



Office of the Minister  
MLA, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater

December 6, 2012

Carol Henderson  
President  
Alberta Teachers' Association  
11010 – 142 Street  
Edmonton, AB T5N 2R1

Dear Ms. Henderson:

I want to begin by thanking you and your staff for your commitment to these contract negotiations. I realize this has been a long process, but I'm sure you will agree that it is important that we take the time we need to build an agreement that offers the best educational experience we can for Alberta's students.

While I was surprised by your decision to step away from the tripartite table, I respect your decision. That said, before you return to local bargaining, I respectfully request that you consider this alternative proposal.

You will note that we agree on many factors. We agree that Alberta's exceptional reputation as having one of the best education systems in the world is in many ways thanks to the thousands of highly skilled men and women who work as teachers. Other than parents and their families, the single biggest contributor to success for a child's education is their teacher.

We also agree that, as in many professions, the role of a teacher is rapidly changing. These changes bring with them many challenges. In 2009, as part of *Inspiring Education*, thousands of Albertans – including educators – described their vision for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Albertans described how teachers are moving from a knowledge authority to an architect of learning – one who plans, designs and oversees learning, one who collaborates with resources beyond the walls of the school to incorporate more supports and opportunities for children and their families.

As our education system continues to evolve, teachers are being called on to consider the unique needs and abilities of individual students more than ever before. To be successful, teachers need to have the resources, supports and professional development opportunities they need to make this transition. As Government, we need to ensure our legislation, regulations and policy are aligned to give teachers the tools they require to help students succeed and give parents assurance that their children are taught by the world's best.

*Alberta* 

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As you outlined in your letter to Premier Redford, any agreement between the Alberta Teachers' Association, the Alberta School Boards Association and the Government of Alberta must move us closer to realizing the vision of *Inspiring Education*. I agree.

This proposal, a response to the Alberta Teachers' Association November 30, 2012 proposal, does that by laying a foundation for workload balance; offering opportunities for professional development; and maintaining our teachers as the best paid among all the provinces, all while ensuring what is in the best interest of Alberta students.

The Government proposal also makes teachers, along with students, their parents and Albertans, partners in the design of our education system – in its curriculum, competencies and assessment. In short, it moves us – all of us – closer to the vision of *Inspiring Education*.

### **Where we agree**

Let me begin by reiterating the areas where the Government of Alberta substantially agrees with the proposal offered by the Alberta Teachers' Association.

#### ***A long-term agreement***

Government agrees that a minimum **four-year agreement** is in the best interest of Alberta students and their families. This allows teachers, as professionals, to get on with the business of teaching without the distraction of negotiations. It also gives teachers, school boards, communities and Government time to continue the critical work of transforming the education system to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

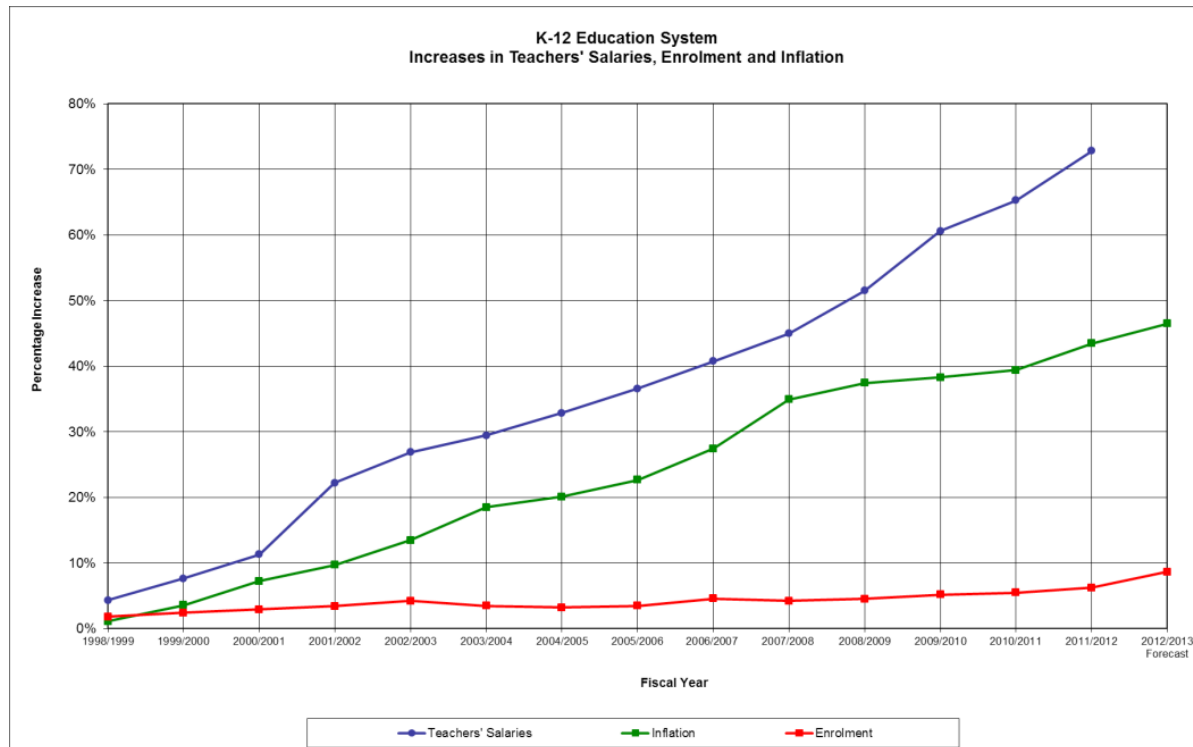
#### ***Maintaining high compensation levels***

Great teachers are an investment in Alberta's future. Albertans want the world's best teaching in our classrooms and are willing to pay to recruit and retain the talented teachers that make our system so successful.

That is why, since 2006, teachers' compensation has increased by 26 per cent, including a \$1,500 lump sum payment. The Government of Alberta has also assumed the unfunded liability for the teachers' portion of the Teachers' Pension Plan at a cost of \$2.2 billion (which added another three per cent to teachers' take-home pay).

Thanks to that investment in education, Alberta teachers with 10 years of experience are now earning an average of \$92,300 a year, significantly higher than the national average of \$77,105.

The chart below shows how Alberta teachers' salaries have increased since 1998 relative to inflation and student enrolment. These increases over the previous contract are an important component of our investment in education; however, in the current fiscal climate similar increases cannot be sustained and investments in other supports are required.



Alberta is currently facing a challenging fiscal situation with Government revenues forecast to be much lower than originally expected. That is why the Government of Alberta initially proposed **more modest increases of 0 per cent, 0 per cent, 1 per cent and 3 per cent** over the term of this contract. To be clear, this is in addition to annual grid increases of approximately five per cent for teachers who have not yet reached the ceiling on the 10-year grid. I am pleased that the Alberta Teachers' Association has accepted our salary offer.

***Investing in classrooms***

Today's classrooms feature a mix of cultures, first languages and abilities. Diversity in the classroom is one of the great strengths of our system. It exposes our children to a wealth of ideas and perspectives and teaches respect and understanding for others. I also appreciate that it can present challenges for teachers to provide meaningful, engaged learning opportunities for many different students at different learning levels in a variety of learning environments.

We cannot expect that every child in the classroom will learn in the same way. Increasingly, differentiated instruction will be required to allow all children to succeed. To meet the needs of this increasingly diverse classroom, teachers will be required to have a broad range of skills and resources.

**The Government of Alberta has heard the concerns of teachers** about the challenges they face in our changing classrooms. As I have visited schools across the province, teachers have told me they need more support. They have called on Government to address issues that are at the heart of their current workload concerns. Specifically, teachers have called on me to:

- Provide more supports for inclusive classrooms;
- Reduce classroom size; and
- Fund more teacher assistants in the classroom.

To **support inclusive education** Government is investing nearly \$375 million this year. That is a 22 per cent increase over the previous year, or \$68 million, to support children who require additional learning supports and programming. This is an important investment for our students. Government commits to maintain this investment and increase it over the next two years.

We also commit to increasing our investment in the Class Size Initiative, which has seen more than \$1.6 billion in supports since the program began. This year, \$232 million is being invested specifically to support **smaller class sizes** in the lower grades.

#### *A commitment to add more resources for teachers*

We are also prepared to invest in new supports for teachers. To reiterate our previous offers:

Government proposes an **additional \$10.5 million in annual funding** specifically to create an additional 200 full-time equivalent educational assistants positions to support classroom teachers and give them more time for lesson planning, collaboration and teaching.

Or...

If teachers would prefer, we could take those dollars and use them to increase salaries in divisions where teacher salaries are below the provincial average as outlined in the Alberta Teachers' Association proposal.

Regardless of which choice your membership selects, we also remain committed to **investing in new schools** to relieve pressure in our growing communities and to create new spaces for Alberta's children.

#### *Addressing workload*

Throughout the current contract negotiations, all parties have acknowledged that workload is teachers' biggest issue. And we have proposed and agreed on many ways forward to begin to address workload.

Some challenges will be tackled with investment in the areas already mentioned. However, in other areas we need to understand more about what contributes to workload issues.

Therefore, the Government of Alberta will conduct an **internal review** – in addition to similar reviews by each school jurisdiction – to look at how teacher workload can be reduced without impacting the educational experience of our students. If there are tasks that can be eliminated, they will be. If there are efficiencies that can be found, they will be implemented.

In addition, **Government will fund a third-party study** that will examine teacher workloads in more depth over different times in a school year and in a variety of teaching environments to better understand the specific circumstances contributing to teacher workload.

Reports from all these reviews – the Government’s, those conducted by each school jurisdiction and the third-party analysis – will be shared with all parties. It is anticipated the reports on the school jurisdiction and Government reviews will be available by April 30, 2013. The timing for the third-party report will be determined as the study’s terms of reference are finalized.

***Working together to improve education***

Government wants to work with teachers as professionals to further support the transformation of Alberta’s education system to ensure it is truly focused on students. We also want to work together to support the continuous improvement of the teaching profession.

As such, Government proposes to establish a **Teacher Development and Practice Committee**, which will replace the Council on Alberta Teaching Standards. The committee will advise the Minister with respect to the teaching profession within the overarching vision of *Inspiring Education*.

The role of the committee will include:

- Providing advice based on the results of the third-party study on the workload of teachers;
- Advising the Minister on the role of the teaching profession in the 21st century, leadership quality, educational research, professional development and other matters of interest to the Minister;
- Providing input on the need for a continuing education requirement for all certificate holders, anticipated to be administered by the Association;
- Providing insight on the development and implementation of renewed Teaching Quality Standards;
- Overseeing the Excellence in Teaching Award program to recognize, celebrate and share stories of exceptional teaching; and,
- Advising the Minister on any legislative, regulatory or policy changes impacting the teaching profession.

Members of the Teacher Development and Practice Committee will be appointed by the Minister of Education from education stakeholder groups; business and community; post-secondary institutions; and the public. Half of the committee members will be certificated teachers currently teaching in the classroom who are members of the Alberta Teachers’ Association.

The Alberta Teachers’ Association will select the vice-chair of the committee from the committee’s membership. To ensure an independent view, the chair of the committee will be appointed by the Minister, but will not be a representative of government, the Alberta Teachers’ Association or the Alberta School Boards Association. Members will be expected to bring their own perspectives to the table, rather than simply reflecting the bargaining position of their parent organization.

The Minister of Education also proposes to enact a **Ministerial Order on teacher workload**, with an expiry date of August 31, 2016, to articulate how we will work together to frame workload expectations going forward.

The Order will:

- Require Alberta Education and school jurisdictions, guided by the findings of the internal reviews, to reduce the number of tasks outside the classroom they assign teachers.
- Direct superintendents and principals to work to balance the workload of teachers over the school year while meeting the needs of the school community.
- To ensure stability, maintain the “hard caps” on assignable work hours for those school divisions where they expired at the end of the last contract until other means of addressing workload issues are identified or the end of this agreement, whichever comes first.
- For jurisdictions without assignable hard caps, create an independent review mechanism for resolving teacher disputes related to workload. Where resolution cannot be reached with the principal, the superintendent will appoint an independent individual to investigate and report back to the teacher and superintendent, who will make a final decision.
- Ensure time is dedicated from currently allotted non-instructional days or those times when students are not in attendance to allow classroom teachers to collaborate with colleagues in a professional learning community and address goals of the teacher’s professional growth plan.
- Grant principals two paid personal leave days and vice-principals one paid personal leave day, in recognition of their unique responsibilities and workload.
- Require each school division to establish a Teacher Board Advisory Council, with membership from the school board and a teacher from each school to meet regularly and facilitate discussion on matters related to the teaching community.

For the term of the agreement, Government also proposes to create a **Tripartite Committee** to ensure senior leaders within the Government of Alberta, the Alberta School Boards Association and the Alberta Teachers’ Association work in partnership to help develop and nurture key initiatives for the education system that Albertans articulated as part of *Inspiring Education*.

Finally, we also agree to work with the Alberta School Boards Association and the Alberta Teachers’ Association to encourage **pilot projects** within individual school jurisdictions to implement aspects of *Inspiring Education*.

### **Where we disagree**

While Government agrees with many elements of the proposal presented by the Alberta Teachers’ Association, we continue to disagree on three critical factors.

#### ***Hard Caps on Hours Worked***

The first is the proposal to permanently expand implementation of hard caps on hours of work and assignable time to all Alberta schools. Government has expressed our willingness to compromise and accommodate the concerns of the Alberta Teachers’ Association and maintain those caps that already exist until a suitable replacement is identified.

However, based on the feedback of teachers in jurisdictions that already have hard caps on assignable time, we maintain that these caps are not an effective tool to resolve concerns about workload. Indeed, a recent study cited by the Alberta Teachers' Association concluded that teachers work an average of 55 hours a week. While insightful about the workload of teachers, the study also says much about the impact of current attempts to solve the challenge. The study in question is a sample of teachers who all have hard caps as part of their current contract. And despite these caps, workload remains an issue.

Caps do nothing to actually reduce the burden on teachers. Great teachers, as professionals, do not punch a clock. Educators have been calling on Government for years to move away from a factory-based education model that rewards students for minutes spent at a desk, toward a more flexible system that allows students to learn at any pace, in any place and in more relevant ways.

We also maintain that caps on assignable time would likely result in significant challenges for small rural schools. These areas with smaller student population densities and a limited pool of available staff could quickly find themselves in circumstances where introduction of such a policy will result in school closures and/or increased class size.

As an alternative to hard caps, the Government of Alberta proposes we address workload concerns by adding supports, investing more into classrooms and taking actions above so that we can have a meaningful impact on the education of students.

### ***Veto Clause***

Secondly, the Government of Alberta will not abdicate its responsibility to assure excellence in education. This is a sacred trust which requires us to develop legislation, regulations, policies and standards that are in the best interest of Alberta's children. While no specific changes are contemplated, we will not agree to freeze the profession in time like we did in 2007 or effectively give the ATA a veto while we work to evolve all other aspects of education.

Through *Inspiring Education*, Albertans have called on all partners in education to work to improve our education system. Teachers have called on Government to improve the supports available to them so they can concentrate on teaching. Parents expect our programs to evolve to ensure their children have access to the best educational opportunities we can give them. We need to work together toward innovation and transformation, rather than limit ourselves through inflexible terms in collective agreements.

The Alberta Teachers' Association proposal of a "comfort clause" would limit Government's ability to establish legislation, regulations or even policy to support teachers or to implement continuous improvements to the standards of practice in the classroom and assure that the standards are met.

If we agreed to make no changes, we would be tying teachers and students to a 20<sup>th</sup> century model of education. We would also risk losing our position as one of the best education systems in the world. We will, however, as part of this agreement, commit to work through the proposed Teacher Development and Practice Committee to give the ATA a strong presence and voice in any dialogue related to the teaching profession. We will also affirm that the Alberta Teachers' Association will be consulted on any potential changes related to the teaching profession.

***Local Bargaining/Dispute Resolution/Arbitration***

Government also disagrees with the exception proposed by the Alberta Teachers' Association for **local bargaining, dispute resolution and arbitration**. It is important that school boards be given flexibility to negotiate local issues not addressed by a tripartite agreement. We agree that boards should do so within the one per cent grant increase they have been promised. Where we disagree is the exception clause that would allow boards to go above that one per cent. This exception could result in significant increases in costs for school boards and taxpayers that would violate the spirit and intent of a tripartite agreement, which was mandated to give cost certainty with respect to compensation.

***In conclusion***

This proposal is based on months, indeed years, of ongoing discussion with both the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Alberta School Boards Association. I feel it represents a reasonable, sustainable path for us to work together to fulfil the vision of *Inspiring Education*. It provides certainty that workload issues will be addressed and that Alberta teachers will continue to be well paid. It provides certainty that teachers, as professionals, will have significant input into changes to our education system. Above all, it will allow all of us to put students first.

Again, I urge you to consider this proposal. I will also be sharing this with the Alberta School Boards Association, and will request that they consider it and share it as well. I believe it represents an approach that benefits us all – teachers, families, education stakeholders, communities and most importantly students.

Sincerely,

Jeff Johnson  
Minister  
MLA, Athabasca-Sturgeon-Redwater

Attachment

cc : Honourable Alison Redford, Q.C.  
Premier

Ms. Jacquie Hansen  
Alberta School Boards Association