

## Government

1. There will be another **Q & A session for Local Presidents on December 17th.**
2. Keep an eye on the **ATA website for the most recent “Pandemic Pulse” survey** results. The survey closed on the 27th of November and the results are eye-popping:
  - a. High proportions of teachers and school leaders have been quarantined/isolated because of COVID
  - b. Very high proportions of classes/schools have had students quarantined/isolated
  - c. A strong majority of teachers favour stronger public health measures but these teachers do believe that their community would be in favour.
  - d. Keep in mind that this survey would not have captured the experience of teachers under the current state of [public health emergency](#). The Pulse surveys are intended to be “in the moment” snapshots of the experience in Alberta schools.
3. We continue to do some **public polling**. Here are some highlights:
  - a. The most important education issues are funding and curriculum, followed by safety during the pandemic
  - b. A slim majority now disapproves of the provincial government’s handling of K-12 education
  - c. Almost two-thirds say education is underfunded, the highest percentage since June 2017
  - d. One-third think the ATA is the group that has most supported classroom condition improvements
  - e. Two-thirds think class sizes are too large, a return to 2019 levels
  - f. Three in ten now think teachers are paid too little, the highest point in tracking
  - g. One quarter strongly agree the ATA is looking out for students, the highest point since June 2017
4. **Bill 32** is a proposed piece of legislation meant to create “transparency” in the use of union dues and add the ability for members to opt out of dues related to political or social causes. The bill left the details to regulation and the Association has been invited by the government to consult on this. The president met recently with other union groups to discuss how to approach

providing feedback. The Alberta Federation of Labour (AFL) is considering a constitutional challenge to the bill.

5. **Several school divisions have chosen to give their teachers an extra day off** (or even several days off) in an effort to reduce stress and give folks a break. **If your division has done so, please be sure to thank them and recognize them for taking this step.** Superintendents and trustees routinely face public and social media pressure to keep teachers in school and it's important to show appreciation when they put the interests of their staff first.
6. Some people have commented that the decision to have grades 7 to 12 move to online instruction while keeping lower grades in class has put a **strain on collegial relations** in some cases. Let's all keep in mind that teachers are not making these decisions; **we're all at the mercy of the COVID winds.**
7. [The Alberta School Councils Association had their budget unexpectedly - and retroactively - cut by 75%.](#) These folks are, understandably, [not happy](#) and they've been [quite vocal about the matter](#). Locals may recall that the Association has received advice that during difficult times like these it's a good idea to try to make friendships with people outside the organization and **form alliances with other organizations with a shared interest in education.** This might be an excellent opportunity to do that sort of work.
8. [Local/municipal elections, including school board elections will be occurring on 18 October 2021.](#) The provincial nomination period for local election candidates begins on 1 January 2021 and ends on 20 September 2021. Local Political Engagement Committees should be planning for these elections now as we have reason to believe that third party advertisers (TPAs) and political action committees (PACs) may be unusually active during this election cycle (despite [the government capping individual contribution to PACs at \\$30,000](#)).
9. **Political Engagement Awards will be no more!** Out with competition! From now on we will showcase excellence without awards and trophies!

### **Professional Development (PD)**

1. [Online resources a'plenty are available](#), many of which are archived.
2. If you're planning to attend a **specialist council conference**, please be aware that they're all going to be online for the foreseeable future AND **please be attentive to the dates:** some of them are being delayed, others are being broken up into a speaker series, etc.

- a. For instance, there is a [Leadership Essentials for School Leaders speaker series](#) that you can register for.
  - b. Check the [ATA events calendar](#) for current information.
3. **Alberta Education’s curriculum advisors have been a source of controversy for a while**, notably William French (he’s very much a “canon” guy) and [notoriously Chris Champion](#) (the social studies advisor who regards truth and reconciliation as a fad). Hopefully the controversy doesn’t envelope the members of the [Curriculum Working Groups](#) which were recently published. A couple of points about these groups and the curriculum development process:
- a. This government promised a greater degree of transparency regarding [the curriculum development process](#), but several elements seem quite opaque. While we know the names of the advisors and working group members and we have a sense of the timelines, but we don’t know
    - i. Who wrote the curriculum that the working groups will be reviewing (we’ve been told that they are not writing curriculum, reviewing only),
    - ii. What that review process actually entails,
    - iii. nor what the assessment plan is (other than an assurance from the ministry that they are “on it”).
  - b. Please peruse the list of members of the working groups, but be aware that the teachers selected for the working groups will not be at liberty to discuss their activities because of **non-disclosure agreements**.
    - i. A few people have noted that the teachers nominated by their respective superintendents tended to be teachers working out of central offices (i.e. “zombie AISI” or “school improvement team” teachers). It’s important to remember that those teachers are still our members (assuming that they haven’t chosen to renounce their Association membership) and may be very well qualified participants. Superintendents may have chosen to avoid nominating classroom teachers because of the ongoing COVID subpocalypse.
  - c. If you have concerns about this process - and you should have concerns - please **consider putting those thoughts in writing**. Let the Minister, your MLA, and potentially your social media circle know your thoughts. Remember to be professional in your comments, of

course. Several academics have done this, along with organizations and groups like the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Education Council.

- i. **Please consider signing [the Learning Team's "Shred It" petition](#).**
4. Convention planning continues apace, and steps are being taken to secure the services of an **AV company to provide support for the online/Zoom platform that the pandemic has relegated us to using**.
  - a. Some teachers, it seems, will be attending their virtual convention from school
5. ATA research continues. The recent study on [compassion fatigue](#) seems timely. [Other research can be found here](#).
6. [ATA Association workshops](#) are a good value and there's a new one: "Making the Most of a Teaching Life - How to be Well and Stay Well". Contact [pdworkshops@ata.ab.ca](mailto:pdworkshops@ata.ab.ca) to book this or any other workshop.

### **Teacher Employment Services (TES)**

1. Keep an eye on the ever-evolving [COVID Q & A](#).
2. **Bargaining**
  - a. **Central Table Bargaining** has recommenced with two days of bargaining in November. [Please find updates, including the Bargainer's Blog, here](#).
  - b. **Local Bargaining** is down to just 7 open agreements.
    - i. Four locals have attempted negotiations with the help of a mediator and had the mediator "write out" (i.e. the mediator determined that the sides were too far apart to be mediated). **These locals have voted to authorize the taking of a strike vote**, which is a prerequisite step in labour law to an actual strike vote. The authorization votes were strongly supported by the teachers: 98% for Centre Nord, [Northern Gateway](#), and [Sturgeon](#), while [Wetaskawin](#) was at 92%). Hopefully these negotiations will resume with renewed focus soon.
      1. **Labour law around strikes and lockouts** is constructed to mandate many steps in order to ensure a ponderous process, permitting tempers to cool before a strike can occur. You can [read all about it here](#).
    - ii. **Grande Prairie Catholic Local #42** (the mighty #42!) has voted at a Bargaining Unit General Meeting to apply for the services of

a mediator. Hopefully that works better for them than it did for the four locals above.

- iii. In FrancoSud bargaining is ongoing, while in High Prairie bargaining has only just begun.
- c. **School board audited financial statements** are being posted to division websites. Keep an eye out for those. They often contain interesting information!

### 3. Wellness resources

- a. [ASEBP's Wellness Sandbox](#) has a lot of good resources.
- b. You can access Homewood Health via your division's portal.
  - i. Some teachers have reported long wait times with Homewood Health. Please let me know if you have trouble getting through.
- c. [CASS has a workplace wellness framework](#). Check and see if your division is implementing it and whether it is effective. Consider giving the board feedback (positive, negative, or inquisitive) at your teacher/board liaison meeting.

### 4. Proper ventilation, HVAC processes and air quality are critical at any time but especially so during COVID. As an employee you have a right to know about the air quality of your workplace. How do we know this? I inquired to OHS via their ["Ask and Expert" portal](#) and received the following response:

- a. Your employer is obligated under the OHS Act, Part 2 - Availability of information:

#### ***Duty to provide information***

*14(1) In this section, "health and safety information" means information that may affect the health and safety of a person at a work site and includes information about hazards at the work site, hazard controls and work practices and procedures, but does not include personal information about an identifiable individual, confidential proprietary information or trade secrets.*

In addition to the Act, under Part 4 of the OHS Code - Chemical Hazards, biological hazards and harmful substances:

#### ***Potential worker exposure***

*21(1) If a worker may be exposed to a harmful substance at a work site, an employer must identify the health hazards associated with the exposure and assess the worker's exposure.*

*21(2) The employer must ensure that a worker who may be exposed to a harmful substance at a work site*

*(a) is informed of the health hazards associated with exposure to that substance,*

*(b) is informed of measurements made of airborne concentrations of harmful substances at the work site, and*

*(c) is trained in procedures developed by the employer to minimize the worker's exposure to harmful substances, and understands the procedures.*

*21(3) A worker who is provided with training under subsection (2) must use the procedures appropriately and apply the training.*

Therefore, yes, your employer is required to advise their workers of any air quality testing/ sampling they have conducted, why they were conducted, and what the results were.

5. [Changes are likely coming to OHS](#) and they don't look good for workers, but these changes won't take effect until September of 2021. Until then the current rules are still in effect.
6. Below is a list of links which might be useful if things go awry. You are, of course, strongly advised to seek advice from a TES staff officer before taking any action. Both of the following can be used anonymously.
  - a. [Click here if you have concerns that the orders of the Chief Medical Officer of Health are not being followed.](#)
  - b. [Click here if you need to file an OHS complaint.](#)

### **Other Stuff**

1. [The ATA's 2020/21 Calendar](#)
2. [My District Representative Calendar](#)
3. [Alberta Education's revised Guide to Education](#)
4. [All Government Relaunch Guidance Documents](#)
5. [COVID-19 Alberta Health Daily Checklist](#)
6. [Alberta Education's School Re-entry Plan](#)

Finally, I'm running once again to be your District Representative. [You can run too!](#) It's a good gig. Ask me about it sometime!