



Teachers invited to  
help build strike archive  
[See page 5.](#)



**Teacher's  
PET**

Cuddly critters  
making a positive  
difference  
[See pages 8-9.](#)

# ATA NEWS

January 13, 2026 ■ Volume 60, Number 7

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PARKER LOWRIE

*Photography 10 students at Beaumont Composite High School took advantage of the warmer temperatures and the abundance of snow the first week back to snap some shots!*



## Committee matters

Why the cabinet committee is a win for teachers

*See Q&A, [page 2](#).*



## Practising self-compassion

Well at work  
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## "Net new" teachers

ATA files 61 grievances, alleges bad-faith bargaining over hiring commitment

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## ATA names research award winner

Research aims to counter anti-LGBTQ2S+ legislation  
*See [page 5](#).*

## Students need space for learning



### EDITORIAL

**Kristine Wilkinson**  
**ATA News**  
**Editor-in-Chief**

**T**here's just not enough space. Over the past several years, Alberta has been facing an increasingly urgent school capacity crisis. In 2024, the government admitted that its previous approach to school construction needed to be changed. Schools were stuffed full, with no solution in sight.

To solve the problem of overcrowded classrooms, the provincial government promised a historic investment: \$8.6 billion for up to 200,000 new student spaces over seven years, including 50,000 in the initial three years under the School Construction Accelerator Program. They further pledged to build 90 new schools by 2031, with an annual commitment of approximately 30 new public schools plus charter and modernization projects beginning around the 2025/26 school year.

However, by May 2025, it was clear the province remained behind schedule. The government pledged funding to fast-track 11 school projects across Alberta—a drop in the bucket compared to what's needed. Alberta is registering a net enrolment growth of around 20,000 students per year, which would roughly equate to 30 new schools annually.

If we're adding only 11 schools per year while enrolment numbers call for 30, Alberta is building less than one third of what's required. This is why we're seeing hallways, libraries and even gyms being turned into makeshift classrooms, and schools being forced to turn students away. Teachers and school leaders are doing their best, but I speak from experience when I say holding classes on a school gym's stage while a P.E. class is taking place in the gym itself is not conducive to learning.

To soften the gap, the government has leaned heavily on modular classrooms, investing \$50 million to deploy them across 19 school boards. Modulars certainly provide temporary relief, but they do not replace

long-term infrastructure. They have no gyms, proper libraries, science labs or technology spaces. Modulars are a stopgap, not a solution.

The government's \$8.6 billion investment and assurances of swift construction may sound bold, but the province has underdelivered, and students and teachers are paying the price. More than a year after the School Construction Accelerator Program was announced, only 33 of the 132 promised school projects had even moved to the next design or construction phase. The rest remain stalled in planning, approvals or worse: they are absent from any timeline despite assurances from the minister of Education and Childcare that this would not be the case.

In fast-growing cities like Calgary and Edmonton, boards have been forced to chop offices, libraries and even storage to carve out classroom space. And rural communities aren't immune from this issue. Though Budget 2025 included funding for rural school projects, few will open before 2027 or 2028.

The classroom crisis is already here.

Alberta's students deserve more. Alberta families deserve real schools, built on time. They deserve full amenities, adequate staff, and infrastructure that lasts and supports learning. The government must be honest: it has promised more than it has delivered. It's time to acknowledge that promises are not progress. The clock is ticking, and every student without a proper desk represents a broken commitment.

Parents, teachers and community members must demand accountability now. Write to your MLA, attend school board meetings and speak up in public consultations. Push for transparent timelines and accelerated construction, not just temporary fixes. Public education deserves real schools that provide a physical environment that can support teaching and learning.

If the government truly values education, it's time to prove it—not in words, but in bricks and mortar. ■

*I welcome your comments. Contact me at [kristine.wilkinson@ata.ab.ca](mailto:kristine.wilkinson@ata.ab.ca).*

## Cabinet committee a win for teachers



### Q & A

**Dennis Theobald**  
**ATA Executive**  
**Secretary**

**Question:** What is this "cabinet committee" that the government has established, and why is the Association participating on it?

**Answer:** The Class Size and Complexity Cabinet Committee was established by Premier Danielle Smith shortly after the government passed Bill 2, the *Back to School Act*, which ended the teachers' strike by unilaterally imposing a settlement on the province's teachers. The cabinet committee is mandated to address critical challenges in public schools, including overcrowded classrooms, increasing student needs (like English Language Learners) and lack of adequate support for inclusion.

The cabinet committee has as its voting members the premier, who is also its chair, and four ministers holding relevant portfolios:

- Demetrios Nicolaides, minister of Education and Childcare
- Jason Nixon, minister of Assisted Living and Social Services
- Rick Wilson, minister of Mental Health and Addiction

- Searle Turton, minister of Child and Family Services
- In addition, representatives of various interested groups sit as nonvoting members:
  - Elissa Corsi, Alberta Teachers' Association
  - Lynnette Anderson, chief superintendent, Edmonton Catholic Schools
  - Nicole Buchanan, chair, Red Deer Public Schools
  - Marilyn Dennis, former president, Alberta School Boards Association
  - Mike McMann, superintendent, Fort Vermilion Schools and president, College of Alberta School Superintendents
  - Joanne Pitman, chief superintendent, Calgary Board of Education
  - Kevin Van Lagen, principal, Prairie Land School Division (named to the committee January 5, 2026)
- Tamara Korolis, teacher, Calgary Board of Education (named to the committee January 5, 2026)

That this committee should be established at all, that it is chaired by the premier with significant representation from cabinet and that the Association is represented is unprecedented and a win for teachers. It reflects government's reluctant recognition of the validity of the consistent concerns that teachers have been raising through advocacy, at the bargaining table and through the course of the recent strike. While the government refused to meaningfully address teachers' concerns about class size and complexity in a freely bargained collective agreement, it could not escape the issue and the expectation that we have raised among Albertans that these issues will be prioritized.

Because this is a cabinet committee, its deliberations are considered to

**“ Ultimately, the test of the cabinet committee's effectiveness will be its ability to drive significant improvements to teaching and learning conditions in our classrooms. ”**

be cabinet secrets and so we will not be receiving updates that can be shared with members. That said, the cabinet committee has been meeting frequently, and one immediate result has been the decision to resume collecting detailed class-size and composition data from schools across the province. You may recall that former Minister LaGrange's ostrich-inspired approach to dealing with these issues was to attempt to make them go away by no longer aggregating relevant data.

