

The background of the cover is a vibrant, abstract collage made of various colored paper scraps. It includes shapes like a large green leaf, a blue hand, a pink house, a yellow sign, and various human figures in different colors (green, blue, pink, yellow). The overall style is folk-art or scrapbook-like.

FALL 2025

THE ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

# ATA Magazine

**HELP  
WANTED**

Climate change demands bold action.  
Education must play a role.

## DIVERSITY

The transformative effect  
of social and emotional  
learning (SEL)

PAGE 16

## IN PROFILE

Former principal finds freedom  
in return to teaching

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## MOST MEMORABLE LESSON

The most enduring lessons  
happen beyond the classroom

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## Feature

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### HELP WANTED

Climate change demands bold action.  
Education must play a role.



Fall 2025 / Vol. 106/No. 1

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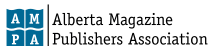
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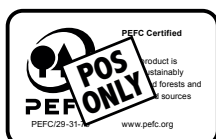


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Alex Chen is an award-winning illustrator based in Toronto. She earned her bachelor of illustration degree from Sheridan College, and her work has been recognized internationally by organizations including 3x3, WIA and RGD. She finds inspiration in everyday life, transforming simple moments into delightful illustrations that radiate positivity and warmth. See more of her work at [alexshed.com](http://alexshed.com) or [@alexchen\\_art](https://www.instagram.com/alexchen_art) on Instagram.



## CARLYN VOLUME-SMITH | p. 12



Carlyn Volume-Smith is the chief stakeholder relations officer at the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP), as well as a licensed clinical pharmacist with a bachelor of science degree in pharmacy, a master of science degree in health promotion and a Ph.D. in pharmaceutical sciences from the University of Alberta. Volume-Smith has been in the pharmaceutical policy and health benefit industries for more than two decades, managing complex scientific advisory processes and serving on several pan-Canadian committees in that time.



## CRYSTAL PUIM | cover, pp. 18–21



Crystal Puim is an Edmonton-based corporate photographer. A trusted industry partner with more than 20 years' experience, she elevates brands with a professional, discerning eye. Fun fact: Crystal is a huge supporter of Alberta teachers and was once accepted into the education program at the University of Alberta only to later politely decline it to follow her photography path. Her company, Crystal Puim Photography ([crystalphotos.ca](http://crystalphotos.ca)), is a staple in Western Canada.



## ROBERT LEBLANC | pp. 32 and 33



Robert Jean LeBlanc is associate professor of ELA/literacy in the Faculty of Education at the University of Lethbridge. He received the 2024 ATA Educational Research Award.



## AMY STORNAIUOLO | pp. 32 and 33



Amy Stornaiuolo is a full professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania.



## COPPER LEAF PHOTOGRAPHY | pp. 48–50 and 52



Chasidy Kuffner is a photographer whose work is rooted in capturing authentic, heartfelt moments. Based near Brooks, Alberta, she's a proud wife to her high school sweetheart, a busy mom of four and a devoted caffeine enthusiast. Her love for the arts was nurtured by her teacher Ms. Pool (now Mrs. Sturch), whose encouragement inspired Chas in all aspects of life and into a career that truly fulfills her soul.



## LORI WHILLIER | p. 55



With 26 years of experience at Edmonton Public Schools, Lori Whillier currently serves as a consultant, providing K–12 visual art and dance support through professional learning, resource development and teacher mentorship. Her career has largely been spent as an elementary classroom teacher and primarily in Arts Core schools, allowing her to integrate her personal passion for the arts into her professional life.

The Alberta Teachers' Association respectfully acknowledges that we are located on Treaty 4, 6, 7, 8 and 10 territories—the travelling route, gathering place and meeting grounds for Indigenous Peoples, whose histories, languages, cultures and traditions continue to influence our vibrant community. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We recognize the land as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on or are visiting.



PHOTO BY RYAN PARKER

**Elissa Corsi**

Editor-in-Chief, ATA Magazine  
Rédactrice en chef de l'ATA Magazine

## Rooted in hope, rising to challenge


**EVERY NEW SCHOOL YEAR** brings a mix of anticipation, resilience and reflection. Even as September retreats further into the rearview mirror, we are still surrounded by reminders that these are uncertain times—economically, socially and politically. The education landscape is ever shifting, and with it, the pressures placed on teachers continue to grow. From curriculum changes and class size challenges to questions around funding and professional autonomy, there is no shortage of complexity facing classrooms across our province.

And yet, here we are again—ready.

There is something remarkable about teachers' ability to show up, year after year, with renewed purpose. Each new school year brings not only a return to routines but also the promise of new beginnings. It is a time of clean notebooks, sharpened pencils, fresh faces and the quiet optimism that comes with starting anew.

In the face of uncertainty, hope is not naïve—it is necessary. It is what allows us to see our students not only for who they are but for who they might become. It is what drives innovation, compassion and the courage to speak out when something isn't working. And it is what unites us as a profession committed to public education as a cornerstone of democracy and equity.

As we continue to settle into this school year, let us lean on each other. Let us celebrate small victories, advocate for what matters and continue to find joy in the everyday moments that make this work meaningful. Your voice, your care and your commitment to students matter deeply, especially now.

To a year of persistence, possibility and hope. 

## Enraciner l'espoir, relever les défis


**CHAQUE NOUVELLE ANNÉE SCOLAIRE** s'accompagne d'un mélange d'anticipation, de résilience et de réflexion. Malgré septembre qui s'éloigne peu à peu dans le rétroviseur, les signes que nous vivons une période d'incertitude sur les plans économique, social et politique restent omniprésents. Le paysage éducatif est en constante évolution, et il en découle que les pressions exercées sur les enseignants ne cessent d'augmenter. De la refonte du curriculum aux défis liés aux classes trop nombreuses en passant par les enjeux du financement et de l'autonomie professionnelle, ce n'est pas la complexité qui fait défaut dans les salles de classe de notre province.

Et pourtant, nous revoilà, prêts pour ce qui nous attend.

Il y a quelque chose de remarquable dans la capacité des enseignants à se présenter, année après année, avec une motivation renouvelée. Le début d'une nouvelle année scolaire signifie non seulement un retour à la routine, mais aussi la promesse d'un nouveau départ. C'est à ce moment que les cahiers sont propres, que les crayons sont bien taillés, que les têtes sont fraîches et que le renouveau est porté par un doux vent d'optimisme.

Face à l'incertitude, l'espoir n'a rien de naïf : il s'agit d'un atout essentiel. C'est grâce à l'espoir que nous voyons en nos élèves tout ce qu'ils sont aujourd'hui, mais aussi ce qu'ils pourraient devenir. C'est l'espoir qui stimule l'innovation, qui inspire la compassion et qui donne le courage de prendre la parole lorsque quelque chose ne fonctionne pas. Enfin, c'est l'espoir qui nous unit en tant que profession engagée en faveur de l'éducation publique comme fondement de la démocratie et de l'équité.

Alors que la routine de cette nouvelle année scolaire s'installe petit à petit, entraïdons-nous. Célébrons les petites victoires, défendons ce qui est important et continuons à tirer de la joie des petits moments qui donnent un sens à notre travail au quotidien. Votre voix, votre bienveillance et votre engagement envers les élèves sont d'une importance profonde, surtout en ce moment.

Que cette année en soit une de persévérance, de possibilités et d'espoir. 

## Letters

### We want your feedback

We'd like to hear from you! One of the ways we'd like to engage with teachers is by hearing from you regularly. In several locations throughout this magazine are sections calling for ideas and submissions from teachers. Please watch for these and send us your ideas.

### Also please send us

- general feedback,
- your thoughts on items that you particularly liked (or didn't),
- suggestions for future content
- letters to the editor for possible publication.

We really do want to hear from you. After all, this is your magazine.

Email your feedback to Elissa Corsi, editor-in-chief, [elissa.corsi@ata.ab.ca](mailto:elissa.corsi@ata.ab.ca) or Cory Hare, managing editor, [cory.hare@ata.ab.ca](mailto:cory.hare@ata.ab.ca).

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR — GUIDELINES

#### Word limit: 300

Please include

- your first and last name,
- basic information about your teaching assignment (i.e. school, grade, subject).

*All letters are subject to editing for length, clarity, punctuation, spelling and grammar.*

PHOTO BY ERIN SOLANO



## Alberta Magazine Awards

The ATA Magazine took home several awards from the Alberta Magazine Awards on Sept. 25.

The magazine earned first place in the Editorial Package category for its feature entitled "We Are Here!" Published in the fall of 2024, We Are Here! featured the lived stories of 2SLGBTQ+ teachers in the public education sphere.

In the Illustration category, the magazine earned two awards, first place for its depiction of teacher Michael Koehler and second place for its rendition of teacher Tom Spila.

The magazine also earned second place in the Service Journalism category and was short-listed for awards in the following categories: Alberta Story, Cover, Essay and Feature Design.

"This recognition reinforces that the hard work and dedication shown by our staff and contributors is translating into a top quality magazine for members," said editor-in-chief Elissa Corsi.

## Editor of the year

Managing editor Cory Hare was named Editor of the Year for 2024–25 at the annual Alberta Magazine Awards.

"Our team of designers and editors is second to none in this industry and any success I've had comes from being part of this group," Hare said in accepting the award.

The Alberta Magazine Awards are sponsored by the Alberta Magazine Publishers Association.



## Spring issue hits the mark

To the editor and team: please accept my congratulations on the fantastic overall look, design and content of the spring 2025 issue of the ATA Magazine. It really brings the relevancy of the publication into focus with today's youngest and newest teachers. I love it!

- Donna Swiniarski, Former ATA Coordinator, Communications



Read the spring issue.



Sign up for the ATA eMagazine.





PHOTO BY RYAN PARKER

## FROM THE PRESIDENT MOT DU PRÉSIDENT

### Jason Schilling

President, ATA  
Président de l'ATA


## Students need our help to grasp climate change

**IN THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS**, we have seen an escalation in how climate change has impacted our environment and people around the world. This past summer in Alberta, wildfires displaced thousands of people as entire communities had to be evacuated while others struggled under a blanket of smoke.

Our students and their families have been directly impacted by climate change; therefore, education has a role to help them make sense of it, from a basic understanding of the causes to new and creative ways to address the problem.

Earlier in my career, I was fortunate to teach junior high science for a while. The students were always very curious to venture beyond the basics of the science curriculum and learn about the world around them. In my teaching, I have always found that, given the right tools, students are creative and outside-the-box thinkers. When thinking through a problem, they are not always bound by the same restraints and restrictions as adults. As an education system, we must ensure that our students in all grades have the resources that allow them to foster that scientific curiosity.

Students should also be encouraged to explore the issue of climate change free of politics, which can create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation that does not serve our students' needs or help them answer their questions about the world around them. We need to help them navigate it now and into the future.

As a teacher, I often found the most creative, collaborative work my students did was when I helped them with the facts and then got out of their way as they "worked the problem." After all, it's their world too. 


## Les élèves ont besoin de notre aide pour comprendre le changement climatique

**CES DERNIÈRES ANNÉES**, nous avons été témoins de l'aggravation des effets du changement climatique sur notre environnement et sur la population mondiale. L'été dernier, en Alberta, des incendies de forêt ont contraint des milliers de personnes à quitter leur domicile. Des communautés entières ont même dû être évacuées, tandis que d'autres suffoquaient sous une épaisse fumée.

Nos élèves et leur famille ont subi de plein fouet les effets du changement climatique, aussi l'éducation a un rôle à jouer pour les aider à mieux comprendre ce phénomène, que ce soit en examinant les causes ou en développant des solutions innovantes pour y faire face.

En début de carrière, j'ai eu la chance d'enseigner pendant quelque temps les sciences au premier cycle du secondaire. J'ai alors été surpris par l'engouement des élèves à vouloir approfondir leur connaissance du monde qui les entoure en s'aventurant au-delà des limites du curriculum en sciences. J'ai aussi compris au fil de mon enseignement qu'en leur fournissant les bons outils, ils développent leur créativité et osent penser hors des sentiers battus. De plus, lorsqu'ils réfléchissent à un problème, ils ne sont pas toujours limités aux mêmes contraintes et restrictions que les adultes. En tant que système éducatif, nous devons donc veiller à ce que nos élèves, quelle que soit leur année de scolarité, disposent des ressources nécessaires pour cultiver leur curiosité scientifique.

Il faudrait aussi encourager les élèves à réfléchir au changement climatique en dehors de toute considération politique, car celle-ci peut créer un climat de peur et d'intimidation qui ne répond pas aux besoins de nos élèves ni ne les aide à trouver des réponses à leurs questions sur le monde qui les entoure. Nous devons les aider à y voir plus clair dès maintenant et dans l'avenir.

En tant qu'enseignant, j'ai souvent constaté que la créativité et l'esprit de collaboration de mes élèves se manifestaient davantage lorsque je les aidais à comprendre les faits, puis que je m'éclipsais pour leur permettre de régler le problème eux-mêmes. Après tout, ce monde est aussi le leur. 

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Archival issues of the **ATA Magazine** can be just as relevant now as they were when originally published, or they can remind us how far we've come. You decide.

