



WORLD TEACHERS' DAY 10-5

Celebrating teachers creating a brighter future, [see page 6.](#)

ATA NEWS

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LEADERSHIP
THRIVE5
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SUPPLIED

This summer, Alberta teachers participated in the Teaching Together program, travelling abroad to promote equitable, high-quality, publicly funded education for all. Here, teachers on the Ghanaian team take part in a culture night showcasing Canadian and Ghanaian culture. See more beginning on [page 9.](#)



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Schools have never ignored the trades



EDITORIAL

Kristine Wilkinson
 ATA News Editor-in-Chief

This fall, Advanced Education Minister Miles McDougall said he hopes young people will become more receptive to careers in the skilled trades. Comments like this might lead some parents to assume that schools have not done enough to expose students to trades-focused courses. Anyone who has worked in Alberta schools, however, knows that is simply not true.

Alberta's public schools have a long history of promoting and supporting the trades. My own education, many years ago, included woodworking, foods, plastics and sewing. When I returned to schools as a teacher, I saw that this type of programming had only expanded. Students are introduced to hands-on learning as early as junior high through shop, construction, mechanics, fabrication, foods, robotics and many other Career and Technology Foundations courses.

By high school, students can pursue more specialized opportunities through Career and Technology Studies, work-experience placements, dual-credit programs and the Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP). Alberta's apprenticeship system has been so successful that thousands of students have begun their apprenticeship journey while still in high school.

According to Statistics Canada, more than 6,600

former RAP students had gone on to complete full apprenticeship programs and earn journeyperson certification by 2022 (the most recent year for which data is available). Alberta also has approximately 45,000 registered apprentices, representing a larger share of Canada's apprentices than Alberta's share of the national workforce.

For years, parents, industry leaders, governments, school divisions and teachers have encouraged students to see the trades as rewarding and respected

“What [students] have lacked is freedom from a narrative that suggests that schools somehow value university education above all other pathways.”

career paths. The province has continued to invest in apprenticeship education, while schools have provided students with opportunities to explore those careers first-hand.

The reality is that students have never lacked exposure to the trades. What they have lacked is freedom from a narrative that suggests that schools somehow value university education above all other pathways.

Apprenticeship pathways are important and

growing, but they continue to represent a smaller proportion of students than traditional post-secondary routes. That is not evidence that schools are failing to promote the trades. Young people make decisions based on many factors, including their interests, strengths, family influences, labour-market conditions and the opportunities available to them. They also have a wide range of pathways from which to choose after graduation.

Teachers understand something that often gets lost in public discussions about career preparation: success is not measured by whether a student attends university or enters a trade. Every year, Alberta teachers and parents celebrate students who begin apprenticeships, just as they celebrate those accepted to universities, colleges and polytechnics, or those who pursue careers in the military, entrepreneurship or the workforce.

The goal is to help students discover a pathway that fits their strengths, interests and goals. That is at the heart of career education: giving young people the knowledge and opportunities to make informed choices about their futures.

So, when we continue to hear about the need for more people in the skilled trades, it is worth remembering what is already happening in classrooms, schools and worksites across Alberta. Teachers have been helping students work toward skilled-trades careers for generations.

The challenge is not convincing schools that the trades matter. They already know. They have been proving it for decades. ■

I welcome your comments. You may contact me at kristine.wilkinson@ata.ab.ca.

A right and responsibility—go vote!



FROM THE DESK OF

Robert Mazzotta
 ATA Executive Secretary

Getting out the vote can be a challenge, whether for municipal, provincial or federal elections, various plebiscites in your local communities, or our own Provincial Executive Council (PEC) election. Explanations for this can include lack of information, apathy, busy lives at work and home, or even the feeling that one vote won't make a difference. Your vote does matter, though. And there is an important vote approaching that I encourage you all to take part in: the provincial referendum vote on Oct. 19.

As we have seen in some elections locally and internationally, a low voter turnout can result in an unexpected candidate winning an election. Just a few votes can make a difference. The same can hold true for a referendum, which is why it is important that you, your family members and your neighbours go out and vote on Oct. 19.

Back in June, President Jason Schilling released a statement on the referendum, which read in part “The Alberta Teachers' Association opposes any ballot questions in the Alberta referendum that refer to restricting access to provincially funded public education based on a child's immigration status. Children do not choose their immigration status, and they should not be denied an education because of

it. Every child in Alberta deserves access to publicly funded education. Period. ... Other Canadian provinces have already acted to ensure that no child is denied public education based on immigration status. Alberta should be doing the same.”

The outcomes of this referendum may have a direct impact on what happens in our classrooms and schools. As teachers, we want to do what is best for students and part of that is ensuring they have access to public education. It is time to make your vote count.

If you requested a special ballot, remember to submit your mail-in ballot sooner rather than later—these ballots must be received by 5 p.m. on Oct. 16. As long lines are expected on referendum day, you may also consider taking part in advanced voting in your electoral division from Oct. 13–17. If you choose to vote on Oct. 19, voting locations are open from 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. However you decide to vote on the 10 questions being posed, one thing is important: vote! More information on the questions and the process is available at www.elections.ab.ca/elections/referendum.

There is another vote on the horizon that will also impact you as teachers: the Association's PEC election.

You might be thinking, “What the heck is PEC?” PEC is composed of your elected representatives for the Association. PEC members represent your views at the provincial level and, collectively, are charged with creating and setting Association policies and practices. PEC also creates standing and ad hoc committees to advise and assist representatives on various education-related matters. Some of PEC's

duties are to help draft the Association's budget and provide input on fees, set objectives and priorities and help develop high-level strategies for the Association and identify issues affecting teachers and the profession. Their most important role is to maintain ongoing contact with you, the members, to ensure your ideas, successes, suggestions or challenges are brought forward to the rest of PEC and to staff.

If you want to learn more about how PEC is representing members, you can find a record of any of their recorded votes on the ATA website. More insights into PEC's meetings are also available in “PEC Points,” a recurring item in the *ATA News*, and *Precis*, a brief account of PEC meetings now available to members. These reports create transparency and help members better understand the decisions made and their impact on you and the profession.

In March 2027, the biennial general election for PEC will be held. The positions to be filled in that election are the president, two vice-presidents and 15 district representatives. More information on the PEC election, including nomination deadlines, will be distributed in October, but if you want to find out more about PEC in the meantime, information is available on our website at teachers.ab.ca/about/ata-governance/provincial-executive-council.

We live in a democratic society, and each of us has the right and responsibility to participate fully in the voting process. Please exercise yours. ■

I welcome your comments and questions. You may reach me at robert.mazzotta@ata.ab.ca.

