



With gratitude

Acknowledging our teachers and those who stood alongside them

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WHO'S WHO

Meet your elected leaders.

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ATA NEWS

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SUPPLIED

Mary Van Driesum's kindergarten classes at Edmonton Christian West School created paintings of poppies in honour of Remembrance Day.

"Do what is right"

ATA launches legal challenge against Bill 2

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Step in the right direction

New committee to address class size, complexity

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Back to work, but not backing down

Teachers will not give up—not now, not ever

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Pitfalls and Precautions

How to handle conflict within your team

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A question of funding

Petition asks if private schools should receive public dollars

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The strike is over, but the work isn't



EDITORIAL

Kristine Wilkinson
ATA News
Editor-in-Chief

When the call finally came for teachers to return to classrooms, teachers felt a heavy dose of unease. The strike is over—for now—but for many in the profession, the path forward under Bill 2 doesn't feel like a victory. It feels like a reset, and on someone else's terms.

To recap where we stand, Bill 2 ended teachers' lawful strike action. But it did more than that. It also undermined their rights. By invoking the notwithstanding clause, the province chose to override the Charter-protected rights of association and collective bargaining. The legislation imposes the collective agreement that the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) had already

rejected, suspends local bargaining until August 2028 and threatens substantial fines for noncompliance.

In other words, teachers were forced to return to work, abide by the imposed contract and stop striking.

Teachers feel exhausted, and understandably so. Months of negotiation, mediation, strike action and public scrutiny have taken their toll. On the one hand, there's some sense of relief in being back in classrooms, as teachers are back doing what they signed up for, interacting with students and reclaiming routine. But on the other hand, there's frustration that teachers had to return to work without consent even though the conditions that led them to strike—larger class sizes, increasing complexity, fewer supports—haven't been addressed. Some teachers are demoralized, having experienced the emotional struggle and physical energy of engaging in activism only to have their rights undermined.

If collective bargaining can be overridden so dramatically, what does that say about our agency in the profession? What does this mean for the union function of the ATA?

In this moment, the ATA's role remains vital. The collective agreement still exists. Rights and obligations still exist. The ATA monitors the agreement's implementation and steps in when it isn't being upheld by the employer.

The strike's end doesn't mean resolution of the underlying issues in public education, and adhering to the imposed collective agreement doesn't mean accepting the status quo. It means we use other tools at our disposal and avoid slipping into "why bother" rhetoric. We enter the classroom, uphold our professional standards and collaborate with colleagues—yes—but we also keep the pressure alive, quietly and steadily, for the conditions that make our work meaningful and sustainable.

The ATA remains the vehicle through which issues that affect teachers and school leaders continue to be addressed and pressed. Teachers are under stress. The ATA offers channels for discussion, for representation and for reminding members they are not alone.

When teachers walked back into schools, many carried two bags. One was filled with lesson plans, greetings from students and even some hope. The other was heavier, filled with questions about respect, rights and what all that has happened means for our profession.

The ATA is here to help with that second bag. Because returning to work isn't just about showing up. It's about showing resolve and using our collective voice to secure the respectful, resourced and valued teaching and learning environments the province deserves. ■

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

Hard circumstances lead to hard decisions



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive
Secretary

Question: How is the Association planning to respond to Bill 2?

Answer: The passage of Bill 2, the *Back to School Act*, in the middle of the night and after less than a day's worth of debate, pulled the rug out from under teachers and ended the strike which, at that point, had been ongoing for 16 instructional days. As reported elsewhere in this edition of the *News*, the bill legislated a settlement, precluded any further bargaining, mediation or arbitration at the provincial level and eliminated local table bargaining entirely. To insulate the bill from an inevitable and highly credible constitutional challenge, the government took the unprecedented step of invoking the Section 33 provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (the "notwithstanding clause"), applying them in their entirety to the entire content of the act. Included in the bill were draconian penalties that would be imposed on the Association and individual members for any action that would seek to continue the strike or promote further labour action (as broadly defined in Alberta's *Labour Relations Code*).

The bill denied teachers a "normal" conclusion to the strike resulting in deep frustration, confusion and recrimination. Many members are deeply hurt and in a form of "moral mourning," wondering whether their sacrifice and hard work over the past months was worth it. Association leadership and staff have heard from members and share this pain, even as we have been formulating a response that will allow the Association and teachers to continue to pursue our legitimate strike objectives, albeit by other means.

At an emergent meeting on November 12, Provincial Executive Council confirmed several measures that were already being undertaken, and approved additional responses, the sum of which comprise a comprehensive plan that will guide Association action over the next few months. In broad strokes these include

- engaging strategically and purposefully with government to advance teacher interests. This includes naming an Association representative to the Class Size and Complexity Cabinet Committee established and chaired by the premier, the first time in the history of the Association that teachers have been afforded direct access to the top-level decision makers in education;
- mounting a legal challenge of the *Back to School Act* and specifically its use of the notwithstanding

clause, including applying for an interlocutory injunction;

- advocating, in concert with civil society and other unions in Alberta and across the country, opposition to the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause;
- promoting and participating in the citizens' initiative to restrict the use of public funds for public education;
- enforcing aggressively and vigorously the terms of the collective agreements imposed by Bill 2 through individual and policy grievances;
- reviewing and revitalizing of local communications officers' and local political engagement officers' programs, examining their current roles and responsibilities, and how their critical work might be better supported;
- ongoing, refocused media public relations and advocacy campaigns making use of existing and new channels and modes of communication; and
- reviewing and assessing the role of local bargaining units and teacher welfare committees in light of the Bill 2 prohibition on local bargaining, providing support and direction as appropriate.

While the eight strategies outlined here will together constitute a comprehensive and, I believe, effective response to the government's actions

while continuing to advance teacher interests and build Association capacity, some members will wonder why other possible actions were not taken. In determining the Association's response, Provincial Executive Council had to consider several fundamental questions:

- What is the likely outcome of the proposed action and in what timeframe?
- What degree of control and support (among teachers and in the community) would the Association have in implementing the proposed action?
- How would the action actually advance the interests of teachers?
- What risks, costs and consequences would the action impose upon individual members and the Association, and how do these compare to the anticipated benefits?

