



Above and beyond

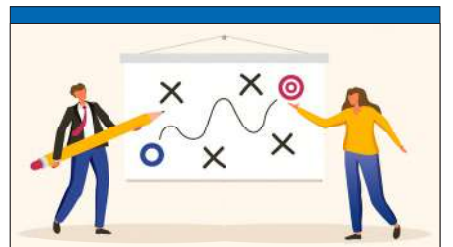
Expressions of appreciation for teachers

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ATA NEWS

May 5, 2026 ■ Volume 60, Number 13

■ News Publication of The Alberta Teachers' Association



ATA BUDGET 2026-27

No fee increase in proposed budget

[See pages 9-12](#)



JENNIFER FERGUSON, LIFETOUGH PHOTOGRAPHY.

The Council for School Leadership hosted the 2026 iteration of the uLead Conference from April 19-21 in Banff. Here, the conference's organizing team coordinates in Red for Ed.



See, stay, signal

What students carry into your classroom

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A sense of moral distress

"Neutrality" directive places teachers in untenable spot

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On the fast track

Mixed reactions to the province's expedited certification plan

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Here's to 65 years!

Specialist councils celebrate anniversary at PD event

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“Neutrality” directive places teachers in untenable spot



EDITORIAL

Kristine Wilkinson
ATA News
Editor-in-Chief

There is an exhaustion settling over Alberta’s staffrooms this spring. It isn’t the usual end-of-term fatigue; it is a profound sense of moral distress. With the implementation of Bill 25, *An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act* and its mandates for “classroom neutrality,” teachers are continuing to see a shift in the province’s relationship with its educators. Alberta is moving away from a system built on professional trust and toward one built on heightened scrutiny and suspicion. This simply does not work and is unsustainable.

The government’s push for “neutrality” is framed as a way to protect students from “ideology.” However, the absence of a clear

commitment to inclusion and safety within classrooms and schools doesn’t create a neutral space. If anything, it risks reaffirming the biases of the loudest voices.

When teachers are told to remain “unbiased” on issues that touch on human identity and safety, we

This lack of trust is a large part of our current teacher retention crisis. In addition to supporting a complex class, teachers now must navigate an ambiguous “neutrality” mandate while striving to remain compassionate and responsible professionals. Why would a new graduate enter a profession

children become empathetic, engaged and thoughtful adults. Adults who think critically and don’t ignore marginalized issues; adults who want everyone around them to be able to live their best life.

Professional trust means acknowledging that teachers are not “delivery mechanisms” for a sanitized curriculum. They are highly educated professionals capable of navigating complex, nuanced conversations with skill, grace and objectivity. They do not need legislation to remain professional; they need the autonomy to be the teachers their students deserve.

For teachers feeling this moral distress, this is not a sign of weakness. It is proof that you refuse to let your classroom become a place where silence is mistaken for “neutrality.” It is proof you want to teach students in a way that encourages growth and thoughtfulness, not complacency. It is time for the government to trust your judgment, not question it. ■

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

“ They do not need legislation to remain professional; they need the autonomy to be the teachers their students deserve. ”

are being placed in an untenable position as professionals. There is no “neutral” way to witness a student or group of people being marginalized. And what about teaching critical thinking? By imposing a “both-sides” approach to human rights or well-established historical understanding, the province is forcing teachers into a state of moral injury.

where their judgment is treated as a liability? Why would a veteran teacher stay if their 20 years of experience isn’t being valued?

Education is, by its very nature, an act of trust. Parents trust us with their children; society trusts us with the future. I have always been honoured that, as a teacher, I could work hand in hand with parents to help their

Don’t do the government’s job for Bill 25



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive
Secretary

Question: How should teachers respond to Bill 25?

Answer: The editorial in this issue of the *ATA News* speaks to the fundamentally misguided premises and agenda that underlie Bill 25, the most recent unnecessary and unwelcome foray of this government into the classroom. Disingenuously titled *An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from the Classroom*, the bill is a grab-bag of incoherent provisions, a few potentially good, most bad and some downright ugly. So, what should teachers do now?

How about nothing?

Let’s start with *not* doing the government’s job for it. We have received calls from teachers who are asking very specific questions about how they should adjust everything from teaching practice to the posters and decorations in their classrooms in response to Bill 25. However, as I am writing this, the bill has not passed through the legislature, received royal assent or been proclaimed. It is not yet law. Now, I am not so naive as to expect that government will experience some eleventh-hour enlightenment and significantly amend the bill, but even after it is passed, much of

bill’s practical effect will depend on specific regulations that still need to be written.

Once those regulations are in place, a process that might take months and in which the Association might be able to exert some influence, we will have a much better understanding of the actual impact of the changes in legislation and practice resulting from the bill. Until then, teachers are under no obligation to be proactive.

“ Teachers are under no obligation to be proactive. ”

Even then, any new directions entailed by the bill and regulations will be imposed upon the school boards and will be up to those school boards to administer. Teachers should, therefore, refrain from changing their practice until they receive clear and specific written direction from their employer board. If at all in doubt, a teacher is always free to request additional written clarification from their employer regarding the specific application of a regulation or board policy to their particular situation. Absent such specific, clear and documented direction, the teacher is free to act professionally as they see fit.

Doing nothing, or rather, continuing as usual to teach in an effective,

pedagogically sound, professional and principled way is the best approach to mitigating the potential damage that Bill 25 may cause and preventing the legislation from having a chilling effect that exceeds its actual reach. I’ll note that for years the “Teaching Controversial Issues” policy embedded in the *Alberta Education Guide to Education* (<https://open.alberta.ca/publications/1496-7359>) effectively addressed management of political

and ideological issues in the classroom. That policy, unfortunately scrubbed from the current iteration of the *Guide*, provided thoughtful guidance for teachers in developing students’ critical inquiry and thinking skills, thus preparing them to participate responsibly in a democratic and pluralistic society.

Teachers also have the unique ability by virtue of the circumstances in which they work to ignore or rise above some of the problematic aspects of Bill 25. For example, the bill amends the preamble of Alberta’s *Education Act* by removing language that mandates schools to be “welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and

a positive sense of self” and scrubs other similar references elsewhere in the act. It seems to me that teachers and school leaders would want to continue to reflect these values in their relationships with students and community, regardless of what the government might choose to prioritize.

Finally, there is the possibility of creative noncompliance. Having taught Grade 8 students, I became familiar with this strategy. It’s not about disobeying, but rather obeying in a creative, technical, limited or unhelpful way. For example, the city of Boise, Idaho, circumvented a state ban on displaying pride flags by wrapping the city hall flagpoles in rainbow-striped colors and installing additional, permanent, multicolored artwork. Depending on what subjects they teach, I can imagine some teachers who wish to create a safe space for gender and relationship-diverse students taking a sudden interest in displaying posters depicting the story of Noah’s Ark, Newton’s experiments in optics, the colour wheel and perhaps, Pink Floyd’s 1973 studio album, *The Dark Side of the Moon*.

In the face of bad legislation, teachers’ obligation is to exercise their professional judgment rather than being unquestioningly compliant or complicit. ■

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

What students carry into your classroom



VIEWPOINTS

Jamil Jivraj
Child and adolescent psychiatrist and clinical assistant professor

There is a student I want to tell you about.

She was in Grade 7. She arrived a few weeks into the school year—new country, new language, new everything. For three weeks, she did not speak. Not in class. Not in the hallway. Not at lunch.

Her teacher later told me, “At first I thought she was shy. Then I wondered if the language was more challenging than it appeared. Then I started to worry.”

