

# ATA NEWS

 The Alberta Teachers' Association

**100 years**  
Learn from the past.  
Inspire the future.

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## END OF AN ERA

*Executive secretary  
Gordon Thomas retires*

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Thomas simply  
one of the finest

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Every teacher  
leaves a legacy

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41-year career in the  
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### From the Archives

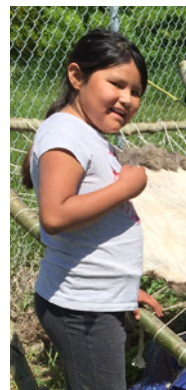
Teacher professionalism rises from years of struggle.

*See story on page 4.*

### In Focus

It's teachers' convention season.

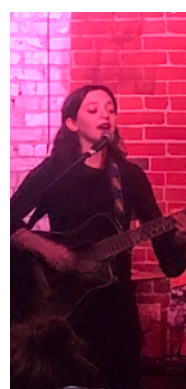
*See story on page 5.*



### Cultural understanding

Funding available for program that brings together Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

*See story on page 6.*



### Coup de cœur

À Beaumont, nous aimons notre musique!

*Voir l'article à la page 12.*



## Quite simply, one of the finest



### EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer  
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

During my 10-plus years of working at the Alberta Teachers' Association, I knew that if I ever wanted to hear a good story, I could just pop into Gordon Thomas's office. As a storyteller, as with many things, Gordon was quite simply "one of the finest" — (this is a phrase that Gordon often included in his stories).

Be it a humorous teaching anecdote, a characterization of a business meeting or the retelling of an ATA triumph, Gordon's stories always feature a compelling narrative. A Gordon Thomas story always starts with a detailed description of the setting, an overview of important background information, a thorough analysis of the problem and an exciting recounting of the conflict and its resolution. And no Gordon Thomas story is complete without a generous helping of humour.

If you have a question about the history of the ATA or of education in Alberta, you take it to Gordon — no one knows this stuff better. Not only do you get the right answer to your question, but you get the best story of what happened and why. Not only are the stories

fun to hear, they illustrate the important necessary learnings.

I will not be able to tell the best or most complete story here, but let me tell you my story of Dr. Gordon Thomas.

Gordon Thomas began his teaching career in 1977 at the newly opened Sturgeon Composite High School, where he made his mark as a social studies and drama teacher. Notably, Gordon taught with a colleague, Helen Morgan, who ended her career teaching with me. She spoke highly of Gordon and since she was a tough marker whom I respected, I started with a good first impression of him.

While employed with Sturgeon, Gordon started his PhD, taught at the University of Alberta and served his profession as local treasurer and negotiating subcommittee chair.

In 1984, Gordon became the youngest staff officer ever hired to the ATA when he joined the Professional Development program area. For many years, he led Association work in teacher education and certification. At the last meeting of Provincial Executive Council, when asked to recall his proudest accomplishments, he cited his work to help develop government policy on teacher growth, supervision and evaluation — policy that continues to serve public education and teachers very well.

During the turbulent 1990s, Gordon was appointed associate executive secretary (our number two) and played a key role on the ATA team that often went toe to toe with a hostile government.

By 2002, the Association was preparing for a co-ordinated provincial strike that would result in about two-thirds of teachers being off the job. Gordon was there, and amidst the turmoil, council named him to become the Association's seventh executive secretary.

Right away, he would need to lead Association work in responding to the risky Alberta Commission on Learning. My first opportunity to hear Gordon was while attending a member information meeting called by the Association to respond to some of the commission's problematic recommendations. Gordon ably and succinctly explained the complex and somewhat esoteric issues related to Association structure, membership and teacher employment — like the Board of Reference — contained in the report. Not only did I leave with a clear understanding of the issues, but also with the passion to go forward and act.

Later he would lead the ATA as it achieved a settlement for the multibillion-dollar unfunded pension liability and fought off the dismantling recommendations of the Task Force for Teaching Excellence.

I first met Gordon when I, just 28, was being interviewed for an ATA staff job. I was shocked when he called just a few days later to offer me the job. Gordon, I think, was later shocked to learn that he was no longer the youngest staff officer ever hired.

In the years that we have worked together, Gordon has sometimes reminded me that, like him, I was hired young and hired for my potential. I take this as a big motivator, and I aspire to live up to that potential. He also reminds me that one day, like him, I will hold much of the memory of the Association. And so I listen intently to his stories.

I do not know if Gordon sees himself in me, but I see myself in him, and that I think is a key part of his great leadership. He models the best and inspires others to be like him.

I will miss having Gordon around the office to talk to and seek advice from, and I will miss having ready access to his excellent stories, but I know he will be near and only a quick call away.

Gordon Thomas has served public education and the teaching profession well. Now I hope that retirement treats him well. All the best, Gordon. ■

*I welcome your comments — contact me at jonathan.teghtmeyer@ata.ab.ca.*

## Looking forward to resources, support, unity ... and rest



### Q & A

Gordon Thomas  
ATA Executive Secretary

**Question:** For more than 15 years, you've answered a lot of questions in this column and this is your last Q&A. You should get to answer your own question at least once. What would you like to ask and what's the answer?

**Answer:** Well, thank you. I've done about 275 Q&A columns for the *ATA News*. I'm retiring at the end of the month, so this is my last Q&A as executive secretary. I'm often asked about current issues that surface, and the column clarifies a current Association issue or concern. I've often been asked about ATA processes (how the fee is set, how the budget is made). One of the most often asked questions is about a teacher's legal and professional obligation to attend teachers' convention. And I'm always asked about bargaining

My question is this: What would I like to see for the future of the profession? First, I'd like our members to have the resources they need to meet student learning needs. Although the government's ongoing commitment to fund student enrolment growth is very helpful, there are urgent needs to resource the classroom.

Teachers require additional support, especially related to complex classrooms. Class sizes need to be smaller, and support for inclusive education needs to be much larger. I would hope that the new round of collective bargaining will make progress in all of these areas.