You will appreciate that these are questions that your elected leaders could not ignore or gloss over. Hard circumstances lead to hard questions and hard decisions.

Over the next few weeks and months, you will be hearing more about our progress in implementing these strategies. Some, I suspect, will generate their own Q&As. ■

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

Rebuilding trust will take more than time



VIEWPOINTS

Meaghan Boutillier
Assistant Principal, Calgary

When I look back on the three weeks teachers were on strike, I feel a mix of emotions. At the forefront are anger, frustration and pride. Anger that there was no path to a fair, negotiated settlement. Frustration that the government used legislation that suspends Charter rights to send us back to work. But most of all, pride. Pride in the way teachers and school leaders across Alberta showed up every day, united in our belief that students deserve better and that public education is worth fighting for.

For three weeks, teachers rallied, went on walks to raise awareness and shared their stories with communities across the province. This historic strike wasn't only for higher wages, but for conditions that allow all students to thrive. Things like smaller class sizes, adequate support for complex learning needs and respect for our professional expertise.

Then came Bill 2, a piece of legislation that determined the contract teachers will work under and restricted the rights for teachers to negotiate for our working conditions—our students' learning conditions. Removing class size and composition from collective bargaining silences the very people who have the deepest understanding of classrooms and what students truly need to succeed.

In under 12 hours, and with limited debate, Bill 2 told teachers that their voices don't matter to this government. That their lived experiences

don't matter. That what is happening inside our classrooms doesn't matter. That message isn't just demoralizing, it is dangerous, because when those on the front lines are silenced, meaningful progress becomes impossible.

This strike brought to light the issues teachers have been quietly dealing with for a long time:

- Classrooms stretched beyond capacity
- Supports for complex needs spread impossibly thin
- Teachers and school leaders doing more with less every day

“... trust cannot be mandated. It must be earned through listening, transparency and respect for the people who make learning possible every day.”

Now we are unable to advocate for improvements through the collective bargaining process. But that doesn't make those issues go away. It only makes them harder to fix and pushes solutions even further out of reach.

Since returning to school, I've felt the weight of exhaustion. Many teachers are feeling disheartened and frustrated that their concerns and lived experiences aren't being respected. The government has said it wants to work with teachers and that it values what we have to say. But with the passing of Bill 2, trust has been broken, and rebuilding that trust will take more than time.

Public education is built on a foundation of collaboration, trust and respect. It depends on government, school leaders, teachers and families all working together toward a common goal: to create the best conditions for students to learn and reach their potential. But trust cannot be mandated. It must be earned through listening, transparency and respect for the people who make learning possible every day.

The breach of trust has served to deepen divisions in our province when what we need most right now is unity. Teachers are ready to be part of the solution. We always have been.

It's not too late to rebuild trust, but it will require significant work. Rebuilding trust starts with genuine and active listening to the people who work in schools every day. It means valuing and elevating teachers' voices, not silencing them.

Because when teachers are heard, respected and valued, students succeed. And that is what every teacher in Alberta's public schools wants. That is exactly what we have been—and will not stop—fighting for. ■

Meaghan Boutillier has been part of Alberta's teaching profession for 18 years. She is currently an assistant principal in Calgary.

RED FOR ED



BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF) members wore red in solidarity with Alberta teachers. At its Representative Assembly, the BCTF voted to support the ATA with a donation of up to \$1 million in financial and legal assistance to help in their fight against the Alberta government's Bill 2 and use of the notwithstanding clause.



Cassandra Hallett, executive director of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, shared her support for Alberta teachers, saying, "Wearing red in support of the tremendous educators in Alberta and the leadership of the ATA. The smile is for them (NOT for the appalling actions of the government)!"

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.

Create your own "Red for Ed" wear. Visit albertateachersassociation.entripyshops.com to customize and order "Red for Ed" branded apparel — hats, hoodies and more! The online shop rotates graphics every few months, so check out the current styles now.



ATA launches legal challenge against Bill 2

ATA News Staff

The Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) has launched a legal challenge against the provincial government’s use of the notwithstanding clause to end the provincewide teachers’ strike after calling the move “a reckless and historic abuse of power.”

On November 6, the ATA filed an application with the Court of King’s Bench seeking to overturn sections of Bill 2, the *Back to School Act*, which ordered Alberta’s striking teachers and school leaders back to work and imposed a collective agreement on ATA members. The ATA also requested an injunction to immediately halt enforcement of the legislation while the legal challenge proceeds.

“This government’s overreaching decision to invoke the notwithstanding clause goes beyond forcing teachers to end a lawful strike,” said ATA president Jason Schilling. “It imposes a settlement, restricts free collective bargaining, and sets a precedent that threatens the fundamental freedoms and legal protections of all Albertans.”

While the notwithstanding clause shields legislation from most legal challenges under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the ATA’s legal counsel believes there are avenues to argue that the government’s actions constitute overreach and violate broader principles of administrative and labour law.

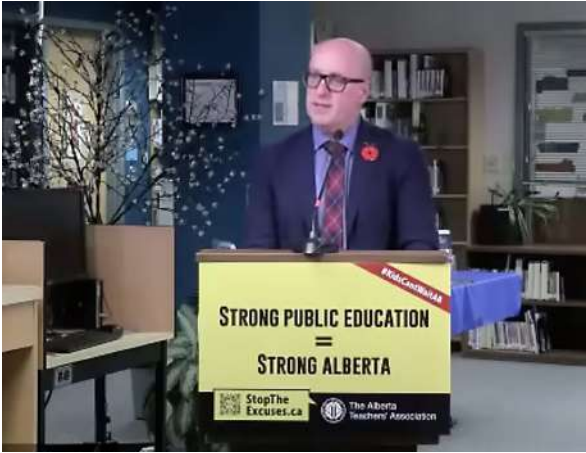
What Bill 2 means

The controversial legislation, introduced on October 27 and passed through the provincial legislature in less than 12 hours, retroactively applies a central collective agreement from September 1, 2024 to August 31, 2028. This agreement was rejected earlier this fall by 89.5 per cent of teachers.

