

Off Script

with ATA President Jason Schilling



Ready to protect the profession
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ATA staff members set up lawn signs in support of public education in front of Barnett House in Edmonton. See more on the ATA's fall ad campaign on [page 11.](#)



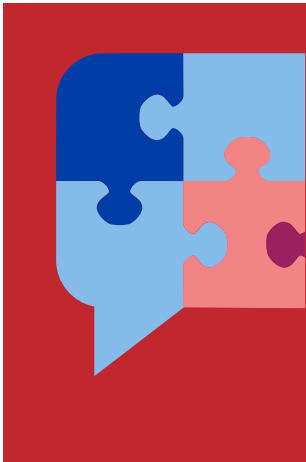
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The stakes have never been higher

Teachers can make a difference in upcoming trustee election



EDITORIAL

Kristine Wilkinson
 ATA News
 Editor-in-Chief

On October 20, 2025, Albertans will cast their votes in municipal and school board elections. For teachers, this isn't just another date on the calendar — it's a defining moment. Across 61 school boards, Albertans will elect trustees to steward the future of public education in the province. And make no mistake: the stakes have never been higher.

We are witnessing a pivotal shift in the discourse around education. The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) has called on teachers to "shoulder tap" potential trustee candidates — people who believe in inclusive, well-funded and equitable public

education for every child. This isn't just a suggestion. It's a call to action. Because while we advocate for students, others are mobilizing too.

John Hilton-O'Brien, leader of Parents for Choice in Education, is actively recruiting trustee candidates focused on "parental rights." His organization has targeted sexual health education and successfully pushed a ministerial order that removed or restricted numerous books from school libraries. These actions must not be diminished — they impact the intellectual freedom and access to information for all students.

School board trustees are not ceremonial figures. They oversee operations, set priorities and manage over \$6 billion in public education funding. They decide what gets funded, what gets cut, and whose voices are heard. This year, those decisions will be made against a backdrop of overcrowded classrooms, staffing shortages, curriculum

upheaval and widening gaps in inclusion support.

These aren't abstract problems. They are the daily realities we face in our classrooms. And they demand trustees who understand the complexity of teaching, the diversity of student needs and the urgency of investing in public education, not dismantling it.

To support informed voting, the ATA has launched [Vote4Kids.ca](https://www.vote4kids.ca), a platform where candidates can share their views, and voters can explore the most pressing issues in education. It's a resource designed for engagement, not just awareness. Use it. Share it. Challenge candidates to speak clearly and boldly about their vision for Alberta's schools.

Nominations for trustee candidates close on September 22, 2025. That means there's still time to act. Ask your neighbour. Tap a retired colleague on the shoulder. Encourage your spouse. We need thoughtful,

courageous people who will stand up for students, for teachers and for the integrity of public education.

This election is not just about governance—it's about values. It's about whether we believe that every child, regardless of their background, deserves access to a rich, inclusive and empowering education. It's about whether we, as teachers, will rise to meet this moment.

So, head to the ATA website and download the *Trustee Handbook* (available at abteach.cc/trusteehandbook). Read it. Share it. Use it to guide conversations and inspire action. Because the decisions Albertans make on October 20 will echo through our classrooms for years to come. Let's make sure those echoes reflect our commitment, our passion and our unwavering belief in a great public education for all. ■

I welcome your comments. Contact me at kristine.wilkinson@ata.ab.ca.

Aggression in schools is the tip of a larger iceberg



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
 ATA Executive
 Secretary

Question: The government has announced that it is looking into the problem of aggression in schools. What should teachers make of that and how is it related to collective bargaining?

Answer: The issue of classroom aggression has been a topic of continuing conversations between ATA president Jason Schilling and Demetrios Nicolaidis, minister of education and childcare, for about two years. In a series of meetings, Schilling shared teachers' concerns about increasing incidents of aggression and the consequences, including serious injuries to teachers and school staff, the impact on students who are committing aggression and on other students in the classroom, and the ability of schools to provide safe and caring spaces for teaching and learning. ATA research conducted between 2022 and 2025, shared with the minister, highlighted the following:

- Prevalence of aggression (micro and macro): Fifty-two per cent of teachers reported experiencing bullying or physical violence in their work environment within

just the first few months of the school year. These incidents were predominantly in person (95 per cent) and most often perpetrated by students (about 60 per cent of cases) in the teacher's own classroom.

- Lifetime exposure: Across their careers, an overwhelming 93 per cent of Alberta teachers and school leaders have encountered some form of aggression (verbal, physical or bullying) directed at them. This includes aggression from students, and to a lesser extent from parents (reported by 15 per cent of teachers).
- Injuries and impacts: Up to 50 per cent of teachers have suffered physical and/or psychological injury as a result of aggression and/or violence in schools. The fallout of aggression is far-reaching — 90 per cent report emotional effects like stress, anxiety or fear. Eighty-four per cent report that it is hurting their job satisfaction and morale, and 70 per cent share that they have experienced physical symptoms (such as sleep loss and headaches) due to school violence. More than half (56 per cent) of teachers who were victims say they had to take time off work in the aftermath of serious incidents, highlighting the toll on teacher well-being.

These representations caught the attention of the minister, who in late June announced the creation of the Aggression and Complexity

in Schools Action Team. This team has a mandate to deliver a report with advice and recommendations to Alberta Education and Childcare to inform a combination of practical solutions and policy by fall 2025. Some recommendations could begin rolling out as soon as the 2025/26 school year.

The ATA, along with other interested parties, was given the opportunity to provide representation to the Action Team and named four teachers, each with relevant and recent classroom experience and good understanding of the policy environment. These teachers are, collectively, representative of large urban, smaller urban and rural schools. The Action Team has been meeting frequently over the summer months and is currently in the process of hearing additional insights from teachers and interest groups. ATA representatives have so far been impressed by the process and the efforts of government officials and facilitators to listen to teachers.

The challenge, though, is that aggression is the tip of a larger iceberg. It is only one element contributing to classroom complexity, with both aggression and complexity being consequences of large class sizes, inadequate support for inclusion and insufficient funding. Ensuring that these larger issues are not glossed over in a race to find a "quick fix" for aggression has been a major challenge and focus of teacher representatives,

as well as other participants, in their conversations with the government.

