

# Mathematics Council NEWSLETTER

The Alberta Teachers' Association

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## President's Message

Welcome back to another exciting year in the best profession ever! As we enter a very uncertain year, I want to assure you that the Mathematics Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association (MCATA) is working diligently on creating ways to support you during these times.

We will continue to send out an e-mail every Monday to provide you with information on a weekly basis. (Watch for some amazing math problems coming your way!)

Make sure to mark October 23 and 24 on your calendar. MCATA will be hosting our first virtual conference. Our keynote speakers are Jon Orr and Kyle Pearce, two amazing mathematics teachers from Ontario. Be prepared to be engaged!

I will leave you with a fun problem I found over the summer and have been playing with:

The first five numbers of the Fibonacci sequence are 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, . . .

The first five perfect squares are 1, 4, 9, 16, 25, . . . At this point, the last number in the Fibonacci sequence is much lower than the last number in the perfect square sequence. Will the Fibonacci sequence ever catch up? Will it ever become larger than the perfect square sequence? What other two sequences would be interesting to explore?

Have an amazing start to the school year, wash your hands, and stay safe. Please contact me at [teacher.davidmartin@gmail.com](mailto:teacher.davidmartin@gmail.com) with any questions, concerns or interesting math problems you may have.

*Dave Martin*

## From the Editor's Laptop

The 2020/21 school year will definitely go down in history! As I think about planning for this unique school year, I have more questions than answers, just like many other teachers. Ultimately, all of my questions relate to a larger one: How can we move forward with equitable mathematics learning in the era of COVID-19?

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) has many great suggestions for school leaders and teachers in the areas of school decision making, professional learning and collaboration, effective teaching practices, and productive classroom structures. Some of these suggestions are new, and some are not (good teaching is good teaching), but one thing they have in common is an emphasis on relationships and connection between all stakeholders, especially between teachers and students. After all, what the pandemic has hurt the most is our connection with our students. "No connection, no influence!"—to quote Jody Carrington, author of *Kids These Days: A Game Plan for (Re)Connecting with Those We Teach, Lead and Love* (Impress, 2020). This is the case whether we are doing in-person learning or online, at-home learning.

Stay safe and stay connected!

*Stacey Wu*

## C<sup>3</sup>: Current Commentary by the Council

### That's How I Feel: A Student's Perspective on Emergency Remote Learning

Are you listening? Have you heard the voices of your students? This time of transformation might be your best opportunity to do so.

Our students' guts are screaming that something is wrong. The academic programs offered to them during the coronavirus pandemic have increasingly avoided addressing their very real human needs in favour of *evidence-based learning*—a term that distorts the complex existence of human beings alongside one another. Unfortunately, we've been largely unable to voice our baser instincts, those feelings that come before consciousness and unconsciousness (D'Amour 2019). What could be used as evidence to inform teaching practices has largely been unspoken, unvoiced, unheard and, in some cases, ignored in favour of the evidence that officials and researchers alike have decided is important enough to become the basis for our evidence-based programs.

Even students who excel in school have been left speechless, unable to find their voice in this new environment, unable to identify their own learning needs or communicate with those of us who care for them. This, I think, has only become more pronounced during this pandemic, as we've raced toward at-home

learning delivered to solitary students with preconstructed programming and materials that hold little or no opportunity for the human. For what room is there for the human in a program designed for the demonstration rather than the learning of a skill?

But a special few, such as this young lady, the daughter of a friend of mine, have broken the silence and expressed what I have been unable to express from my vantage point:

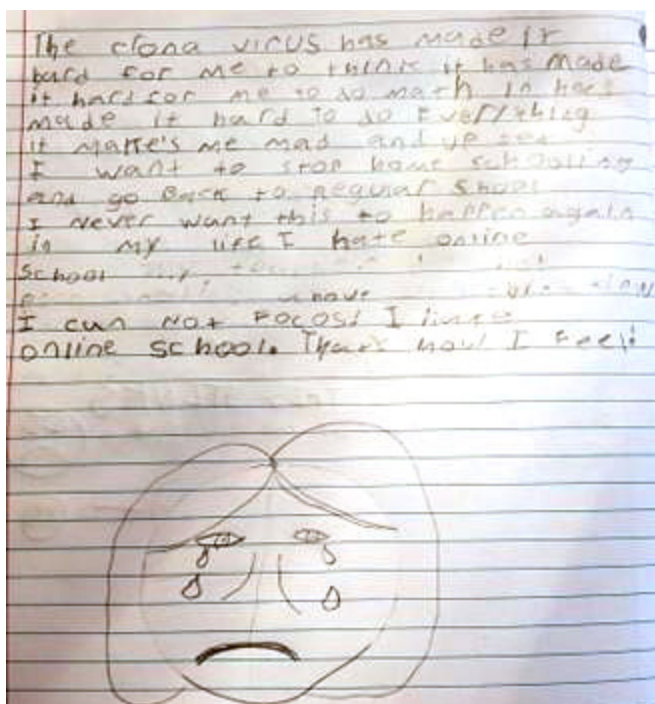
The corona virus has made it  
hard for me to think it has made  
it hard for me to do math it has  
made it hard for me to do everything  
it makes me mad and upset  
I want to stop homeschooling  
and go back to regular school  
I never want this to happen again  
in my life I hate online  
school  
I can Not Focus! I hate  
online school. That's how I feel!

In reading this poem, I am reminded that it is the lived experiences of my students that should inform my practice. Is it ethical, then, to advocate for online learning if the experience effectively brings a student's love for learning to an end? Is my admiration of online learning opportunities justified? Are the meaningful experiences that I intended materializing? Have I even begun to address the primal, undetectable, unmeasurable, unwritten somethings that have scraped their way upward and outward during this time of unease through the voices of children? Or have I been so blinded by the utility offered by technology that I've failed to notice the loathsome human experience it offers or, worse, intentionally ignored it? Is it time to re-examine students' experiences in light of these emerging voices? Have I asked myself how I might begin to listen for other voices? How might this evidence that I'd unintentionally ignored inform my classroom practice? Might it also have an impact on the use of standardized assessment, meritocratic structure and the privileging of measurable data in my classroom? And if after asking all these questions and more, I determine that something needs to break, I imagine that it shouldn't be our students.

### References

D'Amour, L. 2019. *Relational Psychoanalysis at the Heart of Teaching and Learning: How and Why It Matters*. New York: Routledge.

Darcy House



# Summary of the Spring Executive Meeting

At its spring executive meeting in May, the MCATA executive discussed the challenges and opportunities the council faces in connecting with members under the current and evolving pandemic conditions.

We discussed the council's use of social media platforms, as well as our newly designed website ([www.mathteachers.ab.ca](http://www.mathteachers.ab.ca)). Thank you to Amanda Schulz, Darcy House and Robert Wong for their commitment to the website's evolution. We continue to add content, such as information about our contest to design a new MCATA logo; digital issues of our journal, *delta-K*; and information about council positions, conferences, symposia, awards and resources. Webinars were also noted as an effective means to engage and connect teachers and to share mathematics ideas, with support and expertise from the ATA.

MCATA has committed to engaging with members and promoting mathematics education through the following activities:

- Offering speakers for events
- Digitizing *delta-K* for ease of access and searchability
- Encouraging members to share their expertise and research through writing and presenting
- Hosting high-quality conferences
- Offering symposia throughout the province

- Promoting a progressive and balanced view of and a passion for mathematics
- Updating the website as a hub for mathematics writing, resources and news
- Providing weekly posts on mathematics topics
- Increasing awareness of MCATA's mathematics education awards
- Encouraging teachers and students to enter our new logo contest

Darcy House is developing an interim position paper on the use of appropriate secured technology in provincial assessment programs to present to the government.

Last, MCATA acknowledges the dedication and commitment of several members. A special thank you to Robert Wong for his 20 years of service. He, Tancy Whitehouse and Alicia Burdess have been awarded the Friends of MCATA designation. With these three members recently resigning their positions, Rod Lowry was appointed to past president, Carmen Wasyluniuk to vice-president (professional development), Stacey Wu to vice-president (publications) and Amanda Schulz to web technician. The positions of newsletter editor and director of awards and grants are now vacant.

*Barbara O'Connor*  
Secretary

## Save the Date: Fall Conference

Keep October 23 and 24 open! Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, MCATA will be holding our fall conference online, at no cost.

Our keynote speakers are Jon Orr and Kyle Pearce. Sessions will focus on the following topics:

- Making thinking visible in assessments
- Making thinking visible through learning activities
- Making thinking visible through projects
- Making thinking visible through the use of technology, manipulatives or mathematical tools

We are still looking for presenters. Fill out a speaker proposal form at [www.mathteachers.ab.ca/fall-conference/](http://www.mathteachers.ab.ca/fall-conference/).

More information will soon be available on the website. If you have any questions, send them to [mathcouncilata@gmail.com](mailto:mathcouncilata@gmail.com).

# PEC Report

Wow, what a year! Where do I start? Lots of bad stuff, but a lot of good came out of it.

My first year on Provincial Executive Council (PEC) was very busy, and I loved every minute of it. I was assigned to the Political Engagement Committee, the Teacher Welfare Services Committee, the Resolutions Committee and, as luck would have it, MCATA. I have been a member of MCATA for as long as I can remember in my teaching career, and I am grateful to be associated with your executive.

The ATA has been busy dealing with the Alberta government. In the 2019/20 school year, we faced the following:

- Bill 8 (*Education Amendment Act*)
- Bill 9 (*Public Sector Wage Arbitration Deferral Act*)
- *New Education Act*
- Changes to standardized testing
- Budget uncertainty
- Increased instructional and busing fees
- Blue Ribbon Panel on Alberta's Finances (MacKinnon Report)
- The cancellation of the memorandum of understanding on curriculum
- The establishment of a curriculum advisory panel by the government
- The erosion of classroom conditions
- Updated *Teaching Quality Standard* and *Leadership Quality Standard*
- No new government funding for enrolment growth
- Bill 21
- Bill 22, which transfers assets from the Alberta Teachers' Retirement Fund (ATRF) to the government-owned Alberta Investment Management Corporation (AIMCo) at the end of 2020
- The government's survey on choice in education
- The March for What Matters (in which 13,000 teachers, nurses, parents and other Albertans protested at the legislature)
- An unexplained cut of \$136 million in education funding
- The COVID-19 pandemic
- The short-sighted layoff of 26,000 education workers
- Bill 5 (*Fiscal Measures and Taxation Act*), which shifts the power in central table negotiations to the Teachers' Employer Bargaining Association (TEBA) board of directors, which has a majority of government appointees
- The new ministerial order on student learning, as well as the press conference with Angus McBeath (chair of the curriculum advisory panel)
- Bill 32 (*Restoring Balance in Alberta's Workplaces Act*), which would require unions and associations to obtain opt-in approval before using member dues for political and advocacy functions

Just to list a few!

What can we do? Please take the time to meet with, write or call your MLA. Visit [www.ibelieveinpubliced.ca/call\\_your\\_mla/](http://www.ibelieveinpubliced.ca/call_your_mla/) for tips.

We did have some wonderful things happen this past year.

The 2018 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results showed that if Alberta were a country, we would have placed eighth in the world for math. Congratulations to Alberta's math teachers on an excellent result!

The end of this year saw a resolution by MCATA submitted to the ATA's Annual Representative Assembly (ARA) and successfully passed. Resolution 3-10/20 (Immediate Directive) reads, "Be it resolved that the Association urge the Government of Alberta to allow students to use appropriate, secured educational technologies, in addition to scientific and graphing calculators, during math and science diploma exams and other standardized assessments." The resolution had 97 per cent in favour pre-vote and easily passed in the block 2 voting. Congratulations, MCATA!