And I think we also have to say that we are done with zero per cent salary increases — five zeros in the past six years. The bargaining process is driven entirely by our members. A fair process exists in collective bargaining, and it's up to our members to drive the process to a satisfactory outcome.

With respect to the profession itself, I strongly support a unified teaching profession based on strong collegial

“ Thank you for the honour of serving you. ”

relations. Quite simply, it's the best way we have to ensure student learning needs are addressed. Working with colleagues in the school and across the system, all teachers work to achieve their students' learning needs. That's the job of each teacher, and the role for the rest in the system is to support the teacher to do so.

A unified teaching profession would be made up of all certificate holders, and the ATA would look different than it does today. Our membership would include teachers, school administrators, central office teachers, superintendents, faculty of education staff, department staff, private and charter school teachers and other certificate holders. Our executive council would be drawn from all of the profession,

and would include groups not currently represented (e.g., superintendents).

The profession would be responsible for setting professional conduct and professional practice standards and for ensuring that members meet those expectations. Policy positions would reflect a discussion among representatives of all members of the profession. A unified profession would strengthen the ability of the profession to act collegially to meet student learning needs.

Thank you for the honour of serving you. My friend and colleague Dennis Theobald, the ATA's eighth executive secretary, will be taking over this space next issue. I'll be reading and I hope you will too.

*Magistri Neque Servi.* ■







## ATHLETIC ACHIEVEMENTS

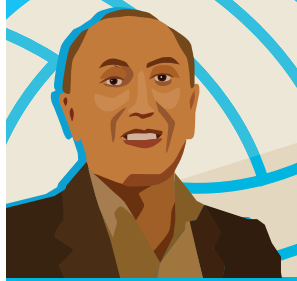
With the 2018 Olympic Winter Games around the corner, we reflect on some historic sports-related achievements involving Alberta teachers.



1914 – 1940

### J. PERCY PAGE

From 1914 to 1940, teacher J. Percy Page coached the Edmonton Grads women's basketball team. One of the most successful sports teams of all time, the Grads won approximately 95 per cent of their games.



1982

### HAROLD MORI

In the summer of 1982, Vegreville teacher Harold Mori volunteered hundreds of hours training 100 volleyball officials for the 1983 World University Games held in Edmonton.



1992

### SHELLEY VETTESE-BAERT

At the 1992 Summer Olympic Games in Barcelona, Edmonton teacher Shelley Vettese-Baert captured a bronze medal in taekwondo.

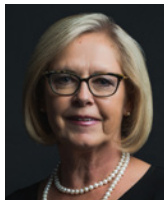


1994

### JANE ROBINSON

In May 1994 Sherwood Park teacher Jane Robinson was a winger for Team Canada, the gold-medal winner at the World Hockey Championships.

# Every teacher leaves a legacy



## VIEWPOINTS

Jacqueline Skytt

I recently returned from a family vacation that included my 80-year-old sister-in-law Evelyn. I was deeply moved by her stories of attending a one-room school in rural Alberta in the 1940s. Unfortunately for Evelyn, her nine years at that school were horrific, due to the treatment she received from her teacher, who it seems did not like Evelyn and took pleasure in singling her out for ridicule.

"Don't pick Evelyn, she'll never catch the ball," the teacher would say on the softball field.

"Well Evelyn, what are you going to cry about today?" the teacher often said in class.

And on more than one occasion, the teacher made Evelyn wear a dunce hat and sit on a chair facing the entire class.

"I was afraid to learn. She sucked out all my self-esteem," Evelyn told me during our trip, some 70 years after her terrible school experience.

Now I want to share a different set of memories about another teacher.

In 1977, I was blessed to be hired as a first-year teacher on the staff that opened the new Sturgeon Composite High School in Namao. The school had such excellent learning opportunities, a vibrant atmosphere and a rich, collaborative culture. Every day was rewarding and fun, largely due to the wonderful relationships we had with all the students.

A key figure in creating that culture was another first-year teacher, Gordon Thomas, who taught social studies and drama and supervised the drama club.

During his second year in that role, Gordon had the vision that students throughout the school

should be involved in staging the annual musical production — building construction students would build the set; industrial arts students would provide the technical lighting and sound; beauty culture the hair and makeup; graphics the publicity and program; clothing and textiles the costuming; and music students would form the orchestra.

*As a member of the teaching profession, I am thankful for colleagues like Gordon, who inspire us to be the best teachers possible for all our students.*

Under Gordon's directing and management, these musical productions instantly became the highlight of the school year, involving close to 200 students and staff and playing to sellout audiences for an entire week each spring.

"Mr. Thomas had a huge impact on my student life at SCHS and the career path I have chosen," says Annette Loiselle, an Edmonton-based actor, writer, producer and theatre instructor.

Loiselle was one of several former students who emailed me with glowing reflections of their former

teacher. Loiselle said that Gordon was able to share his passion for theatre — and musicals in particular — by creating a welcoming place where students could drop their inhibitions and sing, dance, perform and lose themselves in stories and characters.

"We made friends, we felt important, we were inspired and he gave us a place to feel safe, talented, motivated and so happy," Annette says.

As teachers, we all know that we are influencing our students' lives every day — it's the reason we became teachers — but the memories shared by Annette and Evelyn illustrate just how profound and lasting these influences can be.

I had the pleasure of teaching with Gordon for seven amazing years, until he was hired as a staff officer at the Alberta Teachers' Association. I later worked with him for another 17 years after I joined the ATA staff. Despite the weighty issues we tackled and the important work we did in our ATA roles, Gordon and I often talk about those wonderful years at Sturgeon Composite as being the best of our careers.

As a member of the teaching profession, I am thankful for colleagues like Gordon, who inspire us to be the best teachers possible for all our students. As he gets set to retire after 34 years with the Association (including 15 years as its executive secretary), there's no doubt that he has forged a profound legacy as a provincial education leader, but first and foremost he will be remembered as a teacher who was a positive influence in his students' lives. ■

Jacqueline Skytt retired as the Association's assistant executive secretary in 2013.

# YOUR VIEWS

## FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

We asked teachers: "What is your favourite part of teachers' convention?"