While classroom complexity is an important theme in the current round of negotiations, the reality is that the collective bargaining process is not designed to effectively resolve complex, diverse and nuanced policy issues. The fact that teachers are raising this issue in negotiations is a mark of our desperation to advance some solutions — any solutions — in the face of continuing government and employer inaction.

That the government has established the Aggression and Complexity in Schools Action Team should not, therefore, be construed as an attempt to undermine collective bargaining with teachers, but rather as a sign that continued teacher advocacy is making a real difference. Even the premier in recent comments has noted that "classroom complexity" is a major challenge for schools. One way or another, teachers will have a collective agreement, but we should anticipate that advocacy on the related issues of aggression, complexity, support for inclusion and adequacy of education funding will continue, even after bargaining has reached its conclusion and in light of the recommendations of the Action Team. ■

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



Fewer readers + neglected school libraries = Time to ban books?



VIEWPOINTS

Karen Belter, Educator
Lissa Davies, Teacher

In an era where literacy itself is in crisis, our priority as teachers is clear: we need to engage students in reading.

The data is sobering. With social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and Snapchat capturing young people’s attention, books are being left behind. Over the past two decades, we have seen a 35 per cent drop in students who enjoy reading; today, only one in five students aged 4–18 reads for pleasure, according to a 2025 U.S. study. Research from the National Literacy Trust in the U.K. reinforces this global pattern, showing an ongoing decline in reading motivation and enjoyment among children and youth.

These findings signal that we need to focus on building strong, diverse, high-quality library collections and making reading an engaging activity. However, as we enter a new school year, schools are facing the need to devote time, resources and energy to comply with a ministerial order requiring the removal of books considered “sexually explicit.”

The push toward what some are deeming censorship or book banning began with an emotionally charged headline: “Sexually explicit books are available to kindergarten students.” Following this, Alberta Education released an online survey on school

library books, which was presented as a “temperature check.” The survey’s results, garnered from only 0.02 per cent of Albertans, were then presented in misleading ways. For instance, it was reported that “some respondents affirmed their belief that sexually explicit material should not be available to students in schools at all.” But numbers matter, and the reality is that 30 per cent of respondents — only 0.00006 per cent of Alberta’s population — said this. Despite this, the results were used to justify the provincewide Ministerial Order #030/2025: Standards for the Selection, Availability, and Access of School Library Materials.

But who was consulted in creating this policy? Where were the voices of teacher-librarians, school leaders, literacy experts and developmental psychologists who best understand students’ needs? The omission of these critical voices is telling.

The consequences for schools and school communities are significant. Rather than investing in student supports, updating collections, training staff or creating vibrant reading cultures, schools must now divert scarce resources to review thousands of books for compliance with an order that includes a broad and unclear definition of “sexually explicit.” With vague guidelines in

place, beloved books such as *The Kissing Hand* could be flagged and removed. Even more concerning, many of the titles under scrutiny represent 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, further narrowing students’ opportunities to see themselves reflected in literature.

This work also raises practical questions. With schools needing to meet the new standards by October 1, who will review school library collections? Alberta has very few teacher-librarians left. Will the responsibility of implementing the order fall to teachers already overwhelmed with full, complex classrooms? To administrators, pulling them away from supporting students? To educational assistants? Or to parent volunteers? How do you prevent one person from imposing their personal beliefs on entire school communities? Each option undermines professional decision-making and misuses valuable education time.

The result is predictable: many teachers are already removing entire classroom libraries to avoid conflict.

As Canadian School Libraries has said, “Not every book in a school library is meant for every student.” Collections are built to reflect the diversity of student populations, offering choice, challenge and opportunity. Parents, teachers and librarians can work together to guide students to appropriate materials. But blanket restrictions dictated by a small, unrepresentative group remove the voices of those directly involved in students’ lives. There is a difference between “MY child should not read this” and “NO children should read this.” This ministerial order actually

serves to remove parental choice and autonomy.

This order gives a narrow set of voices the power to dictate access for all. Meanwhile, the deeper crisis remains ignored: many school libraries have been shuttered or underfunded for years, leaving impoverished collections that fail to inspire or reflect students’ realities.

If we want students to become thoughtful, empathetic citizens capable of critical thinking, we must put books back at the centre of our schools. That means investing in trained staff, revitalizing outdated and abandoned collections and ensuring that every student has the chance to see themselves, explore diverse viewpoints and find joy in reading. Our focus should not be on removing books but on offering great books for students to get excited about. ■

Karen Belter is currently completing her doctorate in school leadership and has served in K–12 schools as a teacher-librarian and school leader.

Lissa Davies has a master of education in teacher librarianship and has worked in education and school libraries for over 20 years as a teacher, consultant and administrator. She is passionate about ensuring that all students build critical thinking skills, a love of learning and a vibrant reading life.

Editor’s note: For the full list of references used in this article, please contact managing editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

RED FOR ED

Nearly 30 Alberta teachers participated in this summer’s Selfie with Your MLA Challenge, which asked teachers not only to take a selfie with their MLA but also to speak with them about how underfunding is affecting their classrooms.

Alexandria Walters, her husband and MLAs Christina Grey and Rakhi Pancholi

Deb McMillan and the MLA from Calgary Varsity, Dr. Luanne Metz

Megan Girard and MLA Sarah Hoffman

Kevin McBeath and the MLA for Lethbridge-West, Rob Miyashiro

Matthew Loewen with his MLA and premier, Danielle Smith

Show us your Red for Ed

Want to share how you or your team is supporting public education in Alberta? Let your colleagues know why you wear Red for Ed or how you create moments of engagement or advocacy. Email managing editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

Education Act amendments now in force across Alberta schools

ATA News Staff

Changes to the *Education Act* are now in full effect. As of September 1, teachers and schools must follow new rules requiring additional parental notifications, parental consent and ministerial approval for resources. The *Education Amendment Act, 2024* (formerly Bill 27) also included amendments related to the right to education during emergencies, which took effect in March 2025.

New rules on notification, consent and approval

The changes taking effect this fall include a requirement for parental notification and consent before teachers and staff can use preferred names or pronouns for students under 16 years of age. For students aged 16 and 17, parents must be notified, though consent is not required.

