

A Polycrisis: Class Size and Complexity in an Education System Under Duress

ATA Pulse Research Study (November 21 to December 5, 2025)



The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Overview

The fall 2025 Pulse Survey captured a nested system of pressures that move outward from the lived experience of the individual teacher or school leader to the provincial education system as a whole.

The survey was conducted between November 21 and December 5, 2025, and given the highly representative nature of the over five thousand two hundred (5200+) teachers and five hundred (500) school leaders who responded, the margin of error for this study is ± 1.5 per cent (19 times out of 20).

At Level I, the survey gathered information about teacher and school leader well-being, emotional state and post-strike adjustment. That experience is directly shaped by Level II, the classroom and school environment: class sizes, complexity and diversity of student needs, available support(s) and complexity assessment needs. These classroom realities, in turn, sit within Level III, the wider school and community context, where staffing levels, teaching and learning resource adequacy, and the conditions of professional practice affect the daily lived experience of being an Alberta teacher. All of these are situated (nested) within Level IV, the broader education system that is shaped by government legislation, regulation and provincial directives.

By structuring the fall 2025 Pulse study around these four interconnected (nested) levels, the ATA attempted to capture a coherent and integrated picture of how system-level decisions cascade downward into the classroom, and how pressures accumulate upward to have societal impact, ultimately shaping a snapshot of the overall working lives of Alberta teachers and school leaders.

LIMITATIONS

This study draws on a large, random stratified sample of over 1,000 Alberta teachers and school leaders, complemented by chain referral and an open sample totaling more than 4,000 additional respondents to enable robust triangulation of the findings. Across all data sources, directional trends were consistent, with only minor variation in sentiment intensity (typically within three to five per cent), reinforcing the representativeness of the sample and coherence of the overall ATA research report findings. On questions with a majority sentiment represented (for example, 80 per cent agreement/disagreement in one direction or the other), the statistical certainty increases to an even lower margin of error (± 1.5 per cent).

To further strengthen data integrity, an artificial-intelligence-based response quality algorithm was applied on the final sample to quarantine submissions that were flagged by rapid completion, patterned or gibberish answers, inconsistent responses and fake entries. Together, these design features, with the rigorous sampling, methodological triangulation and automated artificial intelligence (AI) quality controls contribute to a high degree of confidence in the validity and reliability of the results.

The final set of quantitative and qualitative data provides a highly representative sample of the population of teachers and school leaders in Alberta and clearly documents member opinion on key issues.

REPORT STRUCTURE

Level I—Teacher and School Leader Well-Being, Adjustment and Professional Recovery

Level I captures the foundational experience of the profession and sets the context for understanding pressures at higher levels. This section asks respondents to reflect on

- current emotional state and measures of personal well-being;
- post-strike adjustment;
- ability to re-establish a positive classroom rhythm;
- early indicators of stress, workload strain and professional recovery; and
- optimism or pessimism in the future of the teaching profession.

Level II—Classroom and School Context

A) Class Sizes Across Alberta

This section maintains the ATA's ongoing monitoring/oversight of class size pressures. Teachers and school leaders reported the following:

- size of their largest class/largest class in school,
- frequency and distribution of classes exceeding 30–45 students and
- program areas most affected by oversized classes.

B) Classroom and School Complexity

Teachers receive their own individualized classroom complexity weighted index score at the end of the survey. This section captures:

- The teacher-identified factors contributing most to classroom complexity
- Composition and size of the most complex classroom
- A weighted complexity index (aggregate), reflecting the distribution of
 - typical learners,
 - targeted/individualized supports,
 - high-incidence exceptionalities,
 - low-incidence exceptionalities,
 - refugee/newcomer students and
 - gifted students
- Number of EAs and/or other support(s) in place
- The personalized complexity index score (individual)

C) Supports and Assessments

These Level II indicators show how classroom-level needs intersect with available school/community supports.

- Requests for speech-language, occupational therapy, physical therapy and/or psycho-educational assessments
- Estimated wait times for these assessments
- Barriers to timely assessment and support for complex needs

Level III—Wider School and Community Context

Level III provides insight into structural conditions that shape the experience of both classrooms and individuals. This section examines the broader working environment by capturing

- reported changes compared to the previous school year;
- staffing levels and disruptions following the legislated return on October 29, 2025;
- resource adequacy and operational capacity; and
- pressures emerging at the school and community level.

Level IV—Education System

This portion of the study captures teachers' and school leaders' perceptions of

- provincial legislation and regulatory changes;
- system directives such as the mandated return to school;
- resource adequacy relative to system expectations;
- impacts on teaching, learning, instructional time and school operations;
- the most significant policy impact affecting practice;
- perceived direction of Alberta's education system;
- areas where advocacy may be most needed; and
- system-level pressures requiring attention.

Final Response Counts



Executive Summary

The ATA's fall 2025 Pulse (rapid research) study provides a comprehensive snapshot of the pressures facing Alberta's teachers and school leaders, structured across four nested levels. Over 5,700 respondents (teachers and principals) participated, yielding a highly representative sample (margin of error ± 1.5 per cent, 19 times out of 20). The findings reveal a teaching profession under extraordinary stress, and one that has been in an extended period of moral distress.

Alberta's teachers report record-high levels of occupational stress, the highest in the world according to the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS). Teachers also report plummeting morale (Level I), increasingly complex classrooms with insufficient supports for the diversity of student needs (Level II), school-level resource and staffing crises (Level III), and systemic challenges ranging from the underfunding of public education to poorly conceived and implemented Government of Alberta policy mandates (Level IV). These intersectional issues are creating an unsustainable situation in Alberta's public education system, with urgent implications for both policy and practice.

Level I—Collapsing Teacher Well-Being and Moral Distress

At the personal level, teacher well-being has deteriorated to alarming levels. Only eight per cent of teachers reported feeling happy in their job, while 61 per cent described themselves as unhappy. Nearly three-quarters of respondents do not feel hopeful about their work or recovery post-strike. An overwhelming 95 per cent say they feel stressed, with almost 94 per cent being pessimistic about the future of the teaching profession in Alberta. Qualitative comments describe widespread moral distress, burnout and despair. Many teachers, across ages and experience, expressed a sense of hopelessness and even an intent to leave the profession. These metrics paint a picture of a profoundly fatigued and demoralized workforce struggling to find solid ground.

International context: Global benchmarks corroborate Alberta's crisis in teacher well-being. According to the OECD's 2024 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS), Alberta teachers report the highest occupational stress levels among 50 participating jurisdictions. In the OECD study, 42 per cent of Alberta teachers experienced a lot of work-related stress, more than double the global average of 19 per cent. Alberta teachers also rank near the top worldwide in terms of workload, averaging about five hours per week above the international average (OECD 2025a; OECD 2025b). Such extreme work hours and stress loads accelerate burnout and put Alberta at heightened risk of teacher attrition. TALIS 2024 reports that about 17 per cent of teachers (and 20 per cent of those under 30 years old) intend to leave the profession within five years amid rising pressures (Education International 2024; Bae 2025). Alberta's data thus reflect an extreme case of a broader challenge: a profession pushed to its limits with many looking for an exit.

Level II—Overwhelming Classroom Complexity and Lack of Supports

At the classroom and school level, teachers face unprecedented complexity in student needs combined with oversized classes and inadequate supports. Eight in ten teachers reported that the diversity and complexity of student needs in their most complex class have increased this year compared to last year. Alberta's classrooms are increasingly complex and under-supported, a combination that is eroding instructional quality, teacher well-being, and even student and staff safety.

Respondents describe classes of 30 to over 40 students that include a mix of specialized learning needs, ranging from mild to severe, including English language learners, refugee students, students requiring individualized support plans for complex social-emotional or learning needs and students with severe or multiple disabilities or complex medical, cognitive or behavioural needs. When weighted for these needs, the average Alberta classroom functions like a class of 38 students in terms of workload.

Alberta teachers and school leaders report “severe classroom complexity” without the necessary supports, which is a multi-layered burden (ie, a polycrisis) that significantly exceeds traditional expectations.

Notably, 82 per cent of teachers cite social-emotional student needs and 79 per cent cite behavioural challenges as top complexity factors in their classrooms. Many teachers described rising safety concerns, with escalating student aggression, violence and dysregulation now much more common in Alberta classrooms. This intensity of need, coupled with large class sizes, has created volatile conditions of professional practice and made daily teaching and learning conditions extremely challenging.

Classroom complexity is the real instructional load for teachers. It is measured by the class size, plus the full range and intensity of student needs that require extra planning, supports and coordination with teachers, educational assistants, specialists and parents/guardians.

It should be noted that support staffing has not kept pace with classroom needs. Teachers voiced acute shortages of educational assistants (EAs) and specialist support services within the school community. EAs are described as “essential but severely underfunded and understaffed” across the province, leaving many complex classrooms with no aid. One respondent noted being promised an EA who “has not been hired yet,” exemplifying widespread hiring gaps.

Similarly, access to specialists (for example for assessments or interventions) is lagging.

Over one-third of teachers awaiting student assessments such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy and psycho-educational assessments estimate that required assessments will not be completed at all this year due to wait times and resource constraints. Such shortfalls in support mean individual teachers are attempting to meet all diverse needs alone, particularly in remote areas, an approach widely seen as untenable. The result is an overextension of teachers' time and energy, reinforcing the trend of lost preparation periods, working through breaks, and unsustainable workload frequently mentioned by respondents.

Level III—School-Level Strains and Resource Gaps

At the wider school and community level, systemic strains are evident as conditions have worsened relative to the previous year. The aftermath of the fall 2025 labour action and the Government of Alberta's legislated return to work on October 29, 2025, disrupted school operations and staffing continuity. Many schools began the year under-resourced, facing unfilled teaching and support positions, high student needs and morale challenges. Respondents reported that staffing levels remain inadequate: schools struggle to recruit and retain support staff, and substitute teacher shortages force teachers to give up preparation time to cover classes. Such adjustments have led to intensified workloads at the school level. Teachers describe routinely working through lunch and after hours to fill gaps, saying "I never leave my classroom. I have never worked harder in my life."

Resource adequacy is stretched thin. Compared to last year, more teachers note declines in availability of learning materials, specialist services and manageable class groupings. Rapid curriculum changes and new assessment requirements (detailed in Level IV) have added to school-level operational stress. Many respondents pointed to "loss of prep time and unmanageable expectations" as a daily reality. Schools with higher concentrations of English language learners or complex needs are strained, as supports have not kept up with rising enrolments and needs. For example, some Alberta schools report over 10 per cent of students as English language learners, adding to teachers' workload in addressing language and literacy gaps.

The OECD reports that in 2024 the share of Alberta teachers who teach in schools where more than 10 per cent of students have special education needs is 20 per cent higher than the global average, students with immigrant or with migrant backgrounds was 38 per cent higher than the global average, and an increase of schools where one per cent of the students are refugees has increased by 22 per cent since 2018 (OECD 2025a; OECD 2025b). These compounding pressures at the school level are undermining teachers' capacity to maintain quality instruction and are accelerating feelings of professional exhaustion. The overall picture is one of schools in Alberta operating in a constant crisis-management mode, marked by widespread fragility and difficult-to-sustain situations, a polycrisis in which multiple, interconnected crises are now overlapping and intensifying one another.

Level IV—Systemic and Policy Pressures

At the provincial system-level, the survey reveals deep frustration among teachers and school leaders with government policies, funding and the overall direction of public education.

Teachers and principals overwhelmingly perceive current legislative and regulatory changes as detrimental to their work. Notably, 91 per cent of respondents flagged the Alberta government's use of the notwithstanding clause (Bill 2) to impose a contract settlement as a significant issue impacting their school. This extraordinary legislative measure, effectively curtailing bargaining rights, left many feeling disempowered and disrespected. Large majorities of educators also cited curriculum changes (74 per cent), proposed funding model changes (54 per cent), and new assessment requirements (52 per cent) as areas of serious concern.

Controversial social policy directives have added further strain: about half of respondents highlighted policies around student pronouns/gender identity and school libraries (book restriction debates) as negatively affecting school climate and trust. Together, these policy changes are seen as top-down pressures that ignore the input of teachers, diminishing their professional autonomy, creating additional work, or even conflicting with their fundamental professional values.

Chronic underfunding is another systemic pressure repeatedly emphasized. Teachers describe a “dismantling of public education” narrative, linking inadequate funding to larger class sizes, insufficient supports, and even personal financial strain (teachers paying out of pocket for classroom necessities). Especially in rural and high-needs schools, resource disparities are pronounced, fueling perceptions of inequity (urban versus rural) in Alberta’s education system. Critically, there is a breakdown in trust and dialogue between Alberta’s teachers and school leaders and policymakers. According to the TALIS 2024 results, only 13 per cent of Alberta’s teachers feel that their views are respected by the provincial government (OECD 2025a; OECD 2025b), which is an astonishingly low level of teacher confidence in education decision-makers; the steepest drop worldwide.

The fall 2025 Pulse research qualitative comments contained in this report echoed this sentiment, calling for stronger advocacy and a restoration of professional respect. The combination of feeling unheard, underresourced and overregulated by policy directives has left Alberta’s teachers alienated from the very system they serve. The data suggest that without changes at the system-level, in funding, class size policy, support for complex and diverse student needs, support allocations and genuine consultation with the profession, the foundational issues driving this crisis will persist or worsen.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

In summary, the fall 2025 Pulse research findings point to a public education system in Alberta under acute stress, with compounding and systemic pressures at every level. In other words, a polycrisis in Alberta's education system, where large class sizes and complex and diverse student needs have not been supported with additional funding, teachers and resources, has created an education system under duress. Teacher well-being and morale are at historic lows, classrooms are increasingly complex and unmanageable without more supports, and schools are grappling with staffing and resource polycrisis. These challenges are amplified by broader system-level issues, from contentious legislation in the form of Bill 2 to policy moves exacerbating years of underinvestment in public education, all of which are creating a climate of deep pessimism in Alberta's schools.

The evidence signals a profession at a tipping point. Without swift and meaningful intervention, Alberta faces a heightened risk of teacher burnout and widespread attrition (in line with global trends of early exits from teaching), which would further exacerbate the teacher shortage and threaten educational quality. However, the research also outlines a clear path forward. Alberta's situation, while dire, resonates with international calls to improve support, respect and working conditions for teachers and school leaders (Education International 2024; Bae 2025).

To avert further deterioration, Alberta's education partners must urgently address the core issues identified. This includes reinforcing funding and staffing (eg, hiring more teachers and EAs to reduce class sizes and unsustainable work intensification), providing comprehensive supports for complex and diverse student needs in classrooms, and involving teachers in policy decisions.

Importantly, funding models should be aligned to student needs (not just headcounts) to ensure that resources target the classrooms with greatest complexity. Rebuilding trust and morale will require visible investment in teachers' well-being, ranging from manageable workloads and competitive salaries to professional autonomy and respect in decision making. The urgency of these actions is underscored by the data: without them, the current pressures will continue to accumulate, putting the future of Alberta's public education at risk.

This ATA pulse rapid research report serves as both a warning and a call to action for Albertans. The well-being of Alberta's teachers and school leaders in our public education system is the linchpin of educational success; addressing the issues documented in this research study is not only critical for retaining teachers but for ensuring that every Alberta student can learn in a stable, supported and high-quality learning environment.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE STRATIFICATION LOGIC SAMPLE

For the December 2025 Pulse (rapid research) Survey, the ATA drew a randomized stratified sample from an algorithm that arbitrarily draws emails out of the ATA's membership database. The stratification logic used to garner the thousands of responses was as follows:

- The sample was randomized and stratified across all school authorities; that is it would include an equal percentage of members from each school jurisdiction, relative to the size of the authority.
- Only active members were included; no associate members.
- Anyone who was part of another sample during the current school year was excluded.
- Every person had a contract with a primary board (and the board was associated with a local).
- Every person had a date of birth (DOB) recorded in the membership database.
- The person was not deceased.
- Anyone on leave as of the date of the last member count (November of current year) was excluded.
- Anyone eligible for active membership in the ATA but had ever elected for associate membership or nonmembership was excluded.
- As the survey was sent by email, every person had to have a primary personal email address recorded in the database.
- Every person had to have been recorded in the last member count; if the last member count was not completed, then every member must have had a contribution for November of the current school year.
- Anyone who had a mail preference specifying that they are not to be contacted was excluded.
- Anyone with an ATA email address was excluded.

RANDOMIZATION

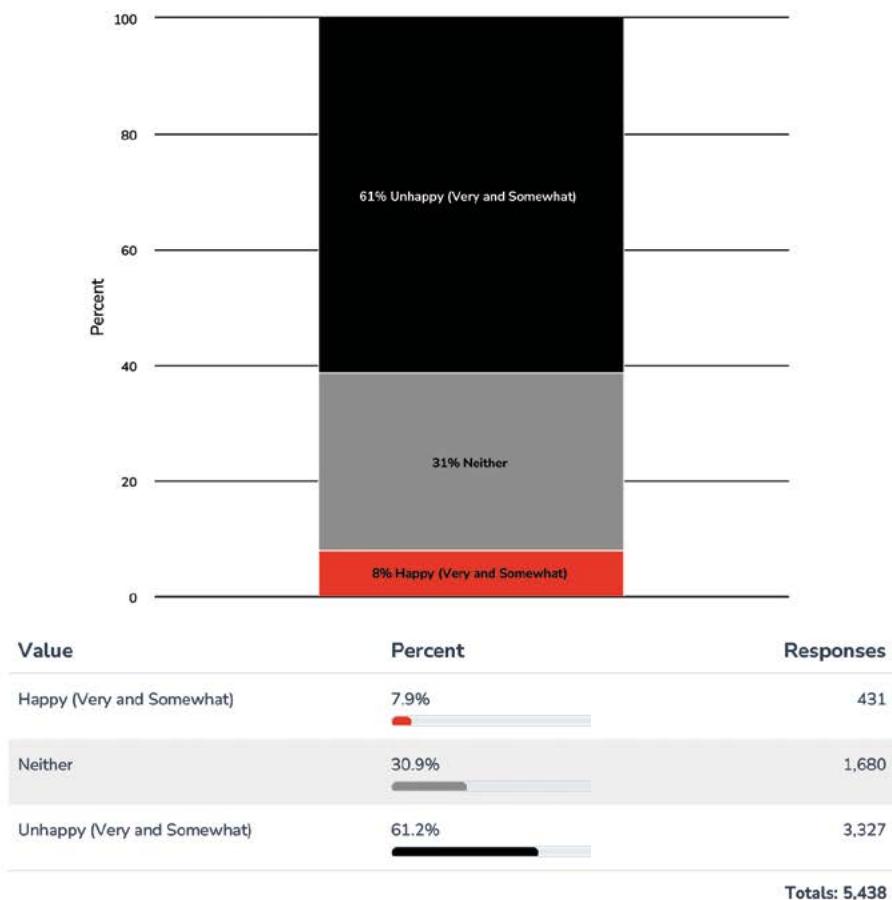
The randomized pool that we surveyed was selected based on indicators that most represented the population dynamics of the teaching profession in Alberta. Geography was one such key indicator. The randomization considered where the population of Alberta teachers are employed. For example, the sample drew randomly from a specific large metro area at 28 per cent while the sample from a rural area was at 3 per cent. Gender identity is another significant indicator of the teaching population in Alberta. Data suggests approximately 3/4 of the population identifies as female while 1/4 identifies as male; however, some respondents also preferred not to answer or preferred to self-describe. This study contains a complete breakdown of the demographics of the respondents.