**Laurie Jean**

Seeing colleagues that I haven't seen since last year!

**Elaine Shanks**

I am a retired teacher. One of the best things about teachers' convention was having so much choice. So many times PD is not relevant to what you teach, or where your interests are. Teachers' convention allowed you to choose from an extensive list of PD and that is a luxury that teachers don't get very often.

**Lynn Hamilton Farrugia**

Connecting with colleagues and friends.

**Response to Jan. 16 editorial calling for more resources to improve learning conditions**

**Ed Meers**

Very true. Many don't understand the plethora of mental health issues that teachers must contend with in the classroom. Schools like mine, particularly, experience very high student needs, given our inner city, refugee and immigrant demographic. I know that teachers have their limits tested as we strive to teach curriculum while dealing with the issues and behaviours of students who are afflicted by PTSD and factors related to poverty.

It is a tough slog, but given that we work with our most important resource — children — teachers give it their all. We, or shall I say our students, require so much support. We have an amazing support team at our school, but, like the teachers, their plates are overflowing with the high demands for help. We do what we can with what we have, but it seldom feels like enough. This is another serious factor in teacher burnout and why so many leave the profession.

I tip my cap to all those who serve these beautiful children and hope each and every teacher knows that their sacrifices are making a huge difference.

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 Cory Hare: cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.





# Survey is live; update your email address

ATA News Staff

If you'd like to have your voice heard by the people who will negotiate your next collective agreement, your chance is now.

An online survey is now available for teachers to share their views. The results will be used to establish priorities for the next round of central table bargaining between the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association.

In order to participate in the survey, members must provide the Association with a personal (non-employer) email address by updating their profile on the Association's website.

"This is a critical step as it will enable members to participate in the survey and have access to regular status updates," said Jason Schilling, ATA vice-president and chair of the Association's Central Table Bargaining Committee.

"Having as many members as possible complete this important survey will best support our bargaining position in the next round of negotiations."

## How it works

Members who have provided the Association with a personal (non-employer) email address will receive an email invitation to complete the online bargaining survey.

The Association has contracted a research firm, Strategic Communications Inc. (Stratcom), to conduct this research. The email invitations will come from surveys@stratresearch.ca with the subject line "ATA Bargaining Survey 2018." That email will contain a personalized link enabling the recipient to access the survey.

The survey will close on Feb. 20 and should take between 15 and 20 minutes to complete.

Members who do not receive an email should take the following steps:

- Check spam filters (Gmail users should check Promotions and Updates tabs).

- Visit [profile.teachers.ab.ca](http://profile.teachers.ab.ca) to ensure that the Association has your non-work email address.
- If not, update your email prior to Feb. 15. An email invitation should be sent out within the following week.
- Contact the Association at 1-800-232-7208 or [onlinesupport@ata.ab.ca](mailto:onlinesupport@ata.ab.ca).

Members will be able to complete the survey over multiple sessions across multiple devices (desktop computer, laptop, tablet, mobile). Simply close the browser and the survey will resume where you left off when you next click the link.

As always, follow the Bargainers' Blog at [teachers.ab.ca](http://teachers.ab.ca) to stay informed about the progress of bargaining.

## The process at a glance

Passed in December 2015, the *Public Education Collective Bargaining Act* outlines a three-phase process for negotiating collective agreements for teachers employed in each of Alberta's 61 public, separate and francophone school jurisdictions.

In the first phase, the Association and the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) negotiate which items will be discussed at the central table and which items will be discussed at the local tables. In the second phase, the Association and TEBA negotiate the terms of agreement for the items that were assigned to the central table. In the third phase, individual Association bargaining units and individual school boards negotiate the terms of agreement for the items assigned to local bargaining.

## Where are we now?

In the spring of 2016, a two-year central table agreement was reached. The agreement expires at the end of August 2018, so phase one negotiations are now taking place and input is being gathered from teachers in order to inform the negotiations that will take place during the second phase. ■

[Update your contact information at profile.teachers.ab.ca.](http://profile.teachers.ab.ca)



Survey closes Feb. 20.

# Teacher professionalism rises from years of struggle

## FROM THE ARCHIVES

Maggie Shane  
ATA Archivist

Leading up to its official 100th anniversary in June 2018, the Alberta Teachers' Association is celebrating its history through a number of initiatives, one of which is this column. Curated by archivist Maggie Shane and appearing in each issue of the ATA News this year, this column will feature significant moments and individuals in the Association's history, as well as interesting artifacts and documents from the Association's archives.

In 1917, there were teachers but no teaching profession. The struggle to establish teacher professionalism, with all the concomitant rights and responsibilities, was the vision to which the fledgling Alberta Teachers' Alliance dedicated itself. Professional status and recognition was the foundation upon which teachers could raise a collective voice in support of students, public education, better working conditions and salaries, ongoing professional learning and adequate funding. Professionalism referred to *pedagogical practice* rather than employment, every aspect of which could be dictated and circumscribed by a school board.

Alliance efforts to secure professional status was the first order of business beginning in 1918. At the first annual

general meeting (today's Annual Representative Assembly), delegates adopted a code of honour that established professional standards of ethical conduct. Although the Alliance did not wield enforcement powers as we understand discipline today, early members understood the code to be of primary importance in gaining the public trust and support for teacher professional status.

By 1926, the *School Act* had been amended to establish a board of reference or as a board of arbitration" of three members appointed by the lieutenant-governor-in-council: one teacher, one trustee and one public member. The Board of Reference shifted general dispute resolution away from teacher/board dynamics to an independent and informed tribunal. Although it wielded investigative powers to compel documents and call witnesses, the tribunal was essentially toothless, as the first Board of Reference was not granted the power to enforce its decisions.

As the Alliance executive continued to drive towards full professional status, members continued to debate and refine expectations of professional conduct. Delegates to the 1932 annual general meeting revisited the old Code of Honour of 1918 and gave their support to an expanded Code of Ethics. In 1935, after 17 years of relentless effort by the Alliance, the United Farmers of Alberta government under Premier Richard Gavin Reid passed the first iteration of the *Teaching Profession Act*.