Teachers have every right to be skeptical about any promises made by the government about improving teaching and learning conditions, but we have created a political impetus that cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the government understands that it needs the participation of the Association to provide credibility, and Elissa Corsi has been tasked with giving voice to teachers' views and holding the cabinet committee accountable.

Ultimately, the test of the cabinet committee's effectiveness will be its ability to drive significant improvements to teaching and learning conditions in our classrooms. We are all waiting for action. ■

*Questions for consideration in this column are welcome. Please address them to Dennis Theobald at [dennis.theobald@ata.ab.ca](mailto:dennis.theobald@ata.ab.ca).*

# Well at work—and other good things

## VIEWPOINTS

Lisa Everitt  
ATA Executive Staff Officer

The third Monday of every January is often referred to as *Blue Monday*, supposedly the saddest day of the year. In 2026, it falls on January 19. While *Blue Monday* is not supported by scientific evidence, it resonates with many people for understandable reasons.

In Alberta, January typically brings the coldest temperatures and the shortest days. We drive to work in the dark and return home in the dark—enough to make even the most resilient among us want to stay under the covers. This time of year also coincides with the arrival of post-holiday bills, and for many teachers, finances are particularly tight following the teachers' strike in October. Add to this the quiet disappearance of New Year's resolutions that felt so achievable just weeks ago, and it's easy to see why January can feel heavy.

It's no wonder the idea of *Blue Monday* looms large.

Feeling low at this time of year is not unusual. However, *Blue Monday* reflects a broader *deficit lens*, one that focuses on what is missing or not enough: not enough daylight, not enough warmth, not enough money, not enough energy. This same deficit thinking often shows up in education, where attention is drawn to what is lacking rather than what is working: test scores are too low, teachers aren't doing enough, school leaders aren't supportive enough. The list can feel endless.

For many of us, a deficit mindset is easier to adopt than an appreciative one. Our brains are wired with a negativity bias—an evolutionary adaptation that helps us detect danger and stay safe. Negative experiences tend to elicit stronger emotional reactions and are more easily remembered than positive ones. While this bias is useful for survival, remaining stuck in it can limit our ability to notice moments of competence, care, connection and growth.

From a well-being perspective, attending to positive experiences matters. Noticing what is going well—however small—can become a source of individual strength. When shared, these moments can also help build school communities where staff feel supported and able to thrive.

With intention, appreciation can be practiced and expanded.

An appreciative approach begins with self-compassion. Psychologist Kristen Neff invites us to consider this: "Instead of mercilessly judging and criticizing yourself for various inadequacies or shortcomings, self-compassion means you are kind and understanding when confronted with your failings—after all, who ever said you were supposed to be perfect?"

According to Neff, self-compassion has three core dimensions:

**1. Self-kindness** — Treat yourself as you would a trusted friend. Notice when your inner voice becomes harsh, and gently reframe your self-talk with care and understanding.

**2. Common humanity** — Remember that struggle is part of the shared human experience. Every teacher faces challenges, and recognizing this can reduce feelings of isolation.

**3. Mindfulness** — Slow down and allow yourself to notice your emotions without judgment. Mindfulness creates space to respond with care rather than criticism.

Self-compassion is not easy, and it takes practice, especially in a profession shaped by constant demands and a culture of self-sacrifice. Our brains may be wired to spot what's wrong, but self-compassion offers a powerful pathway to well-being. Practiced individually and collectively, it can help reframe deficit thinking about our work and ourselves.

While self-compassion and collective compassion are not quick fixes for the deep structural challenges facing public education—including shortages of resources and people—they can strengthen our capacity to cope, connect and care for one another. In doing so, they help lay the groundwork for more resilient schools and healthier staff communities—even in the darkest days of winter. ■

*Lisa Everitt is an executive staff officer with the Alberta Teachers' Association, with expertise on educator well-being, labour relations, women's leadership, and benefits. In addition, she holds an EdD and is an Accredited Compassionate Leadership Teacher through the Center for Compassionate Leadership.*



## YOUR VIEWS

We asked teachers, what is your hope for public education in 2026?

**f** Kris Fedun

I hope we have an early election and will vote out this corrupt government. Nothing will ever be better for public education and health with the UCP in power.

**f** Ryan Powell

That academics are put at the forefront.

**f** Bette Maraboochi

That it be properly funded. That teachers and students get the support needed for the success of the students.

**f** Leah Jean

I hope that lots of people come to all the recall signing events run by the brave and diligent individuals. I hope that all my efforts to collect lots of recall signatures pay off so we can boot out the government who made teachers second-class citizens with the notwithstanding clause.

**o** Michelle Fatica

My hope is [...] to be respected in our profession. I have never felt so unvalued in my 20+ years in this profession.

## FOR THE RECORD

**“** Our government is focused on rebuilding trust with teachers and we will work with them to achieve our shared goals. **”**

— Demetrios Nicolaides, minister of Education and Childcare, in a social media post on Jan. 6

## Show us your RED for ED!

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

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



# ATA files 61 grievances, alleges bad-faith bargaining

Mark Milne  
ATA News Staff

Following the imposition of a settlement for teachers, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) is taking steps to ensure the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) is upholding its commitments. On December 12, the ATA launched a coordinated legal offensive against TEBA, filing a Labour Relations Board (LRB) complaint and 61 grievances, one against each public, catholic and francophone school division in the province. The LRB filing specifically alleges bad-faith bargaining regarding a commitment to hire new teachers.

## 61 grievances filed

"TEBA is responsible for ensuring employers are following the language of the imposed settlement, which includes hiring 3,000 teachers," said Sean Brown, ATA coordinator, Teacher Employment Services.

Because the hiring of additional teachers—part of the settlement imposed on teachers by Bill 2, the *Back to School Act*—is the responsibility of employers to enact, grievances had to be filed in all 61 public, catholic and francophone boards.