Bill 2 not only prohibits teachers from striking for the duration of the agreement, but also suspends local bargaining while the agreement is in effect. In addition, the bill outlines significant penalties for noncompliance, including fines of up to \$500 per teacher per day and \$500,000 per day for the ATA.

While the ATA and its members complied with the back-to-work order, Schilling emphasized that the imposed resolution failed to address the underlying issues that triggered the strike in the first place, including overcrowded classrooms, chronic underfunding and insufficient support for students with complex needs.

“We will challenge this legislation in the courts,



ATA president Jason Schilling announcing the legal challenge.

in our communities and in the very conscience of Albertans,” he said. “While Alberta may have ended the strike, they have not ended the crisis in Alberta’s classrooms.”

Critics denounce the bill

Opposition leaders condemned the government’s actions as authoritarian and undemocratic. NDP Leader Naheed Nenshi accused Premier Smith and her cabinet of using the notwithstanding clause to bypass democratic processes and override workers’ rights.

“They trampled over the rights of teachers and their unions,” Nenshi said, adding that “the strike was entirely of the UCP’s own making.”

Civil society groups, professional organizations, unions, and even churches and religious groups from across Canada also spoke out against the use of the notwithstanding clause. Many viewed the matter as serious and important for the future of collective bargaining—not just for teachers, but for all unionized employees and Albertans who are at risk of similar breaches of their rights.

“The pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause cannot be allowed to normalize. Neither should the curtailment of legislative debate become routine,” said a statement from Christopher N. Samuel, president of the Canadian Bar Association, Alberta Branch. “Overuse of these extraordinary measures—especially when coupled with provisions that also set aside the Alberta Bill of Rights and the *Alberta Human Rights Act*—risks undermining the constitutional and human-rights architecture that

protects all Albertans. We cannot take the rule of law for granted; if we do, it may not be there to protect our rights when we most need it.”

Premier, education minister on defense

Premier Danielle Smith defended the legislation as necessary to restore stability to Alberta’s schools and classrooms, stating that prolonged labour disruptions were causing irreparable harm to students’ education. In an open letter to teachers, Smith acknowledged that back-to-work legislation was not the desired outcome for teachers.

“Our government did not make the decision to introduce the *Back to School Act* lightly,” she said. “Our intent is to ensure that students return to the classroom while we work together to address the real and pressing issues in our schools.”

Minister of Education and Childcare Demetrios Nicolaides likewise spoke of the need to reopen schools to restore stability for students.

“Students should not pay the price for this strike action, which unfortunately they are. Obviously, that has to be the paramount consideration in everything that we do,” he said.

ATA calls for government “to do what is right”

Even as the ATA challenges Bill 2 in the courts, it is also calling upon the government to reconsider its use of the notwithstanding clause to order teachers back to work. In a letter to Smith and Nicolaides dated November 4, Schilling entreated them “to do what is right” and repeal Bill 2, particularly its use of the notwithstanding clause.

“There are solutions to the accumulated challenges facing Alberta’s public education system and the teachers who work every day within it,” the letter said. “What Albertans require from you is the political will to reach agreement on concrete solutions that teachers, students, parents and Albertans can have confidence in.”

The outcome of the ATA’s challenge will likely shape not only the future of teacher labour relations in Alberta but also the broader debate over government limits and the protection of constitutional rights across Canada.

As the challenge moves forward, it will likely clarify the limits of the notwithstanding clause and its impact on workers’ rights within Alberta and within Canada. ■

Need-to-know *Teacher retroactive pay*

Following the teachers’ strike and the return-to-work legislation, retroactive pay for teachers will be handled according to the following guidelines.

For teachers who are still with the same employer: Teachers who provided service for a school division after September 1, 2024 are eligible to receive retroactive pay. This includes substitute teachers. Retroactive pay will be handled automatically by the employer.

For teachers who have changed employers: For teachers who are no longer employed by the school division for which they provided service during the eligibility period, **retroactive pay is not automatic.** These teachers need to contact the payroll or finance department of their former school division(s) and request (1) that they receive their retroactive salary (including appropriate allowances) from the 2024–25 school year and (2) the required application form. School boards will also be reaching out to these teachers. Applications made later than January 15, 2026 will not be processed unless the teacher can demonstrate that exceptional circumstances prevented a timely application.

If you have any questions about your specific case, please reach out to your school board or contact the ATA’s Teacher Employment Services team at 1-800-232-7208. ■

Recall petition targets Education and Childcare minister

Kim Clement
ATA News Staff

A recall petition has been formally issued against Minister of Education and Childcare and Calgary-Bow UCP MLA Demetrios Nicolaides, citing concerns about public education funding, classroom conditions and government priorities.

The petition was filed by Calgary resident Jennifer Yerimiy, who argues that schools are facing growing pressures while government policy is increasingly favouring charter and private school expansion. The petition notices state that public schools are facing “overcrowded classrooms, inappropriate curricula, inadequate resources and insufficient funding and staff” while charter/private-school funding is slated to rise from \$42 million in 2022 to \$561 million by 2027.

“I launched this petition because recall legislation is the only means to hold my representative accountable for not listening to the advice of his constituents,” said Yerimiy.

In his formal statement to Elections Alberta, Nicolaides spoke against the petition. He argues that the recall process should be reserved for cases of “breach of public trust, ethical violations or sustained dereliction of local duty” not “dissatisfaction with government policy.”

He went on to state that he was elected in 2023 to represent his constituents and his party platform, and warned that using recall to overturn election results based on policy disagreements “undermines stable governance and the electoral process.”

Under Alberta’s *Recall Act*, a recall petition must be signed by 60 per cent of eligible voters in the constituency. In Calgary-Bow, this represents 16,006 signatures, based on the 26,676 ballots cast in the 2023 provincial election.