Early drafts of the bill had given teeth to the Board of Reference and required mandatory ATA membership for publicly paid teachers, as suggested by the Alliance. However, the act was passed without these advancements in teacher professionalism. The *Teaching Profession Act* retired the Alliance to establish the Alberta Teachers' Association — a profession was born.

*Professional status and recognition was the foundation upon which teachers could raise a collective voice in support of students, public education, better working conditions and salaries, ongoing professional learning and adequate funding.*

The fall of 1935 witnessed a change of government and the election of former high school principal William Aberhart as the Social Credit Party's premier and minister of education. In Aberhart's first legislative session in April 1936, the *Teaching Profession Act* was amended to include mandatory membership. It was amended again in 1937 to grant enforcement powers to the Board of Reference. With the stroke of a pen, Aberhart had secured permanent

membership and funding for the ATA, provided statutory professional status for teachers and established a robust and effective Board of Reference.

The years of the Second World War were disruptive and painful. Nevertheless, the Association continued to work to strengthen the profession. In 1945, Alberta become the first province to grant universities the exclusive responsibility for teacher education. Two years of university training was the minimum requirement to obtain certification. In that year, the board of teacher education and certification was established with representation from the ATA.

Teacher professionalism endured a challenge in the mid-1950s. As the baby-boom generation approached school age, a teacher shortage prompted the ministry to relax teacher certification requirements through the *Emergency Teacher Training Act*, which remained in effect from 1954 to 1958.

While acknowledging the emergency, the Association fought hard to maintain professional standards. Part of the Association's response was to organize and implement a formal professional induction program for new teachers, take over the Teacher Qualifications Service, appoint representatives to the Teacher Salary Qualification Board, increase the minimum university program to three years and adopt competency bylaws between 1960 and 1972.

The pillars of contemporary professional status that support modern pedagogy were hard won during the Association's first 50 years. ■



## STORIES AND PHOTOS WANTED

If something newsworthy is going on in your school, district or local, please let us know. We will also consider articles, photos and cartoons. Please email tips and submissions to managing editor Cory Hare: [cory.hare@ata.ab.ca](mailto:cory.hare@ata.ab.ca).





Every year Alberta teachers flock to one of 10 teachers' conventions held throughout the province.

## Teachers' convention: an annual rite that changes with the times

### IN FOCUS

Jen Janzen  
ATA News Staff

Welcome to In Focus, an ongoing series that shines a spotlight on the operation and programs of the Alberta Teachers' Association. This instalment focuses on teachers' conventions.

If this is your first year at teachers' convention, Dan Grassick can help. As the Association's executive staff officer responsible for supporting the annual events, Grassick suggests there are two paths to choose from in order to maximize the value of your convention experience.

The first: Find a veteran teacher from your school or from another school who teaches the same subject area as you. Co-plan your two days of convention and shadow each other, using break times to network with others. The pros? Along with developing a sense of camaraderie, this approach leads to professional collaboration and discussion, which will connect what you're learning at convention to your work back at your school. By moving through the crowds with a convention veteran, you'll be on a fast track to greater collective efficacy.

The second method: Find out which sessions your colleagues are planning to attend and then be where they aren't.

"Strike off in a new direction and take a temporary break from the people you work with every day," Grassick says.

"Your professional practice can be significantly transformed when you step outside your comfort zone and put yourself in a learning situation that's totally new."

On that note, don't just look for convention sessions focused on the subject areas that you teach. Look for seminars led by education researchers and by Association presenters, Grassick suggests.

#### Improving the profession

Teachers' conventions have been held since the late 1800s — before Alberta was a province. They've had several iterations over the years. Originally organized by individual teachers working in the Northwest Territories, then by the provincial government, convention planning was passed to the Association in 1942 as a result of the new *Teaching Profession Act*, which made the Association responsible for improving teachers and the teaching profession.

Teachers' conventions used to be held in the fall, focusing on policy debates, local meetings and emergent issues. Over the years, conventions gradually became conference-style events aimed at providing workshops on curriculum and pedagogy.

Although the events have changed significantly over the past 120 years, their spirit remains unchanged. Conventions continue to provide two days for the province's teachers to gather together to hear about new education research, consider innovative pedagogical practices and discuss issues of professional concern.

For teachers in more remote locations, conventions are an opportunity to liaise with others who teach the same grades or specialize in the same subjects. Grassick, for example, was the only Grade 8 science teacher at his school in Calgary, so the annual convention was a chance to network with other junior high science teachers.

"You're really finding your people when you go to conventions," he says.

The *School Act* identifies the days on which teachers' conventions are held as "teaching days," Association president Greg Jeffery explains, and that's why attendance is mandatory for active members. Contractual and legal obligations aside, Jeffery says conventions are also a heck of a good deal.

"Your local is paying between \$75 and \$115 for you to attend two days of professional development. I don't think you'll find a deal like that anywhere else."

By comparison, conferences of a similar size and scope typically have registration fees in the \$300 to \$400 range.

At one time the ATA had more than 24 teachers' conventions occurring at or around the same time. One of the reasons why the number was reduced to the current 10 was so the president could attend them all. This was a topic of hot debate at annual representative assemblies in the 1960s and 70s, and it has since become the norm for the president to speak at each convention.

#### Under review

This year, watch for teachers' convention focus groups, as the Association is reviewing the mandate, structure, governance, operation and programming of teachers' conventions. The last review of this kind occurred in 2003.

"The last review was during the height of the Blockbuster Video era, before YouTube, before iPhones, before Twitter," Grassick says. "Teaching and learning have changed a lot since 2003."

The current review will help conventions meet the needs of members as new professional quality standards are released and new programs of study are developed.

No matter what changes lie ahead for teachers' conventions, Grassick says they will continue to provide teachers with an opportunity to reconnect with their colleagues, revitalize their creative energies and renew their sense of professional purpose.

"Conventions have always been and will continue to be a core component of teachers' ongoing professional development." ■

#### Teacher convention myth-busting

**Myth:** Teachers' conventions are organized by school boards.

**Reality:** The Association provides the professional development. The convention associations do the direct planning. School boards are bound by the *School Act* to provide the time for conventions.

