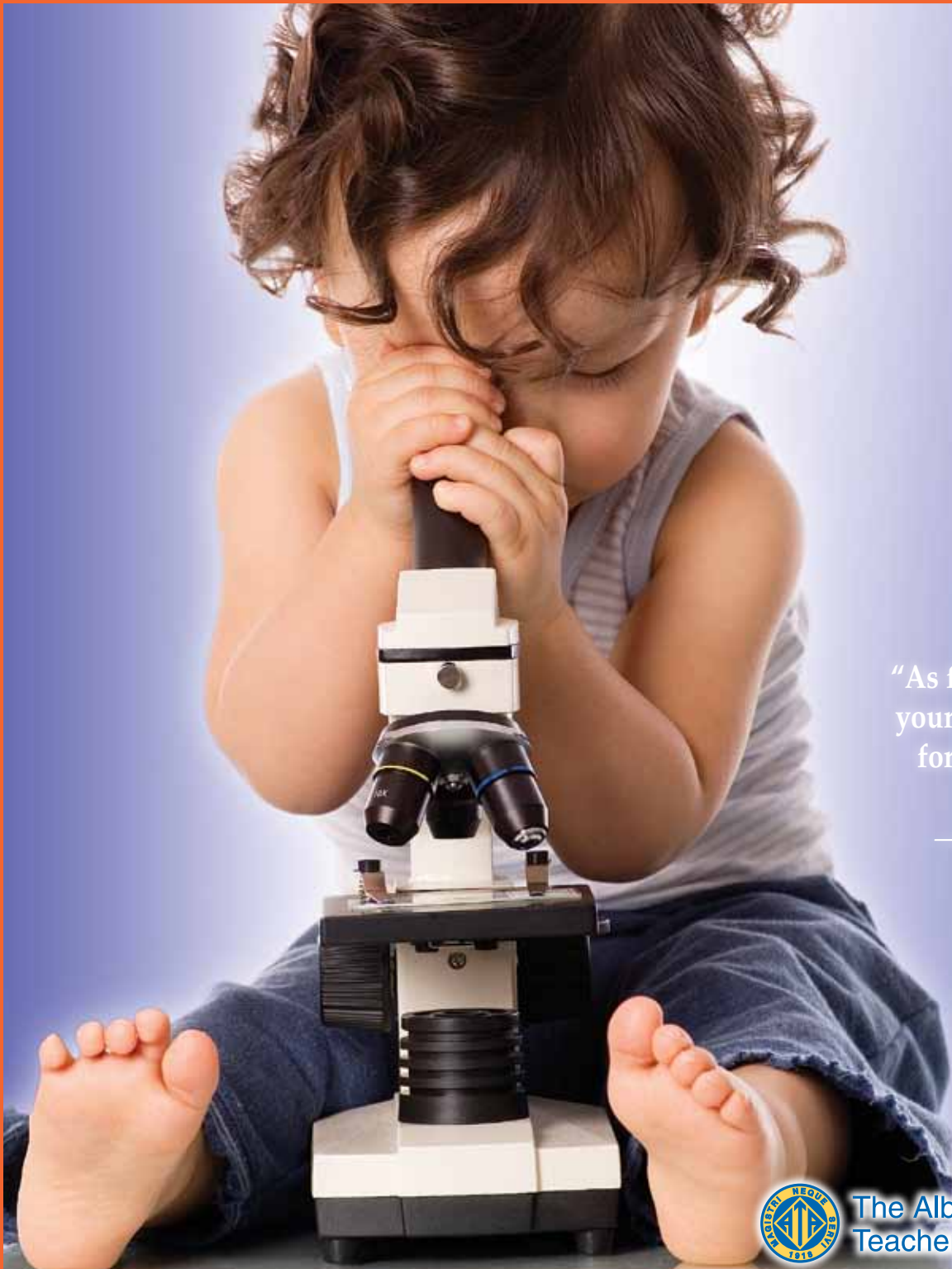


Looking Forward

Emerging trends and strategic possibilities for enhancing teaching and learning in Alberta schools 2009–2012

ATA Research Update: Fall 2009



www.teachers.ab.ca

*“As for the future,
your task is not to
foresee it, but to
enable it.”*

*—Antoine de Saint
Exupéry*



The Alberta
Teachers' Association

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“We need a multiplicity of visions, dreams and prophecies—images of potential tomorrows.”

—Alvin Toffler

Preface

This document provides an analysis of the teaching and learning conditions in Alberta schools that shape the work life of Alberta teachers, and identifies key opportunities to enhance their work in the next three years and beyond. Prepared by Dr J-C Couture, Executive Staff Officer, Government, who coordinates the Alberta Teachers' Association's (ATA) research programs, this publication draws on a number of ongoing research studies and initiatives over the past year. ATA Administrative Officer Koni Macdonald steered the publication through its various stages of design and development.

The significant growth and changes in the K–12 educational system anticipated over the next few years make it more important than ever for Association leaders to assess the scope and quality of teachers' work life and their opportunities for professional growth.

The current comprehensive labour agreement that goes to the end of the 2012 school year gives the teaching profession and its organization, the ATA, an important opportunity to advance the four strategic directions outlined in the ATA's strategic plan:

1. To advance the professional role of teachers into public leadership in learning
2. To actively address social justice and social cohesion in the interest of healthy families and communities
3. To be an adaptive organization that is continuously learning through research and strategic thinking about the future
4. To enhance member engagement and commitment to the collective interests of the profession by providing flexible and responsive services

As the professional organization of Alberta's teachers committed to promoting and advancing public education, the Association sees the next three years as a critical time for addressing systemic issues and for capitalizing on such key opportunities as supporting beginning teachers in the early years of practice, advancing administrator leadership development, and advocating for policies and programs that will address socioeconomic barriers to learning.

Underscoring these specific activities is a broader strategic initiative, *Real Learning First*, which addresses the single most significant professional issue facing teachers: the growing bureaucratization of school life driven by the government's test-based accountability processes and its deleterious effect on promoting innovation, creativity and social justice. As the research in the following pages illustrates, until the government rethinks its current approaches to assessing school success, in which students, schools and jurisdictions are pitted against each other, sustainable school development will not be achieved.

*Gordon R Thomas
Executive Secretary*

Until the government rethinks its current approaches to assessing school success, in which students, schools and jurisdictions are pitted against each other, sustainable school development will not be achieved.

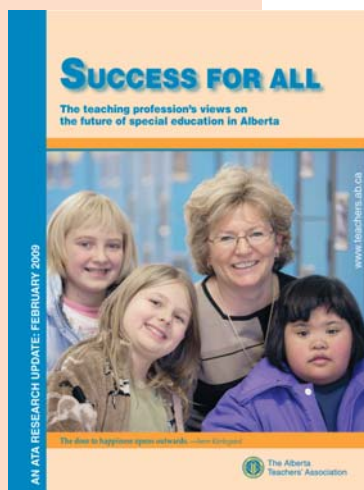
Our shared leadership opportunity: 2009–12

Over the past two years, Education Minister David Hancock's public consultations have shown his commitment to finding ways to improve Alberta's education system.

The challenges faced by schools in achieving the goal of educating all children well have been recognized by Education Minister David Hancock. Indeed, this past year, two of his public consultations showed his commitment to finding ways to improve Alberta's education system. Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans was an effort to engage Albertans in a discussion about education as a foundation for the future societal and economic success of the province. The 10 formal community conversations held over the past school year used an innovative generative dialogue approach that promises to provide a policy framework for the overall direction, principles and long-term goals for education in Alberta over the next two decades.

On a second front, Setting the Direction for Special Education in Alberta was designed to gather public feedback on a number of possible policy directions for special education. This process culminated in the minister's forum in Edmonton on June 8–9, 2009. As well, the government's Speak Out—Alberta Student Engagement Initiative provided an important opportunity for Alberta youth to share their perspectives on how to improve the education system; this initiative is proceeding to its next phase following an analysis of its community forums and website postings.

In all of these cases, the Association remains optimistic that the education policies and reforms that will be generated by consultations will ultimately be driven by the need to address the actual experiences of Alberta's teachers and students, as well as by the following research-based principles articulated by two leading experts on school improvement (Hargreaves 2009; Sahlberg 2009).



Success for All contains the contributions of a number of dedicated teacher-leaders in the field of special education. The lead author, Dr Joan Jeary, is a teacher, an administrator, a University of Calgary faculty member and an internationally recognized researcher who has committed much of her professional life to enhancing learning opportunities for Alberta students. Association staff and members of the Association's Special Education Council and Gifted and Talented Education Council played a leadership role in the development of this report and in staging focus groups across the province.

To improve, school systems need to

- develop flexible policy frameworks that encourage locally defined, educationally sound solutions and that recognize the realities of diverse and complex schools and communities;
- foster ethical pedagogies focused on teaching and learning for deep and enduring understanding;
- build a culture of trust among education partners instead of encouraging competition for scarce resources; and
- use best practices from the past while constantly encouraging innovation.

Subsumed in all of these principles, of course, is the provision of adequate funding and a recognition that investment in public education is one of the key predictors of a nation's long-term economic growth and viability (Belfield and Levin 2007).

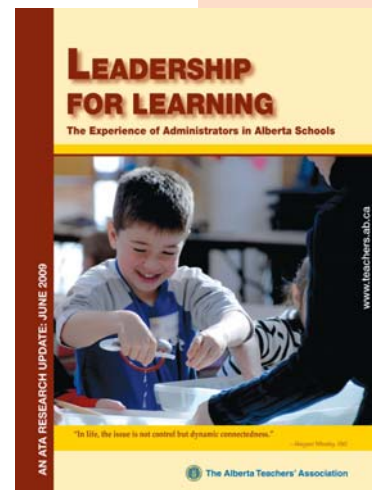
The government's recent claims of a fiscal crisis and its projecting the equivalent of \$2 billion in cuts or tax increases in 2009/10 may indicate significant challenges ahead for education funding. In this regard, it is important to note that Alberta school board expenditures per capita (in constant 2002 dollars) increased by approximately \$100 between 2000 and 2003 and have remained relatively flat ever since. Educational expenditures are not growing out of control and are not excessive in historical terms.

The recommendations outlined in the "Three Years Ahead" section of this publication identify preferred futures for the next three years that are built on a belief that Alberta's current economic challenges provide an opportunity, not a crisis—a chance for Alberta to make the necessary investments in public education that will ensure a robust future for this province.

The Association's ongoing research program provides a comprehensive picture of the long-term trends that shape teachers' work and ability to lead school improvement. Over the past few years, the Association's Member Opinion Survey, Professional Development Survey and Beginning Teachers Survey (including follow-up study that involved telephone interviews of 137 new teachers) have tracked the factors that affect teachers' ability to perform their roles and responsibilities. As well, in the past year, the Association has undertaken major research on teachers' work life in distributed learning environments, the experiences of substitute teachers, the workload of school administrators and special education, to name a few.

The role of the principal has long been established as an integral and pivotal leadership position in the Alberta education system. It is a position that is able to influence and impact the social fabric of our society through excellence in student outcomes and community engagement. *Leadership for Learning* is an important contribution to the Association's ongoing research program. It was prompted by the Association's concern about the increasing workload of administrators in Alberta schools (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2009a).

The government's recent claims that it is facing a fiscal crisis and its projecting the equivalent of \$2 billion in cuts or tax increases in 2009/10 may provide significant challenges ahead for education funding.



What is needed is a real commitment to provide resources at the classroom level to ensure schools' ability to meet the challenges related to the growing complexity of our school communities.

Improving teaching and learning—inspiring meaningful collaborative action

Currently in Alberta's K–12 education sector, one does not need to look far for examples of the growing focus on “system improvement” and “capacity building.” To ensure that these do not simply become catchphrases, education partners must collaborate as they address priority areas. Examples of this collaboration include the government's ongoing commitment to the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) and the more recent Workforce Planning Initiative.

Another possible policy challenge is that there is little evidence that system-level reform can have a significant impact in high-performing jurisdictions like Alberta (Sahlberg 2009). What is needed is a real commitment to provide resources at the classroom level to ensure schools' ability to meet the challenges related to the growing complexity of our school communities. Also, as Murgatroyd (2009) has noted, in growing and dynamic systems such as Alberta, the locus of control and influence for enhancing learning is the school, not the provincial education system. This is especially true when it comes to the government's efforts to assess school and jurisdiction performance in terms of educational accountability.

The classroom and school characteristics reported in this document are significant, especially in light of the government's Class Size Initiative, which was launched in 2004. As well, despite the more recent Inspiring Education public dialogue and significant improvements noted in the first few years, progress has been stalled for the past several years. Without a commitment to address the realities of school life, policy pronouncements extolling the latest “best practice” or decontextualized innovations recommended by outside experts are simply make-work projects that yield little benefit for students.

The pages that follow draw on a variety of Association research efforts conducted over the past few years that assess the quality of teaching and learning conditions in Alberta schools. A number of significant trends point to a need for continued attention to these conditions in light of the impending recommendations related to the minister's recent public policy reviews.

While the profession certainly opposes the government's current testing programs, the core focus of Real Learning First is to underscore the message that effective assessment is built on a foundation of trust and relationships built over time between teachers, students and their parents. It is time to move past a reliance on bureaucratic accountability to a new approach that supports and builds capacity for professional responsibility.

—ATA President Carol Henderson

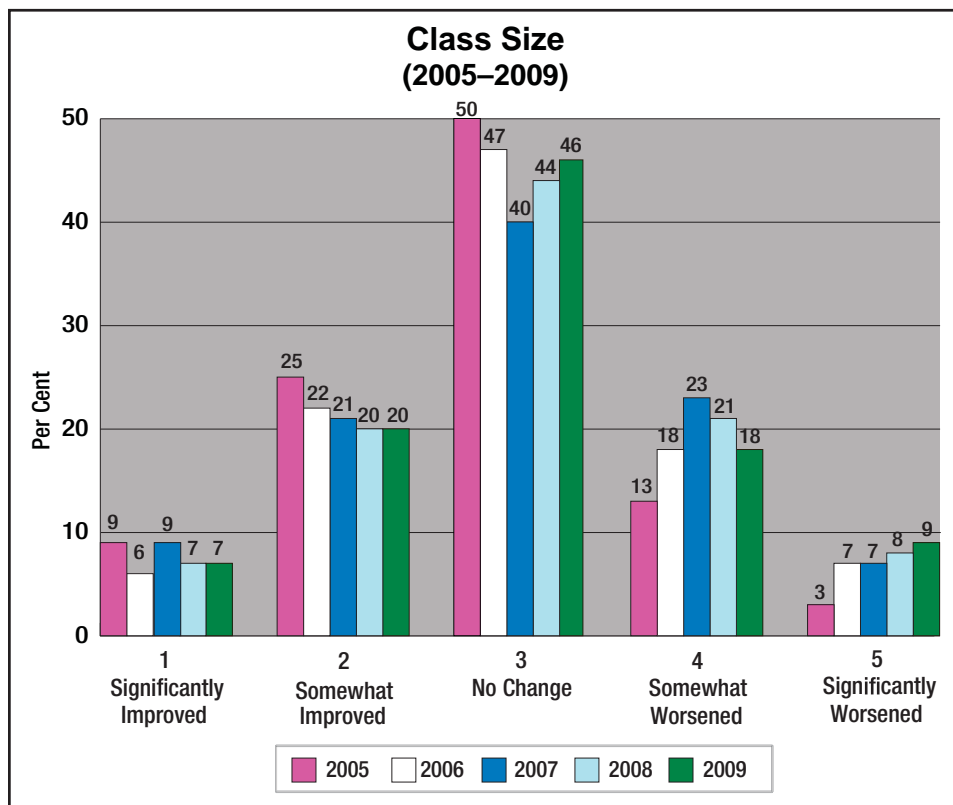


Class size

While the data on class size suggests a slow but slight improvement since 2005, there has been significant erosion in the marginal progress first indicated at that time. Variations in class-size improvements do exist and require closer monitoring at the local level. Even though the government committed significant resources to reducing class sizes, the provincial trends show limited improvements over the past three years. In fact, conditions worsened in 2008 (29 per cent), matching the 2009 results (27 per cent) with respect to increased class size.

As in previous years, junior and senior high school teachers are more likely than others to report worsening conditions (37 per cent), and ECS and Grades 1–6 respondents to report improved conditions.

In 2009, the greatest improvement is reported in the Mighty Peace and Calgary City convention areas, where over 36 per cent indicated that class size has significantly or somewhat improved compared to the overall average of 27 per cent. Two-thirds of Central East respondents and 60 per cent of North East respondents indicated no change (in contrast to the provincial average of 46 per cent), while Palliser and Central Alberta led the worsening conditions reports at 36 per cent compared with a 26 per cent average.



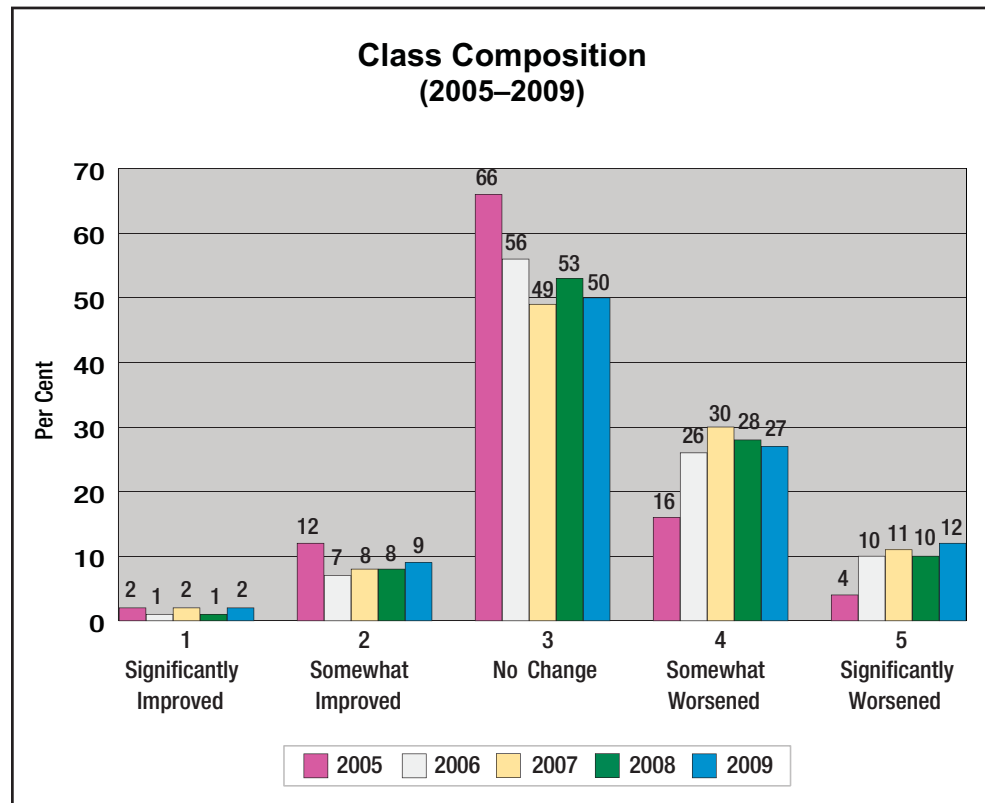
Studies of classroom processes indicate that teachers must continually monitor a large number of events, many of which occur at the same time. The term used to describe this characteristic of classrooms is *simultaneity*.

—David Berliner

When it comes to class size, junior and senior high school teachers are more likely than others to report worsening conditions (37 per cent), while ECS and Grades 1–6 respondents report improved conditions.

Growing complexity and diversity of class composition

As reported in the *Globe and Mail*, in the 12 months leading up to April 2008, the city of Calgary alone saw an average of 27 babies born and 34 people moving to the city every day.



Saying that Alberta’s population is experiencing tremendous growth is an understatement. For example, in the 12 months leading up to April 2008, the city of Calgary alone saw an average of 27 babies born and 34 people moving to the city every day (*Globe and Mail*, Tuesday, July 27, 2008, A8). Despite the economic downturn, Alberta will continue to experience stable growth in the coming years.

Given this demographic reality, class composition continues to be a significant concern. Only 9 per cent of teachers reported improvements in this area in 2008, and 11 percent in 2009. With 39 per cent of teachers reporting worsened conditions with respect to classroom composition, clearly, much work still needs to be done.



Although teachers overwhelmingly support the right of students with learning disabilities to be educated with their nondisabled peers, they nevertheless experience ongoing frustrations with the way that inclusive education has been implemented in the province of Alberta.

—Excerpt from *Success for All*

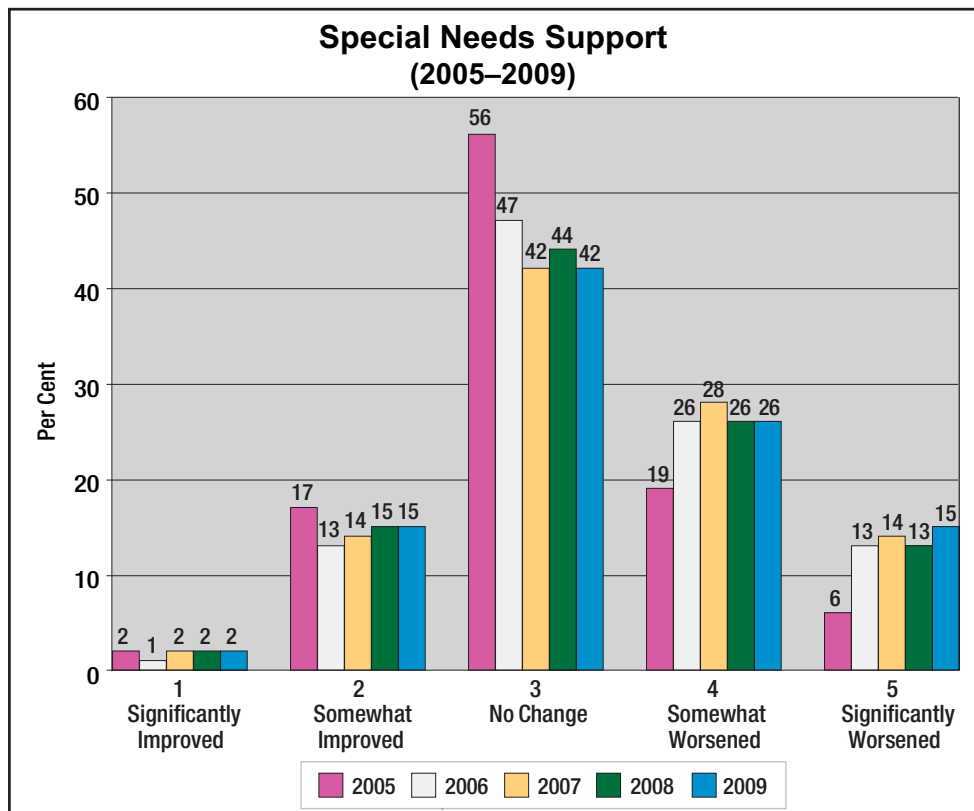
Significant erosion in support for students with special needs

Initial improvements in support for students with special needs continue to slide. In 2005, 25 per cent of teachers reported worsened conditions in terms of support for students with special needs. This number rose to 39 per cent by 2008 and to 41 per cent in 2009. Analysis of the data by region suggests that the erosion in supports for students with special needs has been consistent across the province. In 2008, 45 per cent of Grades 1–6 teachers reported worsened conditions, compared to 26 per cent of Grades 10–12 teachers.

The data supports recent efforts by the Association to raise the issue of support for students with special needs, which includes a major research project, *Success for All*, that examines the impacts of individual program plans (IPPs) and supports for students with special needs. Undertaken by Dr Joan Jeary, this study concluded that “no single teacher can be expected to have the expertise and skills necessary to teach and assess all students in a highly diverse classroom. Education is a shared responsibility, especially in the area of inclusive/special education” (Jeary 2009).

The Alberta government’s special education review, *Setting the Direction*, faces considerable challenges, the first of which includes the imperative to ensure that adequate resources and trained personnel are in place to achieve the goal of educating all students well. Given the freeze in increases for special education grants this past school year, significant reinvestment will be required in order to meet this goal.

Analysis of the data by region suggests that the erosion in supports for students with special needs has been consistent across the province.



Improved access to emerging technologies: A good news story

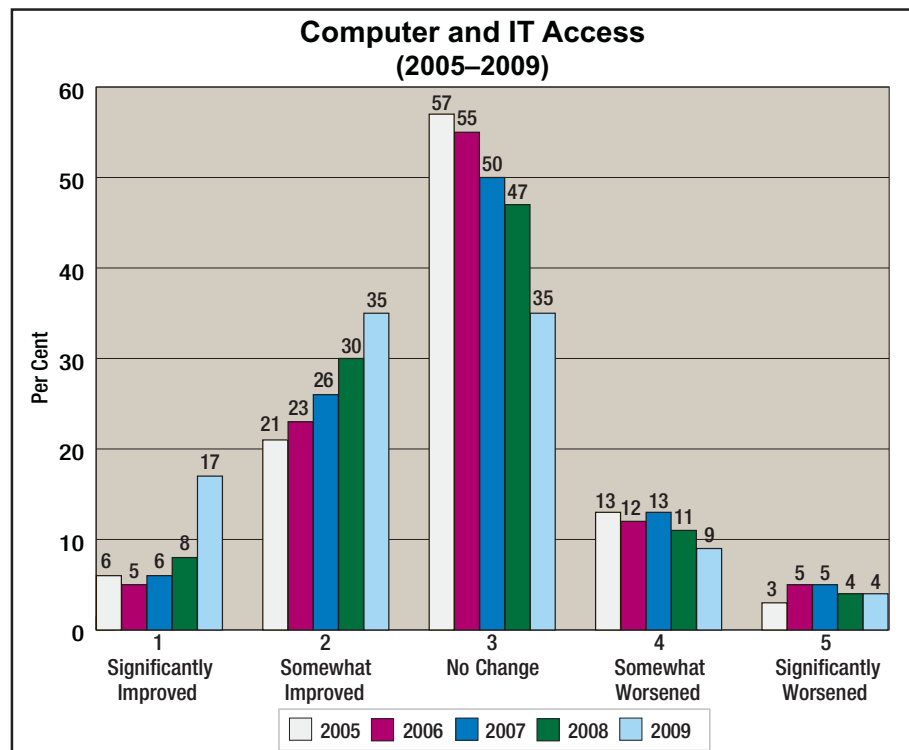
Respondents to the 2009 Member Opinion Survey indicated a substantial improvement in access to information technology and computers.



Ongoing government investment in information technologies has contributed to significant improvements in access to learning technologies. Respondents to the 2009 Member Opinion Survey indicated a substantial improvement in access to information technology and computers. In 2008 significant improvement was reported by just over 8 per cent of respondents compared with 17 per cent in 2009. Last year, 30 per cent indicated that the situation had somewhat improved; this year, 35 per cent so reported.

In the last four years, approximately \$250 million has been invested in a variety of technology initiatives, such as SuperNet, \$4 to \$5 million for video conferencing, and \$18.5 million in each of the next three years for the purchase of data projectors and display devices for classrooms.

While government continues to see investment in technology as a priority, it is clear that other investments must remain high on the list of priorities. As well, continued investments in learning technologies will be needed to sustain the total cost of ownership for such things as tech support and evergreening.



Modest improvement in access to print and text resources

The 2009 results for opinions about access to print and text resources show some improvement over last year in that about 29 per cent now report an improvement as compared with 23 per cent in 2008. There is a corresponding drop in the proportion indicating no change and a slight reduction in the percentage selecting worsened conditions.

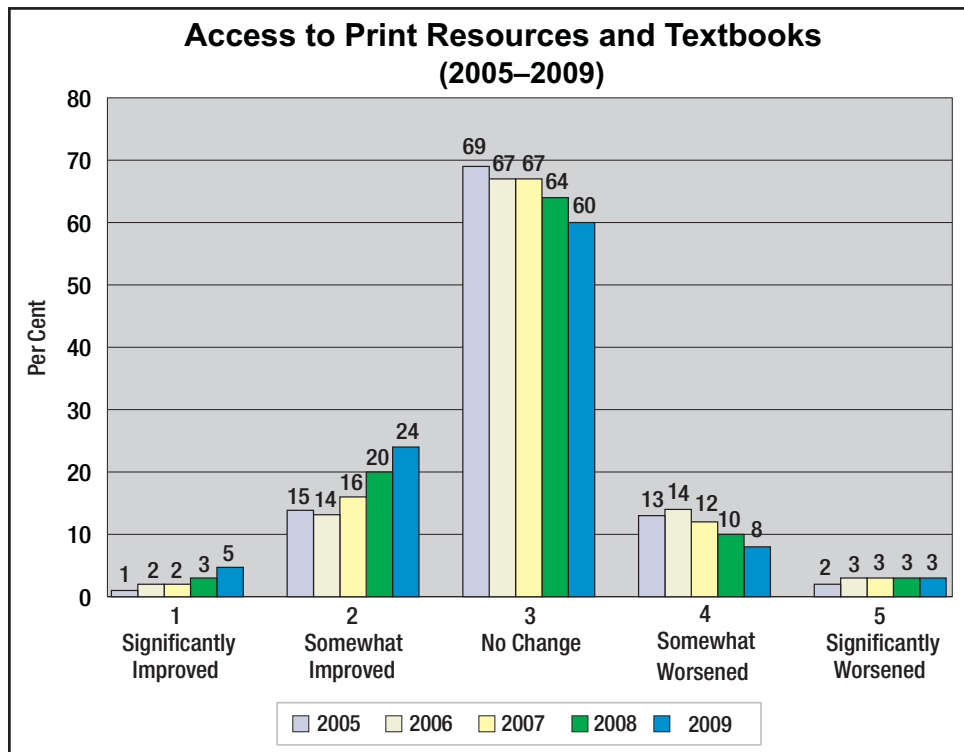
Teachers have seen gradual improvement in access to print resources over the past four years, with little variation by region. One of the difficulties in determining improvements in access to classroom resources is the continued effort by communities to fundraise to purchase resources. School fundraising has increased significantly in past years and continues to be, as one administrator said, “the small difference that makes a big difference for our students.”

One of the paradoxes worth noting in this otherwise positive finding is that Alberta teachers continue to contribute \$800 to \$900 per year out of their own pockets to purchase school and classroom resources and materials (Member Opinion Survey 2007). Indeed, in 2009, 60 per cent of teachers reported that they could not carry out their teaching assignment without buying materials with their own money. Female, relatively younger respondents with early childhood services and elementary assignments and classroom-only responsibilities are the most likely to feel a need to subsidize their school’s budget with their own money.

If one pegs the average out-of-pocket expenditures of Alberta’s 30,063 full-time teachers and 4,759 part-time teachers at \$800 per teacher, the figure works out to approximately \$28 million—the equivalent of what it would cost to support full-day kindergarten.

“When I started teaching, I never expected to be paying for so much out of my own pocket. It is especially hard to see students without the materials that others take for granted. Once you start noticing the need, the impulse to help just keeps growing.”

—Second-year teacher
(Beginning Teacher Survey, 2008)



Limited support for field trips while “student engagement” a growing system-level priority

“To improve student learning through initiatives that enhance student engagement and performance and reflect the unique needs and circumstances of each school authority.”

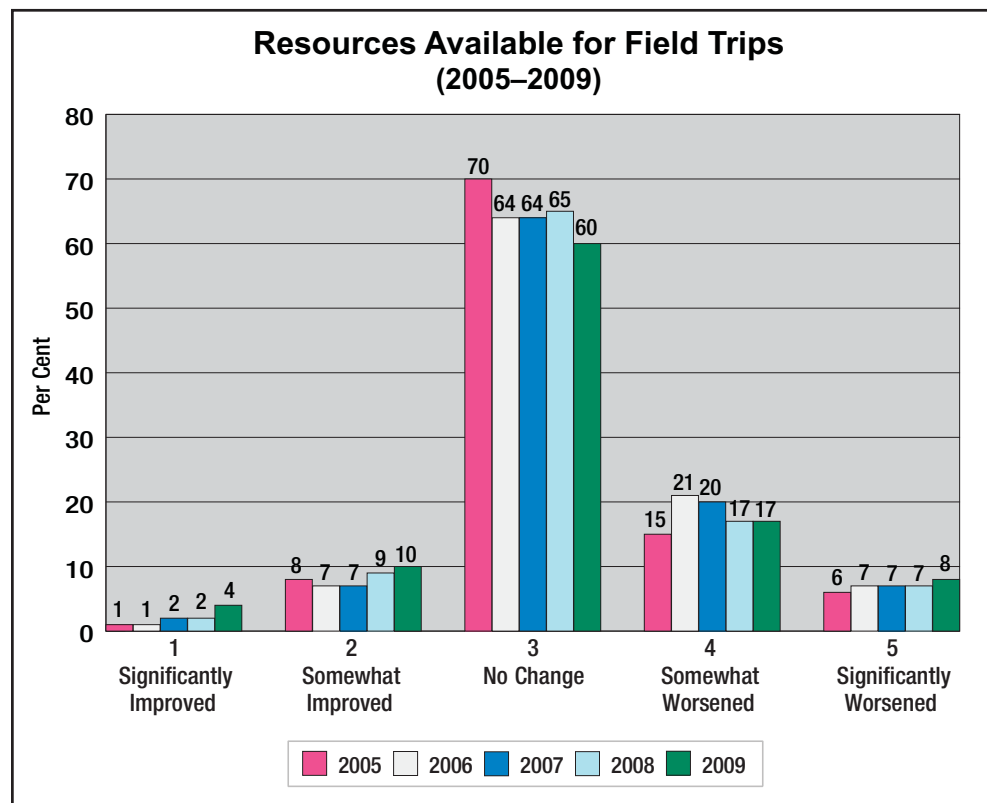
—AISI Handbook for Cycle 4 (*Alberta Education Partners 2008*)



Access to field trips in 2009 is similar to 2008, with a slight increase in the percentage reporting improved conditions and a slight decrease in the percentage reporting no change. There has been little variation in access to field trips over the past five years, though junior high teachers report the most significant levels of deterioration in access.

After the initial funding cuts of the early 1990s, perhaps no other aspect of school life was more unacknowledged than the gradual reduction of school field trips and cocurricular activities. With the fourth cycle of AISI including “student engagement” as a key element of improving student learning, it will be interesting to see if this will increase the number of school field trips.

As with access to emerging technologies and print resources, school fundraising remains a key source of support for this vitally important component of school life. As well, teachers continue to be pressured to facilitate fundraising efforts and/or subsidize field trips out of their own pockets.



Assessing the effectiveness of PD opportunities

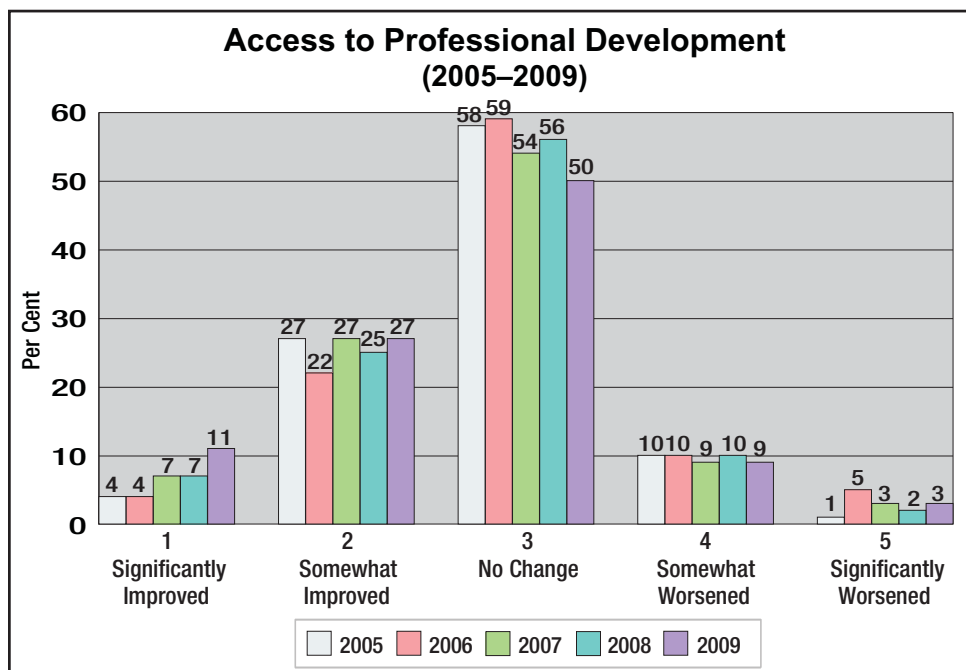
One of the most significant aspects of Association advocacy for its members is the focus on improving professional learning opportunities for teachers, including the annual assessment of professional learning opportunities carried out through the Association’s Professional Development (PD) program area’s annual PD Survey. Included in this analysis of PD programs in the province’s 62 school authorities is the Professional Development Framework (ATA 2003), which outlines the foundational principles of effective professional development programming in Alberta and stresses the importance of evaluating the impact of these programs on improving instructional practice and enhancing student learning.

There has been some improvement in access to PD over the past five years. Improvement was noted by 31 per cent of teachers in 2005, 32 per cent in 2008 and 38 per cent in 2009. However, access to PD continues to decline in approximately one-tenth of school jurisdictions. Forty-four of the 54 local PD committees reported that their jurisdiction had little change in overall spending, 10 reported an increase and none reported a decrease. This is a significant improvement over last year, when 42 PD committees reported no change and 7 reported a decrease in PD spending.

While significant disparity in access to PD continued last year—in the Southeast region, 53 per cent of teachers reported improvements, while in Calgary, only 22 per cent reported improvements—there were significant improvements reported in 2009; the greatest improvements were reported in Southeast, as well as the Northeast and Central East convention areas (48 per cent).

Though the disparities in access to professional development continue, the 2009 PD Survey does identify some improvements in time and resources for professional development. Total PD days, not including the two annual teachers’ convention days, averaged 5.7 days in 2009, up from 5.0 in 2008, and overall funding is increasing significantly in a small number of jurisdictions.

Though the disparities in access to professional development continue, the 2009 PD Survey does identify some improvements in time and resources for professional development.



Based on data gathered since 1999, the estimated percentage of school operating budgets committed to PD has ranged from 2 to 3 per cent, far below comparable standards of 5 to 10 per cent in other professional and knowledge-intensive sectors.

Highlights of the 2009 PD Survey

- Average number of PD days per teacher (not including teachers' conventions) in 2009: 5.7.
- In 2009, 22 out of 43 locals reported 9 or more days for professional development, including teachers' conventions (compared to 3 that did so in 1999).
- 30 jurisdictions provided 5 days or less of professional development, excluding teachers' convention days.
- School expenditures for professional development exceeded \$128 million in the 2008/09 school year.
- Wide variations exist in per capita spending on PD for teachers, ranging from \$3,000 in some southern Alberta jurisdictions to \$800 in others.
- In 2005/06, the average FTE PD expenditure in Alberta stood at \$822; it rose to \$1,069 in 2006/07, to \$1,138 in 2008, and to \$1,287 in 2009.
- 27 of 54 PD committees indicate that lack of teacher autonomy in developing professional growth plans is a significant concern; however, some progress has been made in the recent past on this front.
- 83 per cent of locals report that mentorship programs are in place; 90 per cent indicate that they get support for attendance at the Association's annual Beginning Teachers' Conference.
- Leadership development programs for school administrators exist in 80 per cent of school jurisdictions.
- Locals commit over \$1 million per year to support PD committees and programs in addition to the \$2 million committed to supporting conventions.

Based on data gathered since 1999, the estimated percentage of school operating budgets committed to professional development has ranged from 2 to 3 per cent, far below comparable standards of 5 to 10 per cent in other professional and knowledge-intensive sectors.

Marshalling support for PD for the one out of every six teachers who works part-time remains a considerable challenge. The percentage of part-time employment continues to rise, particularly in urban areas. For example, in 2009, one out of every five Edmonton Public teachers worked part-time. Given this, it is difficult to generalize about teachers' work and to support teacher professional growth in a coherent manner without taking into consideration the diversity and dynamic life experiences of teachers (Clark et al 2007). The challenges faced by substitute teachers in accessing professional development are documented in an Association study to be released in the fall of 2009.

Distributed leadership and school cultures built on enduring relationships of trust are the key elements we see running through comments made by PD committees in their assessments of successful PD programs. In jurisdictions where PD opportunities are optimal, trust among partners appears to be a recurring theme in the comments from local PD committee chairs.

—2009 PD Survey

Teachers' workload

The data clearly illustrates that Alberta teachers enjoy their work, and find students and school colleagues the greatest source of satisfaction. Yet, the passion and intensity of teaching are sometimes undermined by teachers' heavy workloads.



“Canadian research data shows 60 per cent of Canadian employees experience high levels of role overload, while for 28 per cent, high levels of work interfere with their family life.”

*—University of South Australia (2009)
news release*

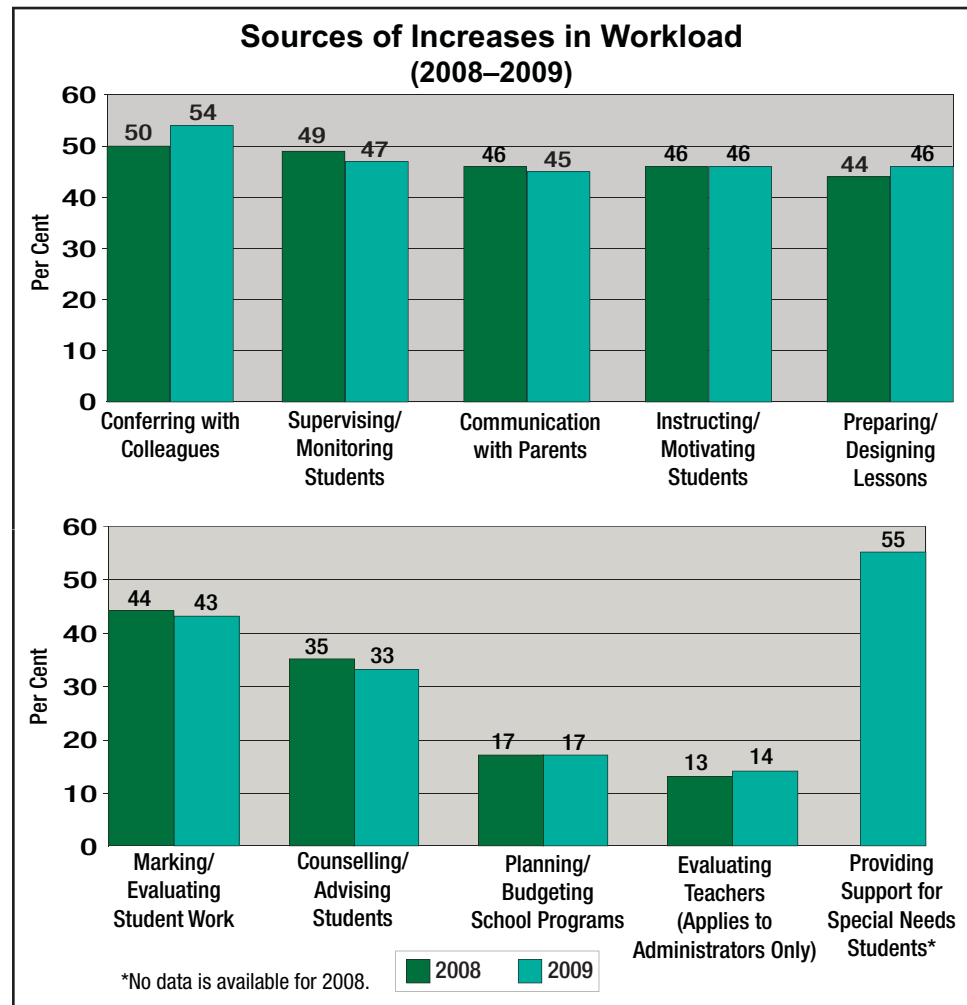
Although 81.4 per cent of Alberta teachers indicate that teaching is satisfying, only one-third see teaching as a lifelong career to be recommended to others. Thirty-six per cent say they would not recommend teaching as a career (2007 and 2008 Member Opinion Surveys). In 2009, 40.4 per cent of teachers reported that they are unable to balance personal and work life, one out of seven teachers reported episodes of depression “frequently” or “often,” while 30.1 per cent occasionally encounter depression. In fact, the trends we see in the intensification of teachers’ work in Alberta mirror some of the broader societal patterns noted by leading workplace researchers Duxbury and Higgins (2001).

Alberta teachers work an average of 53 hours per week; 73.5 per cent reported that they work more than 50 hours per week. This is more than other full-time teachers in Canada, who reported an average workload of almost 49 hours a week (Clark et al 2007). Forty-two of Alberta teachers’ work hours were spent in school working directly with students and undertaking related tasks, such as preparation, marking, supervision and administration. Teachers spent an additional 10 hours per week doing schoolwork at home.

Administrators reported that their workload increased more than that of classroom teachers.

In 2009, Alberta teachers reported greatly increased intensification of work for which they identified different causes. More than half—58.6 per cent—said that their workload had increased over their 2008 workload. In 2008, 65 per cent of teachers reported increased workload, and in 2009, 43 per cent reported increased requirements related to marking and evaluating student work.

Administrators were more likely than classroom teachers to indicate increased workload. These findings are not unexpected given the long-term growth in school-reporting requirements, including the requirement to file extensive school and jurisdiction planning documents for the government. Indeed, the *Leadership for Learning* study (ATA 2009a) confirms the growing bureaucratic reporting requirements imposed on school-site administrators.



“Although we are constantly writing three-year plans (every year, as a matter of fact), we still seem to be in a reactive mode of operation. We don’t have time to get all of our plans in place.”

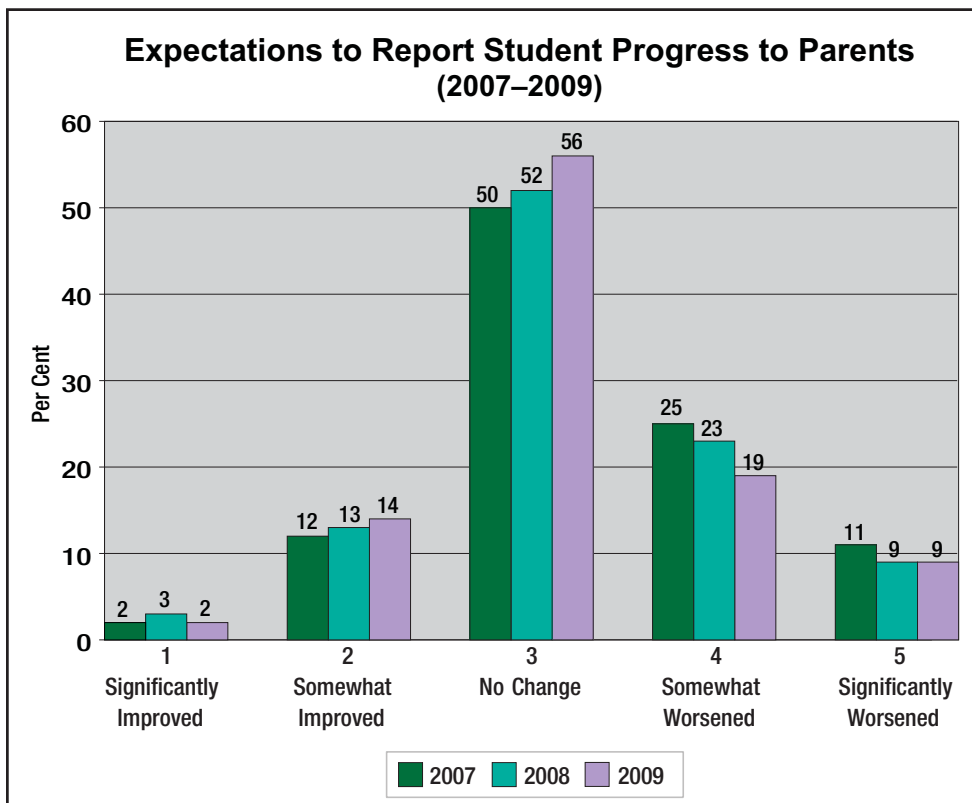
—Respondent to the ATA Leadership for Learning survey report (2009)

Increases in student reporting requirements

The following chart shows the changes between 2007 and 2009 regarding teachers' obligation to report student progress to parents. Providing quality assessment information to parents is an integral part of teachers' work, yet as the data from the past three years shows, these requirements have taken on a life of their own because of the ever-increasing prescriptive policies of government associated with initiatives such as Grade Level of Achievement reporting and prior reporting of Grade 6 and provincial achievement test results.

The challenges teachers face in improving their assessment and reporting strategies is further driven by the government's exclusive reliance on its own testing programs that exclude teacher-assigned grades. This exclusion of school-based measures of student learning creates a gulf—as teachers attempt to enhance their assessment practices, the ministry continues to rely on paper-and-pencil tests administered in Grades 3, 6, 9 and 12.

While there appears to be slight improvement with respect to teachers' obligations to report student progress to parents, 28 per cent of teachers report worsening conditions in this regard. Although the numbers are fairly consistent over time, assessing student progress and effectively communicating with parents remains a major task that requires significant time. Schools need to build time into the school calendar to allow teachers to carry out this important duty.



“Our data links high levels of role overload and work interfering with family to increased absenteeism, greater use of the health care system, increased levels of stress and depression, lower levels of commitment and job satisfaction, and recruitment and retention problems.”

—Linda Duxbury, in a University of South Australia news release (July 15, 2009) www.unisa.edu.au/news/2009/150609A.asp.

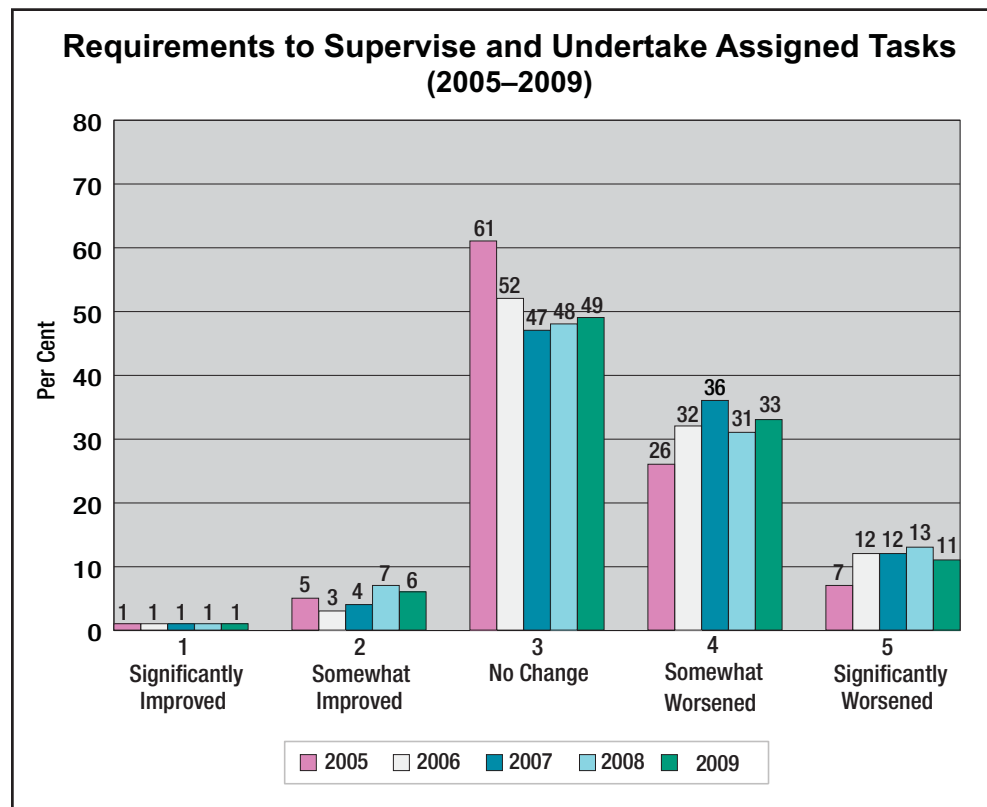
Access to job-embedded professional development is an integral part of sustaining school improvement. In most European and Asian countries, formal instruction takes up less than half a teacher's workday.

Growing expectations outside of the classroom

As highly vocal and well-intentioned policy leaders continue to call for “system improvement” and “enhanced professional practice” by Alberta teachers, the reality is that a significant part of a teacher’s day involves attending to non-instructional duties that contribute little to improving teaching and learning.

Consistent with national trends, we are seeing a significant erosion of the boundaries that define the professional roles and responsibilities of Alberta teachers. Consider the dramatic increase in 2007 in the requirements for teachers to supervise and undertake other assigned tasks over and above their regular classroom teaching. In 2007, teachers reported that these requirements had somewhat worsened (36 per cent) or significantly worsened (12 per cent). It is also important to note the variations by region; for example, in 2008, 56 per cent of Calgary teachers reported increased expectations in this aspect of their work.

In 2009, these numbers continued to remain high. When 44 per cent of teachers report increased expectations to assume tasks over and above their primary professional duties, clearly their ability to focus on their primary responsibilities to students is diminished.



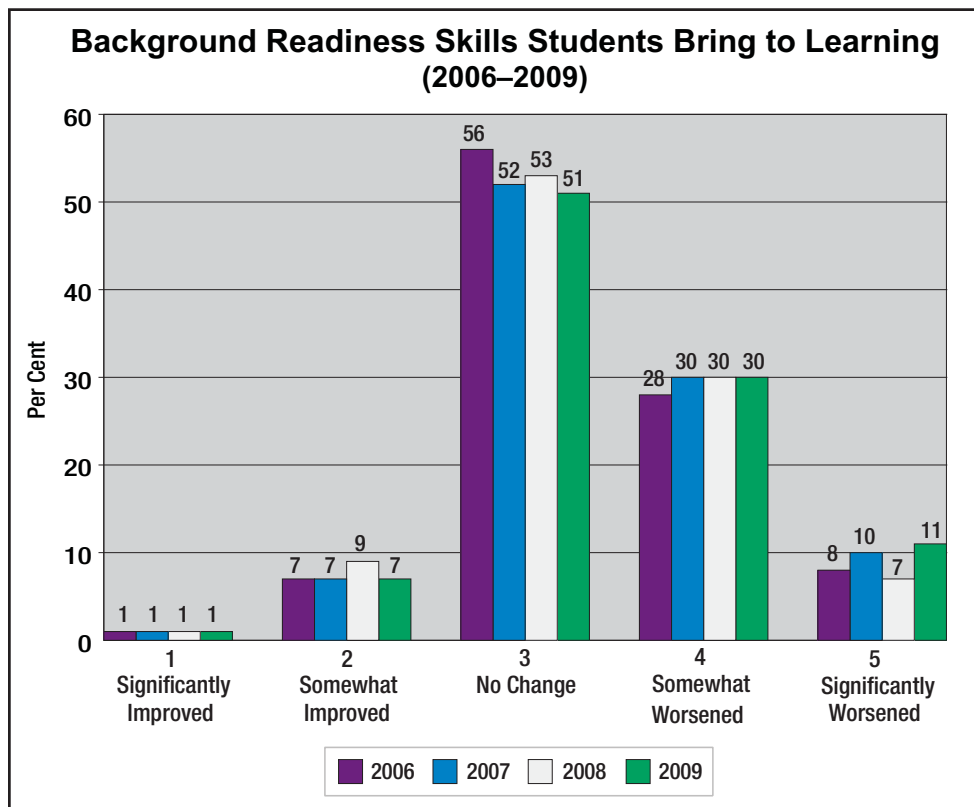
Continued significant decline in student readiness to learn

The growing complexity of teachers' work in Alberta is shaped by the readiness of students to learn. A complex array of social and economic factors affects students' readiness to learn, and the data clearly points to significant declines in this area.

Over the past four years, less than 10 per cent of teachers reported improvements, while 36 to 41 per cent saw declines in the readiness of students to learn. More experienced teachers (that is, respondents between the ages of 46 and 60) are more likely to report somewhat or significantly worsened conditions. The 2009 response resembles that of 2008 but there is a slight increase in the proportion indicating significantly worsened conditions.

These findings underscore challenges identified in other sections of this publication regarding the growing complexity of the student population, which includes the 67,000 students identified with special needs currently in Alberta schools.

There can be little doubt that whatever policy framework emerges from the minister's dialogue with Albertans this fall, a comprehensive approach to addressing student readiness to learn is long overdue. This is especially true as it relates to support for learning in the early years. This issue is discussed in greater depth in the concluding section of this publication.



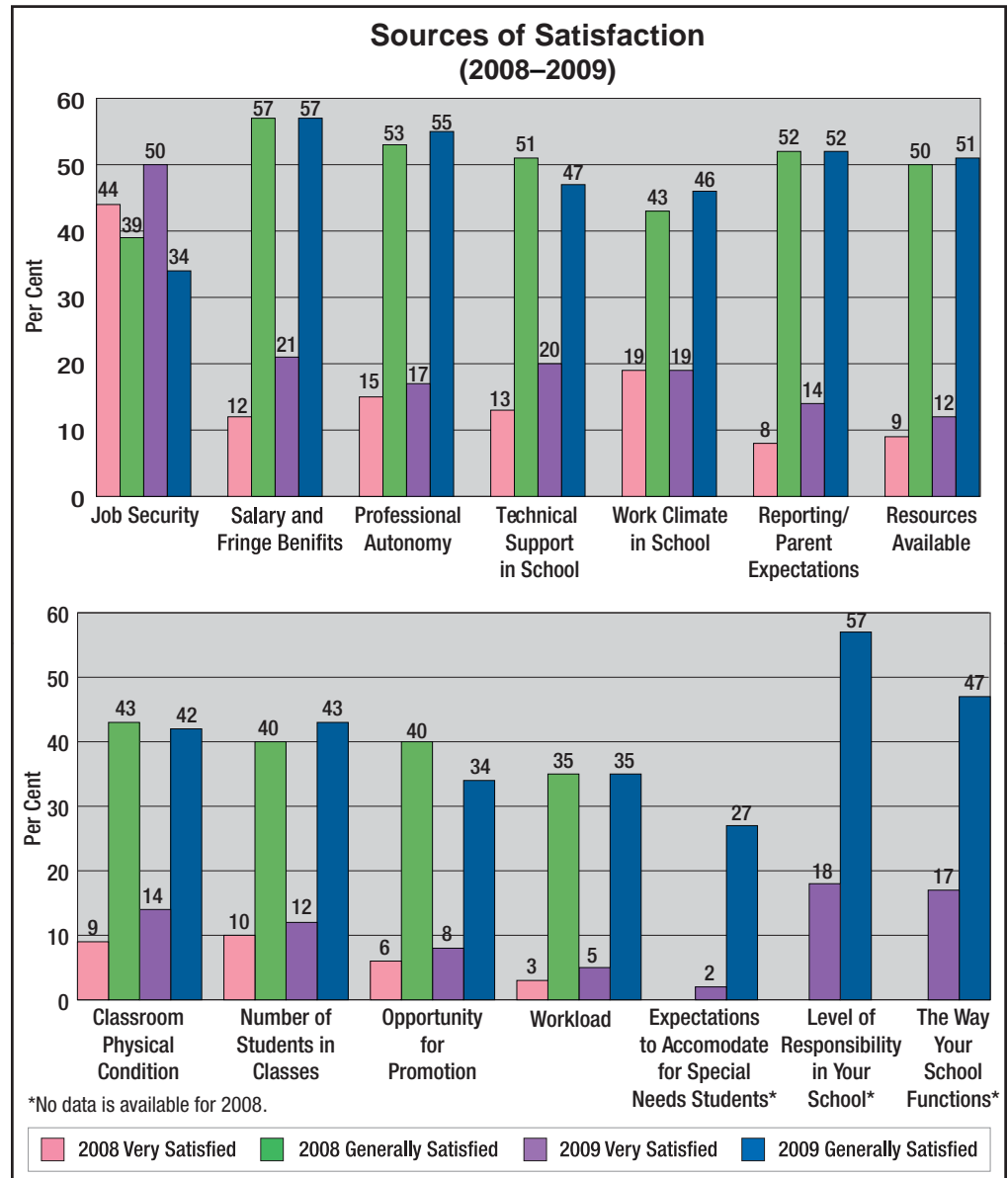
“Indeed, sufficient time for professional learning embedded into teachers’ work life is increasingly being recognized as a key factor in school improvement in selected OECD nations, where 85 per cent of schools in those countries provided such time.”

—Darling-Hammond et al (2008)

Satisfaction with teaching

In 2009, when asked if teaching brought them satisfaction, 80 per cent of Alberta teachers reported that it did (31 per cent strongly agreed; 49 per cent agreed). This data points to a complex combination of factors that drive the very high level of satisfaction with teaching.

Despite overall high levels of satisfaction with teaching, teachers' workload remains a significant area of concern.



Compared with previous years, the 2009 results indicate equal or higher levels of satisfaction with most of the elements presented in this question. Those who were “very satisfied” with salary and fringe benefits rose to 21 per cent from 12 per cent in 2008; those who were “somewhat dissatisfied” dropped correspondingly. Other higher levels of satisfaction, combining “very” and “generally satisfied,” occurred in the following areas: classroom physical conditions, at 56 per cent, up 4 per cent from 2008; number of students in classes, at 55 per cent, up 5 per cent from last year; resource availability, at 63 per cent, up

4 per cent; technical support in school, at 67 per cent, up 3 per cent; professional autonomy, at 72 per cent, up 4 per cent; level of responsibility in school, at 75 per cent, up 2 per cent from 2007; expectations for reporting to parents, at 66 per cent, up 6 per cent from last year; the way one's school functions, at 64 per cent, up 2 per cent from 2007. Overall satisfaction with workload stood at 40 per cent, up slightly from 38 per cent in 2008.

Regarding opportunity for promotion and work climate in school, the former sees overall satisfaction drop from 46 per cent in 2008 to 42 per cent in 2009, while the latter replicates the 64 per cent from 2008.

Beginning teachers in Alberta: An in-depth look

Teaching and learning conditions in the first years

With thousands of new teachers expected to enter the profession in the coming years, there is a growing need to develop leadership abilities in young and mid-career teachers as their veteran colleagues retire.

Assessment of the professional growth needs and working conditions of new teachers is a research priority for the ATA. As well as surveying teachers who attended the annual Beginning Teachers' Conference, in 2008, the ATA used the results of a 2007 pilot study of beginning teachers to develop a five-year longitudinal study of beginning teachers. This study involves a 30-minute interview with 137 teachers over the course of five summers following their first year of teaching. The results reported here are from the first year of the study, which was completed at the end of the 2007/08 school year.



“The beginning of my teaching career was very busy. Amazing staff and supportive administrators who believed that I would make a lasting impact on my students surrounded me. I learned very quickly that I had the opportunity to create very powerful learning experiences for my students.”

—Comment by a first-year teacher from current five-year ATA longitudinal study (2007–12)

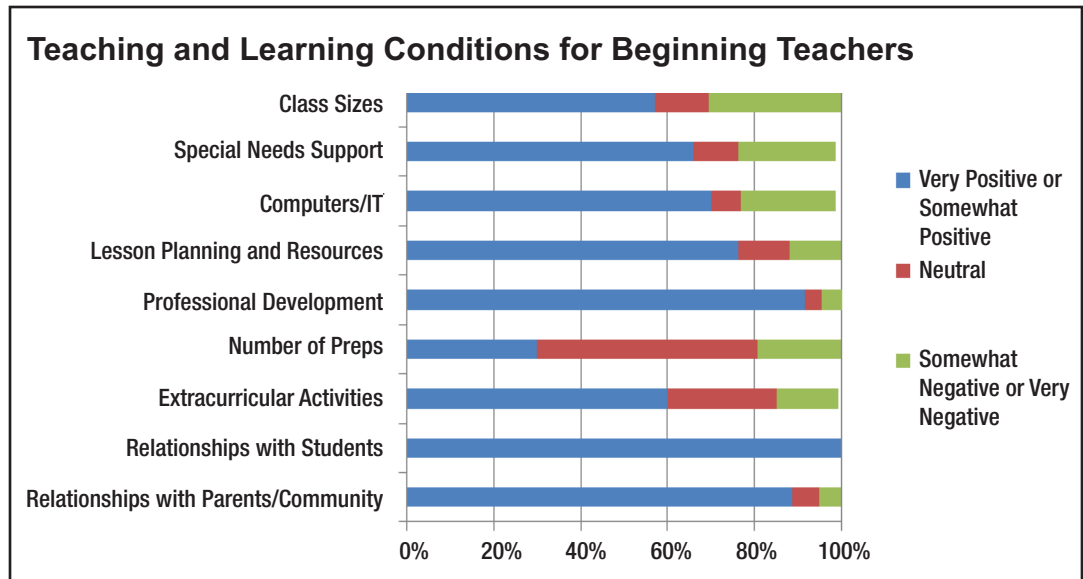
Many new teachers expected heavy workloads, but also commented that they were unprepared for the array of non-instructional tasks they were expected to undertake, such as paperwork and fundraising.

The Association’s longitudinal research on teaching and learning conditions monitors the main factors that affect teaching and learning conditions for all teachers in the province. Class sizes, special needs support and access to resources were among the areas reviewed in previous pages of this report. In this respect, it is important to put the experiences of newer teachers in the context of the broader teaching force.



The first phase of this study finds that a significant number of new teachers experience overwhelming time commitments and have little time to reflect on critical early professional learning. Many new teachers expected heavy workloads, but also commented that they were unprepared for the array of non-instructional tasks they were expected to undertake, such as paperwork and fundraising. Teachers most likely to experience difficulties were those teaching large and/or diverse classes, those preparing lessons for many different subjects and those with many extracurricular commitments.

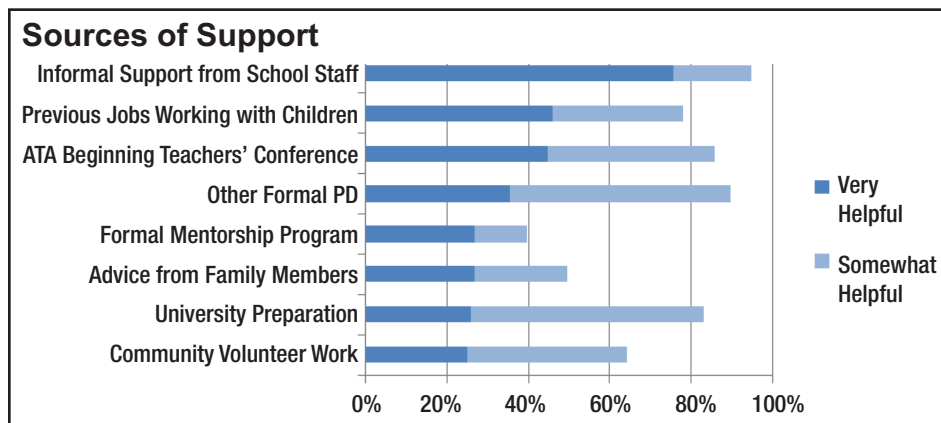
Generally, these conditions were exacerbated by new teachers’ lack of confidence and their uncertainty about school routines, classroom management and teaching to meet diverse student needs. However, in almost all cases, these uncertainties were counterbalanced by the intrinsic rewards new teachers found in their relationships with their students. For many, building supportive relationships with colleagues was also critical to success.



Sources of support for beginning teachers

Mentorship programs and formal PD opportunities were helpful for many, but informal support from school staff was the most significant form of support reported by new teachers. This result suggests that we must ensure that mentorship programs do not ignore the importance of school culture in determining the quality of new teachers' experiences.

Based on the data gathered from this five-year study and the annual fall survey, it is clear that beginning teachers require just-in-time support from veteran colleagues on lesson plan ideas, lesson resources and classroom management advice, preferably in the new teachers' subject areas or grade levels. Collegial support was most effective when it came from committed mentors—either formal or informal—who taught in the beginning teachers' grade or subject area. Professional learning communities were also identified as excellent forms of support for some teachers.



Half of the participants in the study had formal mentorship programs, but only half of these people stated that they found these programs very helpful. Reasons for a lack of enthusiasm about some mentorship programs included lack of time to collaborate, lack of commitment on the part of the mentor and/or school administration, and lack of fit with respect to grade and/or subject areas. Nevertheless, mentors and mentorship programs were generally highly valued by new teachers as sources of support.

While informal support from staff was the strongest and most valued form of support that new teachers received, research has suggested that some forms of support are better than others. New teachers can be led to develop poor, ineffective practices just as easily as positive and effective ones—the difference depends on the quantity and quality of collegial support provided, and the overall climate of the school. Once again, colleagues have a significant influence on the experiences of new teachers, but the direction of this influence—either positive or negative—is sometimes left to chance.

Without formal mentorship programs or other induction practices, new teachers may feel isolated. Based on the findings in the first phase of this five-year study, this was particularly the case with teachers in rural schools, who were often the only ones on staff teaching in their grade or subject areas. New teachers want and value the advice and support of their colleagues, but are often hesitant to ask busy colleagues for help or feel too busy themselves to seek help.

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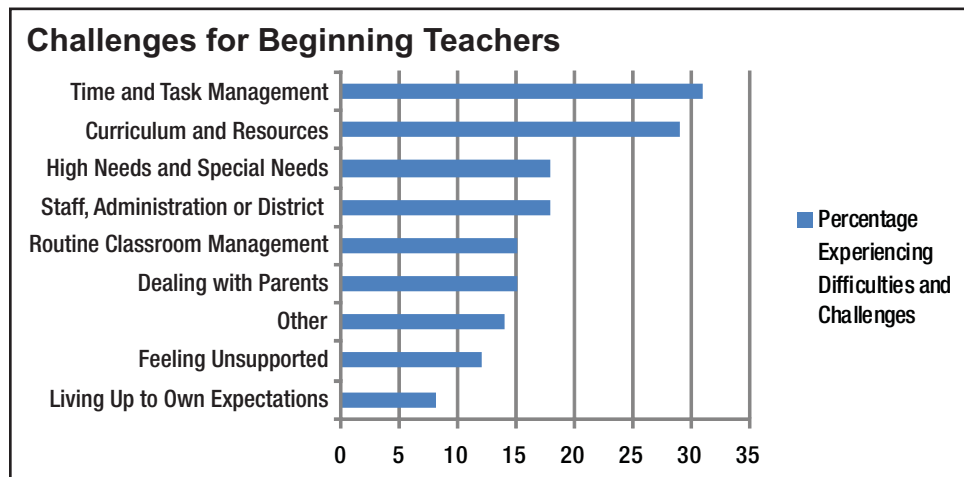
Specific challenges of beginning teaching

New teachers consistently cited their relationships with students as the best part of their work, but also described numerous challenges.



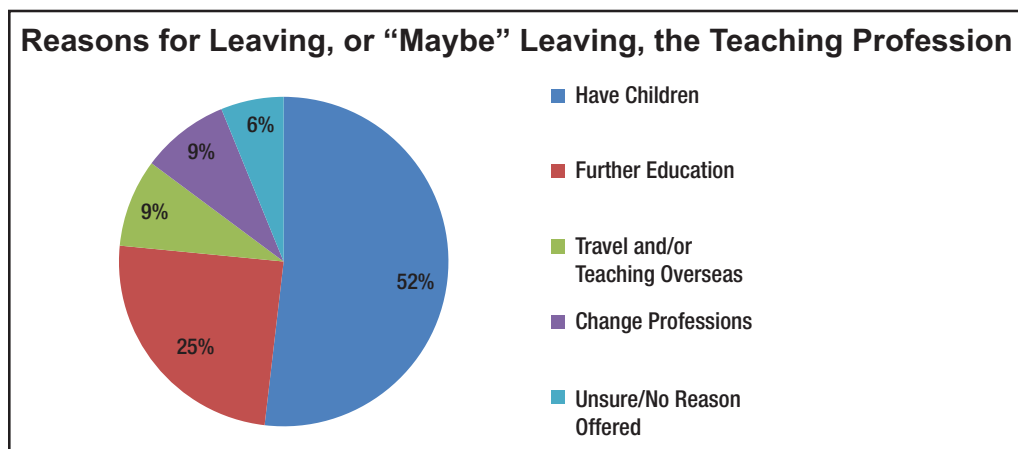
In addition to questions that asked teachers to rank different aspects of their first-year experiences, the survey included open-ended questions about what beginning teachers found most rewarding and most challenging about their work. New teachers consistently cited their relationships with students as the best part of their work, but also described numerous challenges. Again, the teachers' comments revealed that it was not only the volume of work that was difficult but also its complexity. Many overlapping factors contribute to difficulties in the first year of teaching.

It was evident from the findings that keeping pace with lesson planning, including finding appropriate resources, was time-consuming and stressful for beginning teachers. Classroom management and supporting students with special needs were also challenges. It was also evident, however, that many of these challenges could be mitigated or eliminated with strong collegial and administrative support.



Longer-term commitment to the teaching profession

The retention of first-year teachers is crucial to the future of Alberta's teaching profession. With one-third of new teachers anticipating that they will leave the profession in their first five years, it is important to understand the push-pull factors that influence teachers' future plans. In the 2008 survey, 25 per cent of respondents said they would "definitely" leave the profession within five years, and 35 per cent said that they "may" leave. The most often cited reasons included having a family (taking parental or maternity leave), travelling and pursuing further education. What is not known is whether these planned leaves are temporary or permanent; that is, whether teachers return to the profession after leaving the profession is largely unknown.



Research suggests that stress and negative professional experiences also contribute to teacher attrition. Therefore, it is important to monitor new teachers' work and learning conditions, their feelings about the teaching profession and their overall stress levels. Most of the teachers in the study had positive feelings about their chosen profession. Eighty-five per cent said that they saw teaching as a lifelong career, and 90 per cent believed they would go into teaching again if they had to start their lives over. Although 45 per cent of the sample agreed that their first year of teaching had had a negative impact on their quality of life, and 54 per cent described their stress level as "very high" or "somewhat high," overall, new teachers anticipated that their stress levels would decrease in coming years as they gained experience and developed banks of lesson plans and resources.

An inability to secure full-time employment might also have a negative impact on new teachers' commitment to the profession, and might contribute to attrition and mobility. Approximately 20 per cent of the sample held contingent teaching positions, including part-time positions, temporary contracts and substitute-teaching positions. For many of these teachers, the lack of job security was a source of frustration and stress. One respondent wished she "didn't have to jump through so many hoops to get a continuing contract . . . I and a few others are not getting continuous contracts because our subjects aren't in high need areas."

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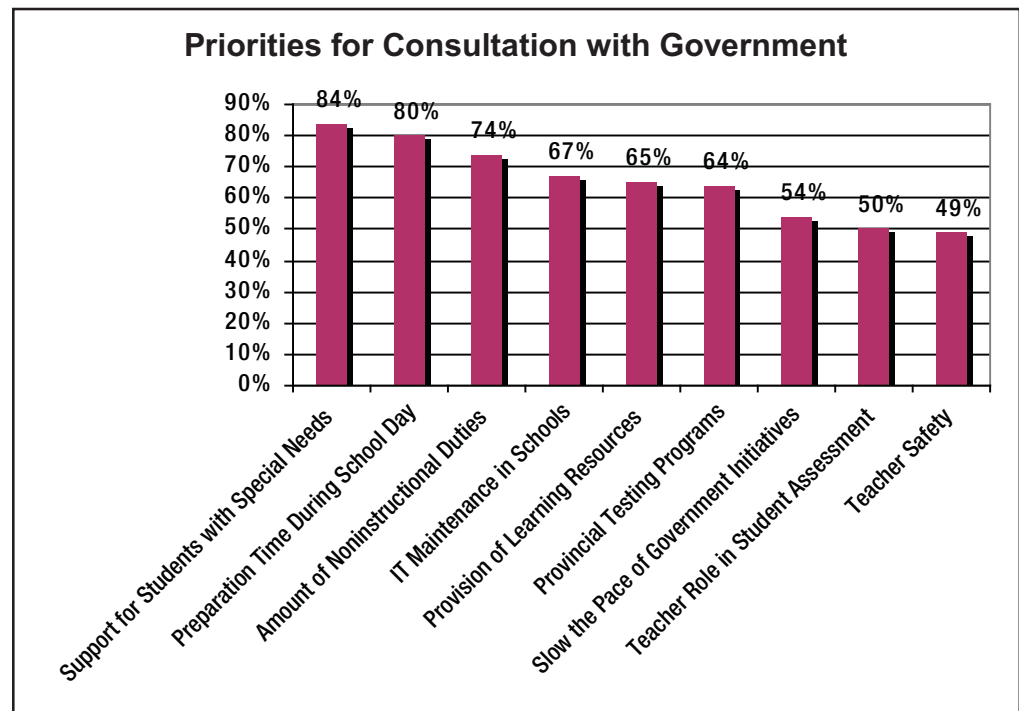
Three years ahead: Strategic priorities to 2012

As noted in the introduction to this document, the minister's consultations in the past year promise to be positive processes that address the systemic obstacles to school development while capitalizing on important opportunities ahead.

As we review the variety of opportunities and challenges facing Alberta's teachers, it is worth considering the profession's priorities for improving its ability to meet students' learning needs. Last year, the 2008 Member Opinion Survey asked teachers to identify what is "a very high" or "high priority" for future consultations with the government. Their responses, which appear in the graph below, continue to inform the leadership of the Association.

The longitudinal data collected over the past year, as well as other studies examining such things as special needs, administrator workload and distributed learning, reinforces what the broad membership articulated in 2008. As indicated earlier in this publication, support for students with special needs and growing noninstructional responsibilities for teachers are significant factors in the intensification of teachers' work. It is not surprising, therefore, that these areas are priorities for future consultations with the Alberta government.

As we review the variety of opportunities and challenges facing Alberta's teachers, it is worth considering the profession's priorities for improving its ability to meet students' learning needs.



Three years ahead: strategic opportunities for public leadership in learning

In the next three years of relative stability, on the collective bargaining front and in light of the promising signals from the minister’s consultations with Albertans, the Association and its subgroups should consider the following strategic opportunities to ensure optimal learning conditions for all students. Given the government’s impending \$2 billion “fiscal correction” for 2010/11, the strength and solidarity of the profession, and the leadership embedded throughout the organization and its subgroups, will be called upon to affirm the importance of investing in public education.

With respect to professional practice, Hargreaves (2009) and Murgatroyd (2009) have stressed the importance of teacher engagement and leadership in determining schools’ ability to improve. In their view, phrases such as *distributed leadership* and *teacher leadership* must go beyond being mere slogans to become an integral part of what professional organizations such as the Association advocate for.

1. In order to meet the challenges of the growing complexity of teaching, professional learning for Alberta teachers must include a strategic focus on the development of teacher leadership.

Supporting professional growth and building capacity for teacher leadership programs are ultimately about creating the future we want for public schools (Gronn 2003; Naylor et al 2008).

The skills and ethical commitments teachers develop as leaders in their classroom and their professional organization are not discrete or mutually exclusive. Given the Association’s commitment to social justice, advocating for meaningful access for all students to quality learning programs is both a pedagogical and an ethical imperative for Alberta teachers.



In order to address the deep-seated obstacles that stand in the way of an optimal working environment that sustains professional learning, a profound set of changes must be put in place that recognizes professional learning as an integral part of a teacher’s work day. Internationally we see wide variations in the time dedicated to instruction vs job-embedded PD. In South Korea, approximately 35 per cent of a teacher’s work day is dedicated to instruction—in OECD countries that number hovers in the 85 per cent range.

—Darling-Hammond et al (2008, 15)

There is little doubt that the strength and solidarity of the profession, and the leadership embedded throughout the organization and its subgroups, will be called upon to affirm the importance of investing in public education.

It is important to recognize the growing complexity of the teaching force and the diversity of the profession's needs.



As with the broad cross-section of Canadian teachers, Alberta's teachers typically spent over 7.5 hours per week over the past year on activities related to formal learning—attending courses and workshops, working on assignments and studying—and devoted 10 hours per week to informal learning, a considerable portion of which involved learning online and networking with colleagues (Clark et al 2007, 70). Indeed, as the data from surveys of beginning teachers indicates, informal networking with

colleagues is the most important form of professional support and growth for new teachers.

It is important to recognize the growing complexity of the teaching force and the diversity of the profession's needs. Overall, female teachers report working more hours per week than males, and female teachers with children spend somewhat more time (6.7 hours) on formal learning activities than females without children (5.8 hours). In comparing levels of schooling, elementary teachers report slightly more hours of formal learning activities (6.0 hours) than do secondary teachers (5.5 hours) (Clark et al 2007).

While the data in the preceding pages points to some strength in Alberta's PD programs, continual pressure on teachers to comply with a patchwork of government initiatives and government failure to trust in teacher leadership and local decision making at the school level remain the two biggest threats to teachers' professional identity and sense of efficacy (Murgatroyd 2009).

Leithwood, who is currently one of the external experts attached to the Moving and Improving leadership initiative sponsored by the College of

Alberta School Superintendents, aptly captures the paradox that, while top-down initiatives may be well-intended, without the recognition of the interdependencies of school communities, the impulse to control ultimately leads to deteriorating performance:

The currently popular teaching standards movement assumes that teacher performance will improve if only teacher capacity or ability changes. High stakes accountability policies, especially those with market orientation, assume performance will change if only teacher motivation changes. These reform efforts often have been pursued within a less-is-more financial framework, the consequences of which have had substantial negative effects on teachers' working conditions. (Leithwood 2006, 6–7)

In stark contrast to support for teacher leadership, a growing body of workplace research (Duxbury and Higgins 2001) identifies dysfunctional organizational cultures that thrive on compliance behaviour and acceptance of externally imposed initiatives that seek standardization and homogenization. The insidious compliance behaviour that results is what the cultural psychoanalyst O'Hara (2004) describes in the larger societal context as the triumph of habituation over authentic trust (p 246).

Regarding school reform efforts, Hargreaves and Shirley (2009a) describe a range of "addictive behaviors" for making short-term improvements that seldom address the systemic factors that cause students to fall through the cracks. Driven by the cultural backdrop of "the persistence of presentism," teachers' energies are continually directed toward satisfying externally imposed mandates (often driven by phrases such as *data-informed improvement*) that then demand even more attention and energy for teaching and learning processes that are neither desirable nor sustainable. "When schools follow policy mandates and pursue the relentless quest for short-term gains, they evolve into such addictive organizations" (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009b).

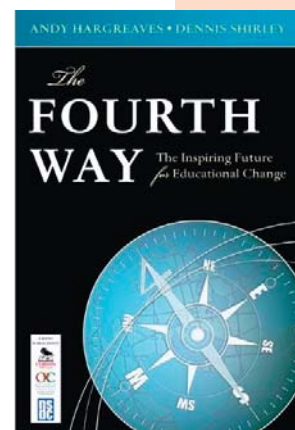
Certainly the Association's 2009 study of the workload of school administrators, (*Leadership for Learning*, Alberta Teachers' Association, 2009a) makes this tension clear. Administrators consistently report the challenges they face in advancing authentic assessment in schools while meeting the government's bureaucratic reporting requirements.

The purposes that define a society's future vision are a matter for public engagement of citizens and community members and of leaders who can tap into and elevate public-spiritedness. Educators today work in a public profession, not a separate and sequestered one. Every time they meet with a concerned parent or discuss the future of their community with business or other leaders, these are opportunities to influence public discourse and democratic deliberation about the achievements and aspirations of public education for their own children and other people's as well.

—Hargreaves and Shirley 2009a

"I am still a teacher and want to talk about teaching with my colleagues. I want to go into classrooms. I want to talk about the best way to teach, but all the other stuff I have to do gets in the way. I enjoy many of the other aspects but the paperwork is overwhelming."

—Respondent to the ATA Leadership for Learning survey report (2009)




The government's imposition of Bill 44 early in 2009 speaks powerfully to the need for teachers to affirm their role as public leaders in learning.

Only by supporting the twin pillars of improved professional practice and principled advocacy for public education will schools and the Association continue to thrive. For example, the membership and the provincial Association should applaud support for initiatives that improve opportunities for students. As the fourth cycle of AISI begins in 2009, teachers are committed to ensuring the success of this innovative approach to school development. The government announcement of support for AISI stands in contrast to the spring 2009 decision of the government to cancel support for the Building Assessment Capacity Mathematics Project, an initiative that was developed over two years of consultation and endorsed by all key education partners. The reason for the cancellation was budget restrictions; however, at the same time the government chose to proceed with other costly testing initiatives, such as making provincial achievement tests available online, and Grade Level of Achievement reporting.

Without the ability of the Association and its subgroups to influence policy and decision making at all levels of the K-12 system, there is a risk that ill-advised initiatives and approaches to teaching that do not serve the

interests of Alberta students will be implemented. The government's mixed success in affirming teachers' professional rights, roles and responsibilities in schools and its sometimes confused priorities are a major concern to educators across the province, especially if the government wants to foster the trust of the education partners. The government's imposition of Bill 44 early in 2009 speaks powerfully to the need for teachers to be public leaders in learning, a key goal of the Association's Strategic Plan.

"THE ASSOCIATION IS CATEGORICALLY OPPOSED TO A PROCESS THAT WOULD PLACE SCHOOL BOARDS AND TEACHERS IN FRONT OF HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNALS," ... "IN ADDITION, THE BILL WILL HAVE A CHILLING EFFECT ON CLASSROOM DISCUSSION AND INSTRUCTION."



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TIMBERLINE LOCAL NO 9

The Alberta Teachers' Association

2. Address the broad demographic, attitudinal and psychosocial changes occurring in Alberta's teaching profession through a sustained focus on teacher identity and professional accountability.

At its core, the Association's current advocacy on educational accountability is not so much about what the K-12 education system purports to do but, more important, about what it means to be a professional. The struggle is for the reaffirmation of the professional identity of teachers and the foundational belief that Alberta teachers' primary accountability is to their students. The Association's Real Learning First initiative is, therefore, about affirming what a teacher does and for whom.

Two years ago survey data indicated that only 25.8 per cent of Alberta teachers saw themselves in the same teaching position and school in five years, and that 25.1 per cent planned to retire by 2011. Further, 10 per cent anticipated that they would move to another occupation by 2012. Another 20.3 per cent saw themselves in a different school within five years (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2007b). Of current teachers in Alberta, 55 per cent will still be teaching in 2013.

The changing attitudes of young teachers entering the teaching profession, coupled with the growing complexity of teachers' work, promise to significantly affect teacher motivation and overall sense of efficacy of the teaching profession (Darling-Hammond et al 2008).

As underscored in much of this publication, the professional lives of Alberta teachers continue to be undermined by the growing bureaucratic encroachment of government interventions in schools. One school superintendent described this intervention as "a pervasive culture of bureaucratic accountability rather than a public-policy-driven or professional view of accountability" (Confidential communication, May 16, 2009). Certainly this sentiment echoes a growing recognition that it is time to consider the collateral damage created by the current approach to accountability in this province (Garipey, Spencer and Couture 2009).



Until the public school system is organized in such a way that every teacher has some means by which he or she can express an opinion on matters of educational importance and can be reassured that this opinion will somehow affect the school system, the assertion that the present system is not democratic seems to be justified. "What does democracy mean, save that the individual is to have a share in determining the conditions and the aims of his own work?" (Dewey 1903, 195)

The professional lives of Alberta teachers continue to be undermined by the growing bureaucratic encroachment of government interventions in schools.

Trust in education is increasingly being replaced with a ballooning bureaucratic reporting regime.

In their upcoming book, *The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change*, Hargreaves and his coauthor Dennis Shirley discuss the collapse of trust in institutions as a fundamental issue in our society, a primary reason for which is a decreased sense of community caused by people spending less face-to-face time with each other, as slow learning and deliberative inquiry give way to performance training sects. For Hargreaves and Shirley (2009a), we have replaced responsibility for each other through a shared culture—that is, the norms and expectations we agree upon—with legalistic contracts defined and determined by growing managerial bureaucracies. Though such contracts can have value, when they diminish trust within communities, they lead to a sad and empty life. Trust has been replaced with written performance standards, standardized tests, managerial supervision, and government requirements and legislation.

Although the education ministry does not support the ranking of schools using provincial assessment results, the Fraser Institute and others are permitted to regularly publish school and district rankings. Ranking schools places additional pressure on school initiatives and programs that conform to what is narrowly measured by the tests; this practice of ranking limits the curriculum, undermines school climate, diminishes trust and community confidence, and disregards the intents and efforts of parents, students and teachers in the school (ATA 2005). Indeed, as a chief superintendent of Calgary Catholic Schools observed, “The Fraser report and the Fraser Institute are socially irresponsible” in their use of school rankings (McGinnis 2009).

Indeed, the culture of many Alberta schools has been skewed by the impact of the government’s accountability processes, even to the point of steering AISI projects toward priority areas identified by results from provincial examinations.



I was the minister of education who implemented diploma exams and achievement tests in the early 1980s. I am not here to offer a *mea culpa* for the decisions made in 1980–83, but I am here to say that the intentions have become misdirected over time. This gives me a more than passing interest in their current status: it also suggests that I have an enduring interest in the question of democracy and education.

—David King, *Time for Action: Real Learning First Symposium*, Calgary, April 28, 2009

As the 2009 PD Survey shows, school culture and a focus on supporting site-based problem solving engage teachers and foster enduring collaborative inquiry. These observations are reinforced by Murgatroyd (2009), who reminds us that school culture is the main determinant for successfully shaping teacher leadership.

Distributed leadership, innovation and school cultures built on enduring relationships of trust are the key elements identified in comments made by PD committees in their assessments of successful PD programs. In jurisdictions where PD opportunities are optimal, trust among partners appears to be a recurring theme, as shown by the comments from PD chairs in the 2009 PD Survey. Indeed, it has been well documented in the school-improvement literature examining successful adoption and infusion of emerging technologies that trust in teachers and distributed leadership are key determiners of success (Parsons, McCrae and Taylor 2006).

With respect to supporting the needs of teachers in the early years of practice, it is important that targeted programs such as formal mentorship programs do not ignore the systemic factors that can create toxic school cultures. As one first-year teacher remarked, “Don’t train me to deliver pre-packaged lessons in my classroom. I am a professional and more than anything I need the ongoing support of the jurisdiction that hired me in the first place.”

In this regard, the Association remains committed to researching the changing contexts of teachers’ work in the early years of practice. Special focus will be given to questions of teacher motivation and efficacy as discussed in the emerging work of leading Canadian scholars in the field (Klassen et al 2009). For example, do new teachers develop self-confidence in their early years, and do they retain a sense of purpose and enthusiasm as they gain teaching experience? What is the role of school administrators in supporting teacher development and professional identity?

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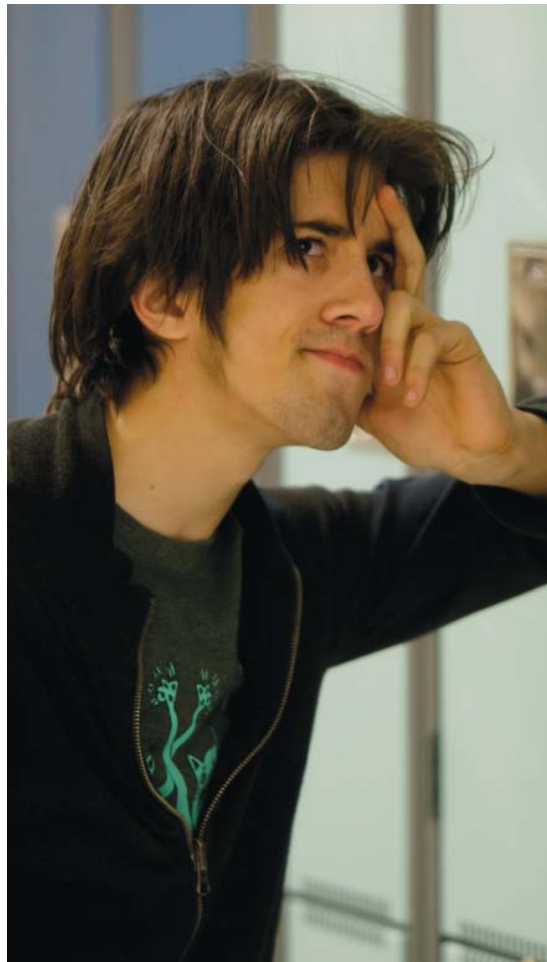


Despite being among the wealthiest people on the planet, perhaps one of our greatest challenges as Albertans will be to address issues of well-being and mental health that many young people face.

3. Capitalize on the current economic uncertainties as an opportunity to address long-standing systemic obstacles to readiness to learn.

Despite the short-term fiscal uncertainties that will occupy government in the months ahead, there is little doubt that we live in an extraordinary time in this province. Yet, as we have seen from missteps such as Bill 44, the government is preoccupied with reductive thinking. Two systemwide issues illustrate the immediate challenge ahead: the psychological and mental well-being of children and youth, and early readiness to learn. While the former is currently the focus of a major Association campaign, the latter needs to be rekindled as a key priority among education partners.

Perhaps one of our greatest challenges in public education will be to address the psychological issues that young people face. For example, while multitasking and virtual networking are commonplace in youth culture, the resulting effects of a sedentary lifestyle cannot be ignored; there is a growing concern over declining health and well-being of youth. Twenty-two per cent of Alberta children are considered overweight; 8 per cent are considered obese. A growing body of research indicates that body image will be one of the most significant inhibitors to the personal growth and well-being of Alberta's young people, and we are only scratching the surface of this issue in our schools. The Ontario Elementary Teachers' Federation (OETF) is



leading Canada in this work. In 2004 the OETF commissioned a study by Dr June Larkin, program director, Equity Studies Centre, Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies, and Dr Carla Rice, clinical program specialist, Body Image Project, Regional Women's Health Centre, Sunnybrook and Women's Hospital. Based on the results of this study, a major curriculum initiative was launched in Ontario to address the issues related to what is likely the single most important area of concern related to the psychological well-being of youth (see www.etfo.ca/IssuesinEducation/BodyImage/Pages/default.aspx).

Alberta's youth are like a family that receives a vast inheritance from a distant and ambivalent rich aunt. Albertans are now the richest people on the planet, with 51,900 barrels of oil per person in proven reserves. However, there

are important issues that money will not solve and, in fact, may make worse. The opportunities and challenges offered by our current energy windfall will be amplified by the growing challenges and complexities of unplanned growth. Currently 1 out of 12 Alberta children lives in poverty. And the rural–urban divide continues to grow—the city of Calgary is expected to create 220,000 new jobs in the next 10 years, while the population in much of rural Alberta will decrease.

With respect to readiness to learn, the path ahead for government is clear. Across the country, \$3 billion, or 0.2 per cent of total GDP, is committed to early childhood initiatives—Sweden invests nine times this amount. Fraser Mustard, the renowned expert in child development, has demonstrated that the \$15 billion needed for a comprehensive child-care program across Canada would yield benefits to the government and society at large (that is, there would be lower costs down the road) of \$13.9 billion. This means that the net cost to governments for a world-class child-care strategy would be \$1.9 billion (Trefler 2009).

In stark contrast to Alberta’s current patchwork of supports for early learning, consider the Ontario government’s recent announcement that it will proceed with a wide-sweeping set of strategies to ensure that all children arrive at kindergarten ready to learn. The projected \$1 billion initiative, based on the Early Years Study, provides provisions for accessible child care (costing up to \$27 per day) and includes extensive provisions for paid parental leave.

The report clearly sets out the steps that the province should take to enhance early child development. It is a comprehensive and practical plan to implement the results from all the prior work on the importance of early child development and the effects on learning, health, and behaviour in later life. We need to ensure that this report will move the agenda for quality early child development programs forward in Ontario.

—Dr J Fraser Mustard cochair/author, Early Years Studies
www.ontario.ca/en/initiatives/early_learning/ONT06_018890



The Alberta government’s willingness to support innovation and research in the hard sciences and medical research should be matched by a commitment to do the same in basic education.

Encouraging research across all levels of the K–12 education sector, from graduate students to national and international researchers, was a key goal of the inaugural provincial research symposium, *From Research to Action*, cosponsored by the ministry of education and the Association in the summer of 2008.

4. Educational research must be undertaken and expanded across the system to support responsiveness and innovation.

The challenges and opportunities outlined in the preceding pages, as well as the policy directions generated by the minister’s public consultations this past year, will require careful deliberation by education partners informed by well-grounded research that reflects the realities of Alberta’s experiences.

In 2003, the Conference Board of Canada published a provocative report entitled *Solving Canada’s Innovation Conundrum: How Public Education Can Help*. The report stresses that for Canada to have a productive society, it must become more aware of the conditions and processes that support innovation. The Alberta government’s willingness to support innovation and research in the hard sciences and medical research should be matched by a commitment to do the same in basic education.

The government’s modest supports for innovation and improvement in the basic education system should be contrasted to its commitment of hundreds of millions of dollars to support research in other sectors in the past couple of years. In his April 2008 budget address, Premier Stelmach said that “Alberta prospers through innovation and lifelong learning.” That year the government committed to a number of significant research initiatives: the creation of a new Alberta Enterprise Corporation that received \$100 million and will boost access to capital for early-stage, knowledge-based companies; a three-year \$178-million private-sector plan that included research and development tax credits and a venture capital fund; \$238 million over four years for biofuel research; \$200 million over four years to the Energy Innovation Fund; and \$950 million to the Heritage Foundation for Medical Research.

Despite the substantial cuts to several of these programs in the 2009 budget, there is little doubt that the government remains committed (in excess of \$1 billion) to supporting research and innovation in a number of sectors. Contrast this sizable research and development investment outside of the K–12 education sector with the \$128 million committed to teacher professional development.

In the years ahead, the Association must capitalize on the government’s 2009 Business Plan, which invokes its “leadership and support” role through such priorities as “strengthening the education sector workforce,” “enhancing working relationships at all levels,” and using “research” and “innovation” to improve the system. These are important commitments that resonate with the Association’s own strategic commitments identified in the introduction of this report.

In elaborating on the reasons behind recent changes to its research and innovation strategy as articulated in the *Alberta Research and Innovation Act*, the government said, “Work to align and support Alberta’s research and innovation is even more important now, in light of the global economic situation. It will help the system to become stronger and more efficient than ever.”

Encouraging research across all levels of the K–12 education sector, from graduate students to national and international researchers, was a key goal of the inaugural provincial research symposium, *From Research to Action*, cosponsored by the ministry of education and the Association in the summer of 2008. This past year, discussions with education partners continued to explore opportunities to advance this goal. The Association looks forward to progress on this front.

Looking forward

The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destinations.

—John Scharr

The next three years provide an unprecedented opportunity for the Association to advance its strategic goals. Against the backdrop of the comprehensive labour agreement with government, with a continuing commitment to collaboration among key education partners and with over 2,000 new teachers entering the profession each year, the leadership of this organization can play a key role in advancing the interests of public education.

Amidst current global economic and environmental uncertainties, this province stands at a critical crossroads, and investments in basic education must remain a priority. Our economy continues to show tremendous potential for growth, provided that we can meet the challenge to capitalize on the changes ahead. As well, Alberta is currently the only jurisdiction in Canada whose student population is growing. Yet against this backdrop of the tremendous growth and potential for Alberta, our challenges remain as complex as our opportunities.

For this province to move forward, our schools must foster a culture of ingenuity to meet the learning needs of students in our diverse and complex communities. To this end, the ATA's Strategic Plan emphasizes the need for members to engage with their Association to make it a truly adaptive organization that responds to teachers' professional needs and well-being. Fostering a culture of innovation and ingenuity to enhance student learning in Alberta schools will also contribute in the long term to supporting teachers as public leaders in learning.

In the next three years, the Association will continue efforts to enhance the authoritative voice of teachers. Teachers make key professional judgments every day that impact the lives of students, and it's important that teachers be supported in their work. The Association will also focus on member engagement, given our current demographic realities, to enhance ongoing commitment to our goals as a professional organization.

—Executive Secretary Gordon Thomas



Alberta is currently the only jurisdiction in Canada whose student population is growing. Yet against this backdrop of the tremendous growth and potential for Alberta, our challenges remain as complex as our opportunities.

“I don’t think anybody anywhere can talk about the future of their people or of an organization without talking about education. Whoever controls the education of our children controls our future.”

—Wilma Mankiller

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"Although children are only 24 percent of the population, they're 100 percent of our future and we cannot afford to provide any child with a substandard education."

—Ed Markey

**Our most basic
common link is that
we all inhabit this
planet. We all
breathe the same air.
We all cherish our
children's future.
And we are all
mortal.**

—John F Kennedy

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"It is up to us to live up to the legacy that was left for us, and to leave a legacy that is worthy of our children and of future generations."

—Christine Gregoire



This publication is part of an ongoing series of research updates published by the Alberta Teachers' Association. Further background information about the research studies cited in this publication is available from J-C Couture at the Alberta Teachers' Association, 11010 142 Street, Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1; phone 780 447-9400 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (toll free in Alberta); e-mail jc.couture@ata.ab.ca.