The dispute centres on a letter of understanding (LOU) concerning teacher recruitment. According to the ATA, negotiations during central bargaining included a commitment to hire 3,000 "net new" full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers over the next three years—1,000 per year starting in 2025/26. While the Association asserts these teaching positions were to be in addition to those funded in the March 2025

provincial budget, the government has taken the position that the new hires include those already budgeted.

"We were clear in our understanding and messaging from the province," said Brown. "At the time, the province said that they gave teachers what they asked for. However, that appears to no longer be the case."

The ATA's position is that the intent of the discussions from the bargaining table should be respected.

"The government's current stance contradicts the very context in which the initial deal was struck and what was, in the end, legislatively imposed," Brown said. "The government's statements now that the hiring was already part of the budget calls into question the government's desire to actually decrease class size and address classroom complexity."

## Allegations of bargaining in bad faith

In its filing with the LRB, the ATA argues the matter constitutes a violation of the Labour Relations Code, claiming TEBA's silence on their "net new" definition misled the Association and its members during the ratification process. The bargaining in bad faith complaint filed with the LRB also cites government interference, alleging that public statements from the Government of Alberta questioned the ATA's motives and undermined its ability to represent its members.

## Additional local grievances filed

Just one week after the submission of the original 61 grievances and LRB complaint, an additional three grievances were filed on behalf of the Calgary Public, Calgary Separate and St. Paul locals. These complaints centre



ATA President Jason Schilling at a press conference on Dec. 12, announcing the ATA's 61 grievances and Labour Relations Board complaint

on the corresponding school boards' deferring earned teacher retroactive pay until at least January 2026.

The ATA maintains the school boards should have known that retroactive pay was a significant possibility since May 2025 and should have taken appropriate steps to be prepared for that likelihood. The information needed to calculate the owed retroactive pay was provided to the employers in November.

"Teachers have a right to receive their pay, including any retroactive salary, in a timely manner," said Brown. "School divisions should have been prepared to implement the procedures required to provide teachers their owed salary, as per their legislated responsibility from Alberta's Employment Standards Code."

Now that the 2026 taxation year has started with no resolution reached before the end of 2025, Brown says the new goal of these grievances is twofold: (1) to ensure teacher

retroactive payments are provided as soon as possible and (2) to make every impacted teacher whole by requiring employers to provide some financial award to ensure the increased 2026 tax burden will be mitigated.

## Remedies sought

When it comes to the 61 grievances filed across the province, the ATA is seeking several remedies, including the following:

- a formal declaration that the 3,000 teachers must be funded and hired over and above the 2025 fiscal plan
- an order compelling TEBA to fulfill the hiring obligations for the current 2025/26 school year
- financial damages, to be determined at arbitration

"The ATA is taking strong action to hold TEBA and the government accountable for their bargaining commitments," said Brown.

# Elections Alberta finds ATA advertising complies with election laws



## EXECUTIVE REPORT

Jonathan Teightmeyer  
ATA Associate Coordinator, Member Engagement and Organizing

If you strap 33 actual chairs to a billboard and ask Albertans to stand for education during a provincial election, does that mean you're supporting the NDP?

This was the focus of a year-long investigation by Elections Alberta into the advertising practices of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) during the 2023 provincial election. The recently wrapped-up investigation found that the ATA's advertising was conducted in compliance with election advertising rules.

## Third-party advertising

Eight days into the May 2023 election campaign, the United Conservative Party's (UCP) executive director Dustin Van Vugt wrote to Elections Alberta asking them to investigate the ATA for appearing to run an "illegal third-party advertising campaign."

The *Elections Finance and Contributions Disclosure Act* (EFCDA) requires third-party organizations that undertake political or election advertising to register with Elections Alberta and disclose financial details related to the advertising. The law

defines election advertising as advertising that promotes or opposes a party or candidate as well as advertising that "takes a position on an issue with which a registered party or registered candidate is associated."

The ATA has never advertised in support of or opposition to a political party or candidate, but it does advertise on education issues.

The UCP took the position that public education is an issue associated with both the UCP and the NDP, noting that it was the topic of announcements and news releases by both parties. The UCP concluded that by taking a position on an issue associated with the parties, ATA materials qualified as election advertising. If accepted, the argument would have effectively prevented the ATA from advertising at all on education issues during elections.

In response to the allegation, the ATA maintained that the *Teaching Profession Act*, which established the Association, mandates it to speak out on education issues and that an issue associated with both parties could not be considered to be associated with any individual party.

Elections Alberta seemed to agree with the ATA's position.

"Education funding and class size was a cross-party issue and not associated with one party," they wrote in their letter to the Association dismissing the complaint.

Election Commissioner Paula Hale said she carefully considered the ATA's statutory purposes (to increase public interest and knowledge in the aims of education and financial support for it) and noted that the messaging in its advertisements was general in nature and not targeted to one specific party.

## What about donations to political parties?

Many teachers have likely heard allegations, particularly in recent months, that the ATA donates money to the NDP. Some erroneous online accusations suggest a number as high as \$2 million. This misinformation stems from the same issue.

Since 2019, the Association has twice, out of an abundance of caution, registered as a third-party advertiser (TPA) in order to conduct similar advertising. The ATA registered during the 2019 provincial election because a previous election commissioner recommended it. Then, in 2021, the ATA registered, as it wanted to speak more directly to curriculum concerns, an issue which was more closely

associated with the UCP. Because of these registrations and associated disclosures, the myth of an NDP donation keeps popping up.

Some groups do in fact use third-party advertising registrations as an opportunity to advertise in support of a particular political party. CUPE-Alberta is a registered TPA and has approved policy to support the NDP. The group Take Back Alberta has advertised extensively in support of the UCP.

Registering as a TPA in itself does not mean that your advertising supports a particular candidate or party. Unfortunately, the previous TPA registration of the ATA has been misrepresented as such.

The ATA is not and has not been an NDP donor, and claims to the contrary are inaccurate misrepresentations.

## Ads that speak out

The conclusion of the recent investigation into the ATA's advertising helps provide some clarity going forward. The ATA will always speak out on education issues, including at election time, if needed. It is part of our legislated purpose and our work to advance the interests of teachers. And the Association will continue to abide by the laws around it.

It's comforting to have some confirmation from the law's enforcers that they would agree.