Parental notification and consent are only required if the name change reflects the student's gender identity. If a student prefers to be called by a shortened version of their legal name (for example, Jim instead of James) or a nickname unrelated to their gender identity, parental notification or consent is not needed.

Another change relates to subject matter dealing mainly and explicitly with gender identity, sexual orientation or human sexuality. Parents must now opt in for their children to receive this content. Schools must provide at least 30 days' notice and enough information for parents to make an informed decision. These requirements do not apply to other subject matters or incidental references to these topics.

Teachers should also be aware of the new requirement for ministerial approval of resources or guest presentations that deal primarily with gender identity, sexual orientation or human sexuality. Resources used

for religious instruction are exempt; however, any external presenter addressing these topics must be approved, even if the presentation is in the context of religious instruction.

Debate over safety and care

For supporters of Bill 27, the changes strengthen the role of parents in shaping their children's education.

Premier Danielle Smith supported the amendments in October 2024, saying, "The changes we're proposing put students first while supporting the important parent-child relationship. From kindergarten through Grade 12, students and their families will be able to rely on consistent and compassionate care from both their school and our government."

While the government has framed the changes as a way to support transparency and parental involvement, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and others have expressed concern. Critics argue the new rules increase the complexity of teachers' work, could undermine inclusion in schools and may negatively impact vulnerable students.

"Unfortunately, these changes to the *Education Act* create barriers rather than supports for some of our most vulnerable kids in Alberta schools," said ATA president Jason Schilling.

Schilling also pointed to the Alberta Government's Teaching Quality Standard, which states, "A teacher establishes, promotes and sustains inclusive learning environments where diversity is embraced and every student is welcomed, cared for, respected and safe."

"It is important to remember that teachers have a responsibility to keep all students safe — the government articulated that responsibility," Schilling said. "Parental rights need to be balanced with teachers' responsibility to ensure every student feels affirmed and supported in their learning environment."



CHRIS SCHWARZ/GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Premier Danielle Smith on October 31, 2024, speaking on and addressing questions on new legislation, including changes to the *Education Act*.

Guidance and support for teachers

Teachers are not alone in navigating the new requirements, which apply to all teachers and school leaders within Alberta school authorities, including public, separate, francophone, charter and independent (private) schools.

Resources include the Alberta Education and Childcare website, including the new LearnAlberta.ca, which will feature ministry-approved teaching and learning resources. School board policy is also an

essential tool for understanding these new rules. Another helpful reference is the ATA's Q and A, available at <https://abteach.cc/QandA>, which also provides links to additional resources teachers can share with students who need support.

"The ATA is here to support teachers as they adhere to the rules, even as they continue to ensure the safety and inclusion of students," said Schilling.

Teachers with additional questions about the amendments can contact Teacher Employment Services at 1-800-232-7208. ■

Teachers stand ready to protect the profession

Off Script

with ATA President Jason Schilling



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

It seems to me that over the last few years, I have often written on how the past year was one of the most challenging for public education in Alberta. Then another new year begins, and the sentiment remains just as true.

Overcrowded classrooms, inadequate funding and unmet student needs remain unresolved, despite recent government announcements that might suggest otherwise. So, Alberta teachers sent a historic message — nearly 95 per cent in favour of a strike vote — signalling a united demand for respect, resources and action. This mandate, rooted in courage and conviction, is shaping the public conversation about why one of the wealthiest provinces in the country funds its students the least.

Government tactics to distract from the real issues — whether by burying announcements or manufacturing false debates — must not pull us off course. Your Association remains

focused on the challenges that really matter: potential job action, chronic underfunding, flawed curriculum and assessments, regressive legislation such as Bill 27 and the integrity of teacher credentialing. Our advocacy efforts have already prompted delays in K-3 assessments and curriculum implementation — small but important wins that prove persistent pressure works.

Member engagement will remain critical this year. Teachers' voices and classroom stories are trusted by the public and must be shared widely. The upcoming trustee elections offer another opportunity to ensure that public education is protected. Keep having conversations with MLAs and members of your community about the crisis in our schools; they need to hear your stories firsthand.

Solidarity has always been our foundation — we have proven that — but now, it must become our fuel. Our collective strength comes from

connection, coordinated action and mutual support. We must have courageous conversations about what's at stake. The stand we take is not just about salaries or class size; it is about the very soul of public education.

As colleagues, we share both the responsibility and the privilege of inspiring hope. No small task, especially in these uncertain times. Yet we will step forward together. Our commitment is to stand for what is just — for each other, for our students and for the future of public education.

United, we can shape the path ahead. Your Association is prepared to act with clarity, courage and conviction. Because taking action for a better tomorrow isn't just what we do — it's who we are. No matter the challenges, we step into a new year, together.

So, colleagues, let us move forward, louder than doubt, stronger than fear, and ready to protect the profession and the students we serve. ■



Public education at risk due to bargaining impasse, ATA warns

ATA News Staff

Without fair wages and improved conditions for teachers and students, Alberta risks driving away its most valuable educational resource: its teachers, says Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) president Jason Schilling.

After talks broke down between the ATA and the Teachers’ Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA), Schilling said teachers have been firm and unequivocal in saying that the government’s latest offer does not recognize the important work teachers do within the public education system, especially when teachers have been disrespected and undervalued for years.

“The government needs to do the right thing and pay teachers fairly for the work they do with the children who will be responsible for Alberta’s future,” Schilling said.

The government’s latest offer is centered around a proposed salary increase of 12 per cent over the next four years, the same offer that teachers rejected in June, Schilling said.

It’s getting harder to keep teachers in the profession and to attract new people to an increasingly challenging job, as teacher pay has fallen far behind inflation and the cost of living, Schilling said. Over the last decade, teacher wages have increased by a total of just 5.75 per cent.

“With fair wages, we can hire more

teachers — and keep the ones we have — but we need the provincial government to step up,” he said.

Schilling added that teachers are not just seeking fair compensation, they’re seeking alignment between words and actions. If the government believes teachers are vital, as the premier recently stated, it’s time to reflect that in all aspects of teachers’ jobs.

