

FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS

**What We Heard About
Teaching and Learning
Conditions in Alberta Schools**

Representative Submissions



The Alberta Teachers' Association

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Preface

Given the Government of Alberta's decision to establish an education commission, the Alberta Teachers' Association convened hearings across the province to collect current data about teaching and learning conditions in Alberta. Thousands of teachers, as well as others, were involved in preparing for the hearings, and submissions came from individual teachers, school staffs, subject specialist groups, school councils, and other education partners. Over 40 hearings were held in May and June 2002 and almost 1,200 submissions were received.

This document consists of 25 teacher submissions and serves as a sample of the submissions received. The report is a component of the Association's initial submission to Alberta's Commission on Learning.

Charles Hyman
Executive Secretary

2002 09

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I. Rural and Small Town

1. School Staff, Elementary School

We Teach

We teach. Sometimes twenty-five at a time, sometimes thirty or more, but still we teach. Sometimes we see them for a fleeting thirty minutes, sometimes an even faster ninety, but still we teach. In classrooms, in gyms, in labs, on playgrounds, on field trips, in hallways, in the way we look at them, in the way we speak to them, in the manner we carry ourselves and in the stories we tell, we teach.

We teach an ever widening curriculum to an ever broadening spectrum of students. Rapidly changing and highly technical programs of study find their way into our mailboxes on a frustratingly regular basis, one great idea replacing the next as the pendulum of educational fashion swings to and fro. Yet still, we teach.

One constant is the child that shows up in our classroom everyday, some with higher anticipation than others, all with different abilities, needs and interests. No one is turned away. All find a desk, a tattered textbook that will be shared by the students of three other classes, and a teacher to work with them.

In this diverse group of students, sometimes outnumbering the minutes that the class lasts, we try to deliver the multitude of curricular requirements that each subject demands. Some students may read two, three or more years below their grade level, yet still we teach. We adapt, cajole, rewrite, reconfigure, repeat endlessly in an attempt to reach all, yet at the end of the day it sometimes feels like we have reached no one.

In their wheelchairs, with their shunts, feeding tubes, walkers and diapers they come into our classes and our hearts on a daily basis. Less identifiable our children that carry the internal bruising that verbal, emotional and sexual abuse cause. The child who has been abandoned by her parents and sent to live with an aunt and uncle. The children that are shuffled from one foster home to another in a series of failed attempts to find stability in their young lives. The children of the poor whose home consists of a series of slum motels and ill kept dwellings. Some arrive unclean, unfed, unprepared and uncared for. Others take on the role of parent to siblings because of parents that shirk their duty or out of necessity because a single parent has to work, and yet, we teach.

The teaching is the best part of the day. Once we are inside of our classrooms the job often becomes the release that we are looking for. Time accelerates, the lesson absorbs and when a concept clicks the end of the tunnel seems not so distant.

If teaching were all we did this would be the best job in the world. The reality is that our day is interrupted with a plethora of non teaching distractions. Most days start with the ritual of collecting student money, whether it be school fees, milk money, hot dog sales money, chocolate almond money, there never seems to be a shortage of fund raising money to collect.

Close on the heels of the money roundup comes the paper blizzard. FOIP forms, registration forms, permission forms, IPP forms, consent forms all blend together on your desktop as the deadlines that they were to be in by is pushed one day further ahead.

A trip to your mailbox reveals another evaluation form that you are being asked to complete. Systems evaluations, administrative evaluations, technology evaluations, staff wellness evaluations. PD evaluations appear ad infinitum. The initial response is to file them in the garbage yet one knows that the familiar mantra of "...everyone had a chance to express their views" will be used if you complain about an outcome that you didn't fill out an evaluation form for, so you dutifully sit down and spend another recess completing it.

Every fall the IPP blitz takes place. Teachers are required to develop individual progress plans for students, many of whom would have been enrolled in special education programs with a certified special ed. teacher in the years before integration occurred. Classes can sometimes have as many as fifteen students that are on IPP's. What is driving this form filling frenzy?

Funding from a government that is intent on letting those most vulnerable fall through the cracks. At the very least, teachers hope to use IPP's as a method of leveling the playing field for students that are so far behind grade level that they will be allowed to use scribes, readers or calculators and then comes that other infamous season. Provincial Achievement Testing. The forms are filled, meetings are set up with parents, testing is arranged that often takes such a long time due to the backlog of students the one or two regional psychologists have, that it is mid term or later before the testing actually takes place.

My colleagues and I were never trained in special education, yet the onus has been put on us to develop individual programs for students with special needs that would be best handled by teachers trained specifically in this area. In its never ending attempt to reduce spending in education, the government has downloaded this responsibility to teachers that lack the training to deal with this daunting task. The ultimate result is a mediocre attempt at being all things to all students. Like so many other things to do with education today the end product looks much better on paper than it actually functions in reality.

Despite all our efforts to categorize and designate special needs students, there is little or nothing that we can do to get the necessary funding for students that are in need of an IPP that show up on our doorstep after the cutoff day of Sept. 30. These students are showing up more frequently as family breakups occur more regularly. Many students of the single parent, transient family bring a great deal of behavioral baggage to their new school and we are left once again trying to figure out how to deal with this child's special needs, except this time there is no funding for a teaching assistant.

In our school over the past ten years we have become experts at doing more with less. Like a family that gives a bright and smiling visage to the outside world, yet seethes behind closed

doors we give the impression that everything is status quo. The beds are neatly made, but there are no sheets on them.

Due to declining enrolment, a critical factor when funding is done on a per student basis, and reductions in government funding, we have seen numerous programs reduced or eliminated all together on a yearly basis. Music and phys. ed. specialists have been reduced, counseling time has been abbreviated, speech therapy has been eliminated, and resource rooms have been shut down, all in an attempt to balance the budget.

School based budgeting has forced school administrators to become accountants first and educators second. The almighty dollar reigns supreme with student needs taking a very hard back seat to the bottom line.

Provincial achievement tests have cast a very long dark shadow over the staff and students of our school. Despite the claim that a schools educational worth or a teachers' effectiveness is not based on PAT results many teachers feel threatened by conclusions that may be drawn as a result of test scores.

Published documents such as the Fraser Institute's report on school rankings based on standardized government tests results, further cement the worth of these tests in the public's eye. As a result some teachers now spend an inordinate amount of time on preparation for PAT's by drilling students endlessly on test bank questions, old achievement tests and a variety of test simulations. Gone are the days when teacher creativity and spontaneity could be used to add variety and significance in the classroom, for fear of using up valuable class time that is earmarked for test practice. Teaching to the test has become a sad reality in many Grade 3, 6, 9 and 12 classrooms.

In my three social studies classes of 32 students each, I have a diverse group of children, parents and families. I teach the son of two doctors that are looking forward to a professional future for their son. They have much different expectations for their son than the single mother of another student in my class. To her, school is a place to send your kids so they are supervised while she is at work. Meanwhile her daughter desperately seeks attention from me or any other adult in the building in an attempt to confirm her existence.

I teach another angry young lady that has recently moved to our town. She arrived on an aunts doorstep because her parents moved to another province and didn't care to take her with them. She arrived with a very "accumulated" cum file. A wide variety of behavioral problems, openly aggressive and hostile to students and teachers alike. In the time that she has been here I have seen glimpses of a bright eager, inquisitive child peeking through the mask of fury that she hides behind. She's not a bad kid when you talk to her one to one, just hurt and angry with the way life has treated her. With the right kind of care and attention she could flourish emotionally and academically.

She unfortunately is one of 32 and is intermingled with 31 others that have the right to my attention. I hope that she finds someone to provide for her needs because everyone around here is too damn busy filling forms, planning field trips, coaching teams, sending letters home, collecting money, preparing for PAT's, justifying your programs existence, worrying about your

tenure in a shrinking job market, requesting parents to come to p/t/s conferences, trying to figure out the latest curriculum changes, trying to figure out where you are going to find the time to teach the latest curriculum changes, going on bottle drives, preparing report cards, filling out evaluations for central office, administration, teaching assistants, creating or signing off IPP's, tabulating contest results, refereeing intramurals, supervising, planning lessons and trying to have a life with our own families before they fall victim to neglect.

We teach, but it's getting harder.

So what to do?

Where do we begin to get the system up and running so that the needs and expectations of children, teachers, parents, administrators, superintendents, school boards and the government can be met?

Teachers feel that the demands of the curriculum have become such that the task of teaching all of this material has become next to impossible. Amendments to the program of studies seem to occur too frequently. With each change comes new texts, inservicing, and the scramble to try to implement. Often resources lag behind the implementation of new curriculum leaving teachers to scramble for resource material. This is a particular problem in French immersion programs where French language texts, equivalent to English texts used in the school sometimes are never published.

To compensate for this explosion in curriculum teachers feel that there needs to be a more concerted and orderly process for keeping teachers current and professionally developed. The current process is too hit and miss to actually keep teachers abreast of the latest in teaching techniques, curriculum and instruction.

Too often teachers are being asked to attend professional development activities on their summer break, after school hours or on weekends. Although the attendance at these activities is voluntary there is an underlying expectation that people attend. New teachers are particularly vulnerable to this subtle intimidation and often fall prey to it under the guise that it their professional responsibility to attend such in-service. It is definitely one's responsibility to remain current, but not without compensation if you are attending on your own time.

Funding is obviously a huge concern. Our staff would like to see a fundamental change in the government's approach to funding education. We have been saddled with a government that continually undervalues education. The familiar hue and cry from the government that there is no more money for education can be quickly resolved by a government that places a higher priority on learning. A redistribution of funds so that more money goes toward education and less to tax breaks for big business or to paying down provincial debt would remedy many of the problems we currently struggle with.

It is felt that integration of special needs students requires an abundant number of teaching assistants that have been well trained in meeting the needs of the children that are their charges. Currently there are too many teaching assistants that have not received the necessary training to deal with the students they are responsible for.

Several staff members felt that the needs of special needs students takes precedent over so called average students. Many felt that the ordinary student that doesn't have special needs is being allowed to fall through the cracks while the teacher has to focus too much time and energy on the special needs student. Providing better trained TA's could help ease this problem.

A suggestion was also made that beginning teacher's salaries be increased in an attempt to try to attract more people into the teaching profession. The low starting wages and the "teacher bashing" that the current provincial government relishes taking part in has sullied the profession in the eyes of many young potential teachers. By making the job more financially appealing more people may consider teaching as a career.

The opinion was also expressed that the government should not be using public taxes to help partially fund private schools in Alberta. As money is being drained away from the public system to assist in funding of private schools a two-tiered system where the families that can't afford private tuition fees are being left in the public system, while their wealthier peers go to private schools will lead to public schools being the refuge of the economically challenged family. Needless to say there is a direct link between socio-economic background and academic success.

The recent withdrawal of voluntary services has brought to light a serious misunderstanding between teachers, the public and the school board. There appears to be the misconception amongst the public and the board that teachers are supposed to work 24 hours a day for the 200 teaching days a year without any additional compensation.

2. School Staff, Elementary School

Pupil Teacher Ratio

The teaching staff at our elementary school brainstormed, discussed, and put in order of importance five major learning conditions that we feel are a concern for us. First, the pupil-teacher ratio is a learning condition of extreme importance to us. On paper our ratio appears satisfactory. However because of the way it is calculated, it is not a true picture of what is reality. Included in our formula are teachers who do not have homeroom classes (e.g. The principal and special education teachers). Because of such a skewed formula, we have a higher pupil-teacher ratio than appears on paper, especially at the primary level where we have class sizes of thirty-three and thirty-five in kindergarten, twenty-six and twenty-five in grade one, and twenty-seven and twenty-six in grade three. These numbers are far too high to reasonably expect quality teaching for these students. It is only due to the extreme dedication of our talented teachers that these students receive an adequate level of learning.

But at what cost? Our kindergarten teacher arrives at school before 7:30 am on many days and often does not depart until well after 7:00 pm on as many evenings. Many of our teachers return on weekends to prepare for their classes. This does not even begin to consider what is done in the evenings by our dedicated team.

This leads into our next concern – lack of preparation time for teachers. Our school affords each full-time teacher approximately one hour of preparation time per week with one other thirty minute period set aside to consult with the special education teacher.

Lack of Preparation Time

Compounding this pittance of preparation time are such factors as supervision and the expectation to do extra-curricular. Teachers at our school each do about seventy minutes of supervision per week. This number is reduced this year because we are on a compressed school week for the year, a program that will be continued next year only if parents decide that they liked it this year. We could be back supervising at least an extra twenty minutes each per week as we were prior to this year.

Although we do not do as much extra-curricular as high schools do, we still are involved in many such activities. For example, one of our grade six teachers has for years organized, planned and conducted a grade six trip to Edmonton. This three day trip is jammed packed with educational, fun activities. It requires many months of planning and fundraising, lots of parent volunteers, which also requires organization and direction, and a terrific commitment on the part of our teachers. When does he do all this – on his own time?

Special Programs

Our staff also identified the special education program as of great concern in our school. It has become quite administrative in nature. Our special education teacher coordinates our teaching assistants, is responsible for non-school-based programs such as the PUF (Per Unit Funding) program at daycare and play school, and tries to juggle academics around pull-outs such as students involved in physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and speech. In conjunction with this is the lack of support for academic problems listed as mild or moderate. Unless a student is aggressive there is no funding available for helping those students who are doing poorly academically. Such funding restrictions leave our teachers frustrated in their efforts to help those students. With more teachers or at the very least more teaching assistant time, to deliver more one-on-one help to those students who have been identified as academically weak but not necessarily aggressive or discipline problems, our teachers could better serve their students and fulfill their mandate of educating children in our care.

Along with more teachers for special needs students, our staff feels more counseling needs to be made available for students. More and more of our students are dealing with home situations and other conditions which have rendered academics secondary. Unless these students receive assistance in dealing with their concerns (divorce, parents fighting, abuse) they are unable to focus and maximize their learning. The number of students who are from broken homes, single-parent homes, blended families, and abusive homes is increasing.

Resources

A fourth issue for our staff is the lack of textbooks and materials with which to work! We often supplement the meager resources supplied by our school district from our own wallet. This is highly unsatisfactory as teachers do not have the financial wherewithal to replace out-dated, worn-out texts or other more costly items. Nor should teachers be expected to.

There also seems to be a discrepancy regarding funding for materials. Northern schools lack many of the resources to which more highly populated areas have access. One of our teachers was at a school in central Alberta on a sporting event. She requested and got a tour of the school. Where we have one or two older computers per classroom as well as a computer lab of about thirty computers, this school had laptops. The only laptops in our school are those purchased by teachers themselves.

Facilities

Finally, we are working in facilities that, although renovated recently, are inadequate. We have nowhere for special services to meet with students. When the health nurse, dental techs, physiotherapists, or occupational therapists come to our school we are scrambling to find a space for them to set up. The ventilation is very poor and we lack enough bathroom facilities to accommodate our students. We have 10 classes using one set of boys and girls washrooms and seven other classes directed to a second set. We do not have proper boot rooms at two of our entrances. It was only after renovations that one of these entrances even got a boot room – a very small boot room. The hallways are too narrow and are made even more so by the addition of lockers particularly in the portable wing. Some of the classrooms have the lockers in their classroom which diminishes areas already too small for teaching. Even our playground space is inadequate.

3. Teacher, Elementary School

I believe with all my heart that public education is absolutely the best way to educate our children. I love teaching and I love my students. I love working with my colleagues and I love learning new methods of educating children. However, increasingly over the past years, teaching and education have changed and my job has become increasingly stressful as well. I would like to highlight some of the problems I have had to deal with over the past years.

Over the years our curriculum has changed to reflect the needs of our society and while I have enjoyed learning new curriculum and methodology, our curriculum is so packed, it is hard to get through it in one year. It seems that when a curriculum is reviewed, more is added and nothing is taken away. If you teach Grade three, six, nine or twelve, you are always under pressure, concerned that you are on schedule and there is no time left to review concepts anymore. You have to hope that the student will understand the concept next year, if it's not

understood this year. When new textbooks are required, no money is forthcoming from the government to help buy the texts. It's important that students have their own texts for two reasons: 1) they are able to read and follow along and 2) they are responsible for taking care of that text. As it is now, my students either have to share texts, which means at the end of the year I usually am unable to locate some of them or my students don't have the texts because we couldn't afford them in the budget.

One of the new parts of our curriculum has been the introduction of information technology into all our subjects. I personally love technology and find it very helpful in my home. My students love to work on computers and they are an excellent tool to enhance the curriculum. However, funding once again, was not enough to buy enough computers and although we get old computers from the government supply, they are old and break down so frequently that the time spent on them is very questionable. Teachers are very worried about how to implement technology outcomes without the hardware.

Throughout my twenty-one years as a teacher, I have taught most of the grades from Grade One to Grade Twelve and I've taught children with many different needs but as I continue to teach, the needs of the children have expanded and there has not been adequate assistance for teachers to cope with these needs. We now need to prepare individualized programs for these children and make sure the programs are followed throughout the year. No extra time is given to prepare these programs and no extra time is given to meet with the parents to go over the programs. Our school hired teacher assistants to help the teachers with these children but don't forget, the teachers then had to plan for the teacher assistant too. Now we are losing most of our teaching assistants and we will still have children with special needs in large classes. How are we going to help them? I don't have the answer to that. I do know that teachers will be dreaming of the problems, grinding their teeth with frustration because they are being left hanging.

Our school has about six hundred students and I love to teach there but our facility needs improvements. We still have a fair number of portables and while portables are a good idea for a year or two, these portables are old and we would love to be able to teach in a permanent structure. What about money for desks, chairs, paper towels, gym equipment, photocopier? This all comes out of our school budget and we don't have enough money to replace many of these items, especially our aging photocopier. I don't know how we're going to cope when it finally dies.

As our society changes it has become apparent that rudeness and violence has become much more acceptable and although it would be nice to have a class of 24 children who all learn at the same rate and all have the same level of parental help at home, we know that is not going to happen. I started out with a class of 31 students this year and it went up to 34 students before finally at Spring Break, another class was created, leaving me with 25 students. I had thought I could handle the 34 students and I guess I could have finished the year, but the teaching load was incredibly tough and the afternoons were pretty much crowd control. That was not a quality classroom. Having this happen in one year was a good lesson for me – more students mean less time spent working in small groups, less room in the classroom – our rooms were not built to house that many students and the more students you have, the more

arguments you will have. I knew all this but with my experience this year, it was reinforced. A student who heaved a chair across a room was an event in my class this winter. Our staff took a non-violent crisis intervention course this year. Angry children and children with attention deficit do not receive special funding, however, teachers are still expected to teach these children, without help. And it's not just the students that may need anger management. Parents have been told what they should expect from a school and goodness, some expect it immediately! They also assume the school is going to do all the work – that their support is not needed. For the most part, my parents have been very supportive of what I do in the classroom and many wonder how I do it but the occasional parent who screams and yells makes the job stressful.

I was asked by a doctor lately what I had been doing during the day and I said, 'just teaching' and he smiled – 'just teaching is very stressful' and although I accept that this is a stressful job I do get upset when I hear that our education system is doing very well – I know it could be so much better.

4. Teacher, K-6 School

I love teaching kids but this is my last year – my letter of resignation went to our central office last week. This was not an easy decision to make. I had really planned on teaching for three or four more years. I am too young to access retirement benefits and have some concerns about how we will manage without my salary — small town Alberta does not have much to offer in the way of a job, especially to someone in their mid fifties.

There are a number of factors that led me to this point — almost all related to classroom conditions which have reached a crisis situation. Today's classrooms are a far cry from five years ago, let alone ten or more years. The severity and sheer number of special needs students in a typical classroom make it impossible to meet their needs. Staff – teacher and support staff – do not have adequate training, resources or support to do a proper job. Some questions to consider:

- Why should schools have to build padded rooms for students whose behavior require this type of facility?
- Why should staff have to go home with bite marks and bruises and wearing arm braces because they are dealing with students whose behavior is so violent that they need restraint?
- Why are we tube feeding and giving daily physical therapy and creating separate rooms with cots in crowded schools for students whose needs would be better met in a medical facility with some educational programming, rather than the other way around?

Given the present level of funding, the needs of the severe disability students cannot be met without taking from the other parts of the instructional budget and/or devoting so much teacher time and energy to these students that the entire classroom program suffers. As one of my colleagues so aptly put it, "You end up teaching to the lowest common denominator". I feel

that this holds true for the curriculum and the classroom management aspects. Examples of this are common – to name a couple:

- A primary classroom of twenty-five students with three teacher aides. Although the needs are there, the teacher asked that no more teacher aide support be considered because he already felt like he was the ringmaster of a three-ring circus.
- A primary classroom of twenty-five students in another school, with twelve identified special needs students and a half-time teacher's aide.

Try and manage a classroom like this, with its curriculum demands, while keeping track of which students at any given time have gone for occupational therapy, speech therapy, counseling, and meetings with the Family School Liaison Officer or the mental health case worker. And try to find time to get those missing students caught up with the work they missed while gone from the classroom and meet with the psychologists and consultants who need to meet to discuss their findings of particular students. Oh yes, don't forget to find some lunch for a hungry student and a hat, mitts and snow pants for a student who came to school dressed in a skimpy jacket on a cold winter day. How can we honestly expect quality learning environments under these conditions?

Other concerns involve the whole area of needs outside the actual classroom – ones that greatly impact classroom conditions. There are so many that it is difficult to single out some. Following are some examples of what I mean.

Although there are many supportive families, there are too many families who are not adequately caring for their children in terms of physical and emotional development. A student with these stresses is not able to learn at the same level or pace of his/her peers. Just today a parent with a court order removed a student from my class in the middle of the day – the child arrived in my class yesterday morning! This type of scenario is played out over and over in the lives of too many children and the school is left to try to help put these shattered lives back together. And, while I appreciate the support of outside agencies, the schools, and the school day, have become the arena where all these needs try to be met.

Another area is the ever changing curriculum – often not well thought out or planned for, often on the heels of a previous curriculum change. Things like mandating a new curriculum change to begin in September but the resources through Alberta Education (now Alberta Learning) were not available until the following February. High school teachers may have some similar thoughts on the recent changes to the math curriculum.

The recent emphasis on constant improvement of schools sounds good in theory, but is much harder to achieve in reality. Schools and jurisdictions which are doing an excellent job under current conditions are, nonetheless, expected to conceive of, and deliver, even better results. This puts much stress on the school community and needlessly builds up unrealistic expectations in parents and the general public.

I have always been an enthusiastic person and have put much into my teaching over the past thirty three years and continue to do so. In filling out a recent survey regarding the time I spend on teaching, preparation, marking and other duties related to my job, I was shocked that

the hours added up to over seventy-three hours a week – a far cry from the proverbial teachers’ hours of 8:00 to 3:00. No wonder I feel tired. I have been fortunate to work with great staffs that genuinely care about students. I suppose it is this caring that has been their downfall. Increasingly, these teachers and support staff have gone the extra mile and made up for the deficiencies in the education system. But there comes a time when it cannot be done anymore – and the time is here. The most disturbing thing about the past few months has been the loss of hope. I see it on the faces of my staff – and on other teachers as well. There’s a sense of futility, a sense of “What’s the use?” A sense of “can’t continue to do this anymore”. There is a sense of desperation and an overwhelming weariness. This is felt by seasoned teachers who feel trapped and see no alternative to “hanging in there”. Today two staff members stopped by to tell me how lucky I am to be getting out and two others were crying behind my closed door because they were having a particularly bad day. I personally know of four teachers from another jurisdiction who are in their first or second year but are leaving teaching at the end of this school year. Statistics bear this personal experience out as so many younger teachers are leaving the profession. Who will be teaching our children in the next five or ten years? How will we ever attract quality people to our profession?

Yes, this is my last year. I leave with many different feelings, most notably relief at escaping a job that has become unbearable, but with feelings of guilt that I am one of the lucky ones who can.

5. Teacher, K-6 School

In the hope that we can improve delivery of educational services for the students of Alberta, let me share with you some of the statistics from my classroom. I am expected to provide a coordinated program that meets the individual requirements of my 25 grade two students; several of whom are especially needy (ie, 12 of 25 students have special education codes, five of these 12 coded students are very challenged, including codes 54, 59 and 42). The remaining seven are code 57’s. Three students whom I missed before the deadline are getting service although we received no money in our budget for them. Two other students require service from the occupational therapist and classroom programming considerations. There is no funding for these students. Two of the coded students are presently being assessed for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. Of my 25 students, 17 have been referred and coded for various needs.

The insufficient amount of help that I receive for these needy children is the result of underfunding in education. For the countless hours I’ve spent making referrals, meeting with consultants and parents, developing Individualized Program Plans (IPP), and trying to meet specific needs there is only meager support. The main provision is teacher assistant help for almost half of each day. (Note, the needs are there all day long!!!). As well, by the end of the year I will have received three days of substitute teacher relief for IPP work. Also, our division office operates an Early Literacy Initiative program whereby seven of my students will have had a reading teacher, one-on-one, for half an hour per day. A native liaison worker also checks

in with some of my students each day. The school counselor sees several of my students. (Note that until March 2002 a department from social services paid for half of the counselor's salary. Our school is now scraping pennies together to provide all of the salary for this much needed position.) These above mentioned services are provided for out of school budget.

The regional health authority provides support through the Student Health Initiative Program (SHIP). Our school gets blocks of time with onsite personnel in occupational therapy and speech language pathology. They are short staffed. Our need for funding approval requires that much of their service must be assessment based rather than emphasizing treatment. They are unable to meet all of the needs. Another SHIP initiative, a centre for fetal alcohol syndrome has also contracted services to our school.

My classroom is typical at our K-4 school. I believe our school division has schools with less needy populations as well as schools with needier populations. For the students and staff at schools like mine the question I ask is: "How do you deliver an adequate and coordinated program when so many needs are to be addressed?" I have so many people with whom to communicate in regard to these 17 students. At one time our school had a special education teacher who coordinated IPPs (no money for such a position now). In the 1980's when the government promoted integrated classrooms rather than segregated programs we were properly funded and supported for special needs students to be in the classroom. Today we are not properly supported; I work innumerable hours and am barely coping. I feel that the program I am delivering is only mediocre. Sometimes I'm angry; sometime I'm sad. (Noon hour meetings, after school meetings, classroom interruptions to share vital information with specialists. . . three 30 minute preps a week are just a blur in the big picture of what I have to do.) I must be more adequately supported with time if I am to deliver an adequate and coordinated program for these 25 students.

By the end of June, I will have been assigned 14 substitute teacher days for professional development, cooperative planning and IPP coverage. That is 14 days that I have to be away from my class, my needy class! As well I have to plan for the subs, more time! Of these 14 days, three of them are for cooperative planning. I need weekly chunks of time to meet with my team not six half days a year. That team includes all of the support people mentioned in this account and particularly my grade level cohort and teacher assistant. Too much teaming has to take place in the hallway, at recess, on supervision, on the run! I need time to effectively communicate and plan with my team.

When I began my teaching career there was more support, there was also a special education teacher, and at lunchtime I could eat and relax and return to my class recharged and ready! As well, I did not have to work bingo in hopes of getting a few books! I had \$200 a year for classroom supplies. I was paid mileage for workshop travel. No more! Conditions in the classroom have grossly deteriorated!!! Expectations of my time have increased but planning time is miniscule. Something must be done!

6. School Staff, Elementary School

Thank you for the opportunity to share our concerns about current teaching and learning conditions in our school. Our school is a small town school of close to 300 elementary students. We have children enrolled in kindergarten through grade 5. As a neighborhood school we have enjoyed fantastic support from our community. There are many people and things that are helping us to create a strong and positive learning environment for our children. There are also some things that are creating barriers for us as educators. We would like to discuss both the good things that are helping us and those that are barriers in the hopes that all those with a stake in the education of Alberta's children will join together to provide them with the best possible educational opportunities.

Our school has many things for which to be thankful. We have a talented and extremely dedicated educational team including students, parents, classroom teachers, support staff, classroom support teacher and administration. We also have access to outside agency support services. Working collaboratively, we have created a safe and caring school where motivation and morale is high. We regularly hold school climate audits and have developed a variety of ways to ensure our school climate is healthy and enhances student learning and success. Our team has ensured a well-managed site-based budget where resources are purchased according to established goals based on annual resource needs audits. Our school plans include goals with strategies to provide inservicing and planning for new curriculum and for all areas needing improvement or development. We measure and revise these goals to ensure we are achieving all that we set out to do as a school team. This has served us well and keeps us focused on our vision. We meet at behaviour consultation meetings to determine ways to help individual children make better behaviour choices. This supports the child as well as all of the staff to find ways to support and deal with the problems of children who routinely display inappropriate behavior in class and in the school. We have implemented many programs and interventions to help our students to grow academically and socially. There are many, many more ways we work together to help our children to become the best possible citizens with all doors open to them in their future. Our school has a high population of special needs students. The processes we have in place for development, implementation and review of individualized plans provides a great deal of support to our classroom teachers and to our special needs children and their family. It has also been our good fortune to have an involved and supportive parent school council. As said previously, as a school we are fortunate in many ways and we are thankful for that.

Having said this, however, there are some tremendous issues in education today that we hope can be addressed. They are barriers that are causing a great deal of stress for educators and impeding the success of our children. For easier reading, we have listed them in point form with brief explanations following each point. They are not placed in order of priority or significance.

- Professional development funds and money for substitute coverage provided for teachers and support staff is not enough for staff to stay up to date on new research, teaching methodologies or resources. Workshops have become so expensive teachers have to spend

much of their own money to remain current and to access professional development opportunities.

- Funding for children with mild-moderate special needs is not adequate. Children with moderate to severe needs are not receiving even close to the support they require. These children are included in the mild-moderate funding because they do not fit the criteria for severe funding and yet their needs are extreme. Students who are identified as having a severe learning disability receive no funding even though their needs are severe. A severe learning disability is a condition that a child will have to cope with for their entire life. With proper supports they can be helped and yet there is no funding that we can access to provide extra help for these children. Other conditions identified as severe do receive funding but children who are severely learning disabled receive no special needs funding.
- The time issues for teachers are tremendous. At times we are feeling completely overwhelmed. Above and beyond the fulltime job of planning and preparing for and implementing regular curriculum teachers have a plethora of other things to deal with. For every child on an IPP teachers must create or modify programs, monitor and revise, meet formally three times with parents and provide continuous and open communication with parents to ensure success. They coordinate and plan for teacher assistants and classroom support. They must also attend outside agency meetings with services such as, Speech, Social Services, medical professionals and others. Other time factors are extracurricular activity planning and supervising, after school and evening staff and planning meetings. One huge time commitment is when new curriculum comes out. There is no time provided to learn this curriculum, review new resources or plan for its implementation. In curriculum like Technology there is no time for teachers to become trained so that they have the necessary skills to teach the curriculum. They are trying to teach at the same time they are trying to learn the skills. Teachers must do this on their own time. Recess and extracurricular supervision and drop-in parent meetings sometimes make it impossible for teachers to even have a half hour lunch. There is also more and more paperwork from Alberta Learning or other agencies that teachers and principals are expected to complete.
- Teachers with family members who are sick or in serious accidents are given no time away from their duties without losing pay. Rarely in other professions are employees expected to pay for their replacement so that they can attend a child's surgery or help a family member who has been in a serious accident. To do so means loss of pay. This affects teacher morale greatly.
- Physical space within our school is very limited. We are becoming increasingly overcrowded. Rooms with no windows or natural light which were never intended as student classrooms must be used as classrooms. Closets, a boot room and the infirmary are being used as offices, conference and speech rooms. There are no other conference rooms and the principal's office is so small she cannot comfortably meet with parents and students in it. Our library has no office area for our library clerk. Our classrooms are small and have very little room for group activities, or manipulatives and learning centers. Another physical factor is lighting. The type of lighting in our school is often difficult for young children to read under. It casts shadows and makes it very hard especially for those with tracking and visual perception problems and many of our younger children experience these difficulties.
- Class sizes are growing bigger especially in the upper elementary. It is getting harder and harder to get funded for enough teacher time to keep Kindergarten to grade 2 with less than

23 students without increasing class sizes in the upper elementary. Our kindergarten regularly has 24-28 children in each class. Our upper elementary classes rarely have below 25 and are often closer to 30 children in each class. Combine that with 112 special needs students in our school and the multi-level skills of all of our children in every class and you can see how difficult it is becoming for our teachers.

- In our classrooms there are more and more students exhibiting behaviours which interfere with their and other students' learning. We also have increasingly more students who are suffering from emotional traumas, problems at home, involvement with social services and lack of proper nutrition and nurturing. They bring their unhappiness to school on a daily basis and our hearts go out to them as they struggle to learn and we struggle to help them and still teach the curriculum.
- Achievement tests and some of the ways they are being used create stress for teachers and schools. Achievement tests at the grade three levels are inappropriate. At the grade three level we would never give mass or cumulative exams. As educators we know that it is developmentally inappropriate to do so and yet Alberta Learning asks these little learners to write these exams every year. Many grade three children are extremely stressed by these exams. It seems the good that might come from these exams at this level is outweighed by their inappropriateness for children of this age.
- Many teachers are spending their own money to provide a variety of learning opportunities. As research clearly shows, there are a variety of learning styles and as teachers we are expected to teach to all of them. That means setting up a number of different types of learning activities. Many of them require extra resources. Teachers regularly spend their own money on science experiments, hands-on language activities, social studies cultural days, learning centers, bulletin board and wall displays, classroom libraries, student awards and incentives and so on. This financial drain is taking its toll on our teachers.
- Strong "basic" resources are difficult to find. Teachers are spending a tremendous amount of time searching out, reviewing and compiling appropriate resources to ensure they have a strong base for each curriculum covered as well as excellent supplementary resources to enhance their programs. The math curriculum at the elementary level is a prime example. It has been a tedious and expensive task searching out appropriate and strong resources to support the Western Protocol.
- Outside classroom services for many children is now imperative and yet difficult to receive. Speech therapy, for instance has been very limited for all grades and almost non-existent for grades over three and yet we are seeing more and more children requiring this intervention. Occupational and physical therapy are difficult to obtain for children over grade three. Counseling in school and through other agencies is not adequate. It is extremely frustrating for teachers to recognize just how important early intervention is, but not be able to facilitate access to the help a child requires.
- Not enough staffing time is allocated at the elementary level to provide specialist classes. We have extremely talented music, art and physical education teachers in our elementary school. We often can not have them share their talents across grades because we do not have the staff time to provide a specialized teacher for our children.
- It is increasingly difficult to ensure students are safe at school. We have regular drills to evacuate and "lock-down" our children. We have crisis teams and crisis intervention

protocols to follow. All of these help us to deal with relatively new and increasingly violent threats possible in our schools today. Still, it is a tremendous responsibility to keep our precious children safe when there are indicators that they are increasingly at risk.

- More and more emphasis is being placed on schools to provide value and character education. What has traditionally been seen as a family and/or church role has now become a school's role. This is just another indication that society is expecting more and more from teachers and schools. When there is an ill within society schools are asked to correct it through the educational system. This is not philosophically wrong. We believe education is the way to better futures for all. The problem is that all of these expectations are being dropped into the lap of education with few resources and a lack of training for those expected to do the educating.
- The need for team work in a school is imperative yet it is difficult to facilitate. Consultation and collaboration time as an educational team is mostly on a volunteer basis. Staff meetings are after school, curriculum meetings are after school, grade level meetings are before or after school and so on. Teachers have very little planning and consulting time available to them during the school day and yet the more sharing and collaboration teachers do as a team, the greater the positive impact on students and the whole school.

Our biggest recommendation is that representatives from Alberta Learning, the ATA provincial and local executives, school boards, and site-based teachers (which includes principals) work together to address the issues in education today. It must be a collaborative and open approach resulting in a common understanding of the existing problems and a commitment from all to address them. The relationship between the Alberta government and the ATA must become one of trust and goodwill. Our government must come to the realization that the concerns active ATA members have about our school systems are not self-serving or sensationalized. They are real and without government support they cannot be addressed. Our government must understand that the school systems that most of their representatives grew up in, are not the school systems of today. The concerns and issues are very different just as our society is very different. There has to be a recognition that unless we work together to solve the existing problems and do so immediately, the barriers we are experiencing today will become even more difficult to overcome. The result will be devastating to our children, our schools and our society.

7. Principal, Elementary School

I am writing this as principal of a small Kindergarten to Grade Four school. I have been the principal since 1990, and have seen a tremendous decrease in services that I've been able to offer the students. During the last seven years I have cut several "frills" positions including the following:

- half-time counselor
- half-time teacher/librarian
- .3 FTE French
- 2 x ½ day enrichment

-
- half-time resources
 - one Phys. Ed/Computer teacher
 - half-time Music teacher
 - administration time (was 1.5 now .6)

Each of the three schools in our town had three full-time maintenance people, now we have one.

My school population has dropped over the last five years because of the industry downturn, but, now I offer the basic classroom program. One year ago I had a deficit of \$43,000.00 and have clawed most of that back this year, through larger classes, and an overlapping of the library position being done by myself. I also teach 1½ days per week as well as doing three times the regular supervision.

Next year I am faced with further cuts. Class sizes will be as follows:

- Grade 1 – 24 and 23
- Grade 2 – 24 and 25
- Grade 3 – 28 and 28
- Grade 4 – 31 and 32

These are the numbers right now. I have kept on a full-time Resource Room Teacher. Prep time (80 minutes/week) is given to staff through Library and Phys. Ed (I teach Phys. Ed). I also have several special needs students that require full-time aides for these students (i.e. 6½ hrs/day) whereas the funding covers me for approximately 3½ to 4 hours/day. The Resource Room teacher also co-ordinates the IPPs with all staff which involves several parent/teacher meetings.

If I get further budget restrictions next year, class size will have to increase or the Resource Room will be the next to go.

8. Teacher, K-9 School

Ours is the story of a successful school. We meet the needs of our 48 rural students, and we meet them well. We know their names, their strengths, their weaknesses, their parents, their bus routes, their hobbies, and their pets. The relationships we've built with our students and their families ensure a safe and caring environment where students and staff are free to learn, to share, to give, and to laugh. Individualized instruction and differentiated learning are not pedagogical "buzz words". They are the reality, and our consistently above average scores on provincial achievement tests speaks to the strength of our programs.

From the youngest first grader to the oldest in Grade 9, all are involved in co- and extra-curricular activities. We run for Terry Fox, raise funds for the Students' Union, and participate

in any and all team sports that our small student population allows. Each year every student has the opportunity to go on a field trip and to shine in the Christmas Concert. We do it all, and a strong force of parent and community volunteers helps it happen.

Can this be the truth? I sound like an educator's utopia! "Reality check" time:

- 48 students and 4.2 teachers.
- falling enrolments leading to reduced funding.
- triple-graded classrooms where 3 or more levels of instruction are the norm. Grade 4 Science? Grade 6 Science? – same place, same time. Grade 7 Math? Grade 8 Math? Grade 9 Math?: we'll see you all in the fourth block!
- ½ time teachers with teaching assignments of 8 different courses. They do in ½ a day what teachers elsewhere consider a heavy load for a full day.
- 16 extra-curricular programs – four people to make them work.
- 45 supervision shifts – same 4 people.
- budgets that allow either the purchase of Grade 8 Science texts, or the continued employment of a teacher aide who has already been cut back to ten hours per week. It is either "There will be no Resource Room this year" or "Can we borrow your books?"
- Sick today? Too bad – but there are no subs.
- You want a PD Day to help you gain the skills you need to meet these challenges? Sorry, that can't be worked into this year's calendar.

But we deal with it. We make do. We sacrifice our evening, our weekends, time with our own families, but we make it work.

And we make it work well! We are safe and caring, have a low pupil/teacher ratio, parent support, strong programming with high success rates across the curriculum, and we provide meaningful, accessible and affordable co- and extra-curricular opportunities. We have what the rest of the province can only dream of. But it is still not enough. Now, in addition to the "annual cutting of the budget and reducing of the staff", we are facing impending school closure. Our vitality is not in question, but somewhere along the line it seems we have lost our viability.

What recommendations can we make to improve education in our school? As teachers, we must continue to adapt to the ever-changing constraints put upon us by our central office, school board, and provincial government. To do this, we need the continued and increased support of AISI projects like the Traveling Resource Room Teacher, Language Arts Specialist, and Technology Specialist. We need to build connections with other teachers in our own division who are facing the same challenges.

Our school division central office administrators and our school board must begin to see the living reality of their schools. Come look into the eyes of our six year olds who ride the bus 45 minutes each way. Be there to carry them into the school when they fall asleep on the way. Then tell them to ride an extra hour because their school has been closed due to lack of viability.

Our provincial government must change its funding framework. Uncap the sparsity grant. Give us the funds we need to do our job. We cannot operate on the same principles as a business because we are not a business. We are a school. We agree that there must be fiscal responsibility, but we cannot agree that limiting our schools, and therefore limiting our children, is a means that justifies the end. Community-minded, well-educated individuals build the road to a successful future. Our small school has in the past, is now, and could continue in the future, to provide children with the tools they need to construct the trail. We just need our hands to be united.

9. Principal, Hutterite Colony School

Teachers in Hutterite colony schools are presented with many different challenges. We work in one-room, multi-graded classrooms with not just two or three grade levels but quite often nine or ten. We have two or three and sometimes four different divisions of students. This is a tremendous amount of curricula to teach and plan for. Our students are all English as Second Language students. The expectation regarding student achievement is the same for colony children as it is for other students. They write the same provincial achievement tests and are evaluated using the same criteria as any other student in any other circumstance. We are expected to deliver programs following the same curriculum guidelines as other schools. We are expected to implement changes in our classrooms as other more traditional schools, (ie, early literacy). We must also keep up with changes in curriculum for all grades. Although all of this is happening, we explain and teach this curricula knowing some of the materials have no benefit for the Hutterite children as their culture does not permit them to see or understand the world the same as other children do (ie, their culture does not permit travel of any kind outside Alberta or Saskatchewan), so understanding planes, trains, buses etc. as travel methods into other countries is very difficult to imagine. Many of the children seldom leave the colony other than for medical appointments until they reach older ages. We deal with the English as a Second Language students from the perspective of knowing the children only speak English for the hours they are in school.

Many of us have students with special needs that we are expected to provide for. Added to this we are often asked to teach these multi-graded classrooms with a very high pupil teacher ratio. In our division half of all colony schools have more than 25 students.

We have administrative duties. We have secretarial duties. We have janitorial duties. We have supervision duties. We have no preparation time and no time away from our students. We are responsible for staffing our schools and providing our staff with guidance and support.

Quite often the physical environment is less than satisfactory. Our buildings are often poorly lit and ventilated. Some are very old and run down, less than sanitary, and poorly heated. Some don't even have proper bathroom facilities. We are not allowed to have visible materials such as posters, or pictures on our walls and usually no bulletin boards in our classrooms because the building also serves as the colony church. Most of our schools are really only one room and

when enrolments are large the crowding is significant. Even grouping students becomes a challenge in a small space. Classroom management becomes a challenge in such an environment.

Most of the time we are not allowed to use available technologies (computers, television, video, cassettes, and overhead projectors) because doing so goes against the wishes of our colonies. Most of our playgrounds are very poor, with little or no equipment, no fences and no field markings.

One of the colony schools, with the classroom also serving as the colonies church, has 10 pews bolted to the floor at the rear of the classroom limiting space to approximately 20 desks. The problem is there are 25 students in the school making the classroom so confined for movement that it makes teaching very, very difficult.

10. Teacher, 1-12 School

I have been a teacher since 1983. My experience has been largely in grade five, however, I have also taught junior high and substitute taught all grades. Over the years I have enjoyed my job immensely; working with children is always stimulating. It is great to learn and grow along with them. This part of my job continues to be satisfying.

I know many people say that children have changed, but I do not believe this is so. What has changed then? Certainly the demands that society places on these children. The curriculum in grade five, as in most grades, is huge. I cannot believe the incredible academic pressure we put on these young children. Unfortunately, our education system, within this framework of increasing demand, has been underfunded. It has made our jobs, as teachers, very difficult. I do not believe that we have received the instructional leadership and sound pedagogical planning to lead us through these changes. Education funding and planning should not be in response to fluctuating oil prices and changing government philosophy. Children, at home and at school, deserve a stable, reliable, safe and caring environment that meets their needs as growing and developing human beings. These needs are far more important than making sure that the budget is perfectly balanced each year.

We teachers are known for our ability to make do with very little. We save everything and are always on the look out for a good deal. In our grade five electricity unit in science we use scrap wire, film canisters, and lots of throw away items to build various electrical devices. This is great. In fact, it certainly directly demonstrates to students the practice of reusing. I say this to illustrate that students have not suffered greatly from supply, textbook and material under funding, because of the ingenuity of teachers. We do what we have to do to get the job done. Many times I dip into my own pocket. Books, stickers, science supplies, cooking supplies, (how do you turn in a bill for a half bag of potatoes, half a can of yeast, 2 oranges) and craft items are just a few of the things that I purchase for my room.

Teachers have certainly felt the crunch of funding cuts. Where else except in the education system would you be required to implement a new program (i.e math), that represents a complete paradigm shift, without proper in-servicing, support materials and instructional demonstration? What other profession would require their employees to develop computer expertise without giving them instruction? The irony in all of this is that most teachers have forged ahead without assistance and are doing an admirable job. By spending many out of school hours developing materials and working on their computer skills, teachers have continued to prevail. However this has certainly been at a cost.

I have personally witnessed colleagues weep with frustration and exhaustion. A number of my fellow staff members are on medication for their blood pressure. Many beginning teachers are so overwhelmed with all of the demands and expectations placed on them, they are just not able to cope. Beginning teachers are often mortified when they receive their first paycheck when they compare it to the mind-boggling number of hours they have worked. I can speak personally about burn out, exhaustion, sick days due to stress, medication to help me sleep at night, antacids (both prescription and non prescription) to relieve a stressed stomach, headaches (often 2-3 a week), family stress due to overwork, and a constant nagging feeling of inadequacy. No matter what I do, it is never enough and never good enough. There are students in my classroom that I could be a better teacher for, if there were more hours in the day, more days in the week, if I could clone myself or if I could just have fewer students.

This year my class has been around twenty-eight. I don't have any funding special needs students in my room. I do have five IPP students and a few that should probably be considered. They are pulled out for reading assistance and this has been very helpful. However these students struggle in all academic areas because of their reading ability.

A number of students require extra help in math. I have not seen math assistance in the school for the last ten years. If a child is fortunate enough to have a parent help them at home, this certainly makes my job easier. It is virtually impossible to get to every child during the math period. If you want to experience stress, try teaching multiplication and division to a class of twenty-eight ten year olds, most of whom require your individual assistance to understand what to do.

The feeling of never being or doing anything well enough is the constant companion of a teacher with a large class. Cram twenty-eight kids into a small classroom where you are trying to follow the curriculum, which requires all sorts of hands-on activities and group work and this is what most teachers experience on a daily basis. Included in that classroom may be a number of special needs students (let us not even discuss what the government's definition of a special needs student is) who may require modification and extra supervision to complete their assignments. Of course every modification is monitored and reported with a barrage of paperwork, all done in addition to planning and organizing the regular program. I sometimes think, and have said it before, that if you put twenty-eight chimpanzees in a cage the size of our classroom, the animal rights people would have a case for cruelty. We do it to our students every day.

I close with the following recommendations to the Alberta education system:

- Fund the public education system well enough to ensure that all children are given opportunity to succeed, no matter what their family, medical, or personal circumstances may be.
- Ensure a strong democracy in Alberta by providing a fully funded public education for every child.
- Support the educational system by encouraging excellent teachers to stay in the profession. Pay them good salaries and offer educational incentives to upgrade and continue training.
- Support links between social services, healthcare and schools. These groups can often work together to provide what is needed to assist a child in need.
- Take another look at the curriculum requirements. Are they always in the best interest of the children? Are they age appropriate and necessary?

11. Teacher, K-12 School

Hello, I am a teacher in a rural school in Alberta. I am writing this submission because I am very concerned about classroom conditions for students and teachers in this province. When I first started teaching over ten years ago, conditions, I feel were a lot better than they are today. Back then in the school I taught in there were no classes over thirty and there were no special needs students in any of my classes. I had an eighty minute preparation period everyday and I only had to do supervision in the cafeteria for one week of the school year for half an hour each day and it included a free lunch! I did not have to mark distance education and I did not have to modify any of my curricula. With this I was able to spend a lot of time helping students during class time and also outside of class. I was able to volunteer a lot more to do all kinds of extra curricular activities. Some teachers who did a lot of coaching were given extra preparation periods to help them cope with the added work.

This year in a six-day cycle I have five forty-minute preparation periods. I have to mark several courses by distance education, which is why I am given five preparation periods instead of four, whoopee! I supervise outside at lunch from twelve to twelve thirty every second day. I also have a special needs student in one of my classes for which I have to modify the curriculum. I teach Physics 20 and 30 in the same classroom at the same time because budget cutbacks forced us to combine those two classes if we were to continue to offer them. Some of my fellow elementary teachers have to teach combined grades as well. While I do not have over thirty students in my classes many of my colleagues in other schools in my jurisdiction do. They also have special needs students in those classes as well. No extra preparation time was given to me while I coached volleyball or did other extra curricular activities. As a result I am able to do less of them.

In shop classes the maximum recommended in a class by Alberta Learning is sixteen students. This is routinely ignored with many schools having many more than this in their shop classes. When this issue is brought up to the school board their response is often to threaten to close the

shop rather than make more and smaller classes. Because of my small budget I am unable to purchase large ticket items such as an air table for physics labs. My students must do the analysis from lab data that I give them because it is just too costly for our school. As a result students in the cities get this extra hands-on activities that my students do not. When I needed new microscopes for my class it took me six years to replace my old ones. This is because I had to buy two or three per year because we could not afford to buy them all at once. Computer software and hardware is also very expensive and as a result I have limited resources available in technology which bigger urban schools have. I routinely see my colleagues hauling atlases around from classroom to classroom because we only have one set of them.

There are many problems with our current educational system but I feel that the root cause of all these problems is the chronic underfunding of education by the provincial government. Not only is there underfunding, but I feel that rural schools are at a disadvantage because of the way the Alberta government funds schools. Because we have smaller numbers we get less money. With less money comes less resources. Is it fair that large urban centres have access to all the equipment and resources they need but we do not? The way the government funds schools needs to change to take into account small rural schools. More teachers are needed to improve classroom conditions and to give teachers the preparation time so that they can spend more quality time with their students and so that the quality of education provided in this province improves. More time for teachers means more time will be available to help students both inside and outside of class. Student achievement is directly correlated with the time the teacher can spend with individual students. How much quality one-on-one time can a teacher give to students when there are forty students in the classroom? Why in the richest province in Canada are there split classes and combined classes? All the while our government has multi-million dollar surpluses. We need to get our priorities right. Paying down the provincial debt is important but not at all costs. Not if it is costing our children the best education that they could possibly have.

12. School Staff, K-12 School

This report deals primarily with the concerns of the teachers in the school. It attempts to address the deterioration of the classroom environment over the last 10 years.

1. In 1992, our school had 17 teachers and 235 students. In 2002 we have 170 students and 9.5 teachers. That means that the loss of 65 students has cost us 7.5 teachers.
2. In 1992, we had no combined classes in the elementary grades. Ten years later, we have combined Grades 1&2, Grades 3&4 and Grades 5&6. The Grade 1 and 2 combination has 26 students, and the Grade 5&6 class has over 30 students.
3. In 1992, we did not need to cycle the core subjects in high school. Now, all of our Grade 11 and 12 sciences are cycled. We regularly have students starting Physics 30 and Math 20 the same semester.
4. In 1992, we taught English 30 and 33 as separate classes. We now combine both English 30/33 and Social 30/33.

5. In 1992, we were able to teach French to the Junior and Senior High. This has become a victim of budget cuts.
6. We used to offer Outdoor Ed., complete with a winter camping trip. Another victim of the budget cuts.
7. Ten years ago we had a full time special ed teacher, who had time for Junior and Senior High students. Now we have a special ed teacher who is scheduled to work .3 in the special ed field. Needless to say, the special ed teacher is already over-committed in the elementary area.
8. Ten years ago, we could afford a half-time counselor. Another victim of budget cuts has drastically reduced this time.
9. Ten years ago, we did not all dread the merry month of May. We didn't worry about being next to be axed. Now every May we worry about what program or teacher will be the next victim of the budget.
10. Ten years ago, we had enough teachers to offer a very good extra curricular program. Now we don't. We no longer can provide the same services.
11. Ten years ago, teachers were rarely asked to teach outside their areas of expertise. Now it is the norm. Most of our teachers are expected to teach courses for which they have little or no training. Teachers are also expected to teach out of their grade areas. For example, the Sr. High English teacher could leave an English 30 class, and walk down the hall to teach Gr 1&2 Health.
12. Ten years ago we had a teacher for business courses. We no longer do. It is expected that teachers will teach CTS programs to pick up the slack. Teachers are often teaching the course to themselves first, and hoping to stay a few days ahead of the students.
13. Ten years ago we had a full time librarian. Today, this has been cut by 20%.
14. We no longer have any aides or special ed. time for the Junior/Senior high students. If an aide is needed to read an exam to a Junior/Senior High student, the aide has to be "borrowed" from the elementary.
15. We have constantly increasing work loads, especially in the area of bureaucracy, and we just don't have the time for it.
16. Combining and cycling Junior High classes results in over-crowded classes, in excess of 30 students. We're starting to see students slip through the cracks. We can no longer do the job as well as we once could. Our students have become victims.
17. Family School Liaison Workers: This organization was intended to help, but in reality these people do not always understand the educational implications of the school setting. We need teachers trained in guidance to help our students.
18. Ten years ago we had a teacher for Math 31. Today our students do Math 31 by distance ed. The success rate has dropped significantly.

In spite of all these cuts, we are still proud of the students who graduate from our school. We continue to do the best we can, but the reality is obvious. We can no longer do as much as we were able to do only ten years ago.

13. Guidance Counselor, 7-12 School

I am a Guidance Counselor of a small rural high school. I also teach .6 and for the last 14 years have had no prep time. My day at school generally begins around 8:00 am and ends around 6:00 pm. Quite frequently the students and/or their problems accompany me home. The position as counselor has been an ever growing and encompassing position. New jobs or tasks are forever being added and the number of students I see on both a personal level or for career guidance is expanding greatly.

The Alberta government recognizes the need for adequate guidance within the schools but unfortunately the funding does not follow the recommendations put forth. If an individual school values the need for adequate guidance in their school then obviously the money needs to come from someplace and that usually means cutting somewhere else.

Over the years I have witnessed an overwhelming lack of support for a great number of students both from home and the system. It is very depressing how many students come to school hungry, dirty, emotionally and physically beat-up and in despair. They are then expected to dive right into their studies and achieve to their greatest potential. How do they even get out of bed in the morning? These are everyday common occurrences that I deal with and try to help both the students and teachers with. Certainly more funding is not going to solve all these students' problems but it would certainly allow me to have more time in order to see them without having to put them on hold while I run off to teach a class.

14. Principal, 7-12 School

A) Declining Rural Enrolment

It is clear that rural to urban migration is continuing at an increasing pace in Alberta. This trend will continue to pressure schools in the rural jurisdictions to find creative ways to offer and deliver programming to students. The present "One Size Fits All" provincial funding model basing school revenue on the enrolled number of students is not supplying the amount of money required for rural schools to meet continually increasing students' needs. My job is to meet the needs of my students; my board and provincial government's jobs are to make this possible. We are critically under-funded and our ability to provide quality learning opportunities is crumbling.

The present provincial funding model is a market model that assumes that educationally, supply and demand can be brought into balance. It naively assumes that students' demands will be curbed by what the school can financially afford to supply. Such is not the case. Provincial, student and parental demands for increased services (to be competitive in a globalized world) are continually escalating. Faced with declining enrolments, rural schools

spiral into an ever-deepening dilemma; trying to meet continually increasing demands with ever diminishing resources.

The reality of a rural setting is that there is no real “educational choice”. We are often the “only show in town”. This situation is compounded by:

- ***Rural schools have less control over their educational inputs.*** The divergent needs of ALL the students who arrive at the door in September must be served. We are forced to be all things to all people. There is no “economy of scale” allowing rural schools to reduce the per pupil cost of supplying learning opportunities. We must recognize and accept that rural education is a more costly part of the enterprise. But definitely not less worthy. Simply, rural schools do not have the built-in advantage of special district-wide student support programs or charter or magnet schools (e.g., behavior classes, gifted programs, IB or Advanced Placement). We also have very minimal (if any) access to divisional curriculum resource centers or system resource specialists and support. Again, we pay a premium to import these resources. Despite dedicated and resourceful staff we are not always able to provide adequate programming for students. Continual coping with less and less does not allow for quality programming. The frustration of rural administrators is, ***“Managing decline is a poor substitute for creating learning opportunities for students.”***
- ***When rural schools are held to the same educational outputs as urban schools*** and reduced student enrolment numbers generate less revenue for school operation, the demand for services actually increases not declines. Rural schools must find ways to offer full high school programming for students planning post-secondary studies, non-academic programming for students preparing for the world of work, inclusion programming for learning differences, and individualized programs for severely disabled special needs students. We must do this without the advantage of any system differentiation that is available in urban jurisdictions. Yet, we are still held accountable to the same provincial achievement and diploma examinations as urban schools. To do well in these accountability tests, rural schools must sacrifice many of the complimentary and enrichment opportunities that encourage and promote student excellence. Rural schools are simply forced to do more with less.

To overcome the inherent disadvantages of the rural context some form of compensation support is required. In a democracy it is incumbent upon us to plan and supply equity for all our students. Since rural students compete with urban and international students for jobs and post-secondary placements rural jurisdictions must be supplied the same learning opportunities as their urban cousins.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS: Rural to urban movement and funding equity

1. How will the provincial government establish and support schools that deliver equitable programming to ALL Alberta students?
2. How will we recognize the legitimacy of the rural educational context and commit sufficient resources to overcome geographic and demographic inequities?

B) Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Staff

Availability – In rural Alberta it is not uncommon for critical teaching vacancies to go unfilled. Especially in specialty areas of Math, Sciences, CTS, and Special Education it has become very difficult to recruit new teachers to replace retirements, or retain teachers who are drawn away to better opportunities in urban jurisdictions.

Issues that are influencing this trend are:

- **Competing demands for skill sets** from other sectors of the economy,
- **Overwhelming job scope of rural placements.** When a teacher has the opportunity to come to a rural school and use their specialized skills only for a minimum of the school day, and be forced to teach a myriad of unfamiliar courses outside of their area of specialty, the decision to decline the rural job offer becomes much easier to make.
- **Support for teachers** to refresh specialized skills and pedagogy is very difficult to supply in rural jurisdictions. Meager funds from declining enrolment budgets can usually be made available to attend conferences, but sabbaticals or ongoing support for pursuing advanced degrees or specialized training is not generally available.
- **Limited access to ancillary supports** – Substitute teachers with the ancillary supports that are required to meet the demands of the 21st century classroom are not readily available or accessible in the rural context. The intended advantage of integration of children services has not always created efficient partnerships. Constantly changing provincial mandates and funding leave schools with chronic shortages of support services. Speech Pathologists and Educational Psychologists have been impossible to attract to rural Alberta.
- **Teacher Supply** – The demographics of the teaching population in rural jurisdictions indicates that in the next few years the “boomers” will be retiring. Many of these teachers moved to our rural communities and have been the stable source of the local teaching force for a large part of their career. With the reluctance of young teachers to move to rural teaching placements the future of supplying teachers to rural classrooms seems dismal.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS: Recruitment and Retention of Qualified Staff

1. Will we compensate rural jurisdictions so they can successfully attract and retain highly qualified staff?
2. How will we meet the complex professional needs of 21st century rural teachers?

C) Rural Governance and Site-Based School Management

Rural boards require additional consideration when faced with rationalizing widely dispersed school systems. Downsizing and school closures are difficult decisions for any jurisdiction, but when faced with the rural complexities of increased student transportation the “educationally correct” decision is often deferred. Delaying the inevitable is counterproductive and works to the detriment of the students and the school system as a whole. Enhanced opportunities from amalgamation and consolidation of neighboring schools becomes fraught with small town politics rather than the legitimate mandate of the elected trustees of supplying the best learning

opportunities for students. Delivering services to students in such a politically paralyzed system causes teachers great frustration. Many teachers and administrators decide to leave rather than being sentenced to a career of forced mediocrity. Boards need direction and support from their provincial government in rationalizing their delivery systems.

The strength of site-based school management is that the true character of each school is recognized and cultivated. The current rural reality is that schools are forced to increasingly surrender any site-based autonomy and innovative independence as more and more funding is “pooled” or taken “off the top” to keep all schools (educationally viable or not) operational. Operating at the lowest common denominator becomes a jurisdictional norm. Site-based decisions simply deal with managing decline rather than educational innovation and leadership.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS: Rural Governance and Site-based Management

1. What guidelines or requirements will the provincial government supply to assist boards struggling with rationalizing their school system?
2. How do we ensure that educational problems are addressed rather than political ones?
3. What encouragement and incentives will be supplied to jurisdictions to enhance student learning needs?

D) Special Education

Without a doubt a significant pressure point in rural schools is the delivery of learning opportunities to students with learning differences.

Present **funding** of students with “severe special needs” is totally insufficient to support the required staffing for such a student’s program. Generally, for every severe coding at least an equal amount of additional funding must be required from the school’s general revenues to supply programing for students with severe special needs. This means that other student’s programing is reduced or eliminated. It is morally wrong to take away funding from other students for whom the funding was provided.

- **Special Education teachers** are extremely difficult to recruit and retain. When a good candidate is secured they often move on very quickly due to the overwhelming demands made of them in our schools.
- **Inclusion in the regular classroom** is increasingly difficult to achieve in rural schools. Today, it is not unusual for teachers to be assigned to a two-class split with the expectation that he/she will modify or accommodate for learning disabilities of students from each grade, as well as modify for and include severely handicapped students.
- **Timely and comprehensive support** for special education is not readily available to rural schools. It simply costs more to import specialized assessment services and supports than in a rural jurisdiction.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS: Special Education

1. When will special education funding reflect the true costs of program delivery?
2. When will the provincial government assume its responsibility to provide equity in specialized resources and support for the delivery of special education component of Alberta schooling?

Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI) – has allowed direct funding for enhancing student programs. Due to creative and innovative planning by teachers this opportunity has doubled as a professional development opportunity for staff and an enrichment activity for students. Given the opportunity and adequate funding the creative juices flow.

- **Technology system** – our computer technology system is a benefit for students and the administration of the jurisdiction. Funding support at \$44.00/student from Alberta Learning is totally unrealistic. Currently we are paying \$225.00/student.
- **Learning Resources Centre subsidy** – Implementation costs for new curriculum needs to be funded. This subsidy helps but there is much more support needed when new curriculum is implemented.
- **Long time dedicated staff** (community) – The basic viability of much of our extra-curricular programming can currently be attributed to the long-standing contributions from staff that have stayed and become community members. Their contributions that extend beyond the curriculum are often a result of building local community for their own children and their community in general.

Unhealthy loads

Efforts to maintain all the services and activities for students as well as assuming increased teaching load/assignments is having a very detrimental effect on the health of the teachers specifically, and the organizational health in general. Good people are simply being stretched too thin and it is taking a toll. Each year we increasingly over-spend our substitute teacher budget. Is this a sign of an occupational health problem?

15. Teacher, Outreach School

Our outreach school has tried to serve the needs of approximately 97 high school students since it opened its doors. It has served several significant needs that I feel are indicative of problems in public education. Below are some categories of reasons students are attending our outreach school and the percentage of students in each category.

- Emotional needs not met in the regular school system	23%
- Special Education students needing more one on one support	15%
- Students with severe behavioral problems	6%
- Single mothers who need a flexible timetable	5%
- Students upgrading or completing diploma requirements	26%
- Students who have had an opportunity to continue their education but have given up trying	<u>25%</u>
	100%

By working with these students one on one I have established trust with them and come to know their frustrations and challenges. Several themes are repeated over and over. Teachers with large class sizes and full teaching loads do not have time nor, in some cases, the skill with which to help these students. School counselor time at schools has been cut back to such an extent that they are often forced to manage by crisis.

The story repeated over and over for Special Education students is that not only does the teacher go too fast, but also they are too busy to help the student with questions they have. After a while these students give up and quit trying. My experience with these students is that you need to be patient and have the time to give them to succeed. Often they are capable of advanced courses but to do this they need significant help. Teachers in large classes cannot slow the pace down for these students nor can they give them significant amount of time for extra help.

I have had several students expelled from regular schools because of behavioral issues that have responded well to more individual attention. Again, this takes time and energy to come to know these students and support them. In large class sizes they get lost in the shuffle and use disruptive behaviors to get the attention they need. This has a cost not only for the student but also for the teacher. Continually dealing with behavioral issues is exhausting and reduces the learning component in a classroom.

Some students who are upgrading or completing post-secondary requirements have already tried to complete a course once but have failed. Often it is the result of excessive work demands put on teachers resulting in their not being able to provide the support these students need. Again, how can teachers provide support in large classes of students with varying learning rates and diverse needs such as emotional and special needs.

A final category concerns me. Approximately 24 out of the 97 students who have enrolled with me did not succeed despite being given a second chance. Although the school is a positive place with many supports being available, these students have developed a pattern of failure throughout their lives and were not able to overcome it. Many were in their late teen years and had lifestyles that did not support school success. What becomes of these students who have been failed most of their lives in the school system? I have first hand knowledge since I work with many of them and support them even though they are no longer in school. Some end up in jail because of crimes they commit. Others are on the streets getting into trouble and hopefully they will make some positive changes before it is too late. Some of the girls become pregnant and doomed to low paying jobs. I worry about their children and how they will make out. Some students seem to just go from low paying job to low paying job. They do not have much hope and often depression is evident. Will they become productive citizens or end up on welfare?

To me it is evident we must put more resources into the schools and increase the number of students who graduate and live satisfying lives. Or, we can continue to maintain large class sizes, reduce counseling and special education services, and continue to have unnecessarily high numbers of students who do not succeed in our schools!

This outreach school is one of 92 in the province that is making a significant difference in many students' lives. I have many examples of students who are succeeding and who have moved on in life towards becoming productive and happy. I hear rumors however, that there has been a moratorium put on all new outreach schools in this province and the funding for grade 10 students next year will be reduced! I do not understand how we would diminish this last chance for some students that we have already failed. More students will slip through the cracks than are already doing so if we continue to reduce education funding. We can pay a little now, or a lot later on.

II. Large Urban

16. Teacher, Elementary School

I have been in the teaching profession for over 25 years. Presently I am teaching grade one full time and I have a class enrolment of 25 students. I have one special needs student who is fully integrated within the classroom that has a full time aide. This year I have had seven children receive extra assistance through the early literacy program and one ESL student.

Throughout my years in education I have seen many changes that directly impact the classroom. The system, in my opinion, has been underfunded for a number of years. This chronic underfunding has created many changes that have directly impacted the classroom. I would like to highlight some of these changes and address the challenges and frustrations that I, as a classroom teacher have in meeting these changes on a day-to-day basis.

Classroom Size

In 1988 when I first started teaching grade one, I had 18 students in my grade one classroom. I had extra help from a teaching assistant for approximately one hour daily. Students that were identified as being at risk were taken out of the classroom in small groups and received extra assistance several times a week. A project aide was also available to assist with preparation work and photocopying. Students that required occupational and speech therapy were seen once a week by the appropriate therapist. Special needs students were not fully integrated within the classroom.

Over the past few years, however, I have averaged between 25 and 28 students in my grade one classroom. I usually have at least one special needs student fully integrated within my classroom accompanied by a teaching assistant. Students that are at risk in developing their reading skills are receiving extra help through the early literacy program but only for approximately 15 to 30 minutes per day for about three to four months of the year. They are

receiving no assistance for any problems in math. Occupational or speech therapy is irregular and students are not even being seen on a monthly basis. While preparation work and photocopying has increased greatly, this is now totally a classroom teacher responsibility.

These increasing numbers in my classroom, over the past years, have added a great deal of stress and frustration. I strongly believe in the importance of starting six year olds off with success. This is their first taste of formal schooling. This is the foundation that future years of schooling are built upon. But I am finding that this goal is more and more difficult to achieve. It is extremely frustrating to know that many of the tears in the first few months could be avoided by simply being able to spend more time with each child. Simple tasks such as tying shoe laces, finding their pencil, locating the correct page in the story that we are reading, become difficult and student anxiety increases simply because the numbers and demands are becoming more than one person, however well intentioned, can meet. Tasks such as individual assessment and instruction become an even greater challenge. Reading assessment, alone, can take anywhere from twenty minutes to half an hour per student. Multiply that by twenty-eight students and that translates into a lot of time and that is only one small portion of the language arts curriculum. That does not even take into account assessments in other subject areas such as math.

Classroom Makeup

The actual makeup of the classroom is another change that I would like to address. Underfunding in education has made schools look at restructuring their classes to stay within their budgets. Split or combined grade level classes are becoming much more commonplace. They, in themselves, are not necessarily detrimental to student success. Consistent split classes when combined with high classroom numbers and integrated special needs students can create many problem classes. For example we have had an instance within our school where one grade level has been split several ways. Children demonstrating independent work skills were placed in the two combined classes. Unfortunately this left very few independent workers to be placed in the other single grade classroom. The classroom became a very needy classroom and the number of children within that classroom still remained very high. As a result of this, both the teaching and learning environment were compromised.

Another factor that I feel impacts the makeup of my grade one classroom is the growing number of students entering grade one from kindergarten that are not yet ready to handle the academic demands of the grade one program. In past years these students would have been retained in kindergarten. Today, schools that are being pressured to stay within tighter budgets know that kindergarten students will only bring in half the funding that a grade one student will. The question arises, is this then part of the reason why these students are sent on? As well, parents now make their own decisions regarding retention. I have heard more than one parent say, "I would rather have my child repeat grade one than kindergarten and we as a family cannot afford the babysitting that half time kindergarten costs." As a result, sometimes the decision to retain a kindergarten student or send them to grade one is an economic decision.

It is becoming more difficult to get testing done on students that are struggling in grade one. Testing is expensive and the waiting list is long. Schools and other assessment institutions require assurances that these students are indeed two grade levels behind before they will invest the funds. Paperwork and documentation is excessive. The result is that students are often several grade levels behind before assessment is accessed, recommendations made and supports put into place. It is increasingly frustrating to witness problems with children compounding over time when, in fact, attention could have been given much earlier.

Special Needs Students

Over the past few years the pendulum in education has swung from total exclusion of special needs to total inclusion. Inclusion of these students has been both positive and negative.

Over the past years I have dealt with students with Downs Syndrome, Autism, Cerebral Palsy and Aspergers. I have received no formal training in dealing with students with these conditions. I have access to very little materials necessary for their programming. Yet, I am responsible for their program. I am given no extra time or education to help me better meet their needs. Special needs students that meet the government criteria are given a full time teaching assistant but the assistant, in most cases, has in fact less training than the classroom teacher. The learning assistant is there in the classroom for a good part of the day. However, there are also times when the teacher assistant is not in the classroom with the child. Therefore, the classroom teacher is expected to assist, educate, bathroom, etc this special needs child, as well as, be continually responsible for the 25–28 other children in their classroom.

One year I had a psychologist in my classroom while my special needs child's teaching assistant was not in the classroom. The psychologist noted that during a half hour period I had interacted with the special needs child 26 times but had not been able to interact even once with some of the other members of my classroom. Special needs students are special needs students all day long. This condition does not change just when we have the funding to provide the services they require. In fact, it can take away from the learning environment of other students within that classroom if appropriate supports are not in place. I have also had special needs students where proper washroom facilities and time out rooms, necessary for both their health and education, are unavailable because of money constraints.

Curriculum

The curriculum is constantly being changed to meet the needs of today's students. While these changes may be necessary, further research and dollars to support them must be provided to ensure they are successful. Recently our school adopted a new math program to meet the new curriculum. This new program requires many new resources, hours of extra photocopying and preparation of materials. No extra monies have been made available to assist with this curriculum change. In recent years technology was added to our curriculum. It has become a teacher responsibility and expense to update their skills and implement this new curriculum.

In addition, our school library and monies allocated for reading material within the classroom have, in fact, dwindled. In order to run our home reading program grade one students are using many books that I have purchased. The success of this program is dependent upon having this material. I find that more and more the success of my programs is dependent upon my personal resources.

Many schools are restructuring their control of basic supplies such as staples, tape, tacks, etc to stay within their budgets. At our school, we are required to requisition all of our supplies. This further adds to our paperwork and in fact, can make our job impossible to complete if on a busy day you forget to order staples and then return on the weekend to get some work done.

Teacher Time

Many of the changes within the system over the past years have increased teacher workload a great deal. I have many years of experience. I know the curriculum very well. I have expertise in working with children. Yet, I find my job is becoming increasingly more demanding of my time and my family's time. I can't even imagine what the demands must be like on new teachers entering the system. It is easy to see why so many teachers are leaving our profession, why sick leave and stress leave is increasing. The demands are ever increasing. I find I need to spend more and more hours of my day just meeting the day-to-day demands of my classrooms. I find it very difficult to find time to prepare new materials, and implement new ideas. Paperwork is continually increasing. I am spending hours after school or on weekends copying material that I need for my classroom the next day. I spend so much of my day collecting monies for hot lunch, pictures, fundraisers, field trips etc. and then I must fill in the appropriate forms before the money can be handed into the office. I come in on my weekends and wash down my table tops because 26 grade one students have eaten on them, glued and written on them all week. I find that where a service is no longer funded I, the classroom teacher, is looked upon as the replacement of that service. These challenges are sources of much teacher stress and this translates into greater teacher burn out. Ultimately, it all affects the learning environment of the child.

I feel that these are areas that need to be addressed in order to ensure continued success of our public education system. I would make the following recommendations:

- 1) Funding provided to the public education system must be increased.
- 2) Class sizes must be reduced.
- 3) Special needs students should be assessed on an individual basis as to whether integration with a regular classroom is best for the individual and the other students within that grade rather than a blanket policy of segregation or integration.
- 4) The resources needed for their successful implementation must accompany curriculum changes (ie, materials, teacher inservice, preparation time, etc).

In conclusion, while I feel that there are many areas within the education system that need to be addressed I feel that the public education system in Alberta is a success. Chronic underfunding has definitely threatened the very core of the system and it needs to be addressed

immediately. It is successful and has managed to be successful because of the dedicated people and successful programs within it. It would be foolish, however, to assume that this success is guaranteed unless the problems are addressed. Teachers cannot and should not be expected to continue to put in their personal time and money to maintain that success at the expense of their own personal health and family. The support of parents and other community members who give freely of their time to photocopy, listen to readers, count money, coach, cook, work with groups etc should continue to be encouraged and recognized for they make a huge difference to each child's educational success. Programs that are successful such as the Early Literacy Program and the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement program need to be continued and expanded to further meet student needs.

I truly believe in a public education system. I believe it works. I believe it has and will continue to make a difference to millions of Albertans. I love my profession and I believe there is no profession that makes a greater difference to people's lives than the teaching profession. Great teachers need to be further attracted and encouraged to stay within our system. Public education is truly worth fighting for and I believe it is a fight that no Albertan can afford to lose.

17. Teacher, Elementary School

I have been teaching for five and a half years. Four of these years have been in the public system. Currently I am teaching a grade 5/6 class in the English program of a dual track French Immersion School. There are 24 students in my class. Ten of those students have IPP's with a wide variety of learning needs: learning disabilities, behaviour, gifted and hyper activity. I also have a beginning and two moderate ESL students. Not only do I have the responsibility of teaching two grades, I have the responsibility of modifying the curriculum for all the diverse learning needs for the 10 coded kids and those who are not yet coded, yet still clearly require special assistance. I have had at least 5 students come and go throughout the year. Many of my students come from broken families with financial and emotional baggage. Although they are in grade 5 and 6 often students come to school without proper dress and insufficient lunches which leads to poor concentration and learning. This is a brief snapshot of my classroom.

As a teacher, I am dedicated to ensuring the best education possible for my students. There is an old saying, "if the messenger goes down, the message doesn't go out". Well, I am here to say that the messengers are going down. Excellent teachers are becoming so overwhelmed and frustrated that despite their love and devotion to students, they are succumbing to the three following pressures; an ever changing job description, limited resources and non co-operation from government.

Traditionally a teacher's job description is to teach students curriculum. I would like to list what I do as a teacher. I write and co-ordinate Individual Program Plans, coordinating with parents, the resource teacher, administration and the psychologists. Once written, the plans must be implemented in the classroom. This is my job too. Calling translators to speak to parents and understanding cultural differences in their approach. Having to call Social Services

and then giving support to that student and family. Teaching social skills, anti-bullying, etc. A nurse. A 'mother', making sure students have adequate clothing and food. Supporting new teachers who receive little support due to the overwhelming work load of administrators. Fund raising for necessary items such as library books, computers and safe play ground equipment. Paying for our own professional development. Paperwork for field trips. Paperwork for guest speakers. Filling in accident reports. Cleaning and organizing the school and classroom. Deciphering curriculum and keeping the paper work up to date. The list goes on. In all honesty it would be great if all I could do was teach.

There are simply not enough resources today for teachers in order for them to do their jobs. For example, the new ICT (Informational Communication Technology) curriculum was implemented in a very short time. There was limited training provided by the province to few teachers. The only other training opportunity available to teachers occurs when teachers pay with their own time and money. Another problem with this curriculum is there has been insufficient money to come to schools for buying adequate computers. Thanks to dedicated parents who have fundraised and received grants so that we have just about enough computers for our students to implement this program. There is also a concern for schools to be able to have the appropriate money to keep up to the ever changing demands of such a high tech program. Where will these funds come from next and at what cost? This type of expectation is simply not acceptable for the level of stress it gives teachers and quality of teaching to students.

Funding within schools is strained. I do not have any science textbooks and very limited resources. My Social Studies resources (both textbooks and library books) are out dated and few in number. Overall resources are limited and teachers are often stuck digging in their pockets or scrounging for much needed resources. Furthermore teachers are reprimanded for making too many photocopies, due to the high cost. Without adequate resources, this cannot be helped. Some teachers have even felt bullied into making photocopies at other locations in order to "cut-costs". This too is time consuming and adds to the ever larger burden of teachers who wish to provide quality education.

Teachers do not feel respected by the government. The lack of acknowledgment that there is a problem in our education system shows that teachers are not respected. To ensure quality learning there must be quality teachers. To ensure that quality teachers remain in the system they must feel respected, appreciated and provided with non threatening working environment.

Public education is the cornerstone of democracy. In order to maintain and develop a strong democratic government we need to ensure that all students are given a fair chance at becoming whatever they decide to become. Public education has never claimed to make money, however, if appropriate funding is allocated, it will save money in the long run.

I have some suggestions that will help recreate a world that will be doing the best for children. Re-examine classroom sizes, specifically in terms of the complexity of student learning needs. Provide more training and in-service support to teachers in resources and understanding of new curriculum. Implement mentoring programs to support beginning teachers. Provide more

programs for students with special needs. Allow teachers release time and support for specialized in-services. Adjust the funding formula so that it reflects the needs of the students. Allow administrators, librarians and resource teachers to be left out of the teacher/pupil ratio so that classroom size is not adversely affected. Provide more funding for infrastructure to improve air quality. There are many other factors to consider that will improve the working conditions of students and teachers.

I have briefly highlighted three main areas of concern. It is not difficult to see how teachers, even excellent dedicated teachers, can become overwhelmed by their everyday working conditions. Teaching is rewarding, there are many pay offs that money can not buy, however, there needs to be change. The teaching profession is seeing many teachers leaving and we must use our skills in listening and communicating with the government so that we can work out a solution to this ever worsening problem. I am willing to put in the time, are they?

18. Two Teachers, Elementary School

We are two grade 2/3 teachers in a high needs school. We teach 54 students in an open area. The make up of our class is as follows:

- 50% English as a Second Language
- 22% on Individual Program Plans (IPP), which is almost 1 in every 4 students.

Two of the students on IPPs have learning difficulties, 5 are learning and behaviour, and 5 are behaviour alone.

There are 6 other students who could potentially be on IPPs. Some of our students on IPPs waited more than one year after being referred to a psychologist for assessment, because the waiting list was too long.

An ESL assistant came to our room one hour per week (for the whole term) until two students arrived in our school with no knowledge of English. Now she comes for half an hour per week. The ESL assistant has three hours per day at our school. We have eight communities totaling over 350 students (half of the 350 being ESL).

Imagine yourself in our community, with one other adult and 54 seven or eight year olds, for five and a half hours each day. It's September. As you go through the first few days and weeks, you realize that at least 20% of them are reading 1-2 grade levels below their grade. There is no aide yet as a final count of the students hasn't been done, and no one knows for certain how many aides can be hired. Not only are we learning names of students, assessing their learning, behavioural, and emotional needs, handing out supplies, but also collecting fees, and emergency contact information. The task seems Herculean, but we manage somehow. The long awaited news that we are able to have an aide is like manna from heaven.

Students who are struggling in school face tough challenges, frequently because their parents struggled too. Many of our parents work at jobs that pay minimum wage. Some work at two jobs. This makes it difficult for them to provide support at home for their child's learning. In such cases, it becomes our job to provide the extra support in the classroom. However, inadequate support in terms of educational assistants and aides, and the significant number of students with diverse needs requiring support, makes this more difficult. Not only this, but students with severe behaviour needs take valuable teacher time away from the learning of other students. Often we feel guilty that we are not able to do all that we are capable of doing for our students. The ones that would benefit from enrichment don't always get it, as all our energies go toward making the other students proficient readers by the end of year 3, or in dealing with severe behaviours on a daily basis.

There is also little volunteer help when we go on field trips, so we cajole/bribe our spouses or other adults to accompany us, as many places, such as Fish Creek Park or Inglewood, insist on a 5 to 1 ratio. We are committed to providing a quality program to our students and so do whatever it takes.

Many of our students come to school hungry. We have a breakfast program that helps take care of this need.

The library is stocked with books that have turned yellow with age. The pages are so brittle they break if bent. Last year, the school council took the initiative to collect a thousand books for the millennium project. They held fundraisers, such as muffin days, to raise extra money for the school.

As if all this is not enough, the furniture is falling apart too. Metal chair backs are cracked. Screws holding the chairs together are coming loose. I got so tired of asking the facility operator to fix them for me that I got my own screwdriver. My students laugh when I reach for my "handy dandy" Robertson's to tighten chair backs!

We have math textbooks. But not all of the manipulative materials that should go along with them. For example, imagine learning to count money and making change without actually handling money! So I find myself photocopying money sheets which can be laminated. We also purchase books that will enhance the understanding of math concepts for our students, with our own money.

Early reading initiatives in ECS are a good thing. These programs help students come to grade school with better preparedness. Given a smaller class size in the early grades, adequate resources, and classroom support, we are convinced that we can make a huge difference for each of our students.

It is discouraging that people who are in charge of making important decisions that are crucial to the lives of students, have little time to visit classrooms. The last time a school trustee visited our school was in the autumn of 1997. We are upset when the Provincial Achievement Test results are used to portray teachers of high needs schools as being incompetent and somehow not doing enough. We invite anyone, sincerely interested in finding out what life in a special needs classroom is like, to come and live in our community for a day or more.

In conclusion, we would like to say that we agree with Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations, who said at the International Summit for Children's Rights in May, 2002, that adults are failing children everywhere. If we are to do a reasonably good job of preparing children for life and citizenship, we must give priority to their right to a quality education. We believe strongly that Governments **must** set aside their vested interests and allocate more money to ameliorate classroom conditions. This would put the "quality" back into public education.

19. Teacher, K-6 School

My intent is to describe the working conditions in my classroom and in my school community that I am forced to deal with on a daily basis. The conditions this year have made my job extremely difficult, challenging and exhausting. Changes need to be made in order to properly serve the students, parents and communities that are affected by Alberta's education system.

My classroom consists of 25 students in a French Immersion setting. During science, I have seven students that come to my room for instruction; therefore I teach 32 students science. We were not given enough desks, and the room becomes very crowded therefore I resort to teaching in the lunchroom for this subject. Learning a second language is a challenge for these young students and because of class sizes they are not being given the proper learning environment that they deserve.

Of these 25 students, I am dealing with two who have exceptional emotional/behavioral difficulties. I have developed IPPs for these two students. I spend much of my time during the evening and weekends in order to learn how to develop and implement these plans. I was not given any prep time, support or assistance while doing this. Once complete they had to be reviewed by administration and the parents needed to be called into meetings in order to agree to them. This was all done after regular school hours, my time! I have also been making daily anecdotal records on both of these children since September and am required to do so until the end of the school year. In one case there has been and continues to be several regular meetings and/or phone calls with Alberta Children's Hospital so that I may learn to deal with the cases.

Again, this is all done on my own personal time. It is also a daily struggle and a strain on me and the other children in the class, just to cope with this particular case. In April of this year, after seven months of dealing with this on my own I was finally granted one hour of assistance a day. Trust me when I say that this particular child needs much more than that. Furthermore, an aide from a class of 34 had to be pulled so that I may get this minimal assistance. Now two classes are suffering because of this lack of school support. I also have referred a third student to the instructional services department and will most likely need to develop a third IPP in my classroom. Dealing with these three cases takes at least one hour a day out of my time. Have you noticed that I have not yet done anything for my other 22 students!

My typical day begins at six-thirty am. Since our school board does not trust its teachers with having their own access to our place of work, I need to borrow the secretary's key on a daily

basis so that I may enter the school to plan for my day. I do not get prep time everyday. My prep-time consists of approximately 2½ hours every six days. This is not enough to allow me to prepare for English, French, Religion, Health, Art, Science, Social Studies and Math. How ironic is it that elementary teachers receive less prep time however have more subjects to prepare for? I rarely take fifteen minutes recess as I am working with students who need the extra help, phoning parents or photocopying worksheets for my students. (Many of which I prepare and translate myself, as adequate French resources are not available to us). Some resources are also so outdated that it is impossible to properly cover the objectives set out for that topic. My lunch break is also very minimal. If I take my break, I eat and relax for twenty minutes, then it is back to work with students, make more phone calls, (we must keep the line of communication open for the parents) or make more copies and get ready for the afternoon. Have we had a bathroom break yet? I also come to school almost every weekend in order to plan for the week ahead. This does not mean that I have prepared the week. That will be done during my early morning arrivals. Where and when does the evaluation take place?

Since the prep time I receive is not enough for its intended purpose, I take an average of one assignment home per evening to mark. Some assignments consume much more time. Therefore when I get home in the evening I eat supper then I sit down to do corrections for at least an hour. It is not difficult to realize that I do not yet have a family of my own. How could I?

Now let's talk about extra-curricular activities. I head a peer support group for my school. We organize activities for the school and help supervise the playground. Many of my lunches are spent working with the children for this group. It is also my duty to supervise two recesses every six days. I am also expected to prepare one religious celebration for the school, a graduation celebration for the grade six class, schools events such as Carnival, volunteer tea, sports day, French cultural festivals, evening parent-teacher interviews, etc. With what time do I do all this? My own of course.

It is also expected that teachers attend workshops throughout the year for professional development. These workshops occur after hours, during our personal, unpaid time. In case you are wondering how I ever found the time to write this, I am at school for the Parent-Council meeting that I must attend as the teacher representative. This means a fourteen hour day for me today. Will I be receiving my overtime cheque soon?

On the subject of money, teachers spend a lot of money out of their own pockets in order to improve their classrooms. We're told we don't have to yet part of our evaluation is based on the appearance of our rooms that means we need posters, borders, decorations, etc. I also spend money on stickers, certificates, prizes for speaking French, hooks, filing supplies, books, reproducible resources, etc. I do not get reimbursed for this, nor do I get any tax break for doing it. I spend an average of \$300 - \$400 per year.

Now what do I do if I am sick? This is definitely a challenge. If I do get a sub he/she is English, so I need to plan accordingly and my students do not get the language instruction they should. In order to get a sub I need to book weeks in advance. Can we plan on being sick? I have also spent many of my own preps teaching other classes because someone else in the school did not get a substitute. I don't get paid for that either.

I think it is clear to see that teaching conditions are not as pleasant as they may seem from the outside. Teachers dedicate their lives to this profession. I am only in my third year of teaching and am already discouraged by the lack of respect and standards that teacher's deal with. I also still have seven years to pay back \$30,000 that I needed to borrow from the government in order to get me this job. Many say that we deserve all this because we get summers off. I would be willing to punch a clock and receive overtime for my extra hours instead of summer. This will never happen because the 'powers that be' recognize the extra time we give to the system on a daily basis. I know many teachers, myself included, that work during the summer in order to meet our financial needs.

I sincerely hope that I have been successful in portraying my daily schedule to you. This was a refreshing activity as it has reminded me of just what it is that we are fighting for. The students that come back to visit, the ones who leave me thank you notes, the parents who appreciate me and the happy faces I see on my students are why I do this job. I certainly do not do this for the conditions set out for me by the government. Since it is a grade six topic may I remind you of the role of government, "an organization that works to meet the needs of its people". With the current teaching and classroom conditions there are many fundamental needs that are being forgotten.

20. School Staff, K-6 School

We appreciate this opportunity to provide input in this process. We very much believe in an adequately funded, strong public education system, and agree that raising awareness among politicians and the public will be a valuable step in restoring the funding and commitment necessary for schools to continue to do their valuable work.

We have concerns in a number of areas, including, curriculum, class size, integration of special needs children, resources (including technology), reporting, professional development, inequities, and demands on teachers and other school staff.

Curriculum

It is our experience that the demands of the curriculum are such that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to cover all of the objectives adequately. Teachers can not take the time to approach concepts in a variety of ways to address the needs of all learners because of the time pressures to move on to the next set of learning outcomes. There is no time available if students have difficulty. There is no extra time to reteach and review.

We believe that there should be a reduction in the number of units or themes in curricula we are expected to cover, and a reorganization of current curricular documents, to outline where objectives complement each other, and to remove objectives that are duplicated in more than one subject area. In addition, the wording of the objectives in some areas needs to be simpler,

and more specific. The Language Arts curriculum, in particular, in many parts, is very general and not particularly helpful when planning.

There is inadequate support when new curricula are introduced. A case in point is the Information and Communication Technology curriculum. The provincial government mandated this curriculum with very little, if anything, in the way of financial support to accompany it, so that schools could purchase the needed hardware, software, and in-service time to properly implement it.

Class Size

Our experiences confirm what research has demonstrated many times, class size affects student achievement. We know that the reality of class sizes of 29 or 30 that we have been living with in elementary schools does not allow us to meet the needs of students. It becomes impossible to check for comprehension and assist students with their work, so children can reach their full potential. When you combine large class sizes with the range of ability in any given “regular” group of students, and the unique needs of some special children, the outcome is a teaching role that becomes monumental.

Integration of Special Needs Students

The reality in today’s classroom is very different from one of even 10 or 20 years ago. There are many benefits to the mainstreaming or integration of special needs students that we, as educators, acknowledge. In our small school, within one class, we have an autistic child, a hearing impaired child, and a child with severe behavioral needs. In order for those children to succeed, they must have specialized, additional resources, both human and material. The current level of funding is not adequate to provide the teachers’ aides, resource room support, consulting services, and special equipment/materials needed to allow these integrated children to succeed and reach their full potential. We also know that the parents of the “regular” kids do not want their children’s education to suffer because of an inordinate amount of time the teacher may have to use to help that special child who really needs his/her own aide.

Technology/Resources

The bottom line is we don’t have everything we need to meet curricular objectives. When the provincial government says it provides adequate funding, that is not true. Gone are the days when we had Resource Room teachers, Counselors, Teacher Librarians, and real support staff time. These positions were not frills. The work of these professionals is what helped students learn and teachers teach. The progress that can be made when students get the one-on-one or small group assistance they need is remarkable. Once staffing and service costs are determined, we face such a shortage for supplies that we go into a deficit almost immediately. And we know the provincial government doesn’t like deficits and debt.

When one Social Studies textbook costs \$40, how are we to provide the needed resources? The resources in schools have been supplemented through help from our parent council, as well as those purchased by teachers. The inequities in such a situation are apparent.

Assessment/Evaluation/Reporting

Considerable time and energy is required to meet district and provincial requirements with regard to assessing, evaluating, and reporting student progress. No time is provided to teachers for most of these tasks. The bulk of this work must take place at the end of a long day or week during which the lessons and work for those large classes have had to be planned, prepared, and marked.

Our experience is that many teachers have to work on report cards at school during the evenings and on weekends because personal computers/programs are not compatible with district systems. And, again, money is not available to provide laptops that could be used by staff at home, to allow them to meet district/provincial mandates.

Professional Development

Professional Development opportunities for teachers are being limited by the few dollars that are available, and by district initiatives that dictate the areas in which schools are to be doing their in-servicing. There are costs for sessions, and costs for supply teachers that most schools find difficult to cover.

There are inequities within the district. While just a few years ago, some teachers at a district high school were flying to Arizona for IB sessions, schools like ours were having difficulty scraping together enough funds for each teacher to take one or two half-day or after school sessions within the district.

In addition, while private industry often provides many more professional development opportunities for staff, paid for and during their work days, teachers are using their own time and own money to attempt to keep up with the demands of the profession. They must also plan and prepare lessons for the substitute teacher who will cover for them while they are in sessions.

Inequities

A strong, educated, wealthy parent group, that is willing to do fundraisers (including casinos and bingos) will supplement the meager school budget so that resources that help meet the curricular objectives can be purchased. The size of the school and the nature of its population will also affect its allocation and its ability to provide the needed supplies and services. There should not be major inconsistencies among schools. "Have-not" neighborhoods should not in turn have "have-not" schools and children.

Demands

Of all the things that were said during the recent teachers' strike, Ralph Klein's comment about the number of hours a teacher works was the most erroneous and the most infuriating. The teachers in our school work a minimum of sixty hours a week. Teachers in half-time positions are working forty hours a week and a new teacher on staff reports she is working seventy to eighty hours a week. We challenge Ralph Klein, Lyle Oberg, or any other Conservative MLA to shadow us for a week, and observe the planning, preparation, marking, teaching, meeting, conferencing, report writing, club/sports leading, supervising, mentoring, comforting, crisis intervention, and decision making that goes with our job. Perhaps then, they could make comments about the work of teachers in a more informed and accurate manner.

All of the staff members in the school work very hard to contribute to the well-being of the children. We want to acknowledge the efforts of our administrative assistants, custodian, and teachers' aides who have had to pick-up the slack and do many things beyond their job descriptions to try and keep kids from falling between the cracks, and to support our efforts in the classroom.

21. Teacher, K-9 School

First, I would like to say that I love my classroom. It has lots of windows, is bright and sunny, has a sink and has lots of cupboards. That said my room and for that matter, the entire building needs several coats of paint and a thorough cleaning. Everything and I mean *everything* is covered with several years' worth of dust. As well, every spring when the snow melts on the roof, or if it rains heavily, the corner of my classroom floods. This is as a result of the lack of a proper downspout from the eavestrough. There is a very large bookcase in that area of the classroom that never gets moved. What lives under there as a result of this flooding is anybody's guess.

Student desks are inadequate, and, in fact, this year I have had two desks collapse on students because the welding failed. The tops of the desks are filled with holes, the insides are filthy and, in many cases, the sizes are totally inappropriate, making it difficult for students to sit properly, and therefore, work to their best ability.

I have a terrific desk chair, which is ergonomically correct. My desk, on the other-hand, has broken drawers and the arborite that covers them is chipped or missing entirely. My file cabinet has handles falling off and the files slide all over the inside. I've been asking for a bookcase to place behind my desk for my work materials for three years; now I'm using what I think might be an old stereo or VCR cabinet with doors taken off.

Class Make-up

2001-2002

This year I am blessed. I have only 22 students in my class. This means that I can actually work with them individually and in small groups, to provide extra help or enrichment. I am able to determine academic needs and act upon them quickly. Even with the integration of two other students for various subjects, one from the program for children with severe behavioral problems and one from the Pre-vocational Program, I feel that I am more capable of meeting individual needs.

Still, within this “dream” class I have two ESL students, one of whom comes from a single parent family, and one student for whom English is his first language, but who has never been formally educated in English before. There are two students who started the year reading more than two years below grade level, both of whom are now enrolled in reading intervention, one with a learning support teacher and one with me, when I can find the time. There is a child who has watched his mother being physically abused and who has been psychologically abused by his father, which makes it extremely difficult for him to trust anyone. He is in counseling with the school counselor. There is one student with severe attentional deficits who is so distracted during class that he gets very little work done and who requires constant reminders to focus and stay on task. He also requires a great deal of organizational help. His mother works nights and he has a younger, autistic brother at home. His father is alone with both boys in the evenings and as a result my student finds it as difficult, if not more difficult, to concentrate on work at home than at school. I keep him after school most days for 30 minutes, so that he is able to complete his assignments, as there is no other in-school support for him. I have one student who has re-integrated from the severe behaviour program, and two other students who impulsively call out, or make noise (humming, tapping, etc.) on a regular basis. And I have two students who require academic enrichment. The rest of my students are average achievers with a variety of wonderful personalities and talents.

The scariest thing about the challenges in this class is that I don't see them as at all abnormal. In fact, this kind of class has become what most teachers dream about. The four reasonably sized grade 4 classes from this school year will be crammed into three, grade 5 classes for next school year.

2000-2001

Last school year I had 26-27 students in my class. I don't think that I have ever had to work with such a challenging group, both in terms of academics and personalities. These kids, as a group, were very hard on each other and on me.

There were seven ESL students, five of whom had received education in our system, but were still below grade level in reading and writing. They received no learning support. One student was new to Canada from Korea, spoke no English and was extremely reluctant to try. She received two periods of assistance per week from the ESL teacher. That was the only additional support available. I had her read to other students and had students read to her. She had two

peer mentors who were extremely helpful in all subject areas. Another student was new to Canada from Germany. He had had some English language instruction, but still required assistance with his reading and writing. He also received two periods of assistance per week from the ESL teacher.

One student had severe behavioral problems, to the point where he was constantly distracting his classmates. There were several incidents where he presented a danger to himself and others. Needless to say, he was failing academically as well. In April he entered the severe behavior program full time.

I had four students who were reading more than two years below grade level. They were all entered into the reading intervention program with a learning support teacher. There was no writing or math support available.

Two of the boys in my class were extremely loud and disrespectful and were accused of bullying their classmates and other grade four students in school and on the playground. One of these was regularly “rescued” by his mother. This continued throughout the year.

I had one extremely gifted student, who had a very hard time relating to his peer group and was often ostracized by his classmates and bullied by the above mentioned boys.

I had another student who had been identified the previous year as needing enrichment.

I also had a deaf student with a full time assistant. The assistant did what she could to help with other students, but her job was to provide a modified program and ASL (sign language) interpretation for her student.

Last year’s experiences really had me questioning my ability as a teacher, and sometimes, as a human being. There were so many diverse needs, so many distractions and so many expectations that I truly believed that I was a failure because I could not deal with and meet all of them. And, in a sense, I was. I could not, under those conditions, work with students individually, without finding that chaos had erupted in some part of the classroom. I couldn’t even work with small groups as regularly as I would have liked. My ability to diagnose learning needs and implement individual programs was nearly non-existent. I was at a loss as to how to improve the classroom climate. I was totally disheartened.

We need environments where teachers can help all students to learn. This means small class sizes, adequate support services and physical environments that are conducive to teaching and learning.

22. Teacher, K-9 School

This year, my daughter began her BEd program and my daughter-in-law graduated and began teaching. This has provided many opportunities for reflection on the changes in teaching and learning since I began in 1973. I see more clearly than ever, the serious decline in services and support for teachers and students, a trend that astounds me as our province becomes richer and richer. I am highly disturbed by the obvious political leanings toward privatization of education. All Canadian young people deserve the right to a high quality education, and this is getting less and less likely. The results of schooling are not effectively measured until long after children leave school and we determine if they have successfully found jobs and are contributing to society. My fear is that the provincial government will continue to make short-sighted decisions which affect kids, and some 10 or 15 years later will find evidence of their failures in sky rocketing crime rates, underemployment, suicide and drug addiction, all of which are directly related to lack of education. I also fear that fewer young people will choose teaching, fewer will stay in the profession and more will leave early, resulting in a lack of qualified teachers in the years to come. We are already seeing significant evidence of this alarming trend.

Increased Expectations

Teachers are trained to teach. But so much more is expected. We have been required to gain technological expertise, without much support or training. Many of our technological requirements take much longer than they would on paper. Technological failure results in much frustration and upgrades take much money from school funds, which could be spent elsewhere. Paperwork has increased dramatically; more complex report cards and IPPs, more surveys, more forms, more messages. We are expected to take on parenting tasks, such as teaching manners, morals, respect and sex ed. We are often called on to provide counseling to students and parents, without proper training or time to do so. We liaise with police, social workers, psychologists, and physicians, without adequate knowledge or information. We dispense medication and monitor its effects. We order supplies, provide our own secretarial services, copy our own materials and often write our own curriculum materials. We have little support with difficult students who do not respond to typical discipline measures, and for whom there is often little support from home. We've taken on the roles of truancy officers, father confessors, social workers, educational psychologists, school nurses, and after-hours babysitters.

Our jobs are never ending. Holidays are time for preparation or marking. Preparation time during the day is only about one-third of that I enjoyed in my early career. Supervision responsibilities have also increased dramatically.

Reduced Funding

Government funding should cover the cost of public education, but it doesn't. We are required to assess some fees, and while we try to keep them down, they are still necessary to provide materials for the programs we offer. Students who must come to our school are required to pay

\$20 a month for transportation, even if they are close enough to walk to another school. We cannot even afford to provide field trips – today students must bear the full cost. The result is fewer and fewer field trips, even though we know that such experiences maximize learning for students with varied learning styles. Many students do not pay these fees, or bring adequate supplies, and we have to compensate. We spend our own money on supplies because they are needed, and when we are told not to do this, it makes our jobs harder. Or we use school funds to cover fees and transportation, thus limiting other expenditures. We spend thousands on new curricular materials, not because there is a pressing need to change, but because Alberta Learning makes arbitrary decisions that are expensive. The Junior High Science curriculum is a good example – in essence they have changed the grade some units are taught in, but the content is much the same. In September we have to buy a \$75 text for each student. This is a huge cost we cannot afford, but we can't rent or sell them to the students. I can only imagine how much tax money went to Alberta Learning employees who re-wrote the curriculum and previewed all the available texts. Another example is the technology requirement–Alberta Learning provides less money per student for computers than the maintenance actually costs.

Increase in Student Diversity

While I support integration of special needs students and students from other cultures, this can only be accomplished successfully if support is in place for students and teachers. However, there has been no support provided for teachers to give them time to accommodate for these differences, or to students who require supervision and remediation provided by teacher assistants. When I began teaching in a school almost twice as large as my present assignment, there were 3 or 4 kids from other cultures and no special needs students at all. Currently, our school is highly multicultural with about 80 special coded individualized programs for students but who have no support to do so. Most of my colleagues truly desire to give each child the best possible education, but we know, in reality that we simply do not have time or resources to do so, and that some needs must go unaddressed. We often go home discouraged because we cannot be all things to all students.

Support Services

Family support is badly eroded. Most parents are not available through the school day, and many are not willing to take responsibility for the behavior of their children. Homework is regularly incomplete, and parent communication books are more often unsigned than signed. Many, many children arrive without lunches, or exist on diets of junk food. Many are not properly dressed for the weather. Many are not prepared with adequate supplies, without which they cannot complete their schoolwork successfully. Parents often phone for parenting advice, rather than turn to their own families, friends, clergy or professionals. It has become, in many cases, more effective to NOT contact parents, which is so unfortunate. Teachers have been expected to fill the gaps in parenting–it takes time and effort away from curriculum to teach hygiene, morals, behavior, manners, and respect. The plentiful programs of character education and moral intelligence are only a few concrete examples we have that families are failing kids and schools are trying to meet those needs before learning can take place.

We also deal with many students who are suffering the ongoing effects of family breakdown. I have one girl who has been in tears almost daily for the last three weeks, and who has accomplished almost no work because her mind has been on the impending separation. I cannot leave my class unsupervised for any length of time to help her, and though I spend noon hour time with her as necessary, she spends much of her class time with her head on her desk, doing little if any work. Contact with home has provided no relief and there is not a willingness to seek counseling, so she pretty much has to deal with this on her own, and right now, it's too big for her to handle. How I wish we had a counselor available to help her. Parents often ask for parenting advice, and I am not trained to help them. In the old days, we had a full time counselor; today we have none. And yet, we have problems with bullying, violence, drugs, school phobia, students with mental illness, racism, ADHD. Parents are also less likely to provide support with homework, which is often incomplete, often with full knowledge and permission of parents.

In the past, we had free access to consultants who were available within a day or two; now we pay hourly plus travel time from the school budget, and have had to wait as long as 7 weeks for assistance. The cost is too high so we don't access these specialists until there is a critical problem. We have received students from other schools who should have been funded for special education, but because of the cost of assessment, they have not had the appropriate testing done and are therefore not placed in appropriate programs until the following year.

We used to be able to afford team teaching, and were actively encouraged to work together. There is no flexibility to provide extra teachers any more.

Where there were once regular visits from school nurses, and ready access to speech therapists, physiotherapists, and other specialists, we now have little or no access to these services. These positions were deleted under the premise that there was a duplication of services, and the health care system would provide it. The last time I checked, there was a waiting list of over 1½ years for speech therapy, for example.

When I began, there were more secretaries and support staff. Teachers did none of their own typing or copying. Today, we do it all ourselves. E-mails, which were intended to reduce the paperwork, have significantly increased it. Paperwork is overwhelming – we are drowning in forms and reports. Technology takes far more time for most tasks than pen and paper ever did.

Even custodial hours have been trimmed disastrously over the years. Our custodians simply do not have time to do the job that needs to be done. Our staff works very hard and has high standards, yet I regularly clean areas of my classroom that they do not have time to do. They can't even clean the blackboards every day. As well, maintenance has deteriorated as budgets have silently been eroded. I remember when all schools were painted on a rotating basis, approximately every 8 years. We can't afford to paint when necessary. We paint areas we must, due to vandalism, for example, but do not have the luxury of a well-painted building. It has been my experience that students take better care of a facility that looks good, but as conditions deteriorate they show less respect and care. Where there is little damage, it often multiplies rapidly. Health is also negatively affected, for instance, dust vs our large population of asthma and allergy sufferers.

Special Needs Students

Where aides were available for each special needs child, now there are few, if any to provide assistance.

While there are limited funds provided for special needs children, the cost of assessment for eligibility is often greater than the funds will bring in. As well, criteria for these kids have become more restrictive. As a result, there are many students who are considered “regular” who would have previously been coded for special education.

Excellent vocational programs have been cut over the years because of cost. These programs provided good apprenticeship programs, and sent many qualified tradespersons out into good jobs. It is not surprising that our drop out rate is significant, as so many students are falling through the cracks. I have even had high schools tell me they do not want or will not take special needs students who are in their area, even though, officially, all high schools are supposed to provide for their assigned kids.

Special education money is commonly being used to support general education services within the school. In our school, for example, we have 36 students in a district site, which brings in \$261,800, which is \$128,000 more than the equivalent number of regular students. We should have had 3 full time teachers and 3 full time aides, as well as considerable funds for supplies and services. In reality, we have 1.9 teachers and 1.5 aides. We have not been allowed to spend any money. We were even denied workbooks, newspapers subscriptions, and simplified dictionaries. The monies for the other 30+ coded students have not been spent on them either, except for an occasional assessment.

Supplies

Personally, I have spent well over \$700 this year, for program necessities including pencils, pens, highlighters, construction paper, duotangs, novels, magazines, scissors, software, calculators, poster board, paper, rulers, children’s books, and food for lunches and so on. Had I not stopped, as requested by the ATA, I would likely have put in \$1200 by the end of the year. In my Special Ed classes, we are not even using textbooks, as there are not enough, and absolutely none at lower reading levels. I re-write most of our curriculum materials. In the regular program, textbooks are held together with duct tape and missing pages, and in many cases, there are not enough for each child to have one. In September, Alberta Learning requires us to buy all new science texts for junior high, at a cost of around \$75 each, and quite frankly, no one knows how we are going to be able to afford them. Field trips are also limited. I have organized only one in three years, while students pay for these themselves, many of our families cannot afford the cost, and the school cannot afford to pick up the tab, so we don’t go, even though the learning is highly effective.

Stress and Illness

I have heard rumors that the numbers of teachers and support staff on stress and medical leave has grown substantially over the last several years, and this is consistent with my experience. Perhaps we should compare the numbers over the years to determine if the increased expectations and decreased support are positively correlated with rising costs as we pay out benefits and hire replacements. I believe pro-active initiatives to reduce stress and provide adequate support within the classroom would provide financial benefits, as well as all the obvious educational, social and emotional ones. Industry has long known that supported employees have less time off and less injury. This is also true in education.

Political and Community Support for Public Education

I believe in high quality public education for all members of our society. I accept the existence of private schools, but believe that they should be entirely funded by those who attend. I object highly to the practice of allocating tax dollars to private schools. I would like to know how much tax money is being siphoned out of public education to provide private education to a few, most of who could easily afford to pay their own costs. This has not been discussed in the media, to my knowledge, it must be a highly guarded secret.

I also am disconcerted by the increasingly negative public image of teachers, even though the vast majority are caring and hard-working individuals. This lack of respect translates into more difficult interactions with many parents and students.

Conclusion

I love teaching young people. But the job is significantly more difficult as time goes on. Education takes many years, and the results cannot be assessed immediately, yet many government and administrative decisions are based on short-term results. Alberta ranks very high in educational achievement right now, but, contrary to media reports it is not because of a curriculum. It is the result of dedicated teachers, who devote countless hours of overtime to preparation, delivery and assessment of program, and who try to take on the multiple roles that are being handed to us. These are the very teachers who are facing rapidly escalating stress and challenge. Statistics show clearly that the system is breaking down. Teachers are leaving the profession in droves, especially the young and the seasoned. Under and unemployment continue to be a problem for young people, many of whom are under educated. Youth crime is a problem, even with the laxness of the Young Offenders Act. By the time the academic scores show the disaster, we will have paid far too big a price. We already have too many kids who are being lost in the cracks. We need to fix the system now, with more adequate funding, more support within the classrooms, more decisions made by the people who are most affected by them. If we don't pay for education, the price will be higher later, as measured by suicide rates, alcoholism, crime, incarceration, drug abuse, and failed families. We know that education reduces all these costs.

The indirect benefits of teaching are much fewer than they used to be as well. It is hard to feel like I've done a good job, when there are so many things I want to do better. There is so much more I could do with these kids if I had adequate support and funding. It is much easier to be discouraged than in the old days, even though my skills and knowledge are far improved. The kids are needier, more challenging. Teaching takes more energy. I can no longer work at my desk for short periods while they work, the average attention span is much less than it used to be, responsible students are fewer, and behaviors escalate unless monitored constantly. Homework is often undone, and parents are less likely to be concerned about it. The amount of information to cover has grown, but the time to do it has remained the same.

I, like my colleagues, constantly want to do a better job. As a profession, we are highly involved in professional development and sharing of resources and expertise. But our hands are tied in many ways. We don't have the time to do all that is expected of us, nor the funds or support to meet the needs of our students. We go home, knowing that we couldn't give our students all the help that they needed that day. Teaching is much more discouraging than in the "good old days". It is also much more tiring, as we try to meet the needs of a much more varied clientele, with increasingly more challenges and disabilities. Education is vitally more necessary, however, as more and more careers have stringent educational prerequisites. If we want to remain leaders in the global economy, we must have the best educated youth in the world. Therefore, we need the best educators and teaching force. How I wish the government would take the long-term view and put a priority on people rather than industry. While we can't always count on oil production to provide economic security to Alberta, we can rely on well-trained brains.

23. School Staff, K-9 School

As a school staff, we believe that inadequate funding is the fundamental issue affecting teaching and learning conditions at our school. While we realize that we will never achieve an ideal funding level, most of the problems we will address here could be solved through reasonable increases in funding. This submission therefore will raise many issues created by the inadequate funding levels and will present evidence of how better funding makes a real difference to the quality of our students' lives.

Class size is one of the most significant issues. At our K-9 school, most of our classes exceed thirty students. During a forty-seven minute period, a class structured with only sixteen minutes of group instruction would allow for one minute of time to spend with each student. If additional time is needed for the increases in daily administrative procedures or classroom management issues, both of which increase with additional students, the amount of one-on-one time decreases even more. The reality of this is, of course, that not every student gets individual attention and some students fall through the cracks.

The quality of education for all is also affected. For example, in an environment that encourages critical thinking, eliciting and providing feedback for deep, thoughtful answers from every student becomes impossible.

This problem is compounded in our elementary grades where only one class is provided at each grade level. A child in a group of thirty students in grade one will also be surrounded by twenty nine in grades two through six. Alberta Education's average class size statistic is irrelevant to this child.

The question then begs asking. Does a smaller class size have any real impact on the students? At our school, there is undeniable evidence that it does. Allow us to provide two success stories.

Grade 7 – 8

In the 2001/2002 school year, we were fortunate enough to place 15 grade seven students into a separate class. These students were labeled as at-risk based on past academic and behavioral history. The success of this class has been truly remarkable. The increased one-on-one time that the smaller class provided has allowed for a marked improvement in both student self-confidence and academic achievement (up to a forty percent difference in their marks). The successes have greatly improved their attitudes towards school and the organizational and other skills these students have learned will tremendously improve their chances in future mainstream classes.

Grade 1

The 2001/2002 school year happened to provide a grade one enrolment of only 14 students. The educational benefit of this small size is, again, remarkable. Reading level is an excellent marker of this benefit. In May 2002, approximately sixty six percent of the class read at or beyond the end of grade one level and thirty three percent are already reading at the end of grade two. These results stand in great contrast to the 2000/2001 grade one class of 29 students. At the end of the year, approximately seventy percent read at or below grade level. The individual attention that our current grade one students receive is the key reason for their improvement.

The large class sizes affect our students' learning experiences in many other ways beyond the obvious. Field trips, for example, are a valuable way to provide students with alternative modes of learning to enhance the curriculum being covered. We are increasingly being limited by many venues, such as the Odysseum that caps group numbers at twenty to twenty-five students. The reason? They feel they can only provide quality services to groups with these more manageable numbers.

Safety is becoming more of an issue as well. Supervising these large numbers in industrial arts, home economics, science labs and gymnasiums becomes perilously difficult.

The scope of experimental and discovery activities which provide students with the opportunity to develop higher order thinking skills are also strained by the lack of equipment. This is both a funding issue directly and a class size issue indirectly. Larger class sizes are finding us with a lack of equipment, which directly affects the quality of the learning situation.

Hands-on kinesthetic or manipulative learning is hampered by a lack of materials and by the group dynamics that manifest with too many individuals. Again, with adequate funding, a better educational experience would be had by all.

Our final point is aimed at the implementation of the new curriculum. This requires new textbooks and new supplies to support student learning. However, no additional funding is provided over our regular operating budgets. Sacrifices must therefore be made.

At our school, we make difficult decisions every day regarding how we spend our budgets. The simple fact is that when we spend one dollar on a new textbook, it means our class must increase in size. When we take our students on a field trip, updated software for our computer lab is sacrificed. A new microscope means a few less library books. It is time to restore our funding levels to a point where we can make choices based on the quality of our students' education, not on who loses less. We feel that these levels are attainable and, of course, necessary.

24. Teacher, 10-12 School

I have been a teacher in Alberta for over 25 years. When I first began teaching, I believed that Alberta had the resources to develop a model of education that was based upon excellence. As a new teacher I, together with my colleagues, developed programs of instruction that were second to none. We took a great deal of pride as we watched so many of our students develop and go on to become successful adults.

Teaching, both then and now, was never easy, but with the support from my administrators, students, their parents, and adequate government funding, I derived a great deal of satisfaction being a teacher. During the last decade, however, I have seen teachers and their students experience extreme challenges. Mainstreaming of special needs students, new curriculum, crumbling infrastructure, increased student enrolment, all these pressures were implemented without adequate resources to deal with them. These issues, and many more will likely be addressed by my colleagues during this hearing process. I wish to speak about my particular experience teaching students who enroll in Math 14 and English 13, (10-2) classes. Eight years ago I was asked to teach a Math 14 class. The teacher's guide for that textbook had disappeared and I worked each night to develop an answer key for the next day's math lesson. Although I had a few students who struggled with the course materials, I was able to teach the course with a high percentage of students who not only passed but achieved honors standing. For two years afterwards, I taught the course to an Integrated Occupational Math class. These students experience difficulty with regular academic courses, but were able to be successful in this Math class.

This year I am teaching Math 14 again. The text has 18 chapters, but at semester break, halfway through the course, we had only finished Chapter 5. What caused this delay? This year's class was not able to complete the basic review of Grade 9 Math within the week I used to allow for. This year I needed to spend over a month on what I considered basic skills. I have

students in my class who confessed to never having passed a math exam in junior high. I have three students classified as having behavior disorders. These are nice kids, all of them. But come to class each day, hand in assignments, and study for exams? Not consistently. We have had discussions about how they can take ownership over their learning in order for them to be successful. But mostly, the attitude I see in so many students today is “You mean I have to actually do some work in class?” I have to honestly admit that eight years ago, I had students who were not successful in completing their course work. However, those students never expressed the belief that they could pass without completing any assignment.

As dismayed as I am regarding this new attitude there is a more serious aspect of students who are not able to adjust to the demands of high school curriculum.

Last year, in my English 13 classroom, I had three boys who were repeating the course for the third time. Another boy was making his fourth attempt to pass. I never did discover exactly how many were repeating for the second time, but it was considerable. And they were wonderful kids. But they did not have the skills to be successful in that classroom. And yet they would not give up. They continued to try. I don't think I could do it myself. I do know that if I failed a course, I would try it again. When I was still in high school, I failed Math 30 and repeated the course so I could attend university. But to try for a fourth time? No. I wouldn't do it. But they did. I admire them for it and that is why I am here today.

What caused me to become concerned with these students who were unable to be successful on their third and fourth to pass their course? Were my assumptions based upon error? Were there always such students but I was only just becoming aware of them? I believe that aspects of the above comments were always valid. But I have come personally to a different conclusion. I believe that my students from eight years ago had the benefit of a stable, adequately funded school system with support for students who were struggling academically. For the past three years I have witnessed the results of students who have spent their whole lives in an education system characterized by severe financial hardships. I and many of my colleagues at the high school are starting to see the effects of these many years of cutbacks in our classrooms now. We need to stop underfunding education so that when students come to the high school they have the skills they need. I am not talking about the students who have the support and ability to succeed academically. I am talking about the students who struggle in school.

I have experienced myself the difficulties teachers in the lower grades face. Four years ago I taught in a junior high school. My Grade 8 science class had 33 students, eight of whom were really struggling. I physically had no time to help them during class time. Their needs were too great and my time was stretched trying to assist the other students. For those who could stay after school, I was able to help them. However, a reality in a rural school district is that many students must take the bus home and so could not stay for extra help.

In an elementary or junior high classroom, there has always been a varied group of students with differing abilities. The students who can work independently will do well. However, the struggling student, the one who needs extra assistance, finds it increasingly difficult to get that assistance in today's classrooms. It is these students who come to my Math 14 or English 10-2 classroom today and they do not have the skills that my students had eight years ago.

25. Teacher, 10-12

I teach at a large composite high school. Here, I teach Math 10A, Science 10, CALM and Psychology 20. The number of students I teach is as follows:

Math 10A	- 31
Science 10	- 20
Science 10	- 28
Science 10	- 25
Science 10	- 28
Science 10	- 22
CALM 20	- 28
Psychology 20	- 15

The teaching situation at my school is difficult. Our school space is extremely limited which results in large class sizes, which are often above 30 students. Because of the space issue, I do not have a room of my own. I travel to different classrooms for every class. This means I have to take all my markings, handouts, overheads, texts and plans with me wherever I go. Thus it is impossible for me to start my lessons on time. I always begin my classes in a stressed rush and I do not have time to set up materials to correctly begin to teach. This situation is very stressful for me and does not allow me to think clearly to answer questions or to give very organized lectures.

I signed a probationary part time contract this last fall and was assured that I would be working full time or at least very close to it. Because of the debt my school carries, they were not able to open another Math 10A class. To maintain a reasonable standard of living, I have to teach part time at two community colleges. This leaves me with a huge, spotty work load. It detracts from the standard of teaching that I give in every class I instruct. It leaves me with little time to prepare for classes and to finish marking assignments in a short time...which is advantageous for learning.

Class sizes affect learning in my classes in a number of ways. Because of the large numbers of students, I have little choice but to assign mainly multiple choice quizzes for assessment. I do not have time to mark homework assignments which are longer and more entailed. If I had time, checking homework would address more of the root of students' problems in understanding and fostering successful work habits.

Class sizes make classroom management extremely difficult. I do not have time to keep everyone quiet all the time, so I have to talk above the noise to kids who are listening. By the end of class, my throat hurts and I feel drained. With this lack of attention, students get away with disrespectful behavior, not copying notes and doing very little work. Smaller class sizes would make for a more manageable environment and encourage listening and organizing skills. This would also mean I could talk with more parents and give more feedback on their behavior and work habits.

More resources in schools would mean I could have more prep time to thoroughly organize my presentations rather than scramble to throw things together just to get by. It would also mean I could more fully understand the material and bring relevant examples to class. It would mean that our photocopiers would break down less often. It would mean I would have a full 45 minutes for lunch rather than the 10 minutes I usually take in order to prepare for my next class.

Positive Conditions

Our school holds weekly tutorials for science during lunch hour. This is volunteer time that one teacher contributes for the benefit of our students' understanding. Every one of our teachers meet students after school to answer questions and hold department meetings. Our departments work very well in cutting down the repetition of work and spreading the work load of preparation amongst the department rather than each person being responsible for an entire course. We organize and collaborate very effectively after school hours to make our lessons clear and effective. Please note that we receive no extra pay or time during the day for this collaboration. It often extends our work day by 1-2 hours, just in meetings.

I also use the web to supplement my lessons with relevant, real world examples for interest and to better equip my students with connection between theory and application.

We share quizzes and have rules about quiz construction to make marking less burdensome. This allows us to give feed back fairly quickly and shows students where they need to improve.

We also use common exams that allow us to compare teaching techniques and effectiveness. We share our strengths and reveal our weaknesses for the aims of improving our teaching. By using common exams, that reduces our workload by 10 hours per unit. It also increases the accuracy of the exam as more people are contributing to its construction and limiting mistakes.

I will be leaving teaching shortly as many, many others will be. I am too young to be this stressed, both financially and work related. I am too young to be this depressed. I chose to teach because I love academics and people.