Check out these items from the April 1962 issue of the **ATA Magazine**, which examined, among other topics, how changes in education interact with societal shifts.

## Changing times 63 YEARS AGO

“

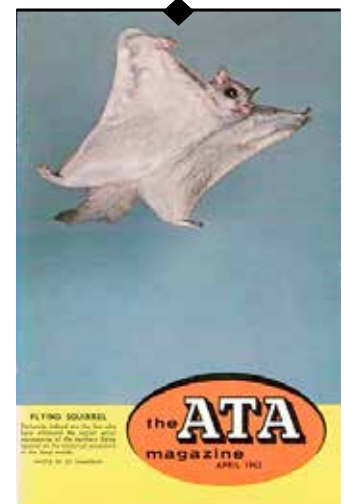
**The biologist has had the problem of bringing his laboratory work to life.** In a biology class he always tells students that “biology is the study of life” and then spends nine months trying to prove it with a parade of dead, dried, preserved, embalmed, pickled, pressed, embedded and otherwise immobilized and distorted specimens. There is seldom the use of frogs that jump, fish that swim, flowers that smell, worms that wiggle, birds that fly or humans that think. [...] But] learning is truly accurate only insofar as students have opportunities for a true experience with the phenomenon or materials under study.

— Paul DeHart Hurd, “Teaching Science in a Changing Society”

“

**Education is like a capital investment; an educated people is more productive.** In the cold war, both the economic and the military race depend upon scientific and technological advances. Our very survival may well depend on the level of education of our people. For all of these reasons, we regard education as of broader importance and concern than that of a unit of local government. Pot holes in the streets of a city are of local concern. Pot holes in the education of the youth of a city will, in the future, affect not only that city but, because of population mobility, the whole province and nation.

— “A special feature: ATA Submission Regarding Urban Counties”



“

**The changing and evolving function of the teacher will bring about a revolution in the architectural design of the schools of the future.** The interrelationship between the architect, trustee and teacher will become critical if new design is to keep pace with educational change.

— J. D. McFetridge  
“School Design – Tool or Tyrant?”



ILLUSTRATION BY MATEUSZ NAPIERALSKI

# Children at the crossroads

UNICEF's report card on the conditions shaping young lives

**Lisa Everitt**

Executive Staff Officer, Research, ATA

## IN MAY 2025, CBC JOURNALIST

Amina Zafar reported that “Canada ranks 19th out of 36 countries in well-being of children and youth, behind other wealthy countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark and France, according to a new report from UNICEF [United Nations Children’s Fund].” (“Canada ranked 19th out of 36 countries in child well-being, UNICEF says.” CBC News, May 14, 2025.)

The news report raised questions about why Canada lags in child well-being when it consistently ranks highly on other global indices, such as *U.S. News and World Report’s* Best Countries.

The UNICEF report noted the current global context is reshaping childhood. In addition to “[the] ‘three Cs’ – COVID-19,

conflict, and climate – childhoods are being transformed by the ‘two Ds’ – digital technology and demographic change” (UNICEF 2025, 1). The report emphasizes that wealthy countries, including Canada, must do more to create conditions that allow children to thrive as healthy, productive citizens.

Titled *Innocenti Report Card 19: Child Well-Being in an Unpredictable World*, the report draws on health databases and international surveys such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Covering the years 2018 to 2022, it examines children’s well-being across three dimensions: mental well-being, physical health and skills. Of the 43 countries identified in the

report (mostly members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the European Union), only 36 had complete data sets, which determined the final rankings. The report framed its findings through an ecological model of child well-being, underscoring the interconnected influences of family, community and broader societal factors.

## MENTAL HEALTH

According to the World Health Organization, mental health is more than the absence of mental illness; it also includes “elements of happiness, life satisfaction and a sense of flourishing” (UNICEF 2025, 14). To capture this dimension, the report examined two



main indicators of mental health: life satisfaction and adolescent suicide.

Acknowledging that the two indicators paint only a broad picture of children's mental health, the report noted that it has been in decline for some time. Suicide trends were mixed: 43 per cent of countries, including Canada, reported improvement; 40 per cent saw worsening rates; and the remainder were stable. Life satisfaction proved more telling, with "the large majority of countries" reporting a drop in satisfaction between 2018 and 2022 (UNICEF 2025, 17).

Factors associated with higher life satisfaction included regular physical activity, frequent conversations with parents or guardians and appropriate use of digital technology. In contrast, bullying, social isolation and limited parental contact correlated with lower satisfaction. Gender differences were notable: girls were less likely than boys to report high life satisfaction during the study period.

UNICEF recommended improving access to mental health services such as counselling and social-emotional learning, reducing the stigma associated with mental health, supporting families and expanding opportunities for meaningful activities that enhance children's sense of belonging and well-being.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

Physical health was assessed using child mortality and obesity rates. Encouragingly, since 2020, child mortality in high-income countries has been halved, reaching just one death per 1,000 children. Most deaths now stem not from disease but from external causes such as accidents, violence or drowning.

However, new challenges threaten children's physical health. Climate change, pollution and increasingly sedentary lifestyles are undermining gains from vaccines, medical advances and improved access to care. To address these issues, UNICEF called for structural reforms: affordable access to nutritious food, stricter pollution regulation, and national policies promoting healthy eating and physical activity.

## SKILLS

The report evaluated skills using two indicators, academic skills and social skills. Academic performance was measured through PISA scores, which in 2022 showed "by far the biggest drop in test scores in the OECD-23 group of

countries...a decrease of 15 points in mathematics and 10 points in reading" (UNICEF 2025, 45). Interestingly, Canada maintained its relative position in the PISA rankings, placing sixth out of 42 countries.

Potential explanations for the global decline included socioeconomic inequality, disruptions caused by COVID-19 and the widespread adoption of digital technologies. Students cited social and psychological barriers as their greatest obstacles during lockdowns: lack of motivation, difficulty understanding assignments and lack of access to learning support (UNICEF 2025, 48).

Social skills, closely tied to learning outcomes, revealed further disparities. Boys were more confident in making friends, while girls and children from higher socioeconomic backgrounds demonstrated stronger empathy and emotional competencies. UNICEF recommended adopting a skills framework that ensures all children acquire foundational literacy, numeracy and social-emotional competencies as the basis for lifelong learning and critical thinking.

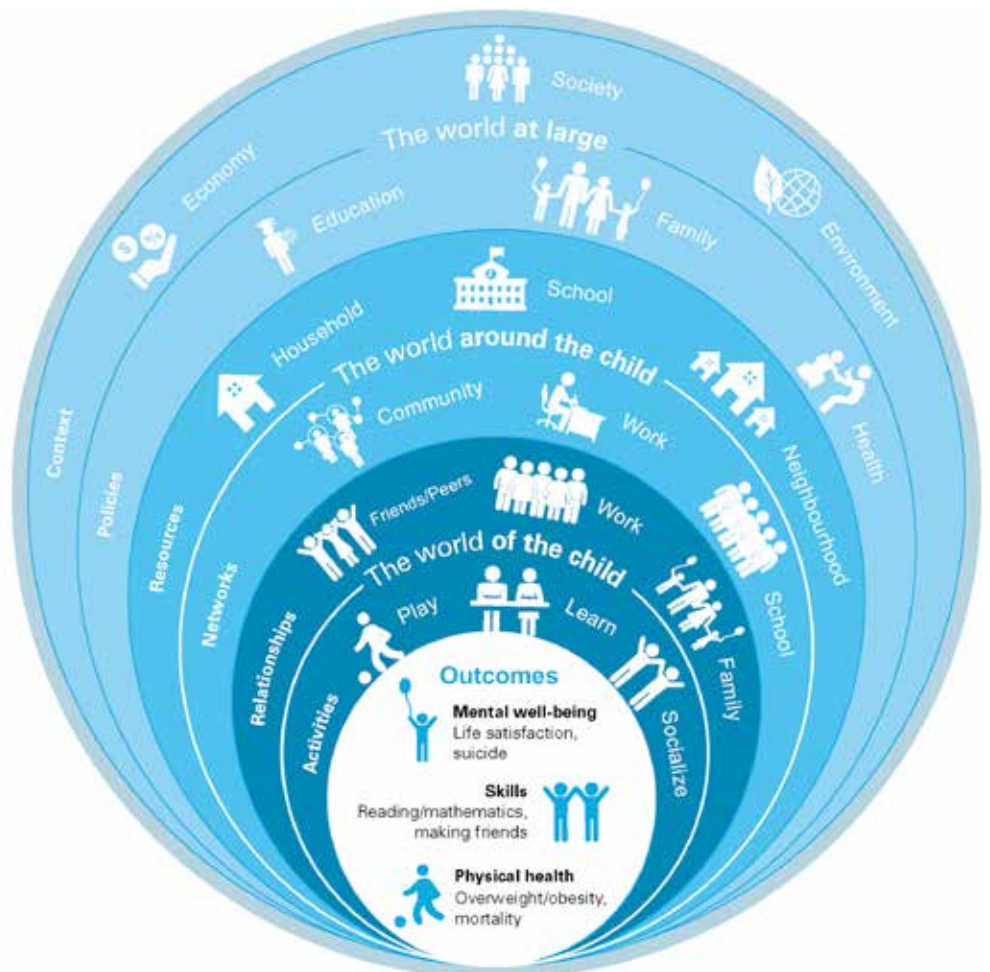
## CONCLUSION

The UNICEF report makes clear that while progress has been made in reducing child mortality in high-income countries, substantial challenges remain. Improving child well-being requires building communities where children feel they belong, equipping them to navigate a changing world and eliminating inequality. Achieving these goals demands sustained governmental commitment and financial investment. There is still much work to be done, and school systems and families have a large role to play. <sup>ATA</sup>

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# Lillian Osborne: Teacher-pioneer

**Margaret Shane**

Archivist, ATA

**LILLIAN MARY OSBORNE** graduated from the Toronto Normal School in 1889 at the age of 19. That year, Osborne was appointed the first woman educator in a small prairie town of 400 known as Edmonton. She was paid \$600 for the year. The town's only schoolhouse, built in 1881, had added a second classroom and Osborne was hired to be the second teacher.


In hindsight, a single woman travelling alone to a remote community without access to support or friends must have been seen as brave. In 1889, such a journey might have been considered a dangerous voyage into the unknown. In fact, the railroad was 13 years into the future, electricity would have to wait another three years and the newfangled telephone system was a novelty. Osborne would celebrate her 36th birthday before the province of Alberta was carved out of the old Northwest Territories.

As a teacher, Osborne contributed to the social advancement of her rapidly expanding community. By the time Edmonton was incorporated as a city in 1904, the population had surged to 8,350. The year 1905 brought provincial status to her prairie home.

Osborne taught through World War I and watched her male colleagues march to battle in Europe. From her classroom, Osborne read the news of Vimy Ridge (1917), lived through the Spanish Influenza epidemic (1918), learned of the Person's Case (1929) and saw the stock market crash (1929). Through these tumultuous times, she maintained a

powerful and reassuring presence in the lives of her students and their families. As Edmonton grew, Osborne served at a succession of what were then new, modern and sturdy brick schools, including McKay Avenue, Queen's Avenue, Queen Alexandra, Delton and Glenora schools.

In 1920, Osborne voluntarily joined the Alberta Teachers' Alliance and undertook to achieve, together with her fellow educators, professional status for teachers—a goal she would, sadly, not live to see enshrined in the *Teaching Profession Act* of 1935. Lillian Mary Osborne died on November 3, 1929, having taught for 40 of her 60 years.

In 1983, the City of Edmonton recognized Lillian Mary Osborne for her contributions to education, and in 2009 Edmonton Public Schools named Lillian Osborne High School in her honour. 

Sources: *A Century and Ten: The History of Edmonton Public Schools* and articles and newspaper clippings acquired from the City of Edmonton Archives and Alberta Teachers' Association Archives

► **Got an idea?** *Unsung Hero* is a space dedicated to honouring ATA members past and present who have had notable achievements, either in the ATA or in their private lives.

If you know of a member whom you feel should be recognized, please contact associate editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at [lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca](mailto:lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca).

**Miss Lillian Mary Osborne  
(1869–1929)**

Edmonton Public Schools'  
first female teacher

Recipient of City of  
Edmonton's Historical Board  
Recognition Award

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX CHEN

# Wellness supports you can count on

## Understanding your Employee and Family Assistance Program benefits

### Carlyn Volume-Smith

Chief Stakeholder Relations  
Officer, ASEBP



Caring for yourself  
is just as important  
as caring for your  
students.

### AT THE ALBERTA SCHOOL

Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP), we know fall is a busy time of year for teachers. New routines, packed schedules and shifting responsibilities can make it difficult to prioritize mental health and well-being. When the demands of the classroom overlap with periods of change and uncertainty, it's natural to feel stressed. Whether it's navigating a new curriculum or managing disruptions, the start of the school year can leave even experienced educators feeling overwhelmed.

If you have benefits through ASEBP, the Employee and Family Assistance Program is available to help.

### WHAT IS AN EMPLOYEE AND FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EFAP)?

An EFAP is a confidential, personalized program that helps you and your family navigate life's challenges and achieve your goals.