The government offered teachers a deal that included the hiring of 1,000 new teachers per year, over the next three years. This was a positive move forward but addressed only part of the proposal that the ATA tabled in June.

“More still needs to be done to attract and retain teachers to fill these added positions,” Schilling said.

In June, teachers voted 94 per cent in favour of strike action, giving the ATA until Oct. 7 to initiate a strike should bargaining efforts fail to deliver an agreement. On the employer side, TEBA was set to take a lockout vote on Aug. 29.

Schilling said the ATA’s Provincial Executive Council will be assessing the current state of central bargaining and considering next steps. Meanwhile, he’s urging TEBA to return to the table with an expanded mandate to address teachers’ salary expectations.

“Teachers are the pillars of our public education system,” he said. “It’s time for the government to step up with a fair deal for teachers, because a fair deal for teachers is a good deal for kids.” ■



YOUR VIEWS

Teachers shared how much they typically spend on classroom supplies each year.

Celeste Jordan Avendano
It depends on the year. When I make a big change in grades, I spend more at first, but it tapers off. This year I’ve put in a good \$500 as I’m switching to kindergarten from years of Grade 2/3, where I spent next to nothing the last two years.

Jesica Torres
I spend most of my personal money for subscriptions to classroom apps like Pear Deck and Edpuzzle. They make my life easier and add quality to my teaching practice, but they add up quickly.

Melanie Thibault
I spent so much more in my first five years, and then again when I switched from junior high to elementary. Building an interesting and diverse classroom library is especially expensive. It has levelled off after so many years of teaching, thankfully.

Scott O’Donnell
\$0. I used to spend money, but now I just eBiz everything to the school and if they can’t afford it, I’m not getting it.

Jennifer Black
I stopped buying for my classroom a few years ago. If the school doesn’t provide it, then we don’t have it. However, I teach high school. I don’t think elementary school teachers have the luxury of saying that.

Melanie Grant
I have a budget for basic school supplies. Then I get money to spend on my classroom, but that money doesn’t pay for subscriptions, treats, extra art supplies, new books, etc. because it just isn’t enough.

Jac Lobley
I am probably closer to \$800–1,000 a year. I know, ridiculous.

Simona Chalifoux
As a substitute, I usually buy \$200 worth of supplies to go in my teacher bag. Read alouds, extra supplies, paper, expo markers, etc. Sometimes it’s hard to find the extra supplies in each classroom, so having extras in my bag for students is helpful. When I had my own classroom, it was definitely \$700+.

Emily Russell
Last year was my first year in a new Interactions class div 4. I easily spent over \$1,000 between fidgets that got broken, books, food, outfitting my supply closet, etc. This year, I’ve already spent \$300 to replenish items, get a stool for an EA in the class, etc.

Kathleen Kraft
Most of what I have spent has gone into materials and resources for the new LA, math and science curriculum for Grade 3.

Alexis Van Leeuwen
Over a thousand each year, but that won’t be the case going forward.



DID YOU KNOW?

In the case of a strike or lockout, teachers may not be able to access their school board email account. To ensure that you are always receiving the latest information and updates from the Alberta Teachers’ Association, be sure to subscribe to Members’ Updates and the ATA eNews using your personal email address.

Subscribe at <https://abteach.cc/UpdateSignUp> or scan the QR code.



FOR THE RECORD

“That’s why we’re going to be asking for a bit more information, to dig a little deeper on that. We have to make sure the money is given to the classroom. That’s everybody’s objective.”

—Premier Danielle Smith on her *Your Province, Your Premier* radio show on Aug. 23

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Teachers receive ATA awards for graduate research

Dan Grassick
ATA Executive Staff Officer

The Alberta Teachers' Association is proud to announce the winners of the 2025 ATA Doctoral Fellowships in Education and the Nadene M. Thomas Graduate Research Bursary.

2025 ATA Doctoral Fellowships in Education

This year's recipients of the \$15,000 doctoral fellowships are Joshua LaFleur and Sana Waseem.

LaFleur, a learning specialist with Rocky View Schools, received the fellowship to support his research on building inclusive, culturally responsive school communities. Specifically, his doctoral work explores how playful learning and community-building strategies can support students with English as an additional language, particularly in suburban and rural schools. LaFleur aims to help create school environments where all students feel seen and supported by designing scalable approaches that reduce absenteeism and boost academic outcomes.

Waseem, a learning leader with the

Calgary Board of Education, is excited to research ways to improve the well-being of female leaders in education, particularly those who are racialized. Through her research, Waseem hopes to inform the development of policies that improve the support, retention and promotion of these leaders, and lead to greater organizational diversity and effectiveness.

Nadene M. Thomas Graduate Research Bursary

This year's recipient of the \$5,000 graduate bursary is JJ Ondrus. Ondrus, a veteran high school physics

and mathematics teacher, is currently completing a master of education at the University of Lethbridge. Her capstone project explores educational leadership through the metaphor of quantum mechanics — specifically, the concept of holding two truths simultaneously, such as being both a leader and a manager. Grounded in case studies, her research focuses on parent engagement as a strategy to improve student attendance and attitudes, with special attention paid to address challenges experienced by students from vulnerable or marginalized groups. ■

The ATA Doctoral Fellowships in Education and Nadene M Thomas Graduate Research Bursary are awarded annually to active members pursuing advanced degrees in education at recognized public universities in Canada. Successful recipients are selected for exemplary teaching and leadership, contribution to the ATA and public education, academic achievement and the potential impact of their research. The application deadline for both awards is February 28 each year. Find out more at <https://teachers.ab.ca/scholarships>.



Joshua LaFleur, 2025 ATA Doctoral Fellowships in Education winner



Sana Waseem, 2025 ATA Doctoral Fellowships in Education winner



JJ Ondrus, 2025 Nadene M. Thomas Graduate Research Bursary winner

Belairdirect Scholarship recipient has her eye on AI



2025 scholarship winner Tasha Fisher

Dan Grassick
ATA Executive Staff Officer

A Leduc teacher has been named the winner of the 2025 Belairdirect Scholarship, which provides \$2,500 to support professional learning.