Nothing was wrong.

This student was not disengaged. She was watching to see if it was safe.

How many students are doing that in your classroom right now?

I work as a child and adolescent psychiatrist. Each week, I sit in case conferences with teachers, often when a student is returning to school after a crisis, or when something simply is not adding up. What I have noticed, consistently, is this:

Teachers already see more than they think.

You notice the student who laughs a moment too late. The one who is always tired. The one who is quiet in a way that feels different from temperament.

You are reading the room, reading the child and adjusting in real time.

What is often missing is not instinct, but language, time and permission to act on what you already see.

Children do not arrive at school alone. They bring with them their own emotional life. Sometimes that shows up as anxiety or withdrawal. Sometimes as perfectionism or defiance. Sometimes, it looks like silence.

If we only ask, “What is wrong with this student?” we miss the fuller picture.

A more useful question may be, “What is this student carrying?”

That shift matters. Behaviour begins to make more sense when we can see the load beneath it.

The challenge, of course, is that the systems around you were not designed to hold this. Not the timetable, the reporting structures or the curriculum demands. And yet, every day, teachers hold it anyway, often quietly. That deserves to be acknowledged.

So rather than offering a new

program or checklist, I want to name three things you are already doing:

See. Stay. Signal.

See is not diagnosing. It is noticing what may sit beneath a behaviour before deciding what it means. A student who is late again may not lack motivation; they may be coming from a home where mornings are unpredictable.

Stay speaks to your presence in a difficult moment. A regulated adult can shift the tone of a room without saying a word. Research on coregulation shows that students’ nervous systems respond to the adults around them. At times, the most powerful influence in the room is simply how you are.

Signal is how you open a door. Consider checking in with families in a way that invites partnership: “I’ve noticed the student seems a bit overwhelmed at times. Are you seeing that at home as well?” This lands differently than, “Your child is having difficulty....” The concern is the same, but the invitation is not. When families feel like partners rather than problems to be managed, they tend to share more. And when they share more, you are better positioned to support the student.

Back to that student.

Around week four, her teacher made one small change. Before calling on anyone, the teacher gave the class 30 seconds to think.

That was it.

Within two weeks, the student began to participate.

Not because of a program, but because one teacher recognized what was happening, stayed steady and made it safe for the student to show up.

Think of a student in your classroom, the one you cannot quite read. What might they be carrying?

You are not responsible for fixing what a student brings through the door. But you are already shaping how it is met. For many students, that moment is the one that stays with them. ■

Dr. Jamil Jivraj is a child and adolescent psychiatrist, clinical assistant professor at the University of Calgary, and keynote speaker on youth mental health. His writing appears on climbtgetherparenting.com.

YOUR VIEWS

With a new wave of teachers graduating this spring, we asked members, what did you look forward to the most when you were a new teacher?

- Daniela Andrea Kutney**
Creating a safe classroom
- Chris McLean-Sleger**
Honestly, a pay cheque and my own room to set up
- Ryan C Smitty**
I was looking forward to making the same difference in a student’s life that my best teachers made for me.
- Michelle Fatica**
Having my own classroom and being able to decorate it, thus creating a learning environment the kids would want to be a part of. Having the opportunity to make plans in the hopes of inspiring kids to learn and grow.
- Caleb Koning**
Helping kids actually enjoy ELA. As a junior high teacher, I do what I can to make it fun. Daily dad jokes.
- Emma Davidson**
Doing cute crafts! Turns out there’s hardly any time for those!
- Serena Svidal**
Having a classroom that I could call my own!
- Abbeygael_**
I will be new in September! Looking forward to making connections with my students!
- Robin_gill**
I never had a teacher who looked like me, so representation for POC students.
- Ami Smith**
Getting a probationary (then continuous) contract
- Rupindersidhu**
Looking forward to a career where I wake up and can’t wait to go to work
- Amymacattack**
Summer
- Morgan Gillespie**
Getting to know my own new students!

FOR THE RECORD

“Artificial intelligence is already reshaping how we work, learn and live—and Alberta students need to be ready for that reality.”

—Demetrios Nicolaidis,
Minister of Education and Childcare, April 27

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.



Expedited certification plan draws mixed reactions

Lindsay Yakimyshyn
ATA News Managing Editor

Four expedited pathways into the teaching profession were revealed by the Government of Alberta on April 24, as part of an effort to address increasing enrolment pressures in the province. According to the province, the new pathways to certification are aimed at recruiting more teachers into Alberta’s classrooms while still maintaining high professional standards.

“As classroom needs continue to grow, students need teachers with diverse skills and experience,” said Minister of Education and Childcare Demetrios Nicolaides. “These new certificates will fast-track qualified professionals into high-need classrooms, uphold strong standards and give school boards greater flexibility to support students locally.”

The four expedited pathways to certification include

- a developmental teacher certificate for Alberta bachelor of education students in their final year;
- a conditional teacher certificate for qualified internationally educated teachers who meet coursework and Canadian residency requirements;
- an interim trade teacher certificate

for tradespeople who have completed teacher preparation training, including a practicum; and

- an interim specialized teacher certificate for other skilled professionals with relevant expertise who have completed teacher preparation training.

All participants in these programs would be supervised by a designated teacher-leader and would still need to meet Alberta’s Teaching Quality Standard and demonstrate successful teaching experience to be recommended for permanent certification.

Reactions to the announcement have been mixed.

Some school boards, including Christ The Redeemer Catholic Schools, are hopeful that the government’s plan will address recruitment challenges.

“Rural and regional school divisions [...] have long faced unique challenges in attracting and retaining specialized teachers,” said Andrea Keenan, chair, Christ The Redeemer Catholic Schools. “These new pathways will help ensure that students across Alberta, regardless of geography, have equitable access to high-quality teaching and the opportunities they deserve.”

Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) president Jason Schilling recognized the need to address teacher shortages

and alleviate pressures in the public education system, but cautioned against any potential lowering of teacher professionalization.

“It is essential that we have the most qualified teachers who have the skills, knowledge and preparation needed to be successful in today’s increasingly complex classrooms,” Schilling said. “Teachers are professionals and must remain so.”

Schilling added that the ATA had advocated for the inclusion of coursework and practicum components in any expedited programs to prepare new teachers for the complex classrooms they will be entering. This emphasis on teacher preparation was echoed by Minister of Advanced Education Myles McDougall, who noted that high standards would be maintained.

“By expanding access to coursework and partnering with institutions to deliver high-quality preparation, we’re helping qualified professionals enter classrooms sooner, without compromising standards,” McDougall said.

However, the Association of Alberta Deans of Education (AADE) has raised concerns about the expedited pathways, saying that they could place student education at risk by “lowering the bar for teacher preparation.”

“Our K-12 education system is one of

Alberta’s greatest strengths because it rests on professional excellence. That standard of excellence must not be compromised,” said Dianne Gereluk, chair of the AADE.

Gereluk also pointed to a lack of investment in degree programs to prepare certificated teachers. She said, “This disconnect sends a troubling message: that formal teacher education no longer matters.”

The province outlined funding that will support the expedited programs, including funding to support new spots in the programs, bursaries to support those in the specialized or trade teacher preparation programs, and funds to support post-secondary institutions developing coursework for the specialized or trade programs.

With details regarding the expedited pathways still to come, Schilling said that the ATA will be watching to ensure that professional standards are maintained and that new teachers—and therefore their students—have what they need to be successful.