An EFAP provides access to professional support through phone, video or in-person sessions. ASEBP-covered members and their dependents receive a yearly service allotment that includes the following:

- Four hours each of individual counselling and couples counselling
- Four hours each of health, career and life transition coaching
- Three hours of personalized nutrition support
- Unlimited financial and legal advice

The program also provides access to wellness resources, self-guided tools and specialized programs for nicotine and alcohol addiction, children's mental health, Indigenous mental health and more.

Choose from a diverse network of care professionals and book a free 15-minute

consultation to ensure you find the right practitioner for your needs. Once all counselling hours are used, you can continue with your chosen mental health professional at a rate lower than the national average and submit your receipts to ASEBP for reimbursement through the psychology benefit under your extended health benefits or your health spending account.

### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF AN EFAP?

One of the most valued aspects of an EFAP is its flexibility. Access support in a way that fits your schedule and comfort level—whether it be a quick phone consultation during a break, a virtual counselling session after school or an in-person session with a local practitioner.

Wherever you are in your career or stage of life, an EFAP has something to offer. New teachers can access career counselling designed to help them navigate change and prevent burnout in their first year. Those starting or growing their families can connect with fertility specialists, doulas, lactation consultants and sleep consultants. Teachers preparing for retirement can benefit from life transition coaching and legal advice on managing wills and estate planning. An EFAP also provides unlimited access to financial advisors who can help with debt management, budgeting, taxes, retirement savings and more.

ASEBP's EFAP is completely confidential, so you can access support without fear of stigma or professional repercussions.

### TAKE CARE OF YOU THIS FALL

Fall is an excellent time to embrace new opportunities and learn more about






IMAGES ISTOCK ADAPTED

the supports available to you throughout the entire year. As you navigate the months ahead, remember that caring for yourself is just as important as caring for your students.

### LEARN MORE AND GET STARTED AT [ASEBP.CA/EFAP](https://asebp.ca/EFAP)

The Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan is an employee life and health trust providing comprehensive benefits to Alberta's publicly funded K-12 education sector. Coverage includes extended health, dental, vision, life insurance and disability support. ASEBP also offers health and wellness spending accounts, an employee and family assistance program and continued retiree benefits through the MyRetiree Plan. 



## What's your go-to wellness app?

**Headspace.** My school division pays for this app for its employees, and I use the sleepcasts almost every night during the school year to turn my brain off so I can actually fall asleep.

—Melanie Hunt-Girouard

**The Calm app** is great for sleep stories. A couple of years ago, they gave lifetime access to their pro account for educators.

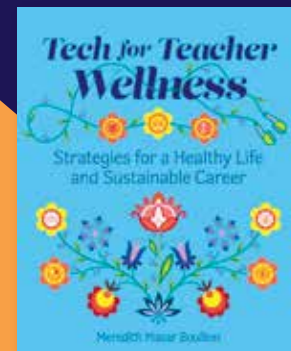
—Crystal Brophy

**Getting off an app** and walking and connecting with nature.

—Robin Senger



## RECOMMENDED RESOURCE



### Tech for Teacher Wellness: Strategies for a Healthy Life and Sustainable Career

Meredith Masar Boullion

Educators are overwhelmed, and the stress of unprecedented challenges in education has caused many teachers to consider leaving the profession. Technology is often portrayed as part of the problem, with many believing that the best way to pursue wellness is to unplug and avoid digital tools altogether. Author Meredith Masar Boullion takes a different approach, showing that technology used wisely can promote wellness, rather than undermine it. Available through the ATA library

## Plan like a pro with AI

Staying in the driver's seat

**Danny Maas**

Acting Associate Coordinator,  
Professional Development,  
ATA

“AI becomes most effective when it helps teachers move from generic lesson materials to intentional lesson design.”

### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

has quickly become part of the education conversation, but for many teachers, using AI can feel like driving on an unfamiliar road with sharp turns and hidden dangers. AI can be a powerful support, not a replacement, for professional judgment. We can think of it like a high-performance car: the teacher is in the driver's seat, deciding the route, the pace and the destination. With the right approach, AI can help you work more efficiently and with greater impact.

### NAVIGATING THE ROAD

When beginning with a new curriculum, subject or grade level, AI can help teachers quickly build background knowledge. It can clarify learning outcomes, highlight common misconceptions and suggest real-world connections across the curriculum. AI can also serve as a thinking partner, broadening perspectives by developing multiple viewpoints such as student, parent, academic or other important perspectives.

In everyday planning, AI can help with brainstorming, organizing and refining ideas, giving teachers back valuable time to focus on instruction and students—things that drive their joy in the profession.

### SHIFTING GEARS

AI becomes most effective when it helps teachers move from generic lesson materials to intentional lesson design. By identifying proven teaching, engagement and assessment practices to be included in the lesson design, teachers can prompt AI to generate activities that build these strategies into lessons from the start.

This approach also applies to Alberta's KUSP framework (knowledge, understanding, skills/procedures). Teachers can ask AI to generate tasks that target specific key KUSP components. Rather than accepting a general lesson plan on a component, teachers can focus their prompting on what they know to be most important. AI can also support differentiation by suggesting tiered activities, scaffolds for English language learners, enrichment tasks and more.



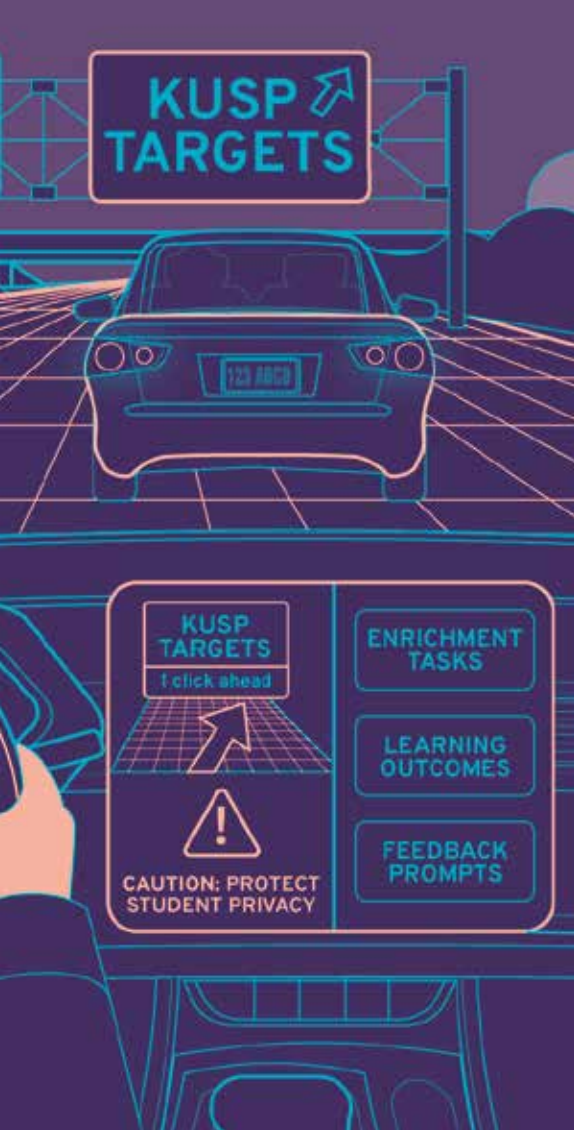
Knowledge, understanding, skills/procedures (KUSP)

Beyond text, AI tools can create images, slides or activity ideas that save preparation time and spark creativity. They can even draft formative assessment items, rubrics and feedback prompts, which lighten the workload while keeping the teacher in control. At its best, AI acts as a coplanner, helping teachers bring clarity and efficiency to their work.

### AVOIDING PITFALLS

Teachers should be aware of potential risks. Protecting student privacy is essential. Identifiable student work, images or video should not be uploaded into AI tools without careful consideration of division policy and appropriate permissions. Accuracy and bias also matter. AI outputs must be reviewed and adapted to fit the right students in the right ways at the right times in our classrooms, and teachers are the best judges of that.






IMAGES ISTOCK ADAPTED

Open communication with administrators, colleagues, parents and students about how AI is being used helps build understanding and trust.

When used best, AI enhances professional expertise and never replaces it.

## LOOKING AHEAD

By using AI wisely, teachers can save time for what matters most: building relationships, providing feedback and encouraging creativity in the classroom. Teachers are in the driver's seat. AI is here to support the journey. 

The preceding article is a condensed version of a new ATA resource that is in development entitled: *Plan Like a Pro with AI: Staying in the Driver's Seat*, which is scheduled for release sometime this year.



## Over the horizon

Watch for upcoming ATA professional development opportunities, including workshops/seminars, YouTube content and self-paced courses, where these ideas will be explored in greater depth.

### AI WORKSHOPS AVAILABLE

#### *AI Tools to Amplify Your Professionalism and Save Time*

Explore how generative AI can create personalized content, assessments and more. We'll guide you through a process that balances efficiency with creativity, ensuring you remain the architect of exceptional learning experiences. Plus, let's delve into professional considerations—because AI is not just about algorithms; it's about impact.

#### *Prompting for Teacher Success*

Learn how to craft effective prompts to get tailored, high-quality results including generating engaging lesson plans, creating differentiated instructional materials or brainstorming new pedagogical strategies. Perfect for beginners and seasoned tech users alike, this session will equip you with practical skills to use AI as a creative collaborator and thinking partner.

#### *Using AI to Enhance Human Centred Work*

In this workshop, participants will explore strategies that leverage

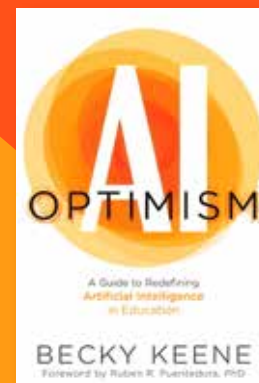
AI to enhance communication and connection. We will explore the intersection of AI and our social and emotional world, professional considerations for leveraging AI tools for human-centered work and versatile strategies that work with a variety of AI tools.



Visit this website for information about scheduling a workshop: <https://abteach.cc/PdAiWorkshops>.

Questions may be directed to [pdworkshops@ata.ab.ca](mailto:pdworkshops@ata.ab.ca).

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCE



### **AI Optimism: A Guide to Redefining Artificial Intelligence in Education**

Becky Keene

*Available through the ATA library*



ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL PARILLAS

# The transformative effect of SEL

How (and why) to bring social and emotional learning into your classroom

**Terra Kaliszuk**

Executive Staff Officer,  
Professional Development,  
ATA

**BUILDING A PRODUCTIVE** and resilient classroom community takes more than great lesson plans—it takes heart. That’s where social and emotional learning (SEL) comes in.

## WHAT IS SEL?

SEL is a powerful, universal support tool for creating caring, safe and productive learning environments for our students. SEL focuses on five areas of social and emotional competence:

1. Self-awareness
2. Self-management
3. Social awareness
4. Relationship skills
5. Responsible decision making

## WHY SEL MATTERS

Decades of research by organizations like the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning have shown that, when embedded in all subject areas and grade levels, SEL bolsters student learning, productive behaviour and personal growth by giving students the skills they need to manage emotions, connect with others and make future-focused decisions. All of this sets students up for success beyond our classroom walls.

Further, teachers share that, in teaching a social or emotional skill to their students, they also experience social and emotional benefits from modeling the skill.

## BRINGING SEL INTO YOUR CLASSROOM

Including SEL as part of our instructional approach involves focusing on teaching and modelling specific social and emotional skills students need



to navigate their learning experiences. For example, we do not assume that all students have the skills to navigate a group-work disagreement. Rather, we include explicit teaching of group-work skills as part of our instruction and model them from day to day.

SEL is easier to bring into your classroom than you might think. While there are many proprietary (and costly) SEL programs out there, you don't need a premade program to incorporate social and emotional skills into your teaching. Here are a few simple ways to weave SEL into what you're already doing.

### 1. TEACH A MINILESSON

Identify a social or emotional skill your students need to complete a learning activity. Before the activity, teach a three-to-five minute minilesson on how the skill works and what it looks like or sounds like.

- In math, demonstrate a coping strategy for calming test anxiety.
- In physical education, discuss what it sounds like to communicate with teammates.
- In science, create language for dealing with disagreements during a group project.
- Before recess, discuss what it sounds like to compromise with a friend.

### 2. MODEL IT

Students learn social and emotional skills by watching you. Share your own strategies for managing feeling overwhelmed, resolving conflicts or bouncing back from mistakes. Make a deliberate choice to use the social and emotional skills and strategies you teach your students.

### 3. CONNECT TO THE CURRICULUM

- In language arts, discuss how a character's feelings and thoughts influence their actions.
- In social studies, explore current events by focusing on perspective-taking skills.
- In science, highlight persistence and empathy skills during experiments and group work.
- Before recess, share that the group-work skill you just used during science can also work well for playing with friends.

### 4. CELEBRATE WINS

Notice and name specific social and emotional successes: "I saw how you included your partner in today's group-work task—great teamwork!"