Prepare for a “neverendum”



VIEWPOINTS

Doreen Barrie
Adjunct Assistant Professor, University of Calgary

The term “neverendum” was coined by Quebec journalist Josh Freed in 1992 during that province’s second referendum on separation, and it sums up what Albertans can expect this fall.

Regardless of the outcome of Alberta’s October referendum, its legacy will reverberate far into the future. By their very nature, referendums are divisive, requiring voters to make a binary choice between two alternatives. In this case, the waters are muddied by nine confusing questions and one setting the stage for a second referendum on “divorcing” Canada.

This is an expensive (costing approximately \$130 million), nonbinding exercise in futility, embarked upon to settle an internal party issue: that is, whether a majority of the UCP caucus are separatists. Like the Brexit vote, which Prime

“The questions ... are grounded in animus toward Ottawa and ideas that have been floated by different groups for a quarter of a century.”

Minister David Cameron called because his caucus was divided, the entire country was plunged into a campaign they did not seek. Fearing that her party will fracture, Premier Smith is trying to appease these rebels by getting all voters to express their views.

The questions we will have to answer in October are hardly the topic of conversation around the kitchen table. They are grounded in animus toward Ottawa and ideas that have been floated by different groups for a quarter of a century. They are solutions looking for a problem: setting up a provincial police force and pension plan, collecting our own income tax and gradually detaching ourselves from Ottawa. These proposals leave Albertans cold. What keeps them awake at night are two-tier health care, artificial intelligence data centres and the leaked voter list that has elicited little response from the government.

What we have instead are some questions that are redundant and others that are confusing. For example, proof of citizenship is

already appearing on driver’s licences, and opting out of federal programs has been possible for three decades. In addition, it does not require constitutional reform.

Although the first question deals with more control over immigration, the three that follow do not target immigrants. They relate to those with temporary status: temporary foreign workers, international students and refugees. Those who fall into this category are among the most vulnerable in society. Ukrainians fleeing the war in their country are unlikely to have the means to pay for health care or education. International students, who pay five times the tuition fees paid by Canadians, and temporary foreign workers are equally disadvantaged.

Despite their uncertain situation, anyone with a nonpermanent status who works in Canada pays income and payroll taxes, plus GST, meaning that they are contributing to government revenue and subsidizing pensioners.

It is highly likely that these proposals will face legal challenges because they violate the Charter rights of individuals. The Supreme Court has ruled that an “individual” in section 15, the Equality Rights section, covers any person physically present in Canada, not just citizens. Whether children of undocumented individuals will enjoy the right to education is difficult to predict. Some families are awaiting documentation from the federal government and others have applied for refugee status. Alberta’s minister of Education and Childcare has been evasive in his answers on the subject, adding to the anxiety of many parents.

In the long term, the post-referendum horizon is bleak. Even if there’s overwhelming support to remain in Canada, separatists will fan the flames and agitate for another vote.

In the immediate term, given the gargantuan task that Elections Alberta has on its hands, the voting process is likely to be chaotic. There will be long lineups, voter frustration and possibly a low turnout. No doubt, the task of counting millions of votes by hand will be lengthy, with thousands of mail-in ballots adding to the burden. If the latter make a significant difference to the outcome, given the Trumpian tendencies of some separatists, they will probably cast doubt on the integrity of the results.

All in all, Albertans are being put through a meat grinder. ■

Doreen Barrie is an adjunct assistant professor in the Political Science Department at the University of Calgary. She has taught courses in Canadian and provincial politics, Alberta politics, and the politics of water.

YOUR VIEWS

World Teachers’ Day is coming up, and teachers shouted out a colleague and shared how they’ve made a difference.

f Laurie McIntosh
Sometimes people flippantly say, “I couldn’t do this without you,” but when I say I wouldn’t be a teacher still without my colleague Colleen Maier, I truly mean it. From checking in to see how our mental health is doing to taking care of me amidst a family tragedy to constantly holding the hope that I AM a good teacher, she reminds me every day of the goodness that is within this profession.

@lolohawes
I want you to know about @heatherclarkaup. She’s the principal of Father Mike McCaffery High School in Edmonton. In fact, Heather opened

the site three years ago. She’s the quintessential principal: visionary, empowering, love of kids first. Heather believes in creating a generation of changemakers, all with fire in their hearts. She ensures her staff and students know they are valued and seen, that each of them matter. I have known Heather for almost 30 years and she inspires me to be a better leader every day.

Reply:

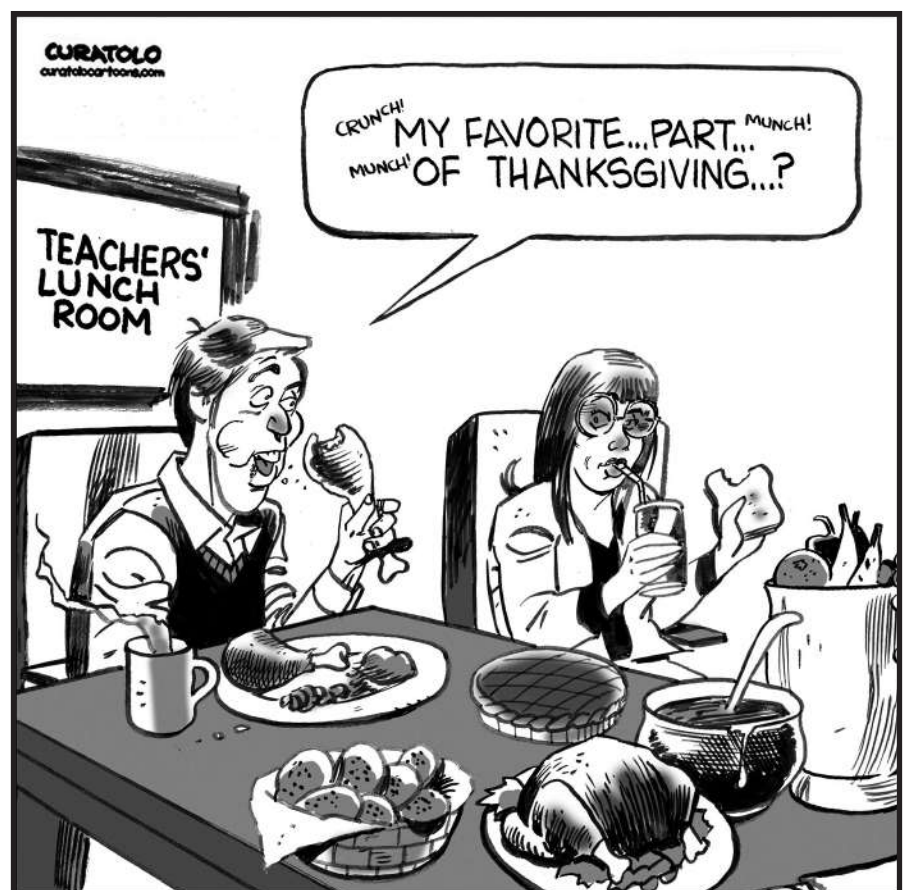
@Heatherclarkaup
@lolohawes what a most beautiful note. Thank you so much for championing my work.

