



Backgrounder

The Alberta Teachers' Association

Backgrounder to ATA news release dated 2014 06 15

ATA response provides way forward for teacher excellence

Highlighted excerpts from Great Teachers, Great Schools, the Association's response to the recommendations of the task force for teaching excellence

ON CONCERNS WITH THE MINISTER, TASK FORCE AND PROCESS:

“A flawed consultation process, is reflected in the product of the task force, a report that is shot through with errors of fact, misrepresentations and omissions.” (p 4)

“Anecdotal reports suggest that participation in the bulletin boards dropped off dramatically over time and it is unclear how many of the individuals who began to respond to the online survey continued through to the end.” (p 8)

“The tendency of the task force report (is) to torque the evidence cited in support of its conclusions and to withhold relevant contextual information in a way that would mislead the typical reader.” (p 8)

“The Minister of Education has compromised any possibility that he could be perceived as a critical recipient and impartial reviewer of task force recommendations by his actions and statements both immediately before and since the release of the report.” (p 9)

“Minister Johnson has made statements about how he plans to respond to task force recommendations before having had an opportunity to review this or any other submission.” (p 9)

“It appears that the task force and the Minister of Education have decided to manufacture a crisis in order to promote an agenda that includes several ill-considered proposals that would, if implemented, undermine public education in Alberta.” (p 10)

“There was a more effective alternative approach: active collaboration with the Alberta Teachers' Association.” (p 10)

For further information contact Jonathan H Teghtmeyer
11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton, Alberta T5N 2R1
T 780-447-9400 or 1-800-232-7208
F 780-455-6481
www.teachers.ab.ca

ON RECOMMENDATION 5: ADMISSION TO TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

“The Association does not accept that academic performance expectations should be lowered... Academic standards need to remain high in the teaching profession.” (p 12)

ON RECOMMENDATION 7: ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS TO TEACHING

“The task force recommendation opens the door to US-style alternative programs of teacher preparation.” (p 14)

“If excellence is to be assured, one would assume that higher, rather than lower, standards should be established.” (p 14)

ON RECOMMENDATION 11: TEACHER’S ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PLAN

“The proposal would remove professional autonomy and impose the inauthentic growth expectations of others on a teacher’s professional practice.” (p 17)

“A professional and collegial model provides for risk-taking—identifying learning goals that would genuinely improve practice. If, as proposed by the task force, teachers are going to be evaluated on growth, they will not choose targets or outcomes that might be particularly challenging, but at which they might fail. The potential for real and meaningful growth is therefore fundamentally compromised.” (p 17)

“Substantial additional resources will be required to provide for this proposal and would be much better spent on teaching supports and supports in the learning environment.” (p 17)

“The Association strongly supports the existing Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy.” (p 17)

ON RECOMMENDATION 12: RECOGNIZING AND MOTIVATING TEACHERS

“The notion that teachers need incentives or recognition in order to work with student teachers or participate in mentoring is insulting and reflects a failure to understand the culture of teaching. In a collegial structure, there is reliance and strength in colleagues. These are not traits for which recognition or incentives are required.” (p 18)

“Given scarce resources, establishing some form of recognition plan is not the highest priority in the view of the Association.” (p 19)

ON RECOMMENDATION 13: TEACHING SUPPORT

“The wording of the recommendation is virtually unintelligible.” (p 19)

“Teachers are still waiting for the resources promised in *Setting the Direction* in 2009. The lack of supports for inclusive education is well past the breaking point.” (p 19)

“The Government of Alberta is completely aware of this significant funding shortfall and has done virtually nothing about it year after year. This is simply another call for funding that is not being provided.” (p 19)

ON RECOMMENDATION 14: SUPPORTS IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

“The Association supports the provision of time for planning, collaboration, sharing best practices and empowering innovation.” (p 20)

“The task force also makes its view clear with respect to class size: ‘in focusing on supports for teachers, issues such as time for collaboration and professional learning are as important, and perhaps more important, than reducing class size.’” (p 20)

ON RECOMMENDATION 19: SEPARATION OF CONDUCT AND COMPETENCE

“Conduct and competence are already dealt with through separate structures and should continue to be differentiated. There is ample evidence in this recommendation and Recommendation 20 that the task force does not understand the professional regulatory functions in operation.” (p 23)

ON RECOMMENDATION 20: ASSURING PROPER CONDUCT

“The task force’s recommendations regarding assurance of professional conduct also call into question its understanding of professional regulatory functions relating to the assurance of conduct and competence.” (p 24)

“The task force seems to believe that the Practice Review of Teachers Regulation applies to teachers employed by public and separate school boards in Alberta. This is not correct.” (p 25)

“Public members are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council and provide a public window on professional conduct matters. We note that the Minister has taken no action to appoint new members or reappoint current members, whose appointments expired on 2014 06 14.” (p 26)

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“We are concerned that this failure to act may be in anticipation of his making unilateral changes to the discipline process.” (p 26)

“The Association was not contacted by the task force for information about the Association’s process.” (p 26)

“It appears that the task force is proposing that the Minister of Education assume responsibility for policing the professional conduct of all teachers, removing the responsibilities the Association has maintained since 1936. Yet, in Recommendation 25, the task force believes that the Association can continue to have both union and professional functions if the task force recommendations are adopted. It’s unclear what professional functions the task force is referring to, given their recommendation to transfer professional functions to the Minister of Education.” (p 26)

“The task force’s assertion that the Board of Reference has something to do with teacher professional conduct ... is fundamentally wrong.” (p 26)

“These recommendations would destroy the powers of the Board of Reference. Any teacher’s employment could be terminated at any time by a board by writing a cheque for one year’s salary.” (p 27)

“Any teacher, school administrator and most central office teachers could lose their employment without cause. There would be no way to reverse this. Astonishingly, the task force sees this as being fair to the teacher.” (p 27)

ON RECOMMENDATION 21: MAINTENANCE OF CERTIFICATION

“The (provincial Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Policy) directs school boards in the development of local policy and has been strongly supported across the education sector.” (p 29)

“Rather than cyclical evaluation of teachers whose competence was not questioned, the policy freed up resources to deal with teachers whose teaching practice needs improvement. A key element of the policy is supervision. A teacher is always supervised, and if there are concerns about a teacher’s practice, an evaluation can be initiated at any time.” (p 29)

“(The task force) attempts to suggest that nothing is happening ‘for promoting and assuring continuous practice improvement’. Evaluations are done when a teacher is new or when there are issues, but otherwise the key to practice improvement is supervision. To suggest that teachers are not monitored is a blatant misunderstanding or misrepresentation of the policy.” (p 29)

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“Our initial assessment of the requirements, on a conservative analysis, suggests the allocation of at least \$60,000,000 per year to perform these functions.” (p 30)

“This recommendation says an enormous amount about the task force’s view of teachers... Teachers are not members of a profession but members of a school board’s work force that require direction and constant inspection.” (p 30)

“For some reason, the task force sees the failure of superintendents to adhere to the statutory requirements of the *Teaching Profession Act* as a failure of the Association and proof that the process should return to the Minister of Education.” (p 31)

“The task force prefers surveillance, directed growth, ongoing evaluation, recertification and management-labor relations over professional growth, capacity building, ongoing supervision and collegiality. These are wrongheaded directions and should not be pursued.” (p 32)

ON RECOMMENDATION 24: EMPOWERING PRINCIPALS

“Removing principals from the Association would bring an end to the collegial model and would replace it with a labor-management model of relationships. This would create many negative issues for future governments in Alberta to deal with that do not exist today. The threat to remove principals from the Association is very troubling.” (p 35)

ON RECOMMENDATION 25: THE REGULATORY (GOVERNANCE) MODEL

“Longstanding Association policy proposes that the Association be responsible for the governance of the teaching profession in a way similar to other professions.” (p 35)

“The dominant model of professional self-governance utilizes a single organization of the members of the profession, not two organizations.” (p 36)

“Other professions organize their structures to adequately separate issues of self-interest and public interest, and this is by far the dominant model for self-governance.” (p 36)

“The task force does not provide any evidence of an actual conflict. Indeed, the task force did not contact the Association to discuss the operation of the professional conduct process nor professional practice review.” (p 36)

“Given that the task force has no actual evidence of a conflict, the task force relies on the cheap shot of ‘perceived conflict’ and ample reporting of the Kendel Report, which has no application to Alberta... If there are problems in Saskatchewan, that’s close enough for the

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task force to believe, with absolutely no reported evidence, that there are problems in Alberta.” (p 36)

“Once again, the task force issues a threat. Implement our recommendations or the Association should lose its professional status and become a trade union. There is no evidence that such a change will improve education in Alberta and abundant evidence that such a change would be very negative for the delivery of education and the relationship of the profession with government.” (p 36)