Only eligible electors living in Calgary-Bow can sign the petition, which must be completed within 90 days. If the petition meets the required threshold, Calgary-Bow voters will vote on whether to recall Nicolaides. Should more than 50 per cent of voters in the jurisdiction support the recall, a byelection will be triggered. ■



CHRIS SCHWARZ/GOVERNMENT OF ALBERTA

Minister of Education and Childcare at a press conference on Nov. 3.

New committee to address classroom conditions

Cory Hare
ATA News Staff

A new cabinet committee created to address class size and complexity is a step in the right direction, says Alberta Teachers’ Association president Jason Schilling.

Unveiled a week after the government announced that it would reinstate the collection of class size data, the new committee will use the data collected to guide the government’s execution of its commitment to hire 3,000 new teachers and 1,500 new educational assistants over the next three years. The committee will also assist in identifying and prioritizing where new schools and modulars should be built.

“This is a step in the right direction, and we will see it through to ensure the government delivers on its promise to enact real change,” said Schilling, who credited years of advocacy, and the unity demonstrated during the recent strike, for forcing the government to act.

“Now, the government must show that it’s ready to repair the damage, rebuild trust and finally do right by Alberta’s public education system,” he said.

The 11-person committee includes Premier Danielle Smith, Education and Childcare Minister Demetrios Nicolaides, three other government ministers, three superintendents, two current or former school board chairs and ATA associate executive secretary Elissa Corsi.

“We heard teacher concerns, and we are providing solutions,” Nicolaides

said. “The Class Size and Complexity Cabinet Committee will help us take immediate action and ensure teachers and students are given the support they need to succeed.”

Schilling noted the importance of having an ATA rep on the committee.

“As a partner ... we will share teachers’ expertise and lived experiences to come up with practical solutions to create better classroom environments,” he said. ■

Class Size and Complexity Cabinet Committee

- Danielle Smith, Premier
- Demetrios Nicolaides, Minister of Education and Childcare
- Jason Nixon, Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services
- Rick Wilson, Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
- Searle Turton, Minister of Child and Family Services
- Lynnette Anderson, Chief Superintendent, Edmonton Catholic Schools
- Nicole Buchanan, Chair, Red Deer Public Schools
- Marilyn Dennis, Former president, Alberta School Boards Association
- Mike McMann, Superintendent, Fort Vermilion Schools and President, College of Alberta School Superintendents
- Joanne Pitman, Chief Superintendent, Calgary Board of Education
- Elissa Corsi, Associate Executive Secretary, Alberta Teachers’ Association

Reactions to the notwithstanding clause

Below are excerpts from statements written by organizations in response to the Alberta government’s use of the notwithstanding clause.

Amnesty International (Canada’s English-speaking section)

Alberta’s use of the notwithstanding clause continues an alarming trend of provincial governments putting political expediency ahead of people’s human rights. We urge the Alberta government to turn the tide by removing the notwithstanding clause from its education bill and commit to only advancing legislation that complies with the Charter and upholds Albertans’ human rights.

The Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada

Premier Smith has weaponized legislation that is intended to protect citizens. Legislating teachers back to work and stripping them of their bargaining rights is a direct attack on students, families and the teachers who keep the education system functioning.

Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA)

The government’s use of the notwithstanding clause sets a dangerous precedent that undermines the rights of all Albertans. For decades, strong Alberta unions have been

instrumental in securing fair wages and safe working conditions across the province by exercising their rights. When these rights are attacked, every workplace in Alberta, both public and private, is weaker, including in education and health care.

Mount Royal Faculty Association

The Mount Royal Faculty Association (MRFA) condemns the Alberta government’s use of the notwithstanding clause to force teachers back to work. This action represents a blatant abuse of power, undermining fundamental constitutional rights, eroding collective bargaining and attacking the protections guaranteed to workers under Canadian law.

Anglican Diocese of Edmonton

For the provincial government of Alberta to use the notwithstanding clause [...] is to acknowledge interference with the teachers’ Charter rights through this action. The deeper implications of this action are sobering because when one fundamental freedom is denied, it is possible to imagine other fundamental freedoms being denied, including our freedom of conscience and religion. In a time when democratic institutions around the world are becoming fragile, I believe it would be wise to step back from this action. ■

FOR THE RECORD

“ We want to identify the classrooms that are complex, get them down into the same realm that we all agreed to back in 2002 with the learning commission about what class sizes should be and deal with the issues of complexity, and let’s really solve the problem this time. ”

— Premier Danielle Smith during her November 8 *Your Province, Your Premier* radio show

YOUR VIEWS

On Constituency Week as a time to connect with MLAs

- Norma Jean McLennan**
Good luck. They will be hiding in my constituency. I haven’t heard Danielle Smith is coming to town. And Justin Wright, I hope he has time to read the letter I dropped off at his office last week. Maybe he will get a conscience.
- Jenn Taggart**
My MLA called me back last week and we discussed our concerns with the UCP’s decisions. They need to represent people, not the small minority.
- Pat Barbier**
I taught for over 30 years and never saw the kind of issues teachers are dealing with now. Yes, there were students with problems, but we had aids, supportive administration and often education ministers who had a clue.

On mandatory screeners for K–3 students

- Kerry-Ann Kope**
The K–3 screeners are just another make-work project for teachers and add to unnecessary stress on children. Meaningful assessment comes in many forms

that help teachers learn more about their students’ needs and abilities. They guide teachers in the direction of how students learn best and whether a student needs additional support or challenge. There has been so much research done in this area. One recommendation is to learn from the teachings of Anne Davies and Sandra Herbst. Politicians are not experts on education. We should be looking to those who really know education to make informed decisions. That includes teachers. I stand for public education.