This year's recipient is Tasha Fisher, an elementary and junior high teacher with St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic. She is currently completing a graduate program in educational technology and design, offered by the University of Saskatchewan. Fisher's coursework and research explore instructional design, teacher efficiency and the integration of artificial intelligence

(AI) in K-12 classrooms. Fisher is committed to creating and supporting evidence-informed, technology-enhanced learning environments.

Since 1991, the Belairdirect Scholarship (originally called the Morgex Insurance Group Ltd—Guardian Insurance Company of Canada Ltd Scholarship in Education, then the John Mazurek Memorial—Morgex Scholarship and now the Belairdirect Scholarship) has provided teachers with professional development funding to attend courses related to business education and/or the use of computers in education. Now, the scholarship program is being reimaged as the Belairdirect

Award for Learning and Leadership, with the eligible programs expanding significantly.

For 2025/26, any education or leadership-related coursework offered by a publicly funded university in Canada will be eligible, with the intent that the recipient can continue their learning (by improving their own professional capacity through formal study) and their leadership (by contributing to the professional development of other teachers by sharing what they have learned).

More information on the Belairdirect Award for Learning and Leadership, including how to apply, is available at <https://teachers.ab.ca/scholarships>. ■

Calgary teacher selected for prestigious fellowship

Mark Milne
ATA News Staff

Once again, the National Geographic Society has turned the international spotlight onto one of Alberta's public school teachers. Calgary teacher Court Rustemeyer has been selected to take part in the Society's coveted Grosvenor Teacher Fellowship, a program that offers teachers a unique field-based experience.

In December of this year, Rustemeyer, with the help of the National Geographic Society, will head to Antarctica to explore the region and its effect on the planet's global ecosystems.

"I was completely blown away — it honestly felt like a dream," said Rustemeyer. "But what excites me most is the chance to bring that inspiration back to my students."

Rustemeyer is a teacher at Vincent Massey School with the Calgary Public School Division. For almost two decades, he has been an inspiration for educators and students alike, connecting with nature through exploration and adventure. Rustemeyer serves as president of the Global, Environmental and Outdoor Education Council, a specialist council of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), and as director of the Prairies for the Outdoor Council of Canada. He has also provided workshops and sessions for the ATA, the Outdoor Learning Conference and Physical and Health Education (PHE) Canada.

As part of the fellowship, Rustemeyer must develop several educational resources, such as outreach and classroom action plans, surveys, as well as outreach presentations and documentation. These added resources will help

educators from across the continent incorporate Rustemeyer's field-based experiences into their classrooms.

The Grosvenor Teacher Fellowship is a professional development opportunity for K-12 educators that is made possible through a collaboration between Lindblad Expeditions and the National Geographic Society. Grosvenor teacher fellows transfer their experience into new ways to teach students, engage colleagues and bring new geographic awareness into their learning environments and communities.

"This fellowship isn't just about me," said Rustemeyer. "It's about sparking curiosity and reminding young people that learning and adventure can change the way we see the world."

Of the 35 recipients of this year's fellowships, only three were from Canada. ■



Court Rustemeyer is one of three Canadian teachers selected for the 2025 Grosvenor Teacher Fellowship.

Teachers celebrate collective hope at the ATA’s Summer Conference



Kristine Wilkinson
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

More than 200 teachers from across Alberta came together this August for the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s (ATA) Summer Conference, an annual event dedicated to professional development, leadership training and community building for teacher leaders in the ATA.

Held in Banff, the conference offered a lineup of programs tailored to support and empower teachers in their roles. This year’s offerings included seminars focused on collective bargaining, local political engagement, convention planning, leadership initiatives and specialist councils. Notably, 2025 marked the

first-ever inclusion of diversity, equity and human rights programming, reflecting the ATA’s commitment to fostering inclusive and equitable school environments.

Call for continued engagement

ATA president Jason Schilling opened the four-day conference with a call for solidarity and strength in this challenging time.

“Member organisation and engagement have always been at the heart of the Association’s work,” he said. “In fact, they are the lifeblood of any major public sector union.”

Schilling said that in the year ahead, that focus must sharpen. He encouraged teachers to continue in their efforts to engage and mobilize fellow teachers through the next year.

“The strength of the Association comes from the engagement of teachers,” he emphasized.

Hope as a strategic act

The program also included a powerful keynote address by Dana Fulwiler

Volk, a well-being strategist and cofounder of *Teacher Fan Club*. Fulwiler Volk holds a master of education degree from the University of Saskatchewan and a master of applied positive psychology from the University of Pennsylvania. With two decades of experience, spanning K–12 education, postsecondary education, non-profit work and global well-being initiatives, Fulwiler Volk brought a unique blend of academic insight and heartfelt advocacy to the stage.

Her keynote, titled “The Regenerative Power of Collective Hope,” explored the transformative potential of shared vision and mutual support in navigating the complexities of today’s educational landscape.

“Hope isn’t naïve,” Fulwiler Volk said. “It’s a strategic act of regeneration and purpose.”

She invited teachers to embrace hope not as a passive emotion but as a collective force for positive action, unity and courage. This topic was timely for teachers as they look to the new school year with many questions about labour action on their minds.

Participants left the conference energized and inspired, equipped with new tools, deeper connections and a renewed sense of purpose. As the ATA continues to evolve and respond to the needs of Alberta’s teachers, the Summer Conference remains a cornerstone of professional growth and solidarity. ■

Summer Conference provides training to members who are actively involved or are interested in becoming involved in the work of the Association.

Teachers are required to have authorization from their local, specialist council or convention association to attend.

Learn more at <https://abteach.cc/summerconference>.



KRISTINE WILKINSON
Alberta teachers gathered in Banff for the ATA’s premier professional learning event.



KRISTINE WILKINSON
Well-being strategist Dana Fulwiler Volk spoke on the value of hope during her keynote at Summer Conference.

New ATA staff role set to boost member engagement

Mark Milne
ATA News Staff

Prepare to get engaged! The Teacher Employment Services (TES) program area has added a new focus to help get members involved with the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). Last spring, the Provincial Executive Council (PEC) approved the creation of a new associate coordinator position to lead this bold direction. Filling this role is executive staff officer Jonathan Teghtmeyer, recently returned from academic leave.