## This...

from ATA President Greg Jeffery

### Happy convention everyone!



February is upon us and here in Alberta that means teachers' convention season is beginning. Teachers across the province will gather at 10 different conventions from Medicine Hat to Grande Prairie. While the conventions are all different, there are still many similarities. All offer two days of professional development for teachers across a wide spectrum of topics and subject areas. There will be motivational keynotes and there will be methods sessions for particular subjects such as "emergency instrument repair 10 minutes before the concert." (This one paid off a number of times for me.)

I recall the excitement of my first convention many years ago. We descended on downtown Edmonton, streamed into the Shaw Convention Centre and then split up with our plans to meet for lunch or a beverage later in the day. I ran into acquaintances from university and we compared notes on schools and on employers. My booklet was highlighted with sessions I wanted to check out and I bravely attempted to find the various locales.

*Go to your convention and have some fun. Connect with old friends and make some new ones.*

What I realize now is how little I knew then about this PD time that I had. I thought that it was great that Strathcona County Schools and all the other employers represented could get together and agree on such a large event. I now know that while employers have two convention days in their calendars, this is a result of being required to by the *School Act* and that the entire event is planned and presented by volunteer members of the ATA.

Our association is entirely responsible for these two days of learning and is solely responsible for funding it. We do however have a responsibility to our employers to attend as these days are paid days in the calendar. The ATA takes convention attendance very seriously and there have been teachers who have been charged with unprofessional conduct and have lost salary for failure to attend.

But enough of the gloom and doom. Go to your convention and have some fun. If there are no sessions that connect directly to your assignment, expand your horizons or hit all the general and motivational sessions that you can. Connect with old friends and make some new ones.

I'll be at all 10 conventions and would enjoy talking with you, so check out my session or come up and say hi if you see me passing by. ■

*I welcome your comments — contact me at [greg.jeffery@ata.ab.ca](mailto:greg.jeffery@ata.ab.ca).*



Learn from the past.  
Inspire the future.





# Cultural exchanges foster student engagement

## Program has \$20,000 available for teacher-led projects

Cory Hare  
ATA News Managing Editor

Maxine Hildebrandt knew she was on to something when she spotted one of her students eating fish.

This particular elementary-aged student was known for being unwilling to try anything new, and fish was definitely not on his list of acceptable foods. Yet there he was, sitting on a patch of uncomfortable ground, happily munching away on trout.

The transformation occurred during a cultural exchange that took place last year. Hildebrandt teaches at Mother Earth's Children's Charter School, an Indigenous school southwest of Stony Plain, and she organized the exchange with Lisl Gunderman, a teacher at Wildwood School, where the community has deep Ukrainian roots.

"What pleased me most was seeing transformations happening in my students, where they totally embraced learning moments and forged new friendships with other like-minded students," Hildebrandt wrote in a summary report following the four-month exchange program.

The program is offered by the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation in partnership with the Alberta Teachers' Association. Its aim is to promote understanding between Alberta's Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The exchanges themselves are organized by teacher partners, one of whom must represent predominantly Indigenous students and the other predominantly non-Indigenous students. The program provides grants from \$500 to \$5,000 to cover 90 per cent of exchange-related expenses.

Through in-person visits or electronic contact, the exchanges aim to maximize

students' understanding of each other's values, aspirations, challenges, family life and community life so they are able to get beyond stereotypes and respect each other as individuals.

"Kids on reserves don't understand white kids and white kids don't understand reserves and are afraid of each other at some level," said program founder Earl Choldin.

Through the program, students learn that they have a great deal in common, such as what they find fun and exciting and what worries them about the future, he said.

"The challenge of building one Canada where we all appreciate each other is maybe one of the biggest challenges we face as a people," Choldin said.

The program has \$20,000 available this year, Choldin said. Applications are processed as they arrive. If they meet the criteria, they will be approved.

Teacher Gordon Power participated in the program last year and is volunteering to co-ordinate it this year. He's eager to spread the word about the program and said he can help teachers connect with a partner if they don't have one with whom to plan the exchange.

"If you have any interest at all in trying this out, go for it," he says. "You're opening up kids' eyes to the world."

### A career highlight

After finding out about the program through its website, Hildebrandt connected with Gunderman, and together they planned a series of activities that included "all about me" posters, letter writing and scrapbooking as well as four group field trips to each other's schools.

The trips included studies of conservation, hide tanning, powwows, the history of coal mining in the Evansburg area, gold panning, a visit to a stocked trout pond and a literacy project with Métis author David Bouchard.



After learning the skill from a Cree elder, students practice scraping hair off a deer hide during a cultural exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

While the program enabled the students to learn about each others' cultures, it also exposed students to aspects of their own culture and traditions that they didn't know about, Hildebrandt said.

The most transformative result from the exchange was its impact on her fish-eating pupil. Before the exchange he was a quiet, reluctant learner who stayed in the background. After the exchange he became much more engaged. He is now vocal and has shown a talent for art that he is willing to share with his peers.

"It just awakened something in him," Hildebrandt said of the exchange program.

"This is such a rewarding program. I can't say enough good things about it. It's the highlight of my teaching career for sure." ■

### For more information

Details about the exchange program are available on the website of the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation, [www.cmef.ca](http://www.cmef.ca).

Direct questions can go to Gordon Power at [gordon.power@epsb.ca](mailto:gordon.power@epsb.ca).

## Economic policy committees renamed Teacher Welfare committees

### PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka  
ATA News Staff

Association administrative guidelines provide for the attendance of observers at selected portions of Council meetings. Association members who are interested in observing selected portions of Council meetings at their own expense are advised to contact their district representative.

### Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held Jan. 18–19, 2018, at Barnett House in Edmonton

1. Approved the 2018/19 proposed budget for presentation to locals.
2. Approved, for presentation to the 2018 Annual Representative Assembly (ARA), a resolution setting the annual fee payable by a full-time, active member at \$1,266, effective Sept. 1, 2018.
3. Approved, for presentation to the 2018 ARA, a resolution setting the annual fee payable by an associate member at \$189.90, effective Sept. 1, 2018.
4. Approved the name of one recipient of honorary membership in the

Association, which is reserved for members and other persons who have given meritorious service to the teaching profession, to the Association or to the advancement of education.

5. Approved the nomination of one individual for consideration of the Alberta Order of Excellence, which is the highest honour the province of Alberta can bestow on a citizen.

6. Directed the president to write a letter to Education Minister David Eggen requesting an immediate meeting with the Association's table officers.

7. Named three members of Council to each of two staff selection committees: the first for the position of associate co-ordinator, Member Services—SARO and the second for the position of associate co-ordinator, Government—research.

8. Received the report of a hearing committee, which found a teacher guilty of one charge of unprofessional conduct for making a statement to a social worker who attends meetings at the school several times per year if the social worker "felt like killing someone or if the social worker felt like killing a kid", thus failing to maintain the dignity and honour of the profession. The hearing committee imposed a penalty of a letter of reprimand and a \$200 fine payable within 30 days of the teacher's receipt of the written notice. Should the teacher fail to pay the fine within

the allotted period, the teacher will be suspended from membership in the Association until such time as the fine is paid in full.

9. Approved recommendations on seven expiring current directives and approved the position of Council for each directive.

10. Approved Council's position on the resolutions arising from the decennial reviews of the Curriculum, Student Assessment and Evaluation long-range policy and the Educational Accountability long-range policy.

11. Approved a resolution to amend an administrative procedure related to costs of attendance of local delegates or representatives at provincially called meetings.

12. Approved resolutions for presentation at the 2018 ARA to facilitate a policy review process, including the development of a new body of policy for presentation at the 2019 ARA and the suspension of current policy review processes for 2018/19 to allow for the preparation of a revised body of policy.

13. Approved, for submission to the 2018 ARA, reports on five resolutions by the 2017 ARA.

14. Renamed economic policy committees to teacher welfare committees to more accurately reflect the nature of the work of the committees involving the economic, health, workplace and professional welfare of teachers.

15. Amended administrative guidelines related to the honoraria provided to contributors to the *ATA News* and *ATA Magazine*, the allowable expenses for delegates during the ARA and the rules around representation at political party events.

16. Authorized the attendance of up to three Council members at the Alberta Rural Education Symposium, scheduled for March 4–6, 2018, in Edmonton.

17. Authorized the attendance of up to five Council members at the Emerging Technologies Research Colloquium and Public Lecture, scheduled for April 5–6, 2018, in Edmonton.

18. Authorized the purchase of eight tickets for the Parkland Institute Gala Dinner and Silent Auction, scheduled for March 1, 2018, in Edmonton.

19. Authorized that up to five members of the Association's United Way Committee are eligible to attend the United Way Red Tie Gala, taking place on Feb. 22, 2018, in Edmonton.

20. Approved the name of one teacher for addition to the Association instructor name bank.

21. Approved dates of key Association-sponsored meetings and Council meetings for the 2018/19 school year.

22. Named a field member to serve on the Edmonton Area Field Experiences Committee. ■



# Gordon Thomas ends tenure as executive secretary

Cory Hare  
ATA News Managing Editor

After following in his father's footsteps with his choice of careers, Gordon Thomas may just do so again when he transitions into retirement.

Thomas's father was a well-respected high school teacher in Lethbridge for more than 40 years. On the morning of his first day of retirement, he got out his phone list and started calling colleagues.

"With each one he said ... 'I just wanted you to know, I'm going back to bed now!'" Thomas recalls. "I've contemplated doing that. Some of my colleagues may get a call on February the first."

Thomas is set to retire after 41 years in the teaching profession. For the last 34 of those years he's been employed as an executive at the Alberta Teachers' Association, including the last 15 years as the executive secretary.

"I will miss the people here enormously," Thomas said of his impending departure from Barnett House. "I think it's also fair to say that I'll miss being at the centre of things because I've been at the centre of things for a very long time."

## A natural teacher

Given his father's reputation at the local high school, it was natural for Thomas to enter the profession. He also had an innate interest in teaching from a young age.

With a keen interest in history, politics and current events, Thomas gravitated to social studies as his area of specialty when he was earning his bachelor of education degree at the University of Lethbridge. After graduating, Thomas landed a job at a brand new high school: Sturgeon Composite in Namao, just north of Edmonton.

Over the following years, Thomas taught mainly social studies and drama. While the former was his primary area of interest, he was more known for the strength of the drama program and its annual musical, which was renowned throughout the school and surrounding community.

"It certainly caught fire and it was something that contributed to the school in my time there, and it defined me," Thomas said. "I enjoyed it. It was a great way to work with students and a good experience."

While he loved being in a classroom and "seeing the light bulb come on" for students, Thomas was also driven to pursue graduate work in secondary education. By the time he was seven years into his teaching career, he had completed a masters and a PhD and thought he was headed for academia or a central office job.

However, other ideas were afoot at the ATA. Like his father, Thomas had been involved with the Association since beginning his career. People at the ATA recognized his potential and recruited him to be an executive staff officer in the Professional Development program area.

"My career path had not included the ATA," Thomas says. "I thought I would end up in a university and yet the ATA, I think, was a very good fit because I could still do research, I could still do teaching and I could represent the profession."

## A quick study

One of Thomas's first assigned tasks at the Association also became one of

his proudest achievements. Shortly after joining the staff at Barnett House, Thomas was called into the office of executive secretary Bernie Keeler, who informed him that the education minister had announced that all school boards were to have teacher evaluation policies. Given this news, the ATA needed to have a well-researched and reasoned position on the issue. Keeler informed Thomas that he was now the ATA's expert on teacher evaluation and was in charge of formulating this position.

"I said to Dr. Keeler, 'I don't know anything about teacher evaluation,' and he said to me, 'I don't know how that could be true Gordon because you are the ATA's expert on teacher evaluation and the ATA's expert would know *everything* there is to know on teacher evaluation, so, the library is there.'"