- Rick Massini**
Experienced and well-trained teachers can identify which students are having difficulty and in what areas, intuitively. Those students [that teachers] are unable to remediate they refer for further assessment in order to access additional support for the child.
- Amy Dern**
Having administered a few of these tests, I have witnessed the stress these unreasonable assessments have on young children. Trust teachers’ professional judgement! #unnecessary
- Mark Heppner**
As a teacher, I fully support the testing. And accountability for teachers is more important than ever right now.



Opinions expressed on this page represent the views of the individual writers and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Alberta Teachers’ Association.

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New bill proposes to legally require K–3 testing

Lindsay Yakimyshyn
ATA News Managing Editor

Standardized assessments for kindergarten to Grade 3 students in Alberta could soon be mandated by law. Introduced by the provincial government on November 3, Bill 6, the *Education (Prioritizing Literacy and Numeracy) Amendment Act*, would amend the *Education Act* to legally require standardized tests in literacy and numeracy for kindergarten to Grade 3. This requirement would apply to all public, separate, francophone, charter and accredited independent school authorities, as well as independent early childhood services operators.

A statement from the government asserted that the assessments would help identify complex learning needs, with priority placed on reading and math to ensure students receive appropriate supports early on.

“Alberta’s classrooms are more complex than ever, and our teachers need the right tools to support every student,” said Demetrios Nicolaides, minister of Education and Childcare. “By identifying learning needs early, these screeners will help us address complexity head on and ensure that children with diverse and complex needs get the help they need to thrive.”

Currently, K–3 literacy and math screeners are required by policy. If passed, Bill 6 would enshrine these assessments in law. The bill also sets out a requirement for school authorities to share the testing results with both parents and the Ministry of Education and Childcare. Further, the ministry would be required to publish an annual report on the assessment data and could request individual student results from school authorities.

While specific details regarding implementation are not included in the bill itself, the government stated that the assessments would be administered under the current schedule: fall and winter screenings for Grades 1–3 (with an additional spring screening for students requiring extra support) and a winter screening for kindergarten students.

Bill 6 garners some support, raises questions

Supporters of the legislation emphasize the importance of promoting strong literacy and numeracy skills at an early age. Some comments, however, suggest that assessment alone is not sufficient to ensure students are well supported.

“Early screening is an essential part of an equitable approach to literacy instruction,” said Alicia Smith, executive director of Dyslexia Canada. “When it is paired with time, training and support for teachers, it strengthens the education system’s ability to identify and respond to student needs, ensuring that children who require extra help learning to read receive it.”

Critics question the need to legislate K–3 assessments, expressing concerns about the impact of standardized testing on student well-being and teacher workload. ATA president Jason Schilling argued that these tests add bureaucratic measures without addressing the core issues of overcrowded classrooms and underfunded supports for struggling students.

“Teachers don’t need another test to tell us which children need help. We need the resources to help them,” he said.

Schilling also referenced research conducted by the ATA, which shows that a strong majority of Alberta elementary teachers and school leaders believe the assessments are developmentally inappropriate, are harming elementary students and have low value for student learning.

“The ATA recognizes the government’s priority on literacy and numeracy but stresses that lasting improvement will only be achieved when the government actively engages with and listens to teachers and draws on their expertise to shape the supports students need to succeed,” said Schilling.

Should Bill 6 be passed, the legal requirement for K–3 screeners would come into effect for the 2026/27 school year.



Back to work, but not backing down

My parents taught me something simple and true: when you get knocked down, you get back up. They reminded me of this all the time, which might have annoyed me as a kid, but now I’m deeply grateful for the lesson. I can still hear my mother’s voice from the stands during a hockey game yelling, “This is no Sunday skate, Schilling—get moving!” She taught me what I have always seen Alberta’s teachers do—show up for your teammates, work hard and never quit, even if you are bruised and exhausted.

On October 27, Alberta’s teachers were dealt a hard, unfair blow. Being ordered back to work under the weight of the government’s use of the notwithstanding clause has left many feeling disappointed, hurt and deeply demoralized. I feel it too.

But when we get knocked down, we get back up. That’s who we are.

Like so many of you, I became a teacher because I believe in people—in fairness, respect and the power of education to lift entire communities. To have our collective voice silenced by legislation is not only an affront to teachers, but also an affront to all workers and to democracy itself. Watching our Association (and me) be dragged through the mud in recent days has been difficult, but no personal

attack or political tactic can erase what teachers stand for.

Now more than ever, we must resist tearing each other down, especially on social media. Every time we do, we give our opponents exactly what they want and weaken the solidarity that carried us through the strike.

Let’s be clear: we will not give up—not now, not ever. We will not give away our power. Remaining silent would be the easiest path, and exactly what the government wants, but silence has never been the way of teachers. We speak up. We stand together. And when it feels impossible to keep standing, we must lift each other up.

The government may have forced us back to work, but they cannot legislate away our resolve. The public sees what’s happening. Parents, communities and students have reached out in overwhelming support because they know the value of Alberta’s teachers and the importance of a strong public education system. We see this support reflected in polls, petitions and conversations. The public has not wavered in its support.

We’ve been knocked down, but we’re getting back up. Together, we’ll keep moving forward with purpose and conviction, fighting for our classrooms, our students and the future generations who depend on us to stand firm for what’s right.



Education issues debated

Kim Clement
ATA News Staff

Alberta’s 31st legislature resumed on October 23 with a speech from the throne. The sitting is scheduled to run until November 27. Here is a summary of the education-related discussions that took place in question period from October 28 to November 3.

October 28, 2025:
Bill 2 and Notwithstanding Clause

Naheed Nenshi (NDP, Calgary-Buffalo) questioned why the government invoked the notwithstanding clause instead of allowing courts to review back-to-work legislation while students returned. He argued it was a pre-emptive and unprecedented decision.

Minister of Finance Nate Horner said the longest education strike in Canadian history required balancing teachers’ rights to strike with students’ right to education. He argued certainty was needed given Alberta’s two-tier bargaining structure and said the clause was used deliberately and within constitutional authority. Nenshi asked why the government abandoned its own rhetoric about inalienable rights and respect for the Supreme Court. Horner said section 33 is part

of the Constitution and the situation was unique due to local and central bargaining dynamics.

