

Alberta teachers cope with COVID-19 pandemic

See pages 4-11.

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ATA NEWS

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We will get through this together

An open letter to teachers from ATA president Jason Schilling



JASON SCHILLING

ATA president Jason Schilling composes a message to teachers from his home in Edmonton.

Dear Colleagues,

Several years ago, while doing my master's degree, my cohort watched a TED talk in our class by Kathryn Schulz entitled *On Being Wrong*. She commented that the stories we know and live often don't work out the way we plan because "we think this one thing is going to happen and something else happens instead."

These last few weeks have been like that. As teachers and principals, you planned for one thing to happen, and then something else happened. You had plans for your students, experiences you wanted them to enjoy, lessons you were excited to share, and then it all suddenly changed. With the arrival of the pandemic in our province, we had to alter our way of life. What we had planned suddenly changed in a manner of a few days. I am grateful for the steady leadership of Dr. Deena Hinshaw, our chief medical officer of health, and medical staff in our province who are working tirelessly to tend to the many sick in our province.

All of the changes that have happened recently have been exhausting. The first few days after classes were cancelled felt like mourning to me, something I believe we need to acknowledge and feel. It's okay to be scared; it's okay to be emotional; it's okay to be frustrated; and it's okay

not to be okay. It's okay to mourn the loss of our school year in the traditional way we know it. I keep reminding myself, it's only been a few weeks. My friends and family are safe, and that's what matters most.

It still seems like there are more questions than answers right now, and a lot of mixed messages. It's frustrating. I have been asking folks to be patient, though I sometimes have lacked that trait myself, especially when your questions need answers that I can't always provide. The ATA will continue to work tirelessly to seek resolutions to the questions you have. We will continue to defend public education in Alberta against policies that mean to undermine or erode it. Public education matters; our students' education and wellness matters; teachers matter — perhaps more now than ever before.

But something great is happening as well. Teachers across the province have been showing great resiliency, making plans, collaborating, connecting with colleagues, and trying to figure it all out. Several of you have sent me messages saying you are ready for this new challenge. And I love it. Teaching is great because teachers are great, and I know that as a profession, we will rise to the occasion.

My only advice, take it or not, is not to rush it and put too much pressure on yourself. This new challenge of teaching will not be solved in a few days. We are turning an ocean liner on a dime. We know teaching and schools are complex, and the concerns we will have moving forward will require complex solutions. There will need to be a balanced workload for parents, students and teachers. Let's take it one day at a time, one problem at a time, and recognize that we will think this one thing is going to happen and something else will happen instead.

Again, I thank you for your dedication to your students and our profession. We've lots to do, lots of questions that need answers, but for right now, let's all take a breath and remind ourselves to be grateful for what we have. We will get through this together, united as a profession, stronger than before. I believe this because I believe in our profession and the great work teachers and school leaders do, day in and day out.

Be well, stay safe, wash your hands and carry on. ■

Very bad decision comes at a very bad time



EDITORIAL

Jonathan Teghtmeyer
ATA News Editor-in-Chief

That leadership cratered on the afternoon of Saturday, March 28.

By a news release and a tweet, 25,000 education workers were told they'd be losing their jobs.

The decision and how it was announced was devoid of consideration and compassion for the people it affected.

But frankly, it was just a bad decision: bad for the economy, bad for well-being and bad for education.

I understand fully that many businesses are struggling and revenue is rapidly shrinking or drying up completely. Many businesses are being forced to make tough decisions that result in layoffs. My heart goes out to the people affected and the business leaders who have to make those tough decisions.

But the Alberta government didn't have to do this. The government had capacity to provide stability to its employees at a difficult time. The amount of money saved by this decision amounts to less than one-quarter of one per cent of the province's annual budget. Although every other province has also cancelled classes, none of the other governments have laid off staff like this.

Alberta's very fragile economic situation is not helped, but rather it is seriously harmed, by adding an estimated

one per cent of the total workforce to the unemployment line. The government should have shown leadership to other employers by stressing the need to keep as many people employed as possible, given the circumstances. It is not a coincidence that just after this was announced, Alberta's billionaire-owned professional hockey teams laid off staff that they were earlier shamed into keeping employed.

When everything else in life is changing, and when the fear of uncertainty and health risks are looming large, income stability goes a long way toward supporting mental health. If people can be supported, they should be. Some are saying that the public sector should not be immune, but that misses the point completely. Every job that can be saved must be saved. Every person that can be supported must be supported.

All of this is aside, of course, from the fact that these employees had work to do. Many school boards were employing education assistants, and even school bus drivers, to help support student learning. Some school divisions were prepared to pay substitute teachers based on an averaging of previous days worked, and they would be needed to step in for teachers who, I don't know,

might become sick during a pandemic. Instead they were all given pink slips.

A release from the Lethbridge School Division captured it well. They designed an education continuity plan that included educational assistants as an "integral part" of providing education to students.

"The role of EAs, under teacher supervision and planning, was to connect with a breadth of students including students with exceptionalities, English Second Language students, students without technology and other students at risk. The work plans developed for EAs included a variety of responsibilities to ensure that ALL students had access to learning while schools remain closed for students."

These times call for a steady hand on the tiller. They call for leadership that instills confidence and makes everyone feel supported.

If you are also concerned, visit www.ibelieveinpubliced.ca/call_your_mla and call your MLA.

I was prepared to give a good grade to this government, but with this one decision, they completely and utterly failed. ■

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

Association is advocating for substitute teachers



Q & A

Dennis Theobald
ATA Executive Secretary

leaves, and subs would be available when the system returned to normal operation.

Initially, these representations were well-received. The minister announced that full funding would continue to flow to the system as usual, and the expectation was that all employees, including substitute teachers, teachers' assistants, support staff, custodians and even bus drivers, would be retained.

Unfortunately, on Saturday, March 28, government's position abruptly changed. In a conference call with education stakeholders and large urban school boards, the minister announced that the government was going to be reducing funding to school boards by 14 per cent, and directed boards to lay off "non-essential" employees. The immediate result of this decision is that, within a matter of weeks, 6,000 substitute teachers and 20,000 other school board employees will be left unemployed and dependent on the federal government's Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) program.

The Association continues its efforts to mobilize public response in support of laid-off school board employees. Visit the "Call your MLA" site at www.ibelieveinpubliced.ca/call_your_mla to do your part, and encourage your colleagues, friends, neighbours and family members to do likewise.

The Association is also pushing out information about the process for applying for the CERB, highlighted below. Please note, though, that like almost

everything related to the COVID-19 pandemic, programs offered by the government are frequently changing. Please visit the Association website at www.teachers.ab.ca or the appropriate government websites for updated information.

Income supports for substitute teachers

According to the Government of Canada, the portal for the CERB should be available in early April. Members who are eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) and who have lost their job can continue to [apply for EI here](#), as can Canadians applying for other EI benefits.

To find out if you are eligible to receive EI regular benefits, you must submit an application online. It will take about 60 minutes to complete. The website takes you through the application process step by step and provides detailed instructions on how to complete the form.

How to apply for EI

Step 1: Ask your employer for a Record of Employment (ROE). They will either provide you a paper copy or send an electronic copy directly to Service Canada.

Step 2: Apply as soon as possible (even if you do not have your ROE yet). You can apply online using your computer or mobile phone.

If you cannot apply online, call 1-833-381-2725. Please note that this line is currently overloaded given the millions of people in Canada who have been

laid off. Be patient. You will not be issued a 16-digit reference code. Please complete your application without using a reference code.

Applying for the CERB

There is a large backlog of EI claims. You may consider applying for the CERB instead. If you have already submitted your EI application, you will automatically be assessed for the CERB. You do not need to send in a new application. The CERB is not taking applications yet, but you can still get ready to apply.

If you plan to apply online (by computer or mobile phone), make sure you have a MyAccount with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). [Register here](#). The CERB will be accessible through a secure web portal starting in early April. Applicants will also be able to apply by an automated telephone line or a toll-free number.

Additional notes

- You do not require a doctor's note for COVID-19.
- You can prove your identity to the government faster online if you use online banking through your bank or credit union.
- Service Canada offices are now closed. The Canadian government will be providing information to help people without a computer and internet. ■

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

Question: What is the Alberta Teachers' Association doing to advocate for substitute teachers who are out of work as a result of the cancellation of classes?

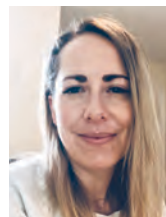
Answer: The situation facing substitute teachers has occupied much of my time and energy and those of my colleagues over the last few weeks.

When the government announced its decision to cancel classes, it was immediately clear that substitute teachers were uniquely vulnerable and were at risk. In several conversations with the minister of education and senior government officials, ATA president Jason Schilling and I advocated for substitute teachers to be retained and to be paid based upon their service in prior months.

These substitute teachers would assist in the delivery of online and distance education and provide coverage for teachers who would be absent from their duties. From the perspective of the larger system, there is a shortage of available substitute teachers in many areas of the province. Retaining substitute teachers for the duration of the pandemic crisis would ensure teachers could access



Shared human experience provides comfort



VIEWPOINTS

Shannon Dube
President,
Fort McMurray Local No. 48

When the COVID-19 pandemic started to shut down events and meetings, anxiety and uncertainty undoubtedly started to sink in. But on March 15, when classes were cancelled, many teachers and support staff in Fort McMurray were having eerily similar feelings to those we felt back in May of 2016.

Evacuating Fort McMurray due to the wildfire is an experience none of us will ever forget. While there are many differences between that experience and this new experience of isolation and social distancing, there are also many similarities.

In 2016, I felt a lot of anxiety about leaving my home, as I'm sure almost everyone did. Some even saw their homes burning before they left. Fortunately, I did not. But I did feel confused about when it would all be over, when we would be able to return home, and whether or not my house would be there when I got back. I think this feeling of uncertainty is very similar to what some are feeling during this pandemic. I know I find myself wondering when we will be able to go back to feeling normal; to seeing our family, friends and students; to being back at work; and to looking people in the eye at the grocery store.

For Fort McMurray teachers, this is the second time we have had to end the school year early without a proper goodbye to our students. And this second time hasn't been any easier. In fact, I've heard from many here that this was one of the most difficult parts for them, to have to do that piece all over again.

I certainly remember the feeling I had in 2016 when the last student in my class left that day. I was relieved that they were all safe with their families, but I didn't know it would be September until I would see them again. Now, in 2020, I imagine that many people are feeling a similar disquiet due to this lack of closure. For me, there's almost a little bit of anger and disbelief that this is the second time that something so unlikely could happen within such a short period.

The main difference between now and 2016 is that, this time, we get to be home. And this time, everyone in the province, country, and even the world, feels and understands what we are going through. There is certainly a comfort in the shared human experience. And fortunately, this time around, we are way more adept at Hangouts and Zoom, and we have more opportunity to connect and sustain relationships through our new reality of online distance learning.

Plus, we are resilient. We all learned that in 2016. And we will learn it again here in 2020. We can adjust and find a new routine. We can support our students from home. We can adapt to teaching online temporarily. But that doesn't mean it's easy. Isolation and social distancing are difficult. This new reality is definitely surreal. But one thing a lot of us learned from our fire experience is that we can overcome

challenges, obstacles and the unknown. We must seek any mental health support we need, but we can also lean on each other, even if it's virtually.

After the fire, some people had a much harder time getting back to "normal" than others did. People like me came back to an unscathed home, but with evidence of the fire being only two homes away. Others came home to nothing but ashes. It was a

truly devastating experience for all of us in different ways. What changed for me is that shared human experience. I always loved Fort McMurray — it has always been my home, where I was born and raised. Coming back to it charred and burned was difficult, but I knew, in time, it would be back to the lush green forest it once was.

I grew from the experience and learned that I found comfort from people who had also been evacuated. I didn't want to talk about it with people who didn't know what I was feeling. Having lived a fairly sheltered and simple life, I hadn't really felt anything like that before. Now, I realize that there is comfort and value to someone knowing what you are going through, to understanding some small ounce of what you are feeling. Well, during this pandemic, there is certainly the opportunity for that. We are all in this together, and it is through this shared human experience that we will overcome and prosper. ■

Shannon Dube is a numeracy co-ordinator for Fort McMurray Public Schools.

“ Now, I realize that there is comfort and value to someone knowing what you are going through... ”

YOUR VIEWS

Announcement of funding cuts and layoffs draws backlash on social media

FACEBOOK FEEDBACK

James Kriese

And the talking point that “school boards came to the minister to ask what to do with all these extra employees” is such baloney. Uh huh. Superintendents called the government and asked to have their budgets cut. Sure they did.

Hillary Anderson

Can we have a do over on the last provincial election please?! I'd give the current government Fs all across the board.

Nikki Eroshinsky Coles

So disappointed in this government.

ON TWITTER

Tarita

@EveryAlbertan

This decision removes the needed EA support and is beyond comprehension. That UCP now cut required support for special needs children is despicable.

Natalie Townshend

@NKTownshend1

Teachers are still working and being paid. They are working online with students in their regular school hours. The only change is that now many of them are trying to figure out how to also work 1-1 with the students that used to work 1-1 with their EA.

gariovich@gariovich

Psst: We didn't have enough EAs before this ... pass it on.

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.



FOR THE RECORD

“ I gotta protect anyone who is not working. They have mortgages to pay. They have rent to pay. They have to put food on the table ... I'm not comfortable with laying provincial frontline people off. I just can't do it to families; I just can't. ”

– Ontario premier Doug Ford, March 31

Alberta teachers cope with COVID 19 pandemic

Association pushes back against funding cut

Cory Hare
ATA News Managing Editor

The layoff of thousands of education support workers has prompted the Alberta Teachers' Association to create a website that enables visitors to contact their MLAs.

On Saturday, March 28, Alberta Education announced that it was directing school authorities to limit the use of substitute teachers effective March 31, give notice to educational assistants that their services would not continue beyond the end of April, and immediately give notice to non-essential support staff and board-employed bus drivers.

The directives came in conjunction with news that a 14 per cent reduction in the base instruction grant would be applied to payments that boards receive in May and June.

ATA president Jason Schilling reacted to the plan by saying that the Alberta government missed an opportunity to show leadership in a crisis by ensuring that thousands of Albertans have continuity of income at this stressful time.

"Today's announcement is very concerning," Schilling said. "Teachers and educational assistants work closely together to facilitate student learning. Their work was still being utilized to support students in need of accommodations and those with inadequate access to technology. We continue to have concerns about how students with special needs will be supported through this time. Many parents are struggling and need as much help as possible."

The Association estimates that around 6,000 substitute teachers and up to 20,000 support staff will be affected by the funding cut.

The ATA has been pushing hard to ensure that substitute teachers are supported during the period of school closures brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, Schilling said.

"Teachers also stand in solidarity with the support staff affected by this disappointing decision," Schilling said. "I appreciate we are in extraordinary times, but laying off tens of thousands of workers at this time is the wrong direction."

In a communication to education stakeholders, Education Minister Adriana LaGrange said that the government is making its decisions based on the following four principles:

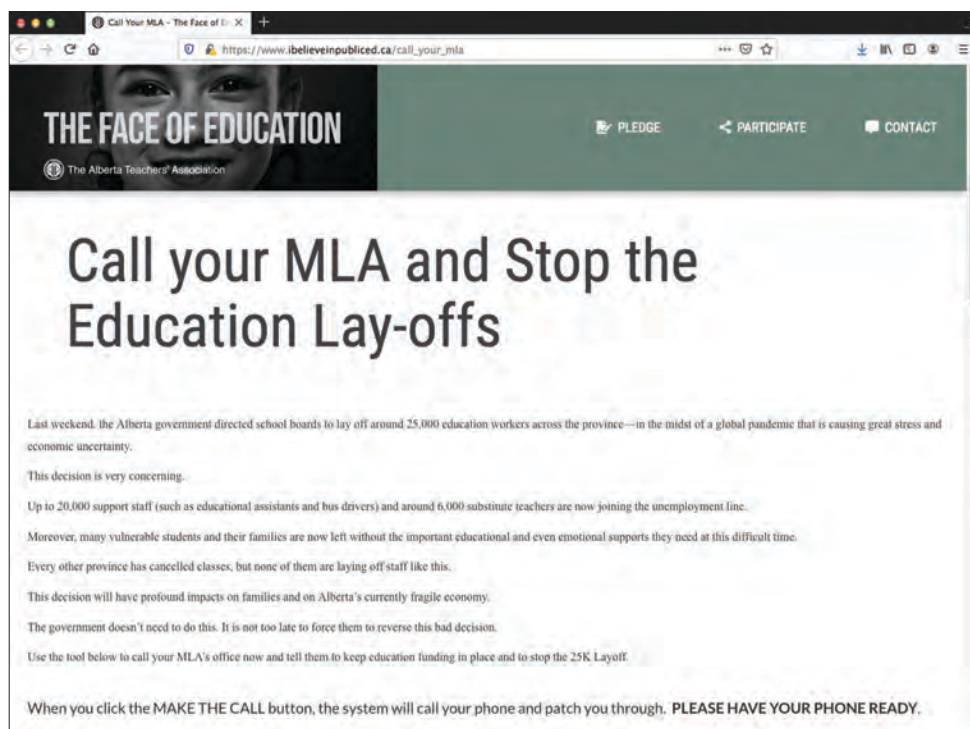
- The safety of students and staff comes first.
- Student learning will continue.
- Resources continue to flow to schools.
- School authorities have flexibility to do what is best for your community.

"While this is not an easy decision — it is the right decision for the province as we responsibly manage taxpayer dollars during the pandemic," she said.

She added that any savings incurred as a result of these adjustments will be redirected to Alberta's COVID-19 response and that staff impacted by these funding adjustments will qualify for the federal government's enhanced employment insurance program and other support programs for Canadian workers.

A website has since been set up in the hope of pressuring the government to reverse its decision. The site enables users to enter their address then click a link that connects their phone to the office of their local MLA. Suggested talking points are included.

"The government doesn't need to do this," the site states. "It is not too late to force them to reverse this bad decision." ■



A new website has been set up to combat the Alberta government's latest funding cut.

Visit the site

The ATA's website to enable people to call MLA's offices is now live at www.ibelieveinpubliced.ca/call_your_mla.



Danny Maas, a staff officer in the Professional Development program area, delivers a webinar to teachers on how to set up their remote learning environment.

Webinars helping teachers deliver remote lessons

Jen Janzen
ATA News Staff

Remote learning isn't just for students.

As soon as classes were cancelled in Alberta, the ATA's professional development team got to work on a plan to support teachers in the move to digital learning.

"Our current support has been focused on providing professional development in establishing their remote learning environments," explained Danny Maas, staff officer within the Professional Development program area.

In the first week after classes were cancelled, the PD team conducted 11 webinars, with more than 800 members participating. Two weeks later, the offerings increased to 16 webinars, with almost each one maxing out at 100 participants.

"The take-up has been incredible," Maas said, adding that the Association is purchasing a license to the webinar software, Zoom, which will allow more participants in each webinar.

Sessions on G Suite for Education tools, which is under the Google umbrella of offerings, have been the most popular, with screen recording sessions on software such as Screencastify coming in at a close second.

In each session, Maas explains, teachers receive tips on how to use these products to enhance instruction as well as tips to save time and support students and parents. The team is also using the platform as an opportunity to connect teachers to ATA Library Subject Guides, where curriculum resources such as 2Learn are available.

Some of the available sessions include

- Getting Started with Flipgrid,
- Getting Started with Google Classroom,

- Getting Started with Screencastify,
- Using Google Slides as a Digital Learning Canvas,
- Making Math Digital in a Remote Learning Environment and
- Using Quizizz.com to Deepen Learning in Google Classroom (or any LMS tool).

Once teachers have established their digital learning environments — most of them using Google Classroom products — the Association will begin offering some of its regular workshops in an online format. As of press time, a self-study module about the Teaching Quality Standards (TQS) and Leadership Quality Standards (LQS) were almost ready to be published.

If you have an idea for a workshop that would help teachers, send an email to pdworkshops@ata.ab.ca.

How to find sessions

All of the latest PD updates, sessions and resources will be posted on new social media pages that have been created. On Twitter, look for the handle @ATA_PD and on Facebook at <https://fb.me/ATApd>. Please note you don't need a Facebook account to see the posts.

Software requirements

To participate in the online sessions, users will need to download free software from Zoom at www.zoom.us.

Available Library Guides (LibGuides)

Some LibGuide offerings include

- LibGuides for Supporting Online Teaching and Learning,
- Coping Through the Crisis: Wellness Resources and
- Virtual Field Trips and Streaming Video. ■

Find out more

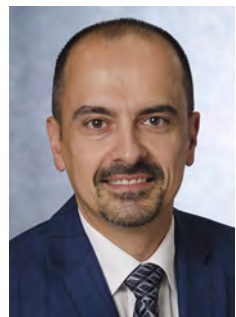
https://teachers-ab.libguides.com/ATA_PD/SupportsForOnlineLearning

Alberta teachers cope with COVID 19 pandemic

Member Services is ready to handle teacher questions

Mark Milne
ATA News Staff

Members are desperate for some clear and consistent direction during these uncertain times, and they're turning to the Alberta Teachers' Association for help.



Robert Mazzotta
Member Services
Co-ordinator

Am I working from home? Why can't I? What is expected of me? Will my temporary contract be honoured? These are some of the most frequent questions being asked, said Robert Mazzotta, co-ordinator for the ATA's Member

Services program area.

Mazzotta assures teachers that Member Services is still fully operational despite the pandemic.

"We are still communicating with our members through phone and email as we always have," Mazzotta said. "The physical building may be closed to the public, but there is a duty officer available in Edmonton and Calgary every day, just like normal."

When the province initially announced that classes were cancelled indefinitely, Member Services saw a huge increase in the number of incoming calls. The call volume has tapered off somewhat due to spring break, but Mazzotta expects an increase in the coming weeks as teachers head back to work and settle into their new learning environments.

Consistent direction needed

While a template of academic requirements for each grade level was released by Alberta Education, there has been little direction to school boards about how it should be delivered. That is the source of the majority of questions that duty officers have been fielding, Mazzotta said.

Despite the lack of attending students, many teachers are still being told by their principals and school boards they must continue to show up to school for work, a position not supported by the Association.

"The prime minister said work from home. The chief medical officer is saying work from home. They're encouraging everyone to work from home," Mazzotta said. "So, the question to superintendents is, 'Why are you saying no?'"

However, Mazzotta points out this isn't a systemwide problem.

"Most are saying 'Yup! Work from home. Here are the guidelines. Here's what we expect of you. Here's the technology. Go ahead and do it.'"

He says the problem lies with those schools that are making teachers report to the building for work. Teachers are feeling unsafe.

"We are still communicating with our members through phone and email as we always have."

There is a greater chance of becoming infected if they have to report to the school, maintains Mazzotta. They will be interacting with other people and handling potentially infected material.

"We'll be aggressively pursuing Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S) guidelines with principals and boards," Mazzotta said. "This pandemic is a health hazard and unless you can minimize it, you need to let teachers work at home."

Cuts to funding

Another common concern with teachers is the recent layoffs of substitute teachers, educational assistants (EAs) and administrative support staff.

When the government previously stated that education funding would

continue, many teachers developed their lesson delivery based on the use of EAs. With those assistants laid off by the end of April, many teachers need to adjust their plans, which will result in a significant amount of added work.

An even larger issue is the delivery of material for students with limited access to technology, as some schools were planning to use EAs and bus drivers for this.

"How will that actually happen without having somebody to do it?" Mazzotta said. "Teachers may now not be able to reach students because of factors beyond their control."

Substitute teachers have also been calling with questions about their status. While schools may continue to use substitute teachers, the funding for their use has been cut by the government. If school boards wish to continue using subs, funds from other areas of their budget or reserves must be used to pay them.

Mazzotta says substitute teachers can apply for employment insurance and other emergency assistance programs offered by the federal government during the pandemic and recommends they contact Teacher Welfare for the details.

What lies ahead

When asked what challenges teachers may face once the pandemic has passed, Mazzotta said the biggest hurdle will most likely be "where do you start?"

"If you could guarantee that everybody had the same access to education, you could all start from the same stage. But the reality is going to be that, next year, where September should be a general review of what you did last year, it will now have to hold a much heavier focus on ensuring the key competencies are covered before teachers and students can actually move on."

For the time being, Mazzotta is advising members to take care of themselves.

"Stay calm. Get exercise where you can. Keep in contact with people. Maintain your mental health, and be mindful of what you can control and what you can't."

Pandemic slows bargaining process

ATA News Staff

Both the 2018 and 2020 bargaining processes have felt the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Local bargaining that remains unsettled for 2018-20 has slowed to a halt. Currently, 35 locals have agreements, leaving 26 in limbo until both parties can get back to the table.

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) issued notice to the Teacher Employer Bargaining Agent (TEBA) to commence list bargaining for collective agreements beyond 2020. According to the *Public Education Collective Bargaining Act* (PECBA), this first phase of the bargaining process must be completed within 60 days of giving notice.

On March 19, TEBA proposed an extension of list bargaining from the end of April to June 30.

The Association agreed to the extension and, as a result, members were given an additional week to complete the online bargaining needs survey (this survey has since concluded).

The extension also pushes back central table bargaining, giving the Central Table Bargaining Committee (CTBC) more time to collect data and prepare its initial proposal.

A second survey, directed specifically at distributed education teachers, concluded on March 31. It provided input to the CTBC on issues distinctive to members who deliver distance learning services such as online, blended learning and alternative delivery.

The CTBC is currently developing other suitable methods of gathering bargaining input during these times of social distancing.

While the Alberta Teachers' Association offices are closed to the public, Teacher Welfare Staff continue to work from home and advice and representation functions continue. All calls and emails are being answered.

Resources help adults talk to children about COVID-19

ATA News Staff

The Alberta Teachers' Association has released a guide to help parents and teachers talk to kids about COVID-19. ATA staff officer Phil McRae and pediatrician Michael Rich of Harvard Medical School and School of Public Health have teamed up to produce a digital document and video that pinpoint the significant issues that adults should be addressing with children and youth.

The guides discuss techniques to approach topics surrounding COVID-19, such as social distancing, truths and fantasies, personal safety and what the future may hold.

"We don't want to scare kids, but we must be truthful and find ways to talk to them honestly and hopefully about COVID-19," McRae said.

The online article and video guide are broken into three parts.

The section entitled "What Should I Say?" addresses how adults can explain what is known and unknown about the coronavirus and how it's spread.

"What Should I Do?" offers idea on how to maintain social connection while also social distancing. For example, you may consider cooking or eating together online with friends or family, playing games in a virtual community or playing music together online.

The section entitled "How Will We Get Through This?" advises readers to avoid treating the pandemic like an indefinite snow day. Get out into nature (but avoid playgrounds), and use this time to learn something special and discover the internet as a powerful tool.

Where to find it

The *Talking to Kids About Coronavirus (COVID-19)* document is [available here](#).

Talking to Kids About Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Dr Michael Rich and Dr Philip McRae

WE FIND OURSELVES THRUST INTO EXTRAORDINARY TIMES. In December 2019, Canadians celebrated the holidays feeling prosperous and largely insulated from problems faced by others. Now, people around the world are all feeling a growing anxiety about a disease, with mounting threat to our health from a novel coronavirus, COVID-19.

Our students, children and youth are watching the COVID-19 pandemic unfold and are listening in as adults, on endless 24/7 news and social media streams, discuss the case and its many complications. What, though, should we say to our children and youth about COVID-19? What should we do? How will we get through this?

To help answer these questions and many others, Dr McRae asked his friend and colleague, Michael Rich, MD, MPH, to share his thoughts. Dr Rich is a practicing pediatrician at Boston Children's Hospital, an associate professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, and associate professor of social and behavioral sciences at the Harvard School of Public Health. Michael is also the director of the Center on Media and Child Health at Harvard and has created a very popular blog called [Talk to the Kids](#) along with podcasts, media "Tip Sheets" for parents, and clinical guidelines for professionals, all freely available at [talkingtothekids.org](#).

Michael has a great ability for listening and has travelled across our province for many years as a principal investigator on the [Common Sense Digital Skills Literacy Research Project](#). In the interest of navigating these uncertain and historical times together, Dr McRae recorded an interview with Dr Rich, and shared both the questions asked and his informed and thoughtful responses. You can listen to that conversation online [here](#).

Alberta Teachers' Association | Boston Children's Hospital | Center on Media and Child Health | Harvard School of Public Health

A document and video co-produced by the Alberta Teachers' Association is aimed at helping adults guide children through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Alberta teachers cope with COVID 19 pandemic

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the ATA and its operations?



The ATA's buildings in Edmonton and Calgary are closed to the public, but employees are continuing to work from home to provide ongoing services to members.

Although ATA offices have been closed to the public as of March 23, staff remain working and serving members. Here is a rundown of how we're operating during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Are Barnett House and SARO open?

Both offices are closed to the public.

What's happening with all the employees?

Employees are working from their homes, in most cases. Some employees remain at each office location (Barnett House in Edmonton and SARO in Calgary) to provide essential on-site services such as caretaking and mail receipt.

What services are still available?

All ATA services are still available, except for food services, meeting room bookings and other services that require in-person attendance.

What's happening with meetings and conferences?

Except for meetings that are legislated or regulatory (such as Provincial Executive Council and discipline hearings), the ATA has cancelled most of the meetings and conferences that were planned for the near future. So far, we know that these events are cancelled:

- Professional Development Area Conference (PDAC)
- Teacher Welfare Area Conference (TWAC)

- Diversity, Equity and Human Rights (DEHR) Conference
- Conference on the Well-being of Children and Youth
- Spring meetings of Local Communications and Local Political Engagement Officers
- Spring specialist council conferences, including uLEAD

What about ARA?

Provincial Executive Council held a virtual meeting on April 2 and decided to postpone the Annual Representative Assembly. Traditionally held over the May long weekend, this event includes debate on ATA policy and the annual budget.

Council would still like to hold ARA prior to the start of the new school year, but a decision on that can't be made until later. Holding ARA in conjunction with Summer Conference is being considered. ■

From the library

The ATA library has more than 100 web guides for teachers, which library staff have been sharing daily via social media. Some of the posts have gone viral.

So far, the most popular resource is the K-3 math guide, which has been accessed almost 9,000 times within a nine-day period. For junior high teachers, math is also the most popular topic, and the grades 7-9 guide has been accessed more than 1,500 times. The most popular high school guide is the grades 10-12 science guide, which has been accessed more than 1,000 times.

Library staff are working very hard to build robust guides for French teachers, having collected more than 400 new links so far. We can't wait to get the new guides out to teachers!

If a teacher has an idea about a new resource or a new guide topic, they can always reach us at library@teachers.ab.ca. We are also still answering research questions for teachers, so feel free to email us any time.

Find web resources

The ATA library web resources can be accessed via this [website](#).

If I have a question or concern, who do I call (i.e. is the main switchboard operating)?

The main switchboard is still in operation. You can call the Association in Edmonton at 780-447-9400 or toll free at 1-800-232-7208, in Calgary at 403-265-2672 or toll free at 1-800-332-1280.

Below is a list of the keypad options for connecting to the program area that can help you. Scroll down further for email addresses.

PRESS # if you know the extension you are trying to reach.

PRESS 1 to reach Teacher Welfare with your question about salary, benefits, leaves, pension or other collective bargaining matters.

PRESS 2 to reach Member Services with your question about employment contracts, the Code of Conduct, teacher suspensions, terminations or legal issues.

PRESS 3 to reach the Teacher Qualifications' Service.

PRESS 4 to reach Professional Development with your question about teacher professional development, workshops, specialist councils, teacher education or certification.

PRESS 5 for the Government program area with your question about ATA communications, governance, leadership and research, or calls about teacher exchanges.

PRESS 6 for calls related to ATA operations, including building, cafeteria, distribution or finance.

PRESS 7 to reach the ATA library.

PRESS 9 to reach ATA web support.

Do you have another inquiry? You can leave a voicemail, or email reception@ata.ab.ca.

By email

Postmaster@ata.ab.ca: general inquiries about the ATA and its services

onlinesupport@teachers.ab.ca: report technical problems with the website

webmaster@teachers.ab.ca: general questions concerning the website

Government@ata.ab.ca: staff in the Government Program Area

PD@ata.ab.ca: staff in the Professional Development Program Area

MS@ata.ab.ca: staff in the Member Services Program Area (Edmonton Office)

MSSARO@ata.ab.ca: staff in the Member Services Program Area (Calgary Office)

TW@ata.ab.ca: staff in the Teacher Welfare Program Area

Library@ata.ab.ca: the ATA Library

TQS@ata.ab.ca: the Teacher Qualifications Service

exchanges@ata.ab.ca: Educator Exchange Programs for Teachers



GLENN ORFINO

Analyst Glenn Orfino keeps the ATA's IT help desk running from his home office.

Looking at issues around COVID-19 and beyond

A Q&A with ATA president Jason Schilling



► What questions and concerns are you hearing most from teachers during this time of closures etc. due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Teachers have had many concerns since the pandemic reached Alberta. Their first concern was the safety of their students, their families and themselves and just how they were to implement the safety protocols in their schools and classrooms. After classes were cancelled, many were concerned about what education would look like for their students along with whether they would be able to work from home or from school. Many were also concerned about how they were going to reach all their students, especially the ones with special needs and those lacking access to technology.

One thing I am also hearing that is not necessarily a concern is how teachers are rising to the challenge. I have received many messages from teachers that this challenge has been almost exciting in terms of their own teaching. Those messages are really great. Finally, teachers have told me that they miss their students, classrooms and the interactions they have with their colleagues. Many teachers are really rediscovering the reason why they love teaching.

► What is your message to members regarding these concerns?

First and foremost is to be safe, patient and easy on yourself. This is

tough for everyone, and teachers were extremely anxious about going back to school during a pandemic. Then, suddenly, classes were cancelled and they had to learn to deliver education remotely.

We need to recognize that we are not recreating our in-class atmosphere at home — it's not viable. We just need to do what we can, deliver the best lessons we can under the circumstances and be easy on ourselves if the day doesn't go as planned.

I would also say that teachers need to know that the ATA staff and members of Provincial Executive Council are working hard to address the many concerns teachers have. As we solve one issue, new ones come up, such as what will assessment look like and how will we meet the needs of our students with special needs. Decisions by the government to lay off substitute teachers and support staff have compounded the anxiety of how to deliver a continued learning program to our students. We need to address those concerns.

► To what extent has the ATA been involved in helping shape Alberta Education's response to the COVID-19 pandemic?

Often our advocacy on behalf of students, teachers and principals happens behind the scenes and that was the case in much of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. ATA staff worked closely with senior government officials and the College of School

Superintendents on issues we saw facing teachers and schools.

I recall the teleconference we had with the chief medical officer of health about the rationale to keep schools open and have students continue to attend class. We asked several questions, one being specifically about whether the government would increase funding to school boards for supplies and extra staff to clean schools, as teachers are busy teaching and could not be expected to also sanitize their classrooms. The next day, when classes were cancelled, the chief medical officer mentioned our concern. I cannot say that our question was specifically part of the equation in the decision making, but it was a good example of where our voices were heard. I am grateful for that.

Unfortunately, in our advocacy work, we are not always heard, such as the inconsistency of letting teachers work from home versus working from school — and obviously the decision to cut funding that supported substitute teachers, EAs, bus drivers and other support staff was very disappointing and a complete shock.

► What outstanding issues related to the pandemic is the ATA pursuing answers for?

After the release of the operations decisions on Saturday, March 28, the issues around how teachers will support their students have been magnified. It was hard enough already with a remote delivery of education, but that difficulty is now compounded without the supports that exist within a school environment.

We also need to recognize that, before the pandemic, some schools were experiencing large class sizes and complexity issues. It is not easy to see your colleagues and friends get laid off, especially after being told by the ministry that funding would not change.

Substitute teachers have concerns about income security and the process to apply for assistance is complicated and confusing. The ATA has [assembled some information](#) to help them navigate those waters. Also, we are still seeking clarity around the question of what happens if a teacher gets sick now.

We also need to focus on the continuation of learning for students. We are still very early in the process. There are many questions about the appropriate amount of work, assessment, access to materials and workload for teachers. We will also have to be mindful and strategic around what it will look like when schools reopen. This experience and the anxiety it has created in our profession and on young people will be profound, and mental wellness will be an issue we will have to face as well.

► What is happening with the various issues that the ATA was focused on before the pandemic, such as class size, school choice, funding and curriculum?

The ATA is still working on the issues that were affecting education prior to classes being cancelled due to COVID-19. Recently, we submitted our representation on the recommendations for the new Ministerial Order on Student Learning and the draft K-4 curriculum. We will continue to engage the government on this issue to make sure teachers' voices are heard about matters around curriculum, especially if there is a plan to implement a new curriculum in the fall. The ATA is mindful as well that the advent of remote learning could lead to more privatization in our system, something we would adamantly oppose.

The government passed the budget, which had a shortfall of funding to school boards that could result in larger class sizes and amplify the problems in our already diverse classrooms. The budget also changed the makeup of TEBA in relation to bargaining, which will also begin in the fall, though the process has been delayed due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Finally, the *Choice in Education Act* was announced in the throne speech prior to the pandemic, so we will need to watch for what this legislation will say. It's hard to say what the future will hold. One thing I know for certain is that teachers are professionals who will face any challenge given to them. We will do this united together because we believe that public education matters. ■



What do you miss most about seeing your students in person?

Teachers share their thoughts about working remotely



SUPPLIED

“I miss how, every single day, they made me laugh ... and cry and yell a bit inside and shake my head and smile and laugh and laugh and laugh.”

– Deborah Nicholson

Carrie Bissoon

“I miss telling people to take their hats off, pull pants up and handing out pencils. I miss watching my students rally around each other and show kindness. I miss seeing a student make connections between the assignment they are working on and the world they live in. I miss the noise of junior high and the chaos of lunch time. I miss watching students try something new in a flex option class. I miss looking forward to Easter long weekend and Friday afternoon. Most of all, I miss the faces of all my sweet babies and watching as they grow closer to the adults they will become.”

Dave Thiara

“I miss everything. The good mornings, the how are you today, the light bulb moments in class, the funny comments they make, the thank you for teaching me, their optimism, their willingness to engage. School is truly one of the happiest, most rewarding places in my life. It's not the same without my kiddos. Still, I try.”

Patrice Weiss

“I miss my students' unique personalities and quirkiness, especially how they addressed me sometimes without the Ms. and just called out “McIntyre!””

“I miss the big smiles and good mornings we get at the door every day. I miss the giggles and the genuine excitement for learning. I miss it all.”

– Leana Howard

Kinch Santha

“As I now sit in my empty classroom, I miss seeing them walk past my room and seeing them smile or wave back. I miss the way they interact and their jokes and being reminded of being their age. I miss the excitement that was building in my Grade 12 students, and I miss the opportunity to celebrate with them. The last couple of months were the busiest and craziest months in my life, but I would gladly keep doing that to have my students be sitting in my room right now.”

Alex Funk

“Absolutely everything. I miss the energy, the joy, the weird comments and funny conversations. I miss saying good morning, seeing the light up of a face when they figure out a concept, the excitement in everything we do. I just miss my Grade 2s. I miss the personal connection. I miss it all.”

Rhonda Schneider

“I miss the little things, like one boy who always flipped his hair out of his eyes before he answered me. The little girl who showed so much love through her eyes and shy little smile. The boy who always helped without even being asked. The little girl who asked how my day was going. I miss the connection with my kids!!!”

Lauren Victoria Wark

“As a substitute teacher, I miss coming in to meet and spend time with different kids each day, and the excitement students show for having a guest teacher in their classroom! I also miss the sweet notes I receive from them.”

Marla Young

“I miss the stories of all the events happening in their daily lives!”

“Getting to see the world through their eyes.”

– Malini Murthy

 Alberta teachers cope with COVID 19 pandemic

“The chaos of junior high — sometimes the noise in the halls is overwhelming — or their constant talking in class and waiting for them to settle and listen. I miss the chatter, the laughter, the busy-ness of it all.”

– Andrea Pantella McGeachie

Meg Cross

“I miss their quick, witty and often hilarious comments. My students are always making me smile and laugh.”

Annie Forney

“I miss being interrupted by the spontaneous “I love you!””

Fan Hildisheim

“I miss the smiles and the spontaneous stories that they have to share while you are teaching, and everything!”

Jennifer Mac

“I miss the class meetings and the heartfelt gratitude statements they would make. Oh, and the hugs. Oh man those hugs were huge.”

Catherine Waddell

“I miss just chatting with them and hearing about what’s going on with them. We spent the first few minutes of each video check-in chat today just joking around and enjoying the interaction.”

Corey Walyuchow

“I miss seeing their faces light up when learning has taken place.”

Portia Lucia

“I miss all the happy smiles and stories! Miss them all so much.”

Amber Pinchin

“I miss the smiles when they see me in the morning and the look of “Aha! I get it!””

“I genuinely miss the organized chaos. We kept busy and got our work done, but sometimes we were wild, laughed and just had so much fun together.”

– Winnie Bang

Nicole Gatner

“I miss surprise hugs, and secret drawings finding their way onto my desk. I miss seeing the lights of understanding flicker in the eyes of “my babies.” I miss the unending noise that is Grade 1.”

Gricelda Christiaens

“I miss their smiles, compassion, friendships, love, willingness to help all the time, conversations. I miss my princesses and princes.”

Roy Hernando

“I miss their greetings, “hi music class.””

Hawley Lequiere

“I miss all of it. I miss the time before classes when kids would be telling me about their lives or what movies I needed to see. I miss teaching content in the classroom, sure, but I really miss the ability to connect with my kids in the same room.”

Alberta Education

Education Continuity Plan

Information provided by Alberta Education

Overview

Alberta students should continue to learn while in-school classes are cancelled.

School authorities will offer at-home learning opportunities for all kindergarten to Grade 12 students online or through accommodations like course packages and telephone check-ins.

Teachers will determine what content to cover based on remaining curricular outcomes and plan tasks that are reasonable to do from home.

Content delivery

Kindergarten to Grade 3

Education content will focus on language/literacy and mathematics/numeracy outcomes of provincial curriculum.

Teachers will assign an average of 5 hours of work per student per week and must work with students and parents to deliver these materials.

Grades 4 to 6

Education content will continue to focus on language/literacy and mathematics/numeracy outcomes. There will also be opportunities to incorporate science and social studies outcomes through cross-curricular learning.

Teachers will assign an average of 5 hours of work per student per week and must work with students and parents to deliver these materials.

Grades 7 to 9

Education content will focus on core curriculum outcomes of

- mathematics,
- language/literacy,
- science and
- social studies.

Teachers will assign an average of 10 hours of work per student per week and must work with students and parents to deliver these materials.

Grades 10 to 12

Education content will focus on specified and core courses required for high school graduation requirements, including

- language (English, French and French Language Arts);
- social studies;
- mathematics;
- biology;
- chemistry; and
- physics.

Teachers will deliver content from other courses where possible.

Teachers will assign an average of 3 hours of work per course per week and must work with students and parents to deliver these materials.

Grade progression and report cards

Each student will get final grades and a report card appropriate to their grade level. Teachers will assess a student’s progress and assign a final grade.

School authorities will consult with parents and inform them how assessment will be determined in this unique circumstance. All students who were on track to progress to the next grade will do so.

Where possible, schools will work with high school students to complete their courses to the best of their ability, providing a final mark and awarding credits.

Principals can award credits for students to progress to the next grade level if a student is unable to complete a course that would have allowed them to progress.

High school diploma criteria

Students on track for 100 or more credits are still eligible to graduate and get a high school diploma. Principals can award up to 15 credits to students in Grade 12 who were negatively impacted by class cancellations.

Schools will work with students to complete courses underway. They will provide a final mark and award credits.

If a student is unable to complete a course that would have led them to achieve a high school diploma, such as a work experience or a career and technology studies course, principals can award credits to ensure the student graduates.

Provincial assessments

All Grade 6 and 9 provincial achievement tests and Grade 12 diploma exams, including rewrites, are cancelled.

We will reimburse students who paid for their April diploma exam.

Under special circumstances, students can request to write a diploma exam. Students should speak to their teacher and school administrator if they want to write an exam.

More information

For more information, visit <https://www.alberta.ca/student-learning-during-covid-19.aspx>.


Alberta teachers cope with COVID 19 pandemic

Cross-country roundup



Yukon

Students in the Yukon won't be returning to the classroom until at least April 15.

School staff will return to work as scheduled on March 30, the end of March break, to begin the work of providing "essential learning" for the rest of the year, Education Minister Tracy-Anne McPhee said in a March 26 interview.

Teachers will be identifying where students are in their education and looking at ways to deliver learning for the remainder of the year. That preparation will take into account possibilities of a longer school cancellation, or students returning to the classroom on April 15.

– Yukon News, Stephanie Waddell, March 31



Northwest Territories

The government announced on March 25 that schools would be closed for the remainder of the 2019/20 school year.

A plan is in development to support continued learning for all students as well as providing meal programs, counselling, and other health and wellness programming.

– My Yellowknife Now, Mo Fahim, March 25



British Columbia

In-class learning at B.C. schools was suspended indefinitely by the province on March 17. The majority of students in the province were already at home for March break at the time and many left school unprepared for a prolonged time away from the classroom.

The province has launched Keep Learning B.C., a new at-home education resource website for parents and caregivers who will likely be helping with their child's education for the remainder of the school year.

– cbc.ca, March 30



Nunavut

Nunavut's schools and daycares will stay closed at least until April 20 to

help prevent the spread of COVID-19. The government originally planned to leave schools shut until April 7.

The department of education has also launched a learn-at-home website that offers free access to some of the same educational resources used in schools. The website offers e-books, audio-books and videos.

Links to the department's Inuktitut-language learning apps will also be available on the website. New resources will be regularly added.

– Nunatsiaq News, Emma Tranter, March 31



Saskatchewan

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the ongoing labour dispute between the Saskatchewan Teacher's Federation and the province. Both sides agree that negotiations will need to take a back seat considering the current health crisis.

Since the schools were mandated to close last week, teachers and students have been confined to their homes waiting for direction from the school divisions.

Negotiations are currently on hold for both sides, and the STF assumes that the bargaining teams will get back together soon to continue its discussions with the province.

– Discover MooseJaw.com, Carleen Wallington, March 30



Manitoba

The Manitoba government is closing elementary, junior high and high schools indefinitely due to COVID-19.

The province originally planned a three-week shutdown that was to end April 13, but schools will now stay closed for the remainder of the academic year unless health officials say they can be reopened.

Assignments and learning are to continue as teachers work remotely, and students won't see their marks drop from where they were on the last day of class in March.

There may be job losses because of the school closures, the government admitted, but some workers such as educational assistants will be redirected to help Grade 12 students finish their year.

– The Chronicle Journal, The Canadian Press, March 31



Ontario

Ontario schools are closed due to the COVID-19 crisis until at least May 4, but students will keep studying with teachers and take exams, all online.

Teacher-led learning will be re-established, with K to Grade 6 students completing five hours of work per student/week; grades 7–8 will complete 10 hours of work per student/week; and grades 9–12 will include three hours of work per course per week for semestered students (1.5 hours of work per course per week for non-semestered students).

– NOW Magazine, Glenn Sumi, March 31



Quebec

The Quebec government launched its online remote learning hub on March 30.

Open School is a free, grade-specific, bilingual website com piling educational resources to keep kids busy and stimulated over the long weeks of school shutdowns ahead.

The material on Open School is arranged according to age, from preschool to adult education.

All Open School activities are optional. No one is required to cover any of the material, let alone all of it. There won't be any tests when school finally does resume. This differs from the private system where some schools are going live this week with online courses and mandatory schoolwork following the curriculum.

– Montreal Gazette, Allison Hanes, March 31



Prince Edward Island

It was announced last week that schools across Prince Edward Island will remain closed until at least May 11.

Starting April 6, teachers will be taking the lead on home-learning activities for their students. A variety of online and printed home learning materials will be provided so that regardless of access to the internet, families and students can still practice skills and continue learning.

The province's government will also be establishing a fund of up to \$2 million to support early learning centres and their staff, maintain child care spaces and ensure parents don't pay fees during the period of closures.

The province is working to create a school lunch program to assist families dealing with food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic.

– CTV News, Allan April, March 31



New Brunswick

A plan to continue providing education to housebound New Brunswick students is on the way, stakeholders say.

However, how learning material will be provided and when it will be available to students remains unknown two weeks after schools were shut down in an effort to protect students and limit the spread of COVID-19.

– Fredericton Daily Gleaner, Aidan Cox, March 31



Nova Scotia

Schools in Nova Scotia will stay closed until at least May 1, with the situation reviewed again as that time draws near. But although public schools remain closed, the learning continues.

Over the next month, students will continue their learning through a plan that involves online learning and at-home packages, along with various supports available to students and families.

Supports for special needs students are also part of the plan. The province says it is modifying existing policies and agreements to allow teaching assistants and child and youth care support workers to provide paid respite care in the community.

– Tri-County Vanguard, Tina Comeau, March 30



Newfoundland and Labrador

Effective March 16, all in-school classes for K–12 students across Newfoundland and Labrador were suspended indefinitely.

The government will ensure that daycare workers will continue to be paid and operating grants in place for early education will continue for compensation.

Contingency planning is underway and will intensify to maintain the integrity of the academic year, which was already affected by time off in January due to a major snowstorm.

– The Telegram, Rosie Mullahey, March 16

Alberta teachers cope with COVID 19 pandemic



So, I'm working from home. What should I be aware of?

ATA Member Services Staff

For teachers who don't normally work from home, the idea of doing so can be exciting – no traffic, no rushing around, no interruptions to the work day – but working from home in an online environment can also pose some challenges.

The first thing to remember is that our Code of Professional Conduct applies to your actions and behaviour at all times. This is no different whether you work from home or at school in front of students. And be mindful of division policies, as they still apply as well.

Here are a few tips to help you with working from home. These suggestions also apply to teachers who are working from school with an online platform. By following these tips, teachers will reinforce their image as professionals whether they are working at home or at school.

Create a routine and take care of yourself

- Focus on routines that you can do at home.
 - Create a practical daily list to help keep you organized and focused. When following up on this, ask, "What have I done today?" or "What is complete now?"
 - Get up at the same time.
 - Get dressed and ready as you normally would.
 - Create protocols for "working hours" regarding noise levels and how others in your household can interact with you.

- Schedule social interactions. To guard against retreating into social isolation, schedule times when you will socially engage with others besides those you live with.

- Be aware of your own emotional state and know when you need to go for a walk or take a short break.
- Ensure that you have a suitable workspace. This includes proper ergonomics, heating, lighting, sound and privacy.

Be a master of technology, mind your attire and always be professional

Whether you are using web-based communications with students or the telephone, here are some points to remember.

Microphone

Always assume your microphone is on unless you are sure you have it turned off or muted. When leaving the room, be sure the microphone is off, and at the end of the day, be sure to log out of all programs and your computer.

Video

If using a webcam, be mindful of what the students can see. What is on the wall behind you? Can students see personal or private information about you or others? It is important to remember that even though you are at home, you need to present a professional image to your audience. And as with the microphone, always turn your video off when you leave the room, and at the end of the day, log out of all programs and your computer.

Accessibility

Teachers should be maintaining regular hours as directed by their employer. This is your teaching time, and the time for you to contact your students and for parents to contact you. Errands and personal appointments should not be occurring during this time unless you have an approved leave (i.e. medical appointment). You are under no obligation to provide your personal home or cellphone number to parents, and should not provide these to students. Use division email for all communication with students and parents. Any other contacts should not be via personal accounts (i.e. Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, Tik Tok, text messages, etc.)

Attire

You should dress for the online world as if you are in front of your students – because you are. You may not be as formal as you are in the classroom, but you are a professional, so dress like one when online.

Feedback

The feedback you provide to students while online should be as professional as it is in the classroom. Avoid slang, jargon or emojis when replying to students, as this takes away from the professional message you are conveying.

Tutoring

Remember that tutoring students in certain circumstances can be a violation of article 6 of the code of conduct. Teachers should not be actively trying to tutor students for remuneration during the current work-from-home situation.

Personal comments

It is essential to remember that your personal comments can convey a strong message to students and parents. Teachers have a duty of fidelity to their employer and must not be critical of decisions the board has made. Be mindful of what you post on any social media platforms or say to students and parents.

Student privacy

Remember that the same expectations for FOIP apply when working online. Teachers should not be posting screen images of their students while on a web-based application. Not all students or parents will want their image displayed virtually, so respect everyone's privacy. Do not record any online sessions without the written permission of all parents involved.

