



# Excellence in Education through Accountability and Choice

Presentation to Alberta's Commission on Learning

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# 1. Reward excellence in teaching with merit pay

The quality of education depends on the effectiveness of teachers.

Unfortunately, the salaries of Alberta's teachers are based exclusively on seniority and on level of education (Bachelor's degree vs. Master's degree). There is a "pay grid" which considers only these two factors. Regardless of where teachers are situated on this pay grid, they are paid the same regardless of how hard they work, or how dedicated or effective they are. In contrast, salaries in law, accounting, engineering, sales, management and other fields are based on merit or performance.

In Alberta today, a caring, dedicated, hard-working and effective teacher is paid exactly the same as a lazy, unmotivated and incompetent teacher. Teachers who prepare diligently for every class, and strive to keep themselves up-to-date in their field of knowledge are paid exactly the same as teachers who do not seek to improve their pedagogical skills, and who spend little or no time preparing lessons. A teacher who volunteers with the school's sports, theatre, music or other extra-curricular activities is paid exactly the same as a teacher who leaves at 3:00 p.m. every day.

Alberta's current teacher pay grid is manifestly unfair to teachers. And, by extension, it is also unfair to students, to parents, to employers, and to the taxpayers who foot the bill. The most caring and talented teachers are worthy of higher salaries, but they never receive those higher salaries. Alberta's current teacher pay system fails to reward initiative, innovation, dedication, hard work, and excellence in teaching. It protects the worst at the expense of the best.

To remedy this unfairness, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) recommends that teachers be paid according to their competence and effectiveness, in addition to seniority and level of education. Determining which criteria should be used to evaluate the competence and effectiveness of teachers is no easy task. But where there is a will, there is a way. The unfairness of the status quo is intolerable.

One criterion which can be evaluated with relative ease is the amount of time a teacher spends on extra-curricular activities. Whether a teacher spends some time, a lot of time, or no time at all on extra-curricular activities should influence his or her salary.

Another criterion is the improvement (or absence of improvement) shown by students on standardized tests. Provincial achievement tests, by themselves, do not necessarily reveal how effective an individual teacher may or may not be. Socio-economic factors can influence student achievement, and this is entirely beyond the teacher's control. However, what does reveal teaching competence is whether student performance in a particular subject improves. The state of Tennessee has used this Value-Added Assessment System since 1992. Students are tested at the beginning of the year and again at the end of the year, and teachers are graded based on the progress their students make over the course of the year. In the September 2001 edition of *Fraser Forum*, former teacher Claudia R. Hepburn, B.Ed., M.A. states that the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System:

"is fair to teachers because it excludes the influence of all pre-existing differences among students, including race, socio-economic background, intelligence, and previous leaning. It therefore levels the playing field for teachers, and in doing so removes the objection put forward so often against standardized test: that they do not account for the student's

background. Teachers get no credit for having a classroom full of well-prepared students, and they are not penalized for a classroom of children testing below average. What counts is how much they improve their student's skills in the course of the year.

The degree of a teacher's extra-curricular involvement, and the degree of student improvement, should be added to the current criteria of seniority and level of education.

As an example of how this would work, consider an Alberta teacher who now earns \$50,000. This \$50,000 is based exclusively on the teachers' seniority and on whether the teacher has a Bachelor's degree or a Master's degree.

Instead of paying all teachers at this point on the grid the same \$50,000 regardless of merit or effectiveness, the \$50,000 should be split into two components: \$35,000 based on seniority and level of education, and an additional \$0 to \$30,000 based on the teacher's degree of extra-curricular involvement and on the degree of student improvement, as measured by a value-added assessment system.

Seniority and level of education would continue as the primary factors which determine teachers' salaries. The variable component (again using the example of a teacher now earning \$50,000) would lie in the degree of extra-curricular involvement (\$0 to \$15,000) and the degree of student improvement (\$0 to \$15,000). Rather than paying all teachers at this point on the grid the same \$50,000 regardless of performance, teachers at this point on the grid would earn \$35,000 (based on seniority and level of education) plus up to \$30,000 more.

For example, a teacher who was not involved with any extra-curricular activities would earn \$0 out of a potential \$15,000. Teachers doing some extra-curricular activities would earn \$5,000 to \$10,000. A teacher involved in a lot of extra-curricular activities, or extra-curricular activities that were particularly demanding, would earn \$15,000. The same \$0 to \$15,000 pay scale would apply to the degree of improvement shown by students on provincial achievement tests.

The most dedicated and effective teachers would earn \$65,000 per year instead of \$50,000. The least dedicated and least effective teachers would earn \$35,000 instead of \$50,000. Average teachers would continue to earn the same \$50,000 which they are earning currently.

Other criteria for measuring teacher performance could be added in future. For example, teachers' self-evaluations and evaluations by principals, parents and students could be used to determine the degree of a teacher's effectiveness. But as a practical starting point which could be implemented soon, student performance and extra-curricular involvement are realistic and measurable components of a teacher's performance.

#### CTF supporter survey question and response:

In addition to the number of years worked and the level of education achieved, should competence, performance and merit be criteria for determining teachers' salaries?

Yes 91%      No 5%      Undecided 4%

## Comments from CTF supporters:

“A system should be in place so teachers can be evaluated yearly and teachers compensated for their ability, and relieved of their Certificate if they don’t meet certain standards.”

“Do away with the salary grid. It must be possible to pay for high performance.”

“Consideration for any teacher pay raise should be based on student performance based on provincial exams.”

“Award the good ones. Get rid of the poor ones doing massive damage to their pupils.”

“I believe that teachers should get performance increases in wages instead of across the board raises. It does not give anyone an incentive to perform, and is not fair to the teachers that give their all only to receive the same as the teachers that does only the bare minimum to receive his or her paycheck.”

“I feel it is unfair for teachers to get wage increases until we come up with an evaluation of them individually. We have some great teachers who deserve more, but also many who deserve less.”

“The small minority of incompetent teachers should not have job protection due to seniority.”

“Teachers should be evaluated and given pay raises because of ability, not years of service.”

“Teachers are not accountable because they are protected by the ATA. We have encountered numerous teachers over the years that our children have been in school, that are just there to collect a pay cheque. It has appeared to us that the administration would rather sweep complaints under the carpet, than deal with the issue of teacher incompetence because it was the easiest thing to do. It is almost impossible to complete this process on your own if you are a parent. Just go to the ATA and ask what the procedure is. As a result, teachers are never fired.”

“A number of years ago we had a meeting with Gary Mar about this issue of teacher incompetence. When we asked how many teachers he had decertified during his term as Education Minister, his reply was none. Quite a record, considering the number of teachers there were out there during his term! I'm sure you would find the same numbers with previous ministers, and our present Education Minister. Teachers are never fired.”

“Our children – our future – deserve the best, not just someone who was able to attain the absolute minimum standard allowed, and then coasts for the next twenty years. Let’s give the school boards and the parents the tools they need to replace those teachers who cannot or will not set our children’s education first.”

## 2. Empower parents and increase accountability with vouchers

Parents should have the right to choose the school that they believe will best suit their children's needs, and to remove their children from a school which fails to meet those needs. Parents (as well as taxpayers who are not parents) deserve a public education system which provides real accountability and real choice.

Alberta's school system already has a degree of choice, but this should be extended further throughout the province with a voucher system. Each parent with a school age child should receive a voucher from the Alberta government. That voucher could be used by the parent for any school in Alberta (public, Catholic, charter, private, etc.). An equal per-pupil grant from the Alberta government would go to the school which parents chose for their child. This would empower parents, giving them real influence over how schools are run and what values are taught there.

### CTF supporter survey question and response:

Should Alberta adopt a "voucher" system for schools, in which education tax dollars follow students to whatever school they attend, according to the parents' wishes?

Yes 74%      No 17%      Undecided 9%

### Comments from CTF supporters:

"As parents we need to be able to put our educational tax money to any school we want, including private schools."

"Competition in the school system would make it better and more efficient by comparison. Could you imagine what the Canadian consumer would pay for goods if the business world was without competition?"

"The balance of the education dollars should follow the student even if the student moves mid-term."

"A voucher system would greatly help all private schools and would force public schools to operate at a higher standard."

"Home schooling must be a lot more economical for the government. Therefore, education tax dollars should also follow students even if they are home schooled."

"Alberta already has a voucher system for the operating costs of education. However, the province only provides capital grants to recognized school boards. If the per student grants were increased to include capital costs, the playing field would be truly level and other education providers might decide to enter the field."

### 3. Separate the union from the professional body

Currently, Alberta's *Teaching Profession Act* establishes the Alberta Teachers' Association as both a union and a professional body. This legislation creates a conflict of interest.

A union exists to protect its members and to promote the interests of its members. For example, when management fires (or attempts to fire) a worker, the union will automatically come to that worker's defence, and advocate on his or her behalf.

In contrast, a professional body exists to serve and protect the public, by ensuring that members of the profession meet high standards. When a member of the profession fails to meet those standards, the professional body will suspend or decertify that member in order to protect the public.

Every person who has gone through the public school system has encountered teachers who are excellent, as well as teachers who are incompetent. A teachers' union, by virtue of its obligation to protect its members, will typically fight against an attempt to discipline or fire a teacher, even when that teacher is performing poorly. In contrast, a professional body can serve the public by excluding those who lack competence or who perform poorly.

By forcing the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) to be both a union and a professional body, the *Teaching Profession Act* creates a conflict of interest. The Alberta Government has the option of amending this legislation to create a professional body for teachers, which is entirely separate from the union. There are no constitutional or other legal requirements which would prevent the Alberta Government from legislating in this area of provincial jurisdiction.

Parents, students, teachers, employers, taxpayers, and all members of the public would be far better served by a separate professional body whose sole purpose would be to establish high standards for those wishing to enter the teaching profession, and to enforce those standards for those wishing to remain in the teaching profession. The existence of a separate professional body, not in conflict with itself by having to be a union at the same time, would enhance the public credibility and stature of teachers. A separate professional body would serve the needs of students by making it possible to remove from the classroom that small minority of incompetent and ineffective teachers.

Therefore, the Alberta Government should immediately amend the *Teaching Profession Act* so as to create a professional body to govern the teaching profession, which will have as its sole mandate the protection of the public.

#### CTF supporter survey question and response:

The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) functions both as a union to bargain for teachers' salaries, and as a professional body to set standards for teacher training and teacher conduct. In contrast, Alberta's doctors, lawyers, accountants and other professionals are regulated by professional bodies which are entirely separate from unions. Should the ATA be divided into two separate organizations: a union and a professional body?

Yes 87%      No 6%      Undecided 7%

## Comments from CTF supporters:

“If teachers want to be treated as professionals, an association would be more suitable than a union.”

“Having licensure exams would heighten the profile and respectability of the teaching profession. Licensure exams would do teachers a favour.”

“If teachers want to be seen as a profession, they need to realize that a union and a profession are not compatible entities.”

“Minimum competency tests should be administered by the professional wing of the ATA.”

“All teachers should have the option to be, or not to be, part of the union.”

“Some teachers are not happy with mandatory membership in union. Should they have the option?”

“Union membership should be voluntary, and does not compulsory.”

“Teachers should not be compelled to join the ATA. They should have freedom of choice.”

## 4. School principals should not be required to join the union

As managers of schools, with responsibility for hiring and managing teachers, school principals should not be required to belong to the teachers’ union. Currently, this requirement puts principals in a conflict of interest, in the same way that the *Teaching Profession Act* puts the Alberta Teachers’ Association in a conflict of interest.

Once the *Teaching Profession Act* is amended to separate the union from the professional body, principals could still be required to belong to the professional body – but not the union.

### CTF supporter survey question and response:

Currently, school principals are required to be members of the ATA. Should principals continue to be required to be members of the ATA?

Yes 15%      No 76%      Undecided 9%

## Comments from CTF supporters:

“No management professional (e.g. principals) should be allowed to join a union.”

“If the ATA is going to remain functioning as a union, then principals should be non-ATA members, similar to management in business.”

“Principals as members of the ATA are in a conflict of interest. Teachers report to the principals. Principals cannot be expected to negotiate in good faith with their own union, when it comes to disciplinary action against a teacher.”

“Principals should not be part of a union. They should be members of the professional body to set standards for teachers’ conduct.”

## 5. Teachers should not have the right to strike

As long as the *Teaching Profession Act* creates a virtual monopoly on education through the Alberta Teachers’ Association, teachers should not have the right to strike. Taxpayers pay for public education as an essential service, which should not be withheld.

CTF supporter survey question and response:

Should teachers have the right to strike?

Yes 17%      No 74%      Undecided 9%

Comments from CTF supporters:

“No union with monopoly power should have the right to strike.”

“No right to strike as long as teachers continue to have a virtual monopoly on education through the ATA.”

“A strike is holding the children hostage – and hostage taking is illegal.”

“Professionals should not have the right to strike as they are deemed essential services.”

“Any government or quasi government body (monopoly/sole provider) should not be able to strike.”

“Most people in the working world cannot strike if they do not agree with given wages. Why make our children suffer?”



## 6. Taxes should not be increased

In the 2001-02 fiscal year, Alberta spent more (per person) on government programs than any other province in Canada. Rather than raise taxes, the Alberta government should better manage the revenues it already takes from Albertans in taxes.

The CTF's five proposals to increase accountability (merit pay for teachers; vouchers for parents; a professional body separate from the union; principals not belonging to the union; removing the right to strike) do not require the government to spend more money, but to manage our tax dollars more effectively. Increased accountability and choice will lead to greater excellence in education, while costing taxpayers no more, and possibly less.

### CTF supporter survey question and response:

Should provincial taxes be increased in order to put more money into education?

Yes 9%      No 86%      Undecided 5%

### Comments from CTF supporters:

“Government should cut waste and ensure existing levels of funding for education are spent more effectively rather than think about raising taxes.”

“The education system has a spending problem not a revenue problem.”

“If home schoolers and most private schools can do a better job for less cost per student, then why should the public system get more money?”