### LIVING SEL

An impactful approach to SEL is all about the people who lead and live the work. It's not about choosing the "perfect" program or being the "perfect" human in front of our students. Rather, when we are human with our students, and pull the curtain back on our own feelings, thoughts and ways of managing emotions and relationships, we are *living SEL*. <sup>ATA</sup>

Learn more about the benefits of SEL on the website for the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, <https://casel.org/>

## Inclusive Chronicles podcast

### Kelsey Bagnall

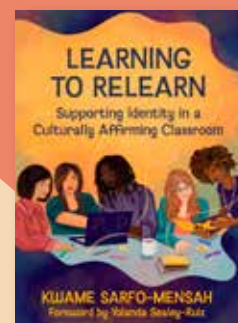
Communications Officer, Council for Inclusive Education

The *Inclusive Chronicles: Tips and Tricks for Inclusive Education in Alberta* podcast, launched by the Council for Inclusive Education (CIE) in 2024, equips teachers across the province with tips and tools to create equitable learning environments. Since its debut, the *Inclusive Chronicles* podcast has been empowering teachers with actionable strategies, inspiring interviews and insightful professional development. This podcast helps to bridge the gap between theory and practice to help Alberta teachers foster inclusive classrooms and ensure every student thrives.

*Inclusive Chronicles* is committed to collaboration and responsiveness, and actively seeks input from Alberta teachers to ensure their voices and needs are reflected in the content.

Share your ideas for the podcast through the CIE's website at [www.cieducation.ca](http://www.cieducation.ca).

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCE



### Learning to Relearn: Supporting Identity in a Culturally Affirming Classroom

Kwame Sarfo-Mensah

Available through the ATA library

# HELP WANTED

*Climate change demands bold action.  
Education must play a role.*



**Cory Hare**

Managing Editor, ATA Magazine

## **THE WORLD NEEDS HELP.**

Teachers have a vital role to play in the global effort to address climate change by educating students and creating space for them to identify, understand and express their feelings about living on a rapidly changing planet.

Being knowledgeable about the causes and consequences of climate change, as well as the world's responses to it, can give teachers the confidence to handle challenging questions that may arise during class discussions. Such knowledge can also help teachers dispel misinformation as they help students navigate their feelings about the future.

It's also important for teachers to understand that it's okay not to have all the answers while still feeling empowered to take the lead in exploring, together with students, this highly complex topic. <sup>ATA</sup>

➤ Adapted from *An Educator's Guide to Climate Emotions*. Climate Psychology Alliance, North America.





## The Paris Agreement\*

Humanity's efforts to address climate change are centred around the 2015 Paris Agreement, a legally binding framework that compels nearly all nations to limit global temperature increase to well below 2°C—preferably 1.5°C—above preindustrial levels, with the goal to achieve net-zero emissions by mid-century. The treaty's temperature goals are based on the scientific consensus that warming beyond 2°C risks catastrophic climate impacts, and that 1.5°C is a much safer threshold.

### \*Notes

- Adopted by 195 parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France in December 2015
- Entered into force on November 4, 2016
- Article 12 calls for signatories to “enhance climate change education.”

### 5 key facts about climate change

1. It's real.
2. It's us.
3. It's bad.
4. Scientists agree.
5. There's hope.

➤ *An Educator's Guide to Climate Emotions.*  
Climate Psychology Alliance, North America.

### A record year

#### 2024

1. was the hottest year on record (1.55°C higher than the preindustrial average), and
2. was the first year in which the global mean temperature was more than 1.5°C above the preindustrial average.

➤ World Meteorological Organization

# Teachers and climate change education

## A Q&A with Canada's foremost expert



**DR. ELLEN FIELD** is an assistant professor in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University-Orillia, where she teaches climate change education and environmental education. Her research focuses on the policy and practice of climate change education. She is widely regarded as Canada's foremost expert in climate change education in the K-12 sector.

The *ATA Magazine* sat down with Dr. Field to discuss her research and her message for teachers and system leaders.

(Responses have been edited for length and clarity.)

**Q. What role can schools and teachers play in addressing such a complex, global issue like climate change?**

A. The data has been clear on climate change for over 50 years. Have our systems changed accordingly? No. So we need to actually learn our way through it, and I think one of the ways that we can learn differently is by learning in schools that it's okay to change our position based on the information we're learning. So the classroom can be this very powerful intervention to build some of the capacities that we know the world needs more than ever.

At the same time, young people are already hearing about climate change in the news and

increasingly experiencing its effects in their daily lives. When schools fail to address climate change in substantive ways, it creates cognitive dissonance, sending the message that what students are living through doesn't matter in their formal education. For schools to be responsive, they need to respond to climate change across multiple dimensions: integrating it into curriculum, updating school policies and practices, preparing for climate-related emergencies, and helping students understand both the urgency of the crisis and the pathways to action. This includes building skills for participating in low-carbon economies and building resilient communities.

**Q. Here in Alberta, many teachers are in a situation where the students come from households that rely on fossil fuels for their livelihood. How can they address climate change in that type of setting?**

A. I think approaching it as an inquiry project and really focusing on an openness to learning. There needs to be an agreement among students that the learning is not going to fall into personal attacks, and that opinions can be expressed, and the learning space is a place to really investigate and learn more about these topics that

are very political and very controversial at times.

You don't want to necessarily be positioning that this is the absolute way to see an issue. You can talk about the consensus of the science, but when it comes to implementation of policy and projects, these are challenging things and you do have to weigh environmental, social and economic impacts.

These are complex topics, so they need complex pedagogy and processes for students to be able to learn that complexity. As soon as we start to flatten it and say, well, we all have to be antipipeline or we all have to be propipeline, that's problematic. So we need to cultivate that willingness to learn and also to learn from each other and to do more research and have flexibility in our position based on what we're learning.

**Q. Teachers in the K-12 system are required to teach the curriculum that's created by government. Given this constraint, what is your message to teachers who are concerned about climate change?**

A. Our curriculum is still quite dated, and I think we need to find whatever windows we can as teachers to be responsive to all of the ways that life in the 21st century is changing. It's often through motivated teachers that this happens, and then policy slowly





shifts over time. But teachers don't need to wait. They can integrate content and update their practices much faster, and our research shows that motivated teachers do and are teaching climate in subjects where there may not be direct curriculum links. Math, health and art are subjects where we find teachers bringing in climate content.

Teachers also have tons of experience in terms of how to scaffold a lesson that's appropriate for the students in their room based on the subject they're teaching. I think we sometimes forget that teachers are very good at planning, very good at thinking about who the students in the room are and what their needs are, so often they just need a little bit of support or professional development to integrate it. Probably after six hours of support,

you could have a lot of teachers feeling a lot more confident.

**Q. Where can teachers turn for this type of support if it's not available through their employer?**

A. There are many climate change teaching resources available. Our research has shown that when it comes to teaching climate change, most teachers create their own lesson plans or pick aspects from already developed resources from environmental nonprofits.

I think it is important to think about their subject, their students and their local experiences of climate change, and then look for climate activities that will align.

See "Recommended Resources" on page 28. ATA

## Learning dimensions of climate change education

Cross-disciplinary research suggests climate change education should focus on the following learning dimensions.

### Cognitive

- Teach the scientific consensus on climate change.
- Foster critical-thinking skills and media literacy.

### Socio-emotional

- Incorporate socio-emotional considerations to overcome feelings of ecoanxiety, denial and inaction.

### Action-oriented

- Use teaching methods that are participatory and place-based.
- Focus on collective action.

### Justice-focused

- Link and strategize with other justice-related issues.
- Address who benefits and who is most affected by our collective inaction.

➤ Source: *Responding to Climate Change: A Primer for K–12 Education*.

### Scientific consensus

"Human activities, principally through emissions of greenhouse gases, have unequivocally caused global warming ..."

"Global fossil fuel use will need to decline substantially by 2050 to limit warming to 2°C, and it must decline substantially by 2030 to limit warming to 1.5°C."

Modelling shows that limiting warming to 1.5°C requires immediate, rapid reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

More money is being invested in fossil fuel development than climate adaptation and mitigation.

Reduction in greenhouse gas emissions on an individual behaviour's basis will not result in humanity collectively keeping warming to 1.5 degrees. Instead, it requires government and corporate leadership.

➤ Source: UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

# How comfortable are you engaging in classroom discussions about climate change?

I'm fairly comfortable myself, but I take it from an angle of let's be critical thinkers, and I change it more into a lesson of how do we establish what is information, what is misinformation?

In my small, rural community, I can't pick a side because there's going to be people on both sides, so my whole thing is, if I can teach my students to be critical thinkers and go seek the information, then I'm not painting them with my liberal ideas.

These kids are constantly worried about those kinds of big ideas, and it wraps around into so many other topics.

**Stephanie Cumbleton**, president Aspen View Local No. 7  
Junior/senior high mathematics  
Boyle School, Boyle

I'm pretty comfortable doing it because science is a thing. Like, the facts are kind of undeniable. I know there's lots of people who are climate change deniers, but I feel like [if] we present everything in a cohesive way and are able to have these conversations, then that's fine.

**Shannon O'Halloran**  
English and social studies  
Westwood Community High School,  
Fort McMurray

I'm fairly comfortable, but I probably have a different set of opinions because we're farmer- and oilfield-based communities and so my version of climate change is maybe a little bit different than somebody from the city, but I feel like I'm fairly comfortable talking about it from a farming and oilfield perspective.

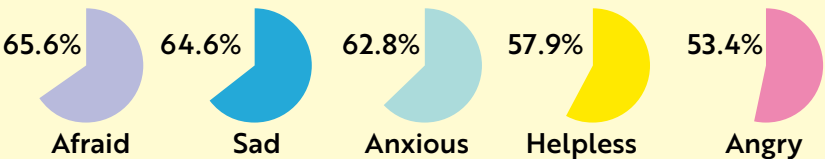
**Megan Wianko**  
Grade 5-6  
Gus Wetter School, Castor

Very comfortable, because back when I was in university, like in 1983 when I graduated, we were talking about it then, so I was fairly comfortable talking about it in front of the class.

**Blaine Woodall**  
Math-science teacher  
Calling Lake School, Calling Lake

## Canadian students are feeling climate anxiety ...

Climate change makes me feel



## ... but also hope.

Can something be done about the climate crisis if people work together?



Source: Importance of Climate Leadership in Schools: Pedagogy & New Opportunities for Learning, Dr. Ellen Field, Faculty of Education, Lakehead University.

## Confidence factor

**32%** of Alberta teachers feel they have the knowledge and skills to teach about climate change.

Source: Canada, Climate Change and Education: Opportunities for Public and Formal Education, Dr. Ellen Field, Lakehead University.



# A national shift toward solutions and action

*Effective climate change education requires leadership at all levels.*



**Cory Hare**

Managing Editor, ATA Magazine

*“Without clear policy, climate change education often relies on the competence, dedication, commitment and enthusiasm of devoted teachers.”*

- Dr. Ellen Field, Lakehead University

**FRACTURED AND UNEVEN.** Those are the words that researcher Ellen Field uses to describe how climate change is included in the various K–12 curriculums of Canada’s provinces and territories.

An assistant professor in climate change education at Lakehead University, Field led a research team that conducted a 2022 Canadawide analysis of K–12 curriculum, documenting the number of climate change references, the grade and subject, and whether the references occurred in mandatory or elective courses. The study revealed a wide disparity in approaches between the various provinces and territories.

“The review shows uneven inclusion of climate change topics, themes and units within grade 7–12 curricula, with most expectations occurring in elective senior secondary courses,” Field’s team wrote. “A second level of analysis with a ranking tool indicates shallow inclusion.”

The researchers found 25 references to climate change in Alberta’s K–12 curriculum, all taking place within science courses, with 20 per cent of those taking place in mandatory courses. This placed Alberta at the lower end of the spectrum in terms of number of references. However, an analysis of curriculum depth put Alberta in the middle of the pack.

Manitoba’s approach is vastly different from the others, with almost 170 references in its curriculum. However, all of

these occur in elective courses. From the perspective of a climate change advocate, it’s preferable to have the subject addressed in mandatory courses.

“A mandatory course ensures that students going through their educational experience will have exposure and learn about it,” Field said in an interview.

The report singles out British Columbia, the Yukon and Nova Scotia for having more than 50 per cent of their climate change expectations occurring in mandatory courses. Nova Scotia was the highest, at 98 per cent.

British Columbia, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick also earned praise for promoting a more competency-based, active learning approach.


“The shift to concept-based and competency-driven curriculum first initiated by British Columbia and then in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick was an important step for promoting active learning strategies across K–12 schooling,” the researchers wrote. “However, this shift necessitated increased funding in professional development for teachers to shift teaching practices to competency-driven approaches and to link issues like climate change to big idea concepts within the curriculum.”

## Getting past the science

Overall, Field’s paper points out that climate change education has generally

been focused on teaching the science of climate change and addressing misinformation, with the underlying assumption being that increased knowledge will lead to changes in attitude and behaviour. However, research has shown that assumption to be erroneous. Field argues that a more holistic and interdisciplinary approach is needed, that focusing just on science misses opportunities to adopt a more transdisciplinary approach that includes the exploration of solutions and actions to mitigate climate change.

The paper concludes by advocating for leadership from the very top.

“If the Canadian K–12 education system intends to be an actor in the global move to meet 1.5 degrees of warming by 2030, there is a critical need for educational leadership within ministries of education to ensure that curriculum is improved when it comes to climate change content.” 

### Reference

Field, E., Spiropoulos, G., Nguyen, A.T., Grewal, R.K. 2023. “Climate Change Education within Canada’s Regional Curricula: A Systematic Review of Gaps and Opportunities.” *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy* 202: 155–184.



ISTOCK


## Preservice success

Climate education professor Ellen Field is involved in a project called Accelerating Climate Change Education in Teacher Education, which disperses grants to faculties of education to create courses to teach preservice teachers about climate change education so they feel more confident and able to teach about climate change.

Since its inception in 2023, the project has dispersed 17 grants worth a total of \$85,000, resulting in 10 new courses being developed in faculties of education across Canada.

Field was also part of a group of researchers who presented their findings to the Ontario College of Teachers. The result was that environmental sustainability and climate action are now required topics in all teacher preservice programs in Ontario, the first Canadian jurisdiction to adopt such measures.

"I think that's a really powerful policy lever that, if other provinces adopted, we could actually move the needle pretty quickly," Field says.

"It came about through some committed deans and getting the right people in the room, presenting some research," she said. "So you know, sometimes policy work takes forever, and then sometimes you get the right people in the room and things can happen." 

## Guiding framework

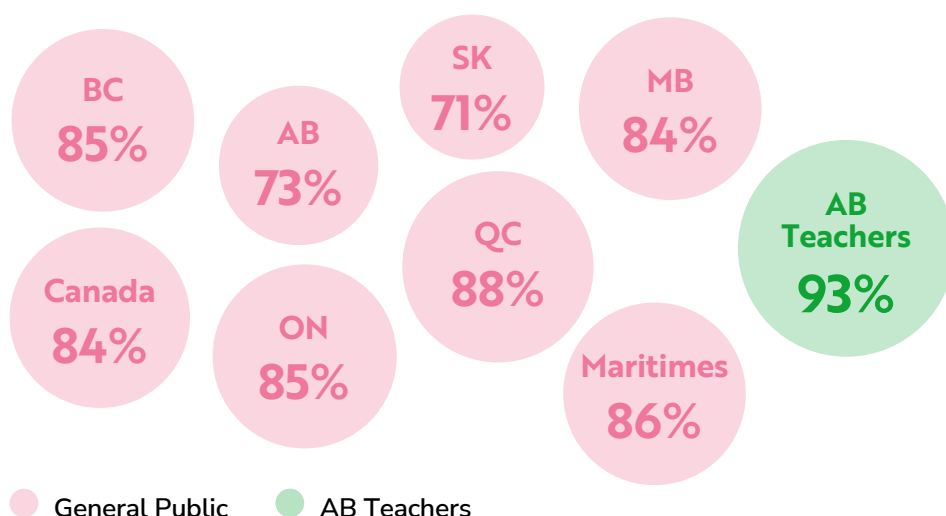
In April 2024, Alberta Education published a guiding framework for the design and development of K–12 curriculum. The 31-page document touched on Alberta's oil and gas industry and climate change and received criticism, including from the Alberta Teachers' Association, for being developed without teacher involvement and for being overly prescriptive.



Read excerpts from the guiding framework:  
[https://abteach.cc\\_GuidingFramework](https://abteach.cc_GuidingFramework)

## Is it real?

*"I am certain that climate change is really happening."*




## A matter of policy

The ATA has three policies acknowledging that climate change is a critical challenge that is caused by human activity and that call for curriculum that explicitly addresses this subject.

## Curricular references

An ATA analysis of Alberta curriculum identified climate change and climate-science connections in

- 25 science grades/courses,
- 13 social studies grades/courses and
- at least 9 CTS courses.

These connections range from indirect to direct references to climate, climate change and climate-science related concepts. Scan the QR code to review the most direct references to climate change in Alberta's K–12 curriculum. 



Read more at:  
[https://abteach.cc\\_CurricularReferences](https://abteach.cc_CurricularReferences)





# How can teachers model ecoresponsibility?


## 1. Make sustainable transportation choices.

Walk, bike, take transit or carpool to work when possible and highlight active transportation benefits in class discussions. Organize a walk- or bike-to-school challenge to model sustainable commuting.

## 2. Teach and practice energy conservation.

Involve students in classroom energy audits and identify ways to reduce energy waste, like turning off lights, projectors and electronics when not in use and opening blinds for natural light instead of using overhead lights.

## 3. Incorporate outdoor and experiential learning.

Take lessons outside when possible to foster a connection with nature by using nearby green spaces, school gardens or local parks to enhance learning. 

➤ ATA Global, Environmental and Outdoor Education Council.

## Expert calls for board action supported by government funding

Climate education professor Ellen Field believes that school boards can play an active role in climate leadership through climate action plans, climate emergency declarations, and mentions of climate change or greenhouse gas emissions in their strategic plans.

"We often look at the ministries at the provincial level for policy change, but we can actually think a lot around driving change at that school or district level," Field says.

A national research study she led found that only four school districts in Canada have explicit climate action plans, and between eight and eleven have a commitment to

climate change or greenhouse gas reductions in their strategic plans.

The study provided two key recommendations:

School boards need to develop policy that supports a whole-institution approach to climate action.

Ministries of education need to provide funding to school boards to develop and implement whole-institution climate change policies.



The full review can be viewed here:  
[https://abteach.cc\\_ClimateLeadership](https://abteach.cc_ClimateLeadership)



# Environmental education and sustainability programs in Alberta schools



## Alberta Council for Environmental Education

- Offers programs such as Alberta Youth Leaders for Environmental Education.
- Supports integrating environmental education into the K–12 curriculum.
- Operates the Alberta Green Schools Initiative, which supports students' environmental, energy and climate change education.

## Alberta Environment and Protected Areas

- Provides various environmental resources and information to schools and youth groups, facilitating access to a variety of educational materials and programs.

## Alberta Parks

- Education programs provide educational resources and programs, including teacher workshops and in-class presentations such as "Kananaskis in the Classroom," which brings environmental education directly to students.

## Calgary Board of Education (CBE)

- The CBE Sustainability Framework 2030 guides environmental education and initiatives, emphasizing energy management, waste reduction and sustainable operations.

## EcoSchools Canada in Alberta

- Provides a certification framework for K–12 schools to achieve bronze,

silver, gold or platinum certification by engaging in sustainability and climate action projects.

## Edmonton Public Schools

- The division has set carbon reduction targets and are exploring renewable energy options, waste reduction strategies and sustainability education.

## Government of Alberta

- Environmental educator workshops provide training on nature and water resources, equipping teachers with tools to incorporate environmental education into their practices.

## Inside Education

- Offers classroom programs, field trips and teacher professional development focused on Alberta's natural resources and environmental topics. Their programs encourage critical thinking and provide hands-on learning experiences related to energy, forests and water conservation.

## Green initiatives

### École McTavish Public High School

This Fort McMurray school has invested more than \$750,000 in solar panels and features both indoor and outdoor gardens.

### Christ the Redeemer Catholic Separate Regional Division No. 3

This division has been recognized for constructing "green" school facilities.

Notably, Holy Trinity Academy in Okotoks was built to LEED Gold standards, making it the first high school in Canada to receive this prestigious recognition. <sup>ATA</sup>

➤ Information compiled by the ATA's Global Education Global, Environmental & Outdoor Education Council (GEOEC).

## Embrace evidence-based education and action

When seeking out climate change information, look for groups whose programs include

- a commitment to evidence-based climate change education;
- attention to the root causes of the climate crisis in political, social, economic and colonial systems and the role of the oil and gas industry within these systems;
- a focus on intersectional approaches to climate justice with particular attention to decolonization and Indigenous justice;
- clarity about the need for urgent action to avoid the worst impacts; and
- a concern to engage students in meaningful collective action that attends to their well-being.

➤ Source: *Polluting the Schools: The Influence of Fossil Fuels on K–12 Education in Canada. A report by the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and For Our Kids*, February 2025.



# Policies, not targets ... and making the case for hope

*Climate change expert Andrew Leach shares his thoughts.*

**Cory Hare**

Managing Editor, ATA Magazine

**POLICIES, NOT TARGETS**, are what are needed to address climate change.

That's one of the messages contained in *Between Doom & Denial*, a book by Andrew Leach, a University of Alberta economist who served as chair of Alberta's Climate Change Advisory Panel in 2015 and one of Canada's foremost experts in climate change policy.

In the book, Leach writes that, globally and within Canada, it's common to find governments that are willing to make ambitious emissions reduction pledges that would combine to limit temperature increases to less than two degrees, but without the policy ambition to deliver on those goals.

For example, following the Paris Agreement of 2015, Canada committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050 and a 40 to 45 per cent reduction in emissions relative to 2005 levels by 2030.

Canada has increased action on climate change through initiatives like national carbon pricing, clean fuels and clean electricity regulations, vehicle emissions standards and subsidies for emissions-reducing capital investment. These actions have slowed the growth of emissions but haven't put us on a path toward meeting our commitments.

"Despite substantial technological and policy progress, Canada remains far from meeting its targets," Leach writes. "I would much prefer that Canada focus on the stringency of our emissions mitigation policies than promises of outcomes we cannot guarantee."

## A drop in the bucket?

Canada sits 12th among the world's top emitters of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, far behind the frontrunners China, U.S. and India in terms of total volume of GHG emissions. However, in terms of GHG emissions per capita, Canada sits fourth, with Canadians' consumption habits producing emissions at 2.5 times the global average.

Some argue that, since Canada produces less than two per cent of global emissions, it shouldn't be expected to pursue reductions; however, Leach argues that even the largest emitters cannot address climate change on their own and that "the lowest cost climate mitigation strategy is to get as many countries as possible to put in reasonably similar levels of effort."

"If Canada doesn't take measures to address emissions, it risks being subjected to external measures imposed by the rest of the world," Leach writes.

## Reason for optimism

Leach was the architect of Alberta's policy to phase out coal-fired power generation. Announced by the Rachel Notley government in 2015, the policy called for the end of coal power by 2030. However, the last coal-fired plant went offline in 2024, having switched to natural gas as a fuel source. This change resulted in a 50 per cent reduction in GHG emissions from power generation.

Leach says the speed of Alberta's coal phase-out surprised experts and illustrates how quickly technological change can occur once clear policies are in place. As further cause for optimism, he pointed to the rapid advancement in low-cost solar and wind power, as well as utility-scale battery storage.

*"Our ability to produce clean, renewable power is far and away [above] what anyone would have expected 10 or 15 years ago ... that's the big thing that gives me hope."*

- Andrew Leach

"I'm not saying it's going to be perfect by any stretch of the imagination, but I think we're going to have a vastly different world in terms of being able to adapt, being able to mitigate emissions. Another 20 years of progress like we've had in the last 20 and our energy systems are going to be unrecognizable." ATA



# Countering misinformation

| Climate change myth or misconception   | More accurate climate/environmental information  |
|--|--|
| "The climate has changed before. It has nothing to do with humans."                | Many factors can change the climate. Right now human activities, especially burning fossil fuels and the destruction of ecosystem resilience, are the major factors.   |
| "Scientists are still debating climate change."                                    | Ninety-seven per cent of scientists agree that climate change is happening and is human-driven, and over 99.9 per cent of studies confirm those positions.             |
| "There have always been natural disasters. What we're seeing now is no different." | Climate change is increasing the overall frequency, erratic occurrences and intensity of dangerous weather events like storms, droughts and high temperatures.         |
| "There's nothing we can do about climate change."                                  | Because humans are driving climate change, humans can slow it down by doing fewer of the things that cause it and finding different ways to get what we need and want. |

➤ Source: *An Educator's Guide to Climate Emotions*. Climate Psychology Alliance, North America.

# Recommended resources

## Accelerate Climate Change Education in Canadian Teacher Education

This project supports climate change education (CCE) in preservice and inservice teacher education across Canada through consultations, webinars, online courses, grants and resources.



Read more at:  
[https://abteach.cc\\_Accelerate](https://abteach.cc_Accelerate)

## Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network (CBEEN)

The CBEEN website has a list of recommended resources to help teachers deliver accurate, effective, empowering and age-appropriate climate change lessons and programs.



Read more at:  
[https://abteach.cc\\_ColumbiaBasin](https://abteach.cc_ColumbiaBasin)

## International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report

### Working Group III: Mitigation of Climate Change

This report provides an updated global assessment of climate change mitigation progress and pledges, and examines the sources of global emissions.



Read more at:  
[https://abteach.cc\\_IPCC](https://abteach.cc_IPCC)

## ATA library

### Teaching Climate Change to Children: Literacy Pedagogy that Cultivates Sustainable Futures

The authors argue that understanding climate change is crucial for young learners and emphasize how reading, writing and language skills can empower children to take action and make a difference.

### Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Learning from Indigenous Practices for Environmental Sustainability

This book focuses on how traditional environmental values of Indigenous peoples are applied to the uses and management of land and natural resources.



Read more at:  
[https://abteach.cc\\_Library](https://abteach.cc_Library)

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# Teaching writing in the age of AI

## Strategies for educators

**Robert LeBlanc**

University of Lethbridge

**Amy Stornaiuolo**

University of Pennsylvania

“By reimagining writing assignments with AI, we hope to inspire thoughtful and equitable uses of this technology that empower students as writers.”

—Robert LeBlanc, Amy Stornaiuolo

**FIVE KEY WAYS TO APPROACH AI WHEN CREATING WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

- assistive
- resistive
- creative
- rhetorical
- critical

**GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL** intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing how people write and communicate. Many educators, however, are unsure what role this technology should play in their teaching due to concerns ranging from ethics to AI’s impact on student creativity. But rather than avoid AI or simply react to its presence, educators have an opportunity to design their instruction intentionally to align with their teaching goals.

We offer a practical guide for educators to design how and when to incorporate AI into writing assignments. Our framework highlights five key pedagogical purposes—assistive, resistive, creative, rhetorical and critical—and provides a roadmap for intentional AI integration in the classroom. By reimagining writing assignments with AI, we hope to inspire thoughtful and equitable uses of this technology that empower students as writers.

**THE CHALLENGE OF AI IN WRITING EDUCATION**

As AI reshapes everyday writing practices, educators are left navigating a continually evolving landscape. Many teachers worry that students are using AI without guidance, potentially crossing ethical lines or undermining their own voice. At the same time, there is a growing interest in how AI can assist with lesson planning, feedback and personalized instruction.

But what’s missing? While there is a wealth of resources for using AI for administrative tasks, such

as creating rubrics or scaffolding lessons, there is little guidance on how to craft writing assignments that explicitly consider AI. Many educators have also expressed concerns about AI’s potential to erode originality and diminish student engagement. As we explored these concerns, we recognized a need for a clearer, more systematic approach to integrating AI into writing assignments.

In our work with teachers, we found that they were looking for a concrete guide that would help them understand when and how to use AI without compromising their values or pedagogical goals.

**OUR FRAMEWORK FOR DESIGNING WRITING ASSIGNMENTS WITH AI**

Through our ongoing collaboration with educators, we identified five key ways to approach AI when creating writing assignments: assistive, resistive, creative, rhetorical and critical.

**ASSISTIVE: HOW AI CAN ASSIST IN WRITING**

Assistive use of AI involves identifying specific ways that assignments can incorporate AI to assist students in the writing process, whether that’s through grammar checks, idea generation or real-time feedback. The goal is to help students learn when to use AI strategically to refine their thinking and improve their writing—and when not to use it.

It’s worth remembering that AI’s assistive role extends far beyond simple grammar correction.



Contemporary writing platforms now integrate machine learning to suggest sentence revisions, flag stylistic inconsistencies and even model alternative phrasing based on tone or audience. Used thoughtfully, these tools can make the drafting process more dialogic—helping writers notice patterns in their prose; clarify intent; and refine expression through continuous, adaptive feedback.

A teacher can design a writing assignment to tap into the assistive dimensions of AI by specifying how, whether and when students should consult it as part of their writing process. For example, a teacher may ask students to use a platform like Grammarly to check for proofreading and editing suggestions before turning in a draft. Another may invite students to annotate and “talk” through their draft with a personalized chatbot on a platform like Writing Partners.

There are many ways teachers can design an assignment that directs students to use AI’s assistance in particular ways, including requiring students to submit documentation about how they did so, for example, by providing a transcript of the conversation or a report.

### RESISTIVE: HIGHLIGHTING STUDENTS’ OWN VOICES

A resistive approach to AI involves designing assignments that resist AI use by foregrounding students’ own ideas and voices. This could involve assignments that focus on personal or process-driven writing, where students are asked to create original work without AI assistance.

Many educators have ethical concerns about using AI. Indeed, not all assignments should use AI. One way to design writing assignments that resist AI is to work with genres and topics that are rooted in particular contexts. For example, a teacher may design a class zine or podcast project in which students develop their own topics, research and produce content across multiple drafts and modes, and present the work to different audiences. Or perhaps the teacher can draw on local texts that are specific to the school, neighbourhood or city, inviting students to use personal experience and creative expression.

### CREATIVE: COCREATING WITH AI

Creative use of AI involves leveraging its creative capabilities to enhance students’ self-expression. AI then becomes a tool for students to experiment with different forms of writing and media, which might include cowriting a story, generating character dialogue or even producing illustrations to accompany their narratives.

If an educator’s goal is to explore students’ creative expressions, writing assignments that help

## AI and ethical considerations

In a pulse survey, conducted in January 2025 by the Alberta Teachers’ Association, teachers emphasized the importance of integrating AI education into the curriculum, focusing on teaching students how to use it ethically and effectively:

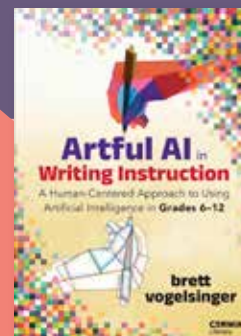
If students are taught how to use AI as a tool, then I believe it will be a major benefit, but if students are using it to do their work for them, it will be detrimental.

We need to teach students how and when to use AI. Education is always changing, but we still need to gauge what each student is capable of without AI.

Students must be taught educational ethics and to view AI as a tool to develop their product, not as it is often misused to be their end product.

Source: *Literacy and Numeracy Screeners, Classroom Conditions, Cellphone Bans and AI in Alberta’s K–12 Schools: ATA Pulse Research Study (January 9–31, 2025).*

### RECOMMENDED RESOURCE



#### Artful AI in Writing Instruction: A Human-Centered Approach to Using Artificial Intelligence in Grades 6–12

Brett Vogelsinger

Available through the ATA library.

students work through character motivation, narrative worldbuilding or genre can be powerful. For example, a teacher may ask students to use AI to suggest alternative endings, a new character or dialogue for a piece of creative writing they are working on.

### RHETORICAL: LEARNING HOW WRITING WORKS

A rhetorical approach involves using AI to help students better understand how writing works, particularly in terms of audience, purpose and style. AI can help students compare human- and AI-generated texts, deepening their understanding of rhetorical choices and gaining insight into how different writing styles and strategies can shape communication.


An assignment may ask students to draft an initial response to a prompt in class (e.g., an argument for cellphone bans in school) and then ask AI to generate a response to the same prompt. The assignment may ask students to compare the two drafts and point out similarities and differences in the argumentative moves in each.

### CRITICAL: EXAMINING THE IMPLICATIONS OF AI

A critical approach encourages students to engage in critical thinking regarding the ethical, social and technological implications of AI. This could involve exploring issues like bias in AI, the environmental impact of large language models or the implications of using AI to complete writing assignments.

Writing assignments that explore the critical dimensions of AI may not use AI at all but ask students to research more about the tool. One such assignment might ask students to run one of their own written assignments through an AI plagiarism detector, read reports about biases and inaccuracies in such technologies, and then write a reflection about what they learned through the process.

### ALIGNING AI AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

These categories provide distinct but complementary ways to align AI use with specific teaching goals. By deciding whether an assignment should emphasize assistance, resistance, creativity, rhetoric or critique, educators can intentionally guide how students interact with AI rather than letting the technology dictate classroom practice. 

## Reimagine writing assignments with AI: 5 approaches

| Category   | Purpose  | Examples   |
|------------|--|--|
| Assistive  | Supporting the practice of writing                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Checking grammar</li> <li>Dialoguing about ideas</li> <li>Generating content</li> </ul>   |
| Resistive  | Resisting AI use by foregrounding students' ideas and voices | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pen and paper</li> <li>Process-focused</li> <li>Documentary or personal writing</li> </ul>  |
| Creative   | Exploring the expressive dimensions of writing               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cocomposing stories/poems</li> <li>Making images or videos</li> <li>Developing characters</li> </ul>  |
| Rhetorical | Highlighting how writing works                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comparing AI/ human output</li> <li>Changing audience/purpose</li> <li>Generating different forms</li> </ul>  |
| Critical   | Learning about how GenAI technologies work                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researching environmental impacts</li> <li>Testing GenAI for bias and misinformation</li> <li>Exploring ethical questions (e.g., plagiarism)</li> </ul> |



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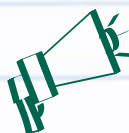
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# Early-career Alberta teachers

## Looking ahead

**Phil McRae**

Associate Coordinator, Research, ATA

**EACH YEAR**, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) surveys early-career teachers (those within their first five years of practice). In June 2025, more than 700 teachers shared their experiences, highlighting issues of mentorship, classroom practice, well-being and inclusion in Alberta schools.

Many survey respondents showed resilience and deep commitment to students yet reported high stress and burnout tied to heavy workloads, limited support and the demands of inclusive education. Informal mentorship was common, but formal structures were rare, raising concerns about sustainability and retention. Even so, most early-career teachers expressed a strong sense of purpose, grounded in their connections with students and a drive to grow professionally.

### KEY 2025 FINDINGS

The study highlighted several critical themes shaping early-career experiences.

- *Mentorship and support:* Seventy-eight per cent of early-career teachers reported no access to a formal mentor, with 62 per cent relying on a trusted colleague for support.
- *Well-being and retention:* Over 65 per cent reported frequent emotional exhaustion, and many considered leaving the profession or transferring schools.
- *Inclusion challenges:* About 40 per cent felt current inclusive practices were ineffective due to class sizes, student safety concerns, lack of educational assistants and insufficient specialist support.

### DECLINING TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY (2022–2025)

A growing number of early-career teachers described their work as “unsustainable,” “unsafe” or “drowning,” reflecting an erosion of confidence in their ability to teach effectively. This decline in self-efficacy—teachers’ belief in their capacity to engage students, manage classrooms and adapt to diverse needs—has been steady across four years of ATA research.

High self-efficacy is linked to resilience, student success and effective practice. Its decline contributes to stress, burnout and attrition.

The main concerns identified in 2025 were the following:

1. *Classroom management:* Teachers increasingly felt unsafe and powerless.
2. *Differentiated instruction in inclusive settings:* Complex, diverse classrooms left teachers feeling overwhelmed and distressed.
3. *Student engagement and motivation:* Aggression and behavioural issues undermined teachers’ ability to inspire learning.
4. *Collaboration with families and specialists:* Teachers felt increasingly unable to partner effectively to meet student needs.

### CONTRIBUTING FACTORS

The decline in teacher self-efficacy is tied to a combination of systemic and classroom challenges:

- *Larger, more complex classes* without sufficient educational assistants or specialist support
- *Disruptive and aggressive student*


*behaviour with inconsistent or absent consequences*

- *Loss of prep time and unsustainable work intensification*, compounding stress
- *Insufficient mentorship and unclear leadership support*, leaving many new teachers isolated
- *Underfunded classrooms, curriculum shifts and new policies* (including book bans) introduced without resources or time

### LOOKING AHEAD: 2025–2030 LONGITUDINAL STUDY

To better prepare for emerging and future challenges as identified in the annual survey, the ATA is expanding an ongoing longitudinal study, which is following one cohort of more than 100 beginning teachers over five years, from self-efficacy to include broader structural forces and emerging areas of impact.

These new forces/areas include the financial burden of postsecondary education (now being cited in other Canadian research as a potential “stranded public asset”); housing affordability in Alberta; the integration of artificial intelligence and other technologies into teaching and learning; and systemic factors contributing to stress and burnout beyond work intensification issues, such as social siloing and professional isolation, where new teachers are rarely mixing with others of different socioeconomic status.

Additionally, the impacts of extreme weather (fires, floods, storms, winds and cold snaps) and broader sustained climate change on Alberta teacher and student well-being will be tracked over the five-year longitudinal study. 





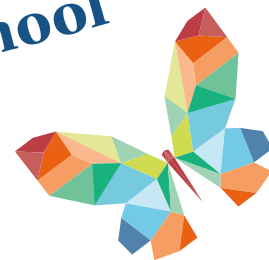
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# Check it out!

These resources are now available through the ATA library.

Have you ever used your ATA library? If not, you should give it a try. Books, DVDs, robots and more delivered right to your doorstep with return postage paid by us. Great teaching resources are waiting for you. Contact us at [library@ata.ab.ca](mailto:library@ata.ab.ca).

## 1. *Enseigner avec bienveillance*

Ce livre propose de précieuses informations aux enseignants et parents qui souhaitent enseigner avec bienveillance, c'est-à-dire développer des relations saines avec les enfants, rompre avec des schémas passés insatisfaisants et créer de nouvelles structures sociales acceptables pour tous.

## 2. *La littérature de jeunesse contre le harcèlement scolaire : développer l'empathie pour prévenir le harcèlement*

Conciliant analyse littéraire et réflexion didactique, ce livre offre aux enseignants et aux professionnels de l'éducation des outils pour développer auprès de leurs élèves des activités de prévention du harcèlement scolaire.

## 3. *Terror, Love and Brainwashing: Attachment in Cults and Totalitarian Systems*

Why do people give up their autonomy to cult leaders? What makes voting for a dictator seem like a good idea? Author Alexandra Stein shares the dangers of isolating relationships and closed-beliefs systems and shows how education can be used to inoculate us from these traps.

## 4. *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*

In the early 2010s, teen mental health statistics suddenly plunged in many countries around the world. Johnathan Haidt ties this disaster to the end of play-based child rearing and educational practices that were replaced with screen time. He calls on teachers, parents and governments to take steps to restore childhood now.

Information provided by ATA librarian  
Sandra Anderson.