Letters to the editor: We welcome letters to the editor. Please limit your submission to 300 words. Only letters bearing a first and last name, address and daytime telephone number will be considered for publication. Teachers are also asked to indicate where and what they teach. All letters are subject to editing for length, clarity, punctuation, spelling and grammar. Email managing editor Lindsay Yakimyshyn: lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca.

FOR THE RECORD

“Removing the provincial fuel tax delivers meaningful relief when families need it most. We are listening to Albertans, and this is just another way we are building on our ongoing efforts to make life more affordable across our province.”

—Alberta’s Minister of Affordability and Utilities RJ Sigurdson in a Sept. 22 news release



Province announces expansion of screener program

ATA News Staff

Albertans can expect to see more screeners. On Sept. 9, Minister of Education and Childcare Demetrios Nicolaides announced that the province’s numeracy and literacy screeners program is expanding to include Grades 4 and 5.



ISTOCK

Beginning in the 2026/27 school year, Grade 4 and 5 students will take mandatory literacy and numeracy screeners each fall. Additional screening in the winter is recommended, and students identified as requiring additional supports will take part in spring screening to measure progress.

“These screeners are short, simple activities that can have a huge impact on identifying and stopping issues with math and reading before they grow into even larger issues down the road for a student,” Nicolaides said.

The expansion builds on mandatory screening that has been in place for kindergarten to Grade 3 students since 2024/25, which has had mixed reviews. The ministry says the screeners and related supports are already having an impact in schools, while the ATA continues to raise questions about the value of these standardized tests for young students.

“Teachers have shared their ongoing concerns with the screening program for K–3 students,” said ATA president Jason Schilling. “Rather than adding more and more assessments, the focus needs to be on creating sustainable and equitable supports for the complex needs we’re seeing in schools.”

For 2026/27, the province plans to spend \$20 million in screening and supports, 60 per cent more than in the previous school year. ■



Grief, loss and a belief in what we can build

As we approach the one-year anniversary of the provincewide teachers’ strike, I have been thinking a lot about grief. That may seem like an unusual word to describe what happened to teachers last fall; however, grief is not reserved for the loss of a person. We can grieve the loss of expectations, trust, certainty or something we fought hard to protect.

I know something about loss and grief. Around the time of the teachers’ strike vote in June 2025, my mother died suddenly. There was no preparation for it. No opportunity to ease into it. Life changed in an instant.

While I was grieving the loss of my mother, I was also leading our profession through one of the most difficult moments in our history: the government unceremoniously bringing an end to teachers’ lawful labour action.

I do not pretend these two experiences are the same. They are not. They are profoundly different. But they both taught me that grief does not follow a schedule, it does not move in a straight line and it doesn’t need to.

For many teachers, the end of the strike brought its own profound sense of loss. We had stood together for our students, our classrooms and our profession. We had asked for sustainable solutions to class size and complexity, and the resources students need to be successful. Then, after weeks of collective action, the government ordered us back to our classrooms.

There was denial: Surely this cannot be how this ends? There was anger: How could this happen after everything we sacrificed? There was bargaining: What if we had done something differently? What if we had pushed harder? There was sadness, exhaustion, and the realization that we could not simply return to how it was before, acting as though nothing had happened.

And then acceptance, which is not agreement. It does not mean forgetting, and it certainly does not mean giving up.

This past year, I have learned that grief does not disappear simply because time passes. We learn to carry it. Sometimes it returns unexpectedly. It could be a date, a memory, a familiar song, a conversation. I suspect this anniversary may raise feelings of grief for many teachers.

We don’t need to be “over” what happened and our feelings of loss. Instead, we should reflect on what we have learned from our experiences and what we are prepared to do with that knowledge. We can grieve what was lost while still believing in what can be built.

The strike changed us and showed us our strength. We grieve. We remember. Then, together, we move forward defending the public education system we deserve. ■

Alberta educator named to national committee on diversity

Lindsay Yakimyshyn
ATA News Managing Editor

Beginning this fall, Edmonton diversity consultant and teacher Janice Pinnock will represent the Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) nationally as a member of the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF/FCE) Advisory Committee on Diversity and Human Rights.

With nearly two decades of experience in education and a strong commitment to building inclusive learning environments, Pinnock brings a wealth of knowledge to the committee. She regularly presents at teachers’ conventions and conferences on such topics as antiracism and holds a Master of Professional Education in Equity, Diversity and Social Justice from Western University. Pinnock looks forward to sharing her expertise with the national committee, learning from colleagues and connecting with educators from across Canada.

“I’ve had the privilege of working with many different communities, from rural to urban settings, with unions, schools, division leadership and other school boards,” Pinnock said. “I hope to bring these perspectives to the table and share what we are learning as we forge ahead here in Alberta.”

Pinnock also looks forward to the opportunity to learn from approaches being taken in other provinces and territories and to bring promising practices back to her own work and her educational community.

“This work is important and nuanced,” she added, “so, the more identities and voices that are represented in these conversations, the more impactful our work will be for all communities.”

Reflecting on her appointment, she recalled a quote from author Dina Nayeri: “It is the obligation of every person born in a safer room to open the door when someone in danger knocks.” For Pinnock, this captures the responsibility she feels in taking on a national role focused on diversity and human rights.

“I feel a responsibility to throw the door open, quit talking, listen and then roll up my sleeves and get to work!”

The CTF/FCE currently has five advisory committees: Advisory Committee on Diversity and Human Rights, Advisory Committee on French as a First Language, Advisory Committee on Indigenous



SUPPLIED

Janice Pinnock

Education, Advisory Committee on the Status of Women and Advisory Committee on the Teaching Profession. With Pinnock’s appointment this year, the ATA has field member representation on three CTF/FCE advisory committees for 2026/27. ■

Each year, the Alberta Teachers’ Association nominates members to serve on the CTF/FCE advisory committees. Opportunities and application information will be posted on the ATA’s website in the spring under Advocacy > Volunteer.

Did you know?

A nonprofit organization, the CTF/FCE is a national alliance of provincial and territorial member organizations and associate organizations representing more than 370,000 teachers and education workers across Canada. Learn more about CTF/FCE and its work to advocate for teachers and public education at www.ctf-fce.ca.