"There have been many leaders at the Association who have spoken about developing our member engagement for many years," said Teghtmeyer. "So, it really is a perennial theme that continues to surface. It's an important piece of work that needs to be prioritized for the Association."

Teghtmeyer will bring his extensive expertise in member organizing and communications, as well as new learnings from his recent studies, to enhance the ATA's capacity to reach out and actively engage the membership.



Jonathan Teghtmeyer is taking on the new role of associate coordinator, focused on member engagement.

"In communications, we've managed several member engagement projects. That will provide a solid springboard for developing even more in-depth engagement," said Teghtmeyer. "I've been studying user-centered design and other theoretical frameworks that could be applied to the question of member engagement."

Teghtmeyer said the exact scope of the new position has not yet been finalized and the next several months will include conversations with various member groups about what they'd like to see.

"Building member engagement is not something that can be done from Barnett House. It's something that must be done in all corners of the province and all areas of the Association," said Teghtmeyer.

Because teachers interact with the Association in different ways, Teghtmeyer plans to collaborate across program areas to engage directly with members and subgroups about the work they do and what member engagement looks like for them.

"I like the idea that it's something that I can dedicate more focus to as part of my work."

With the new position added, TES will now be known as Teacher Employment and Membership Support (TEMS).

Given Teghtmeyer's move to the new position, the communications team needed a new leader. Acting associate coordinator of communications Kristine Wilkinson, who filled in for



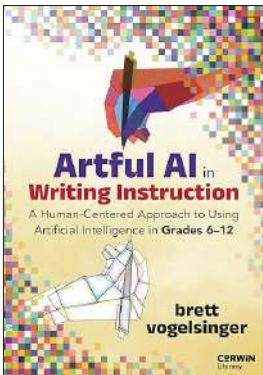
Kristine Wilkinson, the new associate coordinator of communications.

Teghtmeyer during his leave, was the logical choice.

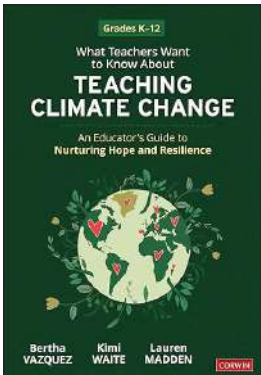
"I was very excited to learn that I would be working with such an amazing and competent team on an ongoing basis," said Wilkinson. "We really seemed to gel this past year, and I'm looking forward to the incredible things we can accomplish with the challenges ahead." ■

CHECK ME OUT!

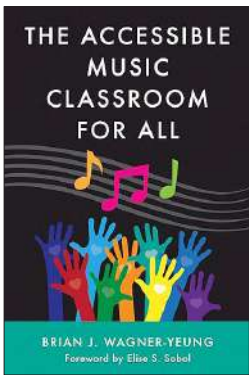
Some of the ATA Library's newest reads:



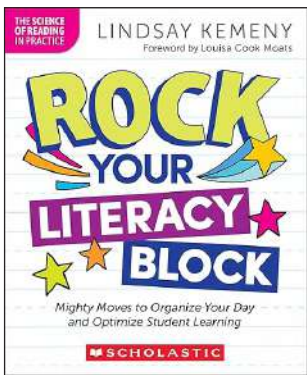
Artful AI in Writing Instruction – A Human-Centred Approach to Using Artificial Intelligence in Grades 6–12
by Brett Vogelsinger



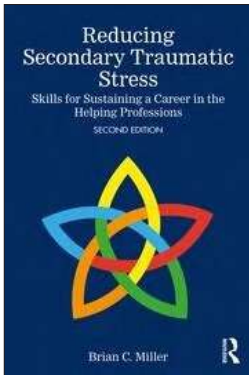
What Teachers Want to Know About Teaching Climate Change – An Educator's Guide to Nurturing Hope and Resilience
by Bertha Vazquez, Kimi Waite and Lauren Madden



The Accessible Music Classroom for All
by Brian J. Wagner Yeung



Rock Your Literacy Block – Mighty Moves to Organize Your Day and Optimize Student Learning
by Lindsay Kemeny



Reducing Secondary Traumatic Stress – Skills for Sustaining a Career in the Helping Professions
by Brian C. Miller

WANT TO **BORROW** THESE?
(HINT: IT'S FREE FOR ATA MEMBERS!)

Head to the ATA Library's webpage to find these books – and so much more!
library.teachers.ab.ca





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LIVE ON STAGE



MONDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2025 | 10:15AM
Jack Singer Concert Hall, Werklund Centre

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Scan this QR code to learn more.

Visit our website to get started, and build confidence in your finances as you approach your retirement.

bit.ly/ARTAPWBlog



ATA Magazine named finalist for Magazine of the Year



ATA News Staff

The *ATA Magazine* has been nominated for 11 awards by the Alberta Magazine Publishers Association (AMPA). The AMPA recently announced the finalists for its annual Alberta Magazine Awards, and the *ATA Magazine* was named a finalist for Magazine of the Year. It was listed in other categories as well, including best editorial package (print), service journalism, Alberta story, cover, essay, feature design and illustration.

“These nominations are a testament to the creativity, dedication and

passion of our team and contributors,” said the magazine’s editor-in-chief Elissa Corsi. “We’re proud to deliver a magazine that informs, engages and celebrates our members.”

Award winners will be announced in September at the Alberta Magazines Conference. ■

Want to receive the *ATA Magazine* straight to your inbox? Subscribe here:

ATA ad campaign spotlights strain on schools

Heather Grant
ATA News Staff

With another school year under way, Alberta teachers are facing the same challenges: class sizes are too big, classroom complexity is increasing and resources are dwindling. These issues are front and centre in the latest ad campaign from the Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA).

Through billboards, radio and television commercials, teacher testimonials on social media, and postcards and lawn signs, the ATA is sharing messages to increase public awareness about the chronic issues facing public education in the province.

“What we need in Alberta is

a government that steps up and recognizes the importance of public education,” said Laura, a high school English teacher featured in one of the teacher testimonial videos. “Without strong, capable, functioning public education, we don’t have strong, capable and functioning adults.”