Thomas went on to lead the creation of an Association policy model on teacher evaluation that helped to shape the longstanding government policy known as the Teacher Growth, Supervision, Evaluation and Practice Review. Now, 20 years later, the policy is still in place and is meeting the needs of the profession and school boards.

"I am proud of it but I'm also not the only one that helped create it," Thomas says. "There were lots of other important fingers in that."

As a staff officer, Thomas proved to be intelligent, literate and a quick study, said Charles Hyman, who preceded Thomas as executive secretary. Thomas was also well-spoken, friendly and took a deep interest in his work.

As Hyman's associate executive secretary, Thomas demonstrated an ability to forge productive working relationships with his counterparts in academia and Alberta Education, Hyman said. This was at a time when the Association was under tremendous pressure due to a labour confrontation with government.

"Almost all my time was taken up with it; almost everything else was his," Hyman said. "Those things did not come back to haunt us ... that's important."

As executive secretary, Thomas was instrumental in working behind the scenes to negotiate the 2007 agreement that saw the government assume responsibility for teachers' \$2.1 billion unfunded pension plan liability, said Frank Bruseker, who was president at the time.

"This was a big achievement and Gordon's role working with Keray Henke, the deputy minister of education, I think was very, very key in finally hammering out the final details," Bruseker said.

Former president Carol Henderson described Thomas as someone who was never in a rush and always willing to listen. And he was instrumental when a very serious cancer diagnosis had her talking about resigning her position.

"He said 'you'll do no such thing ... we'll work through this,'" she said.

"I was able to come back to work and finish my term and that was because Gordon refused to accept my resignation. That meant a lot to me at the time and it still does."

## Leadership style

On the subject of leadership, Thomas believes in collegiality, trusting others and facilitating their work, a style he formed due to the influence of a few key leaders he encountered early in his career.

"I won't purport to be 100 per cent successful, but I have tried to have a very collegial operation," Thomas said. "I've certainly relied on my colleagues. It's always helpful when you're surrounded by some of the very best people in the province in education."



After 34 years with the Alberta Teachers' Association, executive secretary Gordon Thomas will be officially retired as of Feb. 1.

## TESTIMONIALS

Gordon's many years of experience shaped him into a tremendous source of sound advice and guidance. His focus was always on improving the lot of teachers, the teaching profession and the Association. It has been a pleasure to work with Gordon over the years.

—Frank Bruseker, former ATA president (2003–09)

Gordon was among the best listeners I've ever met. He believed in taking time to talk, in sharing ideas and considering the outcomes. By doing that, we could make the best possible decisions. Everyone appreciated Gordon's sense of humour. When I was president and said something incorrect Gordon would say, "What the president meant to say was ...." Gordon always had the president's back.

—Carol Henderson, former ATA president (2009–13)

Sometimes it can be years later when we truly see and appreciate the impact a teacher has on us. Even though I was never in one of Gordon's high school classes, I was fortunate to be a part of the major drama productions his teaching team lead out at Sturgeon Composite High School. I can see these experiences were the best examples of every new idea and instructional practice we have worked to articulate over the last 30 years. Gordon's deep passion and commitment to fostering, creating and highlighting opportunities for every student to shine has always made him a leader in education.

—Sandra Brenneis, former student, current director of learning support, Sturgeon Public School Division

For many years Dr. Gordon Thomas dedicated himself to the betterment of public education in our province. He had a deep commitment to the profession and to teachers in our province. I will miss his humour, his drive and our chats. Gordon has the innate ability to listen, analyze and advise. He always supported the direction I chose ... a perfect match for a random abstract president!

—Mark Ramsankar, former ATA president (2013–17)

It will be hard for me to imagine the Association without Gordon Thomas. His leadership and dedication to the teachers of this province has been exemplary and some of the milestone achievements during his tenure will be felt by our members for generations. I will miss his sage guidance and wish him the best that retirement has to offer.

—Greg Jeffery, ATA president

During his time at Sturgeon Composite High School Dr. Thomas was one of the most popular teachers in the building. This was a direct result of his quick wit and easy-going rapport with students. It was also due to the fact that Dr. Thomas was the active coach of the drama club at the high school.

Dr. Thomas always said that the final performance is not as important as the lessons learned while preparing for the big night. Those words have been a constant comfort to the many now successful people from that class.

—Paul Froese, former student, current teacher and PEC member

He said he was lucky to come into the role of executive secretary when he did, as growth in the profession helped bring progress on some of teachers' most pressing issues, which he also credits to strong leadership from elected members.

"I've had inspired and able political leadership. You don't have that, not much is going to happen. You have to have the right president for the time; you have to have a council that's prepared to act."

## Next chapter

As his last day as executive secretary approaches, Thomas is looking forward to travelling and resuming some hobbies — playing the piano, woodworking,

reading for pleasure — that have lain dormant due to the demands of his position. On the second day of his retirement he's got some baking lessons scheduled — during the day.

No stranger to long hours and late nights, Thomas says he's looking forward to stepping away from the heavy workload that comes with the executive secretary position.

"There is a burden of office and sometimes you just have to commit the energy that's needed to deal with the issue or to resolve the matter, and if that means you're up half the night to do it, well, that's the way it is," he said.

"I'm looking forward to the burden being lifted." ■



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For more information, contact Tracy Pohl at tracy.pohl@ata.ab.ca or by telephone: 780-447-9482 or 1-800-232-7208 (toll free) ext. 482. The Alberta Teachers' Association reserves the right to refuse the highest bid if it is deemed to be inadequate.

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Our school administration will be in Edmonton, Alberta, at the Shaw Conference Centre to attend the Greater Edmonton Teachers' Convention from March 1–2 and the East Central Teachers' Convention from March 8–9.

Please forward your resume and related documents to **Boyd Davies** at [hr.qscis@gmail.com](mailto:hr.qscis@gmail.com) and [hr@cscdfsd.org](mailto:hr@cscdfsd.org) to apply or to set up an interview in Edmonton from March 1–9.