“We can recruit new teachers, but we won’t retain them unless teaching and learning conditions improve,” he said. ■

The most up-to-date information on Alberta’s expedited teaching certificates is available at www.alberta.ca/expedited-teaching-certificates.



Trisha Estabrooks



Brandi Rai

ATA to recognize two public education champions

ATA News Staff

The Alberta Teachers’ Association will grant a 2026 Public Education Award to two individuals who distinguished themselves for their willingness to advocate publicly for increased funding during a time when this was rare among public figures.

Trisha Estabrooks

Trisha Estabrooks is a former CBC journalist who served on the board of Edmonton Public Schools from 2017 to 2025, serving as chair for four years. During her time as board chair, Estabrooks was an outspoken advocate on education funding, curriculum and public education. She resigned as chair in October 2023, then as trustee in January 2025, to run federally as the NDP candidate for Edmonton Centre.

Brandi Rai

Brandi Rai served as president of the Alberta School Councils’ Association from 2020 until 2024. During that time, Rai was a visible and outspoken advocate for public education, speaking at rallies and events about the importance of strong, well-funded schools and meaningful parent engagement. Through these appearances and other advocacy work, she emphasized collaboration between families, teachers and policymakers to improve learning conditions and outcomes for students.

The Association’s Public Education Award recognizes individuals or groups that have provided outstanding support to public education in Alberta other than through teaching. Estabrooks and Rai will each accept their award at the upcoming Annual Representative Assembly on May 16. ■

Respected professor to receive ATA’s highest honour

Kim Clement
ATA News Staff

Professor Dwayne Donald will receive the Alberta Teachers’ Association’s highest honour of honorary membership at the 2026 Annual Representative Assembly (ARA), a recognition that reflects his decades of work reshaping how Canada thinks about Indigenous education.

Working in the University of Alberta’s Faculty of Education, Donald holds a Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Reimagining Teacher Education with Indigenous Wisdom Traditions. Edmonton-born and raised, he is a descendant of the amiskwaciwiyniwak (Beaver Hills Cree) and the Papaschase Cree, and carries the Blackfoot name Aipioomahkaa, Long Distance Runner.

At the heart of Donald’s research is wâhkôhtowin, the Cree concept of kinship and interconnectedness. He has spent his career exploring how this and other Indigenous relational philosophies can transform teacher education, curriculum and the ongoing work of Reconciliation, bringing depth and grounding to conversations that can too easily remain abstract.

One of his most distinctive contributions is his relational walking practice, which ties learning directly to land and place. His widely cited article, “We Need a New Story:



2026 honorary membership recipient
Dwayne Donald

Walking and the wâhkôhtowin Imagination,” makes the case that something as simple as walking together can fundamentally shift the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Donald has presented at universities and conferences across Canada and has been active in Association and subgroup events throughout his career. His Tier 1 Canada Research Chair appointment in 2021 was among several honours recognizing the reach and impact of his work.

The award of Honorary Membership will be presented to Donald at ARA in Calgary over the May long weekend. ■

ATA delays court challenge, cites strategic reasons

ATA News Staff

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) has delayed its day in court on Bill 2, the *Back to School Act*, which forced teachers back to work in October and stripped away their Charter rights by invoking the notwithstanding clause.

The ATA's Provincial Executive Council recently voted unanimously to accept a recommendation from Field Law, the Association's legal counsel, to delay the full hearing on the merits of the ATA's legal challenge to Bill 2 by six months.

This decision was favourably received by the presiding judge, Justice Mah, who had previously expedited the ATA's application for an injunction to roll back the legislation. Justice

Mah had noted in that proceeding the potential importance of cases currently being considered by the Supreme Court of Canada.

"This is not a setback, but, rather, a strategic and deliberate move that will allow us to take into account the cases Justice Mah referenced as we build our own case," said Jason Schilling, ATA president.

The two relevant cases currently before the Supreme Court of Canada, one from Quebec and one from Saskatchewan, deal with very similar legal questions at the heart of the ATA's challenge, particularly the use of the notwithstanding clause by provincial governments. Given that the ATA's case is still in the provincial court system, not the Supreme Court of Canada, the outcomes of those cases are expected to establish new

precedents that would affect the ATA's arguments and help its legal team focus its presentation to court.

With the requested delay, the hearing on the ATA's legal challenge of Bill 2 is set to take place in July 2027. Many other deadlines and milestones regarding the challenge need to be met during the lead up to the ATA's day in court, and the ATA will be busy preparing its case.

Recognizing that some members will be frustrated and disappointed in the delay, Schilling emphasized the ATA's ongoing commitment to upholding the rights of teachers across the province.

"When we have our day in court next year, we will be well equipped to present the strongest case possible on behalf of all our members," he said. "They deserve nothing less."

ATA launches student design contest, calls for entries

Mark Milne
ATA News Staff

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) has launched a new contest to tap into the creative talents of the province's young artists. The "My School. My Future." contest invites artists aged 6 to 17 who are currently enrolled in Alberta's public education system to draw a picture of what they love most about their teacher, going to school or their favourite subject. The winners will have their artwork featured on merchandise in the ATA

online store and receive a \$250 gift card to Mastermind Games, provided by Belairdirect Insurance.

The contest is designed to give students a way to celebrate their teachers and public education. While the ATA store already contains products that promote public education and professional solidarity, these new student-created designs will honour the role teachers play in their students' lives and how teachers help students achieve their future goals.

Five finalists will be selected from the eligible submissions. Those five entries will be presented to the

Provincial Executive Council, which will select two favourite drawings as the winners. The winning artwork will be posted on the ATA's social media channels at the end of June, with the new student-inspired merchandise set to appear in the ATA online store this fall.

Teachers are encouraged to have their students participate in the contest, but the formal entry must be submitted by the artist's parent or legal guardian. Entries can be sent to communications@ata.ab.ca. The contest closes at midnight on Wednesday, June 3, 2026.



ADOBE STOCK

Full contest rules are available at <https://abteach.cc/MySchoolMyFuture>.

LEADERSHIP THRIVE5

Bite-sized takeaways to boost and brighten your leadership life

Featuring: Jill Weatherhead
Principal, Holy Spirit Catholic School Division

1: I am reading...

 *Burnout: The Secret to Unlocking the Stress Cycle* by Emily Nagoski and Amelia Nagoski. I appreciate how they explain moving through the stress cycle and offer practical tools to overcoming burnout. I'm also reading *My Friends* by Fredrik Backman. I love Backman's astute ability to say so much, so well, with so few words.

2: I am eating...

 protein. Not only is this healthy, but helps me bond with my teenage boys, along with picking out barely-there moustache hairs and lifting heavy weights. Beef, chicken and salmon are our favorites, as well as eggs, cottage cheese, black beans, quinoa and nuts.

3: I am loving ...

 Ilia Super Serum Skin Tint. Moisturizes all winter long and protects with SPF 40 all summer long. I'm telling myself it helps a bit with the forehead lines we all incur daily as we move about the classroom managing classroom behaviour with firm stares, raised eyebrows and that just-right tilt of the head.

4: I am listening to...

 *The Rural Scoop* podcast with Melissa Sadorf. She brings new ideas, innovative curriculum and current rural school issues to the table, with guests who are teachers, administrators and educational professionals. (Full disclosure: there's an American slant as she's based out of Arizona.)

The Next Right Thing with Emily P. Freeman, a podcast about making decisions. Great if you struggle with decision fatigue, chronic hesitation or just need a few minutes away from the constant stream of news and information.

5: I have signed up for...