ATA fellowship and research bursary winners announced

ATA News Staff

The winners of the 2026 ATA fellowships and scholarships have been announced, with all three of these ATA members currently engaged in graduate studies aimed at strengthening education in Alberta.

Doctoral Fellowship in Education

Each year, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) awards two fellowships, valued at \$15,000 each, to ATA members who have been accepted into or already embarked upon full-time study in a doctoral program in education at a recognized public university in Alberta or Canada (if the program of study is offered in French or is not available in Alberta). The fellowship program is intended to recognize academic excellence and to help defray the financial costs of university study.

Teri Hofferd

Teri Hofferd is a high school English teacher with more than 20 years of experience. She has spent most of her career at Catholic Central High School in Lethbridge. Hofferd received the University of Lethbridge's School of Graduate Studies' Silver Medal of Merit and the Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada's Master's Thesis Award. Hofferd began her doctoral studies at the University of British Columbia with research focused on teacher-writers and how they negotiate the relationship between their writing practices and their writing pedagogy in response to the emergence of generative artificial intelligence.

Sarah Clark

Sarah Clark is an experienced school leader with nearly two decades in education and was recently appointed as an assistant superintendent in Foothills School Division. During her career, she led dual-track French immersion programming, mentored emerging leaders, and supported diverse student populations, including trauma-impacted and newcomer youth. A former divisional principal and university instructor, she also contributed to designing districtwide programs, codeveloped leadership certification aligned with Alberta's standards, and facilitated professional learning rooted in Universal Design for Learning. Currently completing doctoral studies in educational leadership and administration at the University of Lethbridge, Clark is committed to building equitable and thriving school communities through her research.

Nadene M. Thomas Graduate Research Bursary

The Nadene M. Thomas Graduate Research Bursary in the amount of \$5,000 is offered annually to a member of the Alberta Teachers' Association who is enrolled in a graduate program in education at a recognized Canadian university. Research must focus on contemporary issues impacting professional practice or public education, and/or innovative approaches to teaching or school leadership.

Tia Giesbrecht

Tia Giesbrecht teaches Grade 6 at R.I. Baker School in Coaldale, where she runs her school's Dungeons and Dragons and Student Leadership clubs. She is in the Master of Education program at the University of Lethbridge, with research interests in student and teacher mental health. Giesbrecht enjoys being on the executive for her ATA local and mentoring preservice teachers from the university. Her goal is a classroom where students feel they belong and are supported, using humour and compassion to make a home away from home. She believes that her research will help her to better teach resilience and problem solving. ■



Teri Hofferd



Sarah Clark



Tia Giesbrecht

LEADERSHIP THRIVE5

Bite-sized takeaways to boost and brighten your leadership life

Featuring:
Michelle Prinsonsky, Assistant Principal,
Edmonton Public Schools

1: I am reading...

 *Time for Change* by Anthony Muhammad and Luis F. Cruz. I'm tackling this with my leadership cohort, and it couldn't be more relevant. It focuses on bridging the gap between a big educational vision and day-to-day execution, specifically how to handle resistance and shift school culture. Educational leadership is really about understanding people and guiding teams through change with empathy. It's a great reminder that real transformation starts with aligning our actions with our values.

2: I am eating...

 a delicious baked treat with a fresh mug of spiced tea. I've been loving Yemeni tea lately, but I also brew my own at home with cardamom, cinnamon, star anise, ginger, peppercorns, milk and sugar. Paired with a sweet or savoury pastry, it's pure soul food and comfort—the ultimate way to decompress after a long day. It's even better when enjoyed with good company.

3: I am watching...

 reality TV and K-dramas! I am fascinated by how people handle pressure and transform through challenges—for better or worse. Reality TV gives a raw peek into human behaviour and conflict, while K-dramas deliver incredible storytelling and rich character growth. Plus, after a long week of making big decisions, sometimes you just need a good, cathartic cry over a great storyline.

4: I have signed up for...

 a rec centre membership to stay active and blow off steam. Group fitness is my jam. I love the community energy and letting a great instructor lead the way so I can just show up and push myself. My routine switches between high-energy Zumba to dance off stress and lifting heavy weights for strength and focus. Nothing clears the mind like a solid sweat session.

5: I am listening to...

 WIL Talk (Women in Leadership Talk). I love listening to other women share their real stories, wisdom and hard-earned lessons. Hearing about their setbacks and triumphs is a great reminder that leadership isn't a straight line; it's a constant journey of growth and adaptation. It gives me a quick dose of practical insight, authenticity and daily inspiration. ■

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.

PISA 2025 report released

World-class results in an educational polycrisis



**EXECUTIVE
REPORT**

Phil McRae
ATA Associate Coordinator,
Research

The results from the 2025 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) are now in. Coordinated by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), PISA asks 15 year olds to apply their knowledge in reading, mathematics and science so participating jurisdictions can compare their education systems. In 2025, more than 760,000 students in 91 countries and economies participated in the assessment.

Alberta students scored 520 in science, 499 in reading and 489 in mathematics. These were the highest provincial results in Canada for science and reading, and the second highest in mathematics (behind Quebec). Compared internationally, Alberta’s raw mean scores place the province within the global top ten in all three domains. That remarkable result belongs to students and those who support them in our public schools. Without question, Alberta remains one of the world’s strongest-performing education systems.

As we look at the results more closely, though, one fact deserves emphasis: Alberta’s teachers and school leaders have once again done extraordinary work through their professional judgment, skill, care and attention to creating world-class learning experiences for our students. More notable, they achieved these strong results in an underfunded system with increasingly complex student needs and the erosion of professional conditions of practice.

The educational polycrisis

What makes this achievement especially significant is the context from which it was achieved. Alberta teachers and school leaders are working within an educational polycrisis: interconnected pressures that are intensifying one another. Larger and more complex classes, shortages of teachers and specialized supports, rising aggression and student absenteeism, acute-on-chronic mental health needs, unsupported new curriculum and rapid assessment changes, technology disruptions in the form of artificial intelligence (AI) and pandemic aftershocks are all converging on Alberta classrooms.

The Alberta Teachers’ Association’s (ATA) continuing research has documented this reality.

The ATA study on the OECD’s 2024 TALIS findings, *Teaching in Tension*, reports that 42 per cent of Alberta teachers were experiencing stress “a lot” at work, compared with an international average of 19 per cent. This is recorded as the highest occupational stress in the world. Further, class size and complexity, reduced inclusion supports, policy churn and aggression contribute to work intensification and moral distress.