# ATA names research award winner

*Research aims to counter anti-LGBTQ2S+ legislation*

**Cory Hare**  
ATA News Staff

A research project aimed at documenting the impact of new gender-related legislation and policies has won the ATA's 2025 Education Research Award.

The winning submission, by Campus Saint-Jean assistant education professor Gillian Robinson, sought to understand how teachers' day-to-day professional lives and their perception of their work were impacted by the government's Bill 27 and ministerial order 030/2025.

Passed in the fall of 2024, Bill 27 amended the *Education Act* to, among other things, require school authorities to notify parents when a student chooses a new preferred name or pronoun related to gender identity and also require opting into instruction that deals primarily and explicitly with gender identity, sexual orientation or human sexuality.

Issued in July 2025, ministerial order 030/2025 bans K-12 school libraries from holding materials that include explicit sexual content and limits access to nonexplicit sexual material for students below Grade 10. It also requires school authorities to develop policies, review collections and keep public lists of library materials.

Launched in late August 2025, the award-winning study engaged 30 teachers in one-hour, semi-structured interviews in which teachers explained the various ways the new policies had been interpreted and implemented within their local contexts.

Study participants identified an increased hostility among both students and staff toward vulnerable youth and their general teaching practices, as well as a sense of fear of being disciplined for including and affirming students.

"It is an incredible honour to be recognized by my peers for this research," said Robinson, a former queer-straight alliance (QSA) teacher advisor. "I always aim for my work to be meaningful for classroom teachers and the students in their classrooms. I hope, as I continue my career, that I can continue to amplify the voices of teachers seeking to make their schools more welcoming places, and hopefully empower them, as well as educational leaders, to continue



2025 award winner Gillian Robinson

their important work, even in difficult contexts."

Teachers who participated in the study also recounted the additional hours they spent explaining and implementing the new policies rather than preparing to welcome students to a new school year. Further, many teachers had a sense that the policies had been purposefully implemented at a time of extreme underfunding of education in order to create further division and mistrust of teachers before an upcoming potential strike.

Researchers have compiled their findings into a report that includes harm reduction recommendations for senior administrators, school administrators and classroom teachers. ■

*The ATA Educational Research Award is presented annually to an Alberta academic who is engaged in research directly related to school and classroom practice in Alberta.*

## READ THE REPORT

The research report is available here:



## RESEARCH TEAM

The research team included graduate students/classroom teachers Joelle Tymchuk and Megan Girard.

## Teachers invited to help build strike archive

ATA News Staff

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) is inviting teachers and school leaders to share their first-hand accounts of the 2025 provincewide teachers' strike, aiming to document this historic moment in the province's educational landscape.

ATA archivist Maggie Shane says the project is an important opportunity to capture the human side of a moment that will shape Alberta's educational history.

"Official documents can tell us what happened," Shane said. "But personal accounts tell us what it meant. Without these stories, future researchers lose the context, emotion and lived experience that make historical events understandable."

The project seeks written, audio, video and artistic submissions that reflect the experiences of teachers and school leaders during the strike. The

collected accounts will be preserved in the ATA's archives and made available to researchers studying the 2025 strike. All identifying information will be redacted before materials are accessed for research.

Shane emphasized that every submission, regardless of length or format, has value.

"Even a brief reflection can provide nuanced insight into how this moment felt for teachers, for the province—something future generations wouldn't otherwise get to see," she said.

Participation in this archival project is voluntary, and contributors may choose to share their story in any form of material that suits them.

Submissions can be sent by June 30 to [archives@ata.ab.ca](mailto:archives@ata.ab.ca). It is recommended that attached files be password protected, with the password emailed separately to the same address.

Questions about the project can be directed to ATA archivist Maggie Shane at [archives@ata.ab.ca](mailto:archives@ata.ab.ca). ■



LINDSAY YAKIMYSHYN



CORY HARE

## Teachers added to federal student loan forgiveness program

**Lindsay Yakimyshyn**  
ATA News Managing Editor

The federal government has expanded its student loan forgiveness program to include teachers working in rural and small communities.

On December 31, 2025, teachers became eligible to participate in the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program, which aims to attract and retain workers in areas where

recruitment can be difficult. Eligibility for the federal program is determined both by both occupation and location.

While the program previously

Find out more about the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program here:



included family doctors, family medical residents and nurses who worked in eligible areas, more occupations—including teachers, early childhood educators, social workers, psychologists, physiotherapists, dentists, dental hygienists, midwives, personal support workers and pharmacists—are now captured under the program.

To qualify, teachers must have worked for 10 consecutive months—and at least 400 hours—in a school located in an eligible community which,

for the purposes of the program, is defined as a rural area or a population centre with 30,000 or fewer residents.

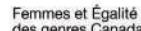
Eligible teachers can receive up to \$30,000 in loan forgiveness over a maximum of five years. Applicants must have a student loan that is in good standing. Also of note, the program applies only to the federal portion of student loans.

Details about the federal loan forgiveness program, including how to apply, are available on the Government of Canada's website. ■






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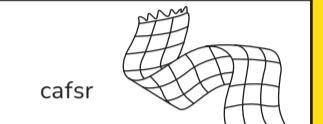
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**popquiz!**

## Word Scramble

Unscramble these seasonal words.

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	<b>hoyekc</b> <hr/>		<b>cafsr</b> <hr/>
	<b>brienateh</b> <hr/>		<b>ococa</b> <hr/>
	<b>soywn</b> <hr/>		<b>cyi</b> <hr/>
	<b>irntew</b> <hr/>		<b>igsink</b> <hr/>



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## LEGISLATURE HIGHLIGHTS

**Kim Clement**  
ATA News Staff

The fall sitting of the legislature adjourned on December 10. Standing orders state that the house will reconvene the second Tuesday of February, unless otherwise noted. Here is a summary of the education-related discussions that took place in question period from December 8–10.

### Provincial Achievement Test Results, December 8

Amanda Chapman (NDP MLA for Calgary-Beddown) asked Minister of Education and Childcare Demetrios Nicolaides how the UCP's new K-6 curriculum had performed on the latest Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs).

Nicolaides responded that PAT results showed continued improvement from the COVID-19 period and that some measures were returning to pre-COVID levels. He noted that the results still required further evaluation.