## Your colleagues recommend

### Melissa Henke-Lambert

*Dad Up!* by Steve Patterson. This is a must-read for any expecting parents and even those who are not expecting. Steve Patterson goes through the ups and downs of being a first-time father and reflects on his own childhood. I guarantee you will be laughing out

loud many times through this book and can relate to many things Steve Patterson is going through as a father and went through during his childhood. For instance, how does a father take his daughter swimming when he does not know how to swim himself?





**5. *Understanding and Supporting Refugee Children and Young People: A Practical Resource for Teachers, Parents and Carers of Those Exposed to the Trauma of War***

As we accept more refugees from around the world into the country, our teachers need to know how to support children whose experiences are completely foreign to most of us. Author Tina Rae explains how we can talk about difficult and painful topics with compassion and help children to develop post-traumatic growth.

**6. *Wrong: How Media, Politics, and Identity Drive Our Appetite for Misinformation***

An interesting exploration of why misinformation is as appealing as junk food while facts are as appetizing as raw broccoli. Author Dannagal Goldthwaite Young explores why we cling to lies rather than embrace difficult truths.

**7. *Learning with AI: The K-12 Teacher's Guide to a New Era of Human Learning***

This practical guide to AI literacy will show teachers how to teach their students critically needed AI skills.

**8. *Truth Telling: Seven Conversations about Indigenous Life in Canada***

An honest analysis of Canada's discriminatory past and current state, while reminding us all of the work we as settlers and Indigenous peoples still need to do.



PHOTO BY ALEXA GUSE

**Shelley Comfort**

*Didn't See That Coming* by Rachel Hollis, *Comfort & Joy* by Kristin Hannah, and *l'Assassin impossible* by Laurent Chabin.

**Melanie Alde**

*The Let Them Theory* by Mel Robbins. Love this for a little self-love. *By Any Other Name* by Jodi Picoult. Inspiring read for women.

**Patricia Gagnon**

*The Unlikely Pilgrimage of Harold Fry* is the best book I've read in a long time and a bit of a departure for me, as I'm a psychological thriller kind of girl.

# Which book that has been made into a movie do you like to use with students? Why?

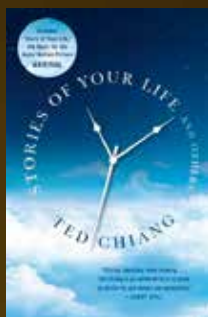


## **Rogue One**

*Rogue One* is interesting to teach because students come with a wide variety of Star Wars and science fiction background to apply to the film, but then they are all able to understand the

ideas of camaraderie, underdogs and the power of hope.

Lindsay Walker, ELAC Social Media Coordinator



## **Story of Your Life**

The film *Arrival* is based on a Ted Chiang short story called "Story of Your Life". Students find it compelling because, on the surface, it's a stereotypical sci-fi flick, but as the story unfolds

there are puzzles to unpack as we learn more about the character and her relationship to others.

Morgan Schaufele, ELAC Journal Coeditor



## **Shakespeare**

I love bringing modern Shakespearean adaptations to my high school students. We watch adaptations like *She's the Man*, *The Lion King* and *Ten Things I Hate About You*. It's empowering for students to engage with Shakespeare in a medium they are more comfortable with, and ultimately, we can have those important discussions about

universal themes to a much deeper level than if we had relied solely on the original text.

Bailey Almberg, ELAC President



## **The Hunger Games**

*The Hunger Games* has a lot of new and exciting buzz. Grade 7s are excited about it. *Scythe* will be a series soon; Grade 9s are having good conversations about the moral and ethical themes in the text.

Alyssa Backs, ELAC Central Region Rep



## **Brooklyn**

First time teaching this film, but it was, overall, well received. The film is centered on a young Irish woman, Ellis, who moves away from home to Brooklyn for new opportunities that she did not have in Ireland. The conflicts she faces are both internal and external, and in grappling with these conflicts, she learns more about who she is

and where "home" is. There are great opportunities to discuss relationships, family, identity and belonging.

Katee Robichaud, ELAC New Teacher Liaison

Responses provided by members of the ATA English Language Arts Council (ELAC)



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## Supporting members' lifelong learning

### AS TEACHING PROFESSIONALS,

ATA members have a professional responsibility to maintain awareness of new developments in education and to continue to develop their professional practice. The ATA supports teachers' professional growth by offering publications, resources, learning opportunities and financial supports for members.

### Online and print resources

The ATA website includes information on the professional practice standards for teachers and school jurisdiction leaders. To support teachers in developing their annual professional growth plans, the ATA also offers a bilingual Self-Reflection on My Professional Practice tool.


Teachers can also access publications on such topics as supporting Ukrainian newcomer students and guidance on Indigenous cultural protocols. The ATA Library's web guides allow teachers to find relevant and credible resources by

subject or observed dates. Further, the *ATA News* and *ATA Magazine* keep members informed on matters affecting the profession.

### Grants, awards and scholarships

The ATA provides grants, awards and scholarships to support members pursuing additional education and professional learning opportunities. If you are engaging in graduate studies, consider applying for the ATA Doctoral Fellowships in Education or the Nadene M Thomas Graduate Research Bursary.

- **ATA Doctoral Fellowships in Education:** Each year, up to two doctoral fellowships in the amount of \$15,000 are awarded to members who are entering or enrolled in their first year of full-time study toward a PhD in education or an EdD at recognized public universities in Alberta or Canada. *Application deadline:* February 28, annually.

- **Nadene M Thomas Graduate Research Bursary:** This \$5,000 research bursary is provided to a member in a graduate program in education offered by a recognized public university in Canada. Research must focus on contemporary issues impacting professional practice or public education, and/or innovative approaches to teaching or school leadership. *Application deadline:* February 28, annually. 

Find full eligibility and application details for these and other grants, awards and scholarships here: [teachers.ab.ca/scholarships](https://teachers.ab.ca/scholarships)



## LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

The provincial ATA, ATA locals and other ATA subgroups facilitate members' ongoing learning through workshops and presentations, speaker series, conferences and other events. Schools and locals can request workshops or presentations, and teachers can check out a variety of events—in person or online—throughout the year.

### HOW CAN YOU PARTICIPATE?

Check out your local's website or social media to stay informed about local events, and check out upcoming provincial events here: [teachers.ab.ca/events](https://teachers.ab.ca/events)





## Soutenir le perfectionnement continu des membres

### EN TANT QUE PROFESSIONNELS

de l'enseignement, les membres de l'ATA ont la responsabilité professionnelle de se tenir au courant des développements dans le domaine de l'éducation et de continuer à faire évoluer leur pratique professionnelle. L'ATA appuie la croissance professionnelle des enseignants en proposant des publications, des ressources, des occasions d'apprentissage et un soutien financier à ses membres.

### Ressources en ligne et imprimées

Le site Web de l'ATA comprend de l'information sur les normes de pratique professionnelle des enseignants, des leaders scolaires et des leaders d'autorité scolaire. Pour aider les enseignants à élaborer leur plan annuel de croissance professionnelle, l'ATA propose également un outil bilingue d'autoréflexion sur leur pratique professionnelle.

Les enseignants peuvent également consulter des publications portant notamment sur le soutien aux élèves issus de familles de nouveaux arrivants ukrainiens (en anglais seulement) et les principes à respecter en matière de protocoles culturels autochtones. Les guides de ressources en ligne de la bibliothèque de l'ATA permettent aux


enseignants de repérer des ressources pertinentes provenant de sources fiables qui traitent d'une variété de matières et d'événements spéciaux. De plus, l'ATA News et l'ATA Magazine tiennent les membres informés au sujet de questions qui touchent la profession.

### Subventions, prix et bourses d'études

L'ATA offre des subventions, des prix et des bourses d'études pour aider ses membres à poursuivre leur formation et à se prévaloir d'occasions de perfectionnement professionnel. Si vous entreprenez des études supérieures en éducation, envisagez de poser votre candidature pour les bourses doctorales de l'ATA ou la bourse Nadene M. Thomas pour la recherche aux cycles supérieurs.

- **Bourses doctorales de l'ATA** : Chaque année, jusqu'à deux bourses doctorales d'une valeur de 15 000 \$ sont décernées à des membres qui entament ou qui sont inscrits à leur première année d'études à temps plein en vue de l'obtention d'un Ph. D. en éducation ou d'un D. Éd. dans une université publique reconnue en Alberta ou au Canada. *Date limite pour*

*présenter une demande* : tous les ans le 28 février.

- **Bourse Nadene M. Thomas pour la recherche aux cycles supérieurs** : Cette bourse de recherche d'une valeur de 5 000 \$ est attribuée à un membre inscrit à un programme d'études supérieures en éducation offert par une université publique reconnue au Canada. Le projet de recherche doit porter sur des enjeux contemporains touchant la pratique professionnelle ou l'éducation publique et/ou sur des méthodes novatrices d'enseignement ou de leadership scolaire. *Date limite pour présenter une demande* : tous les ans le 28 février. 

Vous trouverez des indications détaillées concernant les critères d'admissibilité et la marche à suivre pour présenter une demande pour ces bourses ainsi que d'autres subventions, prix et bourses ici : [teachers.ab.ca/scholarships](https://teachers.ab.ca/scholarships)



## OCCASIONS D'APPRENTISSAGE

L'ATA provinciale, les sections locales de l'ATA et d'autres sous-groupes de l'ATA facilitent l'apprentissage continu des membres en offrant des ateliers et des présentations, des séries de conférences, des congrès et d'autres événements. Les écoles et les sections locales peuvent demander la tenue d'ateliers ou de présentations et les enseignants peuvent prendre part, en personne ou en ligne, à différents événements organisés tout au long de l'année.

### COMMENT PRENDRE CONNAISSANCE DES ÉVÉNEMENTS AUXQUELS VOUS POUVEZ PARTICIPER?

Consultez le site Web ou les comptes de médias sociaux de votre section locale pour vous tenir au courant des événements organisés par cette dernière et consultez la liste des prochaines activités de l'ATA provinciale ici : [teachers.ab.ca/events](https://teachers.ab.ca/events)







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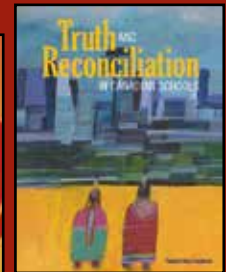
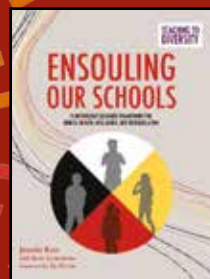
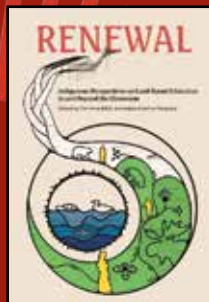
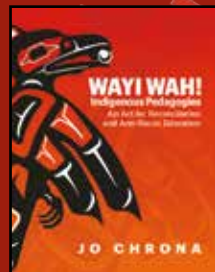


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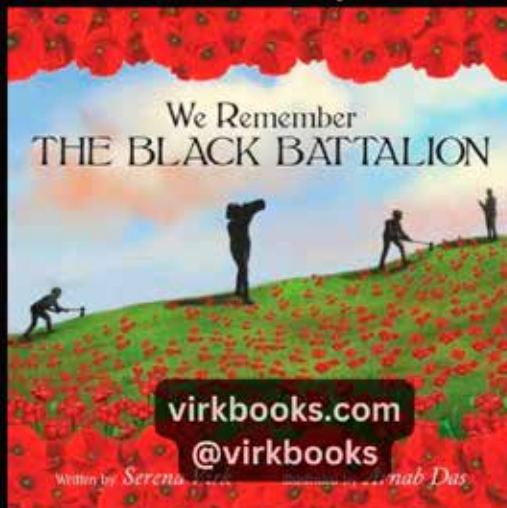
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# Home for good

Former principal finds freedom in return to the classroom

**Cory Hare**

Managing Editor, ATA Magazine

**YOU'RE NINE YEARS OLD.** It's Halloween. You decide, without even considering other options, to dress up as a union soldier from the U.S. civil war. After all, you already have a historically accurate uniform, which you painstakingly assembled over the course of many months, and this is your chance to wear it.

If that paragraph describes you, you just might be destined to teach high school social studies, which proved to be the case for Ben Galeski, a social studies and English teacher at St. Joseph's Collegiate in Brooks. Looking back on his childhood in Bragg Creek, Galeski remembers many costume-fueled manifestations of what has turned out to be a lifelong love of history.

"I was always fascinated by ... the story of history and what people had to go through," Galeski says. "It was really my passion about the subject, the history, being able to spend my days immersed in it, that led me into education."

Galeski's interest in history encompasses pretty much anything that has ever happened in any part of the world, whether it be whaling, the conquistadors, South America or the Pacific War, but there is one historic event that holds special significance for him: the Franklin Expedition, a British sailing party that set out in 1845 to find a northwest passage through the Arctic. Both of the ships disappeared, remaining undiscovered for decades, and all 129 crew members perished.

It was his passion for this event that Galeski drew upon when he was a nervous student teacher preparing to deliver his first solo lesson. Tapping into his in-depth knowledge of the event's minutiae and mystery, Galeski spun a yarn that had students on the edge of their seats.

"I remember little light bulbs going off above their heads," he says. "That was kind of like a drug."