METHOD

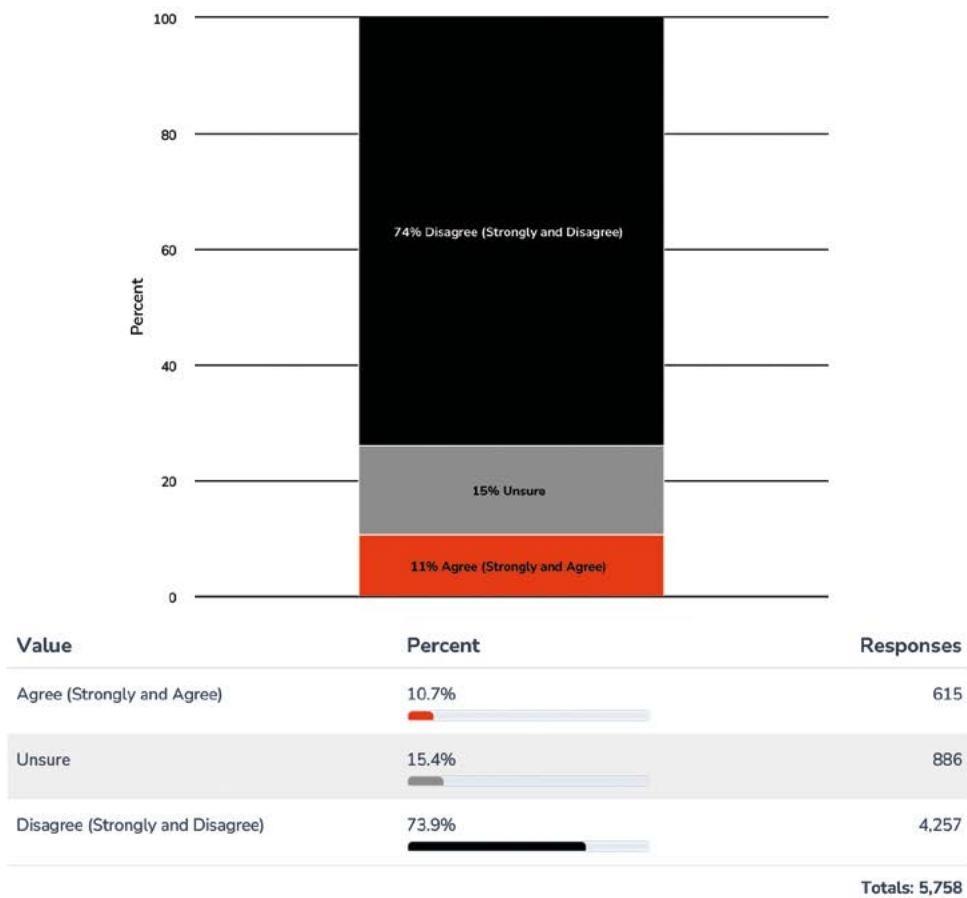
This ATA research study was completed using an online survey and was voluntary (participants could withdraw at any point). It was activated online through our secure socket layer, the Alchemer platform, with data being stored in Canada.

Level I—Teacher and School Leader Well-Being, Adjustment and Professional Recovery

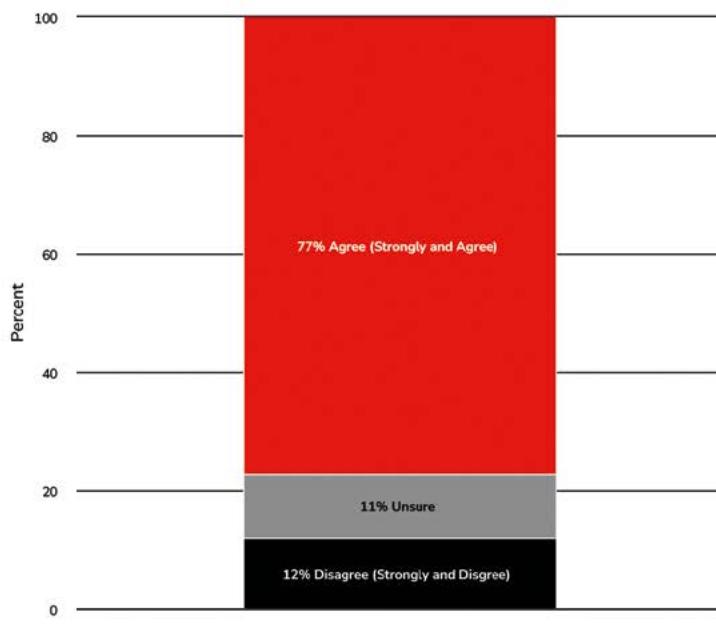
1. How are you feeling?



2. I feel hopeful.

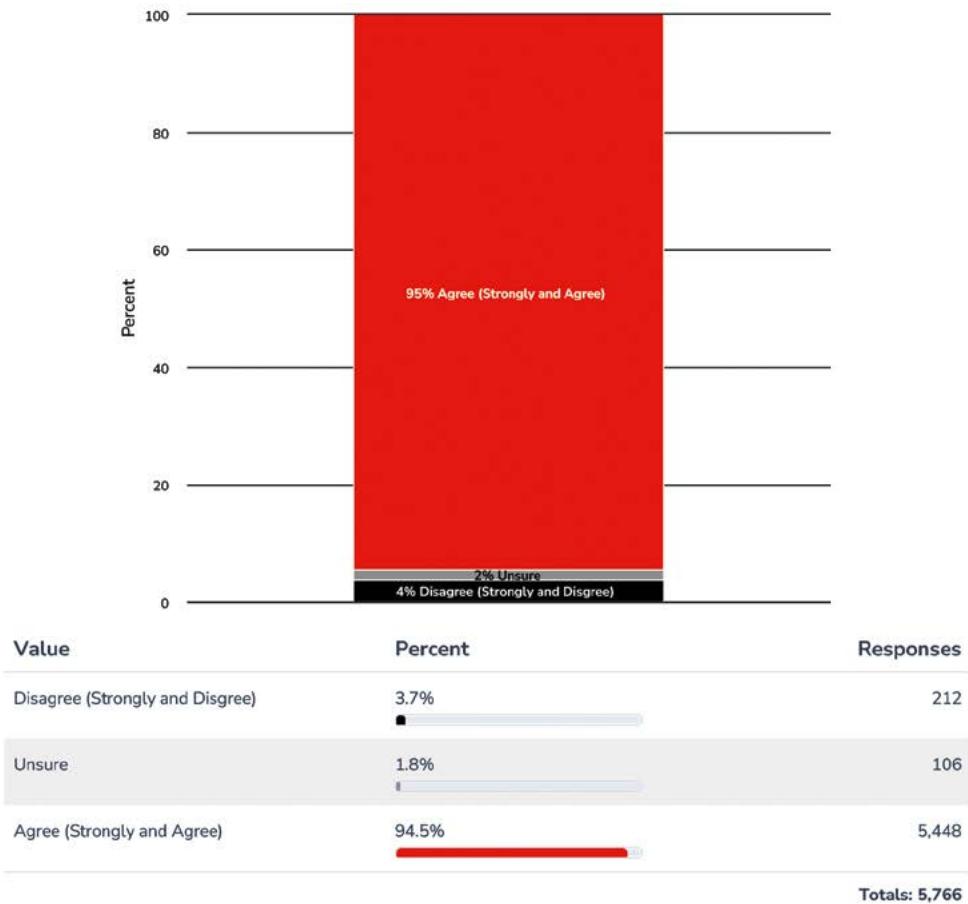


3. I feel moments of joy at school each day.

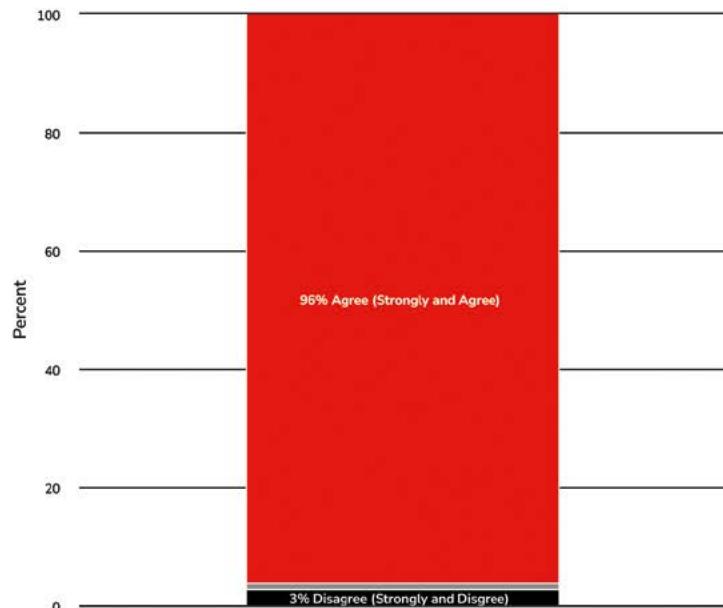


Value	Percent	Responses
Disagree (Strongly and Disagree)	12.0%	694
Unsure	10.8%	622
Agree (Strongly and Agree)	77.2%	4,451
Totals: 5,767		

4. I feel stressed.



5. I feel exhausted by the end of the day.

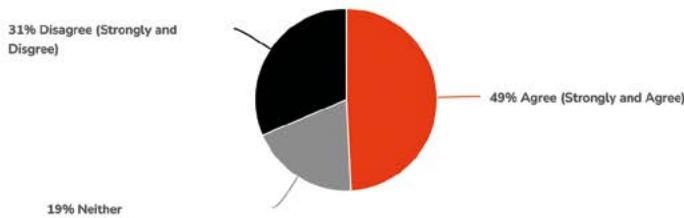


Value	Percent	Responses
Disagree (Strongly and Disagree)	2.8%	161
Unsure	1.0%	56
Agree (Strongly and Agree)	96.2%	5,541
Totals: 5,758		

6. Thinking about this past week, please identify your level of agreement with the following statements:

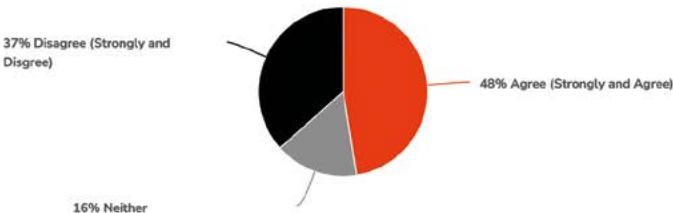
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Agree	Strongly agree	Responses
I feel isolated.						
Count	337	1,991	562	2,170	695	5,755
Row %	5.9%	34.6%	9.8%	37.7%	12.1%	
I feel hopeful.						
Count	1,969	2,288	886	537	78	5,758
Row %	34.2%	39.7%	15.4%	9.3%	1.4%	
I feel stressed.						
Count	67	145	106	2,078	3,370	5,766
Row %	1.2%	2.5%	1.8%	36.0%	58.4%	
I feel exhausted by the end of the day.						
Count	78	83	56	1,157	4,384	5,758
Row %	1.4%	1.4%	1.0%	20.1%	76.1%	
I feel moments of joy at school each day.						
Count	117	577	622	3,703	748	5,767
Row %	2.0%	10.0%	10.8%	64.2%	13.0%	
Totals						5767
Total Responses						

7. Teacher—Considering the return to work after the recent strike, I feel that I have been able to re-establish a positive and productive rhythm in my classroom.



Value	Percent	Responses
Agree (Strongly and Agree)	49.3%	2,585
Neither	19.4%	1,016
Disagree (Strongly and Disagree)	31.4%	1,645
Totals: 5,246		

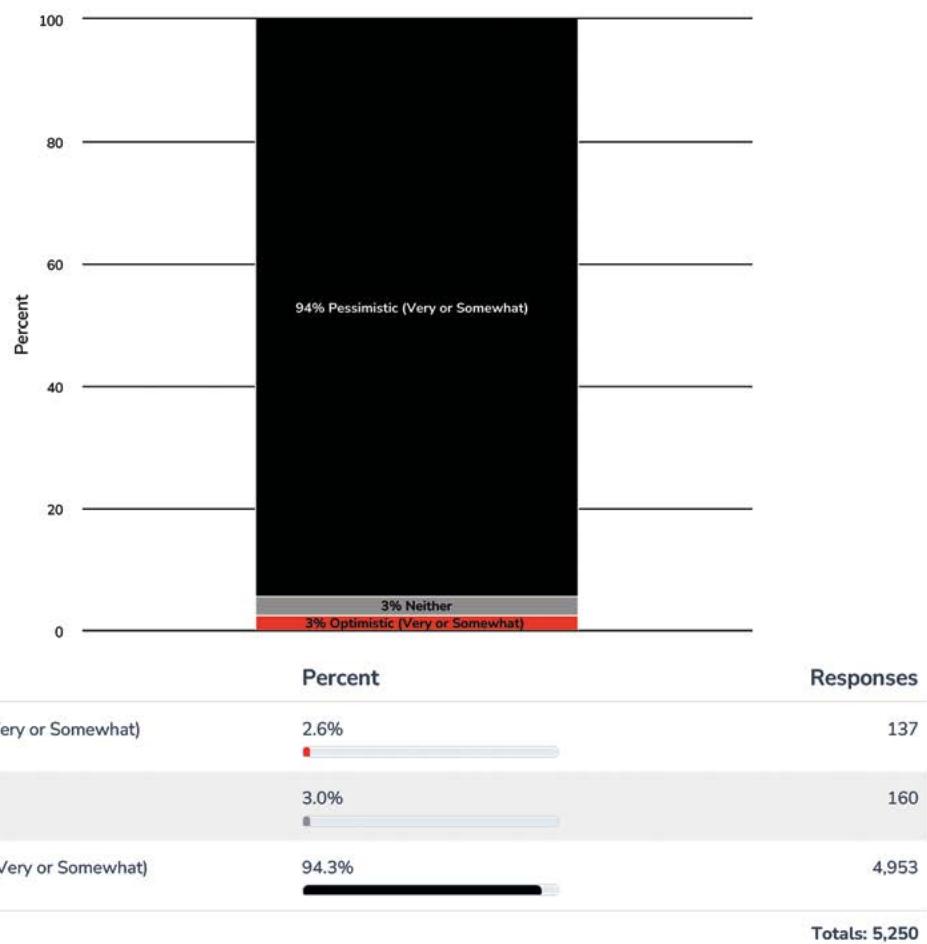
8. School Leader—Considering the return to work after the recent strike, I feel that I have been able to re-establish a positive and productive rhythm in my school.



Value	Percent	Responses
Agree (Strongly and Agree)	47.5%	248
Neither	15.9%	83
Disagree (Strongly and Disagree)	36.6%	191
Totals: 522		

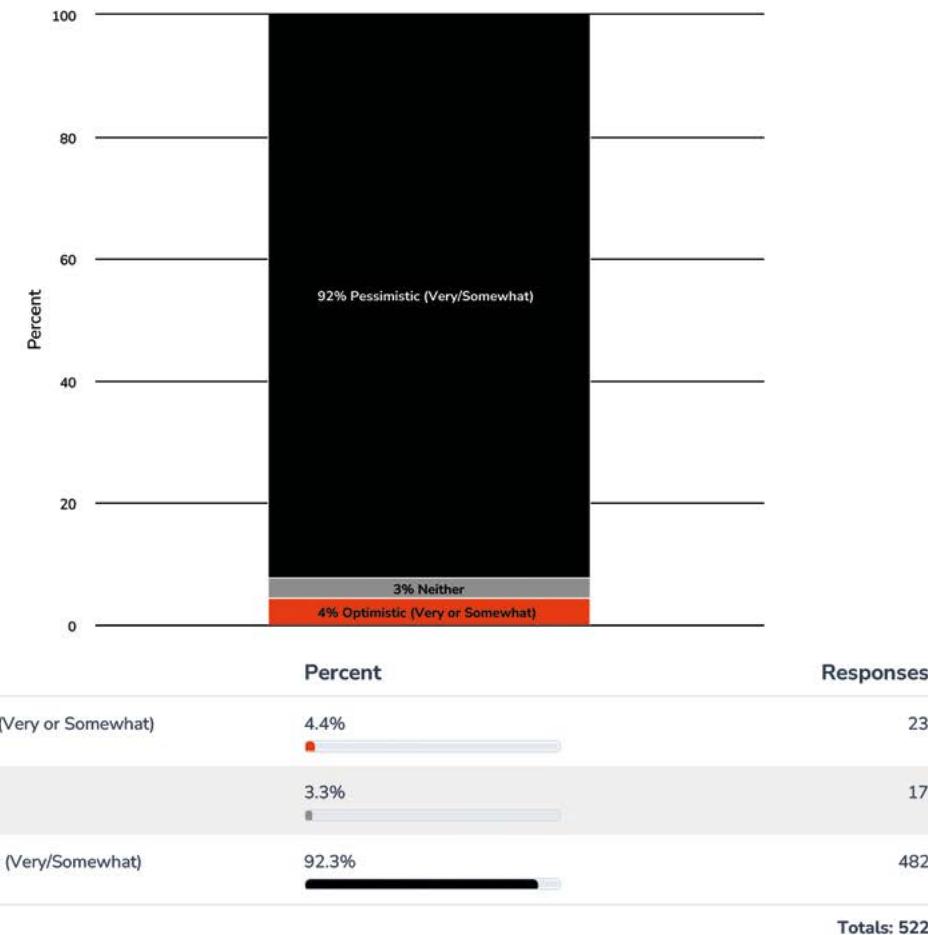
9. Teacher — How optimistic or pessimistic are you about the future of the teaching profession in Alberta?