Chapman pressed further, citing Grade 6 English language arts results in which acceptable-level achievement dropped 10 per cent, excellence dropped 7 per cent and 20 per cent of students fell below acceptable—contrasted with stable Grade 9 results under the previous curriculum. She asked whether students, teachers or the government's curriculum caused the decline.

Nicolaides said that it was "rich" for the NDP to raise literacy concerns after voting against Bill 6, which he said supported literacy and numeracy. He asserted that the UCP remained focused on strengthening these skills.

Chapman then highlighted Grade 6 math results, where acceptable achievement dropped 16 per cent and nearly 40 per cent of students performed below acceptable. She asked whether the minister would apologize to teachers for ignoring their warnings about the curriculum.

Nicolaides said the government listened to teachers and other professionals, pointing to the approval of more than 150 school projects

since 2019 (compared with 46 under the NDP), an 11.7 per cent increase in education funding, and additional supports for mental health and specialized programming.

### Bills 2 and 14, December 9

Leader of the Official Opposition Naheed Nenshi questioned the government's honesty, arguing that Albertans should be able to trust ministers' statements. He said that the minister of Education and Childcare and the minister of Infrastructure had publicly indicated the government never intended to reach a deal with teachers and had planned from the outset to use the notwithstanding clause to avoid paying them more. He asked Premier Danielle Smith to confirm whether she had engineered the teachers' strike.

Smith denied the accusation. She asserted that ATA leadership had been preparing teachers for a strike as early as May while the government repeatedly returned to the table and reached negotiated settlements. She said teachers' leadership introduced additional demands at the last minute, leaving the sides farther apart. Smith claimed the government acted to get teachers back to work, arguing that students' learning needed to be protected.

Nenshi countered that Smith refused to take responsibility and was contradicting her own ministers. He asked whether Albertans could trust ministers at all.

Smith responded by invoking parliamentary supremacy and said judges sometimes overstepped by creating new law. She argued the notwithstanding clause existed precisely for such circumstances and reiterated that the legislature could amend laws at any time.

Nenshi replied that even students learned about separation of powers and accused the government of violating it daily. He then raised concerns about recall legislation, noting that the minister of Affordability and Utilities had told constituents the government would repeal recall rules, but the government did not. He cited reports that the recall petition against that minister might be an astroturf effort by UCP supporters and asked

whether Smith saw this as a flaw in her legislation.

Smith claimed unions and advocacy groups were abusing the recall process and had turned the legislation into a mockery. She said the government was monitoring the situation for possible changes, noting the law was modelled on British Columbia's long-standing system. She argued the opposition was weaponizing recalls due to policy disagreements and said such disputes should be settled in an election, which she looked forward to contesting.

### Collective Bargaining with Teachers, December 10

Nathan Ip (NDP MLA for Edmonton-South West) argued that the government had launched the biggest attack on teachers in Canadian history by stripping them of their bargaining rights in a single day by using the notwithstanding clause. He asked Nicolaides whether this approach had been worth it.

Nicolaides responded that the government had worked diligently to improve classroom conditions through initiatives such as the Class Size and Complexity Cabinet Committee and expected positive results.

Ip pressed further, stating that removing teachers' rights had not improved class sizes, classroom complexity or teachers' working conditions, and noted that two ministers had admitted they did not respect the arbitration process. He asked why the government spent the session attacking teachers instead of bargaining fairly.

Nicolaides replied that the government recognized teachers' hard work and accused the NDP of sowing division, saying the government was focused on results, investments, new schools and smaller class sizes.

Ip then highlighted a \$200,000 sole-source advertising contract used to attack teachers and noted that the same firm had previously received \$300,000 for Alberta Next Panel videos that attacked immigrants and others. He argued that the half-million dollars spent on advertising could have gone to classrooms and asked why the government wasted money targeting teachers.

Nicolaides responded that the NDP focused on rhetoric about attacks and division, while the government aimed to bring Albertans together. He contrasted the NDP's record of approving 46 school projects and raising education funding by 11.6 percent with the UCP's approval of 150 school projects and increases of over 11.8 percent.

### Bills 2 and 9, December 10

Kathleen Ganley (NDP MLA for Calgary-Mountain View) stated that on Human Rights Day the government had spent the session trampling the fundamental rights of Albertans, including using the notwithstanding clause to strip teachers of their bargaining rights, which triggered one of the largest protests in the legislature's history. She asked why the government violated teachers' rights and forced through a plan that did nothing to improve education. Nicolaides responded that the government had worked to improve classroom conditions, invested more in education than the NDP had, built more schools and collaborated with teachers to address challenges driven by unprecedented enrolment growth.

Ganley then argued that the government had also used the notwithstanding clause three times to trample the rights of trans youth. She said Bill 9 would cause irreparable harm and escalate homophobic and transphobic attacks, and asked why trans youths' rights were so disposable to the government.

Joseph Schow, minister of Jobs, Economy, Trade and Immigration, responded by criticizing a heckle from the opposition and then claimed the opposition was unconcerned about protecting girls from being "brutalized" in sports by allowing biological males to compete against them.

Ganley concluded by noting that Human Rights Day commemorated the UN Declaration of Human Rights, and asserted that the UCP often claimed they would never support anything the UN did, even inalienable rights. She said the government's reliance on the notwithstanding clause showed they knew they were violating rights and she asked whose rights they would violate next. ■



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# Teacher's PET

Teachers shared pictures of their pets along with an explanation of how their cuddly critters help them in their profession.

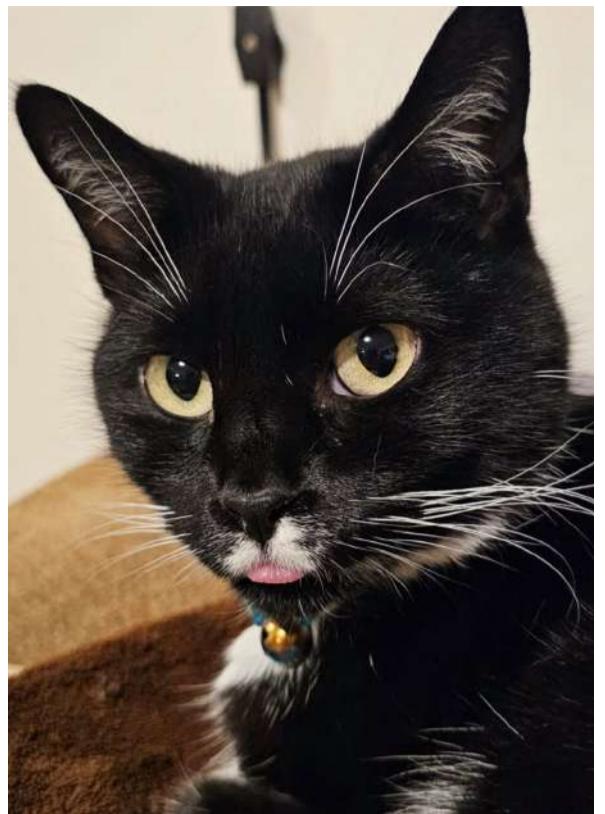


## Tonka

My little Morkie boy Tonka is my computer screensaver and the topic of most of the stories that I tell my students. In the mornings when we review our phonics sound cards, I hold up the sound card to the screensaver and ask, "Tonka, what's the sound?" Then I'll reveal the sound card to the students. It's silly, but a fun little thing. Sometimes, during attendance, instead of saying "here" the kids will say "I love Tonka!", which is very cute and funny.

For me, he's the best thing to come home to after a busy day at the school. He reminds me that regardless of how the day went, he loves me and depends on me. The moment I see his wagging tail, all my worries disappear!

Megan Blacklaws, Grade 2 teacher, Bannerman School



## Luca

(short-haired tuxedo cat)

This is Luca! She is my leash-trained cat who loves adventure, and she has been a regular visitor at Barnwell School since we adopted her from a local rescue in 2022! She visits my classroom a few times a year to help my kindergarten class learn about how animals move, as well as how to care for animals. She visits Grade 9 science to talk about animal adaptations, plus she's just fun to have around. Kids love to take her for walks in her stroller during recess. She has been a comfort animal for a student with special needs who loved cats. I would arrange for her visit after long breaks from school to help the student settle.

At home, she's a loyal companion who reminds me when it's time take a break (usually by walking on my keyboard!).

Barb Arend, kindergarten teacher and principal, Barnwell School



## Fancy

(Welsh/Arabian-cross pony)

I breed and train my ponies for combined carriage driving, which is a sport that combines precision driving with speed and endurance. My ponies give me exercise, confidence and a listening ear when I've had a tough day at work. Working in a tiny country school, I find that they give me a connection to my students, most of whom live on farms.

Kyla Cranston, Grade 3/4 teacher, Reed Ranch School



## Num

formal name Penumbra Soot Gremlin Conner (lionhead rabbit)

Num is the Reading Rabbit at school. He comes with me three days a week, and children who work with me get to read to him. Num teaches everyone what bunny body language (mostly sass) looks like and he has great listening ears.

Jody Hancock-Conner, literacy lead, École Westlock Elementary

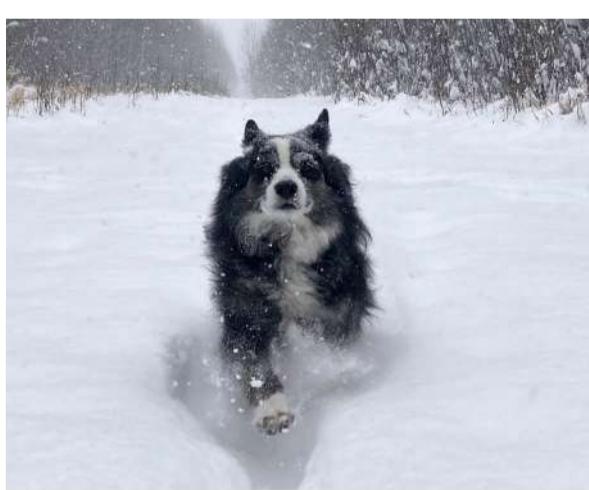


## El Chapo

(Sicilian minidonkey)

When I get home, I make a point to connect with him each day and he grounds me because he's just happy to hang out—he doesn't ask for me to throw a ball or let him in/out. The neat thing about donkeys is that you can "feel" when they bond with you, and this makes me think a bit more deeply about connections I make with students and staff.

Lorelei Gertz-Cummins, Knowledge and Employability, English and art, Bonnyville Centralized High School



## Panda

(border collie mix)

He is very smart, active and loyal to a fault. He helps me de-stress before and after work with outdoor adventures.

Jill Jewitt, kindergarten teacher, Hillside Community School, Grande Prairie



## Norton & Luna

(sheepadoodles)

Coming home to wagging tails and warm snuggles gets me through the tough days.

Laura Corbett, Grade 3 teacher, St. Charles School



## Sam & Frodo

(short-haired tabbies)

Sam and Frodo are brothers who were adopted from a shelter, and let me tell you, they are the biggest love bugs you'll ever meet. As soon as I come home, they greet me with meows until they are picked up and properly hugged. Sam's speciality is playing catch and Frodo's is eating his brother's food. Each day for our bell work in art, they are the prompt. For example, the prompt may be "draw your bed" and on the board the cats will be curled up in their own bed. I think my students look forward to the new prompt of the day displaying Sam and Frodo living their best "hobbit" lives. They are my anchor at the end of a long day and are the definition of unconditional love.

Kameko Ballantyne, high school art teacher, Eagle Butte High School



## Bernie

(short-haired tabby cat)

He helps in my professional duties by serving as an inspiration and life coach to my students through his Instagram account (@ berniewhiskers).

Amanda Closson, English teacher, Westwood High School



## TEACHERS' PETS ROCKING

# Red for Ed



## Billie Jean

aka Billie (mini goldendoodle)

Billie helps me keep healthy by walking almost every day. She helps me keep my head above water by providing love and comfort every single day. She is the one that forces me to get out of bed when times are hard. She supports our cause, and she came with me to rallies. She is special to me because I've had her since she was 10 weeks old, and she has crossed the country by car with me as well as accompanied me on many adventures and hikes. She is my best friend, the first thing I see when I get home from work, and I can't get enough of her smile. Our love is unconditional and forever.

Sandy Le Meur, junior high humanities French Immersion teacher, St. John XXIII School



## Blu

(German Shepherd mix with Staffordshire, rottie and boxer)

Blu is special because he supported me at the rallies during the strike and helps me cope with stress of the day. He listens to how my days go and he makes sure that I'm getting my walks in. He is my confidante and my support!

Monica Chung, vice-principal, St. Joan of Arc School



## Panda

(border collie mix)

He is very smart, active and loyal to a fault. He helps me de-stress before and after work with outdoor adventures.

Jill Jewitt, kindergarten teacher, Hillside Community School, Grande Prairie



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**JAIME ROJO:  
CHASING MONARCHS**

*Curriculum connections: Living systems, biodiversity, ecosystems, environmental sciences, human and environmental interactions*

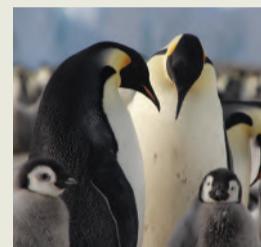
**FEBRUARY 2 & 3, 2026 | 10:15a.m.**



**JESS CRAMP:  
THE UNTOLD STORY OF SHARKS**

*Curriculum connections: Life science, ecosystems, biological diversity, science/technology/society (STS), environmental impact, species at risk*

**MARCH 9, 2026 | 10:15a.m.**



**HEATHER LYNCH:  
PENGUINS OF ANTARCTICA**

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

**APRIL 20, 2026 | 10:15a.m.**

**JACK SINGER CONCERT HALL,  
WERKLUND CENTRE**

*Presentation includes a post-show Q&A.*

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# Off Script

*with ATA President Jason Schilling*

## New year, renewed resolve

Happy New Year, colleagues. I recently saw a comment suggesting that teachers are fortunate to celebrate the "new year" twice, once in September and again in January. There's some truth to this. Each of these times offers us a moment to pause, reflect and reset. And though I am not a big believer in New Year's resolutions, I am a fan of renewed resolve.

Many of us are likely relieved to see the calendar turn from 2025 to 2026. It has been a difficult year for public education, marked by extraordinary challenges but also moments of real strength and solidarity. And while a new year brings hope, we also know that many of the pressures facing our classrooms will not disappear simply because the date has changed.

For me, the new year presents two important opportunities. The first is reflection: taking stock of where we have been, what has tested us and what we have achieved together. Often, our greatest challenges are also our greatest successes. The strike is a clear example of this. It tested us all, but also put a spotlight on public education.

The second opportunity is to look ahead. We know what lies before us, because many of the challenges we faced last year remain unresolved. Classroom complexity continues to grow, and teachers, school leaders, students and parents will be watching closely to see whether the government takes meaningful action. At the same

time, we must remain vigilant about emerging issues, including potential changes to teacher certification that risk undermining our profession in unprecedented ways.

Our advocacy will also continue when it comes to curriculum implementation. Even as the government quietly slowed the rollout of several junior high courses, it also quietly released the latest Provincial Achievement Test results. Grade 6 math scores were deeply concerning, as teachers and school leaders predicted. Along with the Association, you raised red flags about the new curriculum, and now there is clear evidence that it is not serving students well. The government also quietly released the results of the early years literacy and numeracy screeners survey. And guess what? Those results echoed the concerns teachers and school leaders had expressed earlier in the year.

It is striking how often new initiatives are announced with great fanfare, while reversals and corrections happen quietly, sometimes on Friday afternoons or school breaks. That is not accidental, and we will continue to use our voices, advocate forcefully and stand together with renewed resolve in the year ahead. And, as the new year arrives with fireworks and bright displays meant to mark a fresh beginning, we know that real change is not found in the spectacle of the "new," but in thoughtful, collective work in support of public education. ■

*I welcome your comments. Contact me at [jason.schilling@ata.ab.ca](mailto:jason.schilling@ata.ab.ca).*

## Council authorizes strategy for post-strike period

### PEC POINTS

**Audrey Dutka**  
ATA News Staff

#### Highlights of the emergent Provincial Executive Council meetings held 2025 10 27–28 and 2025 11 12

- Approved that the Association take the position and announce that it will pursue all legal alternatives to challenge Bill 2's egregious assault on the collective bargaining rights of teachers and, by extension, all workers.
- Approved that a communication be sent out on 2025 10 27 advising members of the Association's position on Bill 2.
- Authorized the Association to draft for the use of teachers a letter to their employer, copied to the minister of finance, the minister of education and childcare, and the premier explaining that they are returning to work under protest and while they will abide by the law, they will do nothing more until teachers' legitimate grievances and aspirations are addressed.
- Approved that the Association direct its legal team to seek an injunction and report to local presidents that the Association is pursuing that avenue.
- Authorized Finance staff to take the necessary steps to liquidate \$15,000,000 from the Special Emergency Fund and allocate the proceeds for the

reimbursement to school divisions for the payment of teachers' health and benefit premiums incurred during the October 2025 work stoppage.

**6.** Authorized the Association's strategy for the poststrike period to include the following elements:

- Strategic engagement with government to advance teachers' interests on class size and complexity
- Legal challenge of the *Back to School Act* and, specifically, the use of the notwithstanding clause
- Advocacy in concert with civil society and other unions in opposition to the pre-emptive use of the notwithstanding clause
- Promotion and participation in the citizens' initiative initiated to restrict the use of public funds to public education
- Vigorous contract enforcement
- Review and revitalization of local communications officer and local political engagement officer programs
- Ongoing, refocused media public relations and advocacy campaigns
- Review and assess the role of local bargaining units and teacher welfare committees, providing support and direction as appropriate

- Approved the proposed advertising and application timelines for recruitment for the position of ESO1/26, Coordinator, Professional Development.
- Approved to have the official photographs of Provincial Executive Council members redone. ■

### GET READY FOR CONVENTION

Teachers' conventions enhance professional practice by providing teachers and school leaders with opportunities to connect and share innovative practices, collaborate on professional issues and find inspiration as they meet the learning goals identified in their professional growth plans.