PISA 2025 should therefore not be used as evidence that our teaching and learning conditions are acceptable. Strong results do not mean the system is adequately resourced and that teachers and students are reasonably supported. Instead, it demonstrates how much professional effort Alberta teachers and school leaders continue to contribute while barely holding on in an increasingly strained education system. Their commitment is a strength, but this model is unsustainable, as it is predicated on a decline in teachers’ personal and professional well-being.

Broader trends in reading, screentime and AI

The broader PISA story also contains a serious warning. Across Canada, reading fell 17 points since 2022, while science remained broadly stable. Canada’s reading result is now its lowest in our history of the PISA assessment. Internationally, reading has experienced the steepest decade-long decline across countries. Students increasingly struggle with longer texts requiring sustained attention, careful interpretation and the integration of evidence. Fast but inaccurate “hasty reading” has reportedly doubled across OECD systems between 2018 and 2025.

Thirteen years ago, I wrote a *Calgary Herald* opinion piece entitled “Kids should know reading is also for enjoyment,” warning of this very result and speaking on the vital importance of “cultivat[ing] in students both proficiency and life-long enjoyment of reading.” This argument is even more urgent today. Reading enjoyment is not a soft alternative to literacy proficiency; it helps create and sustain it. Measuring reading, through PISA or provincial assessments, cannot be allowed to displace the very act and enjoyment of reading itself.

This decline in reading is also occurring within the “always on” culture of 24-hour social media access. Attention is becoming one of the scarcest resources in education as the attention economy rewards and incentivizes constant engagement with our devices. Pervasive screentime has become normalized, and its effects on attention, engagement and reading are now impossible to ignore.

In PISA 2025, 32 per cent of Canadian students reported that classmates were frequently distracted by digital devices during science lessons. Students also reported more than an hour of leisure device use during the school day. Technology can expand access and support creativity, collaboration and inquiry; however, it can also fragment attention and displace the important cognitive work of deep reading, writing, reasoning and problem solving. As our ATA policy affirms, teachers’ professional judgment must guide when devices are useful and when they should be put away.

AI sharpens this challenge. In Canada, 38 per cent of students reported using AI chatbots at least weekly to help them learn. Most strikingly, Canadian students who did not use AI to draft assignments outperformed those who used it regularly or daily by 29 points in science.

The practical principle is clear: AI may be used as a tool to support learning, but it must never become the thinker. Students need to develop not only AI literacy to question outputs, verify sources and identify bias, but also AI fluency to know when to use these systems in a way that does not surrender their unique and authentic voice or supplant the creative power of their own ideas.

The takeaways

PISA is one measure of one group of students at one point in time. It is not a verdict on a student, a teacher or a school, nor does it determine their future or a society’s relative health and success.

What we can take away from the results are the following:

- Protect time for children and youth to engage in sustained, enjoyable and deep reading.
- Be mindful about the use of devices, ensuring that they enhance, not distract, from learning.
- Give students regular opportunities to write, solve problems and evaluate evidence without outsourcing to AI the struggle that produces learning.
- Most of all, give teachers and school leaders the conditions of professional practice that make this deep learning possible: manageable class sizes, adequate preparation time, educational assistants, access to specialists, supports and resources for classroom complexity, and properly funded classrooms.

Alberta students continue to perform among the best in the world. That is worth celebrating. It is also a reminder that our public education system’s greatest strength remains the people who create the conditions for students to learn. ■

World Teachers’ Day celebrates teachers creating a brighter future

ATA News Staff

October 5 is World Teachers’ Day (WTD), a celebration of the profound impact teachers have on students and the future they help shape.

For WTD 2026, the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF/FCE) has adopted the theme Thank You for Brightening our Future. One student at a time, teachers spark curiosity, build confidence and empower young people to thrive, helping to create a brighter future for all.

Toolkit available

CTF has created a toolkit containing a printable poster, social media graphics, and messages for teachers to use and share. Leading up to and on October 5, CTF is encouraging teachers across Canada to help celebrate WTD by using and sharing these resources. CTF resources are available at <https://abteach.cc/CTF-WTD>.



Here in Alberta

Building on CTF’s theme, the Alberta Teachers’ Association (ATA) has created Alberta-specific graphics centered on the idea of teaching as a global profession with local impact. ATA resources are available at <https://abteach.cc/ATA-WTD>.

Members are encouraged to use and share the ATA’s social media graphics with their nonteacher contacts and use the hashtag #WorldTeachersDay on social media. ■



**WORLD
TEACHERS’
DAY 10·5**





ISTOCK

Food-bank drive launched, recognizes strike-time support for teachers

ATA News Staff

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) will be marking one year since the 2025 provincewide teachers' strike this October with a food-bank initiative recognizing the support teachers received from their communities.

As part of its 365 Days social media campaign, the ATA is encouraging members and supporters of public education to make a small donation to their local food bank this October. There is no set amount or expectation. The idea is for participants to give what they can, if they can. Those making a donation can include a note such as, "This donation is from a supporter of public education."

The initiative follows widespread community support for teachers

during the strike, when people dropped off food and coffee, local businesses offered discounts and meals and others supported teachers at rallies across the province.

The ATA's 365 Days campaign, of which the food drive is a part, will run from Oct. 6 to 27. During the campaign, the ATA will reflect on the year since the strike and share messages from Albertans on the essential role teachers and public schools play in Alberta's communities.

The food-bank initiative is intended to acknowledge the support teachers received during the labour dispute while encouraging continued connections between schools and their communities.

Teachers and supporters can participate by contacting their local food bank or making a donation during October. ■

ATA Magazine lands industry awards

ATA News Staff

The ATA Magazine took home a gold and silver award at the annual Alberta Magazine Awards hosted by the Alberta Magazine Publishers Association (AMPA) on Sept. 17.

The gold award came in the illustration category for a depiction of teacher Kristine Hinton, which appeared in the Unsung Hero section of the winter 2025 issue. The illustration was created by freelance illustrator Rachel Wada under the art direction of ATA graphic designer Alexa Guse. It's the second consecutive

year the magazine has earned top honours in this award category.

The magazine also came away with a silver award in the feature design category for the design of a story collection called "The ATA is You!" published in spring 2025. The design was created by Guse along with ATA supervising designer Erin Solano.

"Among ATA staff, it's well-known that our team of designers consistently delivers brilliant, creative work," said Elissa Corsi, the magazine's editor-in-chief. "These awards provide the world a glimpse of what we've known internally for years." ■



The Unsung Hero illustration won a gold award.



The spring 2025 feature won a silver award for design.

"My school! My future!" winning artwork announced

Mark Milne
ATA News Staff

Student artwork will soon grace some of the products available in the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) merch store. The winning entries from this spring's "My school! My future!" student artwork contest were selected over the summer and will soon sit alongside products featuring current slogans such

as "#Red4EdAB" and "I ♥ Public Education."