Nenshi asked whether the government would commit to never pre-emptively using the clause again. Horner replied he finds it difficult to imagine its use in other public-sector bargaining situations but would not forfeit the tool.

October 29, 2025:
Collective Bargaining with Teachers

Nenshi said that parents, teachers and students returned to school with mixed emotions and argued the disruption was avoidable. He accused the government of ignoring class-size issues and failing to use available labour-relations tools to prevent the strike. He asked why the government refused early intervention mechanisms such as a dispute inquiry board.

Minister of Education and Childcare Demetrios Nicolaides said families were pleased students returned to school and emphasized that children belong in classrooms for academic and emotional well-being. Horner defended the government’s actions, saying options were considered

LEGISLATURE HIGHLIGHTS
continued on page 9





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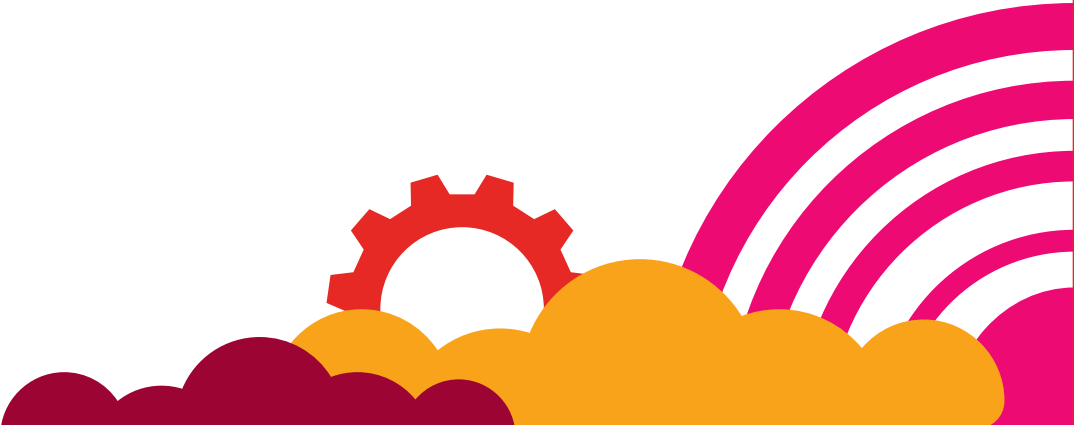
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LEGISLATURE HIGHLIGHTS

continued from page 7

carefully and that other paths, such as a dispute inquiry board or arbitration, could have prolonged instability and led to further strikes. He reiterated that the government preferred to negotiate an agreement, noting the government accepted two recommended deals and offered enhanced mediation.

Nenshi said negotiated agreements are always preferable and argued the government was unwilling or unable to bargain constructively. Horner countered that the government did not engineer the strike and pointed to prior agreements with other unions as evidence of good-faith bargaining

November 3, 2025:
Education Funding

Court Ellingson (NDP, Calgary-Foothills) challenged the government for legislating teachers back to work while underfunding education, arguing that budgets have not kept pace with population growth and inflation, leaving school boards struggling with rising enrolment and operating costs.

Horner replied that health care and education remain government priorities, and stressed limited provincial resources and ongoing budget pressures.

Ellingson pressed further, criticizing the move to a rolling-average funding formula, saying it forced overcrowding and inadequate learning spaces and, ultimately, contributed to the teacher strike.

Nicolaides rejected the premise, noting the province recently shifted from a three-year to a two-year funding model at school boards’ request and pointing to supplemental enrolment grants.

Ellingson concluded by accusing the Treasury Board and Finance of driving the lowest per-student funding in the country.

Horner defended the government’s approach, citing low oil prices and a projected deficit. He also commented that Alberta is still delivering the largest public-sector wage increases in two decades to support recruitment and retention. ■

Petition questions public funding for private schools

Mark Milne
ATA News Staff

Albertans may soon have a say on how their public tax dollars are being spent on education.

Calgary high school teacher Alicia Taylor is the driving force behind a citizen-initiative petition aimed at ending public funding for independent (private) schools in our province. Taylor’s proposal, approved by Elections Alberta on October 7, asks: “Should the Government of Alberta end its current practice of allocating public funds to accredited independent (private) schools?”

“I think there is a disparity in education right now,” said Taylor. “The private schools are a lot fancier, a lot nicer, they’re making donations, they have so much extra money, and I don’t believe they need the public funds to support that.”

Taylor says she started the petition because she felt it was important to bring attention to the fact that public dollars are being funnelled toward education that is out of reach for many Albertans.

This year’s provincial budget allocated approximately \$461 million to independent schools. That amounts to about 5 per cent of the province’s entire K–12 education budget.

“I don’t believe the average Alberta citizens who send their kids to public schools really would support the notion of putting their tax dollars toward these elite private schools. I think if they had the choice, they would vote in favour of taking those public funds away from the private schools,” said Taylor. While she understands that the redirection of the private school funding would be at the government’s discretion, her hope is that those extra dollars would be used to support public schools.

Taylor’s petition officially kicked off on October 14, amid the provincewide teachers’ strike, which raised issues such as classroom complexity, overcrowding and insufficient resources. She believes the timing may have helped spotlight the need for extra funding for public schools.

“We’re just three weeks in and we have over 1,500 people that have signed up to be canvassers, so a large part of our work over the last few weeks has been getting those volunteers organized,” said Taylor. “Now we have the work of getting to all the people that want to sign the petition.”

Taylor, who also serves as a district representative on the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s Provincial Executive Council, has until February 11, 2026 to collect just over 177,000 signatures for the question to qualify for a referendum. The petition already has 13,940 signatures.

Minister comments on potential impact

With just under 50,000 students currently enrolled in accredited independent schools, Demetrios Nicolaides, Alberta’s Minister of Education and Childcare, warned that tens of thousands of students could be forced to immediately seek alternative programming if funding were withdrawn from independent schools.