#### North Central Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 5–6, 2026  
Location: Edmonton Convention Centre, Edmonton  
Contact: Caroly Bennett, president, [president@nctca.ca](mailto:president@nctca.ca)  
Website: <http://mynctca.com>

#### Calgary City Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 12–13, 2026  
Location: Calgary Telus Convention Centre  
Contact: Shae Frisby, president, [cctcapresident@gmail.com](mailto:cctcapresident@gmail.com)  
Website: [www.cctca.com](http://www.cctca.com)

#### Endless Skies Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 12–13, 2026  
Location: Edmonton Convention Centre, Edmonton  
Contact: Melissa Petruk, president, [estcapresident@gmail.com](mailto:estcapresident@gmail.com)  
Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/estca/home?authuser=1>

#### Central Alberta Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 19–20, 2026  
Location: Red Deer Polytechnic, Red Deer  
Contact: Brenda Lewis, president, [teacher.brendalewis@gmail.com](mailto:teacher.brendalewis@gmail.com)  
Website: <https://mycatca.com>

#### Palliser District Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 19–20, 2026  
Location: Calgary Telus Convention Centre, Calgary  
Contact: Jennifer Munton, president, [president@pdtca.org](mailto:president@pdtca.org)  
Website: [www.pdtca.org](http://www.pdtca.org)

#### South Western Alberta Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 19–20, 2026  
Location: University of Lethbridge, Lethbridge  
Contact: Kevin Sheen, president, [president@swatca.ca](mailto:president@swatca.ca)  
Website: [www.swatca.ca](http://www.swatca.ca)

#### Southeastern Alberta Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 19–20, 2026  
Location: Medicine Hat College, Medicine Hat  
Contact: Cam Bernhard, president, [cam.bernhard@gmail.com](mailto:cam.bernhard@gmail.com)  
Website: <https://seatca.atapd.ca>

#### Greater Edmonton Teachers' Convention

Dates: Feb. 26–27, 2026  
Location: Edmonton Convention Centre, Edmonton  
Contact: Karen Sucie, president, [president@getca.com](mailto:president@getca.com)  
Website: [www.getca.com](http://www.getca.com)

#### Mighty Peace Teachers' Convention

Dates: Mar. 5–6, 2026  
Locations: Charles Spencer High School, Grande Prairie  
St. Joseph Catholic High School, Grande Prairie  
Contact: Sue Hauser, president, [mptcpresident@gmail.com](mailto:mptcpresident@gmail.com)  
Website: <http://mptca.teachers.ab.ca>

#### DID YOU KNOW?

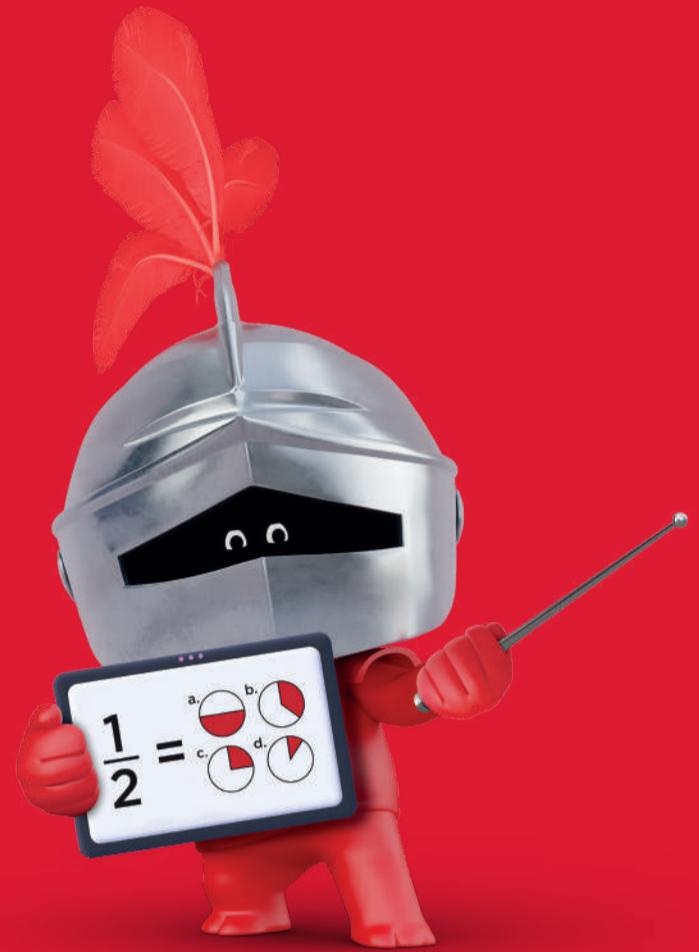
Some convention-related travel expenses are tax deductible.

Convention attendance is a condition of employment; therefore, reasonable expenses to attend convention (mileage, accommodation and meals) are eligible tax deductions. Teachers must retain appropriate supporting documentation of their expenditures and will have to request that their employer complete a T2200 form that outlines certain aspects of the conditions of employment. The T2200 does not have to be included with the tax return. However, the CRA can request it any time after you file the tax return. If you are having difficulty obtaining a completed T2200 from your employer, you can show the request from CRA and inform them that they are obligated to certify the T2200. For more information, you may wish to consult your accountant, visit the CRA website or contact your ATA local office.

#### MORE INFORMATION on teachers' conventions

For the latest updates on your convention, please visit its website, noted above. If you have general questions, visit [ataconventions.ca](http://ataconventions.ca). Further questions can be directed to ATA executive staff officer Danny Maas at [daniel.maas@ata.ab.ca](mailto:daniel.maas@ata.ab.ca).

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# TALEEND

January 13, 2026 | Volume 60, Number 7

## Turning the page

*Moving into a new year often invites reflection—on what has been and what comes next. To capture this moment, we gathered words from writers, thinkers and artists that offer perspectives on change, hope and new possibilities.*

“

For last year's words  
belong to last year's language  
And next year's words  
await another voice.

T.S. Eliot, poet and playwright

“

You know how I always  
dread the whole year?  
Well, this time I'm only going to  
dread one day at a time.

Charlie Brown, cartoon character

“

Hope  
Smiles from the threshold of  
the year to come  
Whispering 'It will be happier.'

Lord Alfred Tennyson, poet

“

Take a leap of faith  
and begin this wondrous  
new year by believing.

Sarah Ban Breathnach, writer

“

Remember, the time of year  
when the future appears  
like a blank sheet of paper  
a clean calendar, a new chance.

Jackie Kay, poet

“

Learn from yesterday,  
live for today,  
hope for tomorrow.

Albert Einstein, theoretical physicist