

Research into Policy and Practice **HIGHLIGHTS**

2019



INQUIRY



INNOVATION



IMPACT



The Alberta
Teachers' Association

We who are teachers would have to accommodate ourselves to lives as clerks or functionaries if we did not have in mind a quest for a better state of things for those we teach and for the world we all share.

—Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*

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PREFACE

The Alberta Teachers' Association undertakes research on a wide range of issues related to teachers' conditions of professional practice. Information on research publications, projects, events and committees is included in this highlights document.

Research is an essential activity of the Association and is rooted in the *Teaching Profession Act*, where legislation extends the profession's responsibilities to "advance and promote the cause of education in Alberta" and "to improve the teaching profession . . . by . . . publications, research and other activities designed to maintain and improve the competence of teachers" and "to co-operate with other organizations and bodies in Canada and elsewhere having the same or like aims and objects."¹

Research in the profession is thus one of the Association's overarching objects and helps identify strategic research priorities that build Alberta teachers' capacity and professional body of knowledge. Flowing from the Association's strategic plan (Alberta Teachers' Association 2013), the research activities outlined in this publication—and the conversations they can engender—will help teachers engage their communities in understanding the forces shaping the precarious future of public education.

Education systems around the world are now witness to a variety of educational changes and improvements, numerous social and economic disruptions, and the

onset of rapid technological advances that were unimaginable in the recent past. In this tsunami of change, innovative teaching and learning practices and new curricula are sweeping into our schools and classrooms, with the broader goal of transforming student learning.

While these forces present education systems with both significant opportunities and significant challenges, some of the most profound developments are related to the standardization, personalization, privatization and datafication of learning. In a number of jurisdictions around the world, the global education reform movement (GERM) is determining the future of education and, therefore, defining what counts as success in schools. In the United States, a renewed commitment to vouchers, charter schools and school choice is being promoted by the Trump administration; in Britain, the growth of selective schools and the dismantling of higher education through GERM-based legislation are gaining steam; and, in the emerging economies of the world, the private sector and private interests are steering education in many countries, despite the urgent need for equity as a driver of public policies on education.

GERM reforms continue to challenge the sustainability of public schools, to reduce the opportunities afforded to all students, and to compel teachers to defend their professional judgment and collective voice. With the growth of reductionist and data-driven

analytics and the emergence of machine-based teaching systems, teachers—alongside school and system leaders—will be challenged to develop the capacity for building a great public school education for all.

As indicated by the diverse research studies highlighting the work of Alberta teachers in the pages that follow, technological changes have enabled and catalyzed a growing interest in standardization of many forms, such as high-stakes testing and uniform digital education platforms.

The research studies outlined here remind us that the patterns of datafication and hierarchical accountability regimes are being used to demonstrate and justify school and system performance. Those who advance the idea of education as a rich, authentic journey to discover and develop the passions and interests of each student, what Gert Biesta (2013) calls the “beautiful risk of education,” will find themselves challenged to demonstrate the value they add to education in a policy-making environment saturated with big data leveraged by standardization (and, increasingly, privatization). As governments respond to the so-called skills agenda and skills gap, while conflating *standards* with *standardization*, we can expect a strong focus on gathering big data that will include not only the conventional focus on learning outcomes but also efforts to adopt a range of new metrics focused on reductionist and hollowed-out versions of student engagement, inclusion, indigeneity, wellness, and other previously marginalized priorities of education systems and the teaching profession.

The recent research efforts undertaken by the Association include the following projects:

- A continued assessment of the shifting teaching and learning conditions of school leaders
- A study on Alberta’s changing curriculum
- A proposal for redefining school success through public assurance
- An analysis of the changing psychosocial development of youth living in digitally saturated environments
- An investigation of changes in off-campus education
- An assessment of the impact of datafication on public education and research
- The development of international education partnerships

This evolving publication invites teachers, school leaders, system leaders, students, parents and the larger communities to learn from and pursue these projects (and the implications of their key findings) in greater detail. More important, as the cover suggests, this publication offers a glimpse into the Association’s efforts to move beyond mere inquiry and toward innovative practices and policies that will enhance the possibilities of that population of students who are already among the most capable and innovative young people in the world today—namely, Alberta’s students.

The Association will continue to research and advocate for the conditions of professional practice required to create teaching and learning environments that advance the goal of public education: to educate all Alberta children well.

NOTE

1. *Teaching Profession Act*, RSA 2000, section 4, www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/T02.pdf (accessed April 9, 2019).

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EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Control, Regulation and Scope of Practice in the Teaching Profession: An Environmental Scan of Selected Canadian Jurisdictions (2018)



Purpose and Design

To better understand the nature, status and control of the teaching profession in Canadian provinces, and how each may be changing, this report focuses on conceptual thinking, contextual settings and evolutionary trends in education. Several papers and authors are employed as proponents of the key issues that might encourage focus and discussion for stakeholders.

Key Findings

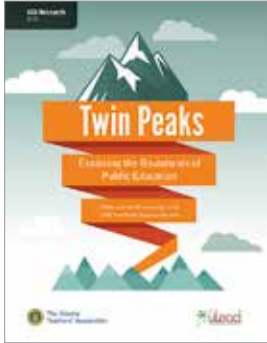
The research considered in this review reveals that

- many changes in the control and regulation of teachers' work have occurred where neoliberal, market-oriented practices are fundamental parts of government philosophies;
- such policies may vary between provinces and countries and can evolve or change over time;
- the erosion of trust in the public sector has been an implicit component of government actions to increasingly control and regulate the work of teachers; and
- governments that increase regulation and control over the teaching profession do so by legislative means that establish what might appear to be a neutral or self-regulating professional body but that, in most cases, retain government control over teachers.

Implications

This report argues that reports on and analyses of teachers' scope of practice fit the preferred directions of the governments that fund them, and a different approach is needed. That approach would be to pose questions, access research and engage multiple authors with diverse perspectives in a dialogue. Counternarratives focused on union-led teacher professional development or on rich accountabilities might be considered in order to build public support and confidence in both the profession and its union.

Twin Peaks: Exploring the Boundaries of Public Education (2018)



Purpose and Design

This report captures the proceedings of the 2018 Twin Peaks research summit, a gathering that aims to push thinking and explore the edges of current issues in public education. Included in the report are short summaries of the 2018 Twin Peaks presentations, written by the presenters themselves to reflect their own voices and experience.

Key Findings

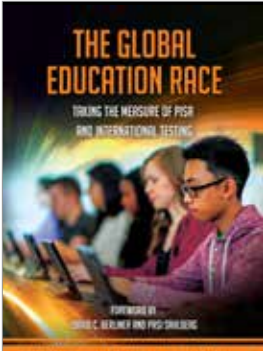
Major topics that emerged from the conversations at the 2018 summit were datafication (the reduction of complex, relational educational processes and purposes to simple data points and algorithms), the commercialization within public education and the role of commercial interests in policy making. The summit also brought to the fore the need to include students' voices in discussions about public education, especially given their growing sense of distress about schools and schooling and the health, anxiety and stress behaviours reported across the developed world.

Implications

The pieces included in this report all reflect a commitment to intensifying our understanding of the challenges faced in keeping the *public* in public education. Teacher organizations need to develop systematic, strategic approaches to the challenges they face through the greater use of strategic foresight, small data and learning from the experience of others. Resilience and adaptive capacity can be built through collaboration and cooperation between teacher professional bodies and within them: no one is standing alone. Building resilience requires focused, effective research and skills with data so that the policy positions taken by those who oppose or seek to weaken public education can be challenged.

The Global Education Race: Taking the Measure of PISA and International Testing (2017)

An ATA-commissioned book written by Sam Sellar, Greg Thompson and David Rutkowski.



Purpose and Design

To promote conversations about the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and international testing more generally, the Association commissioned this book, which “informs and warns, but . . . is neither anti-testing nor anti-PISA.” The authors describe and unpack PISA in a lucid, concise and balanced manner.

Key Findings

In this discussion of international testing, the following key ideas emerge:

- The “power of PISA” is inextricable from the stories it generates.
- A focus on PISA rankings is problematic as rankings, in fact, represent a range (because of standard error), are limited due to sampling issues and “reduce thousands of pages of complex analysis into a single idea.”
- International assessment results need to be contextualized.
- International assessment results are limited in what they reveal about a jurisdiction’s students, education system or economic performance.

Implications

Even as they highlight its limitations, Sellar, Thompson and Rutkowski speak highly of PISA. At the same time, they call for technical democracy, with wider and more informed debate on international testing. The book outlines key considerations related to PISA to improve data literacy and to encourage readers to think critically about and contribute to debate on PISA and international testing.

EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY AND WELL-BEING

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Online Learning Initiatives in Alberta Schools (2018)



Purpose and Design

The Association completed a study that explored how increasingly complex student populations are being supported through a variety of online education initiatives, including software programs, digital classroom platforms used in blended learning environments and fully online courses. This study employed a qualitative approach, recognizing that teachers' experiences, stories and insights are at the core of effective teaching practice and that open-ended interviews allow participants to express their thoughts, concerns and solutions the most thoroughly.

Key Findings

Just as Alberta's classrooms and online teaching environments are complex, so is the topic of using digital technologies in those ecosystems. Below are the key themes that emerged in this study:

- Concerns surrounding the use of student-owned smartphones
- The near-ubiquitous use of Google for Education in Alberta schools and the privacy and security implications
- Challenges involved in the use of both publicly available and school-based social media
- Issues involved in supporting teachers, both technologically and pedagogically, in the effective use of digital technologies
- The emergence of communities of practice
- The benefits and the challenges of encouraging teachers to create and legally share open educational resources
- The constant technological change that confronts educators

Implications

The report recommends that universities, governments and teachers' associations continue to fund research that targets the daily practice of teachers in a variety of teaching and learning ecosystems. A deep, qualitative understanding of educational practice can be achieved only by continuing to listen to the voices of those with first-hand knowledge of the complexity of the educational process.

Research Study of Digital Reporting, Assessment and Portfolio Tools: Results Summary (2018)



This report is part of a longitudinal study. Three earlier reports also addressed the topic of digital reporting and digital assessment tools.

Purpose and Design

The Association continued its longitudinal research into the value and impact of digital reporting and assessment tools with a fourth survey addressing the subject. In addition to digital reporting and assessment tools, this most recent iteration of the study inquired into the popularity and use of digital tools that attempt to quantify and measure student well-being and behaviour, referred to as digital portfolio tools. For the study, 644 teachers and school leaders completed a survey, which produced both quantitative and qualitative data.

Key Findings

The survey results indicate the benefits of digital reporting, assessment and portfolio tools (for example, improved communication) but also the drawbacks (for example, increases in student anxiety and in expectations placed on teachers). Key findings include the following:

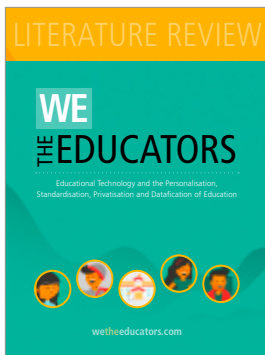
- Many survey participants were currently using or implementing digital reporting (88 per cent), digital assessment (43 per cent) and digital portfolio (25 per cent) tools.
- Increased workload, the level of consultation about the purchase and use of tools, and the flexibility of the tools were teachers' top concerns about digital reporting, assessment and portfolio tools.
- Slightly more than half of the respondents indicated that they were confident that digital assessment tools were improving their students' learning; they were slightly less confident about digital portfolio and digital reporting tools improving their students' learning or behaviour. About half of the respondents indicated that digital reporting tools provided no or very little improvement to the level of instruction and assessment in the classroom.

Implications

Given the number of teachers and school leaders using, implementing or planning to implement digital reporting, assessment and portfolio tools, the ever-evolving effects of these tools on teaching and learning continue to demand examination. In particular, the capacity for such tools to support rather than constrain teacher judgment and autonomy in facilitating student learning must be considered if we are to avoid a reductionist approach to education in Alberta. These tools hold great potential in terms of communication and engagement, but significant concerns and questions related to the expectations and limitations placed on teachers, as well as on students, remain.

We the Educators: Educational Technology and the Personalisation, Standardisation, Privatisation and Datafication of Education— Literature Review (2017)

A collaboration between the ATA, Education International and the Canadian Teachers' Federation.



Visit WeTheEducators.com for the full literature review and accompanying videos (available in English, French and Spanish).

Purpose and Design

Educational technology and the datafication of learning have resulted in increased pressure to standardize learning, reduce curricula, depersonalize student learning and, ultimately, undermine and deprofessionalize teaching in many parts of the world. Responding to this, this literature review works to establish a foundational understanding of the interdiscursive nature of this issue by reviewing the literature surrounding standardization, personalization, privatization, and educational technology and the datafication of learning.

Key Findings

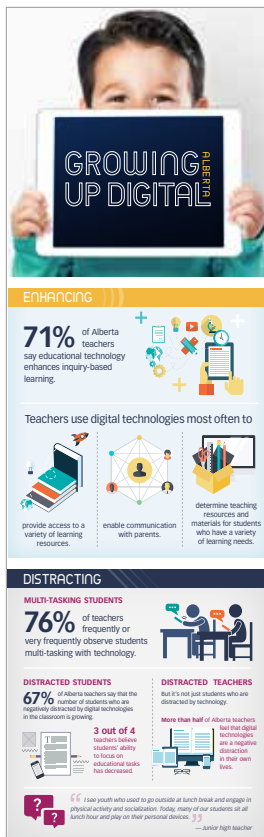
Conducting this literature review reinforced the many connections and tensions between standardization, personalization and privatization. These three concepts are not discrete but, rather, convergent. The relationship between them that begins to emerge here begs attention and further scrutiny.

Implications

Educational technology and the associated production of data hold great potential in terms of supporting individual learner needs. But the relationship between educational technology, data, personalization, privatization and standardization needs to be considered with care; the potential for harm must not be overshadowed by the hype, and the broader purpose of education must not be lost.

ONGOING RESEARCH INITIATIVES

Growing Up Digital (GUD) Alberta



Background

Researchers from the Association, the University of Alberta, Boston Children's Hospital and Harvard Medical School are working on a collaborative initiative, Growing Up Digital (GUD) Alberta, to better understand the scope of the physical, mental and social consequences of digital technologies in areas such as exercise, homework, identity formation, distraction, cognition, learning, nutrition, and sleep quality and quantity. The project is exploring correlations between health outcomes and technology use in students' lives.

Findings

Phase I

To identify baseline issues and essential research questions from teachers, a stratified random sample of 3,600 teachers and principals from across Alberta was invited to participate in a GUD survey in December 2015. This request resulted in over 2,200 participants, which is highly representative of Alberta's teaching population. Data from this first stage of the GUD project show that Alberta teachers

- generally believe that digital technologies enhance their teaching and learning activities;
- have seen a dramatic change in the complexity of the student population over the past three to five years (of particular note is the increase in the number of students who demonstrate emotional challenges, social challenges, behaviour support and cognitive challenges); and
- generally believe that digital technologies are a growing distraction in the learning environment.

Phase II

For the second phase of the research, a survey gathering the perspectives of parents and grandparents was conducted, with more than 3,700 respondents. Key findings from this stage include the following:

- More than one-third of parents are concerned about their children's exposure to digital content when they are not with them.

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- The majority of parents indicate that their children's use of technology has a negative impact on physical activity.
- More than one-fifth (22 per cent) of parents feel that their children are addicted to technology.

Phase III

The Association launched this phase of the longitudinal study with a feasibility test for the measurement of momentary interactive media environment (MIME) use. The tool was developed by project partners at Harvard Medical School and involved the self-selected participation of several young Albertans aged 11–16 years. The initial sample provided groundbreaking data on how young people are engaging with media during the school day and at night, and will be expanding to hundreds of young Albertans, pending analysis and refinement of the research tool.

Implications

Research around digital technologies and media use taking time away from human relationships is an active field of inquiry in the health and social sciences. Of particular interest is emerging research relating to fragmented attention (or unpredictable care) during sensitive developmental periods and the resulting impact on brain development, which may lead to emotional problems later in life.

The eQuality Project

Background

As a partner in the eQuality Project, a multiyear project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Association plays an important role on the project's steering committee. The project focuses on

- informing digital economy policies (especially privacy) in Canada and
- reinvigorating the cyberbullying debate by identifying evidence-based policies that promote healthy relationships and respect for equality online.

Research Initiatives

The project's major research initiatives are as follows:

- *Cyberviolence: Criminal Case Law*. The eQuality researchers have developed legal resources to address questions about how Canadian criminal law responds to technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. These resources provide an in-depth and organized overview of existing case law from across Canada.
- *#DisconnectionChallenge—Youth Participatory Action Research*. In this microstudy, the eQuality researchers tracked the experiences of a group of Canadian youth who wanted to explore how their media use affected their sense of well-being.
- *Defamation Law in the Age of the Internet: Young People's Perspectives*. This research explores young Canadians' attitudes toward and experiences with online defamation, reputation and anonymity, including their opinions on the benefits and drawbacks of existing mechanisms for addressing online defamation.
- *Decision-Making and Privacy: How Youth Make Choices Relating to Reputation*. This research activity investigated how Canadian youth make decisions about personal data and reputational privacy through the selective sharing of images and videos on social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram.

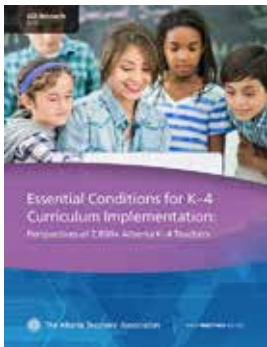
Resources

Links to full research reports and video resources related to the projects are available on the eQuality Project website (www.equalityproject.ca). Also available on the website are lesson plans that provide pedagogical opportunities to engage with the project's research.

EXEMPLARY TEACHING PRACTICE AND LEADERSHIP

RECENT PUBLICATIONS CURRICULUM

Essential Conditions for K–4 Curriculum Implementation: Perspectives of 2,800+ Alberta K–4 Teachers (2018)



Also look for *Next Acts: Educational Impasse, Events and a One-Legged Magpie—a Resource to Support Curriculum Inquiry and Educational Development (2018)*, which offers personal insights and challenges that will provoke assumptions about current curriculum reform efforts both in Alberta and globally.

Purpose and Design

In fall 2018, the Association conducted a survey of Alberta K–4 teachers to understand their readiness for the new K–4 program of studies and the extent to which they have essential conditions in place for the implementation of a new provincial curriculum. An open survey (available in English and French) and a survey of a stratified random sample were conducted, garnering 2,816 responses. The results of the stratified random sample were almost identical to those of the open survey, thus increasing the certainty that the results of this study are representative of all Alberta K–4 teachers.

Key Findings

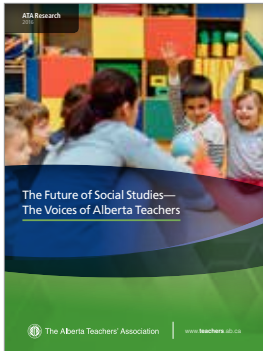
The survey results suggest that, at the time the study was conducted, Alberta’s K–4 teachers

- were, overall, excited about the new program of studies, which is defined by less content and greater flexibility, and were looking forward to its successful implementation;
- felt that implementation should be done over a period of one to three years;
- were aware of the vision for the new curriculum (though only 43 per cent had seen a copy of the draft curriculum); and
- had not yet discussed the new curriculum or prepared for its implementation with their colleagues (including their principal and central office teachers).

Implications

The survey results support the Association’s advocacy efforts related to curriculum implementation timelines. In addition, more than 700 survey participants from across Alberta expressed an interest and a willingness to be part of future Association research studies on the implementation of the new curriculum, offering the Association an active research sample that can provide ongoing data on the successes and challenges of implementing the new Alberta K–4 program of studies.

The Future of Social Studies—the Voices of Alberta Teachers (2016)



“The values and attitudes are the most important part of the entire curriculum. Regardless of what students learn in the form of content and critical thinking, if they are able to recognize and appreciate how our history has helped shape who we are today and appreciate the value of others and what it takes to make a society that people want to live in, they will be in a much better position to help improve our world and make it a better place for all of us to live in.”

—The Future of Social Studies participant

Purpose and Design

Completed in collaboration with the Association’s Social Studies Council, this research project gathered and examined teachers’ perspectives on the current state of social studies in Alberta classrooms. In 2015, researchers conducted an online survey that asked social studies teachers to address the state of curriculum and instruction in Alberta. Nearly 500 teachers completed the survey, which included both scale-response and written-response components.

Key Findings

As represented by the study participants, Alberta teachers

- recognize the need for curriculum change in social studies,
- demonstrate a high level of support for fundamental elements of Alberta’s current program of studies in social studies,
- have significant concerns about aspects of the curriculum, and
- have significant concerns related to aspects of teaching and learning conditions.

These findings suggest that there is a need for systematic, comprehensive and inclusive review and revision of the social studies curriculum consistent with the principles of and evidence for creating great social studies teaching and learning. Further, there is a need to systematically address teaching and learning conditions in Alberta’s social studies classrooms.

Implications

The study reveals the complex interrelationships between curriculum and instruction, assessment, teachers’ capacity to achieve the goals of the program, and the influence of ongoing changes in teaching and learning conditions. Results from the survey help frame consideration of the current social studies program and possible changes to it, and show the productive potential of positioning teachers as leaders in such a conversation.

TEACHER EFFICACY

Engaging in Action Research: A Practical Guide for Alberta Teachers and School Leaders (2019)



Purpose and Design

This publication is a resource intended to help teachers better understand action research as a way of engaging and improving life in classrooms in practical ways. Action research is a collaborative plan teachers can use to investigate a problem or area of interest specific to their teaching and learning, and this guide outlines how they might go about creating, conducting and sharing the findings from an individual or a collaborative action research project. Teachers are faced with daily challenges to build an effective learning culture for all the students in their classrooms or schools. This guide aims to help.

Key Content

This guide describes forms of action research before outlining the action research process, including strategies for developing research questions and ways to collect and analyze data and share findings. Among other matters, it also addresses ethics and the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

Resources

Aside from serving as a key resource for those undertaking action research, this guide points readers to other resources that will support teachers as they engage in action research to make improvements in their own classrooms or schools.

“Who Will Help Me to Do Well?”: How to Best Support the Professional Growth of Alberta’s Newest Teachers (2018)



Purpose and Design

Reflecting a commitment to support its newest members through professional development initiatives and continued research, the Association completed work on a study focused on beginning teachers in Alberta. At and following the 2016 Beginning Teachers' Conference, the Association surveyed over 350 beginning teachers. To better contextualize survey data, the researchers conducted follow-up interviews in 2017.

Key Findings

The findings showed that beginning teachers

- valued existing supports, including informal support from colleagues, sharing resources with colleagues, and formal observations and feedback related to evaluation; and
- desired such supports as formal mentorship programs, school-based orientations, resources (such as lesson plans, unit plans or videos), and regular check-ins from administrators and more experienced colleagues.

Workload was a source of stress for respondents; most felt that they had more to do than they could comfortably handle. Others frequently felt that they could be doing more for their students. Despite the workload, most respondents reported high levels of both confidence in their abilities and feelings of optimism about the profession.

Implications

Effective supports to bolster Alberta teachers' induction experiences can only serve to benefit the profession and the status of education in the province. Sustained attention to and review of induction supports will help ensure that Alberta teachers continue to provide their students with a great education.

Off-Campus Education in Alberta: Current Realities and Future Prospects (2017)



Purpose and Design

The Association initiated this study in spring 2016 based on growing concerns from the field suggesting that off-campus coordinators (OCCs) are finding it difficult to fulfill their responsibilities in this role. While off-campus travel and the administrative requirements of the role are central concerns for OCCs, conditions of practice for this group of teachers are only one part of a larger conversation about the current and future roles of off-campus teaching and learning in Alberta schools. To address concerns related to the OCC role, researchers invited 300 Alberta OCCs to complete a survey. They received 113 responses.

Key Findings

Survey responses suggest the following:

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

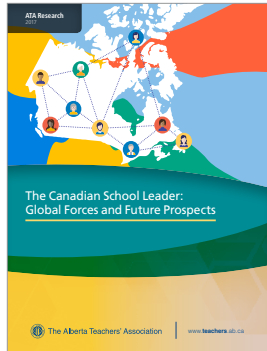
Implications

Alberta's teaching profession believes that vocationalism, human development and citizenship are three possible valued outcomes of any endeavour in public education. The key question is not the prioritization of these outcomes but, rather, how they can coexist. Off-campus education must form an integral part of the educational development of the province. This study offers important context to improve understanding of current teaching and learning realities in this critically important sector of the K–12 education experience and to inform practice and policy in the years ahead.

SCHOOL AND SYSTEM LEADERSHIP

The Canadian School Leader: Global Forces and Future Prospects (2017)

A collaboration between the ATA and the Canadian Association of Principals (CAP).



Purpose and Design

This report examines the key critical influences shaping the work of school leaders across Canada. The impetus for this research was *The Future of the Principalship in Canada: A National Research Study* (2014), which concluded that while school leadership is rewarding and has high levels of job satisfaction, global shifts are fundamentally reshaping the work of school leaders. In striving to better understand the changing nature of the work of Canada's school leaders, the Association and CAP conducted a survey—completed by 921 Canadian school leaders—to investigate the global influences and the future prospects shaping the work of principals.

Responding to Increasing Student Needs

- *The majority (91 per cent) of principals perceived increases in student anxiety.*
- *Half (51 per cent) perceived that fewer students came to school prepared to learn.*
- *Most (84 per cent) somewhat or strongly agreed that their districts placed a high priority on inclusion.*
- *Only 26 per cent strongly agreed that their districts were proactively planning for the increasing diversity anticipated in the future.*

Key Findings

The findings reveal how the following are influencing principals' work:

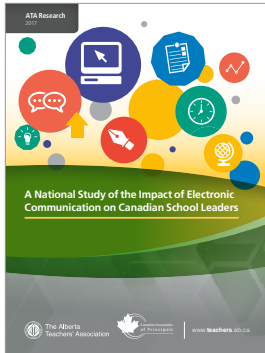
- The changing contexts of teaching and learning, including the increasing need to attend to students' well-being and to students' diverse learning needs
- The role of commercial interests in education
- District supports for school leaders, particularly related to technology, inclusion and professional development

Implications

Canada's school leaders, as teachers first, require a commitment of support to fulfill our country's most important promise to young people: a great public school education for all. This commitment is particularly necessary given the shifting global forces that school leaders are facing in their work.

A National Study of the Impact of Electronic Communication on Canadian School Leaders (2017)

A collaboration between the ATA and CAP, undertaken by Linda Duxbury and André Lanctôt.



Most (92.5 per cent) respondents reported high or moderate levels of e-mail overload, which is one of the most important contributors to role overload.

Purpose and Design

This study reports the findings of a survey—completed by 1,150 CAP members—that inquired into how electronic communication, such as e-mail, is affecting the work lives of Canadian school leaders. Attending to how the number and types of e-mails a principal sends and receives relate to employee and organizational well-being, this report considers how employees and organizations can manage electronic communication to maximize the benefits of the technology while minimizing the drawbacks. This report aims to improve understanding of how Canadian principals evaluate and process work-related e-mail, linking this e-mail use to outcomes of interest to their school systems or jurisdictions.

Key Findings

Higher levels of role overload—connected in part to e-mail overload—have been found to be positively associated with negative consequences to the employee (declines in employee well-being) and to the organization’s bottom line. This study’s respondents reported significant levels of e-mail overload:

- Canadian school leaders devote 17 hours per week to processing e-mail (11.2 hours per week at school and another 5.8 hours per week at home).
- Principals who spend 20 hours or more per week processing e-mail will likely experience high levels of e-mail overload.

Implications

With school leaders already facing heavy work demands (working approximately 61 hours per week), effective management of work-related e-mail is crucial for creating optimal conditions of work. This is important to the school district’s bottom line, but it is even more essential to fostering a positive school environment—school leaders transmit organizational culture. Managing expectations and norms at the individual and organizational levels is key to change.

The Role of the Superintendent and the Teaching Profession (2016)



Purpose and Design

Initiated by the Association's Committee on Superintendents in the Teaching Profession, the research report *The Role of the Superintendent and the Teaching Profession* represents the culmination of two years of work and the contributions of committee members and staff, as well as an expert panel of provincial, national and international researchers. This report comprises four sections:

- An overview of the report's aims to establish the basis for future analysis of the role of the superintendent in Alberta, specifically as it relates to the teaching force
- A comprehensive literature review
- An examination of the way in which the superintendency is currently practised and the challenges associated with this work
- Suggestions for avenues for further research

Key Findings

The superintendent's role is one of balance, nimbleness, pressure and stress, and ambiguity. Contextual analysis suggests that, in addition to everyday concerns (such as safety, budgets and governance) and specific barriers to effective performance (such as community resistance and lack of resources), superintendents face five major challenges in their role:

- Managing human and capital trade-offs
- Living with uncertainty and vulnerability
- Managing risk
- Focusing on outcomes and accountability
- Managing upward, downward, across and outward

Implications

By investigating the role of the superintendent, particularly in relation to the teaching profession, stakeholders can work toward a better understanding of leadership in education to address current practice and future needs. To maintain the strength of Alberta's education system, stakeholders must work to strengthen the adaptive capacity of Alberta's superintendents.

INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Association engages in boundary-crossing collaborative inquiry through its international partnerships. In 2018, the Association commenced three-year international research partnerships with Finland (FINAL) and Iceland (ALICE). The Alberta partner schools for FINAL and ALICE travelled to Helsinki, Finland, and Reykjavik, Iceland, respectively, to engage in multiple school visits and collaborative action research planning. Work is also under way on continuing an international research partnership with New Zealand.

These international research partnerships aim to build the Association's capacity to advocate for schools and lead educational change and development with teachers, school leaders and students developing new networks of learning. The Finland, Iceland and New Zealand partnerships all involve principals, teachers and students working side by side in an action research model to engage in activities focused on what they believe makes a great school for all.

Generally, the first year of a partnership is spent engaging student and teacher voices (among others) to identify what makes a great school for all. The second year involves ongoing reflection and action research on the difference the work is making to the life of the school and school community, and the third year involves a discussion of what should take place now in order to evolve, sustain or transition from the international research partnership work.

FINLAND–ALBERTA (FINAL) INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

Following an open call for expressions of interest from Alberta high schools to become part of a new network of public high schools in Alberta and across Finland, a panel (comprising the Association president, a field member involved in a past FINAL partnership and executive staff) selected five Alberta high schools to participate in the FINAL research partnership.

The 2018–21 international research partnership with Finland (FINAL) officially launched on October 8, 2018, with a Base Camp meeting in Helsinki, with representatives from Alberta high schools and Finnish *lukio* (high schools) meeting to begin their action research projects. Emerging from this meeting were the following topics related to the question, What makes a great school for students?

- The potential of later start times for school
- Increasing costs to attend school (from textbooks to technology) and costs being downloaded to families
- The need to examine environmental concerns, in terms of both creating and maintaining safe spaces for all and examining schools' environmental footprints

ALBERTA–ICELAND (ALICE) INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

The official launch of the Association's 2018–21 international research partnership with Iceland (ALICE) occurred on November 5, 2018, with a Base Camp meeting in Reykjavik, with participants from three small rural Alberta high schools and three Icelandic schools. At the meeting, the Alberta and Icelandic students discussed the question of what makes a great school for all as it relates to rural schools. The following topics emerged:

- The value of food programs
- Issues around inclusion
- The importance of strong relationships between students and teachers
- The potential for flexible class schedules to alleviate student stress
- The potential for a positive atmosphere and strong relationships in small schools

RESEARCH PUBLICATION LISTING

2019

School Leadership in the Teaching Profession: Environmental Scan and Needs Assessment (coming soon!)

Wellness Literature Review and Inventory of Provincial and National Programs (coming soon!)

Engaging in Action Research: A Practical Guide for Alberta Teachers and School Leaders

2018

Essential Conditions for K–4 Curriculum Implementation: Perspectives of 2,800+ Alberta K–4 Teachers

Research Study of Digital Reporting, Assessment and Portfolio Tools: Results Summary

Online Learning Initiatives in Alberta Schools

Twin Peaks: Exploring the Boundaries of Public Education

Control, Regulation and Scope of Practice in the Teaching Profession: An Environmental Scan of Selected Canadian Jurisdictions

“Who Will Help Me to Do Well?”: How to Best Support the Professional Growth of Alberta’s Newest Teachers

2017

Off-Campus Education in Alberta: Current Realities and Future Prospects

The Canadian School Leader: Global Forces and Future Prospects

A National Study of the Impact of Electronic Communication on Canadian School Leaders

We the Educators: Educational Technology and the Personalisation, Standardisation, Privatisation and Datafication of Education—Literature Review

Recounting Student Success: Rethinking Educational Accountability for Public Assurance in Alberta Schools

2016

The Role of the Superintendent and the Teaching Profession

The Future of Social Studies—the Voices of Alberta Teachers

Rich Accountabilities for Public Assurance: Moving Forward Together for a Great School for All

A Great School for All: Moving Forward Together

2015

Growing Tired, Anxious, Distracted: Growing Up Digital (GUD) Alberta Survey 2015 Research Overview

Building School Leadership Capacity Through Cognitive Coaching

Renewing Alberta's Promise: A Great School for All

The State of Inclusion in Alberta Schools

Teaching and Learning Conditions in Alberta: A Global Perspective

2014

Digital Reporting and Digital Assessment Tools: Evaluating Their Value and Their Impact

The Future of the Principalship in Canada: A National Research Study

A Week in the Life of Alberta School Leaders

Reflections on Teaching: Teacher Efficacy and the Professional Capital of Alberta Teachers

The Future Is Growing Together: Building the Professional Capital of Teachers in Rocky View Schools

2013

Teaching in the Early Years of Practice: A Five-Year Longitudinal Study

The 2011/12 National Study on Balancing Work, Life and Caregiving in Canada: The Situation for Alberta Teachers

Transformation and Alberta's Schools: A Time for Action

2012

Creating Possibilities, Balancing Priorities—the 2012 Professional Development Survey

Alberta Voices: Teachers' Aspirations for the Future of Teaching

A Great School for All—Transforming Education in Alberta

Teaching in the Early Years of Practice: Fourth-Year Report

The New Work of Teaching: A Case Study of the Worklife of Calgary Public Teachers

2011

The Impact of Digital Technologies on Teachers Working in Flexible Learning Environments

The Future of Teaching in Alberta

The Early Years of Practice: Interim Report of a Five-Year Study of Beginning Teachers in Alberta

Substitute Teachers in Alberta: A Research Report

2010

Professional Learning for Informed Transformation: The 2010 Professional Development Survey

The Courage to Choose: Emerging Trends and Strategic Possibilities for Informed Transformation in Alberta Schools: 2010–2011

Using Technology to Support Real Learning First in Alberta Schools

Evaluating the School Principal: A Professional Model for Enhancing the Leadership Practices of Alberta's School Administrators

The Experience of Substitute Teaching in Alberta Schools: A Research Report

2009

Looking Forward: Emerging Trends and Strategic Possibilities for Enhancing Teaching and Learning in Alberta Schools 2009–2012

Leadership for Learning: The Experience of Administrators in Alberta Schools

Success for All: The Teaching Profession's Views on the Future of Special Education in Alberta

RESEARCH BRIEF LISTING

2019

Artificial Intelligence and Automation

Student Mental Wellness

2018

Class Size and Composition Matter

The Efficacy of Full-Day Kindergarten

Many of the publications to which this document refers are available on the ATA website at www.teachers.ab.ca (**Public Education > Education Research**). Print copies of many of the reports are also available, with one copy of each publication being available free of charge to all ATA members.

Non-ATA members or ATA members who require more than one copy can view pricing and ordering information on the ATA website (**News and Info > Publications**) or contact Distribution at distribution@ata.ab.ca.

Further background information about the research studies cited in this publication is available from Lindsay Yakimyshyn (lindsay.yakimyshyn@ata.ab.ca).



The Alberta
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