“A significant number of our independent operators operate specifically for students with specialized learning needs and so that will be extremely challenging from a logistical perspective to try and implement and execute,” said Nicolaides at a November 3 news conference. “But, of course, as the petition moves on, we will be modelling that, just to ensure we are prepared for whatever kind of outcome.”

Taylor says Nicolaides’s concern wouldn’t be an issue if the public school system were properly funded, arguing that parents wouldn’t need to look elsewhere to ensure their children’s learning needs were being met.

“My belief is that we should already be supporting those students as part of a well-funded public school system. They shouldn’t need to be seeking out these opportunities at private schools,” she said. ■



Information on the petition is available at abfundspublicschools.ca



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TES-MS-HI-13g-i 2025-10

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2025/26

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members and local presidents

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Trumpeter
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KATHERINE COOK
Battle River Local
No. 32



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No. 25



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No. 15



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District Rep



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No. 11



VANESSA AMYOTTE
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Local No. 40

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Grasslands Local
No. 34



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Medicine Hat
Local No. 1



DEANNA BURZMINSKI
Medicine Hat Catholic
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MARK BREADNER
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No. 36



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No. 2



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Wheat Local No. 20

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JANUARY 19–20, 2026

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NEW DATES!

ELA2025

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The Educational Leadership Academy (LEA) is intended for school and system leaders with at least four years of experience in a leadership role.

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Dr Scott Morrison

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Attendance will be limited to the first 50 leaders to register.

LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS

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KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

Lisa Everitt

ATA Executive Staff Officer

Astrid Kendrick

Director, Field Experience

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LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS

The Alberta Teachers' Association

www.teachers.ab.ca

Merged conferences to bring together new and seasoned school leaders

Chris Gonsalvez
ATA News Staff

This winter, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) will host a new conference that merges two existing events for school leaders. Taking place on January 19–20, 2026 in Edmonton, this event blends Leadership Essentials for early-career leaders and Educational Leadership Academy for seasoned administrators.

"The ATA recently decided to reimagine its approach to these two popular leadership development opportunities to ensure we are continuing to meet the needs of our members in school leadership," said ATA associate executive secretary Elissa Corsi.

The inspiration to merge the two conferences came directly from member feedback. Experienced leaders were asking for access to the inexpensive professional development offered to newcomers through Leadership Essentials, while newer leaders expressed a desire for mentorship opportunities with veteran administrators. The ATA recognized an opportunity to address both asks while creating something greater than the sum of its parts.

"The solution wasn't to create something entirely new. It was to bring together what already worked."

The resulting hybrid model maintains separate, specialized learning tracks while creating intentional touchpoints for collaboration. New leaders will have access to diverse breakout sessions tailored to their professional learning needs, while experienced leaders will engage in cohort-based deep dives into advanced leadership concepts. Networking opportunities will also create space for leaders to learn from each other.

The combined model also serves a broader strategic goal: enabling entire school leadership teams from across the province to attend together, regardless of experience level. This approach recognizes that effective schools require strong leadership at every level, from new administrators learning the basics to veteran leaders refining advanced skills.

Notably, both conference streams will be offered at no registration cost to delegates and with expenses partially covered. While Leadership Essentials has always been free to attend, this marks the first time the Educational Leadership Academy will have no registration fee, reflecting the ATA's commitment to professional growth for school leaders.

"It's a strategic investment in building stronger leadership networks and ensuring professional growth remains accessible to all school and division leaders who are members of the ATA," said Corsi.

If the conference proves successful, the ATA plans to make this combined model a regular offering, potentially reshaping how the ATA supports school leaders across different career stages.

More information about registering for this joint event can be found at <https://abteach.cc/LeadershipEssentials> or <https://abteach.cc/EdLeaderAcademy>.

popquiz!

Sudoku

	4		9			6		
6	8		5		1	9	3	4
9			7			5	2	
8						4		3
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			3		8			6
2	5		6		4		8	1

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Conversations over complaints

How to handle conflict within your team



PITFALLS AND PRECAUTIONS

Tanya Thiessen
ATA Representation Officer

It's natural for conflict to arise in schools. Teachers and school leaders work closely together as colleagues—supervising, meeting, eating, planning and learning together. As a teacher-leader, I often viewed my colleagues as a school family and, while not everyone likes to refer to their colleagues as a “family” or “team,” the reality is we often spend more time with coworkers than with our own families and friends.

So, what do we do when conflict happens within our school family?

When it comes to complaints filed with the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission (ATPC), the second highest number are those submitted by teachers about other teachers (second only to complaints from parents or guardians). Because the current Code of Professional Conduct doesn't require a teacher to speak to their colleague before filing a complaint, you might face such a complaint without warning.

Often, conflict stems not from one major event but from a buildup of small misunderstandings left unaddressed.

Trevor Muir, founder of Epic Classroom, has shared a story illustrating this.

He and a few other teachers once took students outside to play ultimate frisbee after testing week, despite a math teacher's concern that the frisbee game would distract students making up exams. Conflict ensued. During a subsequent meeting, the math teacher tearfully shared that she felt disrespected and unheard, feelings she had experienced before. Her honesty prompted reflection and apology from the other teachers, leading to reconciliation and understanding.

Trevor's story serves as a reminder that conflict within a school team can be addressed and resolved successfully. With conversation, empathy and openness, teams can repair relationships and move forward together. As teachers, we're relational by nature. Working with people means sometimes we must face conflict and seek reconciliation.

Might there be instances where a formal complaint through your school division or the ATPC is appropriate given the nature of the conflict? Yes. There are also other options to consider before pursuing a complaint.

The ATA strongly encourages teachers and school leaders to use existing division supports such as harassment and safe-school policies, or mediation services to address conflict. The ATA also offers free advice, guidance and mediation to help resolve issues.

Ultimately, the strength of a school lies not just in its programs or policies, but in the relationships between the people who make it work every day. Conflict is inevitable when passionate, caring professionals collaborate closely—but it doesn't have to divide.