Other teachers have echoed her message in the campaign, sharing first-hand accounts of how underfunding has strained classrooms and student supports.

On the airwaves, a new ATA radio ad calls out the province for “making excuses” instead of addressing funding shortfalls. On television, an updated commercial from 2023 depicts overcrowded classrooms: students enter a room and hang coats until the rack overflows — they then begin piling the rest of the coats in their teacher’s arms. The coat rack and coats fall by the end, representing what might happen if the public education system continues to be strained.

The campaign also includes a grassroots push. Brightly colored lawn signs with slogans like “Cut the excuses, not education funding” and “Public education: underfunded, undervalued, unacceptable” have appeared in neighbourhoods across Alberta. Thousands of lawn signs have already been distributed across the province. Teachers can request signs through their ATA locals.

Teachers can also participate in the campaign by completing fill-in-the-blank postcards that urge more supports for Alberta’s public education system. Each school was sent a package of postcards for teachers to personalize and send to their MLAs (additional cards can be ordered at <https://abteach.cc/MLAPostcards>). The black-and-yellow postcards feature attention-grabbing headlines such as “We’re not asking for the moon. We’re asking for smaller classes, more supports and fair pay.” Teachers can add their own thoughts before mailing them off.

The ATA’s campaign will continue into the fall, with the aim to keep education issues visible for both the public and policymakers. ■



KIM CLEMENT

ATA lawn signs in support of public education can be seen throughout Alberta neighbourhoods.



Teacher testimonial videos share the experiences and concerns of Alberta’s teachers.

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 Lindsay Yakimyshyn: lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

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- strengthen communication skills,
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- navigate conflict, and
- move beyond the conflict.

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October 27, 2025

Barnett House,

11010 142 Street

Register today!

Scan to register



The Alberta Teachers' Association

<https://surveys.teachers.ab.ca/s3/Healthy-Interactions-Fall-2025>

TES-MS-HI-13g-i 2025-08

Transform your career with an exchange.

Various destinations available.



Virtual and in-person short-term exchanges for teachers and school leaders.

Visit teachers.ab.ca, search "teacher exchange" for applications and details.

The Alberta Teachers' Association



Where are you in your leadership journey?

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MEd Info Session



EdD Info Session





DIGITAL NEWS

The ATA News is available in a digital format.

For the latest issue, visit www.teachers.ab.ca/news.
Subscribe to receive an email when a new issue is available.

<http://bit.ly/ATAeNews>

ADVERTISING IN

ATA NEWS

For advertising information, contact Trevor Battye at Trevor Battye Advertising Sales 1-778-773-9397 trevor@tbasales.ca

Next deadline Thursday, Sep. 11, 2025, 4 p.m. (Publication date Sep. 23, 2025) Advertisers are encouraged to book early – space is limited.

Circulation: 34,500 We accept Visa, Mastercard, cash or cheque.

Holiday card or evidence?

Teachers urged to document to protect themselves



PITFALLS & PRECAUTIONS

Tanya Thiessen
ATA Executive Staff Officer
and Representation Officer

A simple thank you card may one day be more than a sentimental keepsake — it could be a critical piece of legal evidence. That was the case in an investigation into a teacher’s professional conduct, where holiday cards from a parent played a decisive role in clearing the teacher of misconduct allegations.

From appreciation to accusation

The case began when a parent filed a complaint alleging years of bullying and mistreatment by a high school drama teacher, citing a recent decision by the teacher not to cast their child in a play. The complainant claimed this was part of a long history of exclusion.

The teacher, blindsided by the accusation, insisted they had enjoyed a positive relationship with the student and family. Their proof? Three handwritten holiday cards from the same parent. Written over several years, the cards thanked the teacher for supporting the student, praised them as a role model and even expressed hope that the parent’s younger children might one day be in the teacher’s class.

The tone and content of these cards starkly contradicted the complaint and ultimately led to a determination that no further action was required. In this case, documentary evidence was key to disproving the allegations.

Old notes, new importance

Documentation can take many forms, but it is important to remember that all documents may become part of legal proceedings. Strengthening documentation practices is essential for teachers and school leaders as Alberta’s educational landscape grows more complex.

Under the new Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers and Teacher Leaders, the stakes are higher than ever when it comes to maintaining clear, objective records of professional activities, student incidents and decision making. Further, unlike complaints regarding professional competency, which must be filed within two years, conduct complaints can be submitted at any time — even decades after an alleged event.

A conduct complaint could be made about something that happened on your first day of teaching, even if that was 20 years ago. That’s why

keeping accurate, dated notes and summaries is so critical.

Emails, meeting notes, classroom logs and other records (yes, even holiday cards) could be used as evidence in investigations by school divisions or the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission (ATPC). While strong documentation can support a teacher’s position, poor or inconsistent documentation can undermine credibility and legal standing.

Best practices for documentation

While each teacher may develop a documentation style that works for them, some common principles may help guide your practice:

- Date every entry: Always note when the record was created.
- Be concise and objective: Stick to observable facts. Avoid emotional, subjective or accusatory language.
- Stay consistent: Make documentation a habit, not a reaction.
- Know the policies: Each school division has rules around records retention, including how long to keep emails, video files, student data and incident reports.

As documentation may be used in legal proceedings, avoid including personal opinions, hearsay or unverifiable references to family issues or mental health unless directly relevant and professionally appropriate. Further, any documentation involving suspected child abuse or police involvement should be recorded factually and in accordance with legal requirements.

A professional responsibility — and protection

Professional, factual and timely documentation isn’t just good practice, it’s a form of protection. It’s not about being paranoid; it’s about being prepared because you can’t always anticipate which records will become relevant in the future.

It doesn’t hurt to find a safe place for those thank you cards, letters and drawings. Just in case. ■

If you have received a notice of complaint from the ATPC, contact the ATA's Regulatory Affairs team immediately.
Call 1-800-232-7208 or email professionaldiscipline@ata.ab.ca for support.

Council approves in principle Declaration on Assessment

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council (PEC) meeting held June 12–14, 2025, Barnett House, Edmonton.