Filter: #2 Question “Your current assignment” has one of the following answers (“Classroom teacher”; “Online learning or combined online/offline teacher”; “Substitute teacher”)

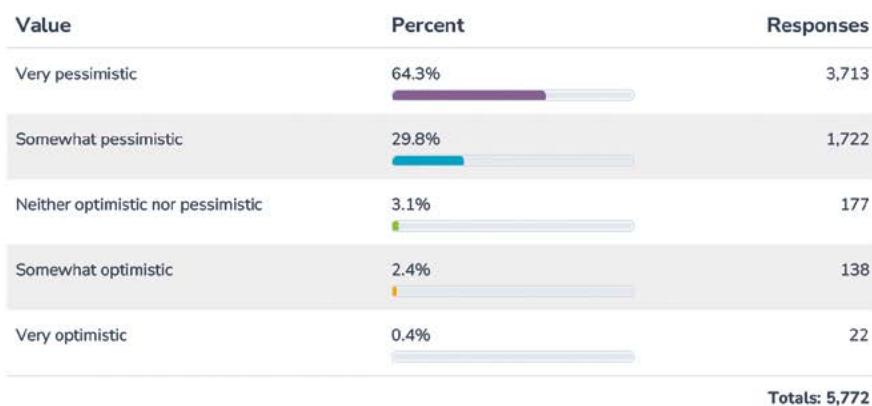


10. School Leader — How optimistic or pessimistic are you about the future of the teaching profession in Alberta?

Filter: #2 Question "Your current assignment" has one of the following answers ("School leader only"; "Combined school leadership and classroom duties"; "Central office")

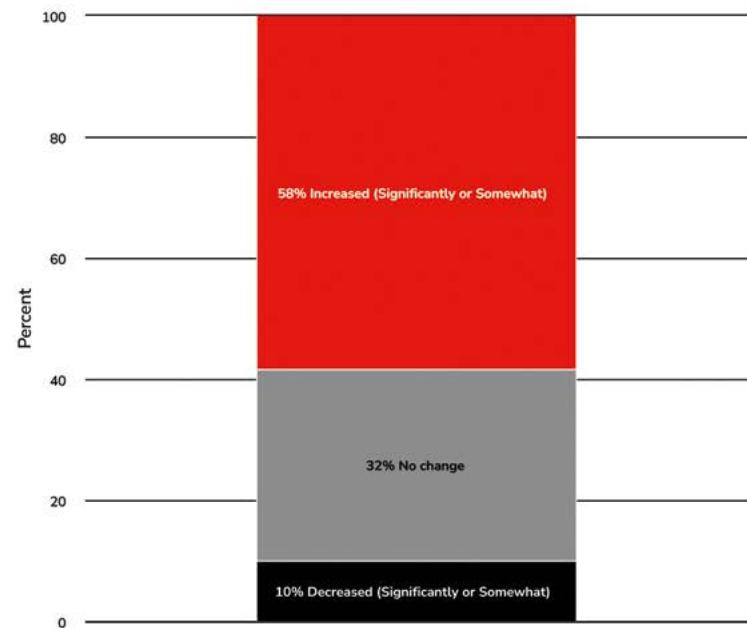


11. Granular—Both Teacher and School Leader—How optimistic or pessimistic are you about the future of the teaching profession in Alberta?



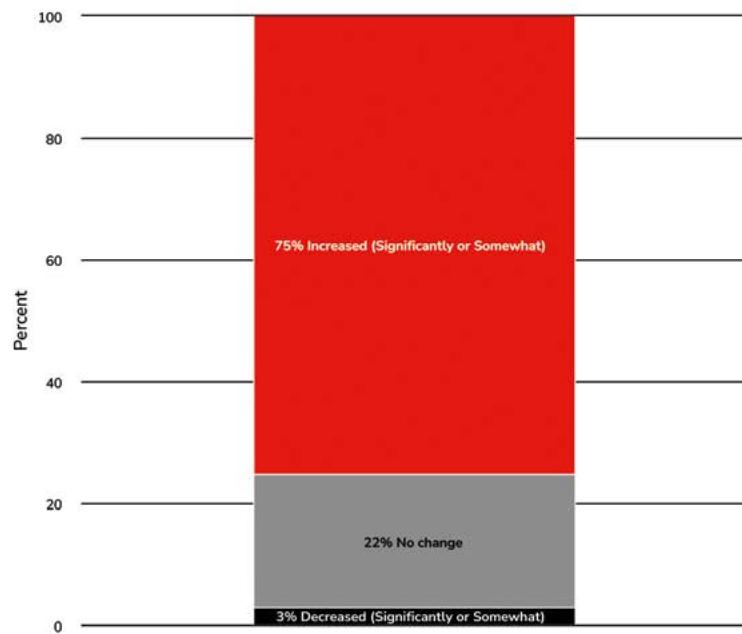
Level II—Classroom and School Context

12. Teachers—The size of the class you teach



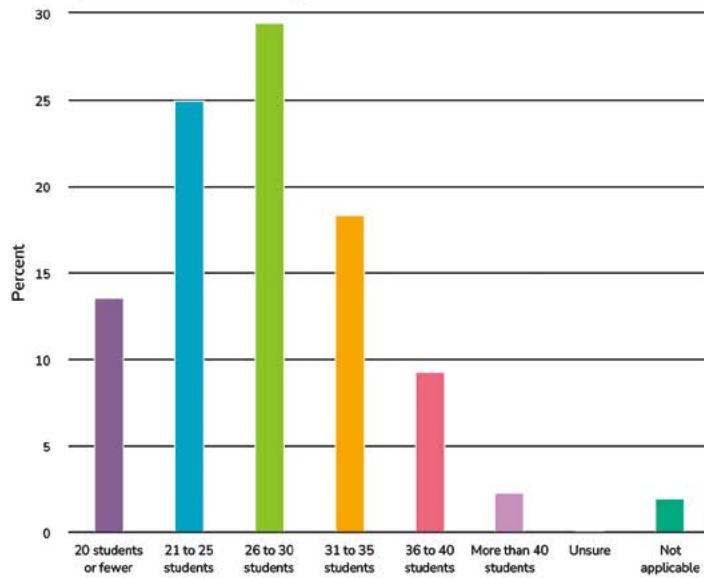
Value	Percent	Responses
Decreased (Significantly or Somewhat)	10.2%	556
No change	31.5%	1,711
Increased (Significantly or Somewhat)	58.3%	3,167
Totals: 5,434		

13. Principal only—The overall class sizes in your school



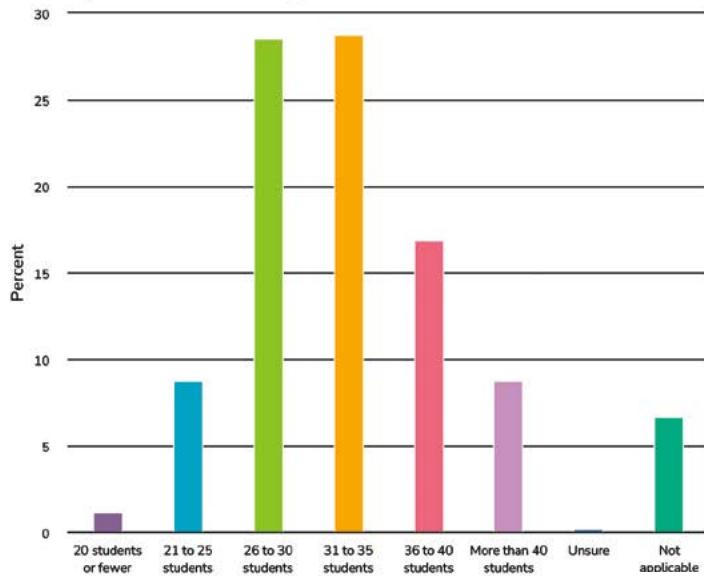
Value	Percent	Responses
Decreased (Significantly or Somewhat)	3.0%	9
No change	21.9%	65
Increased (Significantly or Somewhat)	75.1%	223
Totals: 297		

14. The size of the largest class that you are now teaching:



Value	Percent	Responses
20 students or fewer	13.6%	712
21 to 25 students	25.0%	1,310
26 to 30 students	29.5%	1,548
31 to 35 students	18.4%	964
36 to 40 students	9.3%	489
More than 40 students	2.3%	119
Unsure	0.1%	5
Not applicable	2.0%	103
Totals: 5,250		

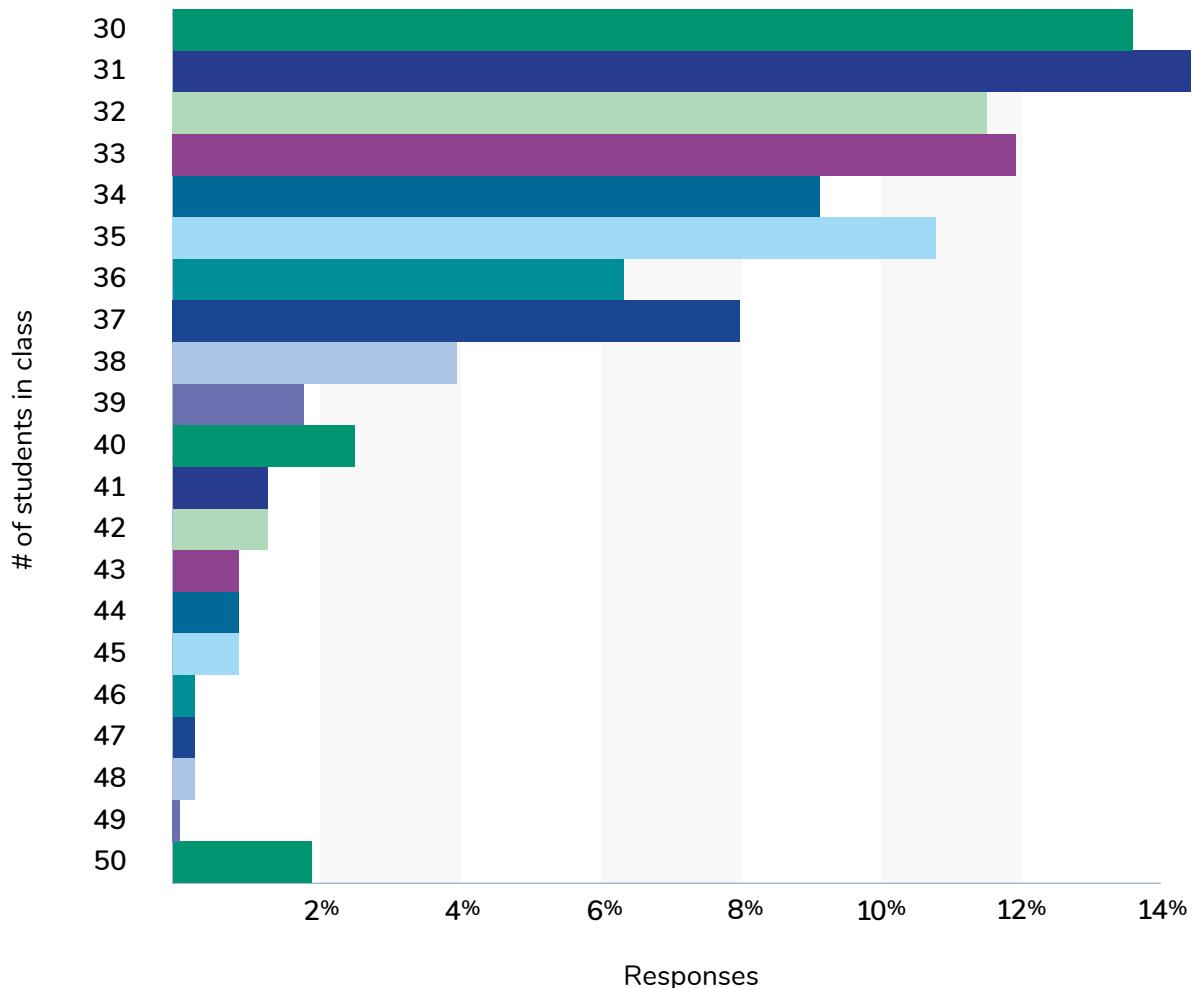
15. School Leader—The size of the largest class within my school:



Value	Percent	Responses
20 students or fewer	1.2%	6
21 to 25 students	8.8%	46
26 to 30 students	28.6%	149
31 to 35 students	28.8%	150
36 to 40 students	16.9%	88
More than 40 students	8.8%	46
Unsure	0.2%	1
Not applicable	6.7%	35

Totals: 521

16. How many students are in your largest class with 30 or more students?



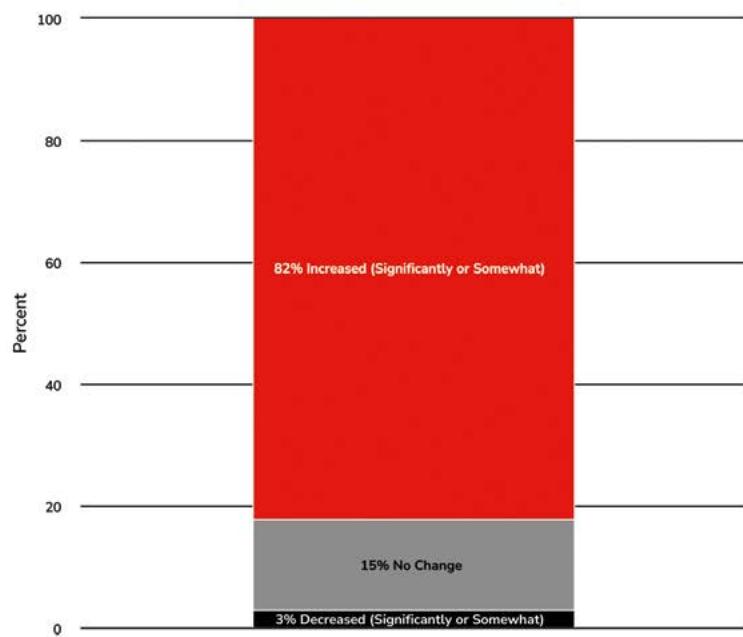
17. In which program of study is the largest class with over 30 students?

Program	Per cent	Responses
Primary grades (4–6)	14%	259
English Language Arts (7–9)	9.2%	171
Science (10 to 12)	8.5%	158
English Language Arts (10–12)	8.3%	154
Mathematics (7–9)	6.9%	128
Physical Education	6.5%	120
Mathematics (10–12)	6.4%	118
Social Studies (10–12)	5%	92
Primary grades (K–3)	4.3%	79
Other	3.7%	68
Social Studies (7–9)	3.6%	67
Science (7–9)	3.2%	59
Career and Technology Studies	2.8%	51
Fine Arts (7–9)	2.5%	47
Career and Technology Foundations	2.3%	42
Fine Arts (10–12)	2.1%	39
Fine Arts (1–6)	1.5%	27
Social Sciences (10–12)	1.3%	24
English as a Second Language (7–9)	1%	18
Health and Life Skills	1%	18
Career and Life Management	.9%	16

Program	Per cent	Responses
Locally Developed Courses	.9%	16
French as a Second Language (7–9)	.8%	16
French Language Arts (M–6)	.5%	15
English Language Arts (K–6)	.4%	9
French as a Second Language (10–12)	.4%	8
English as a Second Language (10–12)	.3%	7
French as a Second Language (4–6)	.3%	5
Mathematics (K to 6)	.3%	5
Environmental and Outdoor Education	.2%	4
Off-campus Education	.2%	3
Science (K–6)	.2%	3
English as a Second Language (K–6)	.1%	2
Information and Communication Technology	.1%	2
International Languages (10–12)	.1%	2
Knowledge and Employability	.1%	2
Aboriginal Studies	.1%	1
Ethics	.1%	1
International Languages (7–9)	.1%	1
Primary grades (K–3)	.1%	1
Social Studies (K–6)	.1%	1
Special Projects 10-20-30	.1%	1

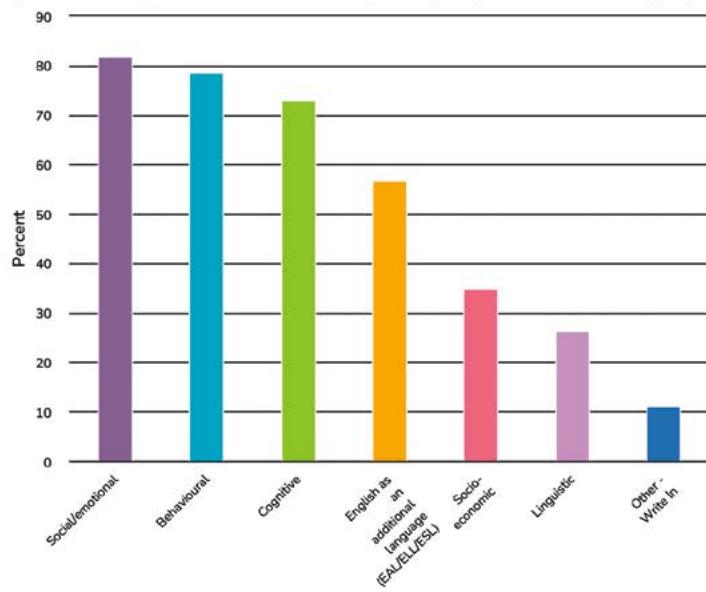
Level II—Complexity and Weighted Index

18. The complexity and diversity of student needs in your classes (eg, socio-economic, linguistic, behavioural, cognitive, social/emotional)



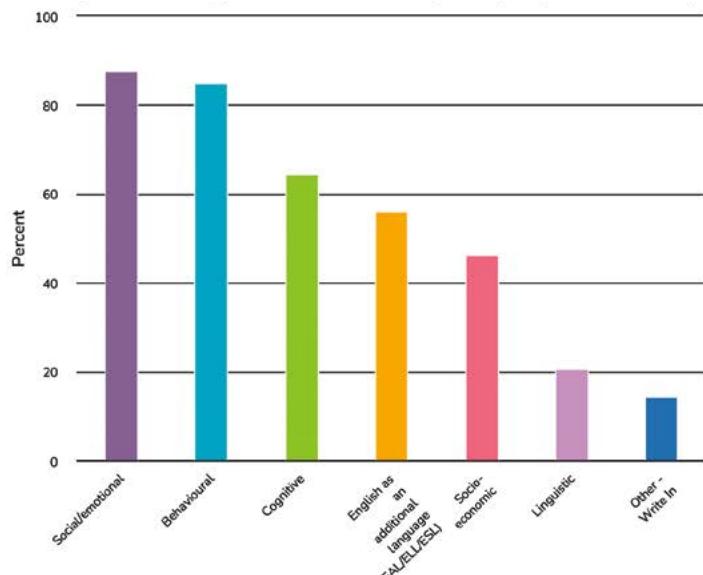
Value	Percent	Responses
Decreased (Significantly or Somewhat)	3.0%	165
No Change	14.8%	805
Increased (Significantly or Somewhat)	82.2%	4,467
Totals: 5,437		

19. Teacher—In what areas do you see the greatest level of complexity in your classroom(s)? (Please check all that apply).