When we approach one another with honesty, empathy and a willingness to listen, conflict becomes an opportunity for growth. By choosing conversation over complaint, understanding over assumption, and reconciliation over resentment, we build not only stronger teams, but stronger schools, places where everyone feels valued, respected and supported.

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

NOTICES AND EVENTS

Dance Teacher Training Conference

The East Side Dance Festival Society is holding its Dance Teacher Training Conference on January 22–23, 2026 at The Decidedly Jazz Danceworks Centre in Calgary. The society aims to cultivate meaningful relationships among dance educators, community partners, students and pedagogical approaches, strengthening Alberta's inclusive and vibrant arts community through shared experiences and collaborative learning.

For more information on the conference and to register, visit eastsidedancefestival.ca.





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programs approved
in principle,
referred for costing

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council
meetings held virtually on September 22, 29,
October 2, 9, 15,16 and 20, 2025.

- 1. Approved the timelines for a membership vote on the memorandum of agreement.
- 2. Approved that, notwithstanding administrative guidelines and policies, the only support provided to teachers during a strike would be group health benefit coverage.
- 3. Reviewed the results of the vote on the memorandum of agreement wherein teachers rejected the memorandum by a margin of 89.5 per cent.
- 4. Reviewed financial measures the Association would implement to economize, commencing 2025 10 06.
- 5. Approved that the Association indicate, in response to the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association letter of 2025 10 01, its willingness to enter into exploratory discussions to identify potential paths forward for bargaining toward a negotiated settlement.
- 6. Authorized the Association to send out a follow-up email to members, stating that the Central Table Bargaining Committee is heading back to the table and talking about student-teacher ratios and salary.
- 7. Requested staff to develop a comprehensive list and description of possible (and probable) next steps by government and/or the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association in dealing with the strike and a description of suggested Association responses for each potential action by government, to be brought to the next Provincial Executive Council meeting.
- 8. Authorized the Association to advise the Provincial Bargaining and Compensation Office that the enhanced mediation proposal as presented in its letter of 2025 10 16 is unacceptable.
- 9. Authorized the Association to remain on strike committed to achieving all provisions in the last tabled position.

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council
meeting held virtually on October 23-24, 2025.

- 1. Approved in principle and referred to Finance Committee for costing a proposed list of programs on which the Association should focus in 2026/27.
- 2. Approved the Association's 2025/26 budget for capital expenditures.
- 3. Approved that, subsequent to the transfer of required funds to the Local Authorities Pension Plan/Alberta Investment Management Corporation, any remaining funds be transferred and invested with Canada Life.
- 4. Approved in principle an implementation plan that would permit convention associations to apply to host an upcoming convention virtually on a one-year pilot basis.
- 5. Appointed two field members to serve on the Calgary Area Field Experiences Committee.



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Our Head of School and High School Principal will travel to **Vancouver, Jan 23rd - 26th, and Edmonton, Jan 28th - 29th, 2026** to meet with potential candidates. We welcome you to email us to schedule a meeting.



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The Alberta Teachers' Association



EEP-T-27a 2024 12



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With gratitude

As teachers and school leaders took historic strike action to advocate for the teaching profession and for students’ learning conditions, they received strong support that reassured them they weren’t alone. We’re taking a moment to reflect on the remarkable spirit of solidarity shown across our province this fall.

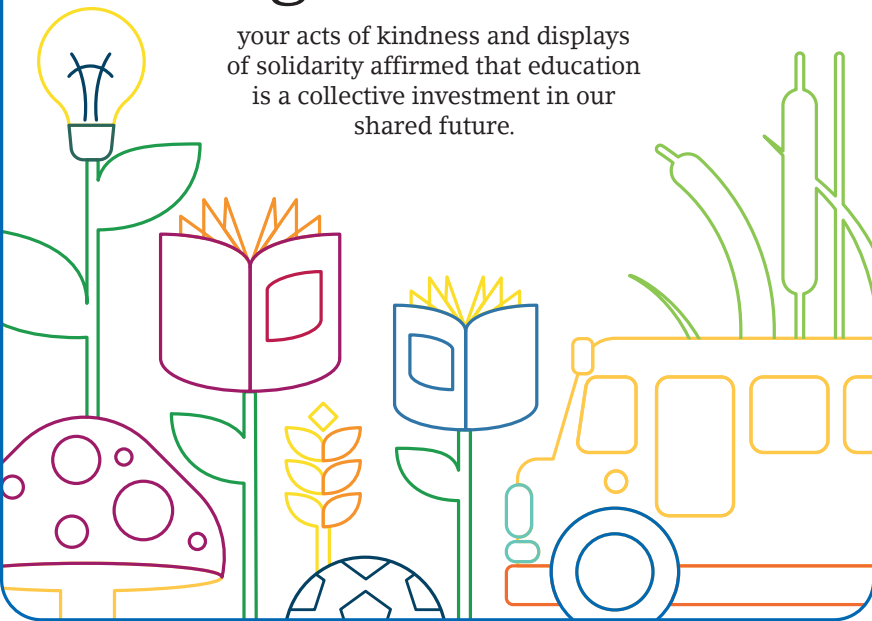
To parents and families,

your understanding and encouragement strengthened our resolve. You showed that education is a shared partnership built on trust and the belief that every child deserves opportunity and support.



To community members, businesses and partner organizations,

your acts of kindness and displays of solidarity affirmed that education is a collective investment in our shared future.



To our members

—the teachers and school leaders who stood together with courage—your dedication to students and public education has been inspiring. You reminded Alberta that teaching is not only a profession, but a calling grounded in care and commitment to our communities and our students.



To our students,

your energy and resilience gave every step purpose. You are why we do this work.



This historical moment was about more than collective bargaining, it was about standing up for strong, well-resourced classrooms where every student can thrive.

Thank you for standing up, together.

Would you like to share a message of appreciation with someone—a colleague, community member or business—whose support made a difference to you? Download a thank-you note template here:

