Research into Policy and Practice

HIGHLIGHTS

2017

INQUIRY

INNOVATION

IMPACT

The Alberta Teachers' Association

CONTENTS

It seems we must learn to be in two places at one time. Simultaneously. We must be in the river and also on the bank. This is the curious time of pedagogy.

—Gary William Rasberry, Writing Research/Research Writing: Through the Poet's I

PREFACE

One of the Association's overarching goals is to identify strategic research priorities that will build its capacity as a forward-thinking teacher organization in order to advance positive educational change. Flowing from the Association's *Strategic Plan* (Alberta Teachers' Association 2013), the research activities outlined in this publication and the conversations they will hopefully engender will help teachers to engage their communities in understanding the forces shaping the precarious future of public education.

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 US, 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 is 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, reduce the opportunities afforded to all students, and compel teachers to defend their professional autonomy and collective voice. With the growth of modular, online, analytics-driven learning and the emergence of artificial-intelligence–supported teaching systems,

teachers—alongside school and system leaders—will be challenged to develop the capacity for building a great public school education for all students.

As signalled by the various research studies in the pages that follow, technological changes have enabled and catalyzed a growing interest in standardized tests. The research studies outlined in this publication remind us that the patterns of datafication and accountability regimes will be 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 standardized testing. As governments respond to the "skills agenda" and the "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 hollowed-out versions of student engagement, indigeneity, wellness and other previously marginalized priorities of education systems.

The research efforts undertaken this past year are wide ranging. They 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; and the development of international education partnerships.

This publication invites you to pursue these projects in greater detail. More important, as the title page of this document suggests, this publication offers a glimpse into the efforts the Association is taking to move beyond mere inquiry and toward innovative practices and policies that will enhance the possibilities of that population of students already among the most capable and innovative young people in the world today: namely, Alberta students.

References

Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). 2013. *Strategic Plan*. Edmonton, Alta: ATA. Available at www.teachers.ab.ca/ SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/Publications/Membership-and-Services/COOR-69d%202014%2003_Strategic%20Plan .pdf (accessed 2017 03 17).

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EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
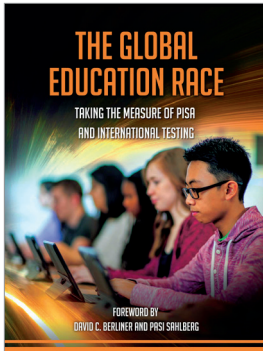
RECENT PUBLICATIONS

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 ATA commissioned this book, which "informs and warns, but it is neither anti-testing nor anti-PISA." In the book, 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 PISA's limitations, Sellar, Thompson and Rutkowski identify real benefits of international assessment. At the same time, the authors 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.

Renewing Alberta's Promise: A Great School for All (2015)
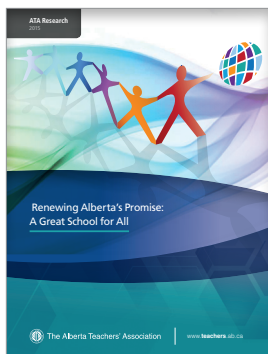
Check out the accompanying brochure, A Great School for All: Moving Forward Together, *which highlights the report's key points.*

Purpose and Design

In May 2014, teachers, school leaders and administrators from across Alberta came together for an international symposium on curriculum change, titled Off the Charts: International Dialogue on Redesigning Curriculum in Alberta. The symposium aimed to enable participants to learn from the experience of others to better understand the changes to curriculum currently under way in Alberta. This report summarizes key points and discoveries that emerged from this symposium and uses the symposium's presentations and dialogue to further explore the questions asked of participants.

Key Findings

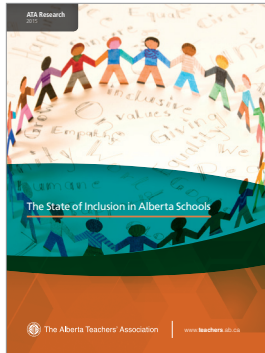The following are recurring concerns related to the curriculum changes in Alberta:

- An unarticulated theory of action appears to be guiding decision making.
- The broader social contexts of learning are being marginally considered.
- The teaching profession's views are not included in leading change.

Despite these concerns, noteworthy opportunities related to curriculum change can arise from, for example, using equity as a driver of reform and renewal, focusing on learning and teaching, and supporting teachers' professional responsibility for sound assessment as a path to public assurance.

Implications

Alberta's schools and school systems are not unique in seeking to improve education, the experience of teaching and learning, and the broader work of schools. Education stakeholders in Alberta should learn from the experience of others around the world to understand the challenges and opportunities associated with curriculum change.

The State of Inclusion in Alberta Schools (2015)

Purpose and Design

Based on the work of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Inclusive Education in Alberta Schools, this report discusses the framework for inclusion and culminates with 38 recommendations for the effective implementation of inclusive education. As part of its efforts, the panel contracted researchers from the University of Alberta to conduct a study on the experiences of teachers and administrators in relation to inclusion. The researchers employed a mixed-methods approach, consisting of telephone interviews with superintendents, focus groups with members and two online submission tools (self-selected and random sample). The research results, as well as consideration of the definition and evolution of inclusion, provided the foundation for the panel's recommendations.

Key Findings

The recommendations include the following:

- Establish a provincial stakeholder advisory committee and a school-jurisdiction–level inclusive education advisory committee to work toward developing and implementing a plan.

- Monitor inclusive education funding and determine the actual costs of supporting all students effectively.

- Conduct regular research in Alberta classrooms to determine the effectiveness of inclusion and to advance this field of study.

- Ensure that provincewide guidelines for average class sizes—which should take classroom complexity into account—are achieved.

- Enable teachers to engage in professional development activities and to meet in collaborative teams to learn and share strategies to support inclusive practices.

- Provide opportunities for parents to learn and engage in dialogue about inclusion.

Implications

Inclusion is a complex issue that requires the combined efforts of the Government of Alberta, Alberta Education, the ATA, postsecondary institutions, school jurisdictions, schools, school councils and teachers. With this in mind, the recommendations delineated in this report foreground the key stakeholders and their roles in the successful implementation of inclusion.

> Classrooms right now have more students, more diverse needs, with no support, time or money. This results in teachers feeling overwhelmed, ineffective, stressed and burnt out. Many teachers are considering leaving the profession because of the current state of the education system.
>
> —*The State of Inclusion in Alberta Schools study participant*

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Rich Accountabilities for Public Assurance: Moving Forward Together for a Great School for All (2015)
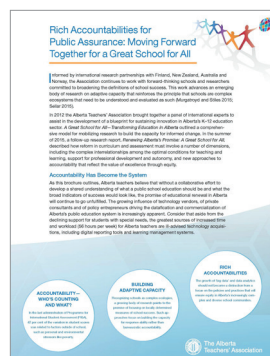
Purpose and Design

The Association is committed to broadening the definitions of school success, promoting rich accountabilities that give an account of what really matters in Alberta schools. This four-page foldout outlines this broadening of the definitions of school success and draws on recent research related to progressive alternatives to test-based accountability systems.

Key Findings

Focused on enhancing public assurance through professional responsibility, this report suggests a model that includes daily teacher-developed classroom assessments, occasional teacher-selected collaboratively developed assessments and periodic provincewide assessments.

In addition, the following design elements for rich accountabilities are proposed:

- Values—achieving excellence through equity
- Information—moving beyond the datafication and commercialization of public education
- Practice and Policy—moving to multilateral or rich accountabilities

Implications

Continuing its work on rich accountabilities, the Association will consider the following lines of inquiry:

- How do we ensure equity and engagement for all learners?
- How do we provide learning pathways that meet the different needs of different learners while also ensuring the quality of all learning taking place in the school?
- How do we appropriately leverage technology and innovation to support engaged and inclusive learning for all without succumbing to the growing influence of commercial and private interests?
- How do we engage Albertans in a democratic dialogue concerning their aspirations regarding great public education and the multilateral accountabilities to ensure a vibrant future for the province?

EDUCATION, TECHNOLOGY AND WELL-BEING

RECENT PUBLICATIONS

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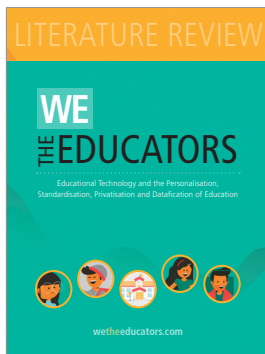
Visit WeTheEducators .com for the full literature review and accompanying videos (available in English, French and Spanish).

Purpose and Design

Educational technology and the datafication of learning have resulted in increased pressures to standardize learning, reduce curricula, depersonalize student learning and ultimately undermine and deprofessionalize teaching in many parts of the world. In response, the 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 convergent. The relationship that emerges here between them 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.

Digital Reporting and Digital Assessment Tools: Evaluating their Value and their Impact on Classrooms (2014)

This report is part three of a four-part longitudinal study. Work is under way on the fourth instalment of the digital reporting and digital assessment tools study.

Purpose and Design

To examine the place of technology in education, the ATA conducted a study on how the use of digital reporting and assessment tools is affecting student learning, the workload of teachers and principals, and overall assessment practices. Focus groups and an online survey provided insight into this important issue.

Key Findings

- Sixty-three per cent of respondents suggest that online reporting and assessment tools have not improved instruction and assessment for students.
- Sixty-six per cent indicate that these tools have increased or significantly increased workload for teachers.
- Ninety-three per cent report having little to no input in selecting or implementing these tools.

Implications

Technology comes with great potential. However, as this study reveals, the implementation of digital reporting and assessment tools must be navigated thoughtfully. Continued attention should be paid to their overall effect and the role that they can and should play in the classroom.

Ongoing Research Initiatives
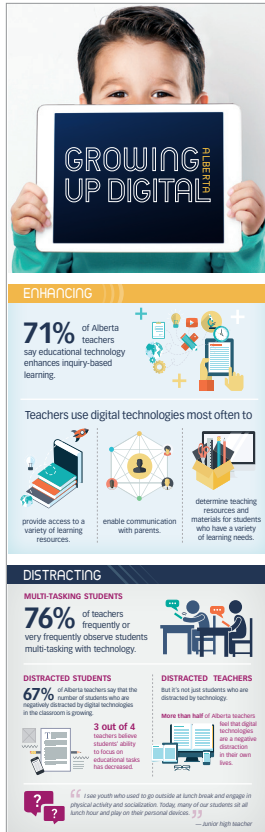
Growing Up Digital (GUD) Alberta

Background

Researchers from the ATA, 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 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.

Preliminary Findings

To identify baseline issues and essential research questions from teachers, a stratified random sample of 3,600 teachers and principals from across Alberta were invited to participate in a GUD survey in December 2015. This request resulted in over 2,200 participants in a sample 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 "somewhat" and "significant" increase in the number of students who demonstrate emotional challenges, social challenges, behaviour support needs and cognitive challenges; and

- generally believe that digital technologies are a growing distraction in the learning environment.

Implications

Research into 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 that may lead to emotional problems later in life.

ENHANCING

71% of Alberta teachers say educational technology enhances inquiry-based learning.

Teachers use digital technologies most often to

provide access to a variety of learning resources.

enable communication with parents.

determine teaching resources and materials for students who have a variety of learning needs.

DISTRACTING

MULTI-TASKING STUDENTS

76% of teachers frequently or very frequently observe students multi-tasking with technology.

DISTRACTED STUDENTS

67% of Alberta teachers say the number of students who are negatively distracted by digital technologies in the classroom is growing.

3 out of 4 teachers believe students' ability to focus on educational tasks has decreased.

DISTRACTED TEACHERS

But it's not just students who are distracted by technology.

More than half of Alberta teachers feel that digital technologies are a negative distraction in their own lives.

"I see youth who used to go outside at lunch break and engage in physical activity and socialization. Today, many of our students sit all lunch hour and play on their personal devices."
— Junior high teacher

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The eQuality Project

Background

As a partner in a multiyear Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) project, the Association plays an important part on the steering committee for the eQuality project. The project focuses on (1) informing digital economy policies (especially privacy) in Canada and (2) reinvigorating the cyberbullying debate by identifying evidence-based policies that promote healthy relationships and respect for equality online.

Research Aims

The project has the following four goals over the seven years funded by SSHRC:

- To create new knowledge about commercial data practices and their impact on youth by mapping out how online and mobile information infrastructures combine with social norms to expose young Canadians to discrimination and cyberbullying

- To create new knowledge about the ways in which diverse groups of young people conceptualize privacy and the potential for equality in networked spaces

- To contribute to digital media policy making by disseminating this new knowledge to policy-makers and members of the public

- To create educational materials that will help young Canadians make the most of their digital media experiences

EXEMPLARY TEACHING PRACTICE AND LEADERSHIP

RECENT PUBLICATIONS
CURRICULUM

The Future of Social Studies—The Voices of Alberta Teachers (2016)
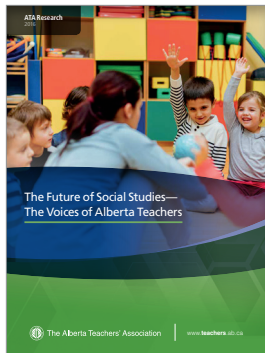
The values and attitudes are the most important part of the entire curriculum. Regardless of what students learn in the form of content and critical thinking, if they are able to recognize and appreciate how our history has helped shape who we are today and appreciate the value of others and what it 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 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 a web-based 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 with some aspects of the curriculum and
- have significant concerns related to aspects of teaching and learning conditions.

The study's findings suggest that there is need for systematic, comprehensive and inclusive review and revision of the social studies curriculum consistent with the principles and evidence for creating great social studies teaching and learning. Further, there is a need to systematically address the 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 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

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

IN PRESS

Purpose and Design

The ATA 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 present 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 and received 113 responses.

Key Findings

Survey responses suggest the following:

- OCCs' experiences 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 maintains that vocationalism, human development and citizenship are three possible, valued outcomes of any endeavour in public education. What is most important is not how these outcomes are prioritized, but rather how they may coexist. Off-campus education must form an integral part of educational development in the province. This study offers important context to help improve our understanding of current teaching and learning realities in the critically important sector of K–12 education experience, and can also help to inform practice and policy as we look forward to high school redesign and curriculum redevelopment in the coming years.

Teaching and Learning Conditions in Alberta: A Global Perspective (2015)
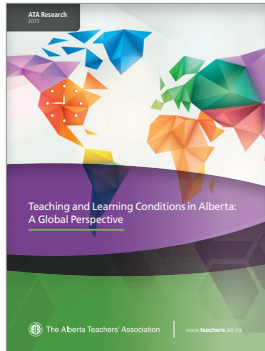
Purpose and Design

This report offers an analysis of the results of the 2013 Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) in relation to five studies focused on Alberta teachers undertaken within the previous three years. Though international in scope, the TALIS report provides insight into the working conditions of Alberta teachers, as the study's Canadian sample consists entirely of teachers in the province. Examining and comparing the TALIS and Alberta studies, this report identifies key areas of concern and opportunity related to Alberta's teaching and learning conditions.

Key Findings

The report discusses the following themes that emerge from several of the studies:

- Workload—five of the six studies report the number of hours worked per week, on average, by Alberta teachers; the studies' findings range from 48 to 60 hours of work per week.

- Classroom composition—classroom size and complexity are often tied to increases in workload-related stress.

- Professional development—Alberta teachers appear to participate in professional development opportunities, but do not always feel that those opportunities are efficacious.

- Job satisfaction, well-being and morale—Alberta teachers seem satisfied with their jobs; however, overall well-being appears to be on the decline, with increasing workloads affecting work–life balance.
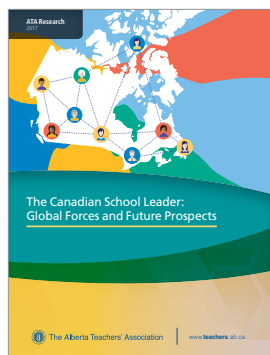
Implications

The six studies—including the TALIS results—analyzed in this report indicate the large amount of change that has affected Alberta's education system, sometimes significantly and negatively impacting the lives of the teachers across the province. Together, the reports suggest that more change is needed in order for the teaching profession to remain a compelling and attractive career choice. However, without incorporating the input of teachers, failures seem likely to be repeated.

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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)

Responding to increasing student needs

- 91 per cent of principals perceived increases in students' anxiety.

- 51 per cent perceived that fewer students came to school prepared to learn.

- 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 increasing diversity anticipated in the future.

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, with 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 ATA 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.

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 the CAP, undertaken by Linda Duxbury and André Lanctôt
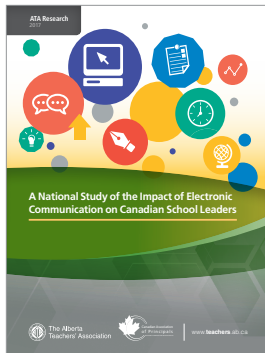
92.5 per cent of respondents reported high or moderate levels of e-mail overload, which is one of the most important contributors to role overload.

Purpose and Design

This study reports the findings of a survey—completed by 1,150 CAP members—that inquired into how electronic communications affect the work lives of Canadian school leaders. Attending to the relationship between principals' increasing e-mail use and 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, and to link this e-mail use to outcomes of interest to their school system or jurisdiction.

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 the organization's bottom line. Respondents reported significant levels of e-mail overload:

- Canadian school leaders devote 17 hours per week to processing e-mail (11.2 hours/week at school and another 5.8 hours/week at home).
- Principals who spend 20 hours or more per week processing e-mails 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 is even more essential with respect 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)
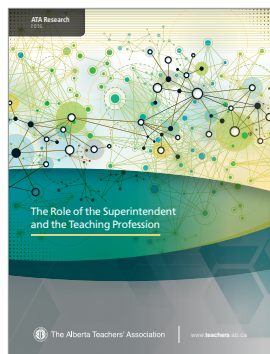
Purpose and Design

Initiated by the Committee on Superintendents in the Teaching Profession, *The Role of the Superintendent and the Teaching Profession* represents the culmination of two years of work and the contributions of committee members, staff, and an expert panel of provincial, national and international researchers. This report comprises four sections: (1) 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; (2) a comprehensive literature review; (3) an examination of the way in which the superintendency is currently practised and the challenges associated with this work; and (4) suggestions for avenues for further research.

Key Findings

The superintendent's role is one of balance, agility, pressure and stress, and ambiguity. Contextual analysis suggests that, in addition to everyday concerns (eg, safety, budgets, governance) and specific barriers to effective performance (eg, community resistance, 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 present practice and future needs. To maintain the strength of Alberta's educational system, stakeholders must work to strengthen the adaptive capacity of Alberta's superintendents, who are ultimately teachers first.

Building School Leadership Capacity Through Cognitive Coaching (2015)
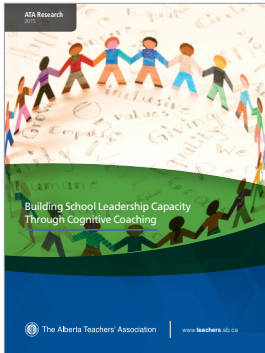
Purpose and Design

This research report is a program evaluation of the Leader2Leader (L2L) program designed by the Association for newly appointed school principals and funded through a conditional grant from Alberta Education. The pilot L2L program—which featured Cognitive Coaching as the framework for peer mentoring—was conducted during the 2012/13 and 2013/14 school years, and had as participants 28 beginning principals, as well as 15 experienced principals who assumed roles as certified peer coaches. The program aimed to develop a network of reflective, self-reliant school leaders whose high-quality leadership optimizes student learning and supports school improvement.

Key Findings

To evaluate the success of the program, researchers had participants complete pre- and posttests related to seven professional practice competencies, as well as surveys and telephone interviews. Overall, the results signal the positive potential of the L2L program. In particular, results indicate that the program

- strengthened both coaches' and beginning principals' professional practice competencies, enabling participants to enhance their school leadership skills and self-efficacy;

- created benefits for the beginning principals and their school communities; and

- positively influenced school climate.

Implications

All of the participants indicated that they would recommend the program to incoming principals, and the success of the pilot program signals the wider potential of the L2L program to build school leadership capacity. In continuing and expanding this program, stakeholders would be enabling principals to be more effective leaders in cocreating great schools for all and a more vibrant future for Alberta's education system.

INTERNATIONAL NETWORKS AND PARTNERSHIPS

In order to advance the goal of a great public school education for all Alberta students as a system priority, the Association has undertaken a research effort to assess the impact of "system boundary-crossing" through a collaborative inquiry that supports educational development and school improvement. This research effort is based on the "internationalization of education reform" advanced by Pasi Sahlberg and Dennis Shirley, among others, who continue to collaborate with the Association. The network of international researchers that has grown from our global partnerships continues to advance the goals of the Association's strategic plan.

This past year, the Association sponsored an international research symposium, Twin Peaks: The Precarious Future of Public Education, held in Banff on April 7–8, 2017. The goal of this symposium was to identify strategic research priorities for forward-thinking teacher organizations over the next 10 years in order to advance positive educational change. The international experts who participated in the symposium agreed that the following three developments need to be addressed by the research of teacher organizations:

- The growth of the precariat globally where the rich get richer, the poor get poorer and the middle class continues to get squeezed while education reforms are dressed up with catch-phrases such as *Canada's innovation gap* and *Alberta's Future Ready agenda.*

- Government policies increasingly being driven by the datafication of public education through a focus on international benchmarking, data analytics and rankings, all increasingly enabled by the growth of digital testing platforms that confuse standards with standardization

- Teachers' professional practice and autonomy being diminished by the growing influence of those who see education as a means of servicing the economy and achieving a narrowly defined vision of the future

As a number of the speakers at the Twin Peaks symposium identified, the global education reform movement (GERM) is narrowing future possibilities in a variety of jurisdictions around the world (e g, by championing ambiguously defined 21st-century skills; the inappropriate uses of international rankings that perpetuate the myth of Alberta's math crisis) and therefore winning the political argument over what counts as success in school. Beyond the volatility that is growing worldwide, beyond the forces acting against public education—and indeed against all public institutions, given the growing societal uncertainty that will follow in the wake of a weakened public education system—lies the leadership imperative for teacher organizations to avoid feeling nostalgic in a future that will simply be a new version of yesterday.

While we might debate this or that test, print versus digital assessment platforms, rankings and league tables, the point is that globally accountability has become the system. It might be time for the public to reconsider who is counting what and for whom?

—*Sam Sellar, 2015, Red Deer, public lecture dedicated to the memory of Joe Bower*

THE FINLAND–ALBERTA (FINAL) PARTNERSHIP

In the fall of 2010, the Association, in collaboration with the Finnish Board of Education, the Centre for International Mobility and Alberta Education, initiated the Finland–Alberta (FINAL) international partnership to advance international educational and policy development through a shared commitment to provide a great school for all students.

FINAL is driven by the principle that transformation is best enabled by educational systems that support local innovation. For the FINAL partnership, "thinking ahead, leading across and delivering within" involve a focus on "big-picture" policy issues aimed at bringing about structural reforms and long-term strategic shifts in the two jurisdictions. For example, the Finnish government is currently overhauling its basic education sector to deal with the growing challenges of globalization and economic instability. This work includes curriculum renewal and rethinking high school pathways to success—two areas of interest in Alberta.

International partnerships such as FINAL are not about simplistically copying policies and practices from exotic locales and shoehorning them into a patchwork of school reforms. The FINAL partners are now exploring widening the principle of the internationalization of educational development to expand the partnership with a number of high-performing jurisdictions who share an interest in both Finland and Alberta. With the leadership strategies of *thinking ahead, delivering within* and *reaching across*, international partnerships can be a catalyst for advancing the profession's views on educational development.

North Americans seem to be more focused on testing. In Finland, we don't have any national testing. We only take a test sampling of students in the country. It is like a blood test—you don't take all of the blood out of the patient, you just take a sample. The results are not public and parents do not know the results. We do not compare or rank schools, because we believe that all schools provide a good education for all. Also, we don't train students for the PISA tests like some countries; we train our students to be prepared for life.

—Kari Louhivuori, teacher and principal, Kirkkojarven School, Espoo, Finland

THE NORWAY–CANADA (NORCAN) PARTNERSHIP

Achievement with Integrity

NORCAN is an international partnership that established a network of schools from Norway, Ontario and Alberta committed to improving student learning in mathematics through mindful, adaptive leadership. The partnership was founded in 2014 on a body of evidence that illustrates how educational development can be undertaken by lateral networks of schools.

Since its inception in 2014, a network of high schools from Norway, Ontario and Alberta (NORCAN) has focused on improving student learning in mathematics by mobilizing student, teacher and principal leadership. As the partnership has evolved, it has sought to address the increasingly pervasive narrative of "learnification" and a focus on performance that occludes what ought to be the broader purposes of education: achievement with integrity.

For many of the NORCAN schools this work is moving forward from adapting so-called "innovative" practices to instead concentrating on the relational work of building cultures where risk-taking and confidence are shared goals for all. Computer adaptive assessments and other strategies incorporating common testing and digital technologies have been exhausted in futile attempts to address the issues of a narrowly defined understanding of mathematics and an impoverished comprehension of students' complex needs. The NORCAN partnership develops alternatives to these inadequate strategies.

THE NEW ZEALAND PARTNERSHIP

High Standards, Not Standardization

As with so many other moments of truth in the work of teaching and school-based research, this brief interlude in the partnership with New Zealand and Alberta schools captures the motivation for the Association's partnership with New Zealand schools. Over the next cycle of the partnership, schools in Alberta and New Zealand will explore strategies to address equity in mathematics through a focus on cultural recovery and how building student confidence might contribute to effective transitions from elementary to high school. While one of the key thrusts of these communities of mathematical inquiry will be to further explore the work of Dr Bobbie Hunter, a researcher, academic and New Zealand-born Cook Islander, a key focus will be on unpacking the day-to-day practices of schooling across OECD countries where performance in narrowly defined definitions of "mathematics" has become the driver for transforming schooling and where the ubiquity of test preparation—now made more accessible through digital platforms—is taken for granted.

The New Zealand partnership has not only demonstrated the futility of driving policy through the hyperventilated musings of the "math crisis" in Alberta schools, but has offered compelling reasons to reconsider both the content of the mathematics curriculum and the inability of governments across the OECD to define success in math as a anything more than a gatekeeper to graduation and later opportunities in life.

RESEARCH PUBLICATION LISTING

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

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Alberta Voices: Teachers' Aspirations for the Future of Teaching

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The Future of Teaching in Alberta

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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

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Leadership for Learning: The Experience of Administrators in Alberta Schools

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

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www.teachers.ab.ca. Click on **Publications>Education Research**.

For most, print copies are also available, with one copy of most publications being free of charge to all
ATA members. Non-ATA members or ATA members who require more than one copy can view pricing
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Further background information about the research studies cited in this publication is available from
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