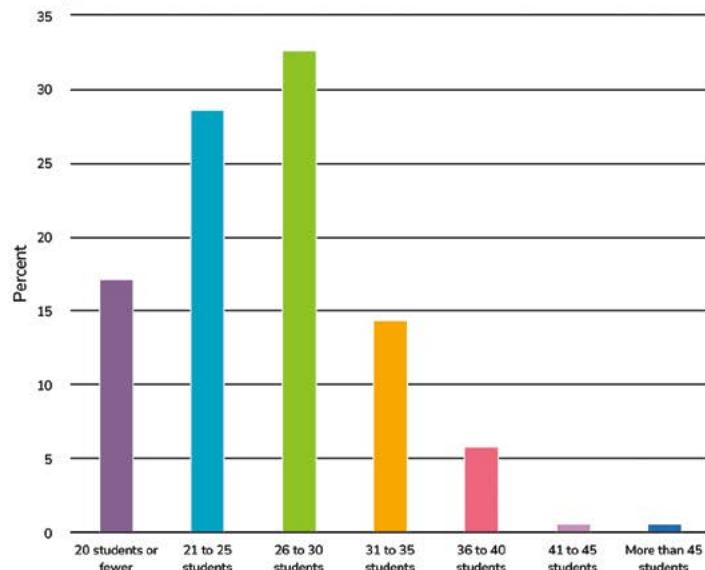
Value	Percent	Responses
Social/emotional	81.9%	4,301
Behavioural	78.8%	4,140
Cognitive	73.2%	3,843
English as an additional language (EAL/ELL/ESL)	56.9%	2,988
Socio-economic	35.1%	1,844
Linguistic	26.5%	1,389
Other - Write In	11.3%	595

20. School Leader—In what areas do you see the greatest level of complexity in your school? (Please check all that apply).



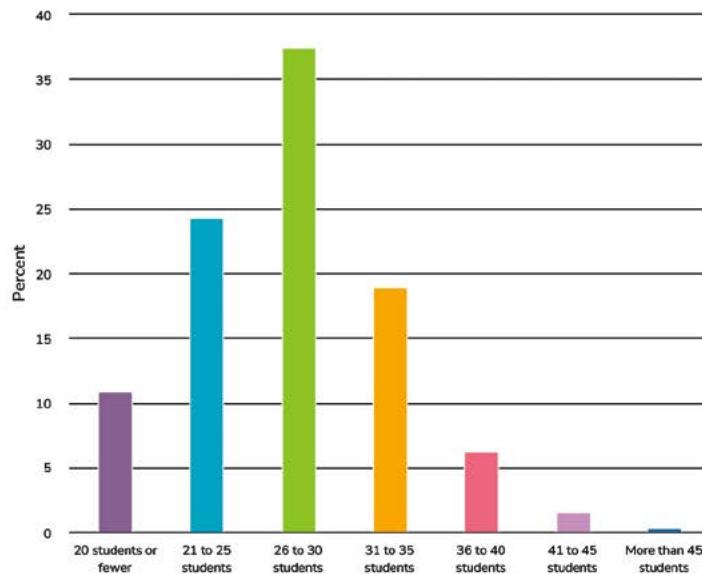
Value	Percent	Responses
Social/emotional	87.7%	455
Behavioural	85.0%	441
Cognitive	64.7%	336
English as an additional language (EAL/ELL/ESL)	56.1%	291
Socio-economic	46.4%	241
Linguistic	20.6%	107
Other - Write In	14.5%	75

21. Teacher—Thinking about the most complex class that you are currently teaching, what is the overall class size in that classroom (total number of students)?



Value	Percent	Responses
20 students or fewer	17.2%	898
21 to 25 students	28.7%	1,498
26 to 30 students	32.7%	1,710
31 to 35 students	14.4%	750
36 to 40 students	5.8%	305
41 to 45 students	0.6%	33
More than 45 students	0.6%	31
Totals: 5,225		

22. School Leader—Thinking about the most complex class in your school, what is the overall class size in that classroom (total number of students)?



Value	Percent	Responses
20 students or fewer	10.9%	55
21 to 25 students	24.3%	123
26 to 30 students	37.5%	190
31 to 35 students	19.0%	96
36 to 40 students	6.3%	32
41 to 45 students	1.6%	8
More than 45 students	0.4%	2
Totals: 506		

Level II—Complexity and Weighted Index Analysis

OVERVIEW OF THE PERSONALIZED CLASSROOM COMPLEXITY INDEX

This section presents findings from the Personalized Classroom Complexity Index, a measure designed to capture the actual instructional load Alberta teachers experience by accounting for both class size and the diversity and intensity of student needs. Results are based on the average of more than 5,000 respondent submissions, each reflecting the teacher's most complex classroom assignment.

The weighted complexity score represents the equivalent number of students in that classroom after applying weighting factors to different categories of complex student needs. These categories, each weighted with a student equivalency to reflect differing instructional, behavioural and support demands, include the following:

- Typical learners (1.0 student equivalency)
- Students receiving targeted or individualized supports such as IPP/ISP/BSP/SIS (1.5 student equivalency)
- Students with high-incidence/low-cost exceptionalities, including mild to moderate exceptionalities, English language learners, francisation or behavioural designations (1.5 student equivalency)
- Students with low-incidence/high-cost exceptionalities, such as severe or multiple disabilities or complex medical or behavioural needs (2.0 student equivalency)
- Refugee or newcomer students (under two years in Canada) (1.5 student equivalency)
- Gifted students (1.25 student equivalency)

The weighted complexity score was then calculated by multiplying the number of students reported in each category by its assigned weighting factor and then summing the results. This approach provides a more accurate and meaningful picture of classroom realities than enrolment counts alone as it captures the cumulative impact of diverse learning, behavioural, medical and social-emotional needs that significantly affect instructional time, emotional labour, safety and classroom management.

An Alberta Classroom Complexity Calculator (Weighted Index) has been created to illustrate how classroom complexity is reflected in a teacher's real instructional load, as measured by class size combined with the full range and intensity of student needs that require additional planning, supports and coordination with educational assistants, specialists and parents/guardians.

Please note that the calculator and any personalized score accessed through the link below are presented as a demonstration tool for illustrative purposes only. The information entered is not being collected or used for Association research; it is intended solely as an online tool to show how classroom complexity can be quantified. The calculator can be accessed online: abteach.cc/ComplexityCalculator.

Classroom Complexity by Division (Div.)

Note: Identification of exceptionalities is an incremental process that often begins more formally throughout Division 1 (Kindergarten to Grade 3).

- Div. 1 Kindergarten to Grade 3: 35 students (weighted complexity score averages)
- Div. 2 Grades 4 to 6: 37 students (weighted complexity score averages)
- Div. 3 Grades 7 to 9: 39 students (weighted complexity score averages)
- Div. 4 Grades 10 to 12: 40 students (weighted complexity score averages)
- Online/blended: 50 students (weighted complexity score averages)

Provincial mean: 38 students weighted complexity average

Teacher Assignment Amplifies Complexity

Multirole responsibilities and teaching conditions (eg, online, split grades, multicourse loads) amplify complexity. School leaders, substitutes and online instructors appear to also report higher levels of complexity.

Experience Does Not Reduce Complexity

There is no meaningful linear correlation between years of teaching experience and reports of classroom complexity.

Early-, mid- and late-career teachers all report high complexity. Those respondents under age 25 reported experiencing challenges with classroom complexity. In other Association research, they are also reporting struggles that are leading to a declining sense of self-efficacy (confidence and competence).

Regional Variations

Data show that the urban and corridor school authorities in Alberta show consistently higher complexity, reflecting greater concentrations of exceptionalities, refugee and newcomer students, and diverse learning needs. Francophone respondents also reported unexpectedly high complexity in this dataset.

Classroom Complexity in Alberta Increasing Year Over Year

8 in 10 respondents reported that the complexity and diversity of student needs had increased this year over last year. The areas of greatest student complexity are as follows:

- 82 per cent social-emotional
- 79 per cent behavioural
- 73 per cent cognitive
- 57 per cent ELL/EAL
- 35 per cent socioeconomic

These trends confirm that teachers are navigating a multilayered burden of needs.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Complexity is systemically high, with pockets of moderate to severe specialized need requiring immediate, differentiated intervention.
- Weighted class complexity rises by grade level, reaching its highest levels in Grades 7–12 and in online/blended settings. However, the biggest mismatch between class size and reported complexity shows up in the elementary grades. For instance, a Grade 1 teacher might have 21 students but report a weighted complexity equivalent to 35 students, while a Grade 11 teacher might have 38 students and report a complexity equivalent to 40. This indicates that the complexity burden is disproportionately higher in the early grades relative to actual class size.

A factor contributing to this early-grade “hidden load” is the change to Alberta’s Program Unit Funding (PUF), which was removed for kindergarten-aged students beginning in the 2020/21 school year, thus shifting supports and increasing pressure on classrooms. Those cohorts are now in the upper elementary grades, which may help explain why complexity outpaces headcount most sharply in the earlier years.

- Early-career teachers are vulnerable, but high complexity spans all career stages.
- Regional disparities in Alberta will require a nuanced-response model.

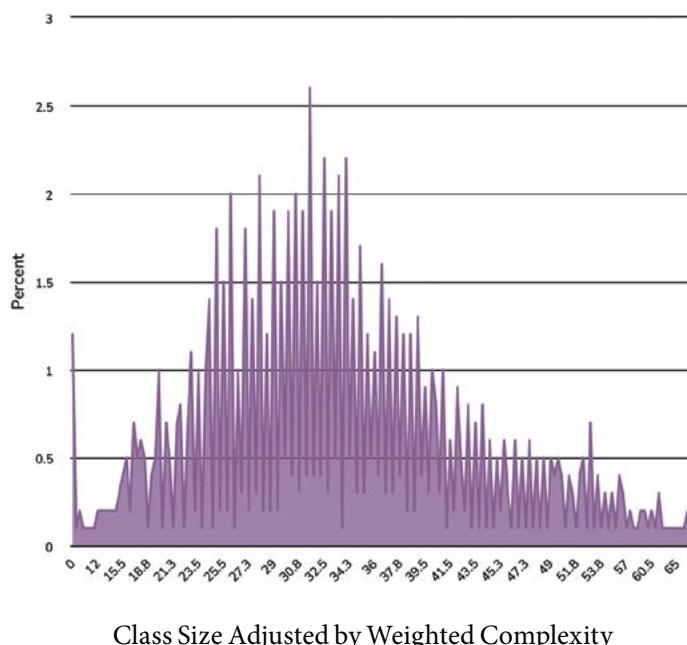
What This Data Tells Us About Classroom Complexity in Alberta

While class size in a teacher's most complex class is a major driver of workload, the complexity and diversity of needs in that class has an even greater impact. Variations in complexity of needs create demands that extend beyond traditional instruction and affect instructional planning time, emotional labour, safety management and specialist coordination. These combinations have been grouped into four categories and are listed below in order of frequency based on each of the 5000+ respondents' weighting. This drives complexity far more than total class size or teacher experience.

Complexity across our public schools is not the result of teacher efficacy, or inadequate teacher preparation or inexperience. Instead, it is a structural phenomenon, arising from the concentration of diverse and high-needs learners in large classes, multilevel system pressures (school resources, staffing, directives), rising rates of behavioural, emotional, linguistic and cognitive needs, and uneven distribution of supports across regions and schools. Addressing complexity therefore requires targeted staffing, specialized supports and funding models aligned to student composition rather than enrolment alone.

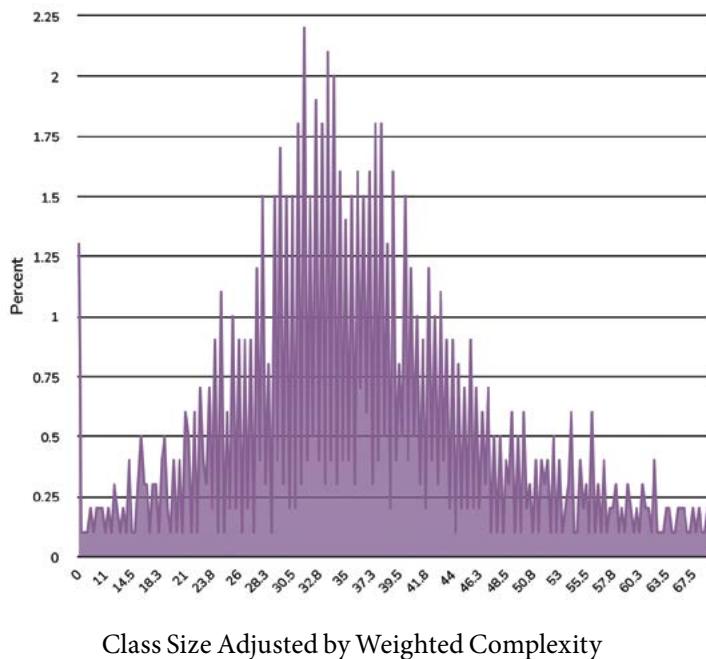
23. Kindergarten to Grade 3 (Division I) Only — Weighted Complexity Index Calculation (Most Complex Class)

Filter: #4 Question "What grade levels are you currently teaching? (Please check all that apply)" has one of the following answers ("ECS/kindergarten"; "Grade 1"; "Grade 2"; "Grade 3")



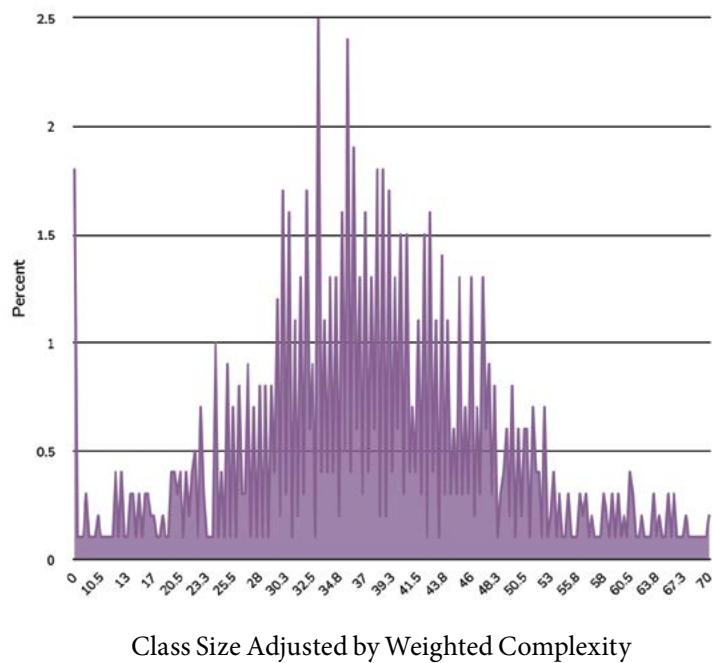
24. Grades 4 to 6 (Division II) Only — Weighted Complexity Index Calculation (Most Complex Class)

Filter: #4 Question "What grade levels are you currently teaching? (Please check all that apply)" has one of the following answers ("Grade 4"; "Grade 5"; "Grade 6")



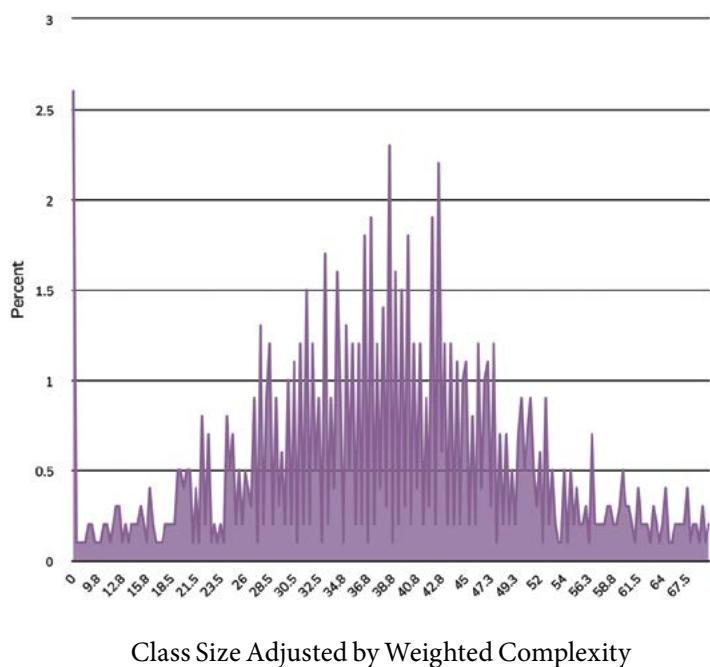
25. Grades 7 to 9 (Division III) Only - Weighted Complexity Index Calculation (Most Complex Class)

Filter: #4 Question “What grade levels are you currently teaching? (Please check all that apply)” has one of the following answers (“Grade 7”, “Grade 8”, “Grade 9”)

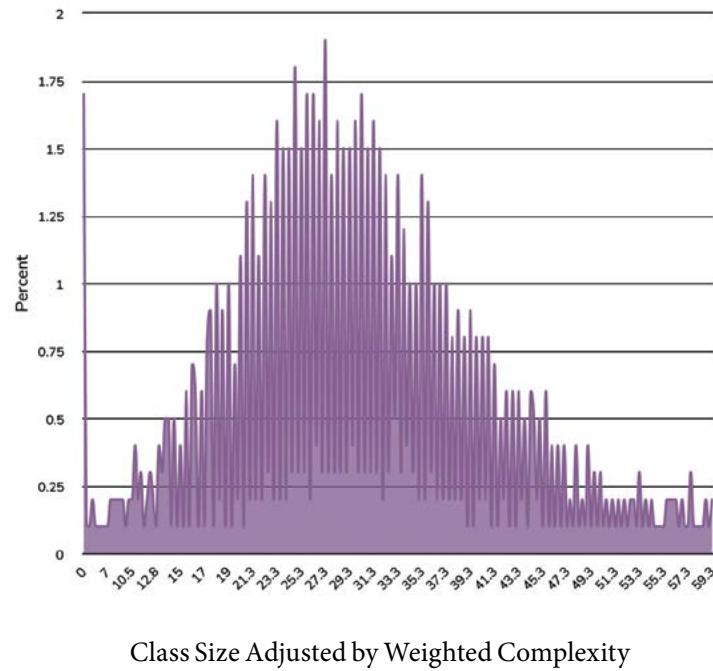


26. Grades 10 to 12 (Division IV) Only — Weighted Complexity Index Calculation (Most Complex Class)

Filter: #4 Question “What grade levels are you currently teaching? (Please check all that apply)” has one of the following answers (“Grade 10”; “Grade 11”; “Grade 12”)



27. Weighted Complexity Index Calculation — Most Complex Class (Overall K-12 system)



ANALYSIS OF PATTERNS WITHIN PERSONALIZED CLASSROOM COMPLEXITY INDEX

The Personalized Classroom Complexity Index highlights the cumulative and layered nature of student needs in Alberta classrooms. While a portion of students are identified as typical learners, data shows that most classrooms include significant numbers of students requiring targeted or individualized supports, those with high or severe complexity needs, English language learners, refugee or newcomer students and gifted students. As classroom size increases, so does overall complexity, with teachers frequently responsible for supporting multiple categories of need simultaneously. Notably, classrooms with 20 or more students often include a mix of students across several weighted categories, significantly increasing instructional, behavioural and emotional demands.

Complexity 1. Students Receiving Targeted or Individualized Supports (IPP/ISP/BSP/SIS)

This group reflects students with documented and significant learning, behavioural or developmental needs who require sustained and targeted support. Their programming often includes structured and individualized interventions:

- Formal individualized plans
- Frequent instructional adaptations
- Ongoing progress monitoring
- Additional adults or specialists in the room

Complexity 2. High-Incidence/Low-Cost Exceptionalities (Mild/Moderate Needs)

This includes students with mild-to-moderate exceptionalities, ELL/EAL needs, behaviour designations or learning profiles that require regular but not intensive support. While each student's needs are manageable individually, the combined load can significantly increase complexity. These students often need the following:

- Daily adjustments to instruction
- Trauma-informed strategies
- Collaboration with specialists
- Differentiated tasks or scaffolding

Complexity 3. Low-Incidence/High-Cost Exceptionalities (Severe or Multiple Needs)

This group represents the highest level of complexity and resource demand. These are multicode students requiring high levels of support due to significant cognitive, behavioural, physical or medical needs. They typically require the following:

- Intensive intervention throughout the day
- Multidisciplinary team involvement (occupational therapists, physiotherapists, speech language pathologists, psychologists, behaviour specialists)
- Safety planning and environmental modifications
- Substantial direct adult support

Complexity 4. Refugee/Newcomer Students (Under Two Years in Canada)

These students bring additional linguistic, academic and psychosocial needs. With these students, the demands on instructional planning, differentiation and emotional support increase due to the following:

- Interrupted or limited prior schooling
- Early stages of English language acquisition
- Experiences of trauma or displacement
- Integration and settlement challenges

Class size in a teacher's most complex class is a major driver of workload; however, class complexity and diversity of student needs appear has an even greater impact as they create demands that extend far beyond traditional instruction and impact instructional planning time, emotional labour, safety management and specialist coordination.

These findings underscore that classroom complexity cannot be addressed through class size alone. They reinforce the need for funding, staffing models and policy decisions that account for both the number of students and the extent of support required to meet their needs effectively. The following combinations, in order of frequency, based on the respondents' individual weighting, drives complexity far more than total class size or teacher experience.

28. Personalized Classroom Complexity Index

	No of students in this category	1																		
		student	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
Typical learner (no extra supports) (Weighting factor 1.0) Count Row %	298 5.6%	62 1.2%	111 2.1%	159 3.0%	172 3.2%	271 5.1%	198 3.7%	203 3.8%	292 5.5%	191 3.6%	510 9.6%	181 3.4%	306 5.7%	211 4.0%	233 4.4%	343 6.4%	201 3.8%	172 3.2%	219 4.1%	118 2.2%
Students receiving (or who should be receiving) targeted or individualized supports (IPP/ISP/BSP/SIS) (Weighting factor 1.5) Count Row %	65 1.2%	149 2.7%	365 6.5%	499 8.9%	676 12.1%	727 13.0%	635 11.3%	467 8.3%	511 9.1%	258 4.6%	437 7.8%	145 2.6%	186 3.3%	92 1.6%	86 1.5%	120 2.1%	49 0.9%	34 0.6%	21 0.4%	14 0.2%
High-incidence / low-cost exceptionality (mild/moderate exceptionality, ELL, francisation, behavioural designation) (Weighting factor 1.5) Count Row %	296 5.5%	425 7.8%	687 12.7%	603 11.1%	564 10.4%	542 10.0%	412 7.6%	246 4.5%	313 5.8%	177 3.3%	244 4.5%	109 2.0%	145 2.7%	87 1.6%	119 2.2%	106 2.0%	72 1.3%	44 0.8%	59 1.1%	28 0.5%
Low-incidence / high-cost exceptionality (severe or multiple disability, complex medical or behavioural needs) (Weighting factor 2.0) Count Row %	938 18.3%	1,325 25.9%	1,222 23.9%	662 12.9%	358 7.0%	221 4.3%	108 2.1%	62 1.2%	87 1.7%	30 0.6%	50 1.0%	9 0.2%	15 0.3%	6 0.1%	7 0.1%	1 0.0%	1 0.0%	1 0.0%	0 0.0%	
Refugee / newcomer (under 2 years in Canada) (Weighting factor 1.5) Count Row %	1,771 37.0%	1,044 21.8%	849 17.7%	420 8.8%	239 5.0%	181 3.8%	85 1.8%	46 1.0%	45 0.9%	11 0.2%	36 0.8%	9 0.2%	11 0.2%	4 0.1%	3 0.1%	13 0.3%	3 0.1%	4 0.1%	5 0.1%	0 0.0%
Gifted (Code 80) (Weighting factor 1.25) Count Row %	3,060 70.0%	775 17.7%	339 7.8%	109 2.5%	37 0.8%	22 0.5%	8 0.2%	4 0.1%	5 0.1%	0 0.0%	4 0.1%	0 0.0%	2 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 0.0%	0 0.0%	1 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	

Teacher Voice: Verbatim Descriptions of Complexity

The following select verbatim quotations from respondents illustrate the depth and urgency of classroom complexity across the province. Together, they show the profound structural, behavioural, medical, linguistic and instructional pressures facing Alberta teachers.

Foundational Skill Gaps and Developmental Delays

- “Kids who’ve never held a pencil or crayon before coming to school. Kids who’ve never used scissors. Kids who can’t sit on the floor without flopping over.”
- “Students foundational skills (self-care such as dressing, fine motor) and development (speech) are lacking.”

Severe and Multiple Specialized Needs

- “15 out of 60 students diagnosed with severe needs.”
- “Medically complex … severe medical and physical disability.”

Extreme Behaviour and Safety Concerns

- “Violence … to myself and other staff members.”
- “Students with ASD, brain trauma, anxiety and ADHD are represented in all of my classes.”

Newcomer and EAL/ELL Complexity

- “A student is EAL with low receptive and expressive language … many without codes or diagnosis.”
- “Attendance, immigration arrivals mid-year and all year.”

Learning Gaps and Academic Range

- “Widespread low literacy abilities … almost a third of my class is more than two grade levels below.”
- “Academic gaps … four of my Grade 2s are at kindergarten level.”

Multigrade, High-Load Teaching Assignments

- “Six grades in one classroom.”
- “I teach Science 20 and 30 at the same time … plus multiple other core courses. I am now on medical leave—it was too much.”

Overburdened Staffing and Lack of Supports

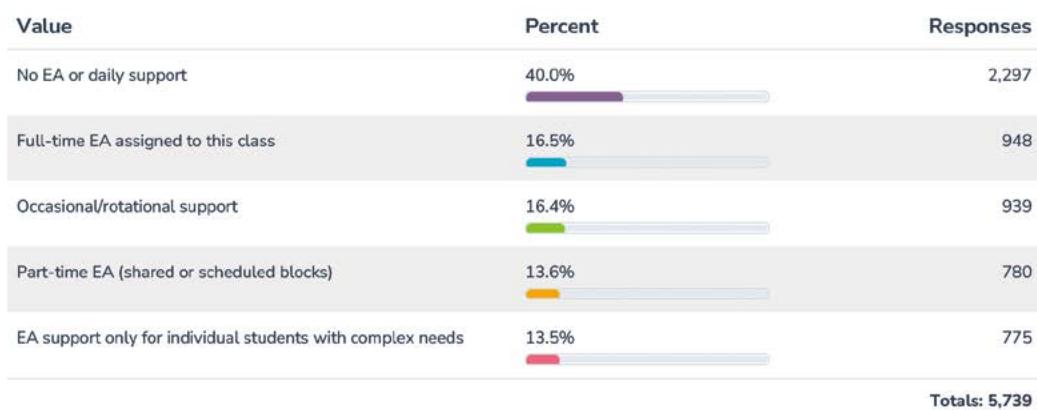
- “Zero EA support and working 12 to16-hour days.”
- “I was told I would have an EA … one has not been hired yet.”

Online/Blended Instruction Pressures

- “I am an online teacher and teach each high school science and math course … 23 courses … ~80 students. This is the greatest complexity.”

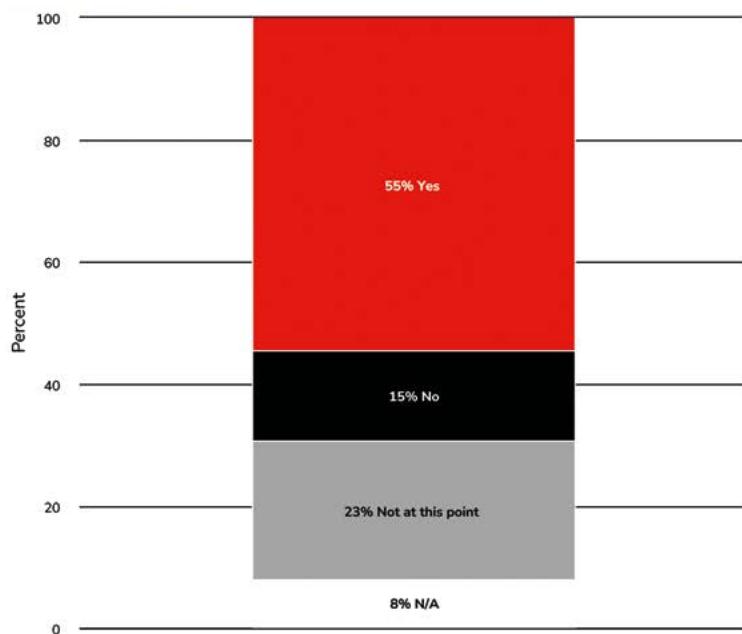
Level II—Supports (Educational Assistants or EAs)

29. What level of access to an educational assistant (EA) or other daily support is available in your most complex classroom?



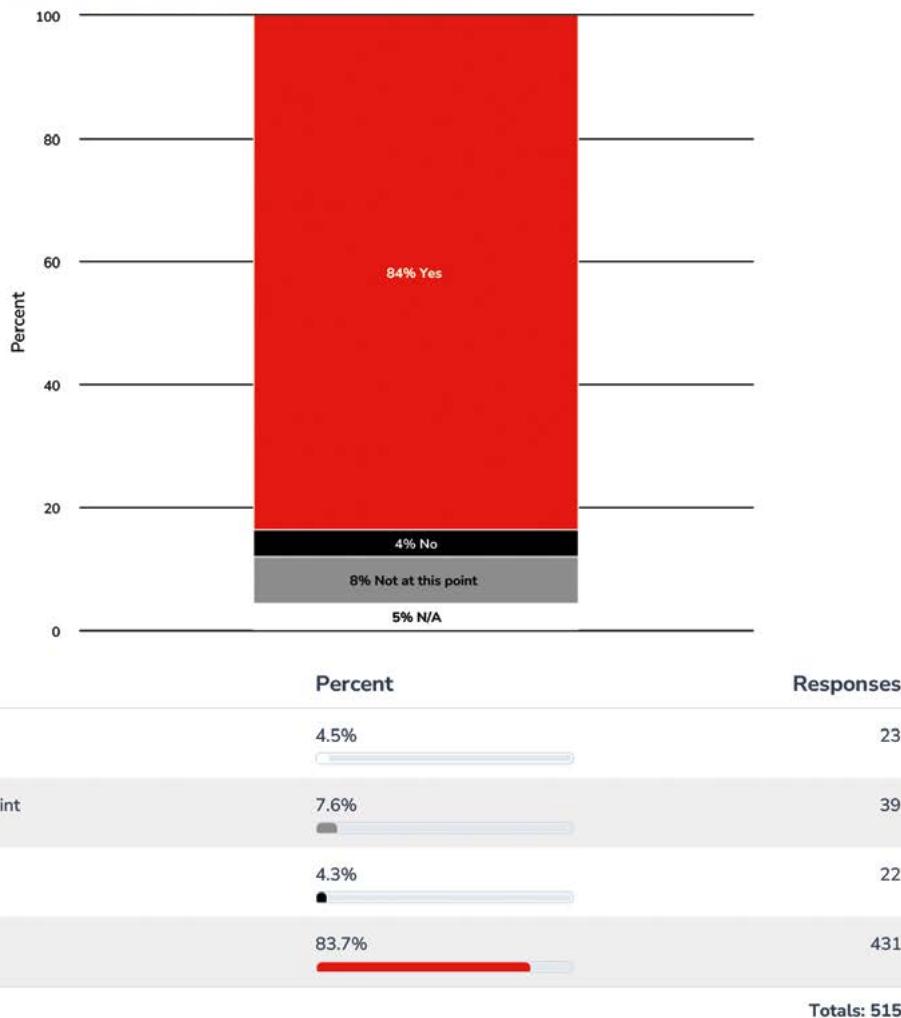
Level II—Assessments (Speech Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and/or Psycho-Educational Assessments)

30. Teacher — Have you requested speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy and/or psycho-educational assessments for any of your students this year?

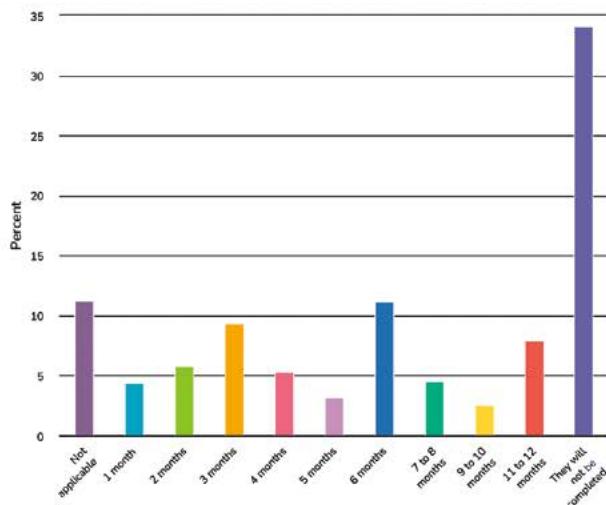


Value	Percent	Responses
N/A	8.1%	426
Not at this point	22.6%	1,184
No	14.7%	772
Yes	54.5%	2,854
Totals: 5,236		

31. School Leader — Have you requested (or approved) speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy and/or psycho-educational assessments for any of the students in your school this year?



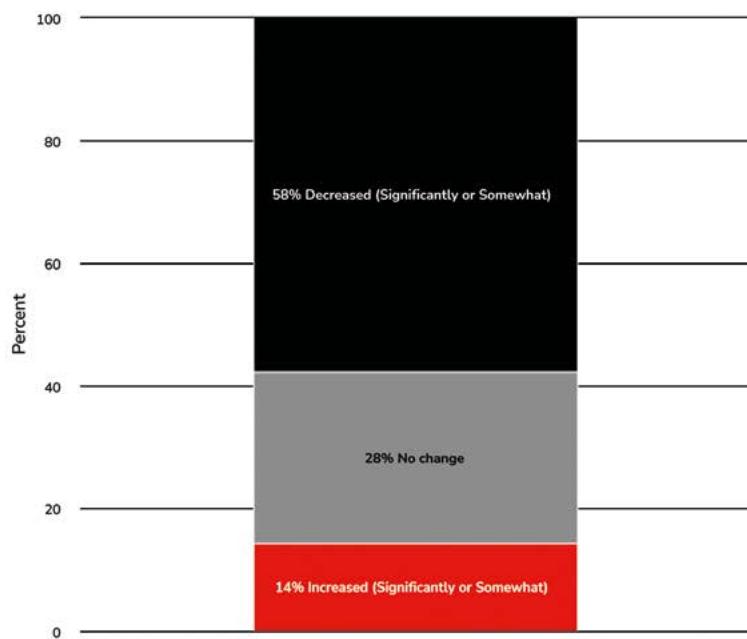
32. How long do you estimate that you will be waiting this year for these assessments of exceptionalities to be completed?



Value	Percent	Responses
Not applicable	11.3%	502
1 month	4.4%	196
2 months	5.8%	258
3 months	9.4%	419
4 months	5.4%	242
5 months	3.2%	143
6 months	11.2%	498
7 to 8 months	4.6%	206
9 to 10 months	2.6%	115
11 to 12 months	8.0%	357
They will not be completed	34.1%	1,516
Totals: 4,452		

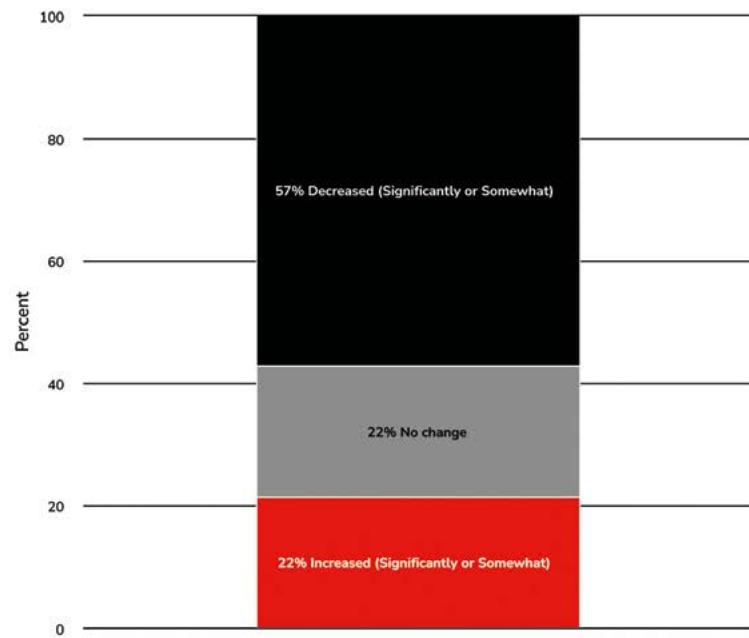
Level III—Wider School and Community Context

33. Supports for students with exceptionalities (increased or decreased) this year over last year.



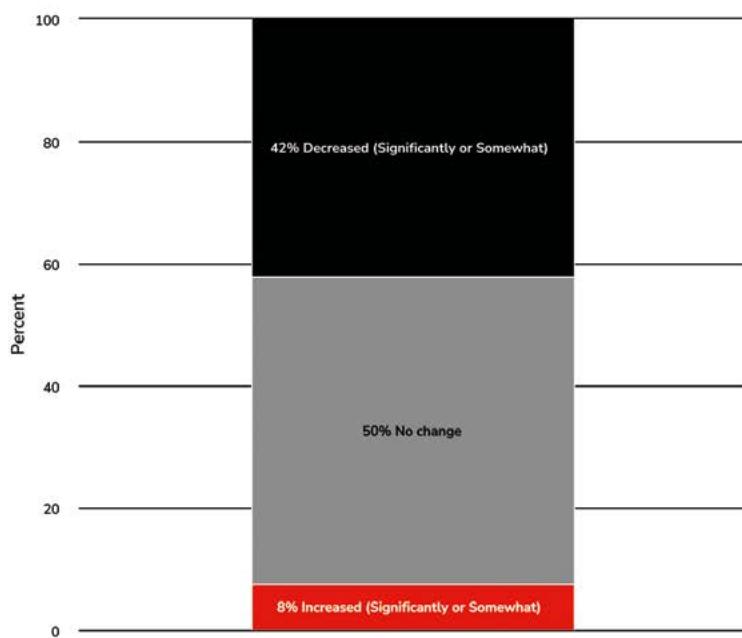
Value	Percent	Responses
Increased (Significantly or Somewhat)	14.3%	778
No change	28.1%	1,528
Decreased (Significantly or Somewhat)	57.6%	3,133
Totals: 5,439		

34. School Leader — Supports for students with exceptionalities (increased or decreased) this year over last year.



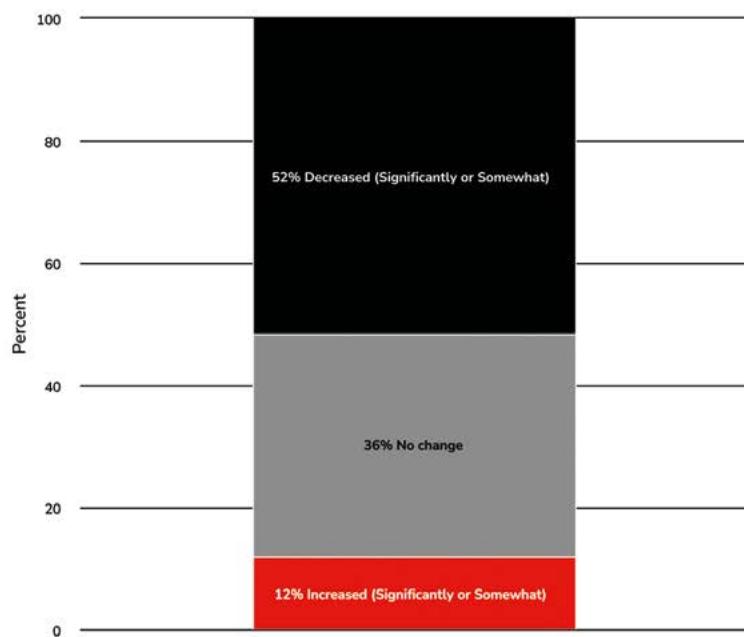
Value	Percent	Responses
Increased (Significantly or Somewhat)	21.5%	64
No change	21.5%	64
Decreased (Significantly or Somewhat)	57.0%	170
Totals: 298		

35. Teacher — Access that students and families have to mental health services (increased or decreased) this year over last year.



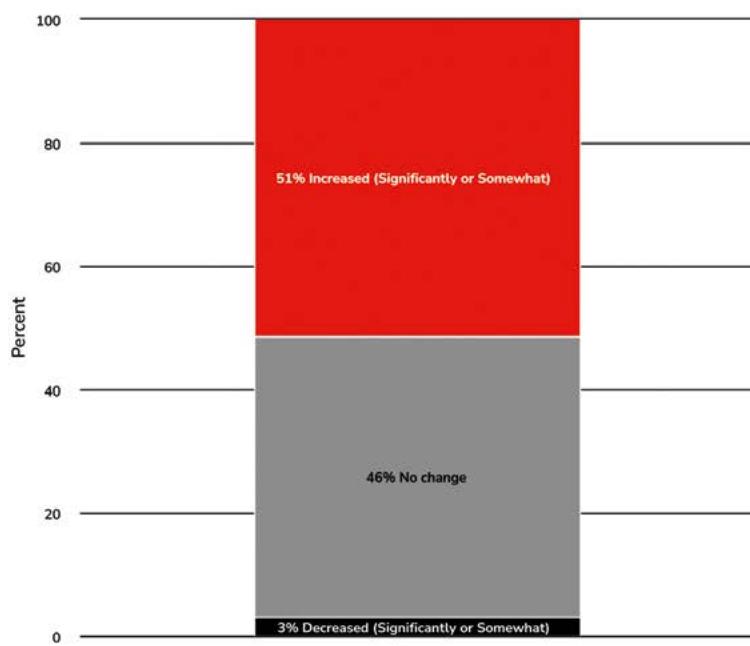
Value	Percent	Responses
Increased (Significantly or Somewhat)	7.6%	413
No change	50.3%	2,722
Decreased (Significantly or Somewhat)	42.1%	2,278
Totals: 5,413		

36. School Leader — Access that students and families have to mental health services (increased or decreased) this year over last year.



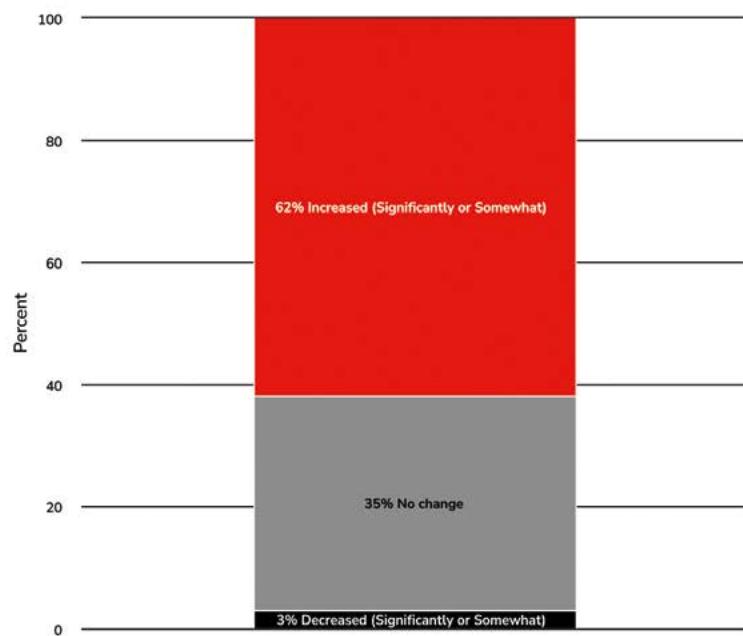
Value	Percent	Responses
Increased (Significantly or Somewhat)	12.1%	36
No change	36.4%	108
Decreased (Significantly or Somewhat)	51.5%	153
Totals: 297		

37. Teacher — Expectations to undertake standardized testing for students (increased or decreased) this year over last year.



Value	Percent	Responses
Decreased (Significantly or Somewhat)	3.2%	172
No change	45.5%	2,470
Increased (Significantly or Somewhat)	51.3%	2,781
Totals: 5,423		

38. School Leader — Expectations to undertake standardized testing for students (increased or decreased) this year over last year.



Value	Percent	Responses
Decreased (Significantly or Somewhat)	3.0%	9
No change	35.2%	105
Increased (Significantly or Somewhat)	61.7%	184
Totals: 298		

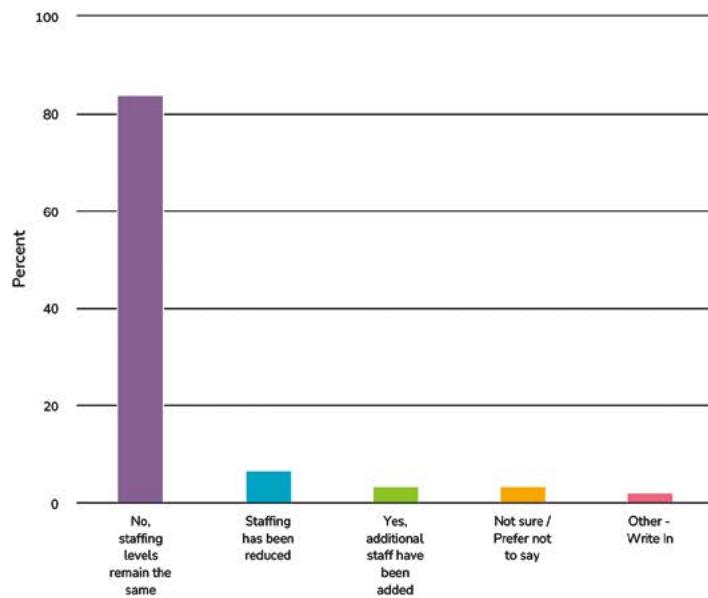
39. Teacher — Use the scale below to indicate the degree to which the following conditions have changed this school year compared with the last.

	Significantly increased	Somewhat increased	No change	Somewhat decreased	Significantly decreased	Responses
The size of your classes						
Count	1,149	2,018	1,711	478	78	5,434
Row %	21.1%	37.1%	31.5%	8.8%	1.4%	
The complexity and diversity of student needs in your classes (e.g., socio-economic, linguistic, behavioural, cognitive, social/emotional)	2,405	2,062	805	133	32	5,437
Count	44.2%	37.9%	14.8%	2.4%	0.6%	
Row %						
Supports for students with exceptionalities						
Count	314	464	1,528	1,481	1,652	5,439
Row %	5.8%	8.5%	28.1%	27.2%	30.4%	
Requirements to supervise and undertake other assigned tasks						
Count	1,264	2,121	1,941	83	25	5,434
Row %	23.3%	39.0%	35.7%	1.5%	0.5%	
Access that students and families have to mental health services						
Count	106	307	2,722	1,411	867	5,413
Row %	2.0%	5.7%	50.3%	26.1%	16.0%	
Expectations to undertake standardized testing for students						
Count	1,250	1,531	2,470	123	49	5,423
Row %	23.0%	28.2%	45.5%	2.3%	0.9%	
Expectations to report student progress to parents						
Count	969	1,777	2,446	227	9	5,428
Row %	17.9%	32.7%	45.1%	4.2%	0.2%	
My school board creates a positive environment for my teaching and learning conditions.						
Count	98	563	2,908	1,227	632	5,428
Row %	1.8%	10.4%	53.6%	22.6%	11.6%	
Positive working relationships with parents/guardians						
Count	73	773	3,377	1,011	196	5,430
Row %	1.3%	14.2%	62.2%	18.6%	3.6%	
Totals						
Total Responses						5,439

40. School Leader — Use the scale below to indicate the degree to which the following conditions have changed this school year compared with the last.

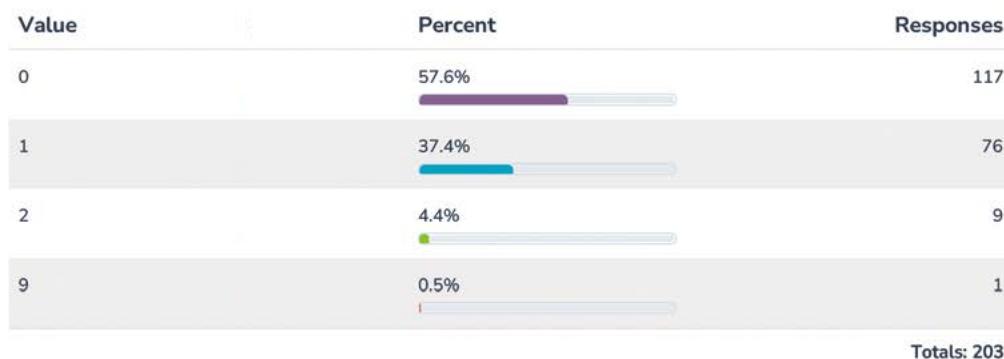
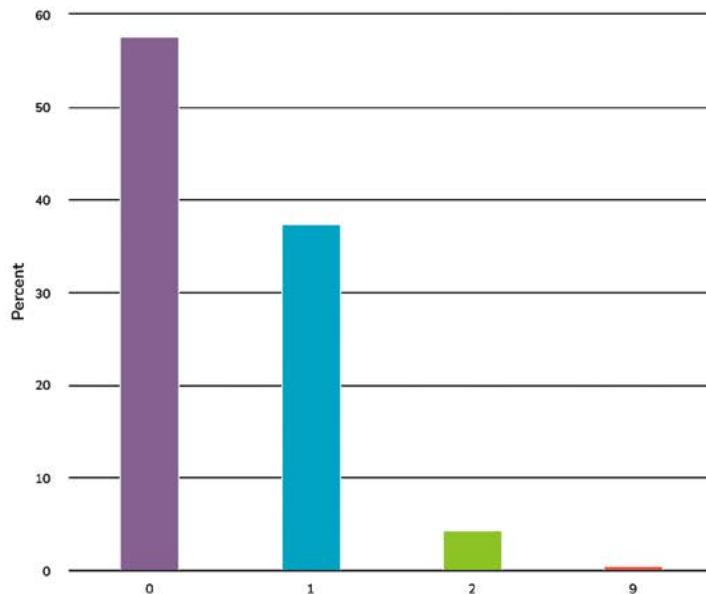
	Significantly increased	Somewhat increased	No change	Somewhat decreased	Significantly decreased	Responses
The size of classes in your school						
Count	66	157	65	9	0	297
Row %	22.2%	52.9%	21.9%	3.0%	0.0%	
The complexity and diversity of student needs in your school (e.g., socio-economic, linguistic, behavioural, cognitive, social/emotional)	143	132	19	3	0	297
Count	48.1%	44.4%	6.4%	1.0%	0.0%	
Row %						
Supports for students with exceptionalities						
Count	32	32	64	95	75	298
Row %	10.7%	10.7%	21.5%	31.9%	25.2%	
Requirements to supervise and undertake other assigned tasks as a school leader	135	109	49	1	3	297
Count	45.5%	36.7%	16.5%	0.3%	1.0%	
Row %						
Access that students and families have to mental health services	17	19	108	103	50	297
Count	5.7%	6.4%	36.4%	34.7%	16.8%	
Row %						
Expectations to undertake standardized testing for students	89	95	105	8	1	298
Count	29.9%	31.9%	35.2%	2.7%	0.3%	
Row %						
Expectations to report student progress to parents	30	80	161	22	2	295
Count	10.2%	27.1%	54.6%	7.5%	0.7%	
Row %						
My school board creates a positive environment for the teaching and learning conditions in my school.	15	72	136	58	20	301
Count	5.0%	23.9%	45.2%	19.3%	6.6%	
Row %						
Positive working relationships with parents/guardians	3	67	137	75	11	293
Count	1.0%	22.9%	46.8%	25.6%	3.8%	
Row %						
Totals						301
Total Responses						301

41. Since the legislated return to school on October 29, 2025, have any additional teachers and/or educational assistants been added to support students within any of the classrooms in your entire school?

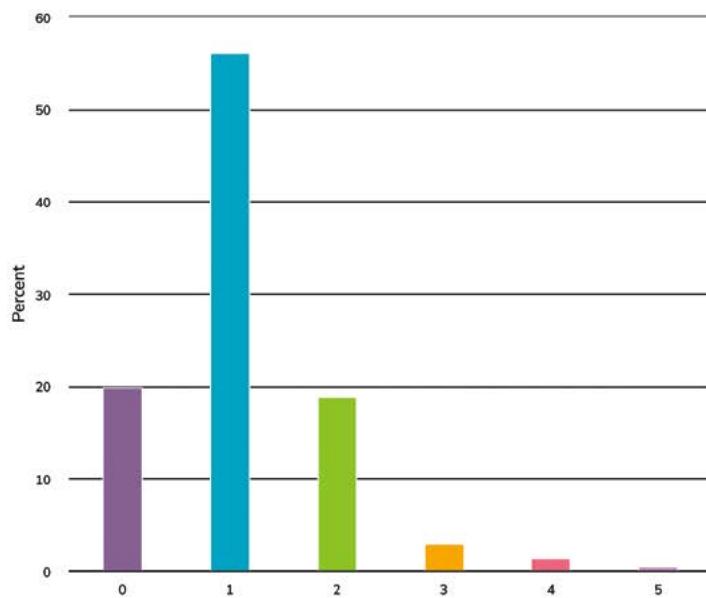


Value	Percent	Responses
No, staffing levels remain the same	83.8%	4,821
Staffing has been reduced	6.9%	397
Yes, additional staff have been added	3.5%	203
Not sure / Prefer not to say	3.5%	201
Other - Write in	2.2%	128
		Totals: 5,750

42. If "Yes," additional staff have been added, how many additional teachers in your school have been added since October 29, 2025?

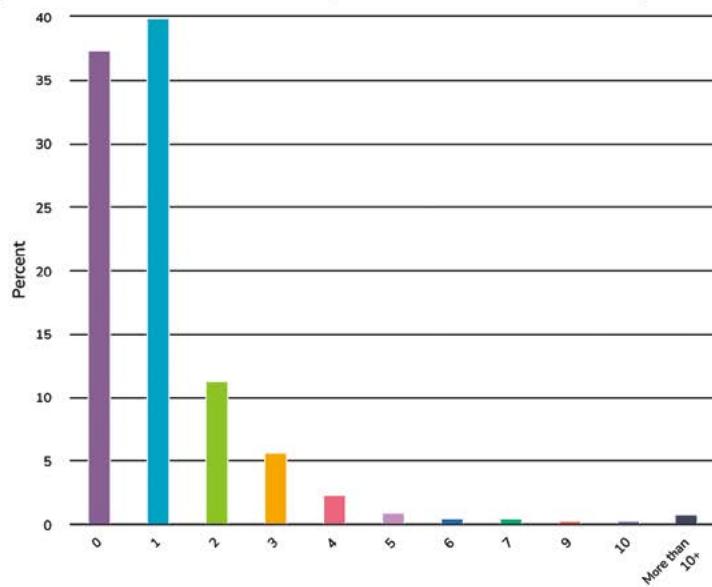


43. If “Yes,” additional staff have been added, how many additional educational assistants in your school have been added since October 29, 2025?



Value	Percent	Responses
0	19.9%	40
1	56.2%	113
2	18.9%	38
3	3.0%	6
4	1.5%	3
5	0.5%	1
Totals: 201		

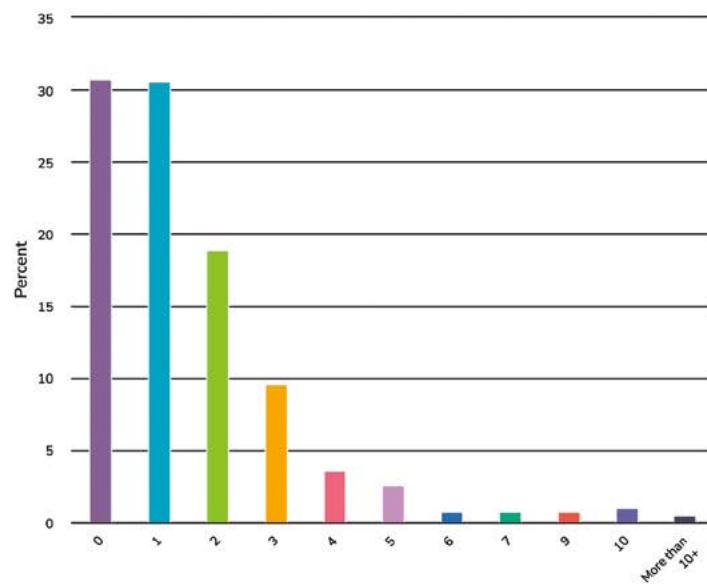
44. School Leader — If “staffing has been reduced,” how many teachers have been lost in your school since October 29, 2025?



Value	Percent	Responses
0	37.4%	145
1	39.9%	155
2	11.3%	44
3	5.7%	22
4	2.3%	9
5	1.0%	4
6	0.5%	2
7	0.5%	2
8	0.3%	1
9	0.3%	1
10	0.3%	1
More than 10+	0.8%	3

Totals: 388

45. School Leader — If “staffing has been reduced,” how many educational assistants have been lost in your school since October 29, 2025?

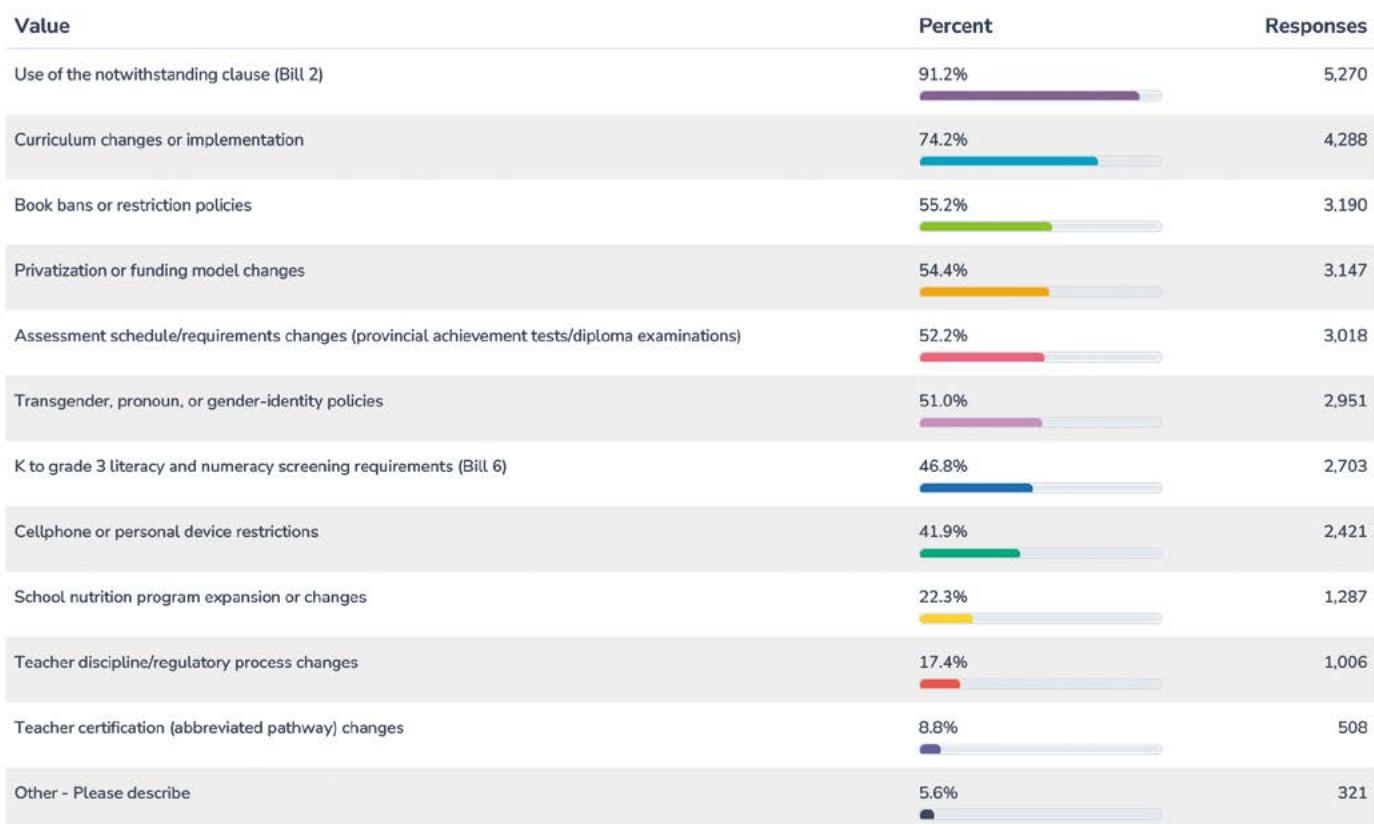


Value	Percent	Responses
0	30.8%	119
1	30.6%	118
2	18.9%	73
3	9.6%	37
4	3.6%	14
5	2.6%	10
6	0.8%	3
7	0.8%	3
8	0.8%	3
9	0.8%	4
More than 10+	0.5%	2

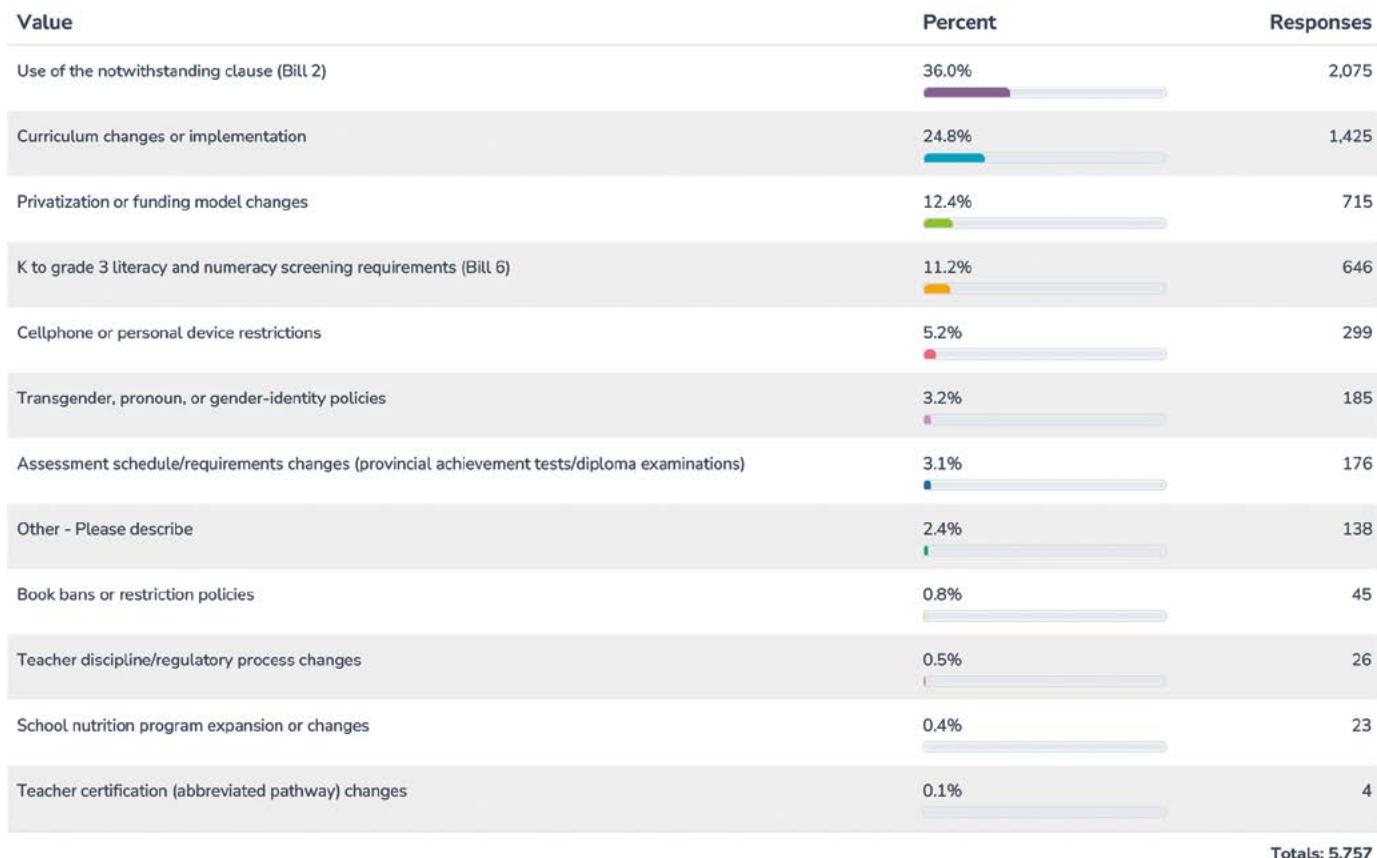
Totals: 386

Level IV—Government Policy Impacts

46. Which of the following recent Government of Alberta regulations, legislation and/or initiatives have impacted your classroom or school (either positively or negatively)? (Please check all that apply).



47. Which one of these do you believe has had “the most impact” on your classroom and/or school?



Advocacy and Supports Needed—Qualitative Comments

QUALITATIVE RESPONSE SUMMARY AND THEMATIC ANALYSIS

We asked teachers to share what kinds of advocacy and/or supports they believed were needed to respond effectively to this change in regulation, legislation or initiative that has had the most impact on their classroom and/or school.

Overall, the qualitative responses to this question reflect a high level of concern and urgency among Alberta teachers and school leaders regarding recent regulatory, legislative and policy changes. Respondents consistently reported feeling overwhelmed and undervalued. They reported experiencing with diminished professional autonomy and felt insufficiently supported in their professional roles. Additional issues identified were inadequate funding to public education, increasing class sizes, and shortages of support staff. These are issues that have a negative impact on both student learning conditions and teacher well-being. Many teachers indicate that the cumulative effect of these pressures is reducing their ability to effectively meet the complex and diverse needs of their students.

Curriculum and assessment changes were also frequently described as being poorly planned and implemented by the Government of Alberta, with respondents citing rushed timelines, developmentally inappropriate curriculum, and a lack of supporting resources and professional learning. These factors are reported to significantly increase work intensification and stress. In addition, there is strong dissatisfaction with recent government actions, particularly the use of the notwithstanding clause, which many teachers and school leaders perceive as dismissive of their professional expertise, labour rights and role in shaping public education in the province. This has contributed to declining morale and, for some, serious consideration of leaving the profession.

The feedback also includes strong calls for enhanced advocacy and leadership. Teachers express a desire for more visible and assertive action from the ATA and call for broader public support for public education, including, in some cases, calls for collective or political action. Although a small number of respondents identified positive outcomes from specific government initiatives, such as improved student focus following cell phone restrictions and nutrition programs, these views are outweighed by broader concerns.

Overall, teachers emphasize the urgent need for sustained investment and meaningful consultation with Alberta teachers, and they are seeking restored respect in order to stabilize the profession, improve conditions of professional practice and ensure high-quality learning environments for all students.

THEME 1. Inadequate Funding, Staffing, and Class Sizes

The most dominant theme centered on chronic underfunding in Alberta and its direct consequences: oversized classes, insufficient numbers of teachers and educational assistants, loss of specialist programs to support complex and diverse student needs, and deteriorating learning conditions. Teachers and school leaders consistently link funding shortfalls to their inability to meet student needs, rising safety concerns and unsustainable workloads.

Representative Quotes

- “We need schools to be properly funded so we have staff and resources.” (ID 26)
- “Smaller class sizes, literacy and numeracy support and support for behaviours. We need more teachers and EAs in our building.” (ID 984)
- “More funding for more staff. We need more EAs and more teachers. We also need to keep our specialist teachers, such as music, fine arts, resource and student services.” (ID 374)

THEME 2. Low Teacher Morale, Burnout, and Loss of Hope

A large proportion of responses express profound emotional and moral distress. Teachers describe feeling devalued, demoralized and exhausted, with many explicitly stating they are actively considering leaving the profession. The language used is often intense and personal, pointing to a widespread morale crisis.

Representative Quotes

- “I feel defeated, depressed and utterly unable to put on the excited, engaged face that I used to put on for my students. I am hanging by a thread. I consider retirement and stress leave daily.” (ID 13)
- “Using the notwithstanding clause has essentially taken the air out of the room. I’ve never felt more unappreciated, invalidated and dejected.” (ID 16)
- “Teachers needed to be treated with respect. Many teachers feel targeted. They simply cannot continue teaching in these conditions.” (ID 68)

THEME 3. Strains of Inclusion and Classroom Complexity Without Adequate Support

Teachers frequently describe classrooms with increasingly complex student needs and inadequate supports to address them. While many support inclusive education in principle, they report that current approaches are failing students and teachers due to insufficient staffing, lack of alternative placements and safety concerns.

Representative Quotes

- “Complexity is too much for my room [...] multiple other behaviours and academic challenges with only one EA [...] leaving me to handle the rest predominantly on my own.” (ID 57)
- “Inclusivity was never meant to include children with behavioural and emotional problems. Inclusion was supposed to include children with mild to moderate learning disabilities.” (ID 989)
- “Children cannot learn in an environment where there are constant distractions from classmates who should not be there.” (ID 357)

THEME 4. Challenges with New Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum changes are widely criticized as rushed, developmentally inappropriate and introduced without adequate resources, training or time. Teachers report significant unpaid labour to create materials and raised concern about negative impacts of new curriculum on student learning.

Representative Quotes

- “I can't help them all and teach that large curriculum that is well above their mental cognitive abilities. We need funding and support.” (ID 37)
- “It's rolled out with very little resources provided [...] most of it is to be done on your own time.” (ID 355)
- “The curriculum is not developmentally appropriate and needs to be rewritten by teachers.” (ID 581)

THEME 5. Burden of Mandatory Standardized Students Assessments and Data Collection

Teachers consistently report that mandated screenings and assessments consume excessive instructional time, are poorly timed and offer little instructional value. Many describe negative emotional impacts on young students and increased workload stress.

Representative Quotes

- “Stop forcing teachers to implement inappropriate screenings. This creates anxiety in students and teachers while providing no positive impact.” (ID 64)
- “I used two weeks’ worth of prep time to get it all done in September.” (ID 47)
- “Support! These are 1:1 tests—someone should be hired to implement [them].” (ID 86)

THEME 6 Calls for Stronger Advocacy and Political Action

Many respondents call for more assertive advocacy, both from their professional association and through broader political action. Language in this theme is often urgent, reflecting deep frustrations and a sense of powerlessness.

Representative Quotes

- “GENERAL STRIKE! WE ARE DONE.” (ID 24)
- “I don’t know how to support or change this other than a general strike and voting the next election.” (ID 36)
- “I have never been more disheartened than I am now.” (ID 79)

THEME 7. Loss of Teacher Voice and Professional Respect

Teachers frequently state that their expertise is ignored in decision making. Many describe top-down policy implementation as disrespectful and damaging to professional identity and their sense of efficacy.

Representative Quotes

- “Involve teachers in curriculum creation. Have more training and time before implementation.” (ID 52)
- “The complete disrespect shown for teachers, their knowledge, and their input from our government.” (ID 377)
- “Maybe actual teacher input would help!” (ID 87)

THEME 8. Student Mental Health and Access to Support Services

Serious concerns about student mental health, trauma and unmet social-emotional needs appear frequently in the qualitative comments. Teachers emphasize that insufficient access to school counsellors, psychologists, speech-language pathologists and other specialists undermines learning and well-being.

Representative Quotes

- “We are drowning and so are the students.” (ID 28)
- “Academic progress for many is no longer a priority due to wellness priorities.” (ID 363)
- “EAs, OT, speech, counsellors—schools need it all.” (ID 398)

THEME 9. Protecting Safe and Inclusive Spaces for Students

A smaller but highly intense set of responses highlights concerns about student safety, dignity and belonging, particularly for 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Teachers express alarm about policies they believe are undermining trust and student well-being.

Representative Quotes

- “I have transgender students in my classroom who are feeling targeted, isolated and unsafe.” (ID 88)
- “When students who are already vulnerable lose their only space to be themselves; it affects our entire community.” (ID 999)
- “I do not think that girls should have to provide their identity to participate in sports.” (ID 371)

Support Themes Rationale

RATIONALE USED FOR THE PRIORITIZATION OF ADVICE AND SUPPORT THEMES

The themes were ordered to reflect both frequency of issues reported in the hundreds of qualitative comments, and the intensity and urgency of the language used by teachers, consistent with qualitative reporting conventions. Overall, the ordering of themes moves from systemic and structural pressures on the education system, to professional and instructional impacts, and finally to specific advocacy and equity-related concerns, which mirroring both the frequency of distribution of responses and the escalation of language observed in the data.

Themes 1 and 2 appear first because funding, staffing, class size, complexity and teacher morale were the most pervasive and consistently raised concerns, often appearing together within the same responses.

Funding and staffing issues were referenced across nearly all areas of impact (curriculum, inclusion, assessment, well-being), positioning them as the primary structural drivers of the challenges described. Closely following this, teacher morale and burnout emerged with the strongest emotional language within the fall 2025 Pulse research dataset, including expressions of despair, mental health strain and the intent to leave the profession of teaching, indicating a system-level risk rather than an isolated concern.

Theme 3 (inclusion and classroom complexity) is positioned next due to its high frequency and detailed descriptions of student and teacher safety, feasibility and equity concerns. Teachers and school leaders repeatedly linked complexity to inadequate staffing and supports, reinforcing its prominence while distinguishing it as a discrete issue affecting daily classroom functioning.

Themes 4 and 5 (curriculum implementation and mandatory assessments) follow because they were frequently cited operational stressors tied to work intensification and instructional effectiveness. While not as emotionally charged as morale or funding for public education, these themes were discussed with clarity and specificity and often framed as compounding existing pressures.

Theme 6 (calls for stronger advocacy and political action) is placed after the operational themes because it reflects a response to cumulative and a sustained frustration, rather than a root condition. The language here is intense, but the frequency is somewhat lower in terms of qualitative comments and often appears as a concluding or escalatory statement within the survey responses.

Theme 7 (teacher voice and professional respect) is closely related to advocacy but is distinguished by its focus on decision-making processes and professional autonomy. It was raised consistently by respondents but typically with less emotional intensity than themes related to teacher moral distress, burnout or poor working conditions.

Theme 8 (student mental health and support services) is positioned next, reflecting moderate-to-high frequency and strong concern, though often framed as a downstream impact of the current teacher and staffing shortages and as an outcome of classroom complexity rather than a standalone policy driver.

Theme 9 (protecting safe and inclusive spaces for students) appears last not because of lack of importance, but because it was raised by a smaller subset of respondents. However, the language used was among the most intense in the dataset, warranting its inclusion as a distinct theme despite its lower frequency of response.

Overall Qualitative Comments

KEY QUALITATIVE FINDINGS: PRIORITY THEMES EMERGING FROM TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER EXPERIENCES

The open-ended qualitative responses in the fall 2025 ATA Pulse rapid research study (closed December 5, 2025) revealed significant pressures shaping teaching and learning conditions across Alberta.

A thematic analysis of the qualitative data identified the following priority themes that reflect both the frequency of issues raised and the severity of their impact on classrooms, staff and students. These themes, ranked by frequency, highlight the interconnected challenges facing teachers and school leaders, including rising classroom complexity, safety concerns, declining morale, insufficient supports and systemic resource inequities. Together, they provide a comprehensive picture of the conditions influencing the profession and the urgent need for improved funding, staffing, and policy alignment.

Theme 1. Severe Classroom Complexity and Insufficient Supports

Teachers report unprecedented social-emotional, behavioural, cognitive and linguistic complexity, with many students requiring intensive supports that are not available in their school or community.

Representative Quotes

- “I cannot support all of my 30 kids with no help and severe complexities in the class.” (ID 311)
- “New ELL students get dropped into my class weekly with no assistance or support. They’re too high for ELL class but too low for mainstream.” (ID 312)
- “Teaching the ‘normal’ child has taken a back seat. Many students need individual or small cluster supports that I, on my own, cannot provide.” (ID 503)

Theme 2. Escalating Student Behaviour, Safety Risks and Violence

Respondents describe rising aggression, student truancy, property destruction and unsafe learning conditions. Many note a lack of specialized placements for students.

Representative Quotes

- “I’ve never been screamed at, hit or bit by a student until last year.” (ID 331)
- “Inclusion does not work. Students are being traumatised by aggressive and explosive students.” (ID 927)
- “Students who elope, are physically aggressive and require constant supervision have increased. It is not sustainable.” (ID 373)

Theme 3. Erosion of Teacher Well-Being, Mental Health and Morale

Respondents describe moral distress, burnout, compassion fatigue, emotional exhaustion and a sense of hopelessness following the strike and legislated return.

Representative Quotes

- “I am burned out. I come home and want to sleep or cry. I don’t have it in me anymore.” (ID 89)
- “My teachers are dejected and stressed. Many feel overwhelmed and abandoned.” (ID 393)
- “Everyone seems especially depleted since the strike and the devastating results.” (ID 858)

Theme 4. Inadequate EA Staffing and Challenges Recruiting/Retaining Support Staff

Educational Assistants (EAs) are described as essential but severely underfunded, understaffed and difficult to recruit, which was especially correlated to responses from Alberta’s rural regions.

Representative Quotes

- “A big reason there is a lack of EA support is that the career is not paid a livable wage.” (ID 129)
- “Our school has a total of 4 part-time EAs for over 500 EAL and severely disabled children. This is OUTRAGEOUS!” (ID 407)
- “On days we are short staffed, we struggle to cover the needs of students at the expense of staff well-being.” (ID 485)

Theme 5. Unsustainable Workload, Loss of Prep Time and Unmanageable Expectations

Teachers describe overwhelming workloads, no real breaks, increasing administrative demands and insufficient prep time.

Representative Quotes

- “I spend my lunch break prepping or meeting students. I never leave my classroom. I have never worked harder in my life.” (ID 427)
- “We’ve lost 2 hours of prep time per week [...] professional expectations have increased!” (ID 178)
- “Special Education (SPED) classrooms. My entire class has IEPs.” (ID 668)

Theme 6. Inclusion Without Supports, Resources or Funding Is Leading to Harm

Respondents support inclusive education in principle but overwhelmingly report that current implementation without supports is unsafe and harmful for all learners.

Representative Quotes

- “Students could be in specialized settings but there are no spots. Inclusion without support is not safe, and it is not working.” (ID 373)
- “Inclusion does not have to be all or nothing—not at the expense of [other] learners.” (ID 454)
- “Inclusion does not work. Violent behaviour is traumatizing other students.” (ID 927)

Theme 7. Distrust of Government Policy and a Perceived Dismantling of Public Education

Many teachers express strong concern that government actions are intentionally undermining public education and disregarding Alberta teacher expertise.

Representative Quotes

- “All of these measures [...] are designed to diminish and defund public education.” (ID 208)
- “We are seeing the purposeful dismantling of public education. This will not change without a change in government.” (ID 285)
- “This government has shown us [that] we are meaningless, unimportant, undervalued.” (ID 489)

Theme 8. Financial Strain on Teachers and the Cost of Underfunding

Respondents reported spending personal money on materials, experiencing financial pressure, and feeling undervalued relative to workload and inflation.

Representative Quotes

- “I am tired of spending hundreds of dollars EVERY YEAR. Every resource is purchased by me.” (ID 287)
- “Cost of living is making it very difficult to maintain choices for my own children.” (ID 1042)
- “Wish I could donate my dues to charity. Tired of rolling over.” (ID 248)

Theme 9. Rural–Urban Inequities and Resource Disparities

Rural schools face severe recruitment challenges and lack specialists, while urban schools deal with rapid growth and high complexity. Both contexts experience different but significant pressures.

Representative Quotes

- “Hiring teachers in an extremely rural town will not happen—NOT with the salary.” (ID 407)
- “We don’t have specialists in our rural schools. We need prep time and supports.” (ID 1007)
- “Urban centres have increased enrolment, but rural areas are losing just enough students to lose teacher and EAs.” (ID 701)

Overall Qualitative Themes Rationale

RATIONALE USED FOR THE PRIORITIZATION OF OVERALL QUALITATIVE COMMENTS AND THEMES

1. Severe Classroom Complexity and Insufficient Supports

This theme appears most frequently and is deeply connected to nearly every other issue (safety, burnout, inclusion, workload). Teachers consistently describe classroom complexity levels that exceed reasonable capacity, with insufficient staffing and resources.

2. Escalating Student Behaviour, Safety Risks and Violence

Although slightly less frequent in the comments than complexity, the intensity of these qualitative responses is extremely high. Safety concerns carry the most urgent consequences for students, teachers and school operations.

3. Erosion of Teacher Well-Being, Mental Health and Morale

This theme is both frequent and high impact, with many respondents describing burnout, despair, emotional exhaustion and long-term sustainability concerns. It is a direct outcome of the top two issues.

4. Inadequate EA Staffing and Challenges Recruiting/Retaining Support Staff

EA shortages are frequently cited and directly worsen complexity, safety concerns and workload. The intensity is also high, especially in rural settings and in classrooms with significant needs.

5. Unsustainable Workload, Loss of Prep Time, and Unmanageable Expectations

Workload concerns appear across many comments. While not always as emotionally intense as safety or burnout-related comments, the chronic unsustainability makes this a high-priority systemic issue.

6. Inclusion Without Supports Leading to Harm for Students and Teachers

This theme is closely tied to complexity and safety but is distinct in its emphasis on structural failure of the inclusion model. It appears frequently and with strong emotional tone but is often embedded within other categories.

7. Distrust of Government Policy and Perceived Dismantling of Public Education

This theme was emotionally intense in the comments and widely expressed, though more macro-level than directly classroom-operational. Its systemic implications are significant but less immediate than safety or complexity.

8. Financial Strain on Teachers and Cost of Underfunding

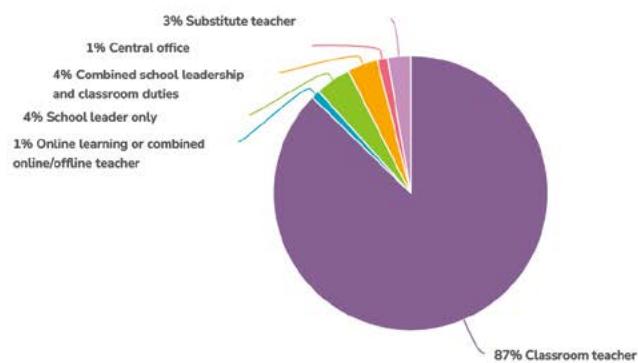
While important, these comments appear less frequently than workload or morale themes. The impact is substantial but not as immediately crisis oriented as student and teacher safety or complexity.

9. Rural-Urban Inequities and Resource Disparities

This theme is highly relevant but expressed by a smaller number of respondents. It is important contextually but does not dominate the dataset to the same extent as the top-tier themes. It also likely represents that of the over 5,000 respondents, approximately four in 10 are outside of the major urban and suburban centres.

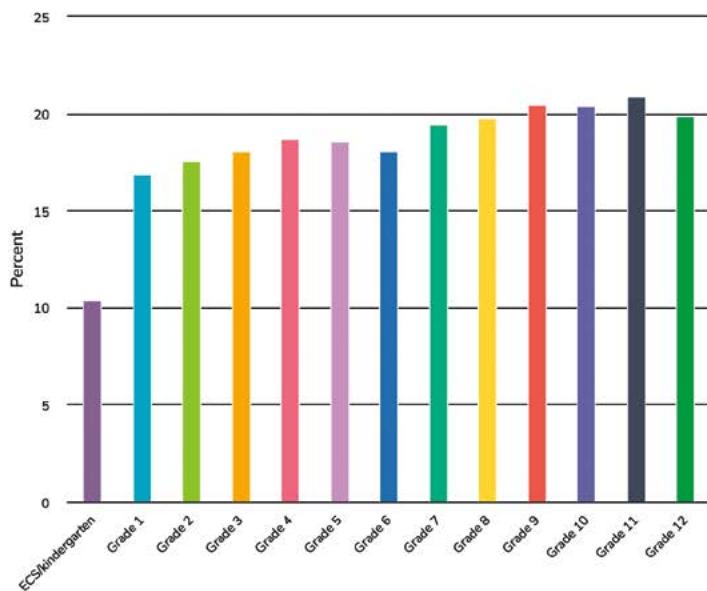
Demographics

48. Your current assignment



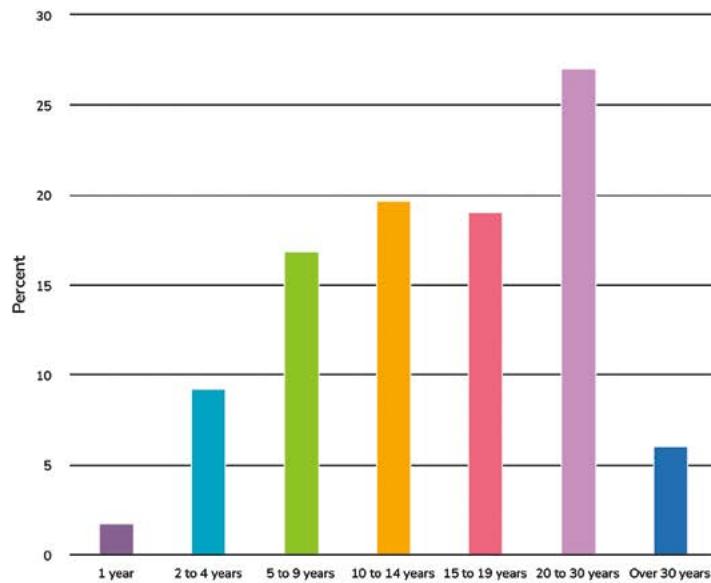
Value	Percent	Responses
Classroom teacher	87.3%	5,047
Online learning or combined online/offline teacher	1.0%	56
School leader only	4.2%	241
Combined school leadership and classroom duties	3.6%	210
Central office	1.2%	72
Substitute teacher	2.7%	156
Totals: 5,782		

49. What grade levels are you currently teaching? (Please check all that apply).



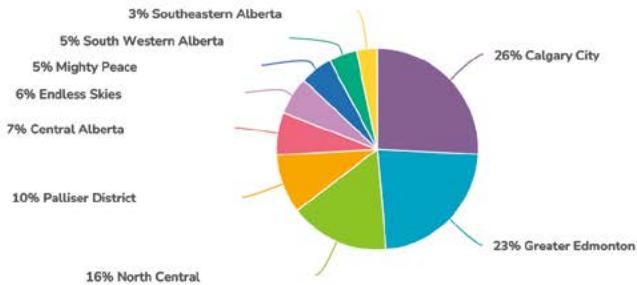
Value	Percent	Responses
ECS/kindergarten	10.4%	568
Grade 1	16.9%	923
Grade 2	17.6%	958
Grade 3	18.1%	988
Grade 4	18.7%	1,020
Grade 5	18.6%	1,014
Grade 6	18.1%	986
Grade 7	19.5%	1,065
Grade 8	19.8%	1,080
Grade 9	20.5%	1,117
Grade 10	20.4%	1,115
Grade 11	20.9%	1,139
Grade 12	19.9%	1,087

50. Your teaching experience, including current year.



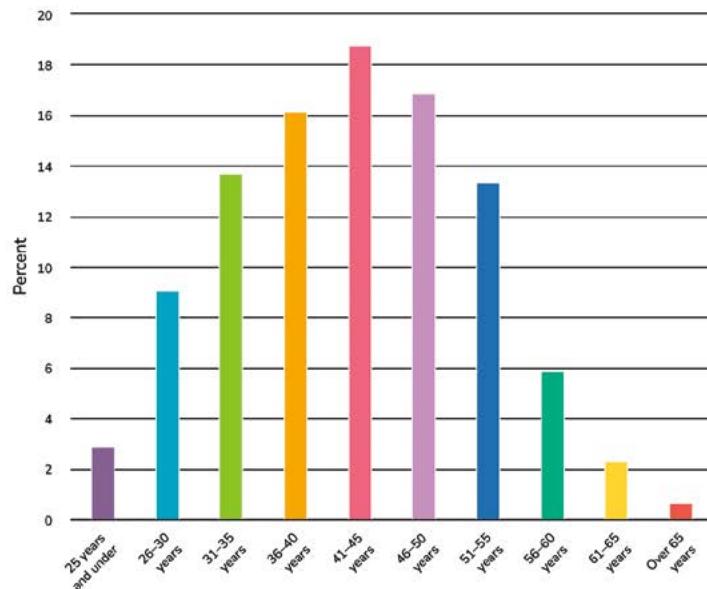
Value	Percent	Responses
1 year	1.8%	102
2 to 4 years	9.3%	537
5 to 9 years	16.9%	971
10 to 14 years	19.7%	1,134
15 to 19 years	19.1%	1,097
20 to 30 years	27.1%	1,558
Over 30 years	6.1%	353
Totals: 5,752		

51. Teachers' convention that you attend.



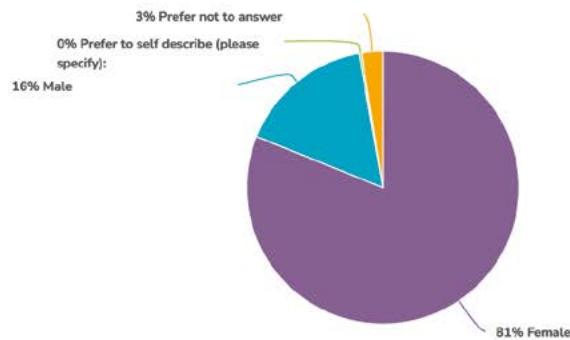
Value	Percent	Responses
Calgary City	25.8%	1,475
Greater Edmonton	22.8%	1,305
North Central	16.0%	913
Palliser District	9.5%	544
Central Alberta	6.8%	391
Endless Skies	6.1%	348
Mighty Peace	5.2%	296
South Western Alberta	4.5%	259
Southeastern Alberta	3.3%	186
Totals: 5,717		

52. Your age.



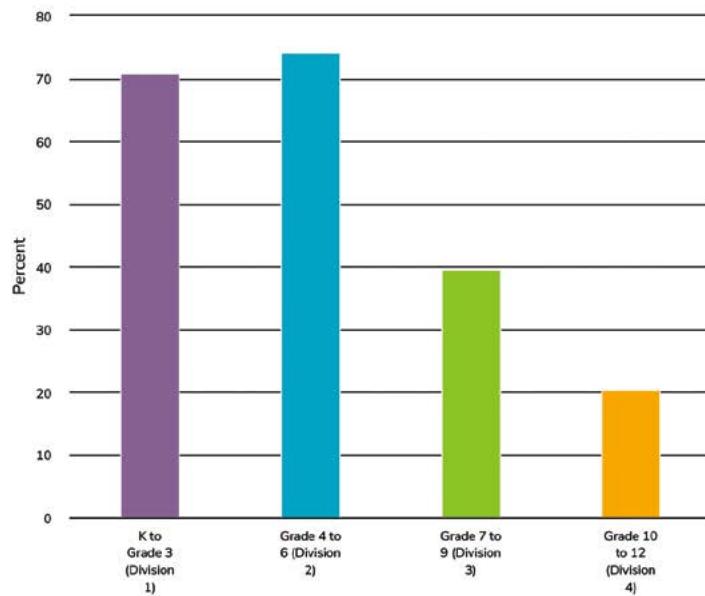
Value	Percent	Responses
25 years and under	2.9%	169
26-30 years	9.1%	525
31-35 years	13.7%	784
36-40 years	16.2%	931
41-45 years	18.8%	1,079
46-50 years	16.9%	971
51-55 years	13.4%	769
56-60 years	5.9%	340
61-65 years	2.3%	131
Over 65 years	0.7%	42
Totals: 5,741		

53. How do you identify?



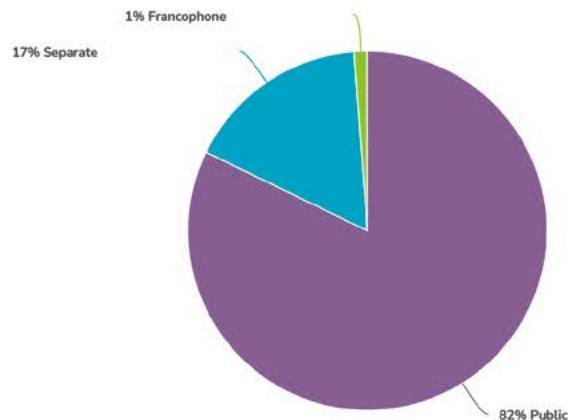
Value	Percent	Responses
Female	81.2%	4,665
Male	16.1%	924
Prefer to self describe (please specify):	0.3%	15
Prefer not to answer	2.5%	144
Totals: 5,748		

54. School Leader—What grade levels are represented in your school? Please check all that apply.



Value	Percent	Responses
K to Grade 3 (Division 1)	70.8%	170
Grade 4 to 6 (Division 2)	74.2%	178
Grade 7 to 9 (Division 3)	39.6%	95
Grade 10 to 12 (Division 4)	20.4%	49

55. Type of school authority in which you are employed



Value	Percent	Responses
Public	82.3%	4,733
Separate	16.6%	953
Francophone	1.2%	67
Totals: 5,753		

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