1. Declared in effect an amendment to the General Bylaws, as set out in Electoral Ballot 1 of 2024 and approved by the 2025 Annual Representative Assembly. Electoral Ballot 1 amended general bylaw 53 to differentiate between associate members who hold the highest level of membership available to them and those who do not and prohibit members of the College of Alberta School Superintendents from running for provincial office.
2. Approved in principle moving forward seven electoral ballots proposed by locals. The finalized ballots, along with a statement of PEC’s position on each, will be prepared and distributed to locals before the end of September.
3. Approved in principle one PEC-sponsored electoral ballot for distribution to locals before the end of September.
4. Authorized the addition of Rule 6.10.1 to the Rules of Order and Procedure: “With respect to representative assemblies, no member, without leave of the meeting, given, if necessary, by a majority vote on a motion duly made and put, shall speak to the same question, or in reply, for longer than three minutes. Time taken by staff or other nonmembers of the assembly to answer questions or provide information in response to a member’s inquiry shall not count toward the member’s speaking time.”
5. Authorized the development of a new resource to support Palestinian newcomer students and their families in Alberta schools.
6. Amended the administrative guidelines pertaining to release, relief and compensation for members of PEC by adding provisions that specifically address how a member of Council who is employed as a substitute or part-time teacher is paid by the Association.
7. Authorized the transfer of approximately \$300,000 cash from the general operating fund to pay off a loan prior to the end of the 2024/25 fiscal year.
8. Approved in principle a draft Declaration on Assessment, which is based on established Association policy and will be published as a combined declaration with the existing Declaration on Curriculum.
9. Approved the reassignment of the members of Clearview Local No. 33 from Endless Skies Teachers’ Convention Association to Central Alberta Teachers’ Convention Association, commencing in the 2026/27 convention year.
10. Amended the administrative guidelines as they relate to the role of the Central Strike Action Committee and approved the Central Strike Action Committee frame of reference.
11. Amended the administrative guidelines to update the standard provincial convention guest registration fees.
12. Amended the administrative guidelines to eliminate the option of sending multiple copies of any one item in a school mailing unless the item is specified as one copy per teacher.
13. Amended the administrative guidelines to update how the Nadene M. Thomas Graduate Research Bursary is paid to its recipients.
14. Approved that funding for local substitute teacher chair meetings and training events be included in the Association’s 2025/26 prognoses for the 2026/27 fiscal year.
15. Repealed the Standard Constitution for Sublocals and amended four local constitutions to remove any references to sublocals.
16. Approved the names of 15 teachers for addition to the approved name bank for possible appointment as Association instructors.
17. Approved field member committee and representation assignments for 2025/26. ■

popquiz!

Sudoku

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SUBSTITUTE TEACHERS' CONFERENCE

OCTOBER 17-18, 2025
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MORE INFO
AND TO
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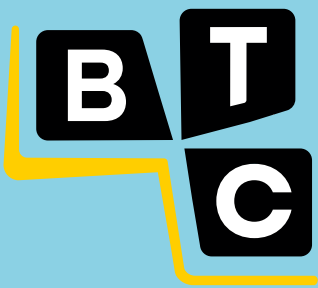
On October 20, vote for your local school board trustee.

Visit vote4kids.ca for more information on voting, issues affecting education and candidates in your jurisdiction.



Vote4Kids.ca

COMM-244e 2025 08



BEGINNING TEACHERS CONFERENCE

Registration is open to teachers in their first two years of classroom teaching who have not previously attended the conference and those teachers new to teaching in the province.

Teachers who live in Red Deer and north should register for the Edmonton conference.

**Edmonton conference—
September 26-27, 2025**
(<https://reg.unityeventsolutions.com/se/2025BTCEDM/ATT>)

**Calgary conference—
October 3-4, 2025**
(<https://reg.unityeventsolutions.com/se/2025BTCCALG/REG>)



The Alberta Teachers' Association



GOT THE INSIDE SCOOP?

We want to hear about it!

Whether it's a teacher success story, a school community achievement or a unique ATA local event, we want to hear about it. Send us your story ideas!

Email your ideas to Managing Editor
Lindsay Yakimyshyn at
lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

COOR-209 2025-03

OCT
25/25

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Calgary



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Dr. Sterling Sparshu



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GROUP OF 10
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CIRQUE DU SOLEIL

ECHO



*SELECT SEATS/DATES

NOTEWORTHY *thanks*

I want to thank you for all the efforts you've made for this year. From day one I've enjoyed each and every class and I even look forward to go to school every day, which is a surprise for me, a girl who always used to find excuses for not attending. Thank you for never giving up on me!

— From a junior high student,
submitted by Jenna Kanary

Teachers shared
thank you notes they
received over the
years from students
and parents.
Here are a few
highlights from the
many messages
of gratitude.

First, thank you for all the teaching. I now know a lot of things in life. I know lifecycles and fractions. Second, wow I have no idea how you and Miss Kelly handle 49 kids. It would be impossible for me to handle 49 kids. Thank you for all the hard work.

— From a Grade 2 student,
submitted by Naomi Bell

Your patient and caring attitude truly helped him to shine this year. We're so thankful for being part of your class. Can you please teach Grade 3? LOL!

— From a parent,
submitted by Amanda Fraser

Your enthusiasm for teaching and genuine care for the kids make a world of difference. We appreciate all the hard work and dedication you bring to the classroom every day. Thank you for pouring so much of yourself into your teaching.

— From a parent,
submitted by Kaitlyn Dobson

A truly great math teacher is hard to find, difficult to part with and impossible to forget. Thanks for teaching me math. Without you I'd be as lost as a pencil in a backpack.

— From a Grade 7 student,
submitted by Tom Janzen

Thank you for being such a wonderful teacher. I'll miss your class, but I'll carry what I learned wherever I go. You are my favourite English teacher!

— From a student,
submitted by Teresa Talarico

Your class was inviting, interesting and exciting. You have been such an amazing teacher and have had a huge impact on my schooling and helped me to achieve my goals.

— From a student,
submitted by Matt Huntley

I know you didn't teach me this year except for being my volleyball coach, but I felt like you were one of the few teachers that made a really big impact on me. Not for sports, not for schoolwork or math, but I'm talking about an actual comfort ... I cannot explain in words how that helped me.

— From a student,
submitted by Jannah Bertin