

DISTRACTED OR ADDICTED?

Revealing results from Growing Up Digital (GUD) Alberta. See *Viewpoints* on page 3.



See inside for the 2018 Resolutions Bulletin

ATA NEWS

The Alberta Teachers' Association



Learn from the past. Inspire the future.

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PHOTOS BY CORY HARE

Spinning for Smiles

Students and staff at Fort Saskatchewan High School participated in the school's third annual Spinning for Smiles bike-a-thon on March 9 and 10. The 24-hour event raises money to fight cancer.



Recommitment required

Growing class sizes call for action from government and school boards.

Read Jonathan Teghtmeyer's editorial on page 2.



In Focus

For 50 years, the Southern Alberta Regional Office has been there for members.

See story on page 4.



This ...

from ATA President Greg Jeffery

Getting engaged

ATA president Greg Jeffery comments on the rise of teachers' conventions as political battlegrounds.

See This ... on page 5.



SUPPLIED

Students from Elmer S. Elementary School in Mayerthorpe.

Pink Shirt Day

Anti-bullying movement garners support throughout the province.

See page 12.

Public vs. private

ATA joins call to scale back public funding of private schools.

See story on page 6.

Success Stories

Education team highlights the potential of sign language.

See story on page 7.

Government and boards should recommit to reducing class size



EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

As outlined in a recently released report, auditor general Merwin Saher has found that, after investing \$2.7 billion toward the “class size initiative,” Alberta has classes that are actually larger than they were in 2004. While the auditor’s report is definitely welcome, it is hardly earth-shattering news to teachers.

They know their classes are bigger than they have ever been in the last 15 years. They also know that those classes include way more special needs students with inadequate supports in place.

In 2003, Alberta’s Commission on Learning (ACOL) recommended that, on average, K–3 classes should have about 17 students in them. It also recommended that class sizes should be lower with the inclusion of students with special needs. The government accepted ACOL’s recommendations and initially allocated \$89 million – increasing to \$150 million in the next three years – to hire more than 2,200 new teachers to reduce class sizes.

At the start of the class size initiative, the average K–3 class size was 21.7 students, and only three of the 62 school boards in the province were meeting the ACOL guidelines. The average was brought down as low as 18.5 in 2009/10, but after that it began rising again. As of the last school year, the average sat at 20.4 students, and only five of 61 school jurisdictions were meeting the ACOL recommendation for average K–3 class size.

Thankfully the auditor general also pointed out the flaw in using averages, saying that it obscures the actual number of classes that exceed the target. This is a particular problem for high school classes where smaller option classes are artificially dragging down the average, while core classes often have 30, 35 or even 40 students.

Many are asking how this happened. How did \$2.7 billion amount to no improvement of class sizes after 14 years of trying? Here are my observations.

The class size initiative was working until about 2009. But two things happened around that time: the global downturn wrecked Alberta’s revenue sources, and Alberta’s student population began a long period of rapid growth as a result of in-migration and a localized baby boom. Between 2009/10 and 2017/18, the student population increased by 100,000.

However, with the bulk of funding

being distributed to school boards on a per-student basis, education placed considerable pressure on the provincial budget at a time when revenues were constrained. The government looked for ways to slow the increase.

While the government maintained most of the base instructional grants, it proposed cuts to smaller grants. At the same time, the auditor general points out, the government adjusted how it funds the class size initiative and reduced the reporting requirements for school boards. The auditor’s report says funding was treated like “additional base instruction funding.”

School boards were faced with more students, more costs and a proportionally smaller amount of money each year.

In some cases, cuts were proposed and then reversed – sometimes after the school year began – but in other cases the grants were cut for good: AISI, enhanced ESL, ESL years six and seven, junior high and high school class size funding and so on.

The unpredictability of funding and the sometimes lack of space meant school boards were reluctant to hire more teachers, even though the total amount of funding (per pupil based with a rising population) was actually increasing.

This created a hiring lag and ultimately higher class sizes. Since 2009, if the growth in teacher population had

matched the growth in student population, we would now have nearly 3,000 more teachers than we do.

But if enrolment growth and class size were continuously funded and teachers weren’t being hired, where did the money go?

First, school boards faced rising costs over time while grant rates were not significantly adjusted. So some of the money was likely used to cover those unfunded rising costs and deal with smaller grants that were cut. But, in some cases, the money may not have been spent at all.

Between 2012 and 2016, school board surpluses and reserves increased significantly. That was actually the subject of a separate auditor general report released in 2015. Further analysis is needed before the link between class size funding and an increase in school board surpluses can be confirmed, but these two reports taken together suggest a need for further investigation.

In the meantime, let’s hope that school boards and the government can use this situation to look at the funding model, the existence of some excess cash and the requirements for reporting as a way to provide the oversight and planning needed to recommit to reducing class size. ■

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

Naloxone is not a tool for teachers



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

Question: I’ve been hearing a lot about Naloxone and the opioid crisis. Should schools be doing something about this? What is the teacher’s role when it comes to administering medication?

Answer: The fentanyl crisis has been in the news for quite some time now and the incidents of overdose in Alberta are on the rise. This is of concern to everyone, and we all play a role in reducing this threat. I asked my colleague Robert Mazzotta, co-ordinator of Member Services, to provide his insights into the problem and to teachers’ role. His response follows.

Fentanyl is a powerful narcotic, often mixed with other street drugs, that when ingested can render an individual unconscious and can lead to death. The primary role of the school is to educate students regarding the risks associated with the use of opioids and

other drugs that may contain fentanyl. As teachers, we need to ensure our students develop healthy lifestyles and understand how to make proper choices in their lives. Preventative measures need to be at the forefront. We want our students to be safe.

Some school boards are looking into having Naloxone kits available in schools as a tool to combat a potential overdose by a student. There are a number of concerns that need to be considered before such a decision is made and implemented.

According to occupational health and safety legislation, an employer must

- conduct a hazards assessment and ensure appropriate controls are in place,
- develop safe work procedures and provide training to workers (not necessarily teachers),
- ensure the equipment (the Naloxone kits) is in working order,
- assess the risk of worker exposure and
- identify controls to reduce the risk of exposure to hazards related to the administration of Naloxone (<http://work.alberta.ca/documents/OHS-bulletin-CH076.pdf>).

It is also important that school board policy cover the use of non prescription medication in schools to ensure that all staff involved are covered by board insurance should something go wrong. School board policies often prohibit members of staff from administering to a student drugs that have not been specifically prescribed for that student. If the employer says that teachers cannot give students aspirin, how could teachers assume they are authorized to give students Naloxone?

There are also practical matters to be considered. For example, Naloxone is available as both a nasal spray and as an injectable. It is not recommended, however, to use the nasal spray kit, as an individual who has overdosed may experience depressed breathing that may render the nasal spray form of the medication ineffective. The injectable form of the medication is medically preferred and comes in kits with four vials of Naloxone and four syringes, as more than one dose may be needed to have the desired effect. Injecting Naloxone requires the first responder to draw the medication into a syringe and then administer

the injection, perhaps several times if warranted – this is very different from using an EpiPen auto-injector to administer epinephrine.

The current information on the Alberta Health Services website states that the Naloxone kits can be prescribed or dispensed only to a patient or individual using opioids. However, a call to HealthLink and to a pharmacy has confirmed that anyone can pick up a kit. The law has not changed, but it appears that current practice has. It is important to review the information as it is changing, particularly in light of these contradictions.

The Association’s position is that teachers are there to teach, not to administer medication. This is why most schools have appropriate policies, safeguards and procedures in place in advance of an emergency as well as designating appropriately trained, noncertificated individuals to be responsible for medication administration. Administering Naloxone should be no different. ■

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



The Alberta Teachers' Association

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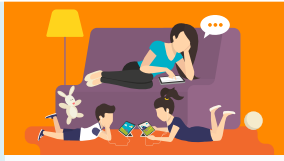
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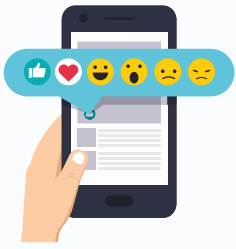
DISTRACTED OR ADDICTED?

Growing Up Digital (GUD) Alberta is a 10-year, collaborative research project that examines perspectives on digital technology, health and learning. The current phase of study involved collecting data from parents and grandparents.



“ People are having a hard time being away from their phones. They are living their life through a screen instead of actually taking in what is happening around them through their own eyes. ”

— Alberta parent



30% of parents feel “addicted” to their own technologies with social media as the area of greatest dependence.



22% of parents feel “addicted” to technology with the areas of greatest dependence being watching videos and video games.



36% of grandparents believe their grandchild is “addicted” to technology.

More details about the GUD Alberta project are available at bit.ly/gudalberta18.

PARTNERS: The Alberta Teachers’ Association, University of Alberta, Boston Children’s Hospital, Center on Media and Child Health and Harvard Medical School Teaching Hospital.

From distraction to addiction



VIEWPOINTS

Phil McRae
ATA Executive Staff Officer

Each day, the average Canadian student spends approximately seven hours and 45 minutes in front of some sort of screen, such as a smartphone, tablet, television or computer. Digital technologies have become inextricably entwined in many of our lives and are now noticeably shaping our students’ identities, habits of mind and physical exposure to the world around them. In fact, according to a 2015 research study by Microsoft, our attention span has been reduced to that of a goldfish, less than eight seconds, by the clickable hyperlinks and constant demands of our digitally drenched mobile lives. Eight seconds is approximately the amount of time it took you to read up to this point, so thank you for staying with me this far. Less than a decade ago we had a 12-second attention span; as our screens colonize our lives, so our attention span diminishes.

To better understand the scope of physical, mental and social consequences of digital technologies in areas such as exercise, homework, identity formation, distraction, cognition, learning, technology compulsions, nutrition and sleep habits, researchers from the Alberta Teachers’ Association, the University of Alberta, Boston Children’s Hospital and Harvard Medical School have been working on a long-term collaborative initiative entitled Growing Up Digital (GUD) Alberta.

The first phase of the GUD Alberta research initiative, conducted in 2016, explored teachers’ and principals’ perspectives around technology, health and learning, and highlighted the paradox of technology both enhancing and distracting learning.

The second phase of GUD Alberta engaged more than 3,500 Alberta

parents and grandparents with detailed questions about the impact of technology on their own children and grandchildren. This survey, completed this year, represents the largest sample in North America, and perhaps the world, on parent and grandparent perspectives around technology, health and learning.

Next year the third phase will directly involve students across the province between the ages of 12 and 17 and attempt to better understand the impact of emerging technologies as they relate to their knowledge, lifestyles, learning and overall health and well-being.

Second phase

This phase of the research was designed to investigate the perceptions of Alberta parents, guardians and grandparents about the scope of physical, mental and social consequences of digital technologies on children and youth within the home environment. Also in this survey was a benchmark of how parents perceive the impact of digital technologies on their children’s reading, speaking, math, social skills, behaviour, emotional health and levels of anxiety.

This research assessed the impact of digital technologies on learning and parenting practices at home and further informed the patterns already identified in phase one. Here are some of the highlights from this new phase two research.

At home

- 85 per cent of parents believe that technology makes it easier to stay in touch with friends and family.
- 62 per cent of parents feel negatively distracted by digital technologies, and three quarters of them recognize that their technology habits influence those of their children.