From nearly 400 entries, the top 10 finalists were selected and submitted to the Provincial Executive Council for the final choice of the top two. Artwork submitted by students Grace, Grade 10, and Leia, Grade 6, were the top picks, each winning a \$250 gift certificate to Mastermind Toys, provided by Belairdirect Insurance.

Along with winning the gift cards, the two student artists will also see

their drawings appear on apparel that will soon be available for purchase at the ATA merch store.

Grace learned about the contest through her art teacher. She says her drawing refers to the growth students experience at their school.

"It's your future and you're going to grow with your future," said Grace. "To me, growth is like plants in real life and the book represents the actual school. So, I have a tree growing out of a book."

Leia took a more structured approach to her artwork. Based on other designs she has seen and liked, she began with the "My school! My future!" logo at the centre and surrounded it with images she felt reflected learning.

"I kind of just added things that typically represent school," said Leia. "I just kept adding things until I decided that if I added more, it would look weird."

ATA executive staff officer Chris Gonsalvez, who served on the selection committee, expressed his pride in seeing how many talented students we have in our public school system.

"The variety and amount of effort these kids put into their entries is a clear indication of the appreciation our students have for the work being done by their teachers," said Gonsalvez. "We had a difficult task narrowing down the entries to the top ten but, fortunately, we had a strong team of four staff members, including a member of the ATA's professional design team."

The purpose of the contest was to tap into the artistic talents of students to create a message that celebrates the work being done in



Grade 6 student Leia's winning design.

Alberta's classrooms. Gonsalvez says it's important, when visiting the ATA merch store, to give teachers the option of wearing something that connects them to the most important part of their job—the kids.

"We wanted an authentic message—a true representation of the pride students feel for their teachers and school," he said. ■



Grade 10 student Grace's winning design.

Check out the what's new at the ATA merch store.



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TEACHING TOGETHER

CTF/FCE

Building connections abroad

Teaching Together experience makes a lasting impact

This past summer, Alberta teachers participated in the Teaching Together program, a joint endeavour of the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE), its provincial and territorial member organizations and partner organizations in developing countries. The Canadian participants had the opportunity to travel abroad to coplan and codeliver professional development workshops for local teachers, aiming to promote equitable, high-quality, publicly funded education for all.

Alberta's participants share their Teaching Together experiences here.

TRINIDAD & TOBAGO

Monique Wilson

This past July, teachers from across Canada travelled to low- and middle-income countries in Africa and the Caribbean to work with local teachers on topics as varied as literacy, numeracy, peace education, unionism, wellness, artificial intelligence (AI) and fine arts.

My team, two teachers from the Toronto area and two teachers from Edmonton, went to Couva, Trinidad. The international program has not been held in Trinidad and Tobago since 2015, so my team was very

honoured to assist with getting the program up and running again. In comparison to the previous projects in which I have participated, Trinidad is well developed and the education system is robust.

In Trinidad and Tobago, teachers attended sessions on universal design for learning, differentiated instruction, creating emotionally safe classrooms and AI use, all under the main theme of responsive teaching. We had many excellent discussions, especially around the ethics and use of AI, which was by far the most popular session. Teachers shared their experiences with each other, and we were reminded that teaching is a profession that brings us all together.

Every local teacher was warm and welcoming. Participants and cofacilitators brought us gifts of fresh mangos, avocados and dragon fruit. The course director set up a meeting with Canada's high commissioner in Trinidad and Tobago. We were also so honoured to be invited to an evening event attended by teachers from all over the Caribbean, including the executive of the Caribbean Union of Teachers.

Despite the differences in our geography, union status, and teaching and working conditions, we were reminded that there are more similarities than differences among us.

Nathan Howat

I had read about others' experiences in the Teaching Together (formerly Project Overseas) program in the ATA News, and it was always something I thought I would like to try. Last fall, I decided to start the application process and was thrilled to be accepted and assigned to the program's Trinidad and Tobago team.

The adventure began in January with monthly online meetings with my team, as well as all the other Teaching Together teams assigned to different countries. In July, we met in Ottawa for a three-day orientation and then the teams were off to their destinations. My team of four Canadian teachers landed in Trinidad and was met by hosts from the Trinidad and Tobago Teachers' Association, who drove us to the town of Couva.

Over the following two weeks, we met our cofacilitators and worked together in a reciprocal cultural exchange, developing and presenting professional development sessions for dozens of teachers from across the country. The topics included differentiated instruction, developing safe classrooms and artificial intelligence in education.

Our daily routine consisted of breakfast with the team, then walking to one of the local secondary schools, where learning and laughter continued throughout the day. The local participants were eager to learn, and the Canadian teachers learned a great deal as well.

The experience was both enriching and fulfilling, and it reinforced to me that teachers face similar challenges no matter where we are from, and that, all over the world, kids are kids.

I take with me friendships and memories that will last a lifetime, and I look forward to my next opportunity to be a member of the Teaching Together team.

ANTIGUA & BARBUDA

Michelle Dickie

This summer, I was honoured to contribute to a new partnership between the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE) and the Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers (A&BUT). As the first team to visit this beautiful island through the Teaching Together program, we had an experience full of incredible joy, meaningful new friendships, cultural exchange and valuable professional growth for all.

The Teaching Together program was one of the initiatives supporting the A&BUT's 100th anniversary celebrations. As part of the program, their local union identified



Michelle Dickie thanking the primary teachers in Antigua and Barbuda

professional learning needs and selected topics including technology, reflective practice and higher order thinking. Our team supported the initiative by sharing perspectives, strategies, research and classroom experiences while also learning from the knowledge and experiences of our Antiguan colleagues.

This project exemplified the broader philosophy of Teaching Together: teachers learn best from other teachers. All the professional development was coplanned and cofacilitated, creating opportunities for genuine exchange rather than the export of one country's educational practices to another. Our program focused on strengthening teaching and learning while also building teacher and union capacity and promoting equity and inclusion.

The partnership also recognized that our education systems may differ, but teachers often share common goals and challenges. Through dialogue, collaboration and cultural exchange, the participants developed new perspectives that will hopefully influence their (and our) practice long after this summer.

Ultimately, Teaching Together 2026 was about more than professional development. It was also about building relationships, sharing expertise, strengthening unions and creating lasting connections between educators in Canada and Antigua and Barbuda. It demonstrated the power of teacher-to-teacher collaboration and that when teachers learn together, students, schools, unions and communities all benefit.

It was a privilege to represent Canadian teachers this summer and to be part of such a meaningful experience.

TEACHING TOGETHER
continued on page 11



Canadian team members with members of the Trinidad and Tobago Unified Teachers' Association after visiting with the Canadian high commissioner in Port of Spain, Trinidad

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TEACHING TOGETHER

continued from page 9

Erinn Esau

For two weeks this July, I had the opportunity to take part in the Teaching Together program in Antigua and Barbuda. Working alongside members of the Antigua and Barbuda Union of Teachers, our Canadian team cofacilitated professional learning grounded in collaboration, conversation and learning from one another.

Antiguan educators brought their own knowledge and experiences to each session, sharing stories about their classrooms, students, successes and challenges. Strategies and ideas were discussed, questioned and adapted, with everyone bringing something to the conversation. I valued the opportunity to hear different perspectives and consider teaching and learning through another lens. Some of the most valuable parts of the experience came from the relationships that developed. Conversations with teachers, collaboration among facilitators, and opportunities to experience Antigua with the people who call it home highlighted how much teachers share across different contexts.

My Teaching Together experience also reinforced for me the importance of listening first. Effective facilitation is not about arriving with answers or deciding what others need. It is about creating space for teachers to share their expertise, learn from one another, and adapt ideas to their own classrooms and communities. I returned to Canada with new perspectives on teaching, professional learning and collaboration. More importantly, the experience reinforced the value of bringing educators together, creating space for genuine conversation and being open to learning from one another.

GHANA

Symonds Botchey

What a summer! I am incredibly grateful to the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE) and the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) for making the Teaching Together experience possible. Travelling to Ghana with six other Canadian teachers gave me the opportunity to collaborate with Ghanaian educators, participate in professional development, and learn from a different educational system and culture.

One of the most meaningful aspects of the experience was discovering the longstanding partnership between CTF/FCE and GNAT—more than 60 years. The program demonstrated the power of educators building relationships across countries and learning from one another. Each Canadian participant was partnered with a Ghanaian facilitator, whose knowledge of the local culture, education system and community realities was invaluable.

For me, the experience was especially personal. I was born in Ghana and attended school there before moving to Canada approximately 30 years ago. Returning to Ghana as a Canadian educator was an unexpected and deeply meaningful gift. I wondered



Participants in Antigua and Barbuda discussed and exchanged ideas during a professional learning activity.

how I would be received and sometimes describe my identity as being like a “zebra”—having experienced both Ghanaian and Canadian cultures. Those concerns quickly disappeared. I felt welcomed and at home, while also gaining the unique opportunity to see Ghana through both the eyes of the child I once was and the Canadian educator I have become.

During the program, we delivered professional development workshops to hundreds of Ghanaian teachers. My assigned topic was gender equity and culture. Working alongside both Ghanaian and Canadian facilitators reinforced that Teaching Together was not simply about Canadians sharing information with Ghanaian teachers. It was a genuine partnership in which everyone contributed experiences, perspectives and ideas.

Visiting Ghanaian schools was another highlight. I was deeply impressed by teachers’ creativity, dedication and resourcefulness. They created meaningful learning experiences despite having fewer resources than many Canadian classrooms. These visits reminded me that effective teaching is ultimately about relationships, adaptability, creativity and commitment to students.

The cultural celebrations, conversations with Canadian and Ghanaian educators and daily team debriefs further enhanced the experience. I also encountered difficult conversations about issues such as teenage pregnancy, which

reminded me that teachers often support students through challenges that extend far beyond academics.

I returned to Canada with a deeper appreciation for my Ghanaian roots, a renewed respect for educators and a stronger belief in collaboration. Most importantly, Teaching Together reminded me not to take my resources, opportunities and support systems for granted. I hope to bring what I learned back to my classroom and colleagues and continue building relationships with educators both in Canada and around the world.

What a privilege, and an experience I will carry with me for a very long time.

Uroog Quraishi

As a first-time participant in the Teaching Together program, I had the incredible opportunity to work alongside the beautiful, kind and generous people of Ghana. This experience allowed me to step outside of my own educational context and immerse myself in a culture filled with warmth, hospitality, and a strong commitment to learning and community.

We spent our time in the city of Kibi, working at Kibi College with over 500 teachers from various regions. Our main discussion focused on gender and culture, a powerful and meaningful subject that generated thoughtful conversations, passionate exchanges and a high level of

engagement among the educators. It was inspiring to witness the dedication these teachers demonstrated toward advancing opportunities for women and girls in Ghana. Their willingness to openly discuss challenges, share their experiences and explore ways to create positive change highlighted the important role educators play in shaping not only their classrooms, but their communities as well.

While I travelled to Ghana with the intention of sharing my own knowledge and experiences, I quickly realized how much I would learn in return. Being immersed in Ghanaian culture and experiencing their way of life gave me a deeper appreciation for the different perspectives, traditions and experiences that influence education. At the same time, I was grateful for the opportunity to share insights into the education system in Alberta and Canada, creating meaningful dialogue about both the similarities and differences between our educational contexts.

One of the most powerful aspects of this experience was seeing educators come together with a shared purpose. Despite differences in geography, culture and educational systems, we were united by a common commitment to our students and to creating a better future through education.

Teaching Together truly demonstrated the power of one union bringing teachers together from different regions, learning from one another and building connections that extend far beyond the classroom.

TOGO

Elodie D. Nana

My experience with the Teaching Together program in Lomé, Togo was much more than a professional exchange.

We spent two weeks in Togo, where I had the opportunity to work alongside Togolese educators and engage in meaningful conversations about teaching, classroom management, inclusive education, differentiated instruction in large classroom settings and universal design for learning. We explored ways to support students with diverse learning needs and discussed how teachers can adapt their approaches so that every student feels valued and included, regardless

TEACHING TOGETHER
continued on page 13



Canadian and Ghanaian facilitators pose together.

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TEACHING TOGETHER

continued from page 11

of the size of the classroom. I was able to share some of the strategies we use in Alberta while at the same time learning from the approaches and practices of Togolese teachers.

One of the most inspiring aspects of my experience in Togo was the incredible sense of cohesion and solidarity among the teachers. Despite working with limited resources and often having only the most basic materials available, they have a remarkable ability to create a warm, joyful and welcoming atmosphere through music, singing and dancing. These activities seemed to help them momentarily set aside the limitations they face and focus on what they can create together. They reminded me that a positive and enriching educational environment does not always depend on having abundant resources. It can also be created through strong relationships, creativity, resilience and a collective spirit.

The cultural exchange was equally powerful. Sharing meals, conversations and everyday

experiences allowed us to discover one another beyond our professional roles. I was especially touched by the warmth, generosity and hospitality we received. These moments reminded me that meaningful international collaboration begins with relationships, mutual respect and a genuine willingness to learn from one another with humility.

The experience also challenged me personally and professionally. Presenting and communicating with educators in a different cultural and educational context strengthened my confidence as a teacher, administrator and presenter. It taught me to listen more intentionally, ask thoughtful questions and remain open to perspectives and approaches that may differ from my own.

I returned to Canada with ideas to share and a deeper appreciation for the importance of global educational partnerships. Teaching Together reminded me that although our classrooms, resources and educational contexts may look very different, our purpose remains the same: to give students the best possible opportunities to learn, grow and succeed.

This experience strengthened my belief that when teachers learn from one another across borders, everyone benefits, most importantly, our students.



In Togo, the program included a classroom management workshop.

NEVIS

Tamara Franko

This summer, I had the privilege of participating in the Teaching Together project in Nevis. Our work focused on differentiation and inclusion, but the experience became about much more than the professional learning we had planned.

Working alongside educators in Nevis expanded my understanding of the possibilities of connection, community and education. It reminded me that teaching and learning can look very different from one place to another and still be really good. Sometimes stepping outside of what is familiar allows us to see our own practice differently and to recognize that there are many ways to create meaningful learning experiences for students.

The educators and people I met in Nevis reinforced for me the importance of meeting students where they are. They demonstrated the powerful role that relationships with families, homes and communities play in a child's education. Those connections extend far beyond a particular lesson, classroom or school year. They shape how students experience school and can influence them for years to come.

I returned to Canada with new ideas, but also with a renewed appreciation for some of the things that good educators seem to understand no matter where

in the world they teach: relationships matter, belonging matters, and students learn best when we recognize and build upon the strengths they already bring with them.

I am incredibly grateful to the ATA and the Canadian Teachers' Federation for the professionalism, care and work that make opportunities like Teaching Together possible. Experiences like this bring renewed excitement to my career and remind me that, despite the distance between our classrooms, the world of education becomes remarkably small when educators come together around good teaching practice and a shared commitment to students. ■



Participants in Nevis explored differentiation and inclusion.



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Council establishes an Election Rules Appeal Panel

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meetings held August 12 and August 28, 2026

1. Approved in principle the Election Readiness Plan 2026/27, with anticipated costs of \$1.036 million charged to the Special Emergency Fund.
2. Extended the timeline for the final report of the Committee on the Review of Central Table Bargaining 2020 and 2024 to the December 2026 meeting of Council, with a progress report to be provided in October 2026.
3. Authorized the Association to create a get-out-the-vote campaign that highlights and educates on the referendum questions that affect public education.

4. Authorized staff to proceed with the communications plan for marking the one-year anniversary of the 2025 teachers' strike.

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held September 17–18, 2026, in Edmonton

1. Approved in principle the final form of three electoral ballots proposed by local associations for distribution to the membership.
2. Approved a statement of Association program emphases for 2026/27.
3. Approved that a summary of progress toward meeting the Association program emphases be reported to Council in June.
4. Authorized a \$1,000 donation toward the costs of providing lunches for the staff at the schools in Tumbler Ridge during the week of World Teachers' Day.
5. Authorized communications staff to develop a Food Bank donation

initiative, as part of the "365 Days Ago..." campaign, to recognize the contributions and support received from the community during the 2025 teachers' strike.

6. Approved the 2026/27 international cooperation proposed budget for international goals, including Teachers' Action for Teaching-Teaching Together, Change for Children PD by Alberta Teachers and Tools for Schools Africa Foundation.

7. Approved, as the position of Council, recommendations on the six-year review of policy and authorized that locals be informed accordingly.

8. Approved, for submission to the 2027 Annual Representative Assembly, the proposed Disposition of Immediate Directives.

9. Approved one executive resolution for submission to the 2027 Annual Representative Assembly.

10. In accordance with general bylaw 77, established an Election Rules Appeal Panel to which candidates in a Provincial Executive Council election may appeal if they have been found by

a returning officer to have breached the election rules.

11. Authorized the executive secretary, after consultation with the Election Rules Appeal Panel, to identify one member as chair.

12. Approved amendments to the Administrative Guidelines pertaining to Summer Conference and Association recruitment practices.

13. Approved beta testing of the Safe Schools Reporting System.

14. Approved one name for addition to the approved bank for possible appointment as an Indigenous Education Professional Development Facilitator.

15. Named field members to field experiences committees. ■

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National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

Wearing an orange shirt on Sept. 30, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, has become a way to signal support for and remembrance of what Indigenous families lost because of residential schools. This day is also an opportunity for teachers to both deepen and apply their own foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultures, while learning about and honouring Indigenous history and cultural practices.

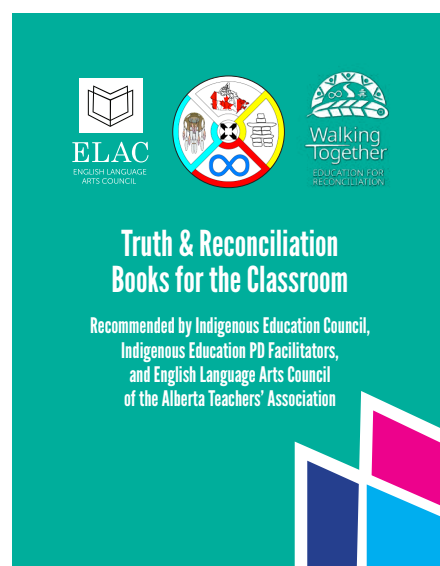
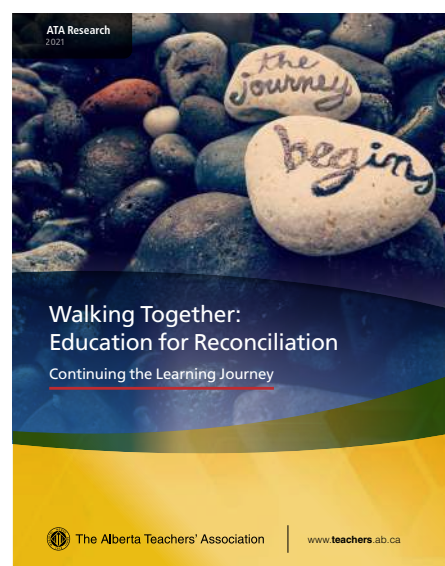
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The Orange Shirt Day website for videos, guides and activities



The National Film Board video series honouring Indigenous voices



The Government of Canada's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation website

Looking for more learning?

Check out the ATA library's guide on Truth and Reconciliation resources at abteach.cc/reconciliation-resources. You can also book an Indigenous education PD workshop by contacting walkingtogether@ata.ab.ca.

