

# LEADERSHIP UPDATE

Volume 3

A publication for Alberta's school administrators

Number 8



## Computer Adaptive Assessment

In the spring of 2005, Alberta Education announced a \$1 million per year, three-year contract with Castle Rock Research Corporation to develop an online databank of multiple-choice questions for classroom testing in four core subjects in selected grades from 3 through 12. The selection of this program, initially known as Computer Adapted Testing (CAT), raised questions about the bidding process and the role of former ministry officials on contract to Castle Rock Research Corporation. The Association raised concerns with the ministry about the unprecedented use of public funds to privatize student assessment in the province. Reputable, internationally recognized organizations such as Educational Testing Services point out that the final cost of developing even the most modest version of a program like Computer Adaptive Assessment (CAA) in Alberta would run into the tens of millions of dollars. The Association views the overly ambitious CAA program as neither educationally sound nor financially realistic and sustainable.

At presentations across the province, representatives from the ministry and Castle Rock promised that CAA would be “an innovative, online form of assessment in which items are presented in a sequence that is dependent on the correctness of the examinee’s response to the preceding item.” CAA would provide technology that adapts the content of the test as the student proceeds through a field of questions, and purports to assess and ascertain the student’s level of ability with great efficiency. The small number of teachers who participated in the early

2005/06 pilots of CAA found that many of the test items were drawn from provincial achievement tests and diploma examinations and that CAA was not adaptive in any way.

In the last month, Castle Rock has taken to offering teachers access to multiple-choice items at various grade and subject levels contingent on schools agreeing to allow Castle Rock to track student performance on those items. This would provide Castle Rock with the student sample it requires to establish degrees of difficulty for test items and would enable the company to move forward with its plan to develop its adaptive testing program. As well, it would allow Castle Rock to claim that it has calibrated its test items and fulfilled its contractual obligations with respect to its three-year, \$3 million contract with the government. The Association is concerned that this approach may create a misleading impression of the level of support for CAA among teachers and create unrealistic expectations for the future success of the technology. Reports from the field indicate that Castle Rock is moving forward with plans to market its online testing service in other provinces and countries.

The Association continues to take the position that teachers should refuse to participate in the online testing programs of Castle Rock Research Corporation, specifically with respect to the offer of free access to unit and term examinations. For more information, call J-C Couture at 1-800-232-7208 (toll free in Alberta) or (780) 447-9462 (in Edmonton).

**I remind  
myself  
every  
morning:  
Nothing  
I say this  
day will  
teach me  
anything. So  
if I'm going  
to learn, I  
must do it  
by listening.**

—Larry King



# Energize Your Meetings

Principals, as well as other school-based and central office leaders, are regularly and frequently responsible for organizing staff meetings.

Administrators have many duties on their mind, and preparing for a staff meeting is often not high on the list of priorities. Teachers and other staff members are also often pressed for time and do not look forward to attending meetings. In fact, the most important item on the agenda might be the adjournment time!

How can you turn meetings into dynamic experiences that leave

everyone energized and eager to face the challenges tomorrow will bring? Why not book the latest meeting facilitation workshop for administrators from the ATA? “Energize Your Meetings” will provide administrators and other teacher-leaders with surefire processes and techniques to make meetings engaging from start to finish. This workshop is perfect for PD at school district administrator meetings or for local/district PD days. You can book a low-cost half-day session or a series of

shorter sessions to help participants develop skills for meeting preparation, decision making and follow-up. Whether your meetings need a major revamping or just a tune-up, these practical ideas will have participants looking forward to your next meeting.

To book this workshop, contact Janey Kemp by e-mail ([janey.kemp@ata.ab.ca](mailto:janey.kemp@ata.ab.ca)) or phone her at 1-800-232-7208 (toll free in Alberta) or 447-9400, ext 485 (in Edmonton).

## Administrators Mentoring Administrators

The Association continues its work to promote its administrator mentorship program throughout the province. Across the province, school districts are reporting high numbers of administrators retiring this year and in the next two or three years. Some districts expect more than 50 per cent turnover in the next few years. The ATA Member Opinion Survey has shown a marked decline (about 50 per cent) over the last three years in the number of teachers interested in pursuing a career in administration. This rising demand and declining

supply are of concern to the profession, given the key role administrators play in schools.

On the advice of the School Administrators Issues and Concerns Committee (SAICC), all superintendents received a copy of the *Administrator Mentorship Handbook* and a letter outlining the program and the availability of money for projects with locals and school districts to develop mentorship programs and to support administrators new to administration, the district or the school.

It is hoped that the program can be established throughout the province so that veteran staff can pass along their wisdom and experience to newer administrators.

For more information, contact Catherine Moir, Professional Development, at 1-800-232-7208 (toll free in Alberta), 447-9473 (in Edmonton) or [catherine.moir@ata.ab.ca](mailto:catherine.moir@ata.ab.ca). Project funding will be offered on a first-come, first-served basis.

*For further information, visit [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) or contact Member Services at the Alberta Teachers' Association, 447-9400 (in Edmonton) or 1-800-232-7208 (from elsewhere in Alberta).*

# Specialist Council Universal Membership

Recommendation 17 of the final report of the Blue Ribbon Panel on the School Administrator recommended that the Association review the potential to provide automatic membership in a specialist council as an established benefit of active membership.

Implementation of this recommendation will provide the Association with a mechanism to have members annually update their membership information on TNET; the Association will be able to effectively communicate with all teachers of a specialization about important policy or curriculum issues (for example, surveying teachers regarding a draft curriculum); and the Association, through its specialist councils, will be recognized as the official voice of teachers in curriculum, student evaluation and policy related to area of specialization (such as special education funding or school administration). It is largely due to the impact of TNET that universal membership is financially feasible. Full implementation of TNET should reduce the costs of publication and mailing of specialist council materials.

TNET will provide more consistency and efficiency in specialist council operations and will include

- hosting of specialist council websites,
- Web-based communication with all specialist council members,
- publications available on council websites,
- Web-based collaboration sites for executive members,
- Web-based standard accounting software and

- online conference and event registration.

## How does this proposal support the Association's strategic directions?

The concept of universal membership in a selected specialist council is consistent with a number of ATA strategic directions.

Strategic Direction 1: Advance the professional role of teachers into public leadership in learning.

- Teachers will have greater voice in curriculum issues through their involvement in specialist councils.
- Teachers will provide more leadership in the area of curriculum inservice and professional development.
- Teachers will enhance their professional competence in their specialty areas.

Strategic Direction 3: Be an adaptive organization that is continuously learning through research and strategic thinking.

- Increased member involvement and support for specialist councils will honour the Association as a professional organization.
- Teachers will be better informed on professional issues, such as professional accountability.
- The Association will have increased capacity to communicate with all teachers in a specialty area.

Strategic Direction 4: Enhance member engagement and commitment to the collective interests of the profession by providing flexible and responsive service.

- The Association will enhance its service to members by offering specialist council universal membership.
- More members will be engaged in Association activities.
- The Association will have increased opportunity to receive feedback from members on professional issues.
- Universal membership will support equity of access to specialist councils for teachers throughout their career.
- Including specialist council membership as part of Association membership will be tangible evidence that the Association is a unified professional organization.

## What are the financial implications for the Association and specialist councils?

Currently, the largest expense for operating a specialist council is for travel and accommodation for executive meetings. Typically, specialist councils hold their provincial executive meetings on the weekend so as not to incur substitute teacher costs. These costs are expected to continue and in some cases may increase, as regional representation and executive positions are added to support the work of the councils. However, as noted above, printing and mailing costs should be

reduced with the implementation of TNET.

The major sources of revenue for specialist councils are (1) membership fees, (2) grants from the Association and (3) conference profits. However, conference profits are not a stable source of revenue and should not be relied on for basic operating expenses. In 2005/06 the total revenue from membership fees for all specialist councils was \$255,643. Association membership grants accounted for \$169,874, making a total of \$425,517. The 2007/08 budget will provide a total of \$465,000 that will be used to fund specialist council operations. With the approved budget at the 2007 Annual Representative Assembly (ARA), a new equitable distribution formula will be developed, based in part on membership numbers but also providing a basic operating grant for all councils.

## Upcoming Events

### **Educational Leadership Academy (ELA) with Joseph Murphy**

**July 8–12, 2007**

Banff Centre, Banff

For information on registration, please contact Leslie Kaun at (780) 447-9410 or [leslie.kaun@ata.ab.ca](mailto:leslie.kaun@ata.ab.ca).

### **Teacher Growth, Supervision and Evaluation Workshop**

**October 22 in Calgary**

**October 24 in Edmonton**

If you are interested in attending, please e-mail Marilyn Terlaan in Member Services at [marilyn.terlaan@ata.ab.ca](mailto:marilyn.terlaan@ata.ab.ca).

### **WCEAC: “Creating Connections Across Differences”**

**October 24–26, 2007**

The Western Canadian Educational Administrators’ Conference is a conference for trustees, superintendents, central office personnel, principals and assistant principals from across western Canada, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. It will be held at the Fantasyland Hotel, in Edmonton. If you are interested in attending, go to [www.wceac.org](http://www.wceac.org).