## WE LOOK FORWARD TO MEETING YOU!



The Alberta Retired Teachers' Association is attending all ten Teachers' Conventions across the province this year, as well as participating in pre-retirement seminars offered by the ATA. If you are thinking about retirement, connecting with us at these events is an excellent opportunity to learn more about the resources we have available to guide you in your retirement.

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The Alberta Teachers' Association

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## Off-campus co-ordinators struggling with workload, new study

ATA News Staff

A new study is highlighting the struggles of Alberta's off-campus co-ordinators, a group of teachers who facilitate work experience programs.

The study found that these teachers are struggling with increased workloads and reduced supports, as well as insufficient training and professional development.

"This study offers some important context to improve our understanding of current teaching and learning realities in this critically important sector," said Alberta Teachers' Association President Greg Jeffery.

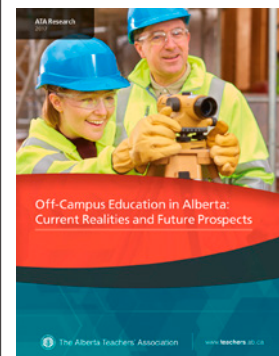
"This newfound understanding will inform practice and policy in the years ahead."

The Association initiated the study in the spring of 2016 based on growing concerns from the field suggesting that off-campus co-ordinators (OCCs) are finding it difficult to fulfill their responsibilities. Researchers invited 300 Alberta OCCs to complete a survey and received 113 responses.

### Key findings

Survey responses suggest the following:

- OCC's experiences vary widely — some work full time in the OCC role, while others work in the OCC fragment of a complex teaching assignment.
- OCCs need more time, flexibility and professional learning to increase their effectiveness.
- Off-campus education requires better definition and integration into secondary public education.
- OCCs believe in the value of off-campus education and advocate for its place in public education. ■



### Get a copy

The study is entitled *Off-Campus Education in Alberta: Current Realities and Future Prospects*. Electronic copies are available on the Association's website, [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) > News and Info > Announcements > New Association Publications Available.

## À Beaumont, nous aimons notre musique!

Denis Lacroix  
l'École Secondaire Beaumont  
Composite High School

Comme tout enseignant d'immersion, les enseignants de l'École Secondaire Beaumont Composite High School et de l'École J. E. Lapointe School essaient de partager avec leurs élèves leurs connaissances de la langue et de la culture françaises. Depuis plusieurs années, certains ont découvert un nouveau passe-temps professionnel et un nouvel outil de motivation et d'apprentissage : la musique contemporaine.

Qui n'aime pas la musique? Depuis toujours, elle est utilisée dans les classes d'immersion française comme outil pédagogique. De temps en temps, les enseignants font écouter des chansons aux élèves, ils leur donnent les paroles en prenant soin auparavant d'enlever quelques mots ici et là, afin de créer un exercice de compréhension orale. Les élèves écoutent attentivement la chanson, complètent les paroles et une discussion s'engage.

Un jour, à Beaumont, lors d'une journée d'activités culturelles, quelque chose est arrivé qui a tout changé :

des élèves se sont portés volontaires pour interpréter des chansons « en direct ». Un nouveau concept et une nouvelle tradition beaumontoise étaient nés : l'interprétation de la musique moderne par et pour les élèves. Vint ensuite le coup de foudre de certains enseignants, puis l'obsession de tout faire pour sortir des murs de l'école. Les élèves en sont à leur 9<sup>e</sup> saison.

Au fil des années, nous avons créé un cahier d'activités qui rassemble les messages véhiculés par les chansons et la musique ainsi que des concepts lexicaux ou grammaticaux. Et bien sûr, nous avons monté un spectacle que nous avons également présenté dans plusieurs écoles. Dernièrement, les élèves se sont même produits sur la scène artistique d'Edmonton. Ils ont participé, en grande partie en français, à la compétition « Compete with the Beat » de YEG Music où ces deux dernières années, « Les Marionnettes » sont arrivées en finale. Ils ont aussi participé plusieurs fois au « Deep Freeze : a Byzantine Winter Festival », où, cette année, ils ont donné trois concerts différents : deux acoustiques et celui qu'ils ont présenté à leur école. ■

*Denis Lacroix est enseignant à l'École Secondaire Beaumont Composite High School.*



The Alberta Teachers' Association

The Alberta Teachers' Association invites applications for the position of

### ASSOCIATE CO-ORDINATOR, GOVERNMENT—RESEARCH

Competition: ESO5/18 Location: Edmonton Commencement: May 1, 2018

Under the general direction of the associate executive secretary, this executive staff member is responsible for undertaking, organizing, coordinating and leading the research of the Association. The role includes providing leadership in research across the sector and acting as Association expert on research in education, strategic planning, student assessment and accountability in education. The incumbent will also act on Association committees and, as assigned, represent the Association with external groups, and assist with the *ATA News* and with the dissemination and preparation of written materials.

A proven commitment to public education, excellent collaborative leadership and human relations skills,

facility in oral and written communication, and good health and stamina are all essential requirements of this position. In addition, travel and evening and weekend work will be necessary at certain times of the year. A minimum of five years of successful teaching experience in public education is also required. Demonstrated commitment to the Alberta Teachers' Association (or other Canadian teachers' organization) will be considered an asset, as well as the ability to work in the French language. An advanced degree, preferably a doctorate, coupled with a proven track record in education research and publication are assets.

Total compensation for this position includes a minimum starting salary of \$145,065, pensionable service under the Teachers' Pension Plan of the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund Board and employer-paid benefits as stipulated in a collective agreement. The initial location will be in Edmonton, but future assignments may be to any present or future Association office. Duties are to commence on or about May 1, 2018.

Applicants should quote position ESO5/18 and include the names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of at least two referees who are not Association employees or elected officials of its provincial executive. Applications must be received by 5:00 P.M. on **February 8, 2018**, and should be addressed to

Denise Wladyka, Human Resources Director  
Alberta Teachers' Association  
11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton T5N 2R1  
Email: [hr@ata.ab.ca](mailto:hr@ata.ab.ca)

For more information, please see our website at [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca).