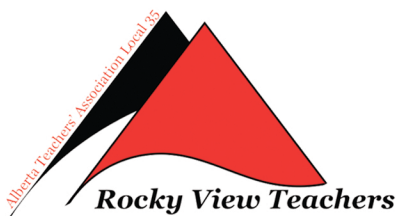


The Future is Growing Together



Building the professional capital
of teachers in Rocky View Schools



**The Alberta
Teachers' Association**

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Foreword

A Vancouver teacher recently told me that she brings an assortment of juices, milk and breakfast cereals to school early every day. Several of her struggling Grade four students – one of whom is homeless – show up each time not just for the food but for the conversation. “I probably teach them more in that half an hour together, than I can during the rest of the day after the other 26 students arrive,” she said. After I spoke at a teachers’ convention about the role of imagination and the arts in education, a Halifax secondary school principal recounted how she had spent her own money to buy musical instruments when the school board failed to provide the funds and then recruited several teachers to help her build suitable classroom cabinets after school. And I know an Ottawa middle school teacher who walked two students home every day for several weeks after they had complained about being bullied along their route. I hear dozens of these stories every year. You have probably heard them too. Or you could tell your own. This past February, Facebook and the Twittersphere exploded with snapshots like these from teachers exasperated by public misperceptions about the full scope of the work they do. It started when Atlanta middle school teacher Stephanie Lavender Weber wrote about staying with and caring for students after a freak southern snowstorm until their parents could pick them up. She ended her post with the hashtag *#evaluatethat*.

Across Canada and the United States alike, teachers and administrators are becoming increasingly impatient with calls for educational standards, accountability measures, and digital reporting tools that consistently fail to acknowledge the daily challenges teachers face or capture their classroom successes across a broad variety of domains. As our cultural obsession with standardization and accountability measures in only two subject areas (math and literacy) increasingly dominates school reform, the most common complaint I now hear from both teachers and administrators is this: *I have been stripped of my professional judgment, creativity, and freedom to make decisions in the best interests of my students*. A Vancouver newspaper headline succinctly warned of the potential consequences: “Lack of prestige and autonomy soon scares off even the most dedicated.”

Against this backdrop, it is not difficult to understand the findings of this latest report from Rocky View Local 35 of the Alberta Teachers’ Association. Between 2011 and 2013, teachers’ job satisfaction, feelings of being included in decision-making, and sense of balance in their personal and professional lives have all decreased significantly. Most alarmingly, 38 per cent of Rocky View teachers now report that, if given the opportunity to switch professions for the same pay and benefits, they would. Despite what is clearly a very strong sense of professionalism and deep commitments, Rocky View teachers, like many of their colleagues nationwide, are experiencing a sense of reduced autonomy and authority at the same time that their responsibilities and workload are increasing. I was especially struck by a comment from one young Rocky View teacher who noted that, “as a professional educator I am saddened to see the paternalistic attitude exhibited by senior district leaders at times. Being told how and when to report on student progress, using technology that often doesn’t work is one of many persistent frustrations I experience. Our voice as teachers seems to be silenced.”

In contrast to the difficulties reported by many survey respondents related to the system leaders, a remarkable 99 per cent of Rocky View teachers report positive relationships with students and parents, and, across Alberta, teachers continue to work an average of 56 hours per week on behalf of students and their families. Teaching has always been first and foremost about relationships and teachers across North America continue to base their practice on that simple fact. But when

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education reforms turn away from an emphasis on supporting positive conditions of practice and move towards technocratic strategies for “compliance,” the profession suffers and so do students. Many teachers would echo the sentiments of Gloria, a teacher in a recent study I conducted of the 10th grade civics curriculum in Ontario. She told us this:

In my 22 years of teaching, never have I experienced a climate that has turned all educational problems into problems of measurement until now. Poor citizenship skills? Raise their math and literacy scores. Poor participation? Doesn't matter. Poverty? Inequality? The solution is always to give the students more tests. These days pedagogically, I feel like I can't breathe.

That's why the impressive work of the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) as represented in the Alberta-wide *A Great School for All* campaign and in documents like this one should serve as a model for other teacher associations across the country. The message behind too many current education “reforms” is not subtle: teachers can't be trusted; they need to be monitored and their practices homogenized. The rhetorical calls for teacher professionalism that are routinely and liberally included in education policy documents and mission statements too often co-exist with top-down edicts that strip teachers of exactly the curricular and pedagogical decision-making authority that allow them to act as professionals. But it doesn't have to be that way.

Let's look at Finland. “We give our teachers a lot of freedom in their work,” said Henna Virkkunen, Finland's Minister of Education. “This autonomy contributes to the popularity of the profession.... After that, it's easy for us when we have the right people.” Indeed, in 2010, Finland had over 6,600 applicants for 660 primary school teacher education spots. In the recent past, Alberta has also done a great deal to support teachers in their work and enable the kind of professionalism they require, and the ATA has worked tirelessly to convey the importance of a rich educational experience beyond test scores and digital reporting tools to students, parents, policy-makers, and the public. Those efforts pay off. While it is true that policymakers' obsession with reporting mechanisms, standardization of practices, and even “incentivizing” teachers (as if lack of motivation is the primary problem teachers face) have all had a negative impact on public perceptions of teachers and teaching, it is also true that a majority of us have had teachers who have made an enormous positive impact on our lives, and most parents believe that teaching is about more than narrow tests of performance on myopic measures of school success.

In fact, education goals — particularly in democratic societies — have always been about more than narrow measures of success and teachers have often been called upon and appreciated for instilling in their students a sense of purpose, meaning, community, compassion, integrity, imagination, and commitment. Every teacher accomplishes these more artful and ambiguous tasks in different ways. Much as Darwin's theory of natural selection depends on genetic variation, any theory of teaching in a democratic society depends on a multiplicity of ideas, perspectives, and approaches to exploring and seeking solutions to complex issues of widespread concern. Parents, administrators, and politicians alike all must acknowledge that educators in a democratic society have a responsibility to create learning environments that teach students a broad variety of lessons – including but not limited to learning how to read and write and do basic arithmetic. But only those teachers free to work as professionals, drawing on their own interests and passions and able to exercise their professional judgments have any chance of achieving these goals.

Talented teachers need the freedom and professional autonomy to work the magic of their art in a myriad of different ways that defy standardization and regimentation of practice. Talented teachers need manageable class sizes in which they can provide the right conditions for that magic

to take root. And talented teachers need policymakers who have the courage to marshal the resources necessary to create the best conditions of practice possible and then let teachers do their jobs free of interference and corrosive mistrust. As one Rocky View teacher commented in the Alberta Teachers' Association survey, "I understand the need to push my practice and improve my teaching. What is frustrating is the continual message that we need to work harder and harder and to adopt initiatives that are too-often unproven and of questionable value to students."

Much of the work that teachers do is difficult to measure, and it would be a grave mistake to seek to quantify every aspect of teaching performance with dubious "value-added" digital reporting-driven metrics. A kindergarten teacher in South Hadley, Massachusetts conveyed this to fellow teachers and administrators through her social media post about a 5-year old girl who had joined her class mid-year after suffering numerous hardships at home and moving repeatedly from one state to another. She described how she and her colleagues are being "bombarded" with test-preparation and data-entry demands, even in kindergarten. "In my classroom, I teach compassion, sharing, and cooperation," she wrote. Then she described how she spent weeks building trust with her new student, allowing her to feel safe with 23 new peers and how she was finally able to "become a stable, loving part of her life." Each day, the student would fall asleep after lunch and, rather than wake her at the beginning of Suzanne's prep time ("I knew her sleep was more important for her well being as she wasn't sleeping at night"), Suzanne would carry her to a colleague's room and rock her in a rocking chair until she woke up naturally. While she was sleeping and Suzanne was rocking, she and her colleague would work on lesson plans. "There are days when I hate my job but love what I do," Suzanne writes in her post, and, like the hundreds of teachers who had written before her, she concluded with the hashtag *#evaluatethat*.

Without the engagement of the teaching profession, school reform efforts simply do not succeed. As this study illustrates, Rocky View teachers are highly committed and engaged in their daily work and in relationships with students at the school level. Yet this study also clearly shows that the growing tendency to treat teachers as 'managed workers' is creating considerable issues that need to be addressed. I trust and hope that this research study will be a catalyst for engaging Rocky View education partners in building both the professional capacity of teachers and an enhanced sense of professional community and solidarity across the jurisdiction.

—Joel Westheimer
University Research Chair in Democracy and Education
University of Ottawa

Introduction

In spring 2011, Rocky View Local 35¹ of the Alberta Teachers' Association undertook an online survey of 544 teachers and administrators. The goal of the survey was to identify the conditions of professional practice that currently exist in schools in the district and document the impact of Rocky View's various governmental and Board-level initiatives such as personalized learning, inclusion, informed transformation, and the ephemeral promise of '21st century skills'.

In 2013, the online survey was administered again in order to collect longitudinal data on these important questions. Both the 2011 and 2013 surveys have thus served as tools to provide a window into how Rocky View's initiatives have affected teachers and administrators over time. In addition, measures have been taken on the state of teaching and learning conditions, supports for technology, and perceptions of the Local and the Board.

Rocky View Schools' senior administration explains that administrators, trustees and teachers have worked collectively to transform its schools into a 21st century learning environment where students are "engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit". This is achieved through "teachers shifting from knowledge

¹ Rocky View Schools contains 41 schools with approximately 20,000 students and employs 1750 school staff. It is the fifth largest school board in Alberta, located around the north, east, and west of Calgary. A Superintendent of schools reports directly to a seven-member board, and works with 150 staff in an Education Centre that supports instruction, professional learning, student transportation, human resources, communication, capital planning and facility maintenance. (Rocky View Schools website, retrieved 2013 September 25. http://www.rockyview.ab.ca/publications/3yp_3/jurisdictional_profile)

disseminator to facilitator of knowledge construction", and administrators modifying and building structures to "encourage risk-taking and to champion a mental mode of system thinking". Trustees also redirect resources to support innovative strategies.

As with the 2011 survey, most respondents were classroom teachers and between 87 per cent held full-time continuing contracts in regular schools settings. All jurisdictions were well represented in the sample, given population sizes of each of these areas. Given the sample size, the margin of error for those surveyed was 4.5 per cent.

The 2013 sample was well distributed in terms of age and years of teaching experience:

- While 88 per cent were classroom teachers, one per cent of respondents were administrators (compared to three per cent in 2011), four per cent had combined administrative and classroom duties, and three per cent were substitute teachers.
- 14 per cent of respondents were teachers with less than 5 years of experience. Two per cent had less than one year, compared to five per cent in 2011.
- 60 per cent of teachers had more than ten years of experience.
- 70 five per cent of respondents were female.
- The median age range of respondents was 41 to 45 years (17 per cent of respondents fell into this category). In 2011, the median age range of respondents was 36-40 years, which included 17.1 per cent of teachers.

The median range for teaching experience was 10 to 14 years (18 per cent of the sample).

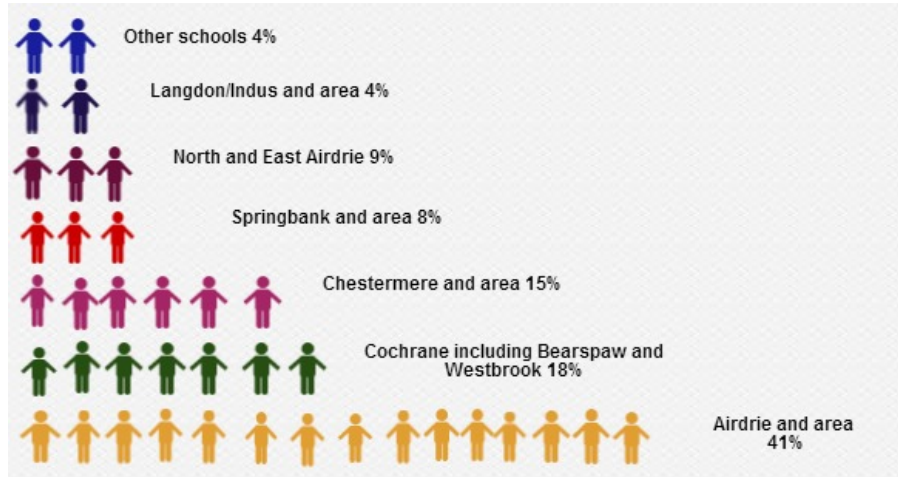


Figure 1: Distribution of Study Sample by Area

Areas which contained a third of teachers within one age category were found in Chestermere and Langdon/Indus area, which each contained the highest percentage of teachers between 26 and 30 years of age (27.2 per cent and 30 per cent respectively); North and East Airdrie and Langdon/Indus

area contained the highest percentage of teachers between 36 and 40 years of age (25.5 per cent and 25.0 per cent) and Springbank and area contained the highest percentage of teachers between 46 and 50 years of age (24.4 per cent).

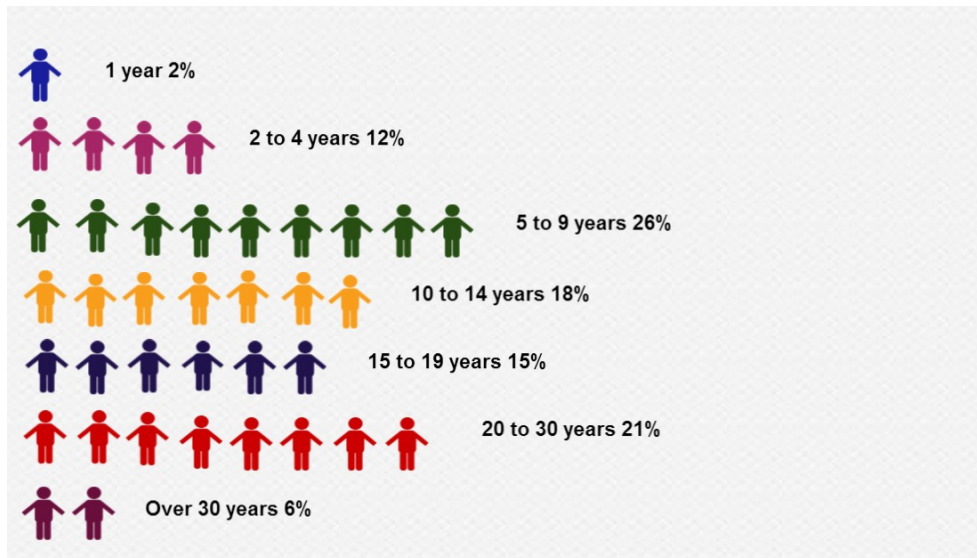


Figure 2: Years of teaching experience, including the current year

Teaching and Learning Conditions

Morale and Commitment to Teaching

The simmering issues around morale observed in the 2011 survey of Rocky View teachers have only grown stronger, and in all areas of teaching and learning conditions, overall teacher satisfaction has declined.

Despite the growing dissatisfaction around teaching and learning conditions and aspects relating to teacher well-being, there was no change from 2011 in the percentage of teachers who agreed they had positive relationships with students, which still stands at 99 per cent. Positive relationships with parents and teaching colleagues also remained high, but had declined 1 per cent and 3 per cent respectively.

Past concerns with engagement with the Local around communication continued to feature in comments from respondents. Some respondents felt the Local could do more to: support access to information; design meetings more teachers in different locations could attend; and, better explain terminology and governance processes for both new and experienced teachers.

The number of Rocky View Teachers who would switch professions for the same pay and benefits rose to 38 per cent compared to 30 per cent in 2011. More broadly across Alberta, the Linda Duxbury and Christopher Higgins' study found that 15 per cent of teachers were considering leaving their current situation several times a week or more, and another 15 per cent think of leaving once a week. These results are of concern for various reasons, notably that

when an individual is highly committed to their work, they are more willing to exert effort for their organisation and more involved in their work.

In 2013, only half of Rocky View teachers reported that their work brings them satisfaction, a decline of 14 per cent from 2011, and less than half feel they are meaningfully involved in their schools decision-making (48 per cent).

Chris Day's research in the United Kingdom of 300 teachers in 100 schools over a three-year period found that workload, and policy surrounding workload management, are key in determining commitment to teaching. Excess teacher workload erodes employees' capacity to reflect on practice and undertake their own professional development, seriously limiting efficacy in teachers' work.

Similarly, as Duxbury and Higgins' research has shown, job satisfaction is related to many other areas of work such as stress, organisational commitment, morale absenteeism, retention and mental and physical health.

In this negative environment, it seems what is motivating Rocky View teachers is the on-going stable nature of their positive relationships with students, colleagues, and parents. Arguably, these relationships may be a large factor in boosting their flagging morale.

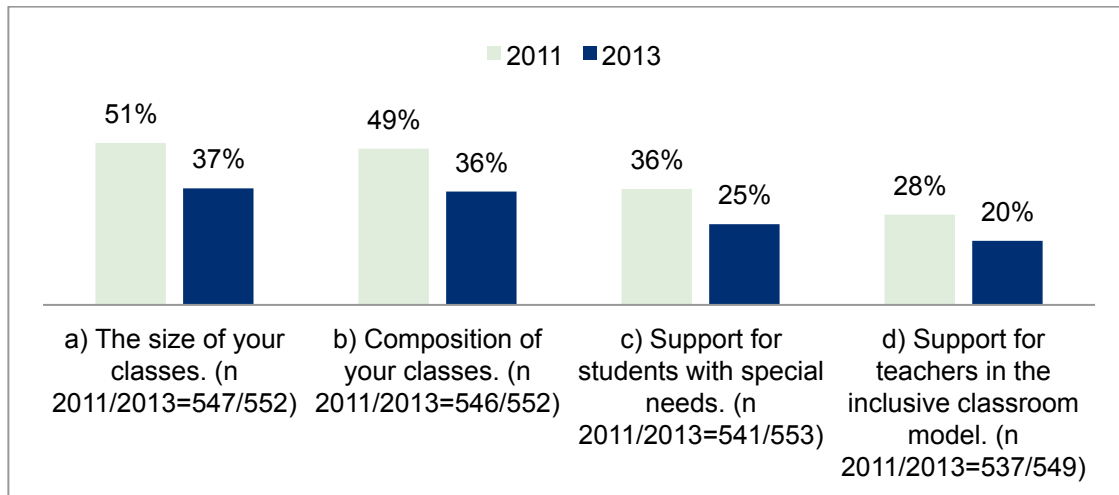


Figure 3: Satisfaction with Elements Relating to Current Teaching and Learning Conditions, 2011 and 2013 (% satisfied)

Classroom Characteristics, Size and Composition

Although teachers remain generally satisfied with the tools and resources available, they are less so than in 2011. Most notably, satisfaction with the composition of class sizes declined 23 per cent from almost half of teachers surveyed to 36 per cent in 2013. 35 per cent were satisfied with class sizes and 27 per cent were neutral on the issue.

Respondents were most dissatisfied with the support available for children with special needs (60 per cent), followed by support to teach in an inclusive classroom model (59 per cent), and requirements to supervise and undertake assigned tasks (51 per cent).

In comments from Rocky View teachers, class size was the most frequently cited condition of practice respondents would like the Local to improve upon. Teaching supports, workload and preparation time were also referenced. Teachers stated class sizes were becoming increasingly unmanageable, and were a negative factor with a ripple effect throughout the classroom when implementing new technologies, teaching in an inclusive model and managing non-instructional workload.

As one respondent stated, “Class sizes have ballooned beyond manageable boundaries. Student learning is now directly suffering as a result, and technology is at best an irrelevant solution.” A number of respondents cited the tendency of jurisdiction leaders to prescribe technology as a panacea for addressing the complex learning needs of students.

Satisfaction with class size was found to vary depending on where schools were located within the Local. The greatest proportion of satisfied teachers were located north and east of Airdrie (71 per cent), while the greatest percentage of dissatisfied or very dissatisfied teachers were found in Cochrane, including Bearspaw and Westbrook (28 per cent).

Satisfaction with the composition of classes also varied depending where schools were located within Rocky View. The greatest percentage of satisfied teachers were found in North and East of Airdrie and Springbank and area (54.9 and 54.4 per cent respectively), and the least satisfied or very dissatisfied were found in Airdrie and area, Chestermere and area, and Langdon/Indus and area (28.2, 30.9 and 31.8 per cent).

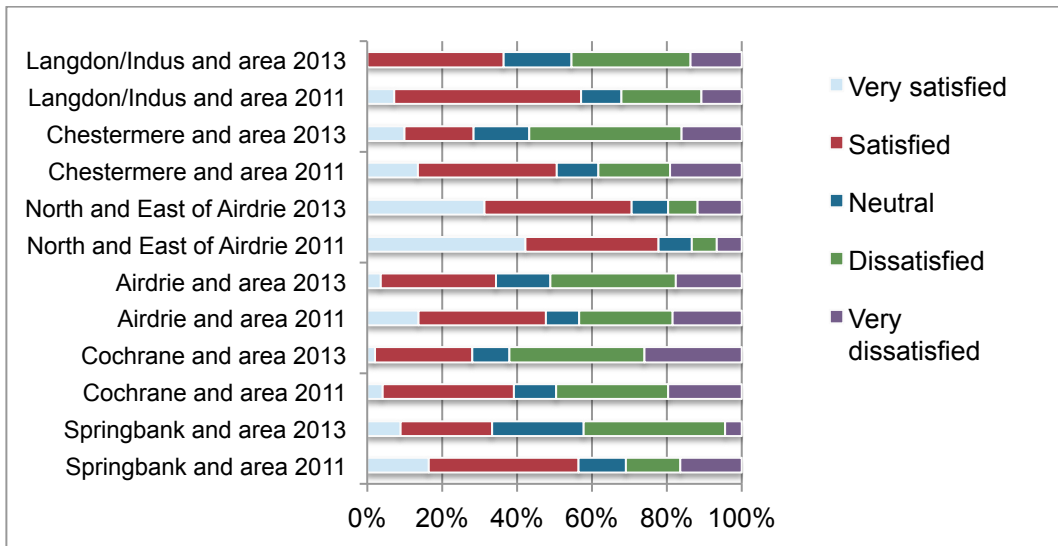


Figure 4: a) Satisfaction with class sizes by area, 2011 to 2013

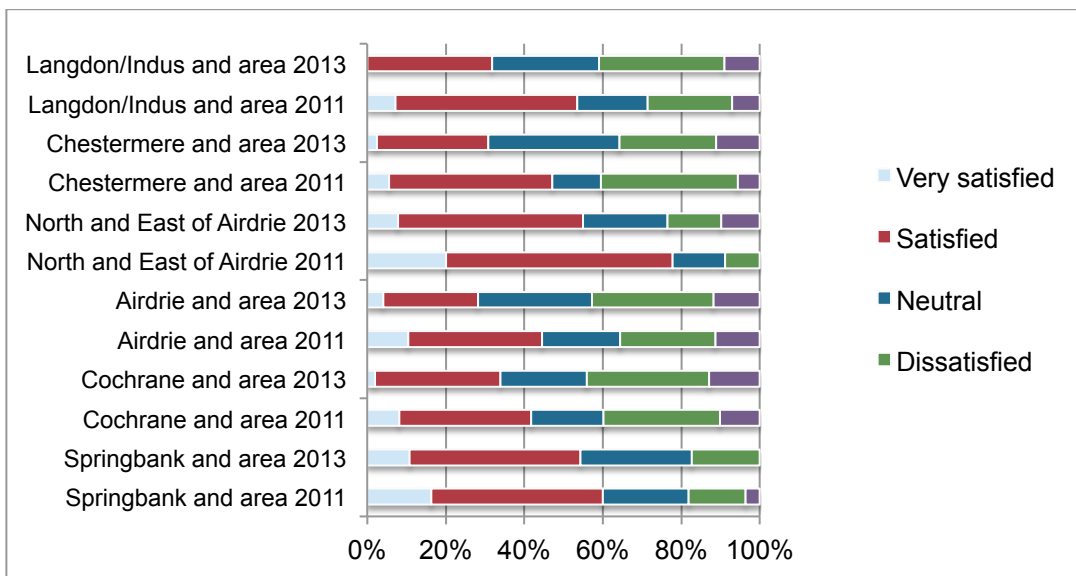


Figure 4: b) Satisfaction with composition of classes by area, 2011 to 2013

The results by area for satisfaction with supports for students with special needs or to teach in the inclusive classroom model differed in areas of Rocky View District. 73 per cent of respondents in Langdon/Indus and area were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with supports for students with special needs, in Cochrane including Bearspaw and Westbrook, 64 per cent felt this way, 63 per

cent in Airdrie and area and 65 per cent in other areas.

Dissatisfaction with support for teachers in the inclusive classroom model was again highest in Langdon/Indus and area (64 per cent), Cochrane, including Bearspaw and Westbrook, (65 per cent), Airdrie and area (62 per cent) and other areas (70 per cent).

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As in 2011, many teachers expressed that they would like to see more support in the classroom from trained educational assistants, more professional development for teachers and for the Board and Local to recognise and work towards smaller class sizes. For some teachers, a lack of resources and support factors were compounding and having a negative impact on their classroom environment. As one teacher reported, “We have inclusive education with very little support. I feel that it is getting harder to reach all of the students in my class.”

Another respondent added, “If inclusive education is to work there needs to be professional development for the teacher of the child with needs, support needs to be provided with assistance of staff who also have some training to deal with these special needs and the class also needs some support so they are not losing out on instruction while the teacher is dealing with one or two special needs individuals.”

Highlights

- Dissatisfaction with class size is rising: 49 per cent are dissatisfied with class size - an increase of 10 per cent from 2011.
- The percentage of teachers dissatisfied with the supports available to teach effectively in an inclusive model has increased. 59 per cent were dissatisfied with the supports they are presently receiving and only 20 per cent are satisfied. This was affected by where the school was located within the district.
- Like in 2011, teachers continue to feel that their ability to manage larger classes depends on the number of special needs students in their classroom, and the supports they receive for these students. Both of these factors were affected by where schools are located in the district.
- Teachers continued to be frustrated when they lack the resources to support all learners in their classrooms and “blanket” approaches to programs and initiatives.

Student Diversity

Growing diversity will be Alberta's greatest asset in the years ahead as the province's population continues to expand.

High rates of interprovincial and international migration and population growth will continue to influence the makeup of Alberta's schools. Rocky View is a dramatically growing school jurisdiction and this very much includes students for whom English is not a first language and who are visible minorities. These students are variously referred to as English Language Learners (ELL) or English as an Additional Language Learners (EAL).

Alberta's growth rate is currently three times the national average. Year over year population growth from 2012-2013 recorded an influx of more than 136,000 people represented a population growth rate of 3.5 per cent.²

Alberta also has the lowest median age of all provinces (36.1), which is a contributing factor to the province's baby boom. In 2012, 52,398 babies were born, breaking the previous record set in 2009.

Airdrie continues to be one of the fastest growing communities in Canada, and has experienced an average annual growth rate of 7.8 per cent over the past five years.³ Despite these changes, Rocky View teachers' concerns related to the growing diversity and complexity of their classrooms remain relatively unchanged overall. In 2013, 43 per cent were neutral on whether adequate supports were available for visible minorities and 40 per cent on support for ELL students.

There are, however, differences in satisfaction with supports between areas of the district.

The lowest rating in satisfaction for ELL student support was found in Chestermere (42 per cent); respondents representing schools in other areas also provided low satisfaction ratings for supports provided to students representing visible minorities was (30 per cent). As in 2011, satisfaction and dissatisfaction with supports for minorities and ELL students could reflect an urban/rural split among respondents and/or the relative presence of these student population groups in different schools. Given Alberta's population growth, this is an important area for the Local and system leaders to monitor.

² Mariam Ibrahim, *Edmonton Journal* September 26, 2013, <http://www.edmontonjournal.com/Astronomical+growth+pushes+Alberta+population+above+four+million/8963079/story.html>

³ City of Airdrie website, "Population and Growth". <http://www.airdrie.ca/index.cfm?serviceID=485>

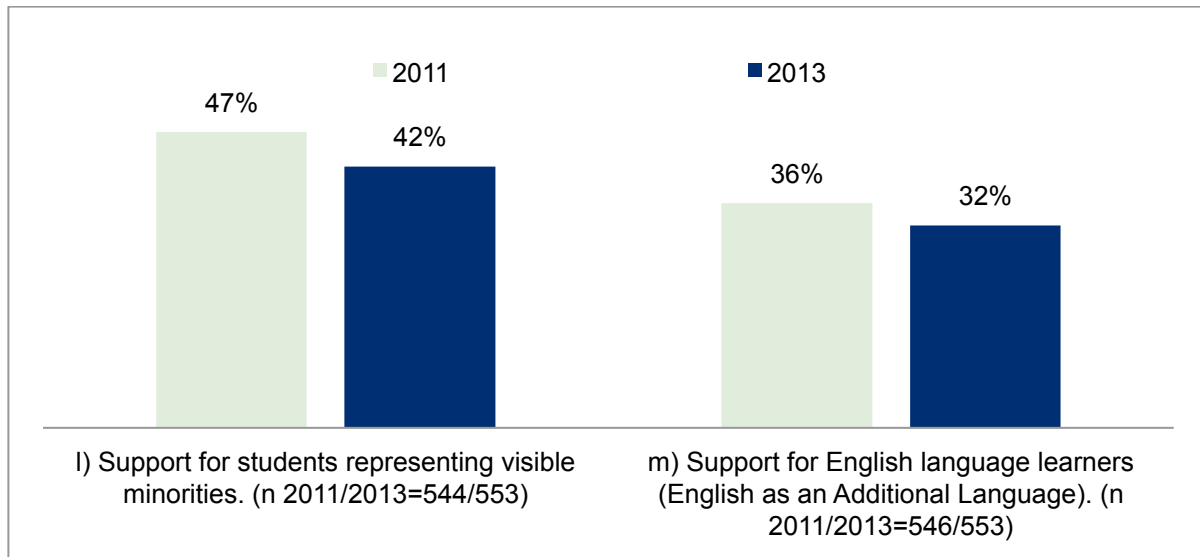


Figure 5: Satisfaction with Elements Relating to Current Teaching and Learning Conditions, 2011 and 2013 (% satisfied)

Classroom Supports

When asked about the various factors that contribute to teaching and learning conditions in 2011, respondents were generally happy with the tools and resources available to them. The situation has not declined significantly with regard to access to

computers and other information technology (5 per cent decline), but a larger area of dissatisfaction is found with regards to access to print resources and textbooks (13 per cent decline) and access to professional development (10 per cent decline).

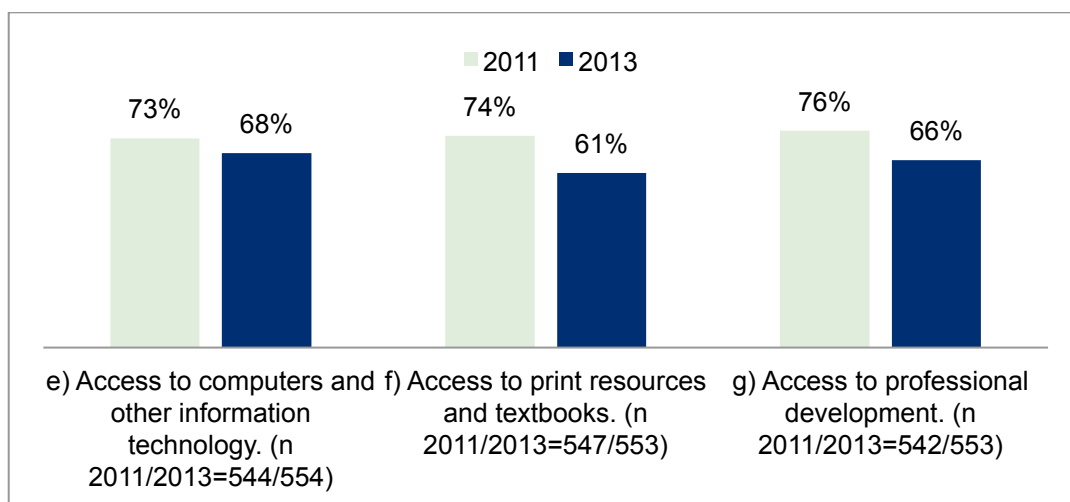


Figure 6: Satisfaction with Elements Relating to Current Teaching and Learning Conditions, 2011 and 2013 (% satisfied)

Reporting and Communication Requirements

Rocky View teachers were asked to comment on the level of stress they experience with respect to various reporting requirements such as developing school-based assessments and analysing, administering and reporting results of provincial examinations.

In 2011, 71 per cent of respondents were very satisfied with reporting requirements, but held concerns around the amount of responsibilities in this area that contributed to a long workweek. These concerns have only increased, with 81 per cent disagreeing with the statement that they work less than 50 hours a week – a rise of 5 per cent from 2011.

Larger classes, increased reporting expectations, and new initiatives were all reasons cited as contributing to workload increases. Although one factor cannot be found to be causing another directly, it is a myriad of factors that are conspiring to increase non-instructional workload and a longer workweek.

One respondent explained the inherent conflict to a manageable workload created by curriculum technology initiatives with

continuously changing classroom sizes and increased digital reporting:

“Unfortunately, it always comes down to time available...It seems that our work load is ever-increasing. There are more IPP's, APP's and constant reporting to parents now that we use email. Parents think it is a quick email with a simple question, but multiply that by 23 and you can easily spend an hour a day just on email; never mind the time you spend reviewing work on I Pads and iPods, IN ADDITION to all the other work you do. All this outside of class time.”

Another respondent warned that workload “has increased exponentially and is chasing people out of the profession. It is almost taking over our entire personal/family time.”

As in 2011, Individual Program Plans (IPPs) were ranked as placing the highest demand on teachers and 43 per cent reported stress in relation to developing IPPs, 23 per cent reported stress when reporting and communicating with parents and students.

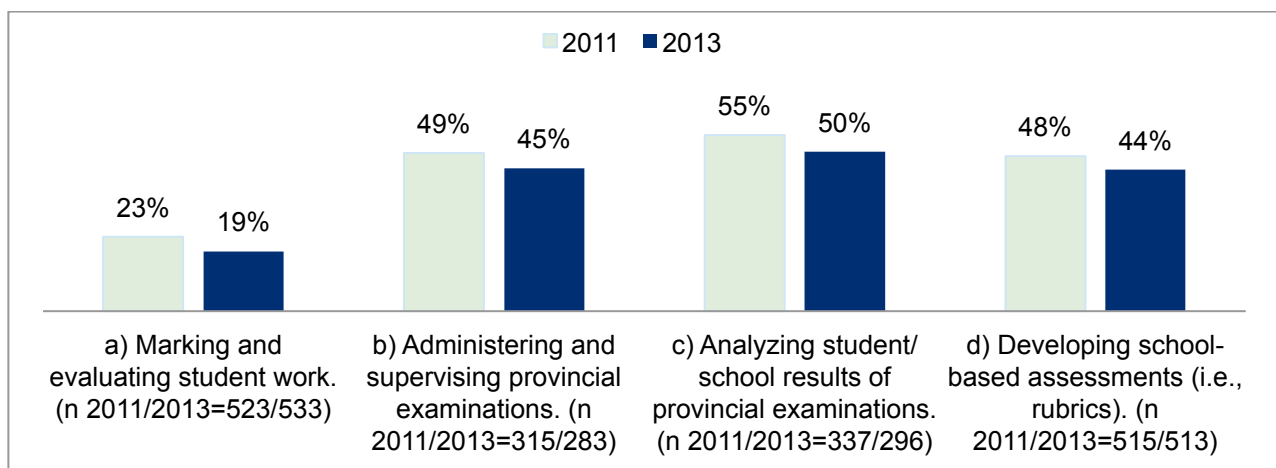


Figure 7: Stress Levels Associated with Student Assessment and Reporting Requirements, 2011 to 2013 (low stress levels)

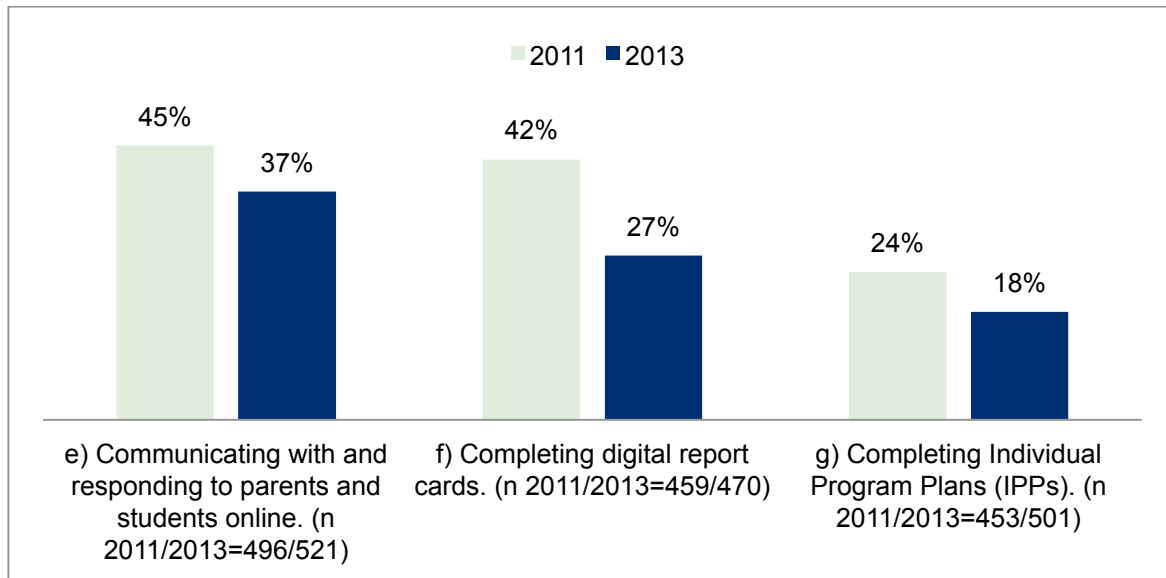


Figure 8: Stress Levels Associated with Student Assessment and Reporting Requirements, 2011 to 2013 (low stress levels)

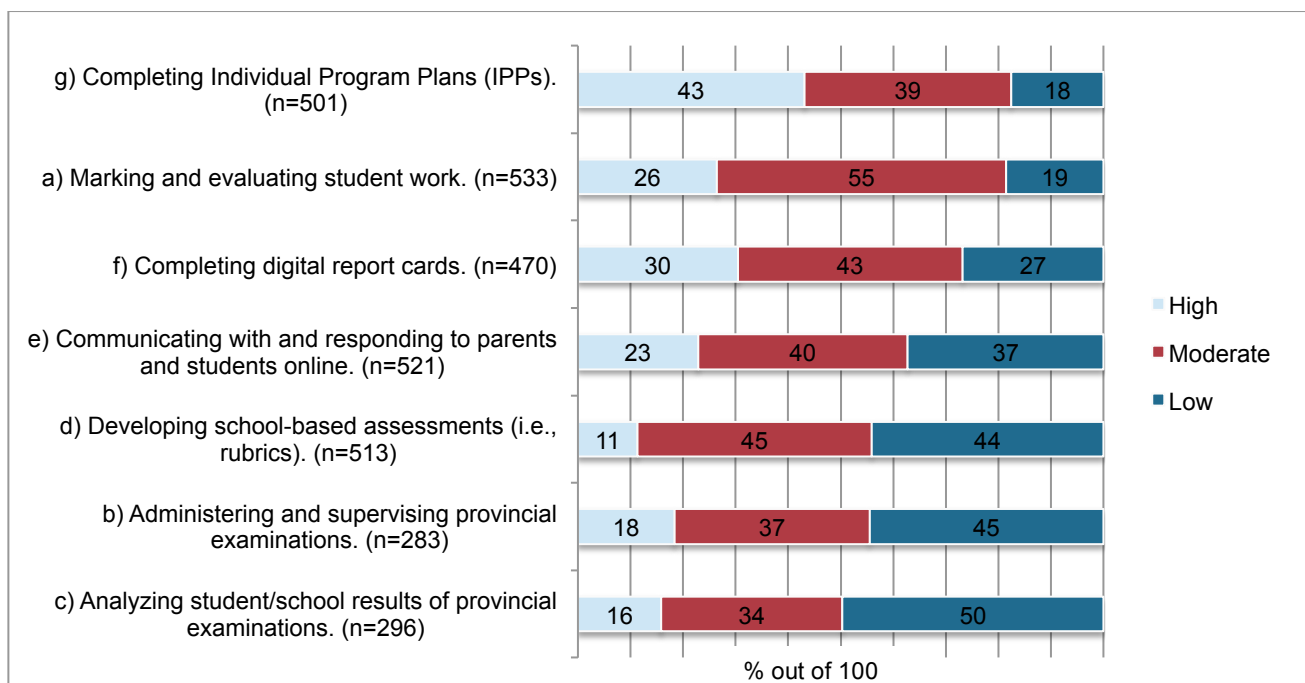


Figure 9: Stress Levels Associated with Student Assessment and reporting Requirements, 2013 (%)

Professional Development

In 2011, teachers were asked to identify the usefulness of a range of professional development strategies and delivery venues that would support the achievement of their professional growth plans. Teachers' responses varied widely.

The usefulness ratings of workshops and professional development offered by the District, Calgary Regional Consortium, Local and schools had all declined by between 8 to 12 percentage points. Only 38 per cent of those surveyed felt that the workshops offered by Rocky View Local were useful and only 49 per cent felt the workshops offered by the District were useful. Workshops offered by the Local were also the least-used form of accessing professional development after video-conferencing and postsecondary education.

School based PD and other conferences and workshops offered by the Calgary Regional Consortium were, as in 2011, found to have higher levels of utility; between 62 and 69 per cent of respondents felt these were useful and/or very useful.

Over half of respondents felt that ATA Specialist Council conferences were useful or very useful (49 per cent), a slight 4 per cent decline from 2011, while independent reading and self-study increased by 4 per cent to a rating of 86 per cent in 2013.

Other educational conferences (67 per cent), independent reading and self-study (86 per cent), and online resources and websites (83 per cent) were rated as the most useful sources of professional development, the ratings for which have not varied significantly from the 2011 survey. These findings were reflected in comments by respondents who sought professional development that was more directly related to the classroom, as determined by self-identification of their needs.

As one respondent noted concerning externally-driven professional development sessions, “[t]oo many of them involve issues that we never broach again. More professional development that is used for organizing and planning our daily lesson plans would be greatly valued as an educator.”

Rocky View teachers are seeking opportunities for collaboration with peers in similar fields and classroom environments to learn from each other, but stressed that it could not be contrived collaboration. Where collaboration was not possible, the increasing role of independent self-study and online resources could be due to their flexibility to undertake within an increasingly busy workweek.

Several respondents noted that division-wide professional development with peers from other schools on projects, professional partnerships, mentoring and dialogue with colleagues were useful supports, while some professional development is sometimes be of little use. Survey comments reflected the fact that it was important that teachers be active creators of their own professional development and have input into what sessions could best help them. Several respondents stated collaboration time with colleagues was the most useful resource for professional growth. “[I] like my [Community of Practice] as it's with a group of teachers with similar issues in my option classes. [I] find PD days at my school of little use. The wheel is round. I like it round. Quit trying to reinvent it.”

The number of teachers who experience high levels of autonomy in developing and meeting the goals identified in their teacher professional growth plans has declined to less than half of the jurisdiction teachers - from 55 per cent to 42 per cent. While the number of teachers who feel that they have some autonomy increased marginally, a larger

increase occurred in the number of respondents who feel they have little autonomy and choice in developing and meeting the goals identified in their teacher professional growth plans.

The problems raised by low autonomy in the development of professional growth plans were reflected by one respondent, who stated, “My growth plan was somewhat dictated by administration. Therefore I have no ownership and just jump through appropriate hoops.”

Teachers are looking for a balanced approach to their professional development and are affected by the vast number of factors that can influence their role such as their specialization, their individual learning style, and the needs of the students they interact with. The extent to which teachers value their professional growth plans and take them seriously continues to be influenced by the extent to which they believe their administrators value these documents and consider growth plans as cornerstone contracts for individual professional growth.

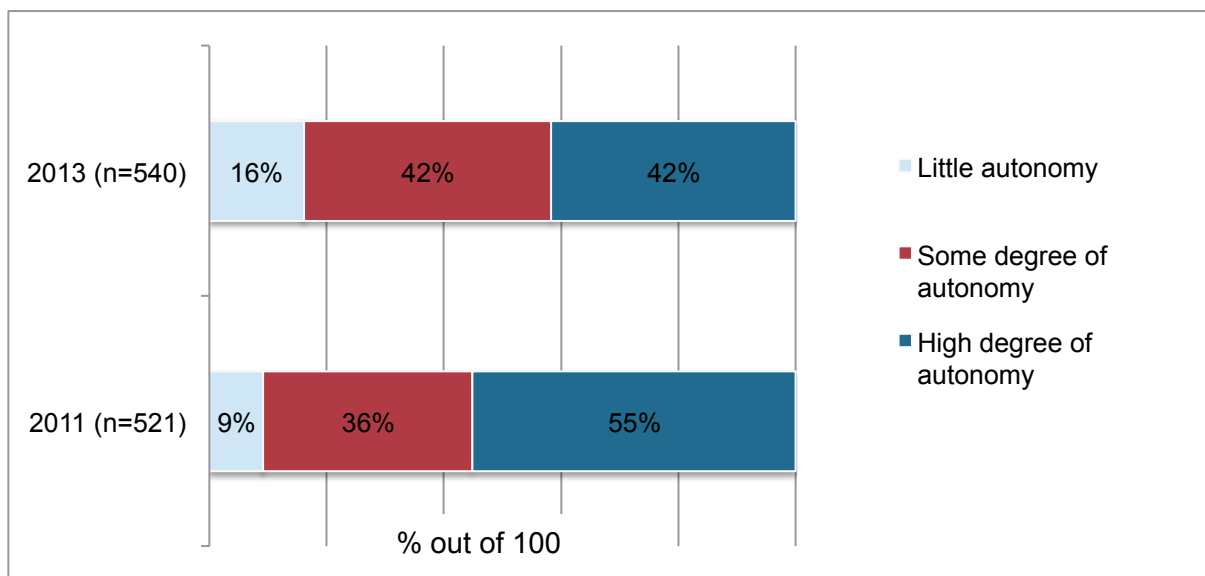


Figure 10: How much professional autonomy and choice are you given in developing and meeting the goals identified in your teacher professional growth plan?

Professional Development Priorities

In 2011, teachers stated they needed appropriate support to integrate technology, and many had observed that technologies were being introduced too quickly which left teachers insufficiently prepared in the classroom.

Highlights

- Videoconferencing is still the least-used method of accessing professional development and is considered the least useful.
- Self-directed professional development, such as independent reading and self-study and online resources, has grown as the most useful or very useful resource for professional development (88 per cent).
- The number of teachers who disagree with the statement, “I have the skills I need to effectively use digital technologies” has declined from 29 to 24 per cent.
- Embedded professional development and collaboration time within the school day is growing concern for Rocky View teachers. More than half of teachers disagree with the statement, “I have access to professional development/embedded learning time during the school day.”

Technology for Teaching and Learning

The ATA’s research on the impacts of digital communications on the nature of teachers’ work (Alberta Teachers’ Association [ATA], 2011) was echoed by the experience of Rocky View teachers when this survey was first conducted. Digital communications raise expectations that teachers will communicate more frequently with parents and will individualize their instruction to meet the needs of each student.

Compared to other professional groups, Alberta teachers spend 50 per cent more time on average using email and are more likely to report that this usage increases stress levels and workloads. Duxbury and Higgins (2013) speculate that this may be due to the increased pressure teachers feel to be constantly available to students and parents. Comments from the Rocky View sample reinforce this relationship.

Two years later after the initial survey, the issues remain. While slightly fewer teachers feel that technology has increased their workload (75 per cent in 2011 compared to 72 per cent in 2013), more teachers strongly agree that digital technologies have increased their workload (30 per cent), with teachers’ anecdotal comments showing scepticism

around the many technology initiatives in classrooms:

“I work 60 hours a week, I am expected to create new assignments with tech each and every day...- we are expected to have each child on their own learning path using 5 different kinds of tech in a learning commons, doing their own inquiry-based learning and have [special] needs inclusion? The expectations are extreme, the focus on tech is extreme; why aren't we having a balanced approach, why are we not accepting the negative aspects of too much tech? What difference does it make if they take home their art, or they take a pic and put it in an electronic file in Google drive for their busy parents to look at on their iPhone.”

Another teacher added:

“Unfortunately, it always comes down to time available. Each year I think that 'next year, I would like to become involved'. It seems that our workload is ever-increasing. There are more IPP's, APP's and constant reporting to

parents now that we use email. Parents think it is a quick email with a simple question, but multiply that by 23 and you can easily spend an hour a day just on email; never mind the time you spend reviewing work on iPads

and iPods, in addition to all the other work you do. All this outside of class time.”

Supports for Technology Integration

Teachers had previously expressed in 2011 that equipment, infrastructure, and training were needed to support technology integration. There was no strong indication that this continued to be a major concern in 2013, which suggests that improvements have perhaps been made. Comments instead focused on the fact that there were too many initiatives at any one time, where “people feel pulled in many different directions.” Ratings on the capacity of digital technologies to serve to improve student learning and teacher effectiveness has declined, which indicates these initiatives are not having the desired effect and could be influencing other areas of work due to increased reporting. Only 34 per cent of teachers were satisfied with the ways in which the growing use of technologies had impacted the quality of their work and only 39 per cent satisfied with the use of digital technologies to report student progress.

A 3 per cent decline was reported in the number of teachers who felt that technology had increased their workload. This could be explained by the fact that respondents are becoming used to digital technologies “faster

than anyone would have suspected”⁴, and may be so continuously reactive to work via the connectivity of their digital devices that they are unable to separate the intrinsic work that brings with it.

There were significant declines in the satisfaction teachers expressed with the use of digital technologies tools to report student progress. Only 39 per cent were satisfied in 2013, whereas, in 2011, half had been satisfied with the use of digital reporting to report student progress.

Compared to 2011, more teachers (55 per cent) feel they have the skills to effectively use digital reporting and communication systems and other technologies. However, fewer teachers agreed that technology had the capacity to either enhance student learning (57 per cent), professional development (56 per cent) or effectiveness as a teacher (60 per cent).

⁴ Sherry Turkle, a clinical psychologist and the founder of MIT's Initiative on Technology and Self, has done extensive research on the impact of digital technologies on human interaction.

Highlights

- 62 per cent of teachers agreed that technology has enhanced their ability to teach, while 20 per cent disagreed with this statement.
- The number of teachers who feel they have the requisite skills to effectively implement digital technologies and programs has increased, but less find that these tools significantly enhanced student learning or enhanced their effectiveness as a teacher.

Policies on Technology Use in the Classroom

As in 2011, few respondents held strong opinions on the need for policies governing technology-related matters such as acquisition, protocols, student use of the Internet, and the use of technology for

reporting purposes. Roughly the same number of respondents were dissatisfied with existing policies related to cell phones and hand held devices (both valued at approximately 30 per cent).

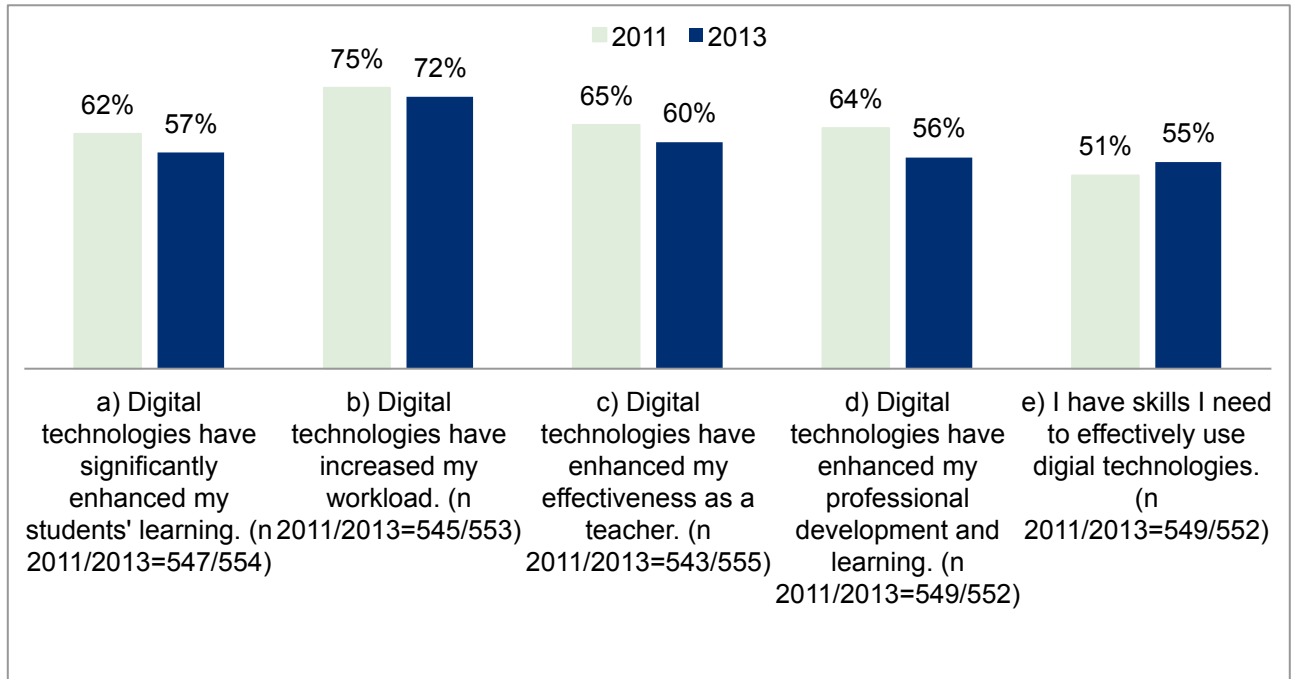


Figure 11: Respondents' Perceptions of the Impact of Technology on Teaching and Learning (% agree)

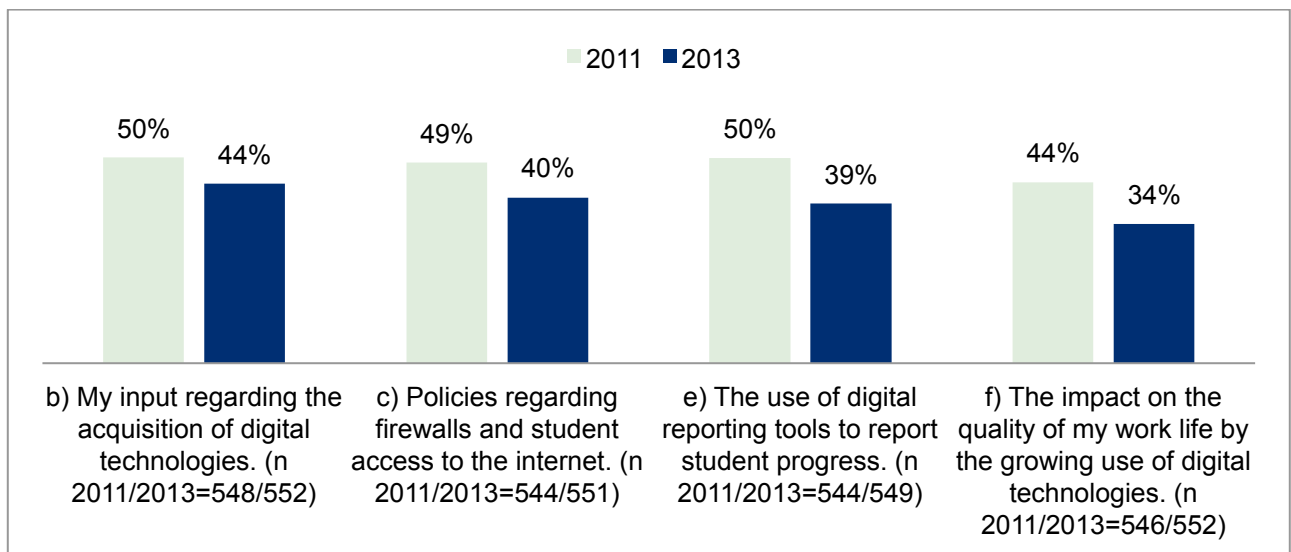


Figure 12: Respondents' Satisfaction with the Role of Digital Technologies in School 2011 and 2013 (% satisfied)

Bargaining and Advocacy

In 2011, teachers cited concerns over factors such as increased stress due to large classes, lack of support for special needs students, and technology integration. Two years on, these same concerns have remained and include the desire for more clarity around governance arrangements, communications, and strategies of the Rocky View Local, the board of trustees and the ATA to ensure the capacity of teachers is fully utilised in the bargaining process to achieve improved conditions of professional practice.

Respondents were asked whether the Local should take a more assertive or a more cooperative approach to 1) collective bargaining, 2) improving classroom conditions, 3) non-instructional duties, 4) influencing the Rocky View board of trustees, and 5) student evaluation and reporting. In all areas, teachers expressed a preference for a more assertive approach

compared to 2011, with an increase from 5 to 19 per cent in all areas.

Due to the fact that the previous provincial five-year framework agreement ended, and school boards were negotiating individually, it is not surprising that many teachers in Rocky View desired the Local to take a more assertive stance. As one respondent explained, “The fact that the government is announcing a much rosier picture of the province's finances when we have settled for 0% is very troubling.”

Sixty-two per cent of respondents preferred an assertive approach to dealing with non-instructional duties. Forty-seven per cent felt that the Local should take a more assertive stance with respect to collective bargaining overall and 40 per cent in relation to influencing Rocky View Schools’ board of trustees.

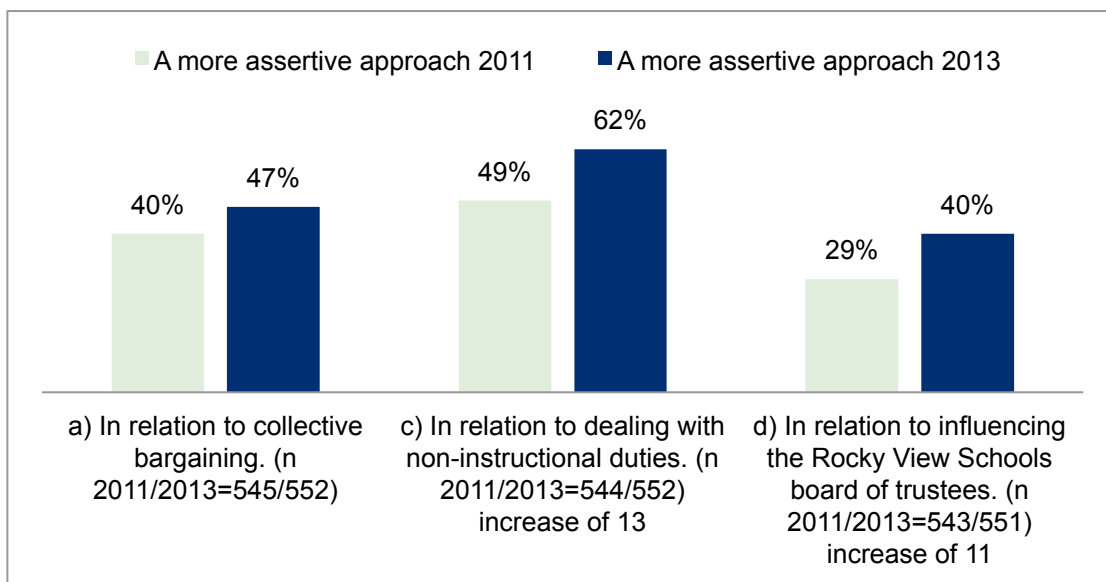


Figure 13: Preferences for Local to take a more Assertive or Cooperative Approach (%), 2011 to 2013

In stark contrast to 2011, half of teachers now feel that more assertiveness is needed with regards to dealing with issues relating to student and evaluation and improving

classroom conditions, and an increasing number feel that a more assertive approach is needed to improve classroom conditions overall.

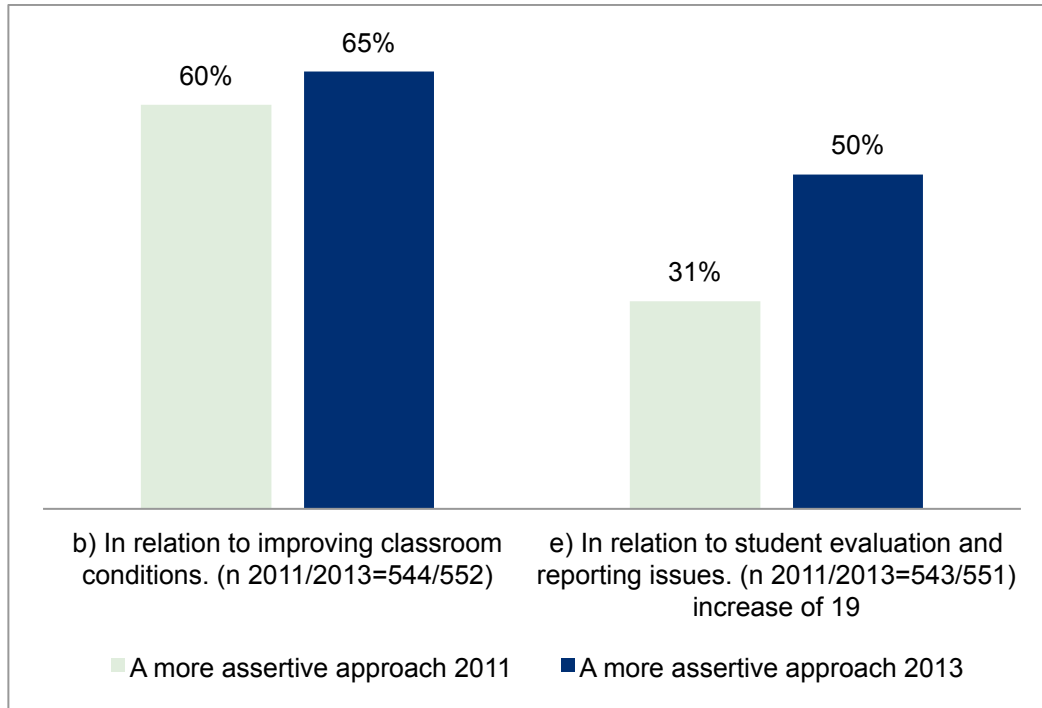


Figure 14: Preferences for Local to take a more Assertive or Cooperative Approach (%), 2011 to 2013

Overall Well-Being as a Teacher

Respondents have recorded declines in their overall well-being in several key areas since 2011 which are concerning. Only 21 per cent of teachers now feel they are able to balance their personal and work life and only 12 per cent agree with the statement that they work less than 50 hours a week. Less than half of teachers (48 per cent) now feel they are meaningfully involved with their school’s decision making, a decline of 13 per cent from 2011 when 61 per cent felt they had a greater role in the decision-making process.

Workload intensification can be attributed to a myriad of factors, and these would vary across schools. Many Rocky View teachers cited the increasing role of managing digital communications, technology tools, and extra-

curricular activities, on top of their existing workload. Staff throughout the district are finding it unmanageable, particularly as the impacts of technology initiatives, digital reporting, and inclusion are not perceived to be well-considered.

Teachers cited increased, daily preparation time, smaller class sizes, and job-embedded professional development time as potential solutions to these problems. As one stated, “The nightly burden of homework and managing your family is slowly becoming unattainable. Reduced class sizes would go a long way to mitigate this problem. Volunteer coaching duties are slowly becoming a major burden and this is an area of concern, where we may begin to see some programs collapse

as a result of the increased strain on teachers and this is not fair to the students affected.”

This finding is mirrored in the Duxbury and Higgins (2013) survey of Alberta teachers that examined balancing work, life and

caregiving, which found one-third of teachers would like to decrease the amount of time spent in work and 31 per cent would spend less time working for proportionally less money, if they had the choice.

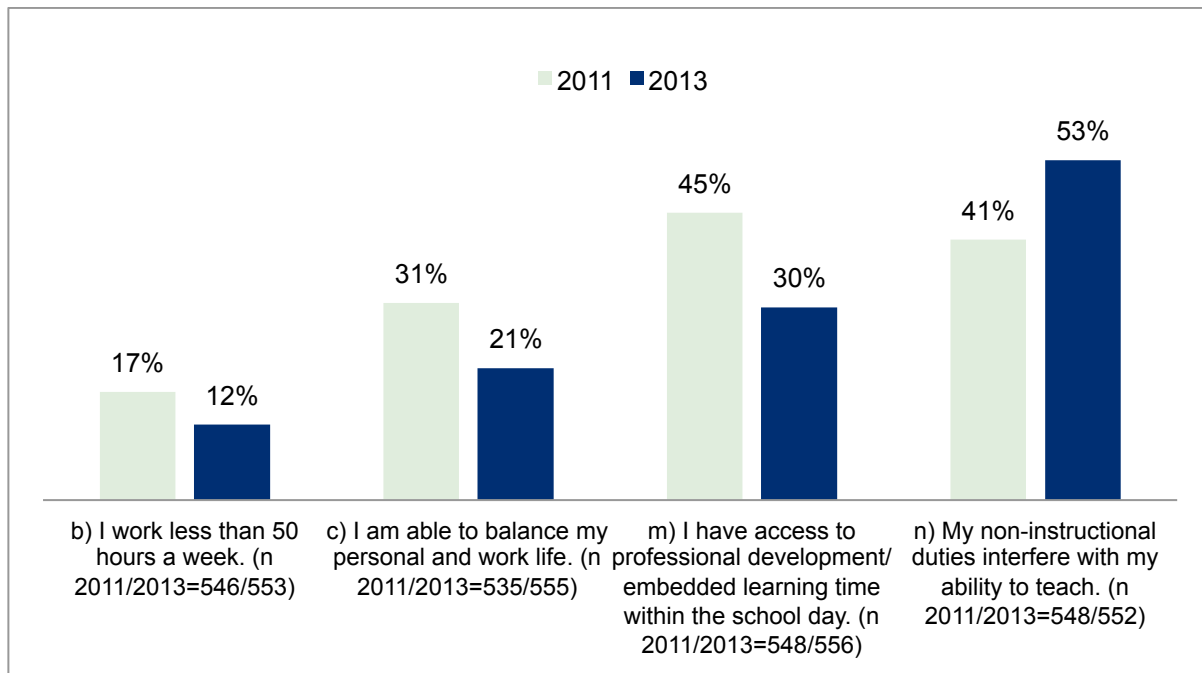


Figure 15: Overall Well-Being as a Teacher (% agree)

Non-Instructional Workload

Fifty-three per cent of teachers agreed with the statement “my non-instructional duties interfere with my ability to teach”, an increase of 12 per cent from 2011. Only 21 per cent of Rocky View teachers agree with the statement that they are able to balance their personal and work lives, a decline of 10 per cent from 2011.

Many teachers commented that the difficulty experienced through achieving work-life balance was made worse by a multitude of non-instructional tasks and demands, which are now affecting their capacity to manage their working hours. Like 2011, a number of respondents indicated the Board should scale back and slow down its many initiatives.

One teacher suggested the Board’s plans should be longer term and be adhered to, not subject to the whims of the latest unproven theories which may contradict what has been set out in the long range plan. It was also suggested that programs should be designed more in consultation with teachers currently spending greater than 80 per cent of their work time in the classroom with students.

Some respondents cited that, due to the lack of preparation time in the day and a multitude of non-instructional duties, access to just one personal paid leave day or release time, which was offered in other school divisions, was their number one recommendation for the Local to improve

conditions of teaching practice. As one teacher stated, “It’s pretty bad when a teacher literally doesn’t have time to go to the bathroom between 8:30-3:30. Being able to at least take a day off to catch your breath, get caught up on marking, do IPPs, or whatever would be such a huge help.”

More widely across Alberta, virtually all teachers surveyed as part of the Duxbury & Higgins (2013) survey reported low flexibility in their hours of work, a finding that was not predicated on gender. These results are unfortunate, since, if employees feel they have flexibility in their roles, it can help to moderate relationships with employers.

Highlights

- 65 per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement, “I am able to balance my work and personal life,” an increase of 17 per cent from 2011.
- Due to the increasing amount of workload and non-instructional duties outside the classroom, teachers would like more flexibility in managing their working hours, particularly through use of personal days.
- More than half of Rocky View teachers (53 per cent) now state their non-instructional duties interfere with their ability to teach.

Hiring Practices

There was almost no change in the number of teachers on continuing or probationary contracts, except for a slight decrease in the number of teachers on temporary contracts (2 per cent). Over 90 per cent of respondents had continuing or probationary contracts.

In survey comments, substitute teachers did state that the services offered by the school in terms of professional development were not necessarily offered to them and wished for greater inclusion.

Supporting New Teachers

One area where results had remained relatively unchanged from 2011 was with regards to the perception of the Local’s efforts in engaging new teachers in the activities of the Association. 71 per cent of teachers felt the Local was providing fair to excellent supports overall, and 63 per cent thought the Local was providing fair to excellent supports and services in supporting new teachers in the early years of practice.

longitudinal study of beginning teachers in 2011 found that the most effecting mentorship programmes are those that provide structured opportunities for mentors and protégées to meet.⁵

It has been noted that new teachers benefit from increased opportunities to consult and collaborate with colleagues, and the ATA’s

⁵ The ATA’s study of a cohort of beginning teachers found that those new teachers who are able to work in professional learning communities and/or with grade level partners are better able to feel supported in the first years of teaching as colleagues are able to provide resources and help new teachers with lesson planning and classroom management.

Members' Perceptions of the Local

Study participants were asked to evaluate the services that Rocky View Local provides to members. Since 2011, there has been a decrease in the number of respondents who rate the Local's performance in communicating with members as "excellent" or "good", down from 87 per cent to 78 per cent in 2013. A similar trend was seen in a recent survey of Calgary's public teachers (Calgary Public Teachers, 2013).

Less than half of respondents now feel the negotiation and enforcement of the Local's collective agreement is "excellent" (10 per cent) or "good" (38 per cent). Once again, Calgary's public teachers (2013) noted a similar decline in these ratings. Both declines appear to be attributable to the recent collective agreement negotiations, which ended with the provincial government

Communication with Members

Most respondents still feel the Local is successfully carrying out communication with members (94 per cent). Anecdotal comments cited the importance of strategic consideration and management for timing and location of meetings to ensure teachers from various locations who may not be able to attend nighttime meetings could participate.

One respondent provided the following suggestion on what useful information the Local could be communicating with members, stating:

"Give teachers statistics about how long our year is compared to other districts. Provide information about how much supervision teachers do across the schools. Talk about instructional time inequities between

legislating elements of the agreement as binding on both teachers and school boards. Locals appear to be picking up some of the backlash, in the form of member discontent, against this contractual imposition.

While some respondents suggested areas of improvement for the Local in their comments, one respondent turned the responsibility on the members, stating they felt the Local's membership was apathetic.

"I'm not sure how to improve this, but I do think it's an on-going issue that needs to be addressed. United, we're more likely to have a positive impact on our teaching and our students. A few voices are underwhelming. A collective is stronger the more people who become involved."

levels. If teacher know the facts rather than just rhetoric they might pay attention. They need to."

Another new teacher remarked:

"...online forms may not be a good way to communicate with [teachers] as many of them are already stressed out by the idea of checking their three email addresses, Moodle messages. If possible, visit the schools, hold meetings in various locations (not just Airdrie and Calgary), or phone calls."

A new teacher also felt that efforts to entice more experienced teachers into engaging in the work of the Association needed to be more aggressive and "clearly explain how badly we need a voice from respected and established teachers."

Engaging Members

In 2011, three factors were identified that were preventing members from becoming involved in the Local: a lack of time, a lack of interest, and a lack of awareness. These issues have not diminished over the past two years, with many respondents stating they would like to become more involved in the Local, but did not have the time to do so given their workload and additional non-classroom duties.

Teachers are struggling more than ever to maintain a balance between their work and home lives. Their time outside the classroom, which is increasingly being encroached upon by non-instructional duties such as digital reporting and digital communications, was prioritised for their families rather than for additional engagement with the Local.

One respondent explained, "I'm just too busy with all the responsibilities as a teacher. I

would be more involved if I didn't spend so much time trying to mark, plan, teach myself technology skills, email parents and students, update my Plone site etc." Another simply stated, "I can't do one more thing concerned with my job since I am swamped."

The increasing "day to day stuff in our classrooms" prevented many teachers from getting involved, which would consequently, as some acknowledged, improve their ability to build strength in negotiating for conditions of work and classroom supports.

Many who were involved with the Local, or had been in the past, stated that while it had its positive aspects, more effort needed to be made by the executive committee to reach out to schools and staff meetings directly, "to make the connections more personal."

Communicating with the Public

Compared to 2011, ratings of the Local as doing "fair" or "excellent" work in informing the public about Local activities (74 per cent), as well as presenting a positive view of teachers and the work that they do (78 per cent), declined. These ratings may have been influenced by the failure of the Local to negotiate a new collective agreement. Comments reflected similar opinions that the Local could be undertaking different approaches to communicate with the public.

As one respondent stated, the ATA and the Local need to be more creative in their

approaches to communicating with the public, and present the good news stories to build engagement and awareness of classroom conditions with parents."

"The media releases are about wages and workload. The public has heard that many times, and the approach is ineffective....We need to get parents on board, and I don't think we have their support. Talking about wages and workload in media releases will not get parents' support."

Advocating for Members

The percentage of respondents who rated satisfaction with the Local in representing teachers' interests with the provincial Association remained relatively unchanged at 82 per cent. Despite the concerns caused by the perceived slow pace of bargaining, most respondents still rated the Local's advocacy efforts with respect to the collective agreement positively.

Where respondents felt the Local could make improvements were cited in comments and offered constructive ways for the Local to improve its governance and communications arrangements. Respondents suggested some practical improvements that could be developed to help the Local better represent Rocky View teachers throughout the school year and ensure members are using the capacity and resources of the Local to its full advantage.

Some respondents felt that voting processes in the Local could be improved upon to support advocacy and represent the most members. One teacher highlighted that, on one occasion, they had been unable to vote by proxy as they were engaged in an extra-curricular voluntary activity. Another added that everyone should be allowed to vote for senior positions in the Local such as president and vice-president.

Engaging with New Teachers

When comparing how respondents viewed the Local's success in engaging new teachers in the activities of the Local (71 per cent), and supporting new teachers in the early years of practice (63 per cent), results from 2011 had not changed significantly. While these results do not show that systems are as good as they could be for new teachers, they also do not indicate that the situation is getting worse.

Within comments relating to the Local's advocacy activities, a distinction could be

Respondents also felt that committee eligibility and appointments could be made more transparent, with new candidates supported and encouraged. One respondent explained it was important that committees, such as the Annual Representative Assembly (ARA) consist of both new and experienced members to ensure both a balance of perspectives and a stronger voice.

Another added, "Too often it is difficult for new people to get on committees that are staffed by the same people year after year. It seems you are on a committee or are the chair until you decide to quit. If a new person wanted to take on a leadership role, the club is hard to break into."

The importance of systematic, on-going communication with teachers by those who serve as a school representative (or on a committee) was also emphasized by respondents, particularly as a result of increasing work hours.

As one suggested, the Council of School Representatives could give oral reports backs to teachers at the school to ensure all teachers are informed, even those who are unable to attend the meetings.

seen between those who were new teachers and those who have been teaching for several years.

Newer teachers wanted greater clarity in information coming from the Local related to supports available to them as a new teacher; this would help to ensure they did not feel "left behind" when Local representatives provided updates to school staff. One new teacher suggested an introductory package to explain roles and time commitments; another

suggested adding information on the ATA's functions and processes to such a package, including how collective bargaining is undertaken and clarity on the role and responsibilities of the ATA and teachers.

Another new teacher stated that it would be useful to "have a 'welcome to the Local meeting' for all new teachers" early on in the school year. "...Not inductions, but West, North and East side meetings for first-year teachers to explain the collective agreement, and roles of the Local and ATA".

In one instance, the fact that a teacher was on a probationary contract and the competitive environment of their school were factors in their style of engagement with the Local:

"I am hesitant to take any stands in school...Answering 'no' to requests of theirs [administrators] (reasonable or not) does not seem like an option if I want security in my career. With this kind of stress hanging over me, the thought of representing the union or publicly voicing my concerns seems risky."

Highlights

- Given some of the perceived shortcomings of the recent labour negotiations, most members are still satisfied with the Local's efforts in negotiating the collective agreement (75 per cent), and bargaining and enforcing the agreement's terms and conditions (78 per cent).
- New teachers would like to be invited to learn more about what the Local does and how to become involved. Sending an induction package to teachers new to the Local could be a practical method to do so.
- As in 2011, teachers feel that they have a lack of face-to-face contact with members of the Local executive and provided suggestions on how the work and governance of the Local could be more transparent, accessible, and effective in representing the views of teachers.

Implications and Recommendations

This survey, conducted two years after the first survey of Rocky View teachers and administrators, finds that in many areas, such as teaching and learning conditions, satisfaction with technologies for teaching and learning and the role of digital technologies, satisfaction has declined since 2011. Well-being has also declined significantly, while stress, especially from student reporting, has increased.

More teachers are feeling overworked and overwhelmed by the initiatives the Board is undertaking, and more than half feel they are not meaningfully involved in their schools decision-making. Teachers have increasing workloads and declining work-life balance, both negative influences on job commitment and well-being. Class size and composition are significant and growing concerns, and teachers feel they lack the resources to teach in an inclusive setting.

While the Rocky View school board has claimed that they have diverted resources to support innovative strategies to help create an imagined '21st century' learning environment, the lived environment of teaching and learning remains mired in overcrowded classrooms and unsustainable expectations.

As one teacher stated:

“There is only so much time in a day and in a school year. A teacher should not have to be overwhelmed with workload or expected to be an expert in everything. Life-long learning is, after all, going through life and slowly learning new skills, not knowing everything to begin with. Rocky View forgets the most important interaction at school is between people, teacher and student, not between technological devices and people.”

Why are Rocky View Teachers Continuing to Struggle? How Much is Too Much?

Work-life balance and working hours in Rocky View Schools have not improved since 2011; they have, in fact, further declined. More broadly, Canadian and international studies over the past decade show teachers are working an average of 50 to 55 hours per week (Duxbury and Higgins, 2013; Dibbon 2004; Naylor and White 2010; Kamanzi, Riopel and Lessard 2007).

The findings of this survey mirrored results across Alberta related to work-life balance. A recent case study of Calgary public teachers (ATA, 2012) found that teachers in their Local work an average of 55.7 hours per week. This lack of balance can negatively impact on work productivity through increased absence, and turning down opportunities for advancement.

Teachers are faced with increasing workload, and, due to their demographics are more likely to have added pressures at home from children and caring for elders.

Work-life balance is an issue that is increasingly being raised by knowledge workers across Canada; teachers have experienced one of the higher rates of dissatisfaction (Duxbury & Higgins, 2013). In Duxbury & Higgins' survey of ATA teachers across the province (2013), only 25 per cent of the respondents were satisfied with their workload and the number of hours they devote to work each week, while half of the knowledge workers in the total sample were satisfied with these aspects of their work. In Rocky View, only 21 per cent of teachers

agree they are able to balance their personal and work life, and 61 per cent disagree or strongly disagree.

Rocky View teachers are not an isolated case, as teachers across Alberta work more than 50 hours per week, with only 12 per cent agreeing that they work less (Duxbury & Higgins, 2013). Teachers in Alberta spend more time working on average than most other professions. 88 per cent work more than 45 hours per week. In the general sample, 60 per cent of respondents work more than 45 hours per week. 98 per cent of respondents Alberta-wide also stated that they cannot get work completed during work hours, thus taking work home, where they spend a further 13.9 hours per week completing this work.

Additional hours and taking work home all lead to additional stress, which is also experienced in the classroom. Rocky View teachers reported the stressors and difficulties described in 2011 are intensifying due to increasing class size, diverse class composition, digital reporting and a lack of input in how decisions and conditions are created in their schools. For instance, many teachers also suggested supervision needed to be reformed, making it either paid, mandatory or removed from teachers' workloads entirely; similar comments were also expressed around extra-curricular activities.

Across Alberta, teachers are suffering from high levels of stress⁶, which is characterized

⁶ Seventy per cent of the employees in the ATA sample report in the Duxbury & Higgins (2013) survey reported high levels of perceived stress—a significantly greater percentage with high stress than was observed in the total sample (57 per cent of the total sample and 61 per cent of the women in the total sample reported high stress).

as being unpredictable, uncontrollable and burdensome. These characteristics were implicit in comments from Rocky View teachers, who stated that it was becoming increasingly difficult to cope. Respondents feel increasing stress, most notably from producing Individual Programs Plans, digital report cards, and responding to parent inquiries online.

In addition, teachers report the least amount of flexibility in managing their workloads when compared to other professionals (Duxbury & Higgins, 2013), and this came through in comments from Rocky View teachers who requested additional flexibility in implementing personal leave options. Teachers have little control over their work schedule, compounded by many variables such as supervision, extra-curricular activities and student reporting and planning, as well as the lowest levels of perceived job flexibility: substantially lower than in working conditions reported by police officers and nurses.

One teacher suggested:

“There should be more opportunities for teachers to receive release time or personal leave time. Even one or two paid personal days (without having to cover sub costs out of pocket) would be a huge benefit to our day-to-day lives.”

Although difficult to implement in the fixed school day schedule, job shares are possible; only 2 per cent of teachers across Alberta are in job shares, however, and just 8 per cent work part-time.

A Culture of Being Overwhelmed

The average length of time that individual teachers have been employed in Rocky View Schools, and in Alberta more widely, indicates that culture change may not be easy; some schools, and indeed, some teachers, have established an entrenched organizational culture. Rocky View Schools has invested significant capital and human resources in using technology to solve the problems faced by teachers in classrooms, but what teachers seek is increased support for English Language Learners and students with other special needs alongside investments to achieve more sustainable class sizes.

The nature of individuals' work ethic and school climates can also intensify teachers' workload. School cultures in which high participation is the norm, coupled with teachers' own high standards for competence, can increase their working hours, for example.

Ballet and Kelchtermans (2008), note that teachers they are frustrated when they lack time or resources to do their best work and may not want to burden colleagues with their extra work. This may be the case in Rocky View, as some respondents noted a perceived need to take on additional extra-curricular

Many Teachers are "Sandwiched"

The current demographics of teachers in Rocky View, and across Alberta, mean that many teachers are women who also assume all responsibility for childcare and elder care at home. Only one in five families in Duxbury & Higgins' Alberta-wide sample share this characteristic (2013). Twenty-five per cent of respondents in the Alberta sample have children under the age of five, while 36 per cent are also responsible for eldercare; a

activities and supervision. These perceptions, combined with other elements such as long hours, poor work-life balance, and declining satisfaction with their lack of capacity to contribute to decisions made at the school level, are all factors that could contribute to burnout.

As one teacher observed:

"If you take into account all of the supervision and extra-curricular requirements, along with our innate desire to help students, I personally have no lunch break. Not having time to sit and eat is a serious occupational health and safety issue in my mind."

Previous research by Duxbury, Higgins, and Johnson (2004) found that poor work-life balance leads to weakened physical and psychological health. This results in individuals feeling overwhelmed, overloaded or stressed by the pressures of multiple roles and is defined as role-overload. Workers who experience role-overload are more likely to seek out mental health supports, visit their family physician more regularly, and be an added drain to employee benefit plans in the form of increased prescription drug costs.

similar demographic breakdown can be assumed for Rocky View teachers.

With this in mind, system leaders should carefully consider the impact of new initiatives, and how the implementation of such an initiative might affect employee groups characterized by individuals who are regularly taking work home, and have a strong potential for role-overload due to children and eldercare concerns.

Building Professional Capital by Engaging Teachers

Building organizational trust and engagement requires the dedication of employees at all levels. This work is not easy and requires an environment that shows care and concern, facilitation across work teams and levels, explicit values and principles for new comers and mechanisms that manage and develop competencies (Six and Sorge, 2008).

For teachers to sustain innovative practice, they must feel part of the change process. As Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) explain, school system leadership is required that “reconciles and integrates responsibility” in order to build the professional capital of teachers at three levels: *human, social* and *decisional*. This multi-level focus on building professional capital is achieved by focusing on developing the individual assets and talents of teachers (human capital) within communities of practice and vibrant school environments (social capital). By working together, and by holding each other accountable through *collaborative professional autonomy*, quality teaching is assured. In this way, the capacity to improve professional practice and judgement (referred to as “decisional capital”) grows over time. By improving the conditions of teaching practice - that shape teachers every day experiences and the cultures and communities they teach in - student learning is enhanced (2012:45).

Based on many of the comments of respondents, teachers within Rocky View are currently so overburdened that, even if they wanted to participate and fully engage in both the jurisdiction’s and the Local’s leadership initiatives, they do not have the time or energy to do so. The Board and the Local continue to miss out on opportunities to engage teachers in initiatives; both groups have the ability to improve teaching conditions collaboratively, however, given the development of stronger organizational trust and leadership.

With regards to bargaining priorities, teachers stated in 2011 that reducing work intensification and achieving more embedded collaboration and

preparation time were important. Presently, they have added that additional priorities include class size reductions, addressing the growing complexity of student learning needs, and giving teachers more professional autonomy in determining inclusion strategies.

Tangible, focused support is needed for teacher involvement in classrooms and schools by increasing trust between teachers, administrators, senior officials, the Board and the ATA. This would serve to improve conditions on a number of fronts, such as engagement, job satisfaction and commitment, and lead to avenues for discussion around increased flexible working options and the development of a culture in which ways to help teachers manage work-life balance more effectively is valued. It should be noted that it is only when the culture of the organization encourages the use of flexible working options, without risk of negative impacts on individuals, that these can be used to achieve desired outcomes (Veiga, 2004; Brannen, 2005).

Difficult multi-agency issues that require agreement across education stakeholders, such as class size and composition, may not be reduced easily. However, engaging teachers in initiatives at a school level can achieve an increase in teachers’ perceived control over their own classrooms. Consideration should also be given to the fact that satisfaction with class size and composition of classes seemed to be influenced by where schools were located in the Rocky View Schools district. As one teacher stated, “Without support, the model is setting up people to fail and deteriorates the quality of education.”

Working together for the improvement of teaching and learning conditions, valuing and amplifying the voice of teachers within the Local, and engaging in effective communication practices, both within the system and in the Local, can only help to reverse declining satisfaction for teachers in Rocky View and serve as a guide for improvement for other school authorities in Alberta.

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Appendix A: The Survey Instrument

Please complete this survey and return it to your CSR staff representative. *All responses will be kept confidential.*

A. CURRENT TEACHING AND LEARNING CONDITIONS

1. Following are several key elements relating to your current conditions of professional practice. Use the scale below to indicate your degree of satisfaction with each element.

1 Very satisfied	2 Generally satisfied	3 Neutral	4 Somewhat dissatisfied	5 Very dissatisfied
------------------	-----------------------	-----------	-------------------------	---------------------

Please circle the appropriate number

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. The size of your classes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. Composition of your classes. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. Support for students with special needs. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. Support for teachers in the inclusive classroom model. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e. Access to computers and other information technology. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f. Access to print resources and textbooks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| g. Access to professional development. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| h. Resources available for field trips. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| i. Requirements to supervise and undertake other assigned tasks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| j. Physical condition of your classroom. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| k. Expectations to report student progress to parents. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| l. Support for students representing visible minorities. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| m. Support for English language learners (English as an Additional Language). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

B. YOUR OVERALL WELL-BEING AS A TEACHER

2. Using the scale below, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

1 Strongly agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly disagree
------------------	---------	-----------	------------	---------------------

Please circle the appropriate number

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. I can carry out my job without having to purchase materials out of my own pocket. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. I work less than 50 hours a week. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. I am able to balance my personal and work life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. I would change careers if I could have the same salary and benefits. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e. I see teaching as a lifelong career choice. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f. I feel teaching in RVS brings me great satisfaction. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| g. I have positive collegial interactions with my teaching colleagues. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| h. I work in a safe environment free from harassment. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| i. I have positive relationships with students. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| j. I have positive relationships with parents. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| k. I am meaningfully involved in my school's decision making. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| l. I feel valued and respected in my school. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| m. I have access to professional development/embedded learning time within the school day. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| n. My noninstructional duties interfere with my ability to teach. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| o. Technology has enhanced my ability to teach. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

C. STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

3. In the past few years, Rocky View School Division No 41 (RVSD) and Alberta Education have focused on assessment and reporting initiatives. These initiatives include assessment for learning and revisions to student reporting practices. Using the scale below, circle the number that reflects your stress level regarding various workload student reporting and assessment requirements.

1 Not applicable 2 Low 3 Moderate 4 High

Please circle the appropriate number

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| a. Marking and evaluating student work. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| b. Administering and supervising provincial examinations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| c. Analyzing student/school results of provincial examinations. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| d. Developing school-based assessments (ie, rubrics). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| e. Communicating with and responding to parents and students online. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| f. Completing digital report cards. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| g. Completing Individual Program Plans (IPPs). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

D. TECHNOLOGIES FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

4. In past years, the growth of technology such as hand-held digital devices has profoundly affected society at large. The following questions assess your impressions of these changes on teaching and learning in your school and in education generally. Using the scale below, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

1 Strongly agree 2 Agree 3 Neutral 4 Disagree 5 Strongly disagree

Please circle the appropriate number

- a. Digital technologies have significantly enhanced my students' learning. 1 2 3 4 5
- b. Digital technologies have increased my workload. 1 2 3 4 5
- c. Digital technologies have enhanced my effectiveness as a teacher. 1 2 3 4 5
- d. Digital technologies have enhanced my professional development and learning. 1 2 3 4 5
- e. I have the skills I need to effectively use digital technologies. 1 2 3 4 5

5. Use the scale below to indicate your level of satisfaction with the role of digital technologies in your school.

1 Very satisfied 2 Satisfied 3 Neutral 4 Dissatisfied 5 Very dissatisfied

Please circle the appropriate number

- a. My level of access to digital technologies to meet the learning needs of students. 1 2 3 4 5
- b. My input regarding the acquisition of digital technologies. 1 2 3 4 5
- c. Policies regarding firewalls and student access to the Internet. 1 2 3 4 5
- d. Policies regarding the use of cellphones and hand-held devices. 1 2 3 4 5
- e. The use of digital reporting tools to report student progress. 1 2 3 4 5
- f. The effect of the growing use of digital technologies on the quality of my work life. 1 2 3 4 5

E. LOCAL 35 SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

6. Rocky View Local No 35 works on behalf of members on a number of specific fronts. Use the scale below to rate the local’s success in carrying out the following responsibilities:

1 Excellent 2 Good 3 Fair 4 Poor

Please circle the appropriate number

- a. Negotiating the collective agreement. 1 2 3 4
- b. Enforcing the terms and conditions of the collective agreement. 1 2 3 4
- c. Keeping members informed about local activities. 1 2 3 4
- d. Keeping the public informed about RVSD’s issues. 1 2 3 4
- e. Presenting a positive view of teachers and the work that they do. 1 2 3 4
- f. Representing teachers’ interests with the provincial Association. 1 2 3 4
- g. Engaging new teachers in the activities of the local. 1 2 3 4
- h. Supporting new teachers in the early years of practice. 1 2 3 4

7. Some members say that Rocky View Local No 35 would achieve greater success by being more assertive in advancing its goals, while others see benefit in a cooperative approach. Use the scale below to identify the most appropriate approach in terms of the issues listed.

1 A more assertive approach 2 A more cooperative approach 3 Indifferent

Please circle the appropriate number

- a. Collective bargaining. 1 2 3
- b. Improving classroom conditions. 1 2 3
- c. Dealing with non-instructional duties. 1 2 3
- d. Influencing the RVSD’s board of trustees. 1 2 3
- e. Student evaluation and reporting issues. 1 2 3

8. Your involvement as a member of the local can take on many roles. If you could make *one* recommendation to the local that would assist you in becoming more involved, what would it be?

F. COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AND ADVOCACY PRIORITIES FOR LOCAL 35

9. Considering your current salary and overall benefits, how would you compare your economic standing relative to your community over the last three years? Check [✓] one.

- Improved significantly
 Improved somewhat
 No change
 Declined somewhat
 Declined significantly

10. Using the scale below, indicate your level of agreement with each of the following statements:

1 Strongly agree 2 Agree 3 Neutral 4 Disagree 5 Strongly disagree

Please circle the appropriate number

- a. RVSD values teachers’ views in determining key educational decisions and programs. 1 2 3 4 5
- b. RVSD values teachers’ views in planning and delivering Alberta’s Initiative for School Improvement (AIS). 1 2 3 4 5
- c. RVSD values the professional judgment of its teachers. 1 2 3 4 5
- d. RVSD is a good place to work as a teacher. 1 2 3 4 5

11. The local is committed to advocating for improvements in the well-being of its members. Use the scale below to indicate the degree of priority that the local should place on its advocacy with RSVD in the following areas outside of salary and other compensation:

1 Very important 2 Somewhat important 3 Not important 4 Not sure

Please circle the appropriate number

- a. More professional development time during the school day. 1 2 3 4
- b. Better communication about professional development opportunities. 1 2 3 4
- c. Support for new teachers through reduced instructional load. 1 2 3 4
- d. Support for new administrators. 1 2 3 4
- e. Programs to raise awareness regarding cultural diversity. 1 2 3 4
- f. Improved access and flexibility for leaves. 1 2 3 4
- g. Better district processes related to awarding continuing contracts. 1 2 3 4
- h. Improved access and support for graduate work. 1 2 3 4
- i. Programs related to supporting wellness and work–life balance. 1 2 3 4
- j. More effective processes for consulting with the local on educational matters. 1 2 3 4

12. Considering your greatest needs as a teacher, if you could make *one* recommendation to the local in advocating for improved conditions of practice on your behalf, what would it be?

G. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Each year in Alberta, teachers are required to complete a teacher professional development growth plan (TPGP). The following questions will help to determine the degree of support teachers receive for achieving the goals identified in their growth plans.

13. How much professional autonomy and choice are you given in developing and meeting the goals identified in your teacher professional growth plan? Check (✓) one:

High degree Some degree Little

14. Using the scale below, evaluate the usefulness of the following resources in helping you meet the goals you have identified in your teacher professional growth plan.

1 Very useful 2 Somewhat useful 3 Of little use 4 Not useful 5 Not utilized

Please circle the appropriate number

- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Workshops offered by the district | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| b. Workshops offered by Calgary Regional Consortium | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| c. Workshops offered by Rocky View Local | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| d. School-based PD activities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| e. Teachers' conventions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| f. Specialist council conferences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| g. Other educational conferences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| h. Independent reading and self-study | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| i. Online resources, websites | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| j. Video conferencing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| k. Postsecondary education | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| l. Other | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

H. DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Check (✓) only *one* response to each of the following questions.

15. Your years of teaching experience, including the current year.

- 1 5–9 15–19 Over 30
 2–4 10–14 20–30

16. Your current teaching assignment is related exclusively or mainly to students in which level?

- ECS/kindergarten Grades 5–8 Other combinations (specify) _____
 Grades 1–4 Grades 9–12

17. Your current status:

- Full-time Part-time Substitute

18. Your employment contract status:

- Continuing Probationary Temporary

19. In which area is your school located?

- Springbank and area North and east of Airdrie
 Cochrane (including Bearspaw and Westbrook) Chestermere and area
 Airdrie and area Langdon/Indus and area
 Other school (specify): _____

20. Your current work assignment:

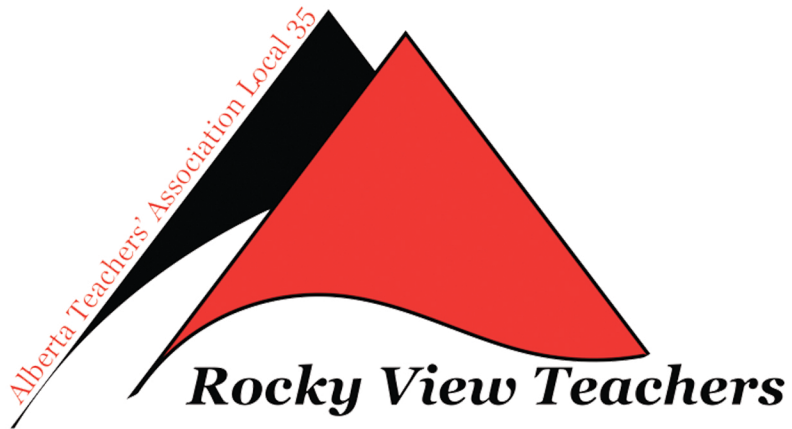
- Classroom teacher School administrator only
 Substitute teaching Other (eg, non-school based, cyber-school)
 Combined classroom and administrative duties

21. Your age:

- 25 and younger
- 26–30
- 31–35
- 36–40
- 41–45
- 46–50
- 51–55
- 56–60
- 61–65
- Over 65

22. Your gender:

- Female
- Male



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