Privacy settings

Regardless of the platform you are using, always ensure that the privacy settings are set to the highest level and that the software uses encryption. Also ensure that the software is not recording the session, as it might be stored outside of Canada. Use encrypted external hard drives or thumb drives, and password protect student folders. ■

Available in French

Ces renseignements sont également disponibles en français. Veuillez vous rendre à l'adresse <https://www.teachers.ab.ca/News%20Room/Issues/COVID-19/Pages/default.aspx>.

Alberta teacher among 50 finalists for Global Teacher Prize



SUPPLIED

Fort Saskatchewan teacher Scott Hebert is the only Canadian named as a top-50 finalist for the 2020 Global Teacher Prize.

Kim Clement
ATA News Staff

An Alberta teacher's unique approach has earned him a coveted spot as a top-50 finalist for the 2020 Global Teacher Prize.

Scott Hebert, a Grade 8 sciences and technologies teacher at St. John Paul II Catholic School in Fort Saskatchewan, has been teaching his students using the concept of gamification, which uses game design elements in non-game environments.

Hebert adapted his lesson plans so that students pose as adventurers who are tracking down the Minotaur King, who has ransacked the kingdom. Along the way, the students encounter different obstacles and people they have to work with to continue their adventure.

Valued at \$1 million U.S., the Global Teacher Prize is presented annually to

an exceptional teacher who has made an outstanding contribution to their profession.

"I was encouraged to apply by some colleagues via Twitter," Hebert said. "I started the process in September and it was quite extensive. Once that was done, it was a waiting game. I still remember on Dec. 21 I got an email that I made the next round."

Hebert said he found it difficult to believe when he was notified that he was among the top 50 finalists.

"I don't know how to put it into words, to be quite honest, but when I try to, the words validation and disbelief come to mind," he said. "Validation because when I first began using gamification, I faced a lot of criticism online about its validity, and people challenged me a lot. I almost gave up on it, but it was all about my students who were showing amazing growth and success, so I kept on with it."

In 2013, Hebert was awarded the Alberta Excellence in Teaching Award, and in 2015, his program was selected as the Best Gamification in Education Project globally by the World Gamification Congress.

"The thing I enjoy most about teaching is the interaction with the students. Even though you sometimes teach the same lesson multiple times a day, students make each lesson, and day, dynamic and exciting," Hebert said. "The way they get excited about some things and captivated by others, to see them develop into creative problem solvers and leaders, those 'aha' moments when it all comes together—I just love it."

Out of 12,000 applicants, Hebert is the only Canadian teacher selected as a finalist. The winner will be announced later this year. ■

Code of conduct still applies to teachers who are parents



PITFALLS AND PRECAUTIONS

Cory Schoffer
ATA Secretary to Professional Conduct Committees

Pitfalls and Precautions is a series that aims to educate teachers on professional conduct issues by highlighting situations addressed by the ATA Professional Conduct Committee.

Teachers as parents. Parents as teachers. Many of us have taken calls on representation files from teachers who are also parents. In fact, this is most teachers. Often we hear passionate stories of how teachers view their role as parents to their own children as the most important role that they have. They're right. However, their role as teacher is pretty important, too. While no one will ever say that their role as teacher is more important than their role as a parent, there are still rules that govern this juxtaposition.

One such example came before a professional conduct committee hearing recently. The committee heard the case of a very experienced teacher who questioned some of the approaches and methods being implemented by their child's teacher in a different school. The teacher/parent in question chose to send emails to various people outlining the concerns. The list of recipients of these emails included the principal of the school that the child attended, and a series of district learning coaches. All of these communications occurred without the teacher/parent ever voicing or articulating their concern directly to their child's teacher.

In accordance with the Code of Professional Conduct, teachers are expected to criticize colleagues only in good faith, to the individual or in confidence to proper officials, and in a respectful manner after the teacher has been informed of the criticism. Teachers need to be able to defend themselves when they are accused of

exempt a teacher from the obligation to adhere to the code and the directions spelled out therein. Additionally, there are issues about individuals who are and who aren't considered "proper officials." A principal is a proper official in a matter such as this. A learning coach is not a proper official. Learning coaches were created to, in part, provide a buffer between principals and staff.

Principals have the duty and authority to supervise and evaluate staff. Learning coaches do not have this authority. It is important that learning coaches be able to work with teachers without a concern about supervision and evaluation entering into the mix. Principals need to be able to carry out

confronted with a teacher who is expressing concern about another colleague's practices, it is incumbent upon principals, learning coaches, consultants and even superintendents to ask one important question: Have you shared these concerns directly with your colleague? If the answer to that question is anything short of an unequivocal yes, then the teacher should be directed to do so, and the concern should not be entertained until such time as the two teachers have communicated on the issue.

Without doubt, one of the hardest things for a teacher to do is to directly criticize a colleague one-to-one. Nevertheless, the ability and obligation to do so is at the heart of being a professional. To handle matters like this appropriately, a teacher must speak directly to the other teacher. This conversation cannot and should not be brokered by another person. If it is not feasible to have this conversation in person, then written communication is appropriate. Note, however, that simply sending an email copied to the principal is not sufficient notice because the receiving teacher would not have time to respond before the principal is informed. Likewise, sending the email and then immediately forwarding the email to the principal fails to meet the appropriate professional obligation.

The Code of Professional Conduct does not prevent colleagues from criticizing practices that they don't support. Rather, the code outlines a process to which teachers must adhere when they are offering such criticism. If a teacher adheres to the process, they have every right and opportunity to voice their concern. This includes teachers who are dealing with the teachers of their own children. Also, if your spouse is not a teacher, it may be best to let your spouse deal with the matter. ■

“While no one will ever say that their role as teacher is more important than their role as a parent, there are still rules that govern this juxtaposition.”

something related to their professional competence. Advance notice of a critical report ensures that matters are dealt with in a fair manner. In this case, there were two charges under consideration. The teacher was found guilty on both charges and received two letters of reprimand and a \$300 fine.

There is no exemption in the Code of Professional Conduct for teachers who are parents. Dealing with an issue involving their own child does not

their supervisory tasks, and being able to separate themselves through learning coaches gives them the clear lens through which to look. By highlighting the concerns to the learning coaches, the teacher in question shared concerns about a colleague with people who are not proper officials.

Though not part of this case, both administrators and learning coaches have some growth opportunities from this matter as well. When

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PD-34-52 2020-03



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PD-80-38e 2020-02

2020 gotcha! PHOTO CONTEST

Cash prizes available!



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

1st place: \$200

2nd place: \$100

3rd place: \$50

GOTCHA! Contest rules

- 1 Photos taken by active and associate ATA members of education- or school-related activities are eligible. (Hint: photos depicting action are best.)
- 2 Entries must be submitted by the member who took the photos.
- 3 Photos taken between Sept. 1, 2019, and May 15, 2020, are eligible.
- 4 Please email photos to cory.hare@ata.ab.ca. Entries must be received by 5 p.m. on May 15, 2020.
- 5 Each entry must be accompanied by a description of the activity; the names (if possible) of the people in the photo; the date when the photo was taken; and the photographer's name, school and contact information.
- 6 Cash prizes will be awarded to entrants whose photos place in the top three, as follows: first place, \$200; second place, \$100; and third place, \$50.
- 7 Each winner will also receive a certificate of merit, as will those receiving honourable mention.
- 8 Up to 20 additional entries may be selected for an award of honourable mention.
- 9 Each entrant may submit up to five photos, but no entrant can win more than one top-three prize.
- 10 A panel of individuals with photography, publishing and teaching experience will judge the entries. The decision of the judges is final.
- 11 Winning photographs will be published in the ATA News.
- 12 Photos submitted for the contest may be published in the ATA News, the ATA Magazine or other Association publications.
- 13 Please read carefully. Failure to comply with any of these rules may result in disqualification.

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COMM-65-1 2020 03



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