## FROM THRIVING TEACHER TO STRESSED OUT PRINCIPAL

That first lesson galvanized Galeski's resolve that teaching was the right path for him. He spent the first five years of his teaching career at a private Catholic school in Calgary before moving to St. Joseph's. Three years later, his career took a turn. The school had an opening for a vice-principal and Galeski was asked to apply.

"I was honored ... it seemed like good career advancement," he says. "I think I was the only person who applied, so I got the job."

Galeski's six years as vice-principal were demanding but also impactful, mainly because he was working under a principal whom he describes as transformational.

"It was stressful to be a vice-principal, but because I got to work with her, it was worth it," he says.

After that principal moved on to division office, Galeski took over the principal's chair. The fit was



both good and bad. Feedback from his superintendent and staff suggested he was a good principal, but he also found the job “almost all consuming.”

“I think some people are wired to be principals and other people aren’t,” Galeski says. “I was not the kind of person who could put unfinished business away mentally at the end of the day. It would nag at me.”

As the years progressed, the stress and anxiety that Galeski was feeling built to such an extreme that his doctor asked if he wanted to go on leave. Galeski refused. But he also realized he was on an unsustainable path. After five years as principal, he decided to step down and return to the classroom.

**"You see other people who are able to handle it ... and it's like, why can they do it and I can't?"**

“When I talked to my superintendent about this ... I wept on the phone with him, feelings of relief and feelings of shame because I felt ... like I couldn’t hack it as a principal,” he says.

Although leaving the principalship meant returning to what he

loved—teaching social studies—it took Galeski a couple of years to get over the shame of feeling like he’d failed.

“Pride gets in the way ... you’re the principal, you’re the boss, and you see other people who are able to handle it and it seems like the stress doesn’t bother them ... and it’s like, why can they do it and I can’t?”

## TURNING THE PAGE

Once he was no longer a principal, Galeski realized more fully the toll it had taken on him and his relationship with his family. As he embraced his return to teaching, he also embraced his reconnection with his family, some found-time in the evenings and weekends, and a reunion with old loves like watching televised Flames games, golfing and camping.

About four years after stepping away from the principalship, Galeski decided to tackle a lifetime ambition that had long remained idle: write a novel.

“It really started as a challenge to myself. I wanted to see if I could do it,” he says.

Relying on the old adage, “write what you know,” Galeski once again turned to the Franklin Expedition. Within a couple months he’d finished a historical novel called *Starvation Cove*, named after the final resting place of the expedition’s last survivors.

“When I finished writing it ... I was so happy,” he says. “It was imperfect and it had problems, but it was a complete story.”

For most first-time novelists, finding a publisher is a harrowing adventure all its own, but for Galeski, all it took was one email. He was aware of an Ottawa-based publisher, Justin Press, that specializes in books with a Catholic flavour. His matched the criteria, so he sent an email.

“I didn’t know what I was doing. I just took a shot,” he says.

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**Continued on page 52**



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## TAKING CARE WITH

### Ben Galeski

#### How important is it to you to convey a Catholic message through your books?

I'm a Catholic, and so my books are Catholic fiction, but it's subtle. I've always felt that inviting people to faith should be like a whisper and not a shout. So the Christianity, especially in my first two books, really whispers. You don't have to be a faithful person to enjoy the books, but the worldview is there, and if you're keen to it, you'll pick it up.

#### Do you have plans for future novels?

Maybe. If there is another story waiting to be excavated, it'll be about one of the characters from my previous novels. I've created a bit of an alternate universe where my characters live. When I write again, I'll go back to that universe.

#### You always have a fiction book and a history book on the go. What is your favourite from each of these categories and why?

I love everything by Stephen King. He's such a good storyteller and I can't read enough of his work. I also love Michael O'Brien, a Catholic novelist from Ontario. His work really inspired me to become a writer myself. Regarding nonfiction, there is just so much! I just finished Cornelius Ryan's three classics, *The Longest Day*, *A Bridge Too Far* and *The Last Battle*. They may be the best nonfiction I've ever read.

#### Drawing on your historical knowledge, when do you think the Calgary Flames will finally win another Stanley Cup?

This year! I'm an eternal optimist. Every new beginning can end in victory. Regarding the Oilers, I really tried to cheer for them during their run to the Stanley Cup Final, and my logical brain said I should, as a fellow Canadian team. Unfortunately, my emotional side made it difficult. My love for the Flames is too deep and forged in the fires of the 1980s Battle of Alberta.

## Continued from page 50

Within a week he received a reply requesting his manuscript. He sent it. They liked it and published it.

"I was just floored. I just couldn't believe that that had happened. One guy in Ottawa who owns this little publishing company ... liked my story and took a chance on me."

Galeski went on to write two more novels, which Justin Press also published. He's sold a few hundred copies of each book.

"I'm just grateful that I have books on a shelf with my name and ... my voice can trickle down to my children and grandchildren even when I'm gone," Galeski says.


"I know I'm never going to become a famous author and I never did it to do that. I had stories to tell ... if people enjoy the books, that's just gravy."

## TAKE CARE

Looking back at the changes he's experienced since leaving the principalship, Galeski can see clearly that the move was necessary for his own wellness.

"I had to go back to my passion, which is teaching, and I'll tell you, in these last seven years, I've done more things than I ever could have imagined, and I would never have been able to do them had I stayed in the principalship because it just demanded too much of me."

Going forward, Galeski has taken it upon himself to share his own story of self-care, advocating for teachers to do what's best for them even if it feels like failure.

"I just want to encourage people that they don't have to stay in situations that they know they can't sustain, that they know are taking too great a toll." 

- **Got an idea?** In Profile features an interesting teacher in each issue of the *ATA Magazine*. If you know of a teacher who would be a good profile subject, please contact managing editor Cory Hare at [cory.hare@ata.ab.ca](mailto:cory.hare@ata.ab.ca).



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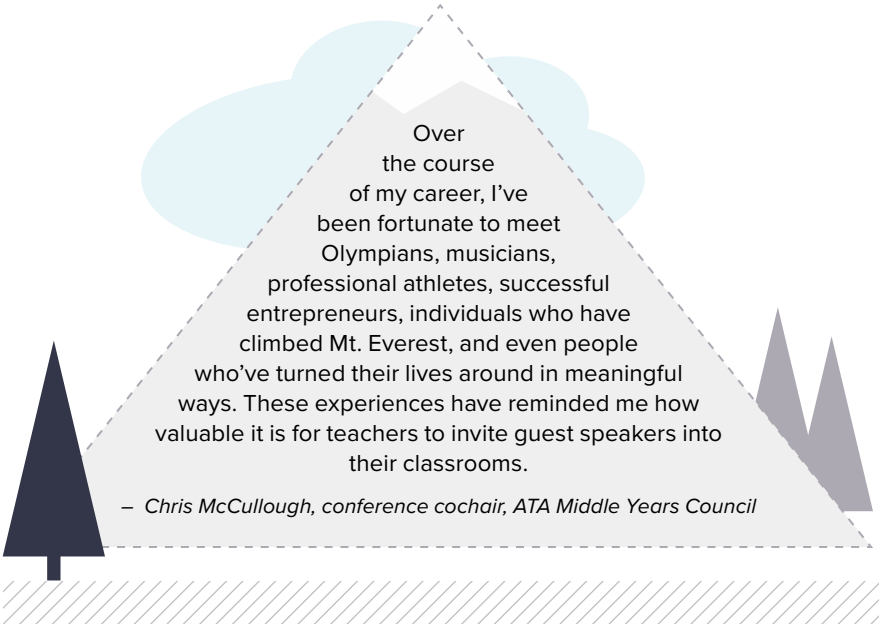
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# Special guests

What is the favourite type of guest you've had visit your class or school?



Over the course of my career, I've been fortunate to meet Olympians, musicians, professional athletes, successful entrepreneurs, individuals who have climbed Mt. Everest, and even people who've turned their lives around in meaningful ways. These experiences have reminded me how valuable it is for teachers to invite guest speakers into their classrooms.

– Chris McCullough, conference cochair, ATA Middle Years Council

Our favourite type of guest would be when leaders from our community come into the classroom. For example, our community of Fort McMurray has the Mayor's Advisory Council on Youth (MACOY) that seeks students from each school to help city council understand what the young people in our community are worried about or seeking. The speaker we had this year took her time with each student's question and really conveyed how much their voice matters.

– Victoria Holota, north representative, ATA Middle Years Council

Former students speaking with Grade 10s about strategies for success in high school.

– Shelley Kirkvold, past president, ATA Social Studies Council

One of our teachers created an animal rescue course for junior high students. She invited all kinds of speakers and their rescued animals (birds, dogs, cats) to interact with the students. The class organized various fundraisers so they could make a donation after their visit. The students were so engaged and positive about their impact.

– Carol Knott, conference codirector, ATA Council for Inclusive Education

One of the most memorable guests we've had was Ophelia the owl and her wildlife ambassador, who visited as part of an inquiry project on the birds of Alberta. During a one-hour session in the classroom, the ambassador shared engaging, age-appropriate information about Alberta's wildlife.

– Meghan Clark-Jamieson, president, ATA Early Childhood Education Council

We have had First Nations members come in for storytelling and various projects for the students that they have loved and continue to ask for all the time.

– Jennifer Lacourse, president, ATA Council for Inclusive Education

We've had motivational speakers come into our school and speak in the gym to our students. These are great for school morale and the students and teachers enjoy them.

– Jeremy Spink, president, ATA Middle Years Council





ILLUSTRATION BY BIANCA HO, PHOTO ISTOCK

# Come Together

Structured sharing promotes student connection

**Lori Whillier**


Arts Consultant, Edmonton Public Schools

**WHEN I WAS** a Grade 4 classroom teacher, a routine I named Come Together was a standard practice in my classroom. I adapted this routine from Indigenous sharing circles that encourage participants to speak from the heart and practice honouring the voices of others.

At the start of the week, we'd form a standing circle to energize ourselves. Students would take turns expressing how they were feeling on a scale of one to 10. Students with lower numbers were encouraged to share the reason for their emotional deficit, but they were also free to pass from speaking. For me, it was a

good indicator of who may need extra support to start their week. For the students, it helped them learn which of their peers could use some extra patience or understanding.

At the end of the week, Come Together was more celebratory. While seated in a circle, we used a talking piece such as a rock to indicate whose turn it was to speak. Sharing was focused through a prompt such as "the best thing that happened to me this week was..." or "today I was proud that I was able to achieve..." It took time to build a sense of safety and foundational expectations for Come Together, but once established, these check-ins became a highly anticipated part of our class routine and community building. If we had to miss this routine, or if it had to be cut short, the group energy was noticeably more unsettled.

The primary goals of Come Together were to help me understand my students' weekly needs and to strengthen classroom community. I consistently observed growth in how students were able to authentically express themselves or feel valued as individuals. The connection we established through this routine supported our collective learning, social interactions and daily experiences. 

**“If we had to miss this routine ... the group energy was noticeably more unsettled.”**



ILLUSTRATION BY ERIN SOLANO

# Into the wild

The most enduring lessons happen beyond the classroom.

**Stacey Hannay**

Executive Staff Officer, ATA

## THE CHALLENGE

Letting go of the reins so students can discover their own path

**EVERY TEACHER** carries a memory or two that outlives the semesters, a reminder of why we chose this path. Mine lives in the forests of Kananaskis, where I led Grade 9 students on a survival trip—four days, three nights and a world away from our classroom routines.

The students trained for months. They studied ethics and safety through hunter education. They honed skills with maps, bows and Moran knives. But the real lessons, the ones that lasted, came not from the curriculum, but from the quiet resilience and transformation that took root in the wild.

When we arrived at camp, which was three hours from the nearest cellphone signal, the students built their lean-tos so well that even a Marriott executive might have reconsidered their business model. Fires sparked to life with such precision that Smokey the Bear himself might have smiled (after double-checking our fire permits, of course).

One student, Aidan, was known in the city for disrup-

tion. But in the forest, he thrived. First to light his fire. First to guide his group back home by compass. His lean-to stood like a fortress. On our final night, beside a crackling fire, he said softly, “I didn’t know I could be good at anything until now.”

That moment reminds me why this work matters.


Beyond shelters and archery, students rediscovered something deeper: how to listen to the land, each other and themselves. Cliques faded. Leaders emerged. They faced rain, fatigue, lost phones, and grew.

When we left, we took everything with us, leaving the area exactly as we’d found it, but we also carried something

else back with us: a reverence for the earth and ourselves.

Years later, former students, some now rangers, scientists or teachers, still remember the forest, the fire and who they became when tested.

In today’s overburdened classrooms, this trip taught me that teaching isn’t about holding the reins; it’s about clearing a path for discovery.

Sometimes, the most enduring lessons happen around a fire, under an open sky. 

► **Got an idea?** Summarize it in up to 300 words and email it to managing editor Cory Hare at [cory.hare@ata.ab.ca](mailto:cory.hare@ata.ab.ca).



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MAR 9, 2026  
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#### Heather Lynch: Penguins of Antarctica

Curriculum connections: Life cycles and living systems, ecosystems, biological diversity, science/technology/society (STS), interconnectedness of land, animals and humans

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