- 45 per cent of parents report that their children have a mobile device with them every night after bed time; 41 per cent of parents state their children never do. The data show the polarization in terms of whether children have their phones with them at night (nocturnal screen time).
- 60 per cent of parents in this survey indicate that their child’s use of digital technologies has a mostly negative impact on physical activity; 37 per cent suggest it has a negative impact on emotional health; and 30 per cent suggest it has a negative impact on anxiety.

In the classroom

- 26 per cent of parents believe their child’s use of technology at school is “too much,” with 68 per cent of parents feeling the amount of time their children are using digital technology at school is “about right.”
- 39 per cent of parents indicate that their child’s use of digital technologies has a mostly positive impact on reading skills; 37 per cent suggest it has a positive effect on math skills.

Future research

Exploring the correlations between the health outcomes reported in this research and technology use across students’ lives will be the work of the GUD project over time. For example, to what extent is there a correlation between students coming to school tired or anxious/depressed and nocturnal screen time? This work is slowly creating a picture of the paradoxical promise and peril of technology and will be used in conversations about how we can live in a digitally saturated era and still be balanced, mindful and — most importantly — present. ■

An executive staff officer with the Alberta Teachers’ Association and adjunct professor within the faculty of education at the University of Alberta, Phil McRae is the ATA’s expert on technology in education.

YOUR VIEWS

FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

On the auditor general’s report on class size

Kimberley Rae

It’s the combination of expectations and class sizes. If they want individualism and inclusion then classes need to be smaller... my opinion.

Tasha Roa-Yaremkowycz

Disappointing, no wonder so many teachers are on stress leaves and are leaving the profession.

Jeanne Carter-Jacobs

It is also who is in those classes. It makes a huge impact on the learning environment and workload.

On public dollars for private schools

Sonja Farrell

We live in a community with two schools; the public school is at or over capacity, and as a parent I want to choose to be able to pay to have the other choice.

Dania Hill

You make the point perfectly. The government needs to address equitable access for all to a high standard of education. If rich people can/want to pay, let them, but smaller classes, support for inclusion need more help and that requires more funds.

Heather Gagne

As a teacher and a parent whose child went to private school, sorry ATA, I have to disagree — you are wrong. My son had 12 [students in his] class and two adults were there to help him through his LDs. All students were able to access additional help as well as learning aids. This is something we can’t do in regular classrooms because we can’t/won’t deny enrolment, don’t enforce class sizes and will never have that much funding per class.

ON TWITTER

Dan Scratch @DanScratch03

Shout out to all my teachers across Alberta who are embracing social justice as part of their pedagogy. I know it’s not always easy and there are many challenges, but your courage to teach for justice and equity will resonate across this province.

Ken Chapman @KenChapman46

Behind most accomplished people there was a teacher who made a positive difference in that life.

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.



Regional office provides improved service

SARO an experiment that became a permanent fixture



The Southern Alberta Regional Office (SARO) maintains a staff of seven, including (above, L-R): Kurt Moench, Patrick Loyer, Keith Hadden and Doreen Link. PHOTOS BY JEN JANZEN

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 the Southern Alberta Regional Office in Calgary.

It started as an experiment: place a staff officer in Calgary for two years and see how it goes.

Fifty years later, the Southern Alberta Regional Office (SARO) is an important part of the Alberta Teachers' Association's service to members.

SARO co-ordinator Kurt Moench, who has worked at the office since 2001, says having a Calgary office is essential for the Association to meet the needs of teachers in southern Alberta.

"It's easy [for us] to drive to Medicine Hat or Lethbridge and make it a day trip," he said. "Not so easy from Barnett House in Edmonton."

Because they focus on southern Alberta — defined for the Association's purposes as the area from Red Deer south to the U.S. border — SARO staff

“ We know the communities involved, they're our communities too. ” — Kurt Moench, SARO co-ordinator

can effectively build relationships with superintendents, administrators, teachers and local universities.

"We know the communities involved," Moench says. "They're our communities too."

SARO's first office space was established in 1968 in downtown Calgary. It had occupied two other downtown locations between 1972 and 2000, when it moved to its present location in Calgary's northeast quadrant.

Administrative officer Doreen Link has been working at SARO for 38 years, starting as a part-time receptionist working late afternoons and Saturdays. When she started, the receptionist position was shared between the Association and the Calgary public and separate locals.

A lot has changed in the interceding years: email has replaced the telephone as the go-to mode of communication, the Calgary locals have gotten their own administrative staff (but still share the same building as SARO), the ATA is no longer open on Saturdays and SARO's

employee roster has surged to four staff officers (Moench, Patrick Loyer, Ian Stewardson and Keith Harrison) and three administrative staff (Link, Melody Osterhaut and Rose O'Brien).

"We have all the functions of Barnett House," Link says, such as a mailroom, caretaking services and meeting catering, "but we do a lot of it ourselves."

SARO's space has more actual offices than it has people to put in them — partly to account for future growth and partly to give visiting Barnett House staff a place to work. There are a couple of meeting rooms that can be rented out to external bodies and ATA groups, as well as an internal meeting room for video conferences.

All of the staff officers in Calgary are assigned to the Member Services program area, but their work will commonly touch on other areas like Teacher Welfare and the Teacher Qualifications Service. If teachers in southern Alberta have a question about their job, their first point of contact can often be a SARO staff officer. A Member Services

duty officer, a rotating position among the staff officers, is available every day to field questions about anything related to teaching.

Loyer, who's been a staff officer since 2009, first at Barnett House then transferring full-time to SARO in 2016, says a regional office is an asset to the Association.

"Our relationship to teachers improves because our service is quicker," he says. "In some cases we can be sitting down in a meeting with members the next day because we are closer geographically." ■

Happy 50th

Jan. 15, 2018 marked the 50th anniversary of the opening of SARO.

SARO misconceptions

That SARO is a person. Staffer Rose O'Brien says she sometimes gets calls from folks asking to speak to SARO.

That SARO exists to serve Calgary teachers. SARO is for all of southern Alberta, from Red Deer south to the U.S. border.

That SARO is a local. The two Calgary locals are in the same building, but the three organizations are separate.

History book a labour of love

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, entitled From the Archives. 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 or documents from the Association's archives.

John W. Chalmers's book *Teachers of the Foothills Province: The Story of The Alberta Teachers' Association* was unveiled at the Annual Representative



John W. (Jack) Chalmers c. 1968

Assembly in 1968. The work was the culmination of a three-year, \$30,000 Canada Centennial Project dedicated to the memory of the ATA's first general secretary-treasurer, John Walker Barnett, and was published to commemorate the Association's 50th anniversary.

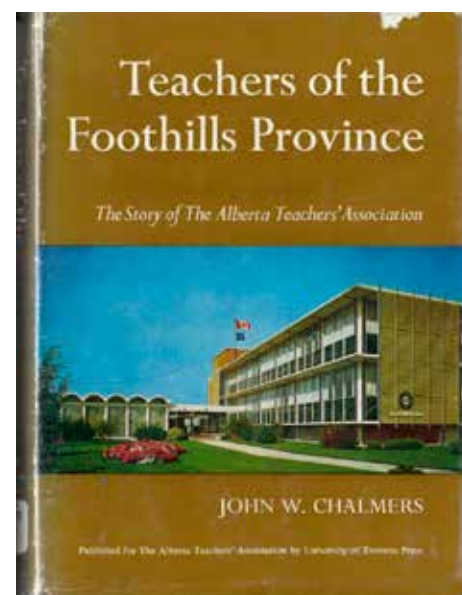
ATA staff contributed to the project by means of a liaison committee that included assistant executive secretary Fred Seymour and ATA News editor Tom McConaghy. Sadly, Seymour did not live to see the work completed. He died suddenly and far too soon in February 1968, a mere month before *Teachers of the Foothills Province* was published.

The work reads like the offspring of history and poetry. Author John W. (Jack) Chalmers's work is historically comprehensive but reads more like a novel than a historical overview.

Chapter titles include "Necessity Most Imperious," "A Home of Fairest Mould" and "The Flowering of the Sixties." Dedicated to the memory of John Barnett, the work also includes a "postlude" penned by former colleague and University of Alberta chancellor George McNally.

Chalmers was a renowned educator and a gifted writer and editor. His contributions extended to poetry, articles and many books. He arrived in Alberta from Manitoba in 1931 at the onset of the Great Depression and took up positions as a classroom teacher and principal. His work as director of the Correspondence School Branch in Edmonton was interrupted by wartime service as a navigation instructor with the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Post war, Chalmers earned a doctor of education degree from Stanford University and was a professor at the University of Alberta and Concordia College. The embodiment of "life-long learning," Chalmers earned his third master's degree from the U of A in 1990



PHOTOS COURTESY OF ATA ARCHIVES

at the age of 80. His epitaph, appropriately from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, reads "Gladly would he learn and gladly teach."

It has been 50 years since *Teachers of the Foothills Province* and 20 years since Chalmers's death. He left the Association with a superb history of its first half-century. Today, we remember his accomplishments at the close of our first century. ■

It's a wrap

Teachers' convention season came to an end on March 8 and 9 with Central East Alberta Teachers' Convention in Edmonton and the Mighty Peace convention in Grande Prairie.

PHOTOS BY CORY HARE



Theatre director and retired drama teacher Gail Whiteford (above, left) removes an artificial wound from the head of Stephen Cole, a drama teacher at Camrose Composite High School, during a workshop on gore makeup at Central East Alberta Teachers' Convention. Alicia Kneeland-Teasdale (above, right), a cosmetology teacher at William E. Hay school in Stettler, experiments with fake blood.



Clinical psychologist Alex Russell (above, left) delivers the opening keynote address at Central East Alberta Teachers' Convention. The topic was raising resilient children. Education Minister David Eggen (above, right) awaits his turn to speak to convention attendees.

This...

from ATA President Greg Jeffery



But I'm not political ...



It was a very interesting convention season for me as I travelled to all 10 conventions across the province. While it was not the first time for me to do so, it was my first time as president

and so there were different things that I had to accomplish along the road.

In addition to delivering my "Ahead by a Century" presentation at each of the conventions, I also responded to a number of media questions, many of which revolved around things happening at our conventions.

Here is where I'll tie things in with the title. It seems to me, and many others around Barnett House, that flagship professional development activities were being used in an attempt to score political points. Take, for example, United Conservative Party leader Jason Kenney's comments on Twitter about David Suzuki speaking at the Calgary city convention.

"How does listening to this kind of political rant constitute 'professional' development for teachers? Are we supposed to believe that those who gave Suzuki a standing ovation don't bring this left wing dogma into the classroom?"

Dr Suzuki has spoken at our conventions in the past and not a peep was heard, but this time there was this huge squawk.

Before this uproar had completely died down, Parents for Choice in Education (PCE) ignited a lobby to protest Kris Wells's appearance at the Paliser convention. This campaign resulted in a flood of emails to my inbox from people who, for the most part, simply copied and pasted the inflammatory and misleading critiques posted by the PCE.

And yet, at the same time, the minister of education used his chance to speak to conventions to ask teachers whether they'd rather bargain with his government or Kenney's.

This is a level of politicization that has previously be unheard of at our conventions. It seems that education may become a battleground in the next provincial election, which is still more than a year away.

We as teachers need to be involved. The ATA is non-partisan, but we encourage our members to get involved with the party of their choice and to support public education in our province. Clearly others are engaging already, so why not us? ■

I welcome your comments — contact me at greg.jeffery@ata.ab.ca.

Throne speech reveals little about education funding

Cory Hare

ATA News Managing Editor

The spring sitting of the Alberta legislature opened March 8 with a throne speech that threatened to cut off oil exports to B.C. due to the ongoing dispute over the Trans Mountain pipeline.

Meanwhile, the speech by Lt.-Gov. Lois Mitchell touched on K-12 education in just a few spots, promising that the construction of more new schools will be announced during the next budget year and the school lunch program will be expanded.

On the issue of overall funding for public education, the speech contained one sentence: "We owe it to our students to ensure that funding for education goes where it belongs — the classroom."

This leaves March 22 as the day that Alberta Teachers' Association president Greg Jeffery has circled on his calendar, as this is when the government will unveil its budget.

Budget anticipation

Jeffery is hoping for a budget that helps teachers and the public education system. He said that the message on the budget that he is hearing from teachers consistently relates to three concerns: large class sizes, undersupported inclusion and pay raises.

The Association itself raised the class size issue with a postcard campaign earlier this winter. A recent auditor general's report also called for action with respect to the class size initiative, after finding the program was lacking accountability and oversight.

"Boards need to be held accountable for the class size dollars they're presently receiving, but certainly there are more dollars required to address the classrooms across the province," Jeffery said.

Inclusion is another area in which boards should be required to report how they use available funds, Jeffery said, adding that more funds are also needed.

"We need, desperately, dollars dedicated to inclusion," Jeffery said. "Students are falling through the

cracks based on the class they're in and their particular needs, which don't always get fully addressed because of class size."

When it comes to compensation, teachers have responded loud and clear that they've done their part after receiving five zeroes in the past six years.

"It's evident to everyone in the province that we've helped this government out through some tough times, but now that times are improving it's time for our needs to be addressed," Jeffery said. ■

Opposition change

This will be the first legislative session for Jason Kenney, who won a seat in a December byelection after being elected leader of the United Conservative Party in October.

Communicating through sign

Focus on communication reduces violent outbursts for teenaged student with autism spectrum disorder

SUCCESS STORIES

Ashley Biffert, Abu Jabbie,
Michael Edward, Gerry Gabrielle,
Myles Bingham and Ian Waugh
Aspen Program
Edmonton Public Schools

Yunis is a high school aged student who is on the autism spectrum and is non-verbal. When he first arrived at the Aspen Program, he presented with limited communication abilities and frequently engaged in volatile outbursts. For staff working with Yunis, it was a challenge to move past anecdotal stereotypes and work with him to improve and develop basic methods of communication. With a team commitment to establishing a safe and welcoming environment, as well as teaching and reinforcing basic American Sign Language (ASL) techniques, Yunis was able to communicate basic needs and participate in the school community in a socially appropriate manner.

Getting past the stereotype

When Yunis started at the Aspen Program, the classroom team that consisted of one teacher and two educational assistants (EAs) refused to accept preconceived notions that a non-verbal teenage student could not understand or be taught new communication methods. The entire school team was committed to reinforcing positive interactions and creating a base of signs that would enhance Yunis' ability to participate comfortably and thrive in a school setting.

Yunis was able to communicate via three consistent signs: "eat," "home" and "bathroom." Through collaboration with family and the inclusive learning team, the classroom team created a list of signs aimed at enhancing Yunis' ability to communicate and fulfill his expected student role at school. This initial list consisted of: recognition of letters and numbers and their respective signs, as well as the signs for "break" (I need a break now) and "thank you."

How did we do it?

To teach a new sign and have it entrenched in Yunis' vocabulary, staff would model and verbalize the sign multiple times in an authentic situation. First, Yunis needed to present as calm, focused and attentive. Ms. Biffert or Mr. Jabbie would ensure Yunis' attention was on the designated task by asking him to point and ask "show your eyes, show your nose, show your mouth, are you listening?" Once Yunis was able to respond to these cues, staff would



Yunis signs "thank you" to educational assistant Ian Waugh and teacher Ashley Biffert.

introduce, model and state the sign until he successfully replicated the sign progression. This often took between five and 10 attempts.

Yunis had "first/then" charts with a two-step plan for him to "first" complete schoolwork or a task, "then" receive a positive reinforcement such as computer time or play. On this chart were generic pictures of the signs that were new as well as the signs he had mastered.

When Yunis became fatigued, there was a possibility that he might become aggressive or anxious and act out physically while punching or biting himself or others. Once he mastered the "break" (I need a break) sign, his anxiety and outbursts were reduced as staff consistently granted him a break and appropriate activity to reset or relax. Being able to sign for a "break" appeared to increase Yunis' autonomy and independence, ultimately allowing him to spend more time in the classroom with his peers.

Aspen Program

Operated by Edmonton Public Schools, the Aspen Program works with students to support positive behaviours and develop skills for success in school, career pathways and in the community.

Timeline for success

Yunis arrived at the Aspen Program in September 2016, and staff started to work with his family to learn about his needs, strengths and areas of improvement. The teaching and practicing of signing started in October and was ongoing throughout the entire school year. This included many failed attempts, resets and perseverance before success was achieved.

This school year, Yunis is creating signs that he attributes meaning to, and he then demonstrates the meaning of those signs to staff. This may indicate that he has an increased sense of personal autonomy now that he is more comfortable in expressing his daily needs and preferences.

Through a commitment from this classroom team to teach, reinforce and accept Yunis' own signs, he is now able to engage in socially appropriate school activities each day. He can work on a 24-piece floor puzzle, eat in an appropriate time frame and manner, clean his area, dress for the weather and communicate with all members of the school community. Yunis now practices signs to represent numbers and letters on a daily basis and he uses an iPad app to work on technology to access preferred songs. His advances in communication continue today. The daily use of sign language for this student with autism has improved his ability to communicate and participate at school. ■

Staff officers to take on new roles with Association

ATA News Staff

At its February meeting, Provincial Executive Council appointed ATA executive staff officers Keith Hadden and Phil McRae to new positions.



Keith Hadden, associate co-ordinator, Member Services—SARO

Hadden, who works out of the Association's Southern Alberta Regional Office (SARO) in Calgary, has been an executive staff officer since 2011. Effective April 1 he will assume his new role as associate co-ordinator, Member Services—SARO.

An executive staff officer in the Association's Government program area, Hadden serves on various committees, conducts workshops and acts as an Association expert on teacher growth, supervision and evaluation. He is also responsible for executing various facets of the discipline process including investigating allegations of unprofessional conduct and presenting evidence at professional conduct hearings.

In his new role, Hadden will have continued involvement with committees and the discipline process. He will provide advice to members, assist with field service to ATA locals, direct the work the work of SARO executive staff and perform other duties as required in addition to being responsible for the overall operation of SARO.



Phil McRae, associate co-ordinator, Government—Research

Effective May 1 McRae will transition to the role of associate co-ordinator, Government—Research. His current responsibilities include acting on a broad range of committees, assisting with ATA publications as an editor and writer and providing

research support on a variety of education issues. He is also a principal investigating officer on the Growing Up Digital Alberta research project, a large-scale study of the physical, mental and social impacts of digital technology and media on Alberta students.

As the associate co-ordinator of the Association's research, McRae will organize and co-ordinate the research of the Association across each of its four program areas — Government, Member Services, Professional Development and Teacher Welfare.

Hadden will fill the vacancy left by Kurt Moench. McRae will step into the shoes of J-C Couture. Moench was with the Association for 17 years and Couture 19 years. Both will be retiring after 40 years in the teaching profession. ■

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

Success Stories is a new feature in the ATA News that enables teachers to share their successes with their colleagues. To submit an idea or an article about a new program or approach that you've instituted, please contact managing editor Cory Hare at cory.hare@ata.ab.ca.



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ATA joins call to scale back private school funding

Jen Janzen

ATA News Staff

Alberta Teachers' Association President Greg Jeffery added his voice to a chorus of people calling for a reduction in provincial funding to private schools.

A group of 17 associations, which includes the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, Progress Alberta, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees Alberta, wants the province to reduce its funding of private schools to 50 per cent in the next budget, and send that \$30 million in savings to select public, separate and francophone schools that demonstrate the most need.

Speaking at a news conference held at the Public Interest Alberta office in Edmonton on March 5, Jeffery said the current model of 70 per cent funding for private schools is "fundamentally unfair."

He compared Rundle College, a private high school in Calgary, with Buchanan School, which is public. At Buchanan School a third of students are learning to speak English, and a quarter of students have special needs, Jeffery said. Meanwhile, Rundle College requires \$15,000 per year in tuition, accepts only students with high marks on admission tests and boasts of small class sizes.

"Our province's current funding model chooses to spend that \$7 million each year on Rundle College instead of Buchanan," Jeffery said. "It is the wrong choice."

He noted that the strength of public education, which includes Catholic and francophone schools, is in its inclusivity.

"As teachers we see the importance of and value in having students from diverse backgrounds learning together. Not just learning content outcomes, but



Alberta Teachers' Association president Greg Jeffery calls on the government to scale back funding to private schools during a news conference on March 5.

learning how to work together to embrace diversity and to become good global citizens," he said.

Carolyn Blasetti, executive director of Support Our Students Alberta, said public education includes everyone regardless of faith, ability or socioeconomic status and should be protected. "We are calling on the Alberta government to focus its efforts and public dollars on public education, reinforcing the principle that public dollars are collected for public use, in service to society at large," she said.

Alberta provides more public funding for private education than any other province. Quebec provides 60 per cent funding and three other provinces offer 50 per cent. Five provinces in Canada do not provide any public dollars to private schools. ■

CLARIFICATION

Superintendent salary report revised

On its website, the Alberta School Boards' Association published a revised version of a report that it commissioned on superintendent salaries. A number of revisions were required when the College of Alberta School Superintendents raised concerns about some of the data contained in the report. The *ATA News* would like to clarify some information reported in the Feb. 27 story "Superintendent salaries raise eyebrows" as a result of the revised report and other information gathered.

The original report claimed that Alberta superintendents experienced a 10 per cent average salary increase between 2015 and 2017. The revised report now says that salaries for Alberta school board superintendents increased by more than 10 per cent from 2011 to 2016.

The original report also suggested that Alberta's lowest paid superintendent (Northwest Francophone) was paid \$229,000 in 2015/16. According to audited financial statements, the actual salary that year was \$138,333.

The College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) believes the revised report continues to contain errors. The organization has provided the following statement to the *ATA News*.

"While the revised report did correct some errors, CASS maintains there are still errors in the revised report. As such CASS questions the conclusions made by the authors, in either version of their report." ■

A drain on the public purse — the history of private schooling in Alberta

James Wilt, Progress Alberta

Special to the *ATA News*

Part of a Progress Alberta campaign calling on the government to defund elite private schools, this commentary is adapted from an article that appears on Progress Alberta's website at www.progressalberta.ca.

On March 5, a group of 17 public school proponents (including the Alberta Teachers' Association and Progress Alberta) banded together in calling on the province to scale back funding to private schools.

Meanwhile, a few weeks earlier, a draft policy framework released by the United Conservative Party contained a line pledging equal funding for all schools — "public, separate, charter, home or private."

Alberta private schools currently receive public funding that amounts to 70 per cent of the government funding received by public schools. This is the highest rate in the country, compared to 60 per cent in Quebec, 50 per cent in B.C. and Manitoba and zero per cent in Ontario.

Clearly the funding of private schools is shaping up to be a hot topic as we head toward the next provincial election, but how on Earth did the province get to this point?

Historical context

Almost all schooling in Canada was private until the early 19th century — created by Catholic and Protestant churches as a means to spread their religion, morality and cultural influence. The *British North America Act* of 1867 officially allocated the responsibility of education to the provinces. This responsibility was further entrenched with the *Alberta Act* of 1905.

Alberta private schools currently receive public funding that amounts to 70 per cent of the government funding received by public schools. This is the highest rate in the country, compared to 60 per cent in Quebec, 50 per cent in B.C. and Manitoba and zero per cent in Ontario.

These acts created public English Protestant schools and separate French Catholic schools. Given their existence prior to Alberta becoming a province, Catholic schools became — and remain to this day — an integral part of our public education system.

Religious values continued to shape the public system up to the middle of the 20th century. As secularization in society grew, some groups — especially Dutch Calvinists — started establishing their own private schools.

"There's a kind of religious competition involved, to some degree," said David Rayside, professor emeritus of political science at the University of Toronto and co-author of 2017's *Religion and Canadian Party Politics*, in an interview with Progress Alberta.

"But there's also vying for influence between what we might call 'clericals' and 'anti-clericals.' And that goes back to the 19th century. It hasn't been as nasty a conflict as it has been in parts of Europe, but it's still part of the Canadian historical fabric."

In 1946, the Ernest Manning-led Social Credit Party officially recognized private schools by a change to the

province's *Education Act*. Manning followed that up in 1967 by starting to actually fund private schools, at \$100 per student. The seven-term premier retired only a year later, leading to the crushing of his party by the Peter Lougheed-led Progressive Conservatives in 1971.

But the seeds had been sown for the continued growth of private schools in Alberta.

By 1974, the PCs had increased per-student funding to 33 per cent of what public schools were receiving, and that was boosted to 40 per cent only two years later. David King, a long-time MLA and provincial education minister between 1979 and 1986, said in an interview with Progress Alberta that people were making the case that separate Catholic schools were receiving full funding and it was "only right" that private schools also received some money.

He remembered particular pressure from the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges, an Edmonton-based organization led by Gary Duthler — a member of the Christian Reformed tradition and an "active, ongoing and determined advocate" for more funding, according to King.

Between 1980 and 1987, the province boosted funding for private schools at a rate that was 50 per cent faster than for public schools. By the mid-1980s, some 13,000 students were enrolled in private schools. Rayside of the University of Toronto said that a "coincidence of interests" was formed between religious conservatives and free enterprisers, creating a concerted force.

Ralph Klein took things to a whole new level following his election as premier in 1992.

Massive changes to the education system were made almost immediately in the name of "parent choice" — slashing wages for teachers, cutting kindergarten funding, repealing schooling regulations,

PUBLIC PURSE continued on page 8

Council proposes policy to protect sexual and gender minorities

PEC POINTS

Audrey Dutka
ATA News Staff

Highlights of the Provincial Executive Council meeting held Feb. 26–27, 2018, at Barnett House in Edmonton

1. Approved one recipient of the Public Education Award, which recognizes individuals or groups that have given outstanding support to public education in Alberta other than through teaching.
2. Nominated a candidate for the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) 2018 Special Recognition Award, which acknowledges individuals who have made major contributions to their provincial/territorial organization and/or the CTF, and to public education in general.
3. Named Phil McRae, executive staff officer, Government, to the position of associate co-ordinator, Government—Research, effective May 1, 2018 or at a mutually agreeable time, and named Keith Hadden, executive staff officer, Government—SARO, to the position of associate co-ordinator, Member Services—SARO, effective April 1, 2018 or at a mutually agreeable time.
4. Approved 142 resolutions dealing with expiring current directives, 45 local resolutions and 86 Council resolutions for presentation to the 2018 Annual Representative Assembly (ARA); assigned speakers to each resolution; and, in the case of local resolutions, approved recommendations of concurrence, amendment and concurrence, nonconcurrence, referral for study and report, or action taken. The package of resolutions will be sent to locals, which will be asked to vote on whether they agree with Council's position on each resolution.
5. Approved, for presentation to the 2018 ARA, and assigned speakers to five resolutions urging school boards to develop clear policies and procedures that permit students and teachers to change the name,

gender and pronouns on all official employment records to protect their privacy and reflect their lived gender identity; urging institutions with accredited preservice Alberta teacher preparation programs recognized by the Association to ensure that these programs formally and effectively address sexual and gender minority health, safety, and educational needs and concerns for teachers students and families; urging the Government of Alberta to change provincial building codes to require all newly constructed facilities, including schools, to provide universal all-gender washrooms in all public facilities; and urging school boards to respect and protect the privacy and confidentiality of sexual and gender minority students and teachers from unwanted disclosure in all school activities and processes.

6. Approved amendments to the Administrative Guidelines to include guidelines for entitlement to honoraria by elders, knowledge keepers and cultural advisors.
7. Approved that the Association identify managing risks associated with political and economic uncertainty as a cross-organizational priority through to 2019/20 and that the Table Officers Committee take responsibility for co-ordinating and organizing the Association's response for consideration of Council and implementation by staff.
8. Approved the model frame of reference for Teacher Welfare Committees.
9. Received the report of a hearing committee, which found a teacher guilty of three charges of unprofessional conduct for not providing adequate notice of absences from school, not completing adequate substitute teacher plans and not submitting report card marks and/or comments to the principal for review and distribution to students and parents in a timely fashion, thereby failing to maintain the honour and dignity of the profession. The hearing committee imposed as penalties a letter of severe reprimand to address charges one and two and a letter of reprimand to address charge three.
10. Received the report of a hearing committee, which found a teacher guilty of two charges of unprofessional conduct for sending inappropriate text

messages to a student from another school, thus failing to treat the student with dignity and respect and to be considerate of the student's circumstances and thus failing to act in a manner which maintains the honour and dignity of the profession. The hearing committee imposed the penalty of a letter of reprimand to address both charges.

11. On a case appealed to the Professional Conduct Appeal Committee (PCAC) on the grounds of inadequate penalty, Council received the report of the PCAC, which upheld the decision of the hearing committee, finding that the hearing committee's decision was reasonable because the penalty fell within the range of penalties as cited by nearly 50 precedents, the hearing committee showed deference to the joint submission on penalty relating to the letter of severe reprimand and the hearing committee deviated from the joint submission on penalty by increasing the fine imposed, thereby demonstrating its consideration to the teacher and other members of the Association.
12. Consistent with section 31(2) of the *Teaching Profession Act*, Council extended the deadline for the commencement of a hearing of the Professional Conduct Committee.
13. Approved that up to three members of Council are authorized to attend the CTF 2018 Women's Symposium, taking place in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, 2018 05 06–09.
14. Approved the purchase of eight tickets to the Public Interest Alberta 12th Annual Advocacy Conference in Edmonton, 2018 04 05(eve)–06, and eight tickets to the keynote address in Calgary, 2018 04 04.
15. Amended the Pension Committee frame of reference to include an annual review of the Capital Accumulation Plan report from Capital Estate Planning.
16. Named a field member to represent the Association on the Alberta French Language Education Consortium.
17. Approved an inquiry into the potential terms of reference and cost of a review of Association governance. ■

Build A Village

Hythe Regional School recently held its first Build A Village fair. Each elementary class or grade partner class was responsible for building a model of a geographical area being studied in social studies. Judges and community members were invited to experience the collaborative projects and hear class representatives provide detailed explanations of what was learned.

PHOTOS SUPPLIED



PUBLIC PURSE

continued from page 7

amalgamating school boards, removing attendance boundaries and eliminating taxation powers for schools. Charter schools were legislated in 1994. A pro-privatization group, Albertans for Quality Education, received significant attention from the government despite being made up of only 325 members.

In April 1997, PC MLA Carol Haley introduced a private member's bill that proposed to increase annual funding of private schools by \$14 million. This move split the PC caucus, with education minister Gary Mar against the bill and provincial treasurer Stockwell Day for it. In response, Klein created a five-person Private School Funding Task Force — members included Duthler and then lawyer Jim Prentice.

At a PC convention in fall 1997, party delegates actually voted to eliminate public funding for private schools.

Instead, the government chose to implement the task force's recommendation and increase per-student private funding from 50 per cent of what public schools received, up to 60 per cent in 1998: equivalent to a \$6.7 million annual increase. That meant that private schools received a 30 per cent hike in government funding between 1997 and 2000, while public schools received only a 6.8 per cent increase.

In addition, the government chose not to introduce any limits on the amount of tuition a private school could charge.

Yet the Progressive Conservatives still were not content.

In 2008, Premier Ed Stelmach increased the per-student percentage again, up to the 70 per cent that we still have with us today — now equivalent to about \$5,200 per student. Defunding private schools would free up about \$100 million to redirect to public schools. This should be our first priority. ■

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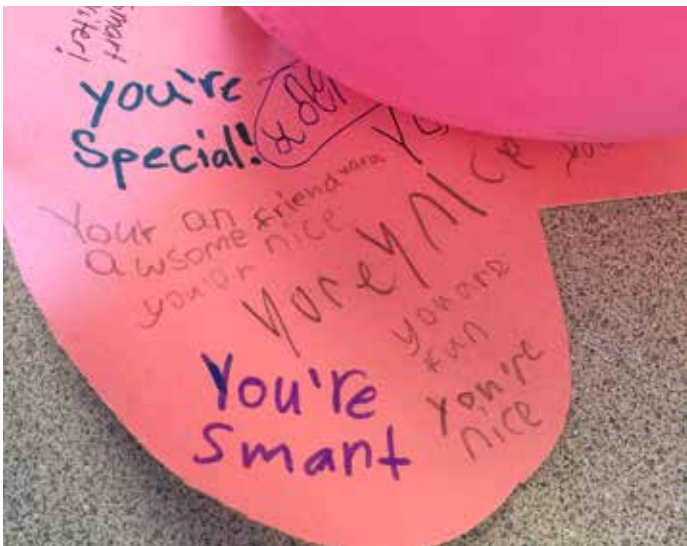
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THE Power of Pink

Staff and students throughout Alberta participated in Pink Shirt Day on Feb. 28. The annual anti-bullying event originated in Nova Scotia in 2007 when two high school students encouraged their classmates to wear pink as a show of support for a student at their school who had been bullied for wearing a pink shirt.



Daisy Black was one of a number of students who read friendship poems or quotes at Father R. Perin School in Janvier (120 kilometres south of Fort McMurray).



Students in Katlin Strand's Grade 3 class filled hearts with compliments for their classmates. Strand teaches at Big Rock School in Okotoks.



Amanda Green, a Grade 7 teacher at Ecole Coloniale Estates School in Beaumont, with her children Ailee and Aidan.



At Anzac Community School-Bill Woodward School, kindergarten student Jaxon Smith gets in on a photo with phys-ed and sciences teacher Tessa Dagenais (centre) and kindergarten teacher Skylar Canning.



Students and staff at St. John Paul II school in Grande Prairie.