# Hope: Resilience and Recovery
# A Report for the Alberta Teachers' Association

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Denise Larsen, Rebecca Hudson Breen,
Darryl Hunter, and Veronica Taylor*

*All affiliations: Faculty of Education, University of Alberta

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# Preface

"Hope is the ability to envision a future in which one wishes to participate."

R F Jevne, 2005

This study, which incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods, was launched in response to findings from the fall 2021 Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) Pulse survey that showed there were high levels of hopelessness expressed by Alberta teachers and school leaders. In addition, the 2021 Pulse Survey, along with other surveys conducted by the Association, indicated that there was a higher than expected number of teachers and school leaders reporting they planned to leave the profession within five years.

The purpose of this research project was threefold. First, the Association wanted to understand the concept of hope in the professional lives of teachers and explore how and where hope is experienced by Alberta teachers and school leaders. Second, this research was designed with the intention of identifying ways of creating and supporting hope within the teaching profession across myriad challenges and the complex educational landscape. The third objective of this research project was to develop new measures for assessing levels of hope that incorporate the context of public school teachers and school leaders and could be used in this context.

This report draws from the literature acknowledging that hope is a foundational requirement for those who are in the teaching profession. Importantly, the concept of hope as described within this study extends beyond the psychology of an individual; it recognizes that hope and hopelessness can be experienced collectively within organizations and groups of individuals. The findings from this study reflect the context of the spring of 2022, when Alberta and the world were well into the second year of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, and draws from the surveys and focus groups to identify sources of hope and threats to hope for both teachers and school leaders. Finally, this report makes recommendations to build and sustain hopefulness and resilience in teachers and school leaders.

This research report reflects the tremendous expertise and effort from the research team of Denise Larson, Rebecca Hudson Breen, Darryl Hunter and Veronica Taylor of the Education Faculty of the University of Alberta. In addition, I wish to acknowledge and thank Phil McRae and Lisa Everitt, the Association research team who worked to bring this project to fruition. As well, thank you to the document production team, Sandra Bit, Laura Baker, Joanne Maughn and Carey Stevenson for their outstanding work in finalizing the report. Last, I wish to extend my deepest appreciation to the 561 teachers and school leaders who completed the online survey and the 10 teachers and school leaders who participated in focus groups in the spring of 2022. Their contributions were essential to the success of this project, which highlights the extraordinary insights and expert knowledge of the Alberta teaching profession.

*Dennis Theobald,*
*Executive Secretary, Government*
*Alberta Teachers' Association*

# Executive Summary

The *Hope: Resilience and Recovery Project* was launched in response to findings from the fall 2021 Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) Pulse survey indicating high hopelessness among Alberta teachers and school leaders along with a high percentage of teachers and school leaders indicating a plan to leave the profession within five years. The project targeted both teachers and school leaders. It included two means of data collection: (a) teacher and school leader surveys (from April 11 to May 2, 2022) and (b) teacher and school leader focus groups (from May 12 to June 27). The total number of surveys collected was 561. In addition, five focus groups totalling 10 participants were held. Participation in the project was voluntary, with recruitment taking place through the ATA database of members. A total of 3000 individuals were approached with the invitation to participate.

The surveys employed were tailored specifically for this project and designed to address experiences of hope and low hope in the contexts of teaching and of school leadership. Both the teacher hope survey and school leader hope survey included 29 items. The two surveys (teacher and school leader) included the same or similar items where appropriate to the roles. Focus group questions focused on illuminating preliminary findings on the teacher hope survey and the school leader hope survey.

In this report, we provide a detailed description of the rationale for the project, literature and contextual elements relevant to the project, the findings, a discussion of the findings and field-relevant recommendations. Analyses are displayed in charts, graphs and text depending on the nature of the data and analysis.

## Main Findings

- Hope is foundational to teacher and school leader experiences on the educational landscape.

- Educator experiences of hope and threats to hope are not only psychological. They are socially constructed, meaning that they are deeply impacted by the broader educational contexts of classroom, school, school board, government, professional association and even the public.

- Alberta teachers and school leaders evidenced some strong reservoirs of hope, suggesting that students, classrooms and schools are often hope-fostering sites for educators.

- Sources of teacher hope include witnessing student success and resilience, recognizing their own agency and professional skills as teachers, observing that teachers are contributing to good futures and experiencing supportive leaders.

- Sources of school leader hope include supporting struggling students to succeed, moving forward as school communities through the pandemic, feeling valued as an educator by students and parents, experiencing supportive leaders and maintaining trusting relationships with staff.

- For both teachers and school leaders, action or inaction by senior educational leadership often has negative effects on educator hope. Educators seek leaders' cues and trace their hopes to actions and inactions of school leaders, senior office administration, school boards of trustees, and distant ministries of education.

- Teachers identified threats to hope in relation to (a) workload intensification, (b) lack of time and resources, (c) disconnection from senior administrators, (d) perceived government attacks on teachers, (e) perceived negative impacts of government decisions on students, and (f) being devalued and misunderstood by the public.

- School leaders identified threats to hope in relation to (a) witnessing the impacts of the pandemic on students, (b) being targets of parent frustration, (c) frustrations with senior administration and (d) seeing the provincial government as an enemy of public education.

## Main Recommendations

- Support educators during difficult tasks, acknowledge difficulties experienced by educators and express appreciation for educator commitment.

- Respect and reflect back to educators appreciation for their engagement. Celebrate successes small and large.

- Encourage educators to take leadership of their own hope, actively and explicitly pursuing hope-fostering practices. Provide resources to make this possible.

- Schools, school divisions and teachers' associations can proactively support teachers in cultivating ongoing networks of support.

- Providing periodic evidence to teachers of individual students' progress and accomplishment in their years ahead, beyond the grade level, is likely to have a hope-fostering effect for educators.

- Permit multiple avenues for teachers to define issues and problem-solve with curricular and pedagogical content.

- Adopt school leadership approaches that revolve around asking questions rather than making assertions.

- School leaders must be supported in sustaining hope to remain a source of hope in their school communities.

- School leaders identified that belonging to the same professional association as teachers was an important source of hope, a point to contemplate whenever membership in teachers' associations are considered.

- Professional associations and other education leader groups have a role to play in educating the public about the value of teachers and of public education.

# Media Statement

Alberta educators are struggling to see a future for themselves in Alberta schools. Last fall 45 per cent of surveyed Alberta educators reported feeling hopeless. Many Alberta educators also indicated plans to leave the profession within five years. Hope is the ability to envision a future we want to be a part of. That a great many Alberta educators cannot see a future in the profession is bad news for Alberta students. In a recent survey of Alberta educators, one of the biggest indicators of hope is seeing their students grow and succeed. Any policy decisions that place barriers on teachers' capacity to foster student growth threatens teachers' hope. Educators are closest to students and understand what policy decisions mean in the lives and outcomes of students.

Educators understand what it will mean to provide students with less than they need to learn. Teachers grew increasingly hopeless about fostering student growth as a result of the actions and inactions of school board leadership, school trustees and government. Teachers and school leaders must be supported in sustaining hope to remain a source of hope to their school communities. For the sake and success of students in Alberta, educators should have real avenues to define issues and collaboratively problem-solve at all levels of educational decision-making and particularly with respect to curricular content and pedagogical practices.

# Purposes of the Study

The purposes for this study were threefold:

1. To understand how and where Alberta educators (teachers and school leaders) experience hope (as of spring 2022)

2. To recommend ways to support Alberta educator hope across myriad challenges on the educational landscape

3. To develop new measures of hope better suited to the context and complexity of work as public educators

The launch of this study is a response to findings from recent Alberta Teachers' Association Pulse surveys (regular random-stratified surveys of licensed Alberta teachers) suggesting high hopelessness among Alberta teachers. In November 2021, the ATA Pulse survey (2022) Fourth Acute Wave of COVID-19 revealed that 45 percent of respondents *disagreed* (13 per cent strongly disagreed; 32 per cent disagreed) with the statement, "I feel hopeful." Further, 36 per cent of respondents reported "feeling down, depressed or hopeless" more than half of the days of the week (18 per cent) or "nearly every day" (18 per cent). Finally, 37.1 per cent of respondents indicated that in the next five years they will either retire (16.1 per cent), leave the profession (14.1per cent), or move to another province to teach (6.7per cent). Clearly, many teachers and school leaders were experiencing distress.

Psychologically, hopelessness is strongly correlated with depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Beck et al 1993; Qiu, Klonsky and Klein 2017). The Pulse findings give reason for anyone with a stake in public education to be concerned over educators' health, the future of public education, students and the profession. This project was launched out of this concern for teacher and school leader hope. There was a need to more deeply understand what teachers and school leaders were experiencing.

Higher hope is "virtually always … related to more beneficial life outcomes" (Cheavens et al 2005), a summary statement that remains as accurate to the research today as when it was first asserted, and a statement with a poignant bearing on the struggles of Alberta teachers and school leaders highlighted by the Pulse surveys. Hope serves as an essential and sustaining factor when facing difficult and stressful workplace conditions (Flesaker and Larsen 2010; Snyder 2005), and is especially necessary in overcoming difficulties and challenges in educational contexts (Nolan and Stitzlein 2011). Hope is an important resource for adults working with young people. It is a valuable resource in being able to hold hope for others who may be struggling and also offers a sense of purpose in one's work (Murdoch and Larsen 2018). Hopeful professionals foster hope and success in those with which they work (Coppock et al 2010; Flesaker and Larsen 2010; Murdoch and Larsen 2018)

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While the ATA Pulse survey highlighted high hopelessness as a concern for teacher and school leaders, it did not directly address its valuable complement: hope. Knowing about hopelessness is only part of the story. Knowing about hope is also critical. Hope and hopelessness can and often do coexist (Farran, Herth and Popovich 1995). Hope is a character strength (Peterson and Seligman 2004) and is associated with a forward moving orientation, particularly in the face of difficulty (Bruininks and Malle 2005). It is a multidimensional construct (eg, Larsen et al 2020; Scioli et al 2011; Stephenson 1991; Webb 2013) meaning that, while it may be in short supply in some areas of one's experience, it may very well be found in other areas of one's life (Larsen et al 2020). This study sought to understand whether and where hope might exist across important areas of teacher and school leader work-related experiences. The assets of focusing the survey on hope were (a) identifying where teacher and school leaders currently find hope in their work; (b) identifying where teachers and school leaders struggle for hope; and (c) identifying and recommending individual, institutional and systemic shifts likely to strengthen a hopeful, more resilient teacher and school leader workforce.

# Contexts of the Study

Context is always important to understanding findings in the social sciences. There are at least three key contextual elements within which the findings of this study should be interpreted:

1. What is known about teacher well-being broadly

2. Pandemic impacts on the general population and on educators

3. The professional/provincial relationship

## Brief Review: A Challenging Profession

An overview of literature on educator mental health reveals professionals facing workload intensification and working under conditions of strain and stress. The occupation of teaching (K–12) is characterized by high stress and burnout (Geving 2007; Grayson and Alvarez 2008) with teachers across grade levels and countries consistently reporting high levels of stress (Fontana and Abouserie 1993). In a Canadian review of research on teacher mental health, Gray and Nordstokke (2017) summarize that "teachers' tasks are made increasingly difficult with large class sizes, complex, and diverse learning needs and variability in school-wide resources and funding" (p 203). In addition, research demonstrates that negative student behaviour predicts burnout (Beltman et al 2011), while work overload, low salaries (Schonfeld 2001), and accountability policies are seen as significant sources of teacher stress (Shernoff et al 2011).

While many researchers identify teacher mental health problems as those of burnout and overwork, others point to deeper experiences of moral distress. David Berliner (2018) asserts that teachers are not able to contribute to education in ways that they had hoped, just as Doris Santoro (2018) highlights that "teachers are leaving the profession at rates that outpace retirements" (p 3) in the United States. Santoro, too, challenges the notion that teachers are burned out, instead providing compelling evidence, from an American vantage point, that teachers are not able to be the educators they sought to become, instead experiencing ongoing "value conflicts with pedagogical policies, reform mandates, and school practices" (p 3).

Teacher attrition is a concern. American figures are alarming, with Brill and McCartney (2008) citing attrition rates as high as 33 per cent in the first three years and 46 per cent after five years in the US. More recently, in a study of teachers, stress and COVID-19, Robinson et al (2022) express concern regarding possible teacher shortages. While these figures reflect an American context, they are evidence that teacher attrition can be a serious matter when important factors in the sector, such as teacher well-being, go unaddressed.

Whether expressions of concern for teacher mental health are couched in the language of burnout or moral distress, the literature is clear. Those who are able to hold on to hope

and create more hopeful workplace contexts tend to fare better with respect to both burnout (Pharris et al 2022; Reichard et al 2013; Snyder 1994) and moral distress (Austin et al 2013).

### Brief Review: COVID-19 Impacts on Teachers

The second key contextual element of this study is the COVID 19 pandemic. This study took place during the second full academic year of the COVID 19 pandemic (ie, 2021–2022) with Alberta's provincial pandemic restrictions lifting in spring just as this project launched. Impacts on living and working through the pandemic are only beginning to be fully researched in the general public, which, of course, includes teachers and school leaders. Nonetheless, strong evidence already points to the deleterious effects of the pandemic in the early days of its onset with greater psychological burden and increased mental health problems among the general public (Bauerle et al 2020; Canadian Association of Mental Health 2020; Gavin et al 2020; The Lancet Infectious Diseases 2020). Overall, an increased prevalence of mental health symptoms across all age groups is associated with the COVID-19 pandemic (Bauerle et al 2020; Brooks et al 2020; Gruber et al 2021; Rossell et al 2021; Taylor 2022) including depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and loneliness (Johnson et al 2020; Marroquin et al 2020; Wang et al 2020).

The pandemic has also resulted in teacher and school leader specific concerns. The 2020 *Pandemic Research Report* published by the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CFT) reported that teachers were "incredibly stressed, struggling to cope, and increasingly feeling unhappy" (p. 3) with 46 per cent concerned about their own mental health and well-being, citing increased workloads as damaging to physical health and well-being. International research reveals universal experiences and concerns. Data collected during the third COVID-19 wave in Germany revealed that the psychological burden carried by teachers exceeded that of the general population with higher depressive and anxiety symptomatology (Koestner et al 2022) while a UK study (data collected 2020) revealed declining teacher mental health and well-being as impacted by six negative job demands: uncertainty, workload, negative perception of the profession, concern for others' well-being, health struggles and multiple roles (Kim et al 2022). Finally, a COVID-19 qualitative study in the Great Plains, US region (data collected 2020) highlighted high teacher stress related to professional roles, additional professional demands, concern for students' well-being, and frustration with administrative and other institutional entities regarding COVID-19 safety measures (Robinson et al 2022). The CFT recommended multiple layers of support for education (eg, at school, board and ministry levels), listening, recognizing issues and acting to lessen the increased workload on teachers. Finally, respondents to the American Psychological Association (APA) Task Force's *Violence Against Educators and School Personnel: Crisis During COVID* report (McMahon et al 2022), identified the presence of verbal and threatening violence from students, parents, colleagues and administrators during the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving a significant portion of respondents indicating a desire to transfer or quit the profession.

Interestingly, with respect to COVID-19 pandemic effects and hope, there is developing evidence to suggest that hope and other character strengths such as gratitude and compassion served protective roles during the adjustment to the COVID-19 pandemic (Cheung et al 2022; Martinez-Marti et al 2020; Ang et al 2022).

## Brief Review: Professional–Provincial Relations

The third key contextual element germane to this study is professional–provincial relations. Data collection for this project took place from April 11, 2022 (survey recruitment launched) to June 27, 2022 (last school leader focus group) during a period of ongoing policy strains between the profession and the province. Examples of this strain include: launch of a new highly contentious curriculum (Croft 2022); rejection of the profession's requests to delay school start due to pandemic (Hayward 2020); contested teaching contract negotiations (Joannou 2022); and the province's recent decision (Bill 15, *Reforming Teacher Profession Discipline Amendment Act*) to remove professional discipline responsibilities from the Alberta Teachers' Association (Johnson 2022).

# Hope: The Construct and Definitions

The field of education draws on theoretical and research traditions across multiple disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, sociology and leadership. Similarly, our research centre, Hope Studies Central, takes a multidisciplinary approach to hope (Larsen et al, in press. Foundations of education are rooted in growth and development models rather than models of pathology. As counselling psychologists, former school teachers and researchers, our approach to hope is also developmental and growth oriented rather than pathological.

The purview of philosophers, theologians and poets long before it was taken up in the social sciences, many point to Karl Menninger (1960), then president of the American Psychiatric Association, as instigating the modern study of hope. In his 1959 presidential address, he asserted, "[we] are duty bound to speak up as scientists … about the ancient but rediscovered truth, the validity of hope in human development …" (p 11). Menninger's conviction about the importance of hope to human development and health was based on his observations of prisoners in war camps during WW II. Following Menninger's address, new research methods developed allowing researchers to better identify and measure a construct once considered too ethereal to study.

Briefly, below are aspects of this history most germane to this current study.

Jerome Frank's (1961) seminal work, *Persuasion and Healing*, remains a pillar with respect to the study of hope in mental health. Frank believed that those struggling and ravaged by the uncertainties and vagaries of life required "remoralization," the recovery of morale, the return of hope. Put differently by Lynch (1965), hope is the "recovery of the knowledge and feeling that there is a way out of difficulty, that things can work out, that we as human persons can somehow handle and manage internal and external reality" (p 32).

In the years following this early work in the social sciences, many instruments to measure hope were developed as the construct became better understood. At our last count there now exist 32 different measures. Most existing measures originate from health contexts (particularly nursing and psychology) and are best described as general mental health measures (Larsen et al 2020), meaning that they are not designed to be sensitive to elements of hope unique to specific contexts (eg, teaching and school leadership). Perhaps the most well-known hope scale used in education is that of Snyder (1994, 1995). This is because Snyder's explicitly goals focused scale makes it an appealing measure in alignment with the common quest for high student achievement scores (eg, Cheavens et al, 2005; Zeinalipour 2022). Developed in the 1990s and originally called the *Goals Scale*, Snyder defined hope via *pathways thinking* (ie, the development of plans to meet goals) and *agency thinking* (ie, a belief in one's ability to pursue pathways and meet goals).

Snyder's model and corresponding goals-focused scales have been critically examined and do not address the multidimensional understanding of hope repeatedly identified across a multitude of hope studies (eg, Larsen et al, 2020). Critiques highlight the lack of dimensionality ascribed to hope in Snyder's formulation of the construct and point to evidence of emotional, relational and often spiritual elements of the experience of hope (eg, Larsen and Stege 2012; Larsen et al 2020; LeMay 2014). While goals may be one aspect of hope, they are not the only important aspect of hope, and certainly not the only hope resource that educators need to access. As Webb explains in *Pedagogies of Hope*, "the mode in which hope is experienced at any particular time, in any particular culture, and with any particular group, is the result of a complex process of social mediation" (p 398).

## Definitions of Hope

A review of some common definitions of hope, informs our position. Lazarus (1999), a psychologist, writes that to hope is "to believe that something positive, which does not presently apply to one's own life, could still materialize" (p 653). Nursing researchers Dufault and Martocchio (1985) define hope as a "confident but uncertain expectation of achieving a future good which, to the hoping person, is realistically possible and personally significant" (p 380). The philosopher Nunn (2005) argues that "if A hopes that p, then, A is uncertain whether p will happen, A believes that p is possible, A desires p, and, A judges p to be good in some respect" (p 71; see also Marcel 1962). The philosopher Bovens (1999) defines hope as the conjunction of belief,

desire and mentally imagining the sought-after outcome. These definitions identify key attributes of hope that can be combined here into the following integrative definition: hope is future-oriented belief, desire and mental imagining surrounding a valued outcome that is uncertain but possible. Finally, the definition that perhaps best resonates with lay audiences defines hope as the ability to envision a future in which one wishes to participate (Jevne 2005).

The field of education has taken up hope as a vital factor in learning. Both social justice concerns (eg, Freire 2014; te Riele 2010) along with more individualistic (Snyder 2002) orientations to hope appear in the research on teaching. Hope practices in schools are often tied to the curriculum in innovative ways that reflect a focus on both self- and other-oriented hope. Some of the most fascinating hope work appears in the classroom practices of teachers who both lead with hope and respond to their students' interests in hope.

Studies within health sciences usually define hope as the multidimensional experience of a confident but uncertain expectation that is measured with the Herth Hope Index (HHI) (Herth 1992). Further, most western instruments have been criticized as focusing too much on the individual at the expense of a more social understanding of hope (Aspinwall and Leaf 2002; Bernardo 2010; Du and King 2013; Howell and Larsen 2015), as well as disregarding the more transcendental or spiritual components of the experience (Ludema et al 1997; Scioli et al 2011).

We see hope as constructed and the workplace of professionals as an important arena where hope is created and experienced. A host of

organizational relationships with colleagues, superordinates, clients and stakeholders all play a role in the creation of hope. Hope is thus not solely a psychological but also a sociological phenomenon. It is an animating, public-facing idea that is shared more broadly or differentially within a community of professionals on a larger scale, such as by their representative organization, the ATA, and ideally among the larger citizenry or government. At times, hope is a media-endorsed, macrosocially influenced concept among stakeholders often influencing the content of ballot boxes, speeches and many public documents. Context means the surrounding society; thus, hope is much more societal or communicative in nature than between the ears of the individual psyche or contained with an autonomous heart. As such, hope has the potential to impact both individual well-being as well as the health of the organization. Moreover, hope is also a pedagogical construct. It is embedded within the act of teaching and learning. Rather than pathologizing hope's absence, educators seek to build hope among themselves while also imparting, eliciting or constructing it in others.

At the outset of this research, integral dimensions of teacher and school leader hope were anticipated to include **competence/ agency** (eg, I am capable of being a good teacher/school leader; I have the tools needed to be effective); **direct relationships** (eg, I have the supports needed around me to make a difference; I can see the difference I am making others' lives); **broader social contexts** (eg, I can see that my work is appreciated); and **future orientation/motivation** (eg, I feel engaged and motivated by my work).

With this study, our aim is to 1) understand how and where Alberta educators (teachers and school leaders) experience hope (as of spring 2022), 2) recommend ways to support Alberta educator hope across myriad challenges on the educational landscape, and 3) develop new measures of hope better suited to the context and complexity of work as public educators.

What follows is a detailed description of the study design, including the development of a research- and practice-informed, context-sensitive survey of educator hope (teacher and school leader versions).

# Study Design

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was used in which quantitative (survey) data and qualitative (focus group) data were collected and analyzed separately. Following these separate analyses, data were merged to produce a more complete understanding of teacher and school leader sources of and threats to hope.

## Survey Development

Over the past thirty years hope has been measured using several different instruments (eg, Snyder 1996; Herth, 1992; Scioli et al 2011), predominantly as a general construct. However, more recent research indicates that the nature and experience of hope varies relative to context. As a result, recent scale development has focused on more nuanced detection and understanding of hope across a wide range of contexts from college student academic achievement (Robinson and Rose 2010) to individual psychotherapy (Larsen et al 2020). In this study, we were specifically interested in teachers' and school leaders' experiences of hope in their work. Because the nature and experience of hope varies relative to context, general measures would be expected to capture only a partial understanding of teacher and school leader hope. A more sensitive and nuanced measure of teacher and school leader hope was needed. The following explanation outlines how research- and field-informed surveys of teacher and school leader hope were developed. Where teacher and school leader

working contexts overlapped, the two surveys were designed to align with one another.

A multi-step process was based on

a) findings from the recent Strengths, Hope and Resourcefulness Program-School Mental Health (SHARP-SMH 2019–2022, Strengths, Hope, and Resourcefulness for School Mental Health.)

b) a recent review of literature on teacher hope;

c) a review of unidimensional (goals-focused) and multidimensional hope scales. Scales under review were chosen based on the strength of each scale construction, relative common use of the scale in research, and the unique selection of items in the scale, often mapping onto multiple dimensions. Scales reviewed included Snyder 1994; Herth 1992; Larsen et al 2020; Scioli et al 2011. Scale items that had the *potential* to align with teacher and school leader hope were identified;

d) information gleaned by a) to c) above, draft versions of teacher hope and school leader hope surveys were developed by the research team;

e) consultations with experienced teachers and with school leaders formally recorded in meeting minutes. Teachers and school leaders were consulted as separate groups about the draft teacher hope and school leader hope surveys. The teachers were selected and consulted based on their knowledge about hope in the teacher, school leader and student context. School leaders

were selected and consulted based on their knowledge about hope in teacher and school leader contexts. The expert consultations with teachers and school leaders were used to refine, remove and add items to the final versions of two context-sensitive survey versions (one for teachers and one for school leaders). The final versions of surveys were designed to identify sources of and threats to hope.

## The Survey

Following the survey development, surveys were disseminated to a stratified sample of Alberta teachers and school leaders through the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), with whom we collaborated on this project. As the official professional body of Alberta teachers, the ATA recruited participants from their membership pool (~46,000) according to predetermined stratification criteria (eg, years of experience, geographic location, employing board and demographic characteristics). Surveys were distributed via email to a total of 3000 teachers and school leaders. The first surveys were distributed on April 11, 2022, with follow-up reminders on April 21, 2022 and April 29, 2022. The surveys closed on May 2, 2022. Total number of completed surveys was 561 with an overall response rate of 18.7 per cent. A total of 505 teachers completed the teacher survey and a total of 56 school leaders completed the school leader survey. Teachers included classroom teachers, online learning or combined online/offline teachers, and substitute teachers. School leaders included school leaders, individuals with combined school leadership and classroom duties, as well as those working in central office roles.

The research team did not have any direct contact with survey participants unless they provided consent and contact information for participation in the focus group portion of the project. All collected survey responses were anonymized and de-identified by the ATA before they were shared with the research team[1] via the Alchemer survey platform.

## The Focus Groups

Focus group questions were developed by RBH and DL based on response trends evident in the preliminary Alchemer analyses. Questions were selected with (a) high agreement among respondents and positive valence regarding hope (eg, there are moments at work that they feel hopeful; and, students are a source of hope); (b) strongly mixed responses among respondents (eg, feeling valued by society as a member of the teaching profession; and, feeling hopeful that things will get better despite current challenges); and (c) high respondent agreement but negative valence regarding hope (eg, that action or inaction by the government negatively impacts hope). A consistent set of questions was posed to all teacher focus groups. A second set of consistent focus group questions was posed to all school leader focus groups. Focus group participation was lower than hoped for. We surmise that recruitment was low because groups took place near the end of the school year (May/June). Recruitment for the school leader focus group was especially low in May (with only a single participant). As a result, follow-up recruitment advertisement was sent through the ATA requesting that school leaders participate in a focus group. This resulted in four additional school leader focus group members.

| Teacher Focus Groups | |
|---|---|
| Date | Number of Participants |
| May 5 | 1 |
| May 10 | 4 |
| Demographics of the teacher focus group members[2] | |
| 1 Male, 4 Female; 4 Urban, 1 Rural | |
| School Leader Focus Groups | |
| Date | Number of Participants |
| May 12 | 1 |
| June 23 | 3 |
| June 27 | 1 |
| Demographics of the school leaders teacher focus group members[3] | |
| 2 Male, 3 Female; 4 Urban, 1 Rural | |

These last four school leader focus group participants were provided with a copy of the school leader hope survey for review and reference prior to the focus group discussions. However, they were not asked to complete and submit the school leader focus group survey because survey recruitment had closed. Focus group sessions were one to two hours long with the focus groups having more than one member take more time.

## Qualitative Data Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data in this study involved analyzing 63 pages of teacher focus group data and 61 pages of school leader focus group data separately. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2012) thematic analysis (TA). TA includes a systematic approach to identifying and reporting patterns within data. It was ideal for this study because it can be used with varying methodological frameworks and complements the mixed methodology of this study wherein focus group questions were derived based on initial quantitative findings. Implementation of TA facilitates the organization of detailed, rich qualitative data into more easily apprehended formats (ie, categories and/or themes) using a six-step method that includes (a) becoming deeply familiar with the data, (b) generating open codes, (c) identifying themes within and across focus group interviews, (d) reviewing themes with auditors, (e) creating names for themes that reflect the data and, finally, (f) producing a report. As an example, the research team first became familiar with the data through conducting the focus groups, creating and reviewing transcripts and producing memos about initial impressions. In the teacher focus groups, open coding generated over 120 initial codes that related to threats to hope, which were then further clustered into six themes comprising the Threats to Hope category. Code and theme structure was reviewed by members of the research team to confirm themes reflected the data, and the report was written to provide an integration of qualitative and quantitative data.

# Key Findings

## QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

### Who participated?

Combining both school teacher and school leader responses, 561 Alberta educators completed the Hope Survey in the spring of 2022. Approximately three quarters were female, and three quarters were from public schools. One-quarter were males and one-quarter were from separate or Catholic school systems. Tables 1 and 2 below provide a more detailed breakdown of teacher and school leader participants by gender, type of employer and geographic background.



Gender
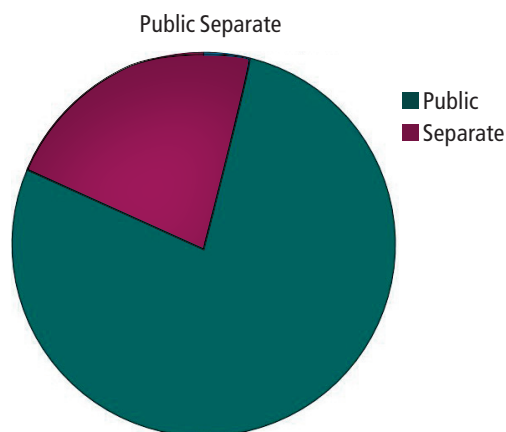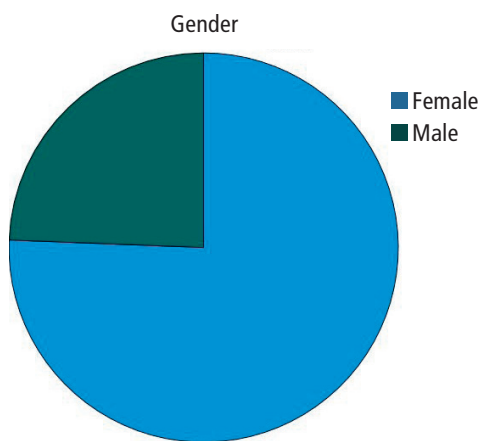


Public Separate

**Table 1: Total Teachers' Sample, Demographic Background, ATA Hope Survey, Frequencies, 2022**

| Number | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | **Public-Separate** | **Age** | **Geographic Location** |
| 467 (38 Declined to identify) | 500 | 500 | 500 |

| Female | Male | Public | Separate | Rural | Suburban | Urban |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 360 | 107 | 387 | 92 | 88 | 92 | 298 |

| 25- | 26-30 | 31-35 | 36-40 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51-55 | 56-60 | 61-65 | 65+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 11 | 37 | 62 | 69 | 80 | 88 | 76 | 36 | 14 | 6 |

**Table 2: Total School Leaders' Sample, Demographic Background, ATA Hope Survey, Frequencies, 2022**

| Number | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Public-Separate | Age | Geographic Location |
| 53 (3 Declined to identify) | 56 | 56 | 56 |

| Female | Male | Public | Separate | Rural | Suburban | Urban |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 34 | 19 | 43 | 12 | 11 | 10 | 34 |

| 25- | 26-30 | 31-35 | 36-40 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51-55 | 56-60 | 61-65 | 65+ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0 | 0 | 2 | 7 | 10 | 14 | 13 | 6 | 3 | 0 |

## Can educators make good changes at work?

Alberta teachers and school leaders were asked similar questions about their ability to make changes at work—"good" changes by teachers and "impactful" changes by school leaders. As tables 3 and 4 show, their responses were largely similar. About two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, and about one in five disagreed with the statement. No marked differences were apparent in teacher response patterns by gender. For school leaders, there was a small tendency for male school leaders to respond neutrally or negatively in contrast to female school leaders.

**Table 3: Hope and Teachers' Ability to Make Positive Changes at Work, Percentages by Gender, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Female | % Male | Total (N=467) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 6.9 | 13.3 | 8.4 |
| 2. Agree | 51.7 | 54.2 | 52.2 |
| 3. Neutral | 20.6 | 13.1 | 18.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 18.3 | 19.6 | 18.6 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 2.5 | 0.0 | 1.9 |

**Table 4: Hope and School Leaders' Ability to Make Impactful Changes at Work, Percentages by Gender, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Female | % Male | Total (N=53) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 20.6 | 15.6 | 18.9 |
| 2. Agree | 47.1 | 31.6 | 41.5 |
| 3. Neutral | 17.6 | 31.6 | 22.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 14.1 | 21.1 | 17.0 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |

## What are views about student engagement and problem-solving at work?

Teachers were asked if they had multiple ways of engaging with students and were resourceful when problem-solving at work. The vast majority (90 per cent) responded positively. There were virtually no differences between teachers employed by public school boards and teachers employed by Catholic school boards. Similar patterns were evident when teachers gave opinions about their resourcefulness when problem-solving at work.

**Table 5: Hope and Teachers' Views about Multiple Ways of Engaging Students, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Public Schools | % Separate Schools | Total (N=502) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 32.4 | 30.4 | 31.9 |
| 2. Agree | 58.9 | 59.8 | 59.2 |
| 3. Neutral | 5.4 | 6.8 | 5.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 3.9 | 3.3 | 2.8 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.6 |

**Table 6: Hope and Teachers' Views about Their Resourcefulness in Problem-solving, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Public Schools | % Separate Schools | Total (N=502) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 34.2 | 33.7 | 34.1 |
| 2. Agree | 60.4 | 59.8 | 60.3 |
| 3. Neutral | 3.1 | 4.3 | 3.4 |
| 4. Disagree | 2.1 | 2.2 | 2.0 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 3.0 | 0.0 | 0.2 |

**Table 7: Hope and School Leaders' Views about Building Relationships in School Community, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public Schools | % Separate Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 25.6 | 0.0 | 19.6 |
| 2. Agree | 60.5 | 83.3 | 66.1 |
| 3. Neutral | 4.7 | 16.7 | 7.1 |
| 4. Disagree | 4.7 | 16.7 | 7.1 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |

**Table 8: Hope and School Leaders' Views about Their Resourcefulness in Problem-Solving, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public Schools | % Separate Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 55.8 | 41.7 | 51.8 |
| 2. Agree | 41.9 | 58.3 | 46.4 |
| 3. Neutral | 2.3 | 0.0 | 1.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |

School leaders responded to similar questions in similar ways to teachers. The overwhelming majority of public-school leaders and Catholic school leaders reported having multiple ways of building relationships within the school community and being resourceful in their problem-solving. Approximately 85 per cent did not feel constrained in their ways of relationship-building, and 95 per cent attested to their resourcefulness in problem-solving.

## Do moments at work make educators feel hopeful?

Both teachers and school leaders were asked if they felt moments of hope at work? The assumption is that hope has emotional elements and can be transitory. When cross-tabulated, clear patterns emerged. Most teachers and school leaders experience moments of hope at work, with very few reporting that they did not. "I need to stay grounded, and remember that hope isn't something external to myself or others, "one teacher noted. "Rather, by showing up and helping children grow we are hope, whether we are capable of seeing it or not."

**Table 9: Hope and Teachers' Moments of Hopefulness, Percentages by Age, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | 25- | 26-30 | 31-35 | 36-40 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51-55 | 56-60 | 61-65 | 65+ | Total (N=501) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 18.2 | 13.2 | 19.4 | 13 | 13.8 | 18.2 | 14.3 | 25 | 28.6 | 50 | 17.2 |
| 2. Agree | 72.7 | 76.3 | 66.1 | 72.5 | 77.5 | 63.6 | 66.2 | 52.8 | 64.3 | 33.3 | 68.5 |
| 3. Neutral | 9.1 | 7.9 | 4.8 | 10.1 | 2.5 | 10.2 | 10.4 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 8.0 |
| 4. Disagree | 0.0 | 2.6 | 8.1 | 2.9 | 6.3 | 5.7 | 7.8 | 5.6 | 7.1 | 0.0 | 5.4 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.6 | 1.4 | 0.0 | 2.3 | 1.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.0 |

**Table 10: Hope and School Leaders' Moments of Hopefulness, Percentages by Age, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | 25- | 26-30 | 31-35 | 36-40 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51-55 | 56-60 | 61-65 | 65+ | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 0.0 | 100 | 0.0 | 14.3 | 50 | 21.4 | 30.8 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 32.1 |
| 2. Agree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 100 | 85.7 | 50 | 64.3 | 53.8 | 33.3 | 33.3 | 0.0 | 57.1 |
| 3. Neutral | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 7.7 | 0.0 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 5.4 |
| 4. Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 7.1 | 7.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 7.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.8 |

At the tail end of their career, between the ages 61 and 65, two-thirds of school leaders reported being neutral on the topic, whereas 85 to 100 per cent of those surveyed in their 30s agreed that they having hopeful moments at work. This facet of hope appears related to age, if not career stage.

## What are feelings about educator progress toward career goals?

Both teachers and school leaders were asked if they did not feel if they were progressing toward their career goals. Responses were reverse coded to retain the underlying direction of the hope survey. Overall, one-third of teachers agreed or strongly felt that they were making progress, but over half were neutral or disagreed that they were making progress. Teachers in urban areas were slightly more likely to report feeling a lack of progress than those in rural and suburban areas, but the differences were not large. For one teacher, "Knowledge that I will get a permanent teaching position" was key to their hopefulness. Another teacher stated, "Open discussion regarding my potential for promotion with my district" was part of creating hope.

**Table 11: Hope and Teachers' Feelings about Progress Toward Career Goals, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=501) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 5.5 | 6.5 | 8.7 | 7.6 |
| 2. Agree | 39.6 | 34.8 | 29.9 | 32.9 |
| 3. Neutral | 19.9 | 29.3 | 25.8 | 25.3 |
| 4. Disagree | 27.5 | 22.8 | 28.2 | 26.5 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 7.7 | 6.5 | 7.4 | 7.6 |

**Table 12: Hope and School leaders' Feelings about Progress Toward Career Goals, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 0.0 | 40 | 26.5 | 25.0 |
| 2. Agree | 27.3 | 30 | 29.4 | 28.6 |
| 3. Neutral | 36.4 | 20 | 17.6 | 21.4 |
| 4. Disagree | 27.3 | 10 | 17.6 | 17.9 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 9.1 | 0.0 | 8.8 | 7.1 |

For school leaders, a feeling of career progress was more evident in urban and suburban areas of the province, where 55 to 70 percent of school leaders reported feeling career progress. But only 27 per cent did so in rural areas. Seventy-three percent of rural school leaders were neutral or negative about a question asking them about feeling progress, whereas 43 to 45 per cent in suburban or urban areas did so.

## What are perceptions of workplace safety?

Both teachers and school leaders were asked identical questions about workplace safety in spring 2022. Although 72 per cent of teachers responded in the affirmative, nearly one in six did not. Moreover, female teachers were more likely to report workplace safety concerns. Alberta reverted back to prepandemic safety protocols in spring 2022.

**Table 13: Hope and Teachers' Perception of Safe Workplace, Percentages by Gender, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Female | % Male | Total (N=470) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 22.2 | 35.8 | 25.3 |
| 2. Agree | 47.9 | 44.0 | 47.0 |
| 3. Neutral | 13.3 | 8.3 | 12.1 |
| 4. Disagree | 13.6 | 10.1 | 12.8 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 3.0 | 0.6 | 2.8 |

**Table 14: Hope and School Leaders' Perception of Safe Workplace, Percentages by Gender, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Female | % Male | Total (N=53) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 35.3 | 21.1 | 30.2 |
| 2. Agree | 41.2 | 47.4 | 43.4 |
| 3. Neutral | 11.8 | 26.3 | 17.0 |
| 4. Disagree | 5.9 | 5.3 | 5.7 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 5.9 | 0.0 | 3.8 |

School leaders' perceptions of safety in the workplace generally match those of teachers, but they were slightly less concerned than teachers.

## How often do educators feel inspired by the work of others?

That hope is socially constructed is revealed by the degree to which others inspire them in the workplace. Inspiration elevates aspiration. Seventy-seven percent of Alberta teachers are inspired in the workplace by others. The patterns are similar in both public and separate schools.

**Table 15: Hope and Teachers' Inspiration from Others, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Public Schools | % Separate Schools | Total (N=502) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 20.3 | 15.2 | 19.1 |
| 2. Agree | 55.9 | 68.5 | 58.4 |
| 3. Neutral | 12.3 | 10.9 | 12.4 |
| 4. Disagree | 11.0 | 5.4 | 9.8 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.5 | 0.0 | 0.4 |

**Table 16: Hope and School Leaders' Inspiration from Others, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public Schools | % Separate Schools | Total (N=53) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 30.2 | 25.2 | 28.6 |
| 2. Agree | 46.5 | 41.7 | 46.4 |
| 3. Neutral | 11.6 | 16.7 | 12.5 |
| 4. Disagree | 11.6 | 0.0 | 9.9 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 16.7 | 3.6 |

School leaders' responses match teachers' reports overall. Three out of four Alberta school leaders derive inspiration from others in the workplace. In general, patterns were similar among public and separate school leaders.

## How often do teachers perceive educational models for hope?

Hope derives to some degree from educational role models. Professionals both exemplify and mimic hopefulness in others. Over 60 percent of teachers perceive educational models for hope. Nevertheless, nearly one in five do not. Overall response patterns are similar whether one works in public or separate schools.

**Table 17: Hope and Teachers' Perception of Models for Hope, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Public Schools | % Separate Schools | Total (N=502) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 11.1 | 9.8 | 10.8 |
| 2. Agree | 49.9 | 55.4 | 50.8 |
| 3. Neutral | 20.3 | 16.3 | 19.7 |
| 4. Disagree | 14.4 | 15.2 | 14.3 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 4.4 | 3.3 | 4.4 |

**Table 18: Hope and School Leaders' Perception of Models for Hope, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public Schools | % Separate Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 18.6 | 0.0 | 14.3 |
| 2. Agree | 51.2 | 33.3 | 48.2 |
| 3. Neutral | 11.6 | 50.0 | 19.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 7.0 | 8.3 | 7.1 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 11.6 | 8.3 | 10.7 |

Teachers' overall patterns of response closely matched those of school leaders. However, school leaders differed markedly in their perception of models for hope depending on whether they were employed by a public or separate school board. Whereas 70 per cent of public-school leaders perceived models for hope, 50 per cent were neutral in the Catholic school system. These differences call for further investigation, but because of the small school leader sample size, we should not overinterpret results.

## How often do students inspire hope?

Hope is not only conveyed from teachers to students. Reciprocally, teachers are inspired by their students. Such constructivist orientations demonstrate that inspiration elevates the aspirations of both teachers and students. Teachers, regardless of age, report the inspirational influence of students, and increasingly so as they age. Seventy-three percent of 25-year-old-and-younger teachers are inspired by students, but by the later stages of their career, the percentages climb to 90 per cent and even 100 per cent. "To see the positive effects of our teaching on our students (especially when they get to high school)," creates hope for one elementary teacher.

**Table 19: Teachers' Inspiration from Students for Hopefulness, Percentages by Age, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 25- | 26-30 | 31-35 | 36-40 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51-55 | 56-60 | 61-65 | 65+ | Total (N=501) |
| 1. Strongly Agree | 36.4 | 34.2 | 35.5 | 33.3 | 32.5 | 39.8 | 33.8 | 45.9 | 42.9 | 50 | 37.1 |
| 2. Agree | 36.4 | 55.3 | 53.2 | 56.5 | 56.3 | 53.4 | 54.5 | 37.9 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 51.8 |
| 3. Neutral | 9.1 | 10.5 | 8.1 | 10.1 | 6.3 | 1.1 | 9.1 | 13.5 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 7.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 9.1 | 0.0 | 3.2 | 0.0 | 5.0 | 3.4 | 2.6 | 2.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2.6 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 9.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2.3 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 7.1 | 0.0 | 1.0 |

**Table 20: School Leaders' Inspiration from Students for Hopefulness, Percentages by Age, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | 31-35 | 36-40 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51-55 | 56-60 | 61-65 | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 100 | 42.9 | 50 | 42.9 | 61.5 | 100 | 33.3 | 57.1 |
| 2. Agree | 0.0 | 57.1 | 50 | 50 | 23.1 | 0.0 | 60.7 | 37.5 |
| 3. Neutral | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 15.4 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 7.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.9 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |

Similar to teachers, Alberta school leaders are also inspired by students. Nearly 95 per cent of school leaders draw inspiration from students. We are close to a central element in teachers' and school leaders' reason for being in education, and a core source of hopefulness for these professionals.

## How do school leadership/board members support hope?

Teachers were asked if school leaders act on behalf of their interests and if trustees advocate for the best interests of schooling. In general, 55 per cent of teachers speak positively to school leaders taking actions on behalf of teachers About one in five disagree or disagree strongly with similar proportions remaining neutral. The picture is similar regardless of whether the teacher works in rural, suburban or urban Alberta.

Teachers are more reserved or negative when talking about advocacy by their employers. Over one-third of teachers agree that their trustees advocate for the best interests of schooling. Just

under one-third remain neutral, and just under one-third indicate they disagree or disagree strongly. These proportions are similar in rural, suburban or urban schools, with slightly more negative opinions in rural areas.

**Table 21: Hope and Teachers' Views of School Leaders' Actions, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=500) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 16.7 | 18.5 | 16.1 | 16.0 |
| 2. Agree | 37.9 | 46.7 | 37.6 | 39.4 |
| 3. Neutral | 24.4 | 18.5 | 23.2 | 22.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 13.3 | 10.9 | 15.1 | 14.0 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 20.0 | 7.8 | 5.4 | 8.0 |

**Table 22: Hope and Teachers' Views of Trustees' Advocacy, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=500) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 5.5 | 5.5 | 6.0 | 5.6 |
| 2. Agree | 34.1 | 28.6 | 34.6 | 33.8 |
| 3. Neutral | 24.2 | 37.4 | 28.5 | 29.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 26.4 | 20.9 | 20.1 | 20.6 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 9.9 | 7.7 | 10.7 | 10.0 |

School leaders were asked if they trust the person they report to at work, and if they believed that school trustees were advocating for the best interests of schooling. Fewer than two-thirds of school leaders trust the person to whom they report, and over 21 per cent distrust their superordinate. The overall picture is similar in rural and urban Alberta, but not in suburban parts of the province, where half of school leaders responded negatively to a statement about trust.

When it comes to school leaders' beliefs about their employer's advocacy, 58 per cent of school leaders agreed that trustees advocated for the best interests of schooling. But 21 per cent remained neutral, and 21 per cent did not believe trustees advocated appropriately. Opinion was more polarized between agreement and disagreement among suburban school leaders than those in rural or urban areas.

**Table 23: Hope and School Leaders' Trust in their Superordinate, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 27.3 | 30.0 | 26.5 | 26.8 |
| 2. Agree | 36.4 | 10.0 | 41.2 | 35.7 |
| 3. Neutral | 18.2 | 10.0 | 14.7 | 14.3 |
| 4. Disagree | 0.0 | 40.0 | 11.9 | 14.3 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 18.2 | 10.0 | 5.9 | 8.9 |

**Table 24: Hope and School Leaders' Views of Trustees' Advocacy, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 9.1 | 10.0 | 23.5 | 17.9 |
| 2. Agree | 54.5 | 50.0 | 32.4 | 39.3 |
| 3. Neutral | 18.2 | 10.0 | 23.5 | 21.4 |
| 4. Disagree | 18.2 | 20.0 | 5.9 | 10.7 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 10.0 | 14.7 | 10.7 |

## What about the ability of educators to turn to colleagues at work for help?

Teachers were asked about the availability of a colleague at work to turn to for help, and about whether they had a network they could turn to for help. Although there are slightly reduced percentages for rural teachers, overall trends are similar regardless of whether one teaches in a rural, suburban or urban setting. Between 83 and 90 per cent of teachers can draw on the support of colleagues.

Similarly, teachers have a broader network of contacts with whom they seek support. Urban and suburban teachers have those networks, whereas those in rural areas do not. About 14 per cent of rural teachers report not having networks, whereas the comparable percentages are 4 per cent to 7 per cent for suburban and urban-based teachers. As one teacher summarized, "To be surrounded by a strong, dependable support network (family, friends, colleagues)" is central to hope.

**Table 25: Hope and Teachers' Availability of Colleague for Support, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=502) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 42.2 | 35.9 | 34.4 | 36.7 |
| 2. Agree | 42.2 | 54.3 | 54.2 | 51.7 |
| 3. Neutral | 8.9 | 7.6 | 7.4 | 7.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 5.6 | 2.2 | 3.7 | 3.6 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 1.1 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.4 |

**Table 26: Hope and Teachers' Networks, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=502) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 29.7 | 34.8 | 30.4 | 31.5 |
| 2. Agree | 47.3 | 53.3 | 52.5 | 51.4 |
| 3. Neutral | 8.8 | 7.6 | 9.4 | 8.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 12.1 | 4.3 | 7.4 | 7.8 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 2.2 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.6 |

**Table 27: Hope and School Leader's Availability of Colleague for Support, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 9.1 | 40.0 | 35.3 | 30.0 |
| 2. Agree | 63.6 | 30.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 |
| 3. Neutral | 9.1 | 0.0 | 14.7 | 10.7 |
| 4. Disagree | 9.1 | 30.0 | 0.0 | 7.1 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 9.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.8 |

**Table 28: Hope and School Leaders' Networks, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 18.2 | 60.0 | 38.2 | 37.5 |
| 2. Agree | 45.5 | 10.0 | 44.1 | 39.3 |
| 3. Neutral | 18.2 | 10.0 | 5.9 | 8.9 |
| 4. Disagree | 9.1 | 20.0 | 11.8 | 12.5 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 9.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.8 |

School leadership has been called one of the loneliest of occupations. Yet overall, four out of five Alberta school leaders report having a colleague they can turn to in the workplace for support. Compared to rural and suburban school leaders, urban school leaders report higher levels of collegial availability. A similar difference exists in terms of professional network breadth; three-quarters of school leaders collectively report having broader networks, with a clear gradient increasing from rural to suburban to urban-based school leadership in networks for support.

### What are trust levels that things will get better despite difficulties at work?

Resilience is predicated on trust and persevering through difficulties. Succinctly put by one Alberta teacher, hope means "[s]ome belief that good things are coming." Both teachers and school leaders were asked a similar question about the hope that things will get better despite difficulties at work. In Alberta, 60 per cent of teachers believed that things would improve when surveyed in spring 2022. Public schoolteachers were slightly more optimistic than separate schoolteachers.

**Table 29: Hope and Teachers' Trust that Things will Get Better Despite Difficulties, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=500) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 9.3 | 5.4 | 8.2 |
| 2. Agree | 52.5 | 51.1 | 52.2 |
| 3. Neutral | 18.1 | 21.7 | 18.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 18.1 | 20.7 | 18.0 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 2.1 | 1.1 | 2.0 |

**Table 30: Hope and School Leaders' Trust that Things will Get Better Despite Difficulties, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 20.9 | 0.0 | 16.1 |
| 2. Agree | 34.9 | 41.7 | 37.5 |
| 3. Neutral | 16.3 | 25.0 | 17.9 |
| 4. Disagree | 20.9 | 25.0 | 21.4 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 7.0 | 8.3 | 7.1 |

School leaders in the two systems were more pessimistic than teachers. Fifty-five percent of public-school leaders compared with 42 per cent of separate school leaders were hopeful that things would improve. One in three school leaders in Catholic school systems were not hopeful that things would improve.

## Do educators feel their work is valued by society?

For one teacher, hope boiled down to four elements: "Opportunity, appreciation, connection, something to believe in." When asked if they felt whether their work was valued by society, neither public nor separate schoolteachers were positive. Fewer than a third responded positively, and about half responded negatively. This belief was shared equally by public and separate schoolteachers.

But when asked a question about whether work serves a larger purpose, 86 per cent to 90 per cent of teachers responded in the affirmative. Again, there was very little difference between public and separate schoolteachers in this regard.

**Table 31: Hope and Teachers' Feelings whether Work Valued by Society, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=503) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 3.8 | 4.3 | 4.0 |
| 2. Agree | 27.2 | 27.2 | 27.0 |
| 3. Neutral | 19.7 | 18.5 | 19.7 |
| 4. Disagree | 35.1 | 38.0 | 35.6 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 14.1 | 12.0 | 13.7 |

**Table 32: Hope and Teachers' About Work Serving a Larger Purpose, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=503) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 33.4 | 35.9 | 33.3 |
| 2. Agree | 52.2 | 54.3 | 53.2 |
| 3. Neutral | 8.5 | 8.7 | 8.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 4.9 | 0.0 | 3.8 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 1.0 | 1.1 | 1.2 |

**Table 33: Hope and School Leaders' Feelings whether Work Valued by Society, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 11.6 | 0.0 | 3.8 |
| 2. Agree | 32.6 | 25.0 | 27.2 |
| 3. Neutral | 27.9 | 25.0 | 19.7 |
| 4. Disagree | 23.3 | 41.7 | 35.1 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 4.7 | 8.3 | 14.1 |

**Table 34: Hope and School Leaders' About Work Serving a Larger Purpose, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 41.9 | 33.3 | 39.3 |
| 2. Agree | 53.5 | 58.3 | 55.4 |
| 3. Neutral | 4.7 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 0.0 | 8.3 | 1.8 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |

School leaders were even more pronounced in their views about whether their work was valued by society, or whether their work served a larger purpose. About 30 per cent affirmed that their work was valued by society, and nearly half believed that society did not value their work. On the other hand, approximately 95 per cent affirmed that their work served a larger purpose. Both public and separate school leaders shared nearly identical sentiments.

**Table 35: Hope and School Leaders' Views About Work Valued and Trusted by Students and Staff, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 34.9 | 25.0 | 32.1 |
| 2. Agree | 48.8 | 50.0 | 50.0 |
| 3. Neutral | 9.3 | 0.0 | 7.1 |
| 4. Disagree | 4.7 | 25.0 | 8.9 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 2.3 | 0.0 | 1.8 |

Another way of considering school leaders' belief in the value of their work is to look at response patterns to a question about whether they believe their work is valued by students and staff in the school. Four-fifths of Alberta school leaders affirmed that their work is valued by students and staff in the school. However, one-quarter of separate school leaders responded negatively.

### Do educators feel that they have what is needed to be effective at work?

Both teachers and school leaders were asked if they have what is needed to be effective at work. The need was not specified, nor was the notion of effectiveness. Teachers' responses were polarized, with 39 per cent responding in the affirmative and 46 per cent responding in the negative. Female teachers more often responded negatively than male teachers.

**Table 36: Hope and Teachers' Needs for an Effective Workplace, Percentages by Gender, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Female | % Male | Total (N=470) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 3.9 | 5.5 | 4.3 |
| 2. Agree | 31.9 | 45.9 | 35.1 |
| 3. Neutral | 16.6 | 7.3 | 14.5 |
| 4. Disagree | 34.6 | 29.4 | 33.4 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 13.0 | 11.9 | 12.8 |

**Table 37: Hope and School Leaders' Needs for an Effective Workplace, Percentages by Gender, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Female | % Male | Total (N=53) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 8.8 | 0.0 | 5.7 |
| 2. Agree | 41.2 | 52.6 | 45.3 |
| 3. Neutral | 23.5 | 15.8 | 20.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 26.5 | 15.8 | 22.6 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 15.8 | 5.7 |

School leaders responded more positively than did teachers to the identical question. Half of school leaders responded positively and about 28 responded negatively. There were no substantial variations between female and male school leaders except perhaps on the intensity of their expressions one way or another.

## What are feelings about support for health and well-being at work?

Both teachers and school leaders were asked about their ability to work in a healthy manner and attend to their own well-being at work.

Thirty percent of teachers feel it is impossible to approach work in a healthy manner. Female and male teachers are similar in their responses. When the question was slightly reworded to the ability to attend to their well-being at work, responses leaned toward the negative. About 55 per cent said they were unable to attend to their own well-being at work. Again, there were no differences between male and female teachers.

**Table 38: Hope and Teachers' Views about the Possibility of Working in Healthy Way, Percentages by Gender, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Female | % Male | Total (N=470) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 11.9 | 16.5 | 13.0 |
| 2. Agree | 39.9 | 42.2 | 40.4 |
| 3. Neutral | 17.7 | 13.8 | 16.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 24.9 | 22.9 | 24.5 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 5.5 | 4.6 | 5.3 |

**Table 39: Hope and Teachers' Views about Well-being at Work, Percentages by Gender, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Female | % Male | Total (N=471) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 3.0 | 8.3 | 4.2 |
| 2. Agree | 24.6 | 26.6 | 25.1 |
| 3. Neutral | 17.1 | 11.9 | 15.9 |
| 4. Disagree | 37.8 | 38.5 | 38.0 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 17.4 | 14.7 | 16.8 |

**Table 40: Hope and School Leaders' Views about the Possibility of Working in Healthy Way, Percentages by Gender, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Female | % Male | Total (N=470) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 17.6 | 15.8 | 17.0 |
| 2. Agree | 41.2 | 42.1 | 41.5 |
| 3. Neutral | 14.7 | 31.6 | 20.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 20.6 | 0.0 | 13.2 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 5.9 | 10.5 | 7.5 |

**Table 41: Hope and School Leaders' Views about Well-being at Work, Percentages by Gender, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Female | % Male | Total (N=53) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 8.8 | 0.0 | 5.7 |
| 2. Agree | 29.4 | 36.8 | 32.1 |
| 3. Neutral | 17.6 | 36.8 | 24.5 |
| 4. Disagree | 29.4 | 21.1 | 26.4 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 14.7 | 5.3 | 11.3 |

When school leaders were asked similar questions, their overall responses were similar about the (im)possibilities of working healthily. However, male school leaders were more equivocal, responding more neutrally and not indicating the impossibility of working in a healthy manner as frequently as female school leaders. Like teachers, school leaders responded more negatively to the question about attending to one's own well-being at work. About equal percentages (37 per cent) responded positively and negatively to the question. But similar to teacher responses, school leader responses differed significantly between the genders, with female school leaders much more forthcoming in disagreement while male school leaders were more so neutral or reluctant to respond negatively.

## What role does spirituality play in hope?

Hope has for long been associated with spirituality. Both teachers and school leaders were asked whether hope arises when they touch the spiritual. Unsurprisingly perhaps, about two-thirds of Catholic teachers report that hope is associated with their spiritual side, whereas about one-third of public-school teachers do so. As one separate schoolteacher indicated, "My connection with God and His Son Jesus Christ. My family" all gave her hope. At the same time, about 38 per cent of public-school teachers are neutral on the topic, whereas approximately 14 per cent of separate schoolteachers are. Note: spirituality is different than religious belief.

**Table 42: Hope and School Teachers' Spirituality, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=502) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 12.5 | 20.9 | 13.7 |
| 2. Agree | 17.9 | 46.2 | 22.5 |
| 3. Neutral | 38.1 | 14.3 | 34.3 |
| 4. Disagree | 16.4 | 11.0 | 15.5 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 15.1 | 7.7 | 13.9 |

**Table 43: Hope and School Leaders' Spirituality, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 14.0 | 25.0 | 16.1 |
| 2. Agree | 7.0 | 58.3 | 17.9 |
| 3. Neutral | 51.2 | 8.3 | 41.1 |
| 4. Disagree | 7.0 | 8.3 | 7.1 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 20.9 | 0.0 | 17.9 |

Differences between public school and separate school leaders are more pronounced than they are for teachers. Eighty-three percent of Catholic school leaders affirm that spirituality imparts hope, whereas only 21 per cent of public school leaders agree or strongly agree that hope arises when they touch their spiritual side. Forty-one percent of public-school leaders remain neutral on the topic, and 25 per cent disagree that hope is associated with spirituality. One principal summarizes her definition of hope in three words: "Pray, read, laugh."

## How do families of students impact professionals' hope?

Educators must attend to the aspirations of parents. The survey asked both teachers and school leaders to report on whether families of students know that teachers are working on behalf of their son's/daughter's best interests. Approximately four in five teachers indicated they do so. Overall patterns are similar in all geographic regions in the province except for rural teachers, where parental influence is slightly lower. In one teacher's constructivist view, hope derives primarily from, "Relationships with my students and their families that I feel are positive and that I am making an impact."

**Table 44: Hope and Family Impact in Teachers' Classrooms, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=501) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 23.1 | 19.8 | 22.7 | 22.2 |
| 2. Agree | 49.5 | 60.4 | 58.2 | 56.7 |
| 3. Neutral | 15.4 | 14.3 | 10.7 | 12.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 9.9 | 4.4 | 7.0 | 7.0 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 2.2 | 1.1 | 1.3 | 1.4 |

**Table 45: Hope and Family Impact on Schools, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 9.1 | 50.0 | 17.6 | 23.2 |
| 2. Agree | 72.7 | 20.0 | 52.9 | 50.0 |
| 3. Neutral | 18.2 | 20.0 | 23.5 | 21.4 |
| 4. Disagree | 0.0 | 10.0 | 5.9 | 5.4 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 9.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |

When we move the lens to the whole school level, school leaders report similar trends. Just under three-quarters of school leaders report overall family impact on feelings of hope. Although there are some variations in various geographic locations, the general pattern appears similar whether school leaders are based in rural, suburban or urban Alberta.

## What are perceptions of trust in reporting relationships?

Trust in reporting relationships may be seen as a precondition for hopefulness. Teachers were asked if they trusted the person to whom they report at work. Most often, that is the principal.

Two-thirds of teachers overall responded affirmatively, but nearly one-in-five responded negatively. Little difference was evident in that regard between public school and separate school employees. When teachers were asked whether their principal understands the challenges they face at work, responses followed a similar pattern, but with slightly more negative appraisals. Approximately 60 per cent of teachers reported that their principal understood their challenges, but 20 per cent reported that the principal did not. Public and separate schoolteachers were nearly identical in their response patterns.

**Table 46: Hope and School Teachers' Trust, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=500) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 24.9 | 23.1 | 23.8 |
| 2. Agree | 42.1 | 40.7 | 41.6 |
| 3. Neutral | 13.6 | 16.5 | 14.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 13.3 | 13.2 | 13.2 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 6.2 | 6.6 | 6.6 |

**Table 47: Hope and School Teachers' Confidence that Principal Understands their Challenges, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=502) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 22.6 | 25.0 | 22.3 |
| 2. Agree | 37.7 | 34.8 | 37.5 |
| 3. Neutral | 13.3 | 12.0 | 13.1 |
| 4. Disagree | 16.4 | 19.6 | 16.9 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 10.0 | 8.7 | 10.2 |

**Table 48: Hope and School Leaders' Trust in Superordinate, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 32.6 | 8.3 | 26.8 |
| 2. Agree | 39.5 | 16.7 | 35.7 |
| 3. Neutral | 11.6 | 25.0 | 14.3 |
| 4. Disagree | 7.0 | 41.7 | 14.3 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 9.3 | 8.3 | 8.9 |

**Table 49: Hope and School Leaders' Confidence in Senior Administration, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 16.7 | 0.0 | 12.7 |
| 2. Agree | 38.1 | 25.0 | 36.4 |
| 3. Neutral | 11.9 | 8.3 | 10.9 |
| 4. Disagree | 19.0 | 41.7 | 23.6 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 14.3 | 25.0 | 16.4 |

When school leaders were asked if they trusted their superordinate at work, nearly half agreed overall. However, one in four reported that they did not. School leaders in the separate school systems were decidedly more apt to respond negatively or neutrally, with three-quarters of them falling into these categories. Nearly half of Alberta school leaders expressed confidence that their senior administration understood the challenges and difficulties they face, but 39 per cent overall did not. Two-thirds of separate school leaders did not believe that senior administration understood the school leader's challenges and difficulties.

### What are beliefs about school leaders', school divisions', and government's (in) actions and hope?

Hope-action theory suggests that our actions and inactions are crucial, not only for the actor but for the observer. Rather than upholding a wishful or passive notion of hope, the concept takes on meaning only when there are actual behaviours. Both Alberta teachers and school leaders were asked a series of questions about (in)activity by others and building or diminishing one's sense of hope.

Without action-oriented hope, striving for success may seem futile, planning for the future may feel like a waste of time and setting goals can seem meaningless. With hope, self-reflection to develop self-clarity makes sense, creating a vision of future possibilities has purpose, setting goals and making plans is meaningful, and taking action is logical. Adjusting plans is expected and adaptive (Niles, Hyoyeon and Amundson 2014).

As one Alberta teacher reported, "I need action, not words. I also need truth, even when the truth seems a little hopeless. Most of all I need the time and the work I do with children to be honored and valued; even by people in education who maybe say "it's all about the kids" but don't really live that truth. I just want the heart of this work to be what we focus upon. Education has become so politically charged, it's easy to lose hope."

Over half of Alberta teachers see school leaders' (in)actions as imparting hope. The trend is consistent across the province, regardless of the geographic setting in which the teacher is based. Also of note are the one in five teachers who remain neutral and 16 per cent to 23 per cent who disagree. Many teachers commented on the centrality of government for creating hope. For example, one teacher underlined, "A government that supports and trusts me. A possible vision of a positive future." When asking about the (in)actions of the school division, as noted in Table 51, teachers are univocal. Between 88 per cent to 90 per cent of Alberta teachers uphold the notion that (in) actions affect their hopefulness.

Likewise, as shown in Table 52, teachers consistently view government (in)actions as impacting their hopefulness. One teacher wrote, "Moral, honest, informed governing bodies: government, superintendents, principal" gave her hope. Well over 93 per cent in every geographic location affirm that government's (in)action impacts their hopefulness. Note: the question did not ask teachers to identify which level of government, whether municipal, provincial or federal.

**Table 50: Hope and Teachers' Views of School Leader (In)action, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=501) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 16.7 | 18.5 | 16.1 | 16.0 |
| 2. Agree | 37.8 | 46.7 | 37.6 | 39.4 |
| 3. Neutral | 24.4 | 18.5 | 23.2 | 22.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 13.3 | 10.9 | 15.1 | 14.0 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 7.8 | 5.4 | 8.1 | 8.0 |

**Table 51: Hope and Teachers' Views of School Division (In)action, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 36.3 | 29.3 | 37.8 | 36.3 |
| 2. Agree | 52.7 | 59.8 | 51.5 | 53.2 |
| 3. Neutral | 8.8 | 7.6 | 8.0 | 7.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 1.1 | 2.2 | 1.3 | 1.4 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.3 | 1.4 |

**Table 52: Hope and Teachers' Views of Government (In)action, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=501) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 64.8 | 60.4 | 69.9 | 67.7 |
| 2. Agree | 28.6 | 30.8 | 24.4 | 26.1 |
| 3. Neutral | 3.3 | 4.4 | 3.0 | 3.2 |
| 4. Disagree | 1.1 | 1.1 | 1.3 | 1.2 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 2.2 | 3.3 | 1.3 | 1.8 |

**Table 53: Hope and School Leader's Views of School Division (In)action, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 27.3 | 30.0 | 35.3 | 32.1 |
| 2. Agree | 54.5 | 50.0 | 50.0 | 50.0 |
| 3. Neutral | 18.2 | 10.0 | 5.9 | 10.7 |
| 4. Disagree | 0.0 | 10.0 | 5.9 | 5.4 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 2.9 | 1.8 |

**Table 54: Hope and School Leaders' Views of Government (In)action, Percentages by Geographic Location, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Rural Schools | % Suburban Schools | % Urban Schools | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 45.5 | 50.0 | 61.8 | 57.1 |
| 2. Agree | 45.5 | 40.0 | 29.4 | 33.9 |
| 3. Neutral | 9.1 | 0.0 | 2.9 | 3.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 0.0 | 10.0 | 5.9 | 5.4 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |

School leaders were also asked questions about whether school division actions and inactions affect their feelings of hope. Like teachers, they consistently indicated that the school division employer and the government's (in)actions affect their feelings of hope at work. Between 80 and 90 per cent of school leaders noted that (in) actions relate to their own hope, as observers of other levels of administration and governance.

Action theories of hope appeal to teachers and school leaders because they emphasize concrete and nonpassive approaches. As practitioners, professional educators value actions more so than theory.

## What are perceptions about the government's valuing educators' work?

Teachers and school leaders were asked for their views about whether the government values their work. Again, the level of government was not specified—whether federal, provincial, or municipal. Because the Canadian constitution assigns provinces the responsibility for education, it is likely that most educators had the provincial government in mind, even though municipal governments collect property taxes for educational purposes, and the federal government is responsible for Indigenous education.

Teachers responding to the survey were overwhelmingly negative in their views about whether the government values their work. Eighty-eight percent of teachers disagreed with a statement about whether government values their work, a pattern that applies in both public and separate systems. Frequently, teachers commented on an absence of government intrusion gave them hope: "Keep letting me do my job…I love it!"

**Table 55: Hope and Teachers' Views of Government's Valuing their Work, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=500) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 0.8 | 1.1 | 0.8 |
| 2. Agree | 5.1 | 1.1 | 4.2 |
| 3. Neutral | 6.2 | 9.8 | 6.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 21.5 | 21.7 | 21.5 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 66.4 | 66.3 | 66.7 |

**Table 56: Hope and School Leaders' Views of Government's Valuing of Their Work, Percentages by Type of Employer, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | % Public | % Separate | Total (N=56) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Strongly Agree | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| 2. Agree | 4.7 | 0.0 | 3.6 |
| 3. Neutral | 2.3 | 0.0 | 1.8 |
| 4. Disagree | 27.9 | 33.3 | 28.6 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 65.1 | 66.7 | 66.1 |

Likewise, school leaders hold virtual identical views to teachers, but perhaps in a more accentuated manner. Between 92 per cent to

95 per cent have negative opinions about the government's values for educators' professional work, a trend that applies in both public and separate school systems.

## What are perceptions about the school board's values for educators' work?

Teachers and school leaders were also asked about the value that the school board put on their work, as a source of hope. Two-thirds of teachers overall were positive or neutral, but over one-third were negative. There were no clear trends or gradients by age, except for those over age 65 to respond in the affirmative, and the willingness of those under age 25 to be neutral or negative.

**Table 57: Hope and Teachers' Views of Government's Valuing their Work, Percentages by Age, 2022**

| Responses of Teachers | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 25- | 26-30 | 31-35 | 36-40 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51-55 | 56-60 | 61-65 | 65+ | Total |
| 1. Strongly Agree | 18.2 | 2.6 | 3.2 | 4.3 | 5.1 | 10.2 | 10.4 | 10.8 | 7.1 | 0.0 | 6.9 |
| 2. Agree | 18.2 | 42.1 | 41.9 | 34.8 | 36.7 | 36.4 | 37.7 | 35.1 | 57.1 | 83.0 | 38.9 |
| 3. Neutral | 27.3 | 31.6 | 21.0 | 17.4 | 20.3 | 23.9 | 18.2 | 8.1 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 19.6 |
| 4. Disagree | 36.4 | 13.2 | 21.0 | 26.1 | 27.8 | 18.2 | 22.1 | 29.7 | 35.7 | 0.0 | 22.4 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | 0.0 | 10.5 | 12.0 | 17.4 | 10.1 | 11.4 | 11.7 | 16.2 | 0.0 | 16.7 | 12.4 |

**Table 58: Hope and School Leaders' Views of School Division's Valuing their Work, Percentages by Age, 2022**

| Responses of School Leaders | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 25- | 26-30 | 31-35 | 36-40 | 41-45 | 46-50 | 51-55 | 56-60 | 61-65 | Total |
| 1. Strongly Agree | | | 0.0 | 28.6 | 30.0 | 7.1 | 15.4 | 66.7 | 0.0 | 21.4 |
| 2. Agree | | | 100.0 | 57.1 | 40.0 | 57.1 | 53.8 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 48.2 |
| 3. Neutral | | | 0.0 | 14.3 | 30.0 | 0.0 | 15.4 | 0.0 | 33.3 | 12.5 |
| 4. Disagree | | | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 14.3 | 7.7 | 0.0 | 66.7 | 8.9 |
| 5. Strongly Disagree | | | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | 21.4 | 7.7 | 16.7 | 0.0 | 8.9 |

When school leaders were asked to give an estimation of the value that their employer placed on their work, over two-thirds believed that their work was valued, but one in six did not (17 per cent). Two-thirds of those between the ages of 61 to 65 responded in the negative, whereas 100 per cent of those between 31 and 35 responded in the affirmative.

## How is hope constructed?

To identify which factors explain the hopefulness of teachers, we distilled the 29 teacher variables into three principal components that explained most of the variation in teacher ratings. Similar procedures were not applied to the school leaders' survey because the sample size was too small at 56 respondents, whereas the teacher survey featured over 500 respondents.

Two techniques were used to reduce, extract and identify the underlying elements or perceptions in the hope survey of Alberta teachers: a) principal components analysis, and b) multidimensional scaling of proximities data. The first technique looks at intercorrelation patterns in the data. The second looks at teachers' perceptions of which questions are similar in "distance" from each other by compressing multiple dimensions into a two-dimensional matrix. For the principal components analysis, we discovered three underlying variables that explain nearly half of the variance in how teachers responded. The three variables strongly intercorrelate, whether negatively or positively and demonstrate the interactive nature of hope construction. Caution is required as correlations do not equal causality:

1.  A **professional self-efficacy factor** that accounted for 33 per cent of the variance in hope scores. This variable includes teachers' trust that things will get better at work despite difficulties, feeling safe at work, their ability to do good work, their ability to attend to their health at work, the possibility of approaching their work in a healthy way and having what they need to be effective at work.

2.  A **school leadership factor** that accounted for eight per cent of the variance. This variable includes school principals' understanding, teachers' trust in the person to whom they report, and the school leader's actions and inactions.

3.  A **collegial support factor** that accounted for approximately seven per cent of the variance. This variable includes inspiration by others, a supporting network, the sense teachers can turn to a colleague for support and the sense they are working for a larger purpose.

## What are threats to hope?

For a multidimensional construct called hope, we can map its attributes by looking at teachers' perceptions of the survey questions and how they cluster on a two-dimensional map. Distances can be calculated between the center point of hope to the various items on a survey. More distal items are peripheral or threats to hope whereas those closer to the center point at 0.0 are more germane, perhaps more generative. Questions that cluster together are perceived as related. Those that are widely separated are viewed as dissimilar. Caution is required: distances in graphs for neither organizational

perception nor values commitment are synonymous with causation.

Dimension 1 appears to be an **organizational setting scale** that positions perceptions along a distal government actions, to school division, to school and trustee, to school leadership, to family, to personal axis from left to right. Dimension 2 appears to be a **values commitment scale** that moves from exogenous agencies' apparent commitment to the educational enterprise, on top, through to endogenous or teachers' internal commitments with others, on bottom. That these scales are

interpretable, thus intelligible, suggests that hope is a rational and not a haphazard construct.

The further each point is from the center point, the more prone it is perceived as a potential threat to hope. The closer the survey item is to the center point at 0–0, the more it is perceived as associated with hope. In other words, the threats to hope lie in the outside belt or ring of elements on the periphery; and the zone wherein hope resides lies near the target centre of this map, and this project. Outliers such as spirituality and the government's valuing of teachers' work deserve further consideration as survey items.



Derived Stimulus Configuration
Euclidean distance model
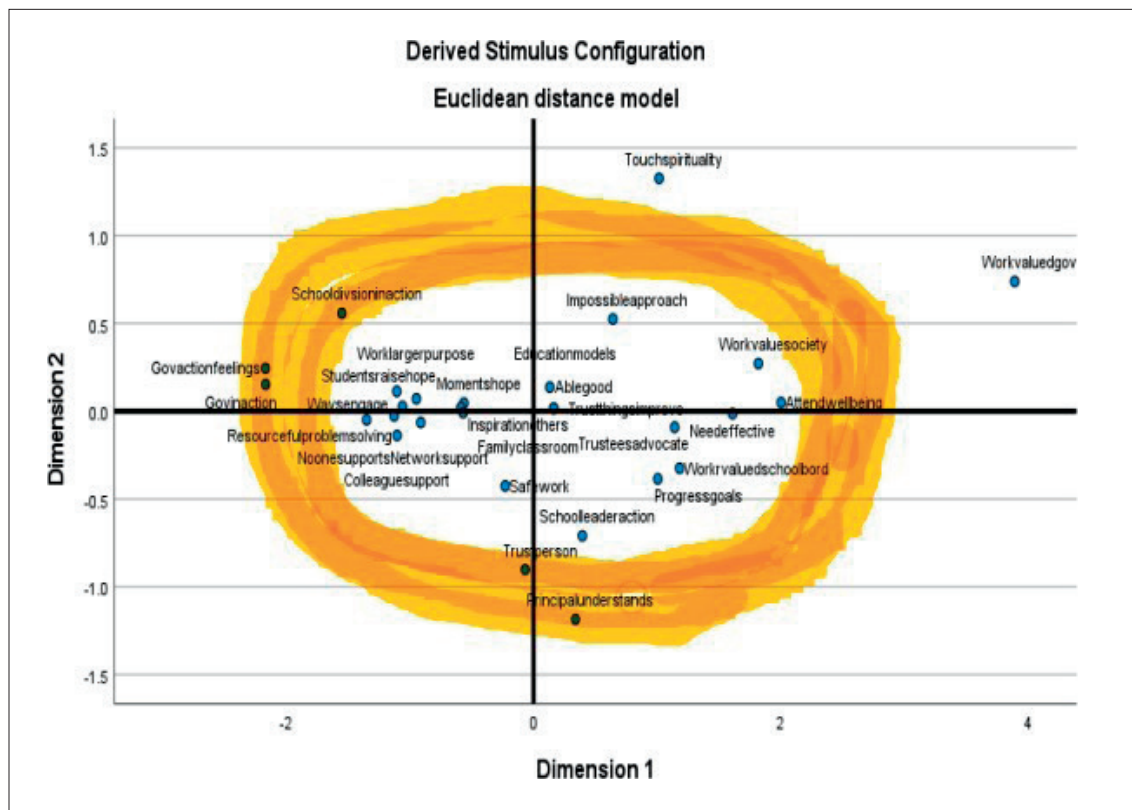
## INTEGRATED QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

As described above, through this mixed-methods explanatory approach, survey respondents had the opportunity to volunteer to participate in a follow-up focus group. Qualitative focus group interviews were intended to illuminate quantitative findings by providing additional depth and explanation to the survey findings. Focus group questions were shaped by initial descriptive analysis of survey responses to allow for integration of quantitative and qualitative findings. Focus group participants were asked to expand on their experiences with regards to various significant findings, and to comment on their perceptions regarding trends observed in the quantitative data.

Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2012) Thematic Analysis (TA). TA "is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set" (p 57). A structured yet flexible approach that involves focusing on meaning across a data set, TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences. TA was also particularly suited for this mixed-methods study, given that coding and analysis typically involve some combination of inductive and deductive approaches while also adopting a constructionist deductive stance (Braun and Clarke 2012).

This was particularly important given the inductive and theory-driven nature of the current research. Existing theory and research on the topic of hope within education and work/career informed survey development, yet we were also seeking to understand the process and experience of hope for teachers. Qualitative findings are presented here with an integration of key quantitative results, which informed focus group questions and which connect to the explanatory purpose of the qualitative findings. Not all themes have a direct parallel to the quantitative findings, owing to the dual inductive and deductive nature of the analysis.

We begin here by outlining sources of hope, first for teachers and second for school leaders, before moving to describe where teachers and school leaders experience threats to hope in their work. While there are similarities between teacher and school leader experiences, there are also key differences that highlight the unique roles and responsibilities for each.

### Sources of Hope: Factors that Fuel or Sustain Teacher Hope

Initial quantitative results revealed a strong agreement among teachers that they were able to experience moments of hopefulness during their work, with the majority of teachers agreeing (68 per cent) or strongly agreeing (17 per cent, see Table 9, p 18) with the statement that there are moments in their work where they feel hopeful. A broad question to begin the focus groups was the request that teachers tell us about those moments when they feel hopeful. Qualitative analysis highlighted themes across these examples of hopeful moments. In the overall category of Sources of Hope, three themes emerged: student success and resilience, building a better future and supportive leadership.

The theme of **student success and resilience** highlights how witnessing student

accomplishments and persistence in the face of challenges fuels teacher hope. One teacher shared *"When they tell me they like an activity, that gives me hope that I'm going in the right direction, that they're engaged. When they're able to figure something out on their own, that gives me hope for them going forward in their school career."* Seeing students succeed, whether teachers directly affected this change or not, was a source of hope.

Another teacher shared an example of a specific student whose growth over the year sparked hope: *"I have a little girl, just reflecting back from September, she was struggling with numbers, like representation and counting and proper order, and to now where she's using number lines to help her subtract double digits, so that was a hopeful moment like, 'Yes! She's doing it, she's got this, at her own pace.'"*

Another teacher described the sense of commitment shared within the classroom community, despite the many challenges of the past years: *"They're still going to show up tomorrow and I'm still going to show up tomorrow. And that just brings me a lot of hope and a lot of joy because even though we've been through it all and we talk about how adults, all the stuff we've been through, we don't talk enough about what the kids have been through and the fact that they continue to show up every single day, in whatever way that means. Sometimes it's not positive, right, but they still come here and school continues to be that safe space for them. And I think that that's really special."*

This aligns with the survey finding that 90 per cent of teachers agreed with the statement that students raise their hope, with the strongest agreement (up to 100 per cent) among more experienced teachers (see Table 19, p 21). As one more experienced teacher shared *"I think even things like, once they graduate high school and just seeing where they're going, even that they end up in the program they want and never thank anyone for that, like they still got there. Like either we helped them along the way or we stayed out of their way and didn't screw them up. So like, either way, they got where they needed to go."* Seeing students succeed both within and beyond the public school system was a strong source of hope for teachers.

In the theme of **building a better future**, teachers described feeling hopeful when they connected the current actions or learning of their students to the prospect of a better future and the power their students have to make the world a better place. This aligns with survey data that shows over 86 per cent of teachers either agree or strongly agree with the statement that their work serves a larger purpose (see Table 32, p 25).

For example, one teacher explained, *"When I think about getting hope from students, really, we know that we are helping to form the next generation of leaders, as we come through, and so when I see one of my students being able to overcome their anger or overcome their frustration when they have a struggle, gives me hope for the future because, if I can support them in learning how to be a better person in our classroom, it's my hope that they'll be able to take that and transfer that."* There was a sense that teachers felt a deep hope for the future through their connections with students. Another teacher shared, *"It's nice to have those opportunities where you actually make a difference and you see it's actually impacting*

them, and it brings a lot of hope from them, just because they realize that things in the past are wrong and we can all do better."

There was an element of students inspiring hope in their teachers, for example, *"seeing kids view injustices and wanting to make sure that those things don't continue to happen, that also gives me a lot of hope"* as one teacher described. Witnessing students' hope in action created a hopeful experience among teachers.

Overall teachers described having colleagues and leaders that inspired or supported their hope. In the final theme, focus group participants highlighted how, in particular, supportive leadership was a source of hope. In terms of both actions and direct expressions of support, appreciation, trust, and positive acknowledgement of teachers and their work from leaders at varying levels (school leaders, board members, superintendents), **supportive leadership** fuels teacher hope and empowers them in their work for students. This theme provides important elaboration on the survey findings around teachers' perceptions of trust and support from school leaders. As described above, 65 per cent of teachers said that they trust their school leader (see Table 46, p 30) while 60 per cent agree or strongly agree with the statement that their principal understands their challenges at work.

One teacher spoke specifically about the importance of their principal in supporting hope: *"I'm very, very lucky to have like two awesome principals who are constantly offering words of encouragement or just acknowledgement that you've done something awesome, which really goes a long way. There's a lot of trust with the staff, so it's nice that we*

have the freedom to do what we want within a framework, but also knowing that if I had any kind of issue or question or concern, I could go to my admin team and just know that I could work with them, and that makes me hopeful going forward too, that I have that team supporting me through that." Another teacher also highlighted the importance of the leadership within the school in sustaining hope: *"I changed to a whole new school just to have a different experience and totally different type of style of instructional leadership and I've never felt more support this year than I have, and I've been teaching over 20 years. So, to actually have the level of support that I have in this final year of COVID, way more supported than I've been at any other school."* This has important implications for the profession, as school leader support has such an impact for teachers, school leaders must themselves be supported in order to remain a source of hope in their school communities.

Others spoke about the value of support for teachers from higher levels of educational administration so that they can best support the students they have direct contact with day to day: *"It's not just the board, it's the superintendent that's willing to work with teachers and respects the work that they do. So my mantra's always been, you know, if you support the teachers—that's what the board's role is, to support teachers and support employees—if they support us, then we can support the children, right? The board shouldn't be coming in and saying "we're here for students." No, you're here for your employees, you're here for the parents, you're here for the public, and then we'll be here for the children, right? So when they have that mantra, it's supportive, and it reflects in how everyone acts, everywhere."*

These qualitative findings provide further explanation of the survey results, which indicated that school leader actions impacted teacher hope (over 55 per cent agree or strongly agree, while 22 per cent were neutral, see Table 50, p 32) while approximately 90 per cent of teachers agree or strongly agree (see Table 51, p 32) that (in)actions of the school division affect their hope. Another teacher explained, *"I find when the board supports teachers, that gives teachers the chance to support kids and the hope translates that you're not having a two-way fight, it's not like there's something happening at the board level that's affecting you at the school level and then also having to do your job as well. [...] when your employer supports the work that you do and likes the work that you do, it just makes your work easier."* Feeling supported in their work, at various levels of leadership, was key to teacher hope.

Understanding sources of hope for teachers and school leaders is essential to supporting their hope. While there are many similarities between teacher and school leader experiences of hope, there are also unique elements for each. In the following section we outline the sources of hope described by school leaders.

## Sources of Hope —Factors that Fuel or Sustain School Leader Hope

There were more themes in the category of Sources of Hope for school leaders than there were for teachers, with a total of five themes under this category for school leaders: supporting struggling students to succeed, moving forward as a school community, feeling valued as an educator, supportive leadership, and trusting relationships with staff. Overall these themes provide further evidence to

support the survey findings that school leaders feel able to make impactful changes in their schools, with just over 60 per cent of school leaders agreeing or strongly agreeing, while 22 per cent of school leaders were neutral (see Table 4, p 16).

In the focus groups, school leaders highlighted the sense of hope that came from **supporting struggling students to succeed**. The process of supporting students who face challenges in their learning fueled school leader hope. This theme provides further depth to the survey findings that school leaders overwhelmingly agreed with the statement that they were resourceful in solving problems at work (98 per cent, see Table 8). Similarly to teachers, the vast majority of school leaders experience students as a source of hope (~95 per cent, see Table 20, p 21).

As one school leader explained: *"You'll see a student who is so struggling in inclusion, you know maybe they have been diagnosed with autism or they have a significant medical issue or a cognitive delay, and we're able to support them to the extent where they see success. It's so rewarding. And I mean, those parents, when they see the success for the kids too, it's like nothing else."*

Problem-solving also involved addressing impacts of the pandemic on student learning, where school leaders' resourcefulness in implementing plans supported hope: *"We had three full-time interventionists this year in the staff, so we were pulling all kinds of kids out and helping them get past that learning gap that they had, so we had these difficulties come up, but our school was well positioned to tackle those and they turned into bringing us hope that we, we were very hopeful and we did very well in bringing*

*these kids along so that the effects of the past weren't as noticeable on them by the end of this year."* Another school leader stated succinctly, *"Hope is when we see struggling learners achieve success with all of the work that we're putting [in]."*

The theme **moving forward as a school community** consists of school leaders' descriptions of the challenges associated with the pandemic in their respective schools. School leaders described finding hope in the sense of coming together and pulling through as a school community, tapping into the potential of schools as a hub within the larger community. One school leader described the importance of the school as a source of hope and community within a local area: *"Those things that really created our school culture and brought in our community, I think that's part of what gives our school hope, because schools aren't meant to be in isolation; they're the hub of the community, they're the hub of families, and when you take that away, I hate to equate it—it's like being in a prison. COVID showed us that. We worked in isolation, and that's not what schools are meant to be, and that's not how schools create hope."*

Another school leader explained that the sense of coming together to weather the challenges of the pandemic was a hopeful experience: *"Being hopeful that it's in tough times that we get to display our character the best, it's not during easy times, and reminding ourselves that we're in this together and we're bending but we're not breaking, we're doing a great job and we're hopeful that we're gonna get through this as a community together, and come out of the other side of it really displaying the fine character and things that we have, and over the last couple*

*months we've been celebrating that in the school, saying, "We did this" and we're looking forward."* Having come through a challenging time together as a school community strengthened a sense of hope among school leaders. This theme aligns with survey results that show that the majority of school leaders (82 per cent, see Table 35, p 26) feel valued by students and staff, and that they are skilled in building relationships within their school community (85 per cent agree or strongly agree, see Table 7, p 17). Slightly more than teachers, school leaders feel that their work is valued by society, and at the same time school leaders strongly endorse (over 95 per cent, see Table 34, p 26) that their work serves a higher purpose. The following theme provides further explanation to these quantitative findings.

The theme of **feeling valued as an educator** captured school leaders' enhanced hope when receiving words of thanks from parents and students that communicate the value of the work of school leaders. This theme is a hopeful contrast to findings regarding threats to hope, (see subsequent section), reflecting the mere 30 per cent of school leaders who felt their work was valued by society (see Table 33, p 26). The theme of feeling valued as an educator also connected to survey findings regarding the belief of 73 per cent of school leaders that parents know that school leaders are working for the best of their students (see Table 45, p 29).

As one school leader described, *"I talk with [parents] and they're very appreciative of the work that we do in the school, they're very supportive of what we do and I see parents, I do supervision every morning, I'm out there talking to parents dropping off their kids and stuff like that and my experiences are by and far, they're mostly positive*

*with parents—and the parents that do get a little bit bent out of shape, that come to see me, they're griping about something, it's a misunderstanding or it's a good thing we work through."* Another school leader noted the value of recognition from the school community: *"We also got lovely emails from some parents thanking us for the work that we did during COVID, so when we got those, it just filled our bucket."* Expanding further, they added *"I think our community really values the work that we do, we've had parents in for a couple of different information nights, one was around literacy and numeracy, and it was to show parents the kind of activities they could do with their children over the summer [...] I know our community values us."*

One school leader described how this sense of feeling valued extends beyond the immediate school context, when encountering students in the community who have moved beyond their school years: *"Sometimes it's hard to remind yourself that you know "this might be hard right now but they are going to be good in the end" and like they come back and they visit and they thank you and they see you in the mall and they stop you on the street, like all of those things."* These enduring connections supported school leaders' hope.

Similar to teachers, school leaders also highlighted the role of **supportive leadership** in sustaining and inspiring hope. This theme aligns with the quantitative finding that 48 per cent of school leaders agree that school divisions value their work, while 21 per cent strongly agree and 12 per cent were neutral (see Table 58, p 34). This theme was not as strongly endorsed as other sources of hope. One school leader who was interviewed described feeling very

supported by senior leadership, which fueled their hope. Others who did not feel supported by senior leadership often described their hope as threatened.

One school leader described the value of communication and support amid the challenges of the pandemic. In contrast to many school leaders, whose quotes appear under the threat to hope theme, *"when COVID happened, our superintendent automatically switched to weekly meetings, operational updates so that we remained updated on everything that was happening around COVID, on divisional procedural changes, so we could put things in place in our schools right away. Yeah, so I feel that my experience with COVID was different, like we knew before the parents and kids knew, if something was coming out regarding a procedural change around COVID so that communication was great and we felt like we were on the pulse."* This school leader further elaborated that at *"every meeting we were thanked for the work that we do, we were valued for the work that we do, we were even each given a present from our superintendent for being flexible [...] even with the new curriculum coming out, and with the learning disruption funding that came out, I just felt like we were always in the know, and some of those deadlines were hard and fast, and that put pressure on our work, but I just feel more valued."*

Another school leader noted the role of trustees as a source of hope, noting *"the trustees that were voted in, we really feel that they understand our work, they understand our concerns, and they really are for the best interest of students. [...] I do believe that our trustees have a better pulse on who they're representing as well as what's going on in the school system."* This school leader also

elaborated on one specific action of the school district that supported their hope: *"One thing that our school division did that promoted hope with the government, was when they refused to pilot. And that was just so affirming, because the [school board] doesn't go out on a limb for anything and so for them to actually go out on a limb for something was really nice to see."*

Finally, highlighting the relational nature of hope in schools, the theme of **trusting relationships with staff** includes school leader comments about how having strong and trusting relationships with their staff bolstered school leader hope in the face of challenges. It is important to note that this theme is a parallel to the teacher theme of school leadership as a source for hope; not only do school leaders support hope in their staff, but they derive hope through the experience of trusting and supportive relationships in their schools. This theme also aligns with quantitative findings that the majority of school leaders feel valued and trusted by staff at their school (85 per cent agree or strongly agree, see Table 35, p 26).

As one school leader described, *"I've worked in very open systems where it's a very healthy relationship, where even staff will come and check on us, [...] or take on some of the work because they're like, "We know you're busy, let me do this for you," right, and that just comes from building really strong relationships with staff and they know we've got their back and now we're seeing that they have ours."* This sense of reciprocity and cooperation was key in this theme. Another school leader shared, *"people come and talk to you, if they don't come and talk to you, you know they're talking to each other. But they come and talk and it's not always good, right, like they'll come and say "I can't make this work, how can*

*we get around it?" or "Can you help me make this work?" so I think that is by far the biggest piece is that you know they're not talking about you behind closed doors, they're coming and talking to you because they see you as someone they can trust, and someone that can help to support them."* Knowing that they are a trusted leader in the school community was a source of hope.

Another school leader explained, *"All of the work that we do is really relationship-based. And I think the other thing is, there's just something— we want to be problem-solvers, we want to be able to move our work forward and so when people are trusting of you and do look to you for leadership, that really does give you hope that "yeah together we can actually make this work."*

Two school leaders specifically noted the value of teachers and school leaders both belonging to the ATA: *"I think it's valuable that we are part of the association because we're on the same field, otherwise it creates an 'us versus them,' so I think it helps us build those relationships a lot better, and to be honest a lot of admin are in the classrooms too, teaching in a lot of cases and working with students, so I think that is part of how we have those supportive and trustworthy relationships with our staff."* Another explained, *"One of the things that I do value is that principals are in the same association as the teachers, I think that drives the collegiality, it drives the relationships that we have and the value in one another, so I think that's kind of a unique thing in Canada and something that's very worthwhile in our education system."*

## Summary of Sources of Hope

These findings highlight that despite the many challenges of the past several years, teachers and school leaders derive hope in important

ways, reflecting the survey finding that the majority of school leaders and teachers are able to experience moments of hopefulness at work. Qualitative analysis revealed three themes for teachers and five for school leaders, which provide further explanation and description of the survey findings. Relationships with students and supporting student success are key sources of hope for both teachers and school leaders. The following section outlines the key threats to hope for both teachers and school leaders.

## Threats to Hope: Factors that Decrease or Block Teacher Hope

Six themes comprise the category of threats to teacher hope: an uphill battle without relief; a lack of time and resources; disconnected from senior administration; government attacks on teachers; government actions are hurting students; and devalued and misunderstood by the public.

Teachers shared about the increasing complexity and challenge of the work, without any possibility of relief or sense of possibility of positive change. This first theme, titled **an uphill battle without relief**, reflected teachers' sense of hopelessness in the face of difficult circumstances, including the increasing complexity and demands of the work. Qualitative focus group responses illuminated the nature of this experience for teachers. For example, there was the sense that teachers are frequently left trying to do more with less, in particular, striving to meet the needs of their students in the face of continually expanding expectations within the education system. As one teacher explained, *"I feel like my division, as well as all the divisions in Alberta, are caught, they are always trying to do more with less*

*because we are given less and so they are trying to do the best they can, [...] I know we need to pivot, but there's never anything less expected of teachers, there is always something more. And when they hand us something more, they don't take anything away."* These additional demands were sometimes in response to the pandemic, but also reveal important issues in terms of working conditions. Teachers experienced stressors around expectations to continue working even when they were ill, as they retained responsibility for their students' learning: *"You can't just take a sick day and walk away. My [spouse] just calls [their] boss and just doesn't have to show up, but I have to sit there and make sub plans for six or seven hours just to make sure that my 6 ½ hour day is timed and is totally going to follow my guidelines so when I come back, my kids aren't falling behind. It's one of those jobs that just requires so much more and you're always having to put out that extra mile to do that."*

It is important to note here that despite these very real threats to hope, overall survey responses indicated that 60 per cent of teachers did endorse hope that things will get better at work despite difficulties, while 18 per cent of teachers were neutral. For some however, this sense that things would get better was difficult to access, which has implications for the future of the profession. One teacher noted *"I would not suggest to anybody to be a teacher. I've had a lot of student teachers, and I support them as much as I can, but unless you have a deep passion for children, a huge ability to live your life with balance, and an incredible amount of resilience in order to take the hits that you're going to take, I don't think you should go into education right now."*

While teachers did endorse the potential for positive change, as discussed in the previous sources of hope section, this theme of an uphill battle connects to a second theme of threats to hope: teachers' perceptions of a **lack of time and resources**. Specifically, this theme included teachers' observations regarding inequities across schools which impact teacher hopefulness about being able to do their jobs effectively. Teacher's data within this theme sheds light on our quantitative findings regarding teachers' perceptions of having the resources to do their jobs effectively, where teachers were somewhat split in their response to the question about having what is needed to be effective at work—39 per cent of teachers agreed while 46 per cent disagreed with the statement about having what is needed to be effective at work. As one teacher explained, *"in lower economic areas where you're providing lunch programs and breakfast programs for kids that don't have it, that money's got to come from somewhere, and so it usually comes from the supplies and resources that then fall on the teachers' backs, and it leaves us running dry because you're not able to teach at your best because you don't have the time and the money for the resources or the effort to put in that time that we don't have, and then, yeah, the resources as well to be effective at your job."* Prominent in this theme was the sense that there are inequities across areas of the province or even within school divisions, which impacted teachers' sense of hope. Not having the resources to do what teachers would most like to do in their classrooms to support student learning was echoed by another teacher, who explained, *"now that I'm back in the classroom, I'm like "[sigh] okay I'd love to do this, but I don't have the materials, I can't get the materials because*

*we're at 95 per cent staffing for budget, and really I've been told all we can buy is toilet paper on top of that, so even though this is a wonderful educational opportunity and this would be a great way for my kids to be able to learn, I can't do that."* Not having the resources to teach as they would like impacted teachers' sense of hope.

Further explanation regarding school contexts and the strain on resources as a threat to teacher hope is found in the theme **disconnected from senior administration**, which includes teachers' sense that senior administrators are out of touch with teacher and classroom-specific needs, and the complexity of classroom contexts. While survey results indicate that the majority of teachers feel supported by their principals (see Tables 46 and 47, p 30), when it comes to senior administration, over half of teachers see school leaders' (in)actions as impacting hope, while over one-fifth are neutral (see Table 50, p 32). Approximately 90 per cent of teachers report that (in)actions of the school division affect their hope. As one teacher explained, *"as much as I believe that [the school board] want[s] to give us hope and try their best to give us hope, in this size of a board, they are trying to make everything as average as possible, and no teacher has an average class. We don't."* Another teacher expressed, *"you kind of wonder, these people that are in these senior administration positions, if they kind of forget what it's like to be in a classroom."* Shedding further light on issues raised in earlier themes, teachers explained that increasing demands often came from senior administration. For example, one teacher noted that *"there's a sense for me personally that there's a lot of extra work being pushed down, pushed down, pushed down, [...] it seems to me that there are additional tasks being put on teachers*

*at an elementary level without considering 'Oh, maybe there's a lot more going on, maybe this isn't the best time, or maybe we need to be a bit more creative in how we deliver this.'"* This theme points to the importance of understanding and support from senior administrative levels in terms of teacher hope in their work. It was noted that school divisions are in a middle space, tasked with responding to provincial government changes while also providing leadership to their school communities.

The two final themes offer further explanation of one of the most significant findings from the survey data. Initial analysis to inform focus groups revealed that the strongest survey responses were in the area of teachers' experiences of hope in relation to the government. As illustrated earlier (see Table 52, p 32), survey findings indicated that teachers overwhelmingly report (over 93 per cent across all geographic areas) that government (in) actions impact their hopefulness. Further, 88 per cent of teachers disagreed with a statement about whether the government values their work (see Table 55, p 33). While questions about government did not identify the level of government, focus group data highlighted in particular the role of the provincial government. The theme of **government attacks on teachers** highlights how teachers feel attacked and powerless against the actions of the current government. Numerous government actions impacting teachers were cited, including cuts to education funding, the new curriculum process, government responses to COVID-19 that impacted schools and learning conditions, as well as the recent contract negotiations and legislation regarding the role of the Alberta Teachers' Association. Teachers also noted how

government messages impact public perceptions of the profession.

One teacher described how *"with this government specifically, I feel under attack. My profession is under attack, my credibility is under attack, what I do and how I do it is devalued by this government. [...] I've been around for Conservative governments [and] this particular government, I almost feel like it has it out for me. I strongly feel like they're just like, "You guys are losers, and you've been y'know riding the coattails of the government for so long, and we are going to make sure that you are working hard," [and] it takes away your hope. It really does, because when you're being, when we're already, as people were saying, we're already struggling to be acknowledged, people don't understand the work we do, and we're already struggling for that awareness of our jobs and the passion and the love and the care that we give. And that's already not as respected, and then to have a government that really promotes that? It's just, it's just a real struggle."* This sense of feeling devalued by the government was shared by others. For example, another teacher shared the analogy that *"Songs become popular on the radio [from] DJ's playing them over and over and over again. And this government has played the song of "Alberta teachers don't do enough, they should be doing more," and what happens is that narrative is out there and people hear it over and over and over again. And I feel like it just permeates our culture now."*

While government attacks were a threat to hope, there was also a point at which it became a fuel for action on the part of teachers to stand up against those attacks: *"I really feel like the government continues to attack us and attack*

*us and attack us and they want us to fail, but I almost start to feel like this is becoming to their own detriment, right, like teachers have had enough and we are ready and at a point to stand up, and we've had enough, and you are going to give us the respect that we already earned."* Teachers described a sense of responsibility to stand up against government attacks on education.

A strong theme, over and above teachers' experiences of threat to their own careers via the government, were teachers' concerns for how **government actions are hurting students**. This theme incorporates teacher experiences of present-day harms, as well as fears for the future. For example, one teacher explained how current actions are impacting students: *"I have a very negative view of our current government and education, I think that the timing for the release of the new curriculum is extremely inappropriate [while] kids are still adjusting from the aftermath of the pandemic and teachers are doing the same, and I think we just need like a cool-down period before we throw another thing on."*

While having a positive impact with students, and feeling hopeful for students' futures is often a source of hope for teachers, as previously discussed, the current theme highlights how teacher hopelessness is sparked by the concerns they feel for their students as a result of the negative impacts of government actions. As one teacher explained, *"I think too it threatens our hope that we have even with our kids. So my hope that my kids are going to have a good future and are going to be able to learn what they need to learn has been incredibly eroded by this government. As I watch kid after kid struggle—not only because the last full year my*

*kids had without the pandemic was Grade 1—but then, to not be able to support them in the way they needed to be supported, it erodes my hope for those children, as well as my hope for our profession."*

While government actions impacted teachers personally and professionally, ultimately the risk is to students, resulting in an experience that could be likened to moral distress, as teachers see their hopes for their students threatened by government actions, particularly in relation to funding cuts and lack of resources in schools: *"These kindergarten kids came in not knowing any letters, not knowing any sounds, not knowing how to hold a book. They couldn't print their name, couldn't hold a pencil, couldn't cut with scissors, and now you've pulled the PUF funding [Program Unit Funding], so they're no longer going to get individual speech and language sessions, they're not going to get supports from OT, they're not going to have psychologists working with them [...] All of these issues, and then pulling more and more and more from the teachers, it kind of leaves you hopeless because, again, we're being expected to do more with less, and the government isn't there to support us, they are trying to cut us down and they want us to fail because their narrative is "Hey look everyone, the public system sucks," but yeah if people don't understand what we're doing, and they don't really understand the impact, because a lot of parents do see us as babysitters."*

The sense from teachers that public education is under threat is key, as it also links to teachers' thoughts about potential ripple effects as a result of government messaging. The final theme under threats to hope is **devalued and misunderstood by the public**. Here we see the

overall sense from focus group participants that despite their best efforts, care and dedication to their students, the messages they hear in the public discourse around teaching and education are often a threat to hope. These qualitative findings are in alignment with survey findings that only 4 per cent of teachers strongly agreed their work is valued by society, while approximately half of teachers either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Another 20 per cent of teachers gave a neutral rating (see Table 31, p 25). In essence, teacher hope is negatively impacted by the sense that the public views teachers quite negatively, does not value the work they do and does not understand the day-to-day realities in the classroom. As one teacher explained, *"I'm not asking for people every day to go, like, "Wow! You're doing such a good job! You're amazing!" like that's not what I'm asking for. But just the overall tone from conversations with parents and reading through things posted on Facebook or whatever, can be a little discouraging reading through that. I think that people don't really fully understand what happens in the classroom and how hard people are trying."*

Another put it more bluntly: *"I've had people tell my [spouse] that my job is useless, because they don't respect what we do because well, "we're not doing anything real" [...] if you're not making money and you're suckling at the teat of the government and the taxpayers, that's your worth, it's way less."*

Teachers also described feeling misunderstood in relation to public grievances about perceptions of teacher's time and pay: "What I hear frequently in my life as a teacher has been *"Oh, I work 8:30 to 3:30"* and *"You have all those summers off"*…well, not really, you know.

*[...] I work ten hours a day. I am in there at 7:30 and I leave there at 5:30, and I work a half-day every weekend, I go into my classroom, and that does not count what I do after supper, when I'm marking, when I'm prepping, when I'm searching for lessons that I know are going to engage my kids or that I'm creating that are going to engage my kids. So, generally I'm working a 60–75 hour work week and nobody gets what you do."* Other teachers also described the frustrations of being misunderstood given public perceptions that teachers are just delivering prescripted lessons, only work during school hours or are paid over the summer months, all of which are untrue. There was also a sense of tension, in that despite being undervalued, teachers are also held responsible by the public for systemic issues in education: *"We'll be the ones blamed for this. Right, "my kid can't read because you can't teach" right, and even if you tell them you've got 30 kids in a room [...] everyone thinks we have more power than we actually do, and in fact we have very little power. The only power I have is I get to decide what I do tomorrow, between like 8:00 and 3:30, within reason, right. And that's it, that's literally the only thing I have say over. And then parents will still be pissed at me because, y'know "I'm not working hard enough" or their kid can't do fractions, and I'm dealing with issues that have started in kindergarten or Grade 1."*

These ongoing threats to hope ultimately culminated in some teachers expressing an intention to leave the profession: *"Teachers in our building do not feel hope, I don't think that they see anything hopeful going forward, teachers are taking leaves, teachers are leaving, like including myself, like I'm leaving, hopefully soon, so it's sad, it's really sad."* Despite teachers' vital role in shaping and supporting the development

of younger generations, this theme highlights a persistent trend of the devaluing of educators and public education for many years and across many regions, which we will touch on further in the discussion section later in this report.

## Threats to Hope: Factors that Decrease or Block School Leader Hope

Qualitative data from focus groups with school leaders revealed four themes in the area of threats to hope: witnessing the impact of the pandemic on students, being the targets of parent frustrations, frustrations with senior administration, and the provincial government is an enemy of public education.

Importantly, school leaders expressed that **witnessing the impacts of the pandemic on students** strained their hope. Specifically, when reflecting on the negative impacts of the pandemic on student learning and well-being, this was noted to be a threat to hope. One school leader noted, *"I agree that last year was very hard to find hope in a school, and we saw a lot of impacts, the mental health impacts on our kids and our families, especially."* Seeing the mental health impact on students and families, especially without the resources to address the concerns, was a threat to hope. For example, a junior high school leader explained *"Our counsellor was so busy, nonstop, never seen so many kids going to her, lots of depression, lots of suicide, lots of referrals. We had so many students around substance abuse, attendance problems, with final exams the learning gaps were huge, so some of the teachers were not able to work on the curriculum, they had to go down a little bit because the students didn't have the foundational knowledge that they could even understand the curriculum that they were supposed to, so*

*I would say junior high, senior high there are a lot of challenges as a result of this [pandemic on] learning over the last few years."*

This theme provides further explanation regarding the complexity school leaders face in schools, as indicated by survey findings. For example, while 98 per cent of school leaders endorse feeling resourceful in solving problems at work (see Table 8, p 17), just over 60 per cent of school leaders agreed or strongly agreed that they felt able to make positive impacts in their schools (see Table 4, p 16), and half endorsed having what they need to be effective at work (only 5 per cent strongly agreed, see Table 37, p 27). As one school leader explained, *"I feel like the last few years have been harder on students and so it's harder to see those glimmers of hope, I mean you get them, but there's so much stuff that's dealing with the social-emotional needs and the increasing behaviours, that, since COVID happened, that students, they're harder to work with."*

While survey findings indicated that approximately three quarters of school leaders felt that families knew that school leaders were working in the best interest of students (see Table 45, p 29), the theme regarding school leaders **being the targets of parent frustrations** captures the sense that school leaders were stepping into the line of fire of parent frustrations during the pandemic School leaders were often the point of contact for parental concerns regarding pandemic measures, and as one school leader noted: *"My dealings with parents [during the pandemic], [were] maybe four times more, parents who were afraid, parents who were angry, parents who were just unsure [...] with the parents we had fear, they*

*were angry, on both sides, vaxxers, anti vaxxers, maskers, antimaskers, and just the amount of additional pressure that added to the principal was significant."*

This sense of additional pressure and feeling misunderstood by some parents was echoed by another school leader, who explained: *"We do get students or parents who thank us for going the extra mile and supporting them, but then you get the other ones who are not supportive, and unreasonable, and don't value teachers especially if teachers are trying to fight for having better work conditions, having smaller class sizes, having a higher pay, I know that that's stuff that continues to be a struggle and other people are like "Well, at least you guys got paid during the pandemic" so they view things differently, like not everyone appreciates the work that teachers did, so I just think that it depends on the situation and the person in society."*

This theme also aligns with the survey finding that the majority of school leaders do not feel that their work is valued by society. Very similarly to teachers, 50 per cent of school leaders disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that their work was valued by society, while almost 20 per cent were neutral (see Table 33, p 26). In the words of one school leader, *"We try so hard— I guess that's the other thing, is if we put in no effort, then we wouldn't expect to be valued for our work. But we are trying really hard, and the teachers that I work with are trying really hard to provide a safe, caring, nurturing educational experience for these students and when we're working so hard and a parent comes in and says "you don't do anything," you know, "you're not doing anything for my kids," that's really the soul-sucking piece*

*of it."* School leaders, and the teachers they work with, describe working hard for the best of their students, coming from a place of deep care and professional responsibility. Yet they are often left with the sense that their work is not valued, understood or appreciated, and that they are a target for public frustrations in the midst of a difficult time.

On a related note, again similarly to teachers, school leaders also expressed a lack of hope in terms of relationships with senior administration. Qualitative findings shed further light on survey results that 82 per cent of school leaders agree or strongly agree with the statement that school division action or inaction impacts their sense of hope (see Table 53, p 32). The theme **frustrations with senior administration** captures school leaders descriptions of varying levels of frustration with their senior administration, ranging from perceptions that senior administration is out of touch with the day-to-day realities of each school, to perceptions that senior administration has not been a trusted support or ally in the face of the government actions that have negatively impacted schools.

The sense that senior administration was not effectively advocating for schools was strong, with school leaders bearing the brunt of directives passed down by senior administration as a result of government changes, and coping with staffing shortages and other strains on schools. As one school leader explained: *"We protect our schools as much as we can, and kind of do that filtering piece, so separate out that 'absolutely must be done' versus that 'it would be great and everyone would be happier if we did these too' but the people above us just*

*keep heaping it on, and so at some point people just go tapping out and they go on leave and don't even leave their mark books, right, so it's that piece."* Another spoke specifically about disappointment with senior leadership, noting *"The [school board], we keep being told, is under a microscope with the government. And so they bend over backwards to not cause any waves, and so yes they did stand up for that particular piece around not piloting the new curriculum when it was a piece of crap, but they haven't stood up for anything else. So, you know the changes in the funding manual, taking away the PUF funding, like all of those things that I think [one of the largest school divisions] in the province should actually make a statement [about], they did not. And they chose not to."*

The sense that senior administration was "out of touch" with the day-to-day realities in school was also central to this theme. For example, one school leader noted: *"I think that the longer somebody is in central office, the less empathy I think they might have for what's going on in a school. They start to forget about the busy-ness of the school and those sorts of things because they're now in a different environment and are living that reality in which you can take some time to think about something, but now it's 8:00, and you don't have three teachers covered in your school, your reality is much different and it becomes a bit of a situation."* School leaders were living the impacts of the changes passed down by senior administration, but there was a sense that those administrators did not fully understand the realities in schools, particularly during the pandemic. Another school leader noted, *"In my division, principals were an afterthought, it's not that we weren't thought of, but we were thought of after, like often we would find out about new*

*rules or something like that from a parent calling you because they released it to parents before principals, and this has never really happened, and it may have been because of the workload going on, but I guess do I feel valued by my school board. I think they would articulate that they value me and things like that, but perhaps in the kinds of things I would look for that would echo that in action, aren't in places I might hope."* The sense that actions did not directly match the words of senior administrators contributed to the sense of frustration among school leaders.

Another school leader explained, *"As a teacher you really feel like your realm of influence is your classroom and so you have to judge what's right for your kids, and then the principal and [assistant principal], they're going to look at each teacher and make sure that they're managing their level of stress [...] but you get to a place in an organization where the people above it are so disconnected with the work that they don't even realize how stressed out people are."* This sense of a lack of understanding or empathy was connected to trust in senior leadership. As one school leader stated succinctly, *"If you want to be hopeful, you need to feel supported, you need to feel there's trust, you need to feel there's communication and transparency [between educators and varying levels of senior leadership]."* This sense of a disconnect and lack of support from senior leadership was a strong threat to teacher hope.

The final theme, **provincial government is an enemy of public education**, provides further explanation for one of the most significant survey findings. Initial examination of survey data to inform focus group questions with school leaders again highlighted strong

responses in terms of government impacts on hope. As highlighted in Table 54, p 33, 91 per cent of school leaders agreed or strongly agreed that government (in)action impacted their hope. School leaders were asked to discuss this finding, and qualitative data again revealed that it was particularly the provincial government that impacted school leaders' hope. This theme captures school leaders' perception of the government as an enemy of educators and public education in Alberta.

The sentiment that government decisions are negatively impacting learning and working conditions in schools was expressed by one school leader, who explained: *"I don't think that there's anything this government has done that makes our working conditions better. Like there's nothing. From their attitude with central table bargaining, to this crap curriculum that they just chose to force down our throats, with plagiarizing from some crazy stuff that's going on in the States, to changing all the funding so that they're giving more funding to private schools, to the way we were treated during the pandemic, like we're just disposable. "Here let's just send them back to school," "why are we closing schools," "it doesn't matter how many people are out sick, you're going to school." Now nobody's going to wear masks because "no kids are getting sick, they're not making anybody else sick." There's absolutely nothing that this government has done to support public education."*

Impacts of government actions were directly linked to stress that is leading school leaders (and the teachers they work with) to consider leaving the profession: *"The amount of stress has risen in this government, work intensification has increased, people are wanting to leave the* profession [...] it doesn't help that we had COVID because that's also probably causing a lot of people to want to leave the profession. So yeah, it's unfortunate that this government has such a negative impact on school leaders and teachers."* Another school leader explained, *"I find this government very discouraging and it makes me want to leave the province. [...] My [spouse] and I are looking outside, actively looking, and we've already got our BC certification in line and it's just a matter of when, because we're tired of the politics in Alberta, tired of this government treating us the way we are, like we're not professionals…"* This has important implications for the profession, as losing highly skilled teachers and school leaders will have negative impacts on public education.

This theme also aligns with survey findings that over 95 per cent of school leaders disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that the government valued their work (see Table 56, p 34). As one school leader noted, *"I think the provincial government actively erodes the confidence in teachers. I think that they purposefully and actively did that over a period of time. What's promising is that [in] poll after poll, the public supports teachers over government, so I mean that's very promising, but it's also very frustrating that the government feels that's a position that they need to fulfill."* Despite evidence that there was more public support for education, feeling under attack by the government actively eroded school leaders' hope.

## Conclusion – Integrated Findings

Overall, we saw sources of hope more closely linked to areas where teachers and school leaders perceived more influence or control in

terms of their work (eg, their actual teaching, competence/skills, and most importantly, their relationships with students). Over and over, we heard a sense of deep dedication to the profession, to students and families, and to public education. These findings highlight important ways that teachers and school leaders connect with hope at work, despite ongoing challenges in the education context, providing further context to the survey finding that the majority of school leaders and teachers are able to experience moments of hopefulness at work. Qualitative analysis revealed three themes regarding sources of hope for teachers and five for school leaders, which provide further explanation and description of the survey findings. Relationships with students and supporting student success are key sources of hope for both teachers and school leaders. Findings also highlight the importance of supportive leadership for both teachers and school leaders.

At the same time, in examining the data around threats to hope that teachers and school leaders described, threats to hope are seen most often in the larger systemic influences on teachers' working conditions, where they have less direct influence and often feel undervalued. This was evident in teachers' comments about the coexistence of both threats to and sources of hope in their working lives. As one teacher noted, *"I think my main concern is the government and their practices that make it really hard for education, that makes me feel less hopeful for the future, but when I'm in my classroom and when I'm in my environment with the teachers—they're amazing, like we are so lucky that we have such an amazing staff—so with them I feel hopeful because they are positive,*

*understanding people, but when I think larger bigger picture to the provincial government, I do not feel hopeful."* This statement highlights how there are clear areas of strength in terms of sources of hope that can be harnessed at multiple levels within education, while there are also clear threats that must be addressed. In the category of threats to hope, there were four themes for school leaders and six for teachers. In particular, impacts of government (in)actions on the profession and the government's ways of relating with educators are a very real threat to hope for both school leaders and teachers, connected to a larger sense that educators are not valued by society. These findings point to important implications for building and sustaining hope for teachers and school leaders, which will be discussed further below.

# Discussion

This project is a response to the fall 2021 ATA Pulse survey indicating that 45 per cent of teacher and school leader respondents were experiencing hopelessness in relation to their work. The following discussion focuses on two key elements most evident across the findings of this mixed method study—for both teachers and for school leaders—**hope** and **threats to hope**[4]. First, even as teachers and school leaders report low hope (see ATA November 2021 Pulse survey ), they are not wholly bereft of hope. When prompted via survey and focus group formats, they can and do readily identify where hope is found at work and they underscore its importance. These sources of hope are often relational. Second, teachers and school leaders also readily identify those aspects of the profession that most threaten their hope. This includes feeling undervalued by the public and the deep human costs (eg, workload intensification, moral distress, burnout) inherent in being primary policy implementers while also feeling largely ignored by policy makers in the education hierarchy.

## SOURCES OF EDUCATOR HOPE

This project reveals strong reservoirs of hope among Alberta teachers and school leaders and suggests that educators, classrooms and schools are often, though not always, hope-fostering sites for educators. First, between 85 and 90 per cent of respondents reported moments of hopefulness at work. Second, the vast majority (90 per cent) responded positively to questions about having multiple ways of engaging with students, suggesting a wealth of professional skills (ie, agency) in the workplace. Further, three out of four Alberta educators are inspired by others in the workplace, highlighting the presence of workplace role models as an important component of a healthy work setting. Finally, four-fifths of Alberta school leaders affirmed that their work is valued by students and staff in the school. Indeed, virtually every focus group member highlighted ways in which witnessing student learning sparked their sense of hope.

While we may continue to ask questions about how much hope is enough and just what kinds of hope are necessary, this is not a picture of wholescale despondency. Via the survey, educators were able to identify their sources of hope when prompted. Further, educators were willing to articulate their sources of hope when given opportunity for reflection during focus groups.

Hope is a search behaviour (Jevne 2005). We often become most aware of our experience of hope, or of our need for hope, when faced with some form of adversity—struggle, conflict, or confinement. We chose to look at the state of educator hope given the somersaulting challenges of teacher and school leader work intensification, the COVID-19 pandemic, budget cuts, contested curriculum changes

and provincial changes to disciplinary oversight. Hope is not simply a synonym for optimism (Bruininks and Malle 2005), nor another word for morale (Clarke and Kissane 2002). Although hope is associated with these collateral terms, it is a higher order concept that can glue together the motivation to overcome in the face of uncertainty, the belief that one's actions matter, the capacity to imagine and work toward a future different than today, and the inspired vision that individually and collectively a better tomorrow is possible through effort. Hope is the fuel that powers the engine of courage. It is not a fanciful sprite that descends effortlessly on educators as they labour. Instead, it often involves hard work and intentionality in the face of adversity (Hinds 1988; Larsen et al 2007).

Fredrickson's (1998) seminal and well-substantiated theory of broaden-and-build (Catalino and Fredrickson 2011; Fredrickson and Joiner 2018) teaches that positive emotions have the power to undo the eroding effects of negative emotion. Intentionally engaging in activities and practices that foster positive emotions fosters emotional health by broadening and building on the positive, while at the same time diminishing the effects of the negative.

In many ways, educators are resident hope experts, already conversant in many hope-fostering practices, whether they have articulated it as such or not. In fact, education and hope are often considered so entwined that the terms are used as near synonyms (LeMay 2014) even if the practice implications of this apparent synonymity are given only passing reflection. Within classrooms and schools, educators take steps to nurture their own hope while constructing it alongside students and colleagues (LeMay 2021). However, this expertise is most often implicit, a practical wisdom that rarely receives direct attention, and is virtually never spoken of. Research demonstrates a similar phenomenon in mental health therapies (Larsen et al 2007; Larsen and Stege 2010), wherein therapists are often depicted as hope purveyors. When asked, therapists often articulate some large part of their professional purpose as hope (Larsen 2009). Nevertheless, educators' professional engagement with hope is tacit and their practice, as yet, uninformed by applied research on hope in their own profession.

The researched effects of working with hope in group contexts points to the positive potential of developing and implementing hope-focused group engagement with educators. While focus group participation was disappointingly low in this project, the low turnout proved instructional in one important way. We held three focus groups each with only one individual attending and two focus groups with three to four participants. At each of the focus group meetings with a single participant, it became evident that the attendee *hoped to discuss experiences of hope with other educators*. They expressed disappointment at missing the opportunity to discuss their experiences of hope at work with other educators. Conversely, at the focus groups held with three to four group members, educators expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn from one another and, on many occasions, were reminded of their own stories of hope long forgotten.

Hope often has an emotional contagion effect in hope-focused group contexts (Larsen et al 2018; Larsen et al 2015; Larsen et al, under review; Zhang et al 2022). It is a teachable and learnable human strength, enhanced with practice. The disappointment expressed by "individual" focus group members in this project suggests an interest and willingness among some educators to discuss and learn about hope with peers. Furthermore, Hope Studies Central (HSC) research on facilitating hope- focused, guided learning and development opportunities suggests that modification of these resources for use with groups of educators may be an effective means of fostering hope (Hudson Breen et al 2022; Larsen et al 2022; Larsen et al, under review).

## RECOMMENDATIONS – BUILDING UPON SOURCES OF HOPE

Findings from this research taken together with (a) recent research on hope in Edmonton- area classrooms (Hudson Breen et al 2022; Larsen et al 2022) and (b) more than thirty years of research on hope at Hope Studies/University of Alberta inform our recommendations for broadening and building on the hope that educators already possess.

- One of the first places that individuals find hope is knowing that their story of difficulty is heard and honoured by a respected other. While the story itself may threaten hope, a caring witness to the story can spark the first glimmers of hope. This most foundational source of hope may seem simplistic; it is research

supported (Larsen and Stege 2012). Leaders at all levels of the educational hierarchy are encouraged to offer support during difficult tasks, acknowledge the difficulties experienced by teachers and school leaders, and express appreciation for educator commitment.

- Educators are encouraged to take leadership of their own hope, actively and explicitly pursuing hope-fostering practices. A number of these activities are outlined on the Strengths, Hope, and Resourcefulness for School Mental Health website. In addition, the website outlines many hope-focused lessons and practices developed in classrooms as part of the SHARP-SMH research. Testimony from teacher–researchers and school leader– researchers who took part in the SHARP-SMH research highlight the ways in which regular hope-focused practice nourishes a healthy educational climate and educator hope (Hudson Breen et al 2022; Larsen et al 2022). Findings suggest that these practices are easy to integrate and implement even within the time constraints of busy professional lives and classrooms.

- Schools, school divisions and teachers' professional associations can proactively support teachers in cultivating ongoing networks of support. Masks, social distancing and stay-at-home orders have disrupted typical interprofessional dialogue that is crucial to sustaining hope. By way of one example, during a hope-integrated project in Edmonton-area schools (Hudson Breen et al 2022; Larsen et al 2022) five participating teachers met biweekly for one full school year to discuss

their innovations while implementing hope in their classrooms. The hope-focused community of practice that developed was a highlight for participants and an enduring source of hope during the dark days of the first full year of the pandemic. Given that (a) important elements of educator hope are deeply relational, and (b) intentionally working with hope can have a positive emotional contagion effect, teachers' associations can explore new ways of permitting their members to interact, whether through social media, changing our notions of an ideal teachers' conference, or re-examining local policies about community relationships. One resource for developing supportive networks is available through HSC and their accumulated body of research-informed practices.

- Providing periodic evidence to teachers of individual students' progress and accomplishment in their years ahead, beyond the current grade level, is likely to have a hope fostering effect for educators. To the best of our knowledge, there is no systematic way of reporting on the progress of students five years after they have left a teacher's classroom. Because teachers are inspired by the accomplishments of their students, because so much professional hope revolves around the sense that teachers are having an impact on their students, and because much school activity is driven by day-to-day operational concerns, recurrent long-term progress reports to educators would provide a stimulus to hope construction. Hope for the future is strongly informed by the past (McElheran 2012). Tangible reminders to

educators of the positive impact their past actions have had are a powerful untapped source of hope.

- School leaders must themselves be supported in sustaining hope in order to remain a source of hope in their school communities.

- Professional associations are an important source of professional identity, support, and solidarity for teachers and school leaders. School leaders identified that belonging to the same professional association as teachers was an important source of hope, and something to consider as changes to the Association are being considered.

## THREATS TO EDUCATOR HOPE

This study also shines a light on arenas of deeply threatened hope for educators. Coming from a psychological stance, the stress and strain experienced by educators is clear. Yet, pathologizing educators who struggle to hold hope misses the key message from educators. Within this study, teachers and school leaders laid bare the negative impacts of educational bureaucracy on their ability to hold hope. Specifically, 55 per cent of teachers indicate that school leader (in)action affects their hope, while 89.5 per cent of teachers believe that school division (in)action impacts their hope, and 93.8 per cent of teachers see government (in)action as impacting their hope. Correspondingly, 82.1 per cent of school leaders agree that school division (in)action impacts their hope and 91 per cent of school leaders see government (in)action as impacting their hope. The emotional valence on these questions was left purposefully ambiguous in

the survey, yet the overwhelmingly common survey responses from teachers and school leaders combined with their responses to open-ended questions on the surveys and their focus group data, make it clear that action and/or inaction by senior education leadership has negative effects on educator hope. In other words, intercorrelations and covariances on one hand, and written survey commentary and focus group testimony on the other hand, together demonstrate that educators' hopes are tied to the (in)actions of leaders.

Threats to educator hope, identified as the **up hill battle** in the integrated findings of this report, include many aspects of the now well documented intensification of work (eg, Stelmach et al 2021; Tsang and Liu 2016), for both teachers and school leaders. Teaching has long been recognized as a profession that encourages individuals and systems to over extend (Jevne and Zingle 1991). What this study adds is research evidence that this intensification is deeply hope threatening to educators. Further, **lack of time and resources** was an additional threat to hope identified by participants and connected to descriptions of moral distress, experiences wherein educators felt they knew the right thing to do, but could not do it because of institutional constraints (Stelmach et al 2021). In a 2013 pan-Canadian study (Austin et al 2013) of compassion fatigue across various five different health care professions, a similar experience was highlighted. Distress was most often described, not in the challenges of working with difficult cases, but in surviving the institutional context as an intact, healthy, effective professional. Indeed, Austin et al revealed the loss of professionals' hope, as a

result of protracted struggle with large health systems, to be linked to health professionals' decisions to leave the field.

The impact of bureaucracy and the policy hierarchy warrant specific attention as they relate to educator hope (eg, Trinidad 2019). Hope is both created and threatened within organizational settings. The closer a bureaucrat's interactions are with teacher, classroom and school, the more hopeful the educators' experience (see graphic under the heading *What are threats to hope?* on p 35). Those elements of educational bureaucracy more distant from hands-on teaching focused work are more likely to be depicted as hope threatening by educators. Put another way, hopelessness increases across teacher survey responses when responding from school leader to school division to government. Similarly, there is evidence of increasingly hopeless experiences on the part of school leaders from the (in)action of school divisions to the (in)action of government. Notably, one or two experiences contradicting this trend were shared during focus groups, including a story about school trustees who appeared to speak accurately and lead effectively by responding actively to school-based needs expressed by teachers. These stories to the contrary may serve as examples from which to grow hope, instances of education leaders believing that they have the capacity (ie, agentic hope) to make circumstances better by leaning in to understand the needs of teachers and school leaders.

These findings raise many important questions. Is it possible that the further one is from the "sharp end" of putting educational

policy into practice in the classroom, the easier it is to be hopeful on the educational landscape? How can educational leaders, at all levels, lead from positions of an informed hope—moving forward with deep knowledge and responsiveness to the nature of current educational labour?

In *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope*, bell hooks wrote, "My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them. Educating is a vocation rooted in hopefulness. As teachers we believe that learning is possible, that nothing can keep an open mind from seeking after knowledge and finding a way to know." (2013, xiv). This deep valuing of their role as educators, the potential of public education, and the potential they see in their students were strong sources of hope for educators in this study. And yet the threats to hope expressed by educators point to a fear that these essential roots of hope are themselves becoming eroded.

Hope is linked to our goals, and deeply rooted in values about who we are (Eliott 2005; Larsen and Stege 2012). Acting out of policy that conflicts with one's values as a teacher exacts deep personal cost (eg, Daliri-Ngametua and Hardy 2022). Santoro (2018) described the demoralization experienced by teachers as "discouragement borne out of ongoing value conflicts with pedagogical practices, reform mandates, and school practices" (p 3). Braun and Maguire (2020), in a study of two primary schools in Greater London, describe this experience for teachers as being made to "doing without believing" and outlined

the corrosive effects of being required to perpetually enact policy that falls outside one's deeply dedicated values, the vocational compass and morals that animate a teacher's or school leader's career engagements.

The sense of not being valued by society that teachers in the current study described is not unique to Alberta. The latest OECD TALIS survey indicated that while 90 per cent of teachers are satisfied with their careers and the vast majority (91 per cent) do not regret becoming a teacher, only 26 per cent of teachers in OECD countries reported feeling that the work they do is valued by society (OECD 2018). Teachers with more experience were more likely to endorse the statement that the profession is undervalued, which may suggest a sense of demoralization among more experienced educators, as described by Santoro (2018). Furthermore, 14 per cent of teachers under 50 endorsed a desire to leave teaching within the next five years. Early attrition from the profession is of great concern, and suggests a potential loss of hope in educators' careers.

## RECOMMENDATIONS – FINDING AND BUILDING HOPE WITHIN THE SYSTEM

It is possible to become daunted by the emotional tenor of educator hopelessness—throwing up one's hands while overlooking the power of hope to inspire and animate professionals as a group. If this study demonstrates anything, it is the importance of leadership and the degree to which followers seek leaders' cues and trace their hopes in some way to the actions and inactions of

school leaders, senior office administration, school boards of trustees and distal ministries of education. If the results of this study spark any questions, imagination and new courses of action, it seems that educators would have leaders and policy decision makers contemplate how they might actively take up a commitment to support the hope of the many professionals whose responsibility it is to implement educational policies. In recognizing the importance of educator hope to health, workplace engagement, motivation and caring for students, how might senior educational leaders and bureaucrats appropriate and employ the now robust human science of hope?

- Respect and reflect back to educators appreciation for their engagement. The capacity to notice and genuinely celebrate the small and the big accomplishments is intimately connected to hope—a signal from peers and senior leaders alike that the hard work is being seen and appreciated. By celebrate we do not mean Pollyanna corporate statements untethered from the realities of the field. Celebration should involve reality-anchored responses directly to educators that their commitment, persistence and successes, despite adversity, are valuable and laudable.

- Permit multiple avenues for teachers to define issues and problem-solve with curricular and pedagogical content. Teachers invest enormous hopes through their teaching, which is shaped by curriculum guides that are periodically (re)issued by the ministries of education. Teachers need multiple fora, both formal and informal, for expressing their

anxieties, building their hopes, and adjusting to curricular and societal change.

- Adopt school leadership approaches that revolve around asking open questions rather than assertions. The era of a caped leader flying into a troublesome situation to make definitive pronouncements and set the problem-solving direction is over. New images of leadership are those of collaborative figures who facilitate a team to address a shared problem by asking carefully thought-out, open-ended questions that promote inquiry, shared responsibility and active problem solving.

Professional associations and other education leader groups have a role to play in educating the public about the value of teachers and education. Social/media campaigns geared toward education of the public about the profession rather than cheerleading for the profession hold potential. Engaging educators in the development of these campaigns may prove valuable and hope-inducing. During the pandemic, educators were on the front line and often feeling underappreciated for their work and for the risks they were taking. As one example, the SHARP- SMH project was in schools during the pandemic. By way of one example of educating the public, teachers in the project led the way in developing a social media campaign (created by a relatively small but dynamic educator group) to teach the public about the importance of hope in their work as educators.

NOTES

1. This study was reviewed and approved for research ethics compliance by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board (Pro00117111) "Exploring Hope Sources and Threats: A Mixed Methods Study of Alberta Teacher and School Leader Experiences."

2. Due to low numbers of teacher focus group participants, additional details regarding their demographic information are withheld to protect anonymity.

3. Due to low numbers of school leader focus group participants, additional details regarding their demographic information are withheld to protect anonymity.

4. Use of language is important. The terms *hopelessness* and *threats to hope* are used synonymously in this report. Because this report examines teacher and school leader hope rather than hopelessness, our preferred term is threats to hope, thereby keeping our attention focused on hope and its barriers rather than on hopelessness.

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Note: All links were accessed and checked for accuracy as of August 24, 2023.

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