 *Truth for Teachers* with Angela Watson, a podcast and weekly newsletter. I started following her for her practical, actionable strategies in the classroom and have continued for her high-quality interviews and wide variety of current topics for leaders of all types.

Are you a school leader? Would you like to share your "Thrive 5"? Submit your ideas to managing editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at Lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

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Grounded in policy and truth, not qualifiers

Off Script

with ATA President Jason Schilling



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

You will often hear political pundits refer to governments “flooding the zone,” which is a strategy used to overwhelm and distract opponents from undesirable reports by generating a large amount of attention-grabbing content. Albertans and teachers are no strangers to this technique. Let’s use Bill 25, *An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act* as an example. When the media and others are busy talking about flag displays, naming of schools and teacher neutrality (all important issues), focus is taken away from the real challenges facing public education and the improvements needed for teachers and students to thrive in an increasingly strained system.

Throughout the debate on such bills in the legislature, media outlets and reporters will reach out to the Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) for its thoughts on the topic of the day. In my

role as president, I am also the official spokesperson for the ATA, and when I’m asked to speak on a topic, the first place I look is the ATA’s policy.

We are inherently a policy-driven association. Our members decide our policy at our Annual Representative Assembly, held every May long weekend. Resolutions are put forward by Provincial Executive Council and by locals, and are debated, amended and, if approved, adopted as policy. That policy reflects our collective values and beliefs and urges government and school boards to act to strengthen public education. Now, do they always meet our requests? No, and that then becomes the focus of our advocacy work.

One thing I witnessed before, during and especially after the strike is a lot of misinformation being spread about the ATA itself—specifically our governance, our policy and our budget processes. Though I find

this inherently disappointing, it is not entirely surprising given the heightened awareness of the ATA during our job action and the passing of Bill 2, the *Back to School Act*.

More concerning, however, is the rise of social media posts that are intentionally false, often aimed at discrediting the ATA, members of PEC or ATA staff, or the profession as a whole. Many of these posts or memes use qualifying language like “allegedly” or “I heard from someone on the inside.” Regardless of the disclaimer, the information is still false, and these untruths undermine the collective interests of us all.

Our members have access to information about the ATA, its policies and processes on our website; through school representatives, locals and other subgroups; and through the ATA itself. If ever you have questions, I encourage you to do what we always tell our students: ask. ■

Specialist councils celebrate 65 years at PD event

ATA News Staff

Here’s to 65 years of ongoing, specialized professional learning for Alberta teachers!

ATA specialist councils celebrated 65 years during the ATA’s spring Professional Development Conference (PDC), held April 17–18 in Edmonton. Attending the conference were more than 120 teachers from across the province, including local professional development chairs, convention association leaders, specialist council presidents and members of Provincial Executive Council.

The opening of the conference on Friday evening highlighted the 65th anniversary, with representatives from 18 of the Association’s 20 specialist councils on hand to help celebrate. The event also featured remarks from ATA President Jason Schilling and from Executive Secretary Dennis Theobald, followed by a look back at the history and impact of specialist councils.

The ATA’s 20 specialist councils play a central role in advancing teacher expertise across Alberta. Organized around subject areas such as science, math and the arts, as well as leadership roles, professional practice competencies and pedagogical



Archival materials were on display, showing the rich history of ATA specialist councils.

PHOTOS: LINDSAY YAKIMISHYIN

contexts, the councils provide targeted opportunities for professional growth.

Beyond the anniversary celebration, the PDC featured a provincial update and plenary sessions focused on classroom complexity and planning for transfer. The program also showcased ATA library makerspace kits and offered more than a dozen breakout sessions on topics including artificial intelligence in assessment, design thinking and visual journaling.

As the conference wrapped up, the specialist councils’ anniversary

celebration served as a reminder of how these subgroups play a key role in maintaining the professional identity of teachers in Alberta. Specialist councils continue to connect teachers and deepen professional practice—even after 65 years. ■



ATA executive secretary Dennis Theobald’s presentation focused on the four pillars of learning: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning to live together.



Specialist council representatives highlighted their councils’ work during the event.

In honour of the 65th anniversary of specialist councils, Belairdirect provided a \$650 gift card to one specialist council member. Out of 19,947 eligible members, Shameen A. (Calgary Public Teachers Local No 38) was the recipient.

All active, student, associate and life members of the Association are eligible to join specialist councils. Learn more at abteach.cc/specialist-councils.

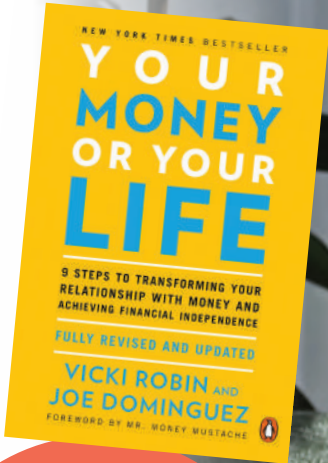


Need help making sense of your finances as you approach retirement?



The Alberta Retired Teachers' Association can help, through regular financial seminars, articles, and book recommendations.

Recently, we reviewed *Your Money Your Life* by Vicki Robin, which promises to transform your relationship with money. Should you add it to your pre-retirement reading list? Find out the answer to that question, and more, by visiting our blog.



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



Scan this QR code to learn more.

bit.ly/ARTAPWBlog



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Scan QR code to register

For more information or to register, contact **Molly Garstad** in Teacher Employment Membership Support at **587-686-7321** (in Edmonton), **1-800-232-7208** (toll free) or molly.garstad@ata.ab.ca.



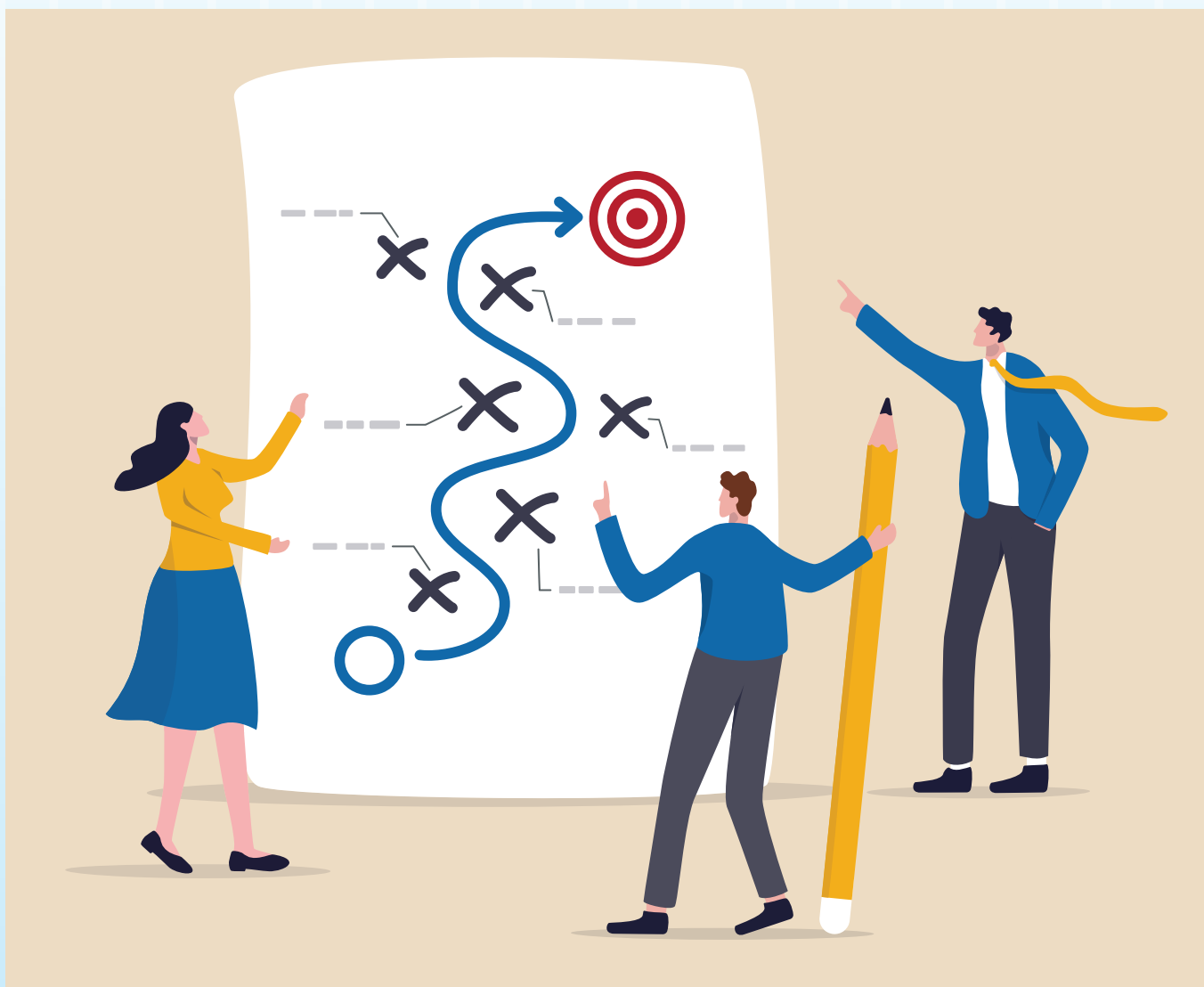
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The Alberta Teachers' Association

2026–27

PROPOSED BUDGET



ISTOCK

The proposed 2026–27 budget, prepared by Provincial Executive Council (PEC), is now complete and ready to be presented to teacher delegates convening in Calgary for the 109th Annual Representative Assembly (ARA) over the Victoria Day long weekend (May 16–18). The plan is balanced, maintains the current annual fee at \$1,422, and supports the continuation of core programs and services while also identifying opportunities for targeted, long-term investment.

Throughout the budget development process, PEC reviewed a range of initiatives and proposals,

engaged in thorough deliberations and made decisions by balancing fiscal considerations with member feedback. The fall's provincewide labour action underscored the critical importance of sustainability and effective long-term planning, both of which are reflected in the proposed 2026–27 budget.

It is anticipated that delegates will engage with the budget through considered questions at ARA, and both elected representatives and staff will be on hand to offer information, context and responses.

Proposed 2026–27 initiatives

In response to priorities identified by members, the proposed budget introduces three new targeted initiatives.

The first is a proposal to support training for local Substitute Teacher Committee chairs, arising from a recommendation of the Substitute Teachers Committee. Aligned with the Substitute Teachers’ Conference, this initiative will provide focused learning and support opportunities to strengthen participants’ skills and confidence in representing and assisting their colleagues.

Bill 2, the *Back to School Act*, was imposed by the Government of Alberta, ending strike action and legislating contract terms for members, with significant implications for collective bargaining

rights across the profession. The Association subsequently launched a legal challenge and sought an injunction. While the injunction was not granted, the matter continues to proceed through the courts. The Association remains firmly committed to advancing this legal challenge, a position grounded in clear and consistent direction from members. Accordingly, the proposed budget includes dedicated resources to support this ongoing work as it proceeds through the courts.

As a final point, work in support of Truth and Reconciliation remains a core and enduring priority, requiring sustained focus. This commitment will continue in 2026/27 through the earmarking of funds specifically directed toward Indigenous Education development.

Completed/discontinued initiatives

The following have been deleted and will no longer be budgeted:

The Professional Development (PD) Facilitator Corps is being discontinued, leading to the elimination of the following budget lines:

- PD Facilitators’ Seminar
- PD Facilitators’ Meetings
- FS PD Facilitators

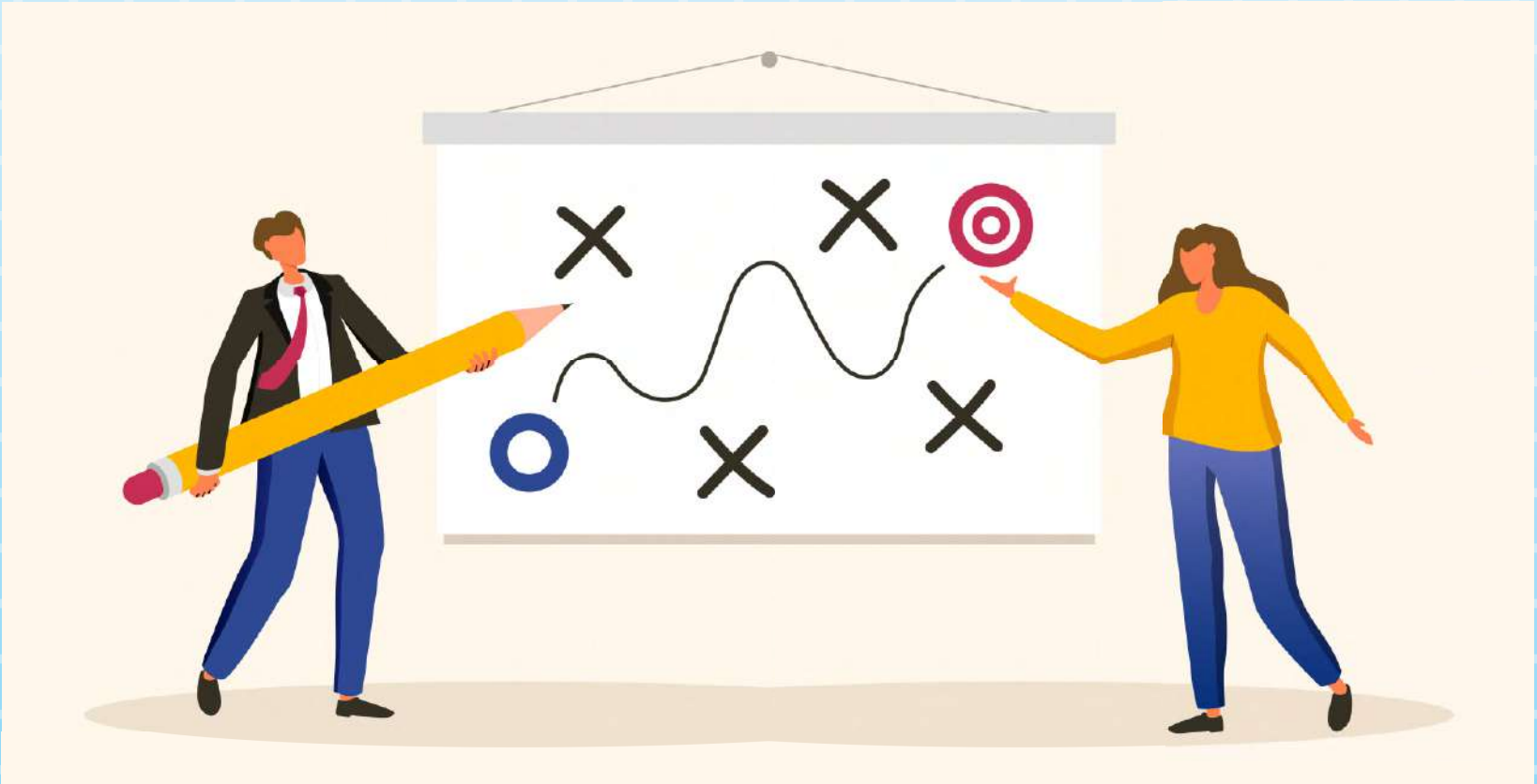
Further, to better align with current conference structures, the following budget lines are deleted:

- Public Education Conference
- Western Administrators’ Conference

Proposed annual fee for 2026–27

Provincial Executive Council is proposing no change to the Association member fee.

	2025–26 approved fee	2026–27 proposed fee
Total Fee	\$1,422.00	\$1,422.00
Funding for programs for which the local rebate does not apply	\$210.00	\$237.00
Net fee to distribute	\$1,212.00	\$1,185.00
Local rebate at 20 per cent	\$242.40	\$237.00
Balance of net fee (80 per cent)	\$969.60	\$948.00



Budget by program area

There are two parts to the Association’s budget. The nonrebatable section of the budget is funded in part by allocating a portion of the annual fee paid by members. As shown in the chart on page 10, this amount is expected to be \$237 in 2026–27. This then results in a net fee to distribute, of which 20 per cent is rebated to local associations to fund their operations. The remaining portion of the fee is used to help fund activities and/or programs on the rebatable side of the budget.

Part 1: Budget subject to local rebate

The table below compares program area expenditures for the 2025–26 approved budget and the 2026–27 proposed budget. It also provides a general description of the mandate of each program area.

Program area	Mandate	2025–26 approved budget	2026–27 proposed budget
Teacher Employment Membership Support (formerly Teacher Employment Services)	- To improve the economic well-being of teachers through work in collective bargaining, pension and insurance - To effect increases in the funding for education - To provide services to individual members on matters requiring discipline, legal assistance and professional relations - To provide general service to and consultation with locals, sublocals and staff as requested - To enhance awareness of the Association’s services	\$9,517,000	\$10,015,700
Professional Development	- To provide for the improvement of teaching practice through specialist councils, conventions, curriculum work, current issues, local leadership development, assistance to local PD committees, field service and representation to other subgroups - To prepare a corps of instructors and facilitators - To improve the preservice education of teachers and liaise with other agencies in these fields and extended field experiences	\$6,384,800	\$6,625,600
Government	- To govern the Association and provide for its obligations beyond Alberta’s borders - To liaise with other organizations within Alberta - To maintain communications internally with the membership and externally with the public directly and through media - To improve conditions for education through the political involvement of members - To support and represent teachers who are subject to the disciplinary proceedings and processes of the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission	\$10,309,500	\$10,574,900
Building	To provide and maintain physical facilities for Association offices in Edmonton and Calgary	\$3,350,700	\$3,208,500
Operations	- To provide for the financial and business operation of the Association, including business management, finance, general administration, human resources and document production - To provide services to other program areas and subgroups	\$5,951,200	\$6,189,800
Nondepartmental Commitments	To provide for items that are not directly a part of any other department and for items affecting all or most other departments, but which cannot be reasonably provided for within the department	\$1,817,900	\$1,873,200
Food Services	- To provide a catering service for participants at various meetings and other functions held at Barnett House - To operate a cafeteria service for staff, tenants and the public	\$864,900	\$688,800
Information and Technology Services	- To maintain and safeguard the Association’s information technology systems and equipment and to develop and maintain electronic capabilities and processes required by other program areas - To drive the Association’s IT-related projects and oversee all matters related to cybersecurity	\$3,192,800	\$3,489,200

Part 2: Budget not subject to local rebate

Member fees required to fund the second part of the budget are not subject to the local rebate, and 100 per cent of these fees are available to fund provincial Association programs. The table below compares expenditures and allocations for the 2025–26 approved budget and the 2026–27 proposed budget and provides a brief description of the nature of the expenditures.

Expenditure and allocation	Description	2025–26 approved budget	2026–27 proposed budget
Canadian Teachers’ Federation	Provides support for the Canadian Teachers’ Federation based on a per capita fee	\$1,125,000	\$1,236,000
Capital fund	Provides an annual allocation to the fund, which is used to purchase any capital assets and to fund capital projects	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
Special emergency fund	Provides an annual allocation to the fund, which is used to fund emergent actions as approved by Provincial Executive Council	\$500,000	\$2,200,000
Technology services project development	Provides annual funding for IT-related projects and key initiatives such as the migration from Alinity to the cloud-based Microsoft Dynamics	\$1,365,500	\$1,365,500
Specialist council membership grants	Provides the annual operating grants to the Association’s specialist councils	\$850,000	\$850,000
Accountability Action Plan	Provides funding to support international partnerships focused on advancing system reform, as well as collaboration with subgroups and like-minded teachers’ organizations that advance the profession’s views	\$105,000	\$105,000
Mortgage	Provides for principal and interest payments on the mortgage in place for construction and renovations that were completed	\$2,500,000	\$2,100,000
Public relations campaign	Provides funding for a multidimensional public relations campaign to highlight the work of the Association and teachers to increase public awareness about the importance of public education and the need for appropriate funding for education	\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000



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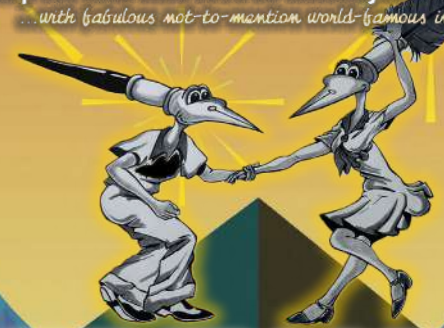
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DIGITAL NEWS



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Subscribe to receive an email when a new issue is available. <https://abteach.cc/subscribe>



Kim Clement
ATA News Staff

The spring sitting of the legislature began on February 24 and is scheduled to run until May 14. Here are highlights of the education-related discussions that took place in question period during the week of April 23.

Teacher Training, April 23

Chelsae Petrovic (UCP MLA for Livingstone-Macleod) made a members’ statement on the issue of teacher training. Petrovic argued that the government was creating pathways for subject-matter experts with advanced degrees and real-world experience to enter classrooms, stating, “Our government is opening the door for real experts [...] to step into our classrooms and teach what they actually know.” She framed this as a way to strengthen education and criticized the response from faculties of education, as well as the Association of Alberta Deans of Education. She suggested their opposition was about maintaining control over teacher training rather than upholding standards.

Petrovic focused heavily on concerns about ideological content in teacher education programs. She claimed that courses emphasize social justice frameworks at the expense of what she described as core academic priorities and practical teaching skills.

She contrasted this with what she said teachers and parents want: stronger preparation in classroom management, curriculum delivery and foundational subjects. She concluded by defending the government’s approach as focused on maintaining standards while reducing ideological influence in education.

Bill 25, April 22

Eric Bouchard (UCP MLA for Calgary-Lougheed) argued that classrooms should focus on student learning rather than political or ideological influence. He asked Minister of Education and Childcare Demetrios Nicolaides why Bill 25, *An Act to Remove Politics and Ideology from Classrooms and Amend the Education Act*, was needed and how it would restore trust in the education system.

Nicolaides responded that classrooms should teach students how to think, not what to think, emphasizing the importance of impartial instruction and exposure to diverse perspectives.

Bouchard followed up by asking how the legislation would define expectations to ensure neutrality in teaching. Nicolaides said amendments to the *Education Act* would require instructional materials to be delivered without personal bias, reflecting public expectations.

Bouchard then questioned how the bill would be enforced and what accountability measures would be in place. Nicolaides replied that the changes would reinforce respectful student behaviour and protect students’ ability to express diverse viewpoints.

Nicolaides concluded by criticizing the NDP, arguing they had previously promoted political and ideological perspectives in classrooms, which his government opposed.

School Construction in Northeast Edmonton, April 22

Heather Sweet (NDP MLA for Edmonton-Manning) raised concerns about rapid population growth in her riding and said several schools that are needed, including Crystallina and Marquis K-6 projects, remained unfunded, contributing to overcrowding and long travel times for students. She asked Nicolaides why the government had not addressed the growing demand for space.

Nicolaides responded that the government was undertaking a historic \$8.6-billion school construction program expected to create over 200,000 new and modernized student spaces across Alberta.

Sweet followed up by arguing that announced projects in her riding were not actually funded and warned of a bottleneck as large elementary cohorts moved into higher grades. She said the lack of investment was leading to increased overcrowding and leaving her riding without a high school.

Nicolaides replied that project prioritization relied on recommendations from local school boards and noted that some projects in her riding had been approved, including schools in Pilot Sound, McConachie and Kirkness.

Sweet responded that key high school projects, including the Horse Hill 7-12 project and a Catholic high school in Gorman, remained unfunded despite being requested by school boards. She asked whether the government would ensure access to local high school spaces.

Nicolaides concluded that the government received hundreds of school project requests annually and could not fund them all. He added that the government was prioritizing fast-growing areas, such as Edmonton and Calgary, based on school division recommendations. ■



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Members with discipline complaints urged to call ATA

Steve Diachuk
ATA Regulatory Affairs Officer

Discipline complaints happen, but when a notice from the Alberta Teaching Profession Commission (ATPC) arrives, the first few weeks can shape the entire file. That's why the ATA urges members to contact Regulatory Affairs immediately: the first 30 days can make all the difference. Under Alberta's *Education Act*, the commissioner has 30 days to conduct preliminary inquiries once a complaint is referred to the ATPC. This is a short window where the complaint is

assessed and key decisions about next steps are made. While the commissioner will speak with the complainant, the teacher being investigated is rarely contacted at this stage, meaning they may not be meaningfully involved in the preliminary inquiries unless they act quickly. This early stage is critical because if a complaint is referred to a full investigation, the process can become lengthy with no fixed timelines. The ATA has seen cases where complaints proceeded without the teacher's perspective, leading to investigations that stretch on for years. The ATA's Regulatory Affairs team works within this system every day

and helps members navigate the preliminary inquiry stage strategically. Early support can clarify what the complaint actually alleges; identify key deadlines and steps; organize facts; and prepare an accurate, focused and professional response to the commissioner before the matter moves further into the process. Just as important, contacting the Regulatory Affairs team early helps teachers avoid common missteps that can complicate a file, such as responding emotionally, oversharing or trying to explain everything at once in response to an allegation. Often, the initial work makes the difference between a file that is resolved

following the preliminary inquiry and a file that escalates into a prolonged investigation that creates uncertainty both professionally and personally. If you receive an ATPC-related notice, don't wait to see what happens next. Call early, ask questions and let the ATA help. Contact the ATA's Regulatory Affairs team at 780-447-9460 or regulatoryaffairs@ata.ab.ca.

DID YOU KNOW?

Since 2023, the ATA has supported hundreds of members named in ATPC complaints.

ATAGSA approved to be first permanent DEN

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held April 16–17, 2026, at Barnett House, Edmonton.

- 1. Approved the application for permanent DEN (Diversity Equity Network) status of the ATAGSA.
- 2. Authorized the Association to initiate a targeted advocacy and public awareness campaign opposing the removal of children from Alberta schools due to expiring or pending immigration status.
- 3. Endorsed the candidacy of Jason Schilling as president-designate of the Canadian Teachers' Federation at its general election to be held July 2026.
- 4. Authorized legal counsel to delay the hearing on the merits pending

- 5. Approved adjustments to the 2026/27 proposed budget for presentation at the 2026 Annual Representative Assembly.
- 6. Authorized a financial contribution in the amount of \$1,000 to the Canadian Teachers' Federation to support Education International's Solidarity Fund, which will support the Union of Teachers of North and East Syria and assist affected colleagues, their families and school communities.
- 7. Authorized three virtual focus group sessions, with six to ten teachers under the age of 30, to gather young teachers' views of the Association and its programs.
- 8. Reconsidered its position on Electoral Ballot 3 of 2025 from concurrence to nonconcurrence.
- 9. Approved for submission to the 2026 Annual Representative Assembly (ARA) a resolution urging the Government of Alberta to enact comprehensive accessibility legislation, developed in consultation with provincial disability organizations and public sector unions.
- 10. Approved for submission to the 2026 ARA a resolution opposing the implementation of Bill 12, *Financial Statutes Amendment Act*, 2025 (NO. 2), and related cuts to the Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program and the creation of the Alberta Disability Assistance Program (ADAP).
- 11. Approved in principle the content and structure of the draft Local Executive Compensation Report Survey. Council may provide further feedback on its content prior to finalization and implementation.
- 12. Reduced the number of ATA News issues from 15 to 12, beginning in the 2026/27 year.
- 13. Approved a review of the print distribution of the ATA News with the aim to strategically reduce the number of print copies distributed.
- 14. Authorized the Association to engage the external consultant services of Crestview Strategy, with a reasonable termination provision negotiated in the contract, to support the Association's external government relations.
- 15. Referred the Association's approach to monitoring media and public discourse to staff, in consultation with the Association's government relations partner, Crestview Strategies.
- 16. Requested staff to consider how to onshore the distribution of the Association's promotional materials.
- 17. Amended the administrative guidelines pertaining to the PEC development fund.

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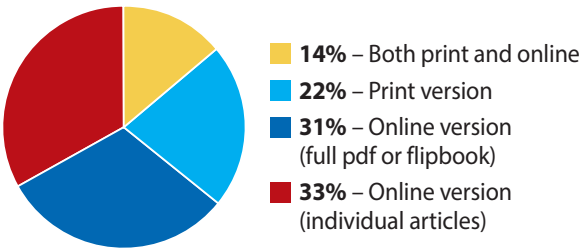
ATA NEWS READER SURVEY THE RESULTS ARE IN!

ATA News Staff

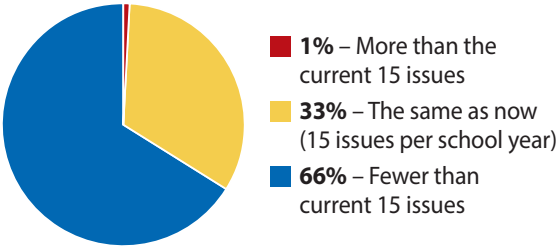
The ATA News team thanks the more than 1,000 readers who completed our spring reader survey. Below are some highlights of what we heard and the steps the ATA News is taking to ensure the publication remains responsive to the needs of teachers and school leaders in Alberta.

Results overview

How readers prefer to access the ATA News:



How many issues readers would prefer:



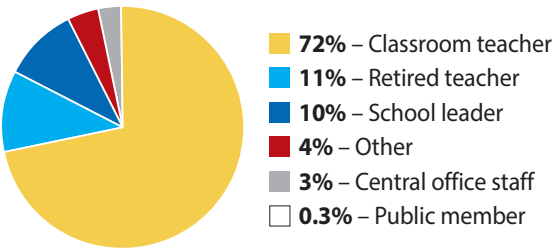
Top 3 preferred content types:

- 1 ATA updates and announcements
- 2 News stories related to the teaching profession
- 3 ATA program and grant information

Representative comments

- Some asked for a reduction in the number of print copies, expressing concerns about paper waste and the cost of printing and distribution. Some readers continue to prefer the print version.
- Some expressed appreciation for the in-depth articles and opinion pieces, though many indicated that time was at a premium and that they preferred more bite-sized pieces and/or fewer issues of the ATA News overall.
- Some said they appreciate the political analyses included, while some others look for continued balance in the perspectives represented.
- Some suggested including content tailored to different roles within the profession, such as school leaders and substitute teachers.
- Many appreciated the current content and format. Ideas for future content included resources and professional learning; teacher tips and strategies; need-to-knows related to employment matters; bursaries, awards and discounts for teachers; local spotlights; snapshots of other jurisdictions, nationally and internationally; teacher success stories; art projects, pet photos, contests and other member engagement items.

Respondent breakdown:



Next steps

Considering the survey results, the ATA News team will be

- reducing the number of issues for the 2026/27 school year from 15 issues to 12 issues;
- reviewing and strategically reducing print and distribution numbers to minimize waste and cost while ensuring effective reach to members who value the print edition; and
- focusing on keeping the publication concise, with more bite-sized content, and continuing to offer relevant updates, content geared at engagement and balanced analysis for members.

Share your voice

The ATA News team welcomes feedback and contributions on an ongoing basis. If you have any ideas to share or would like to contribute an article, photo or other content to the ATA News, please email managing editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn at lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

Survey respondents had the opportunity to enter to win a \$50 gift card. The winner is Kessa D. from Calgary Public Local No. 38.

DID YOU KNOW?

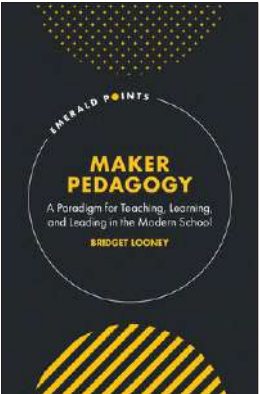
The ATA News was established in 1967. Next year, the publication will be celebrating 60 years of keeping ATA members informed and engaged.

CHECK ME OUT!

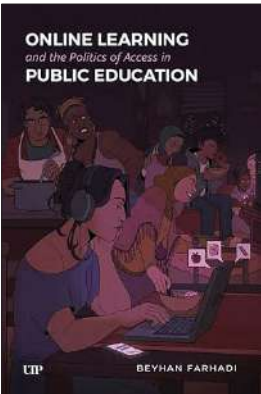
Some of the ATA Library's newest reads:



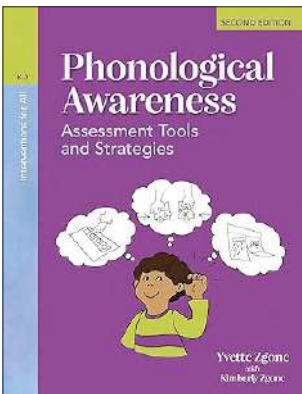
L'Intelligence Artificielle en Classe : 50 stratégies pour soutenir l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de Donnie Piercey



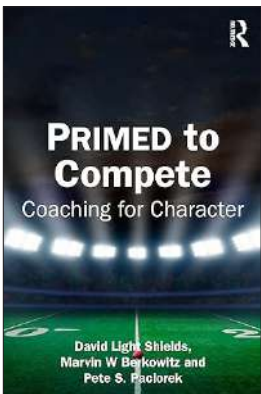
Maker Pedagogy: A Paradigm for Teaching, Learning and Leading in the Modern School by Bridget Looney



Online Learning and the Politics of Access in Public Education by Beyhan Farhadi



Phonological Awareness, K-2: Assessment Tools and Strategies by Yvette Zgonc with Kimberly Zgonc



PRIMED to Compete: Coaching for Character by David Light Shields, Marvin Berkowitz and Pete Paciorek

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2026 gotcha! PHOTO CONTEST



The ATA News invites you to get your camera out and start shooting those award-winning photographs.

Cash prizes available!

1st place: \$200 2nd place: \$100 3rd place: \$50



GOTCHA! Contest rules

1. Photos taken by active, associate and student ATA members of education or school-related activities are eligible. (Hint: photos depicting action are best.)
2. Entries must be submitted by the member who took the photos.
3. Photos taken between Sept. 1, 2025 and May 15, 2026, are eligible.
4. Please email photos to newsandmag@ata.ab.ca. Entries must be received by 5 p.m. on May 15, 2026.
5. Each entry must be accompanied by a description of the activity; the names (if possible) of the people in the photo; the date when the photo was taken; and the photographer's name, school and contact information.
6. Up to 10 additional entries may be selected for an honourable mention.
7. Cash prizes will be awarded to entrants whose photos place in the top three, as follows. First place: \$200; second place: \$100 and third place: \$50
8. Each entrant may submit up to five photos but no entrant can win more than one top-three prize.
9. A panel of individuals with photography, publishing and teaching experience will judge the entries. The decision of the judges is final.
10. Winning photographs will be published in the ATA News.
11. Photos submitted for the contest may be published in the ATA News, the ATA Magazine or other Association publications.
12. Please read carefully. Failure to comply with any of these rules may result in disqualification.

Get snapping and good luck!

COMM-65-1 2026 01

popquiz!

Sudoku

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Above and beyond

During Education Week, held April 13–17, many expressed gratitude and appreciation for the contribution teachers make every day in—and beyond—classrooms across Alberta. Here are excerpts from posts in support of teachers and public education.

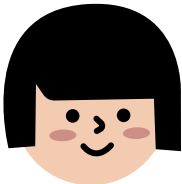


Thank you to our teachers for your expertise, professionalism and dedication, and to all staff for the care and commitment you bring to your roles. Your work is essential to the strength of public education and to the experiences of the students and families we serve.

—Calgary Board of Education

At ATRE, we're honoured to serve Alberta teachers throughout their careers and into retirement. We know that learning doesn't just shape minds; it shapes the future of our communities and our province. Thank you to all Alberta teachers and school communities for the lasting impact you make in the classroom and beyond.

—Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund

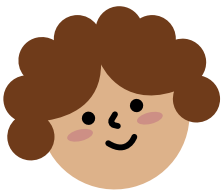


The work of an educator does not end when the lesson does. It carries forward in the choices students make, the confidence they build and the way they come to understand the world around them.

—Saint Thomas Aquinas Roman Catholic Schools

This Education Week, we celebrate the people behind learning! Thank you to our teachers, staff, students, families and volunteers for inspiring growth every day.

—Prairie Rose Public Schools

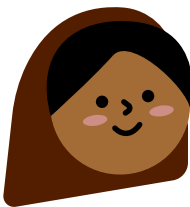


Thank you teachers and education staff, including Elk Island Public Schools in our municipality, for all that you do!

—Lamont County

To all the teachers, thank you for your endless efforts to inspire, support and empower students to be their best.

—Edmonton Catholic Teachers Local No. 54



BRSD is grateful for the dedication and hard work of our staff. You keep our schools running seamlessly, providing students with safe and encouraging learning spaces.

—Battle River School Division

Education can be a guiding light for children, youth and families navigating some of life's most difficult experiences. [...] We also want to extend our heartfelt thanks to the incredible teachers and school staff across Alberta. Your compassion, resilience and commitment to students make a lasting difference.

—LUNA Child and Youth Advocacy Centre

