

MEMORANDUM

TO: Hon. Demetrios Nicolaidis, M.L.A. for Calgary-Bow, Minister of Education

FROM: Catharine Kavanagh, Western Stakeholder Director

DATE: September 25, 2025

SUBJECT: Supporting Student Learning During Alberta Teachers' Strike

WHO WE ARE

Cardus is a non-partisan think tank dedicated to clarifying and strengthening, through research and dialogue, the ways in which society's institutions can work together for the common good.

ISSUE

The Alberta Teachers' Association is set to strike on October 6th if a new bargaining agreement is not reached.¹ On September 24th, a tentative agreement between the government and the ATA was announced, which will be voted on by members from September 27-29th.² If teachers reject the deal, a province-wide strike would still be on the table. It is unknown how long a strike could last and how much disruption that could cause students one month into the school year.³ In the event of a strike, the Government of Alberta should act to support students and minimize lost learning time while classes are cancelled.

BACKGROUND

Alberta teachers' previous contract expired in August 2024.⁴ Bargaining for a new contract began in June 2024.⁵ A proposed collective agreement was reached through mediation, with ATA leadership endorsing it.⁶ In early May, ATA members voted 62% to reject the proposed deal.⁷ A strike authorization vote followed at the end of May, and passed with 99% support.⁸ An official strike vote was completed in June, which received 94.5% support.⁹ The strike vote allows teachers 120 days to begin job action – which gave

¹ N. Brennan, "This is about the future of our classrooms': Alberta government, teachers reach tentative deal in labour dispute", *Calgary Herald*, September 24, 2025. <https://calgaryherald.com/news/alberta-government-teachers-reach-tentative-deal-in-labour-dispute>.

² N. Brennan, "The future of our classrooms"

³ A. Antoneshyn and H. Kavanagh, "Alberta teachers to go on strike next month if no agreement reached," *CTV News*, September 10, 2025.

⁴ "Mediator's Recommendations For