I am proud to have served MCATA and blessed to have met such a wonderful group of dedicated teachers. MCATA works hard to advance the interests of math teachers and, ultimately, students so that they are among the best in the world. I wish you the best of health and happiness in everything you do.

*Murray Lalonde*

# MCATA Grants and Awards

## MCATA Grants

MCATA encourages members to organize professional development initiatives that support current learning and teaching practices and current priorities as outlined by or through Alberta Education, local school districts, MCATA, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), the ATA or other reputable education associations. Grant applications for mathematics education initiatives may be considered. MCATA will award grants to a maximum of \$500 to members.

Submit an application form by **December 1** or **May 1** of each year to the director of awards and grants, Carmen Wasyluniuk (carmenbt@telus.net). The application form is available on the MCATA website at [www.mathteachers.ab.ca](http://www.mathteachers.ab.ca) (under Teaching).

## Alberta Mathematics Educator Award

Do you work with an awesome math teacher or math lead? Is a colleague at another school your go-to resource for teaching math?

Exemplary classroom teachers in K–6 and 7–12, as well as teachers who have made exceptional contributions to the professional development of

teachers at the school, local, provincial or national level, can be nominated.

For more information and a nomination form, go to the MCATA website (under Awards). The nomination deadline is **August 1** of each year.

## Dr Arthur Jorgensen Chair Award

A student teacher attending a postsecondary education program in Alberta will be selected on the basis of demonstrated academic excellence and a clear commitment to mathematics education in either specialization in mathematics at the secondary level or a keen interest in and desire to expand mathematics knowledge at the elementary level.

Application forms are available on the MCATA website (under Awards). The application deadline is **April 30** of each year.

In addition to MCATA grants and awards, ATA Educational Trust grants of \$500 are available for attending a specialist council conference in 2020/21. Apply by **September 30, 2020**, using the application form on the ATA website at [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca) (My ATA > Programs and Services > Grants, Awards and Scholarships > ATA Educational Trust).

# Alberta Education Update

The new ministerial order on student learning (Ministerial Order No 028/2020) sets a new vision to guide student learning, update curriculum and strengthen Alberta's education system. In addition to setting the vision, the ministerial order emphasizes the core knowledge, civic virtues and outcomes that students need in order to succeed in school and throughout life. The ministerial order is available at [www.alberta.ca/ministerial-order-on-student-learning.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/ministerial-order-on-student-learning.aspx).

Now that the new ministerial order is in place, the 2018 draft kindergarten to Grade 4 curriculum will be reviewed, and future curriculum will be drafted for the next grades. All draft curricula will be aligned with the new vision.

Because of delays resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the timelines for piloting the new draft curriculum have been adjusted. The first classroom validation will be expanded from kindergarten to Grade 4 to include Grades 5 and 6. Participating schools will start piloting this curriculum in classrooms in September 2021. During the classroom validation process, the draft K–6 curriculum will be made available at <http://new.learnalberta.ca>. Parents, teachers, education partners and other interested Albertans will be able to provide feedback throughout this process.

*Marcel Ouellette*  
Alberta Education Representative

## Contribute to *delta-K*

Do you have an idea or thoughts to share with other mathematics teachers? The MCATA journal, *delta-K*, is seeking teacher submissions.

Contributing to *delta-K* is something you can include in your professional growth plan, and at the same time you will be sharing with others. Please consider submitting a lesson plan, an activity, a book review, a rich task or a research paper, or simply sharing something that worked in your classroom that other math teachers can try. Our collaboration can enrich all our students' math experiences.

Send your submission to [lboschman@mhc.ab.ca](mailto:lboschman@mhc.ab.ca). See your idea in print!

*Lorelei Boschman*



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Maggie Shane, the ATA's privacy officer, is your resource for privacy compliance support.

780-447-9429 (direct)

780-699-9311 (cell, available any time)

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I am giving consent for myself.

I am giving consent for my child/children or ward(s), identified below:

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print)

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Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_ Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

For more information on the ATA's privacy policy, visit [www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca).



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