilities in the use of technology in the delivery of instruction.
- Be willing to moderate or coach an extra-curricular or after-school activity.
- Have two years or more classroom teaching experience, but consideration will be given to newer teachers who are highly motivated.
- Experience with the Alberta Programs of Study would be an asset

Applicants must provide a resume with the following information:

- Title of the position for which the application is being submitted
- Full name
- Date of birth
- Nationality
- Details of secondary and higher education, including dates
- Full qualifications with dates
- Full details of teaching and any other experience
- Three written professional letters of reference with contact information. One reference should be from a supervisor at the current place of employment.
- The successful candidate will be expected to provide a recent police background check that demonstrates that they may work in an organization involving children.

Please send applications via e-mail to:

Anna Faria-Machado, Principal Designate
 Mount Saint Agnes Academy
 P.O. Box HM 1004, Hamilton HM DX
amachado@msa.bm



Application deadline is Friday, January 29, 2021

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.

<http://bit.ly/ATAeNews>

DEHR =

SPEAKER SERIES
 ANTIRACISM AND ANTIOPPRESSION

UPCOMING SPEAKERS

Amplifying Black Voices

A Conversation with the Black Teachers' Association

Sunday, January 31, 1100-1200

<https://sched.co/gime>

How did we get here and where do we go now?

Critical engagements for antiracist classrooms

Farha Shariff PhD

Saturday, March 6, 1100-1200

<https://sched.co/gimt>

 The Alberta Teachers' Association

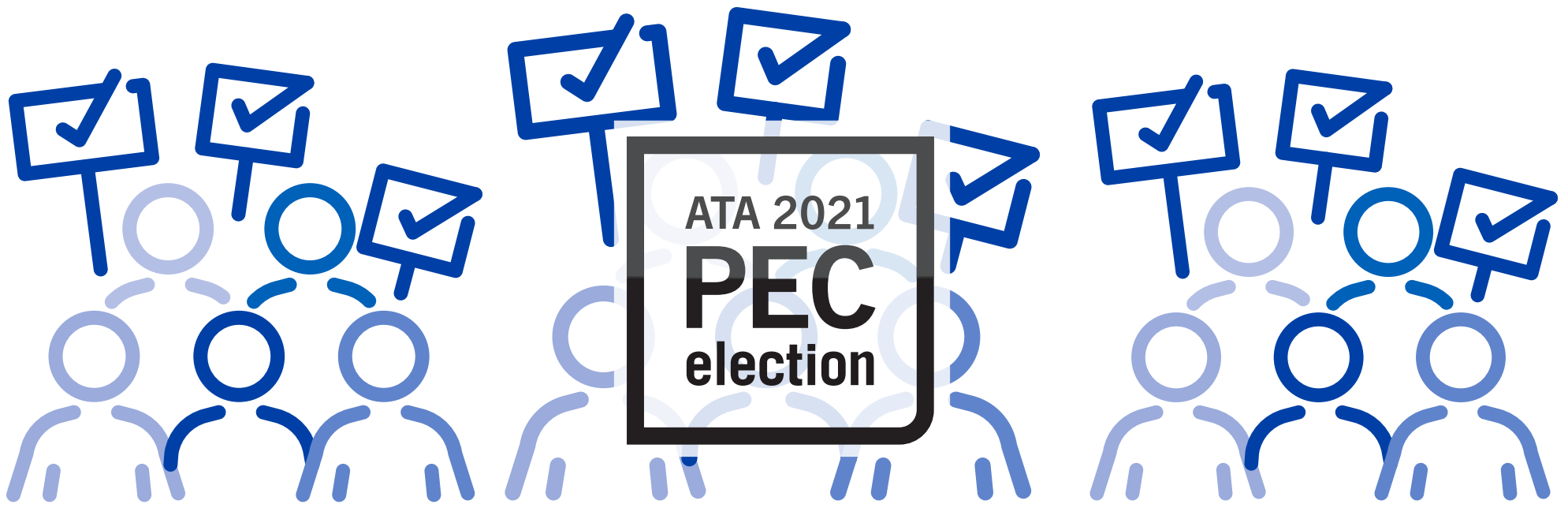
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It's an election year!

ATA News Staff

No, not that election. It's almost time for PEC elections, and because the campaigns and voting will be done almost entirely online, there are some important things for you to keep in mind.

We're going online

No in-person events? No problem. This year's PEC activities, including candidate forums and voting, will all be done online.

This means you need an online ATA account to participate, so make sure you can access the Members' Only section of the ATA website. If you can't, you can request an account. In addition to being able to participate in the elections, your account also ensures you

- get important updates on bargaining,
- can vote on provincial collective agreements and
- have access to the ATA library.

Nomination deadline – January 21

Nomination day is Jan. 21, 2021, and is the single day on which all candidates must submit their completed nomination forms to the Association.

If you are interested in representing your colleagues and your profession, go to the ATA website, read the *Candidate Handbook* and find out more about what it takes to be a candidate in the 2021 PEC election.

Anyone interested in running in the election must now register, which allows the Association to directly communicate updates and instructions to candidates throughout the election cycle. You can register through the 2021 PEC Elections section of the ATA website.

What is PEC?

PEC is the 20-member executive committee that directs the business of the Association. It comprises the ATA president, two vice-presidents, the past president, 15 district representatives and the executive secretary. With the exception of the past president and executive secretary, all positions are elected once every two years by the ATA membership.

PEC members

- are teachers;
- meet as a council two days at a time at least eight times each year;
- serve on internal and external committees and Association subgroups, like specialist councils;
- engage in professional development as part of their duties;
- make decisions affecting the budgets, policies and strategic direction of the ATA; and
- are accountable to the ATA membership. That's you! ■

2021 PEC election schedule

Here are some important dates for you to keep in mind.

- **Sept. 15, 2020**
Nominations open
- **Jan. 21, 2021**
Nomination day
- **Jan. 23, 2021**
Candidate meeting
- **Feb. 16, 2021**
Candidate and election promotional materials to schools*
- **March 8–11, 2021**
Voting open
- **March 12, 2021**
Election results announced

*Sent to the attention of ATA school representatives.



Visit www.teachers.ab.ca/News_Room/Campaigns/PEC-Elections/Pages/index.aspx for more information.

Highlights from the legislature

Government and opposition debate COVID planning and reaction

Kim Dewar
ATA News Staff

The fall session of the 30th legislature wrapped up in early December. Here is a summary of the education-related discussions that took place during its last week. The legislature is now adjourned until February.

School re-entry plan and education funding

Dec. 7—Sarah Hoffman (NDP—Edmonton-Glenora) asked Children's Services Minister **Rebecca Schulz** when the government will act to reduce class sizes to help stop the spread of COVID-19 in schools. Schulz answered that the government's re-entry plan provided staff and students with the resources needed to ensure a safe school year, including \$10 million in PPE for students and staff, which purchased 1.6 million reusable masks and 466,000 litres of hand sanitizer.

Hoffman noted that government also cut \$128 million just prior to that and asked why teachers and principals must be health care workers, infectious disease specialists and educators all at the same time. Schulz said that the NDP plan was unrealistic in terms of space and dollars, and government will continue to

work with education partners to keep students and staff safe.

Educational curriculum review and redesign

Dec. 7—Mark Smith (UCP—Drayton Valley-Devon) asked Children's Services Minister **Rebecca Schulz** to explain what information about the curriculum review can be found on the new government website. Schulz answered that the Department of Education has published a website where Albertans can find detailed information about the review process, how curriculum is being developed and who is working on it.

She added that the previous government "worked tirelessly to hide the membership of their curriculum working groups from the public. Albertans elected us to pause those closed-door secretive curriculum reviews, and that is exactly what we're doing. We committed to taking ideology out of the classroom, not putting it in."

Smith asked what the next steps are in the curriculum review and when Albertans can expect to see a draft K-6 curriculum. Schulz said that the K-6 curriculum is being refined to align with the ministerial order on student learning released in August.

Schulz said the draft curriculum would go forward to the curriculum working groups, consisting solely

of teachers, for further review and refinement. Schulz concluded by stating that government will also begin engaging with academics and education system partners in this work, and in early 2021 will be releasing the draft for public input so parents and all Albertans can review it prior to piloting in September 2021.

COVID-19 in schools

Dec. 8—Sarah Hoffman (NDP—Edmonton-Glenora) asked Children's Services Minister **Rebecca Schulz** about the new policy in schools addressing who is considered a "close contact." She noted that teachers will have to try to recall how many minutes they spend close to people infected with COVID-19. Schulz said that the process is being refined so that teachers are not being forced to quarantine unnecessarily. She added that AHS is working hard to increase staffing for contact tracing for school-aged children so information can get to schools and families more quickly.

Hoffman said that parents and principals are being forced to do contact tracing and hundreds of thousands of students have been forced to abandon their classrooms. Schulz said that transmission in schools is low and accounts for just 1.1 per cent of COVID cases since September. ■

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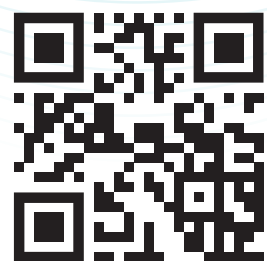
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TEACHERS' CONVENTIONS

Teachers' conventions enhance professional practice by providing teachers and school leaders with opportunities to share innovative practices, discuss professional issues and meet the learning goals identified in their professional growth plans.

North Central Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 4–5, 2021
Contact: Carryl Bennett, president,
president@nctca.ab.ca
Website: www.mynctca.com

Calgary City Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 11–12, 2021
Contact: Lisa Fulton and Shae Frisby, co-
presidents, cctcapresident@gmail.com
Website: www.cctca.com

Endless Skies Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 11–12, 2021
Contact: Adrienne Peoples-Sprecker, president,
adrienne.sprecker@icloud.com
Website: http://estca.teachers.ab.ca

Central Alberta Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 18–19, 2021
Contact: Brenda Lewis, president,
brenda.lewis@wrsd.ca
Website: www.mycatca.com

Palliser District Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 18–19, 2021
Contact: Jennifer Munton, president,
president@pdtca.org
Website: www.pdtca.org

Southeastern Alberta Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 18–19, 2021
Contact: Cam Bernhard, president,
cam.bernhard@grasslands.ab.ca
Website: https://seatca.atapd.ca

South Western Alberta Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 18–19, 2021
Contact: Kathy Thomas, president,
kathyl.thomas@gmail.com
Website: www.swatca.ca

Greater Edmonton Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 25–26, 2021
Contact: Lloyd Bloomfield, president,
president@getca.com
Website: www.getca.com

Mighty Peace Teachers' Convention

Dates: March 4–5, 2021
Contact: Jodie Dell, president,
mptcpresident@gmail.com
Website: mptca.teachers.ab.ca

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Teachers' conventions will take place online during the 2020–21 school year.

Teachers are advised to participate from home or other non-school locations.

For the latest updates on your convention, please visit its website. If you have general questions, visit ataconventions.ca and select "Convention Attendance Expectations for Online Conventions."

Further questions can be directed to executive staff officer Danny Maas at daniel.maas@ata.ab.ca.

New program in the works to showcase local political engagement

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held Dec. 3–4, 2020, via virtual platform.

1. Authorized discussions between staff and the Alberta School Councils' Association to determine possible support and future collaboration.
2. Authorized payments collectively totalling no more than \$3,959.35 to be made to individual members of Provincial Executive Council to compensate for the value of the benefit foregone as a result of delays in the

onset of employer contributions being made to the members' Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund pension after Jan. 1, 2020.

3. Received the report of a hearing committee that found a teacher guilty of three charges of unprofessional conduct stemming from convictions of three criminal offences. The first offence related to the publishing or possession of child pornography, contrary to section 163.1(2) of the Criminal Code of Canada. The second offence related to the unlawful touching, for a sexual purpose, of a person under 16, contrary to section 151 of the Criminal Code. The third offence was for communicating with someone under 18 for the purpose of facilitating the commission of an offence, contrary to section 172.1(1)(a) of the Criminal Code.

The hearing committee declared the teacher permanently ineligible for membership in the Alberta Teachers' Association and recommended that the minister of education cancel the teacher's teaching certificate.

4. Received the report of a hearing committee that found a teacher guilty of two charges of unprofessional conduct. The first charge was for sending a text message to a teaching colleague that referred to another teacher in a derogatory manner, thus failing to maintain the honour and dignity of the profession. The second was for sending a text message that was critical of another teacher to a teaching colleague who was not the proper authority.

To address both charges, the hearing committee imposed penalties of a letter of reprimand and a fine of \$400.

5. Authorized that the Local Political Engagement Awards program be cancelled and that staff begin developing a program for showcasing local political engagement activities.

6. Approved the frames of reference for the Teacher Welfare Committees of the Wetaskiwin School Division, the Calgary School Division and the Palliser School Division.

7. Approved amendments to the frame of reference for the Communications, Advocacy and Public Education Committee to reflect current branding to the program and align internal communication with external communication.

8. Appointed field members to serve on Association committees. ■



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Applications are now being accepted for the following:

ATA Doctoral Fellowships in Education

- Two awards of \$15,000
- For members entering or in first year of a doctoral program in education

Nadene M Thomas Graduate Research Bursary

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

John Mazurek Memorial—Morgex Insurance Scholarship

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

For more information and to apply

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

Application deadline:
Monday, March 1, 2021



PD-3-9-2020.09

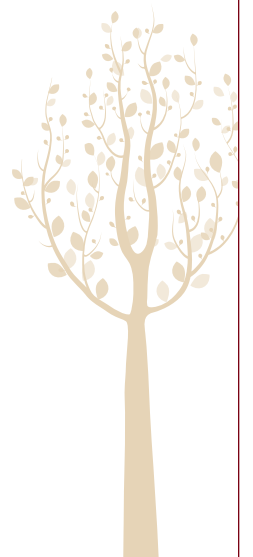


The ATA Educational Trust

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

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**ATA EDUCATIONAL TRUST
DEADLINE EXTENDED**

- If you received a B T Keeler Continuing Education Bursary with a claim deadline of August 31, 2020, you now have until **August 31, 2021**.
- If you received a Morgex/Johnson Insurance Centennial Fund for Professional Development or an award to attend an ATA specialist council conference with a claim deadline of December 31, 2020, you now have until **December 31, 2021**.

Please refer to the website for more information!

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TALENT

January 12, 2021 | Volume 55, Number 7



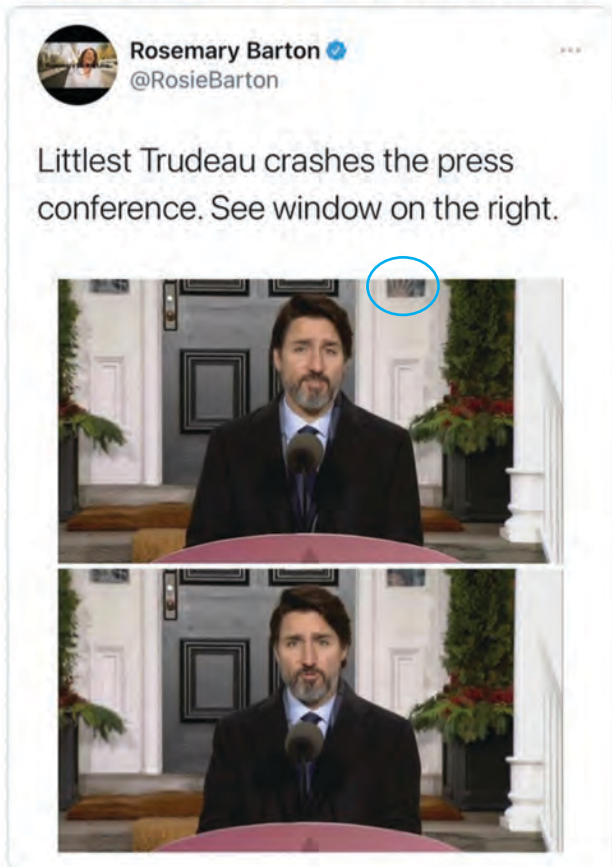
Cute.

One-word tweet leads to a social media adventure for one Edmonton teacher, culminating in a classroom visit by the prime minister.

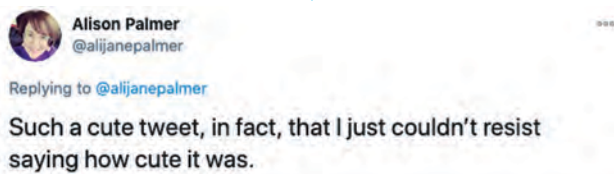


Alison Palmer

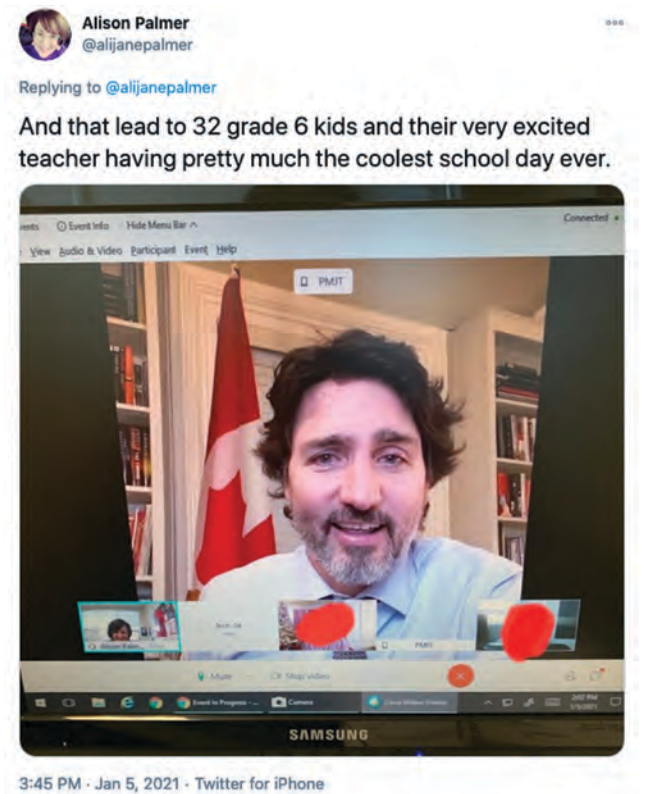
is a teacher at Victoria School of the Arts who is currently teaching Grade 6 online.



3:45 PM · Jan 5, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone



3:45 PM · Jan 5, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone



3:45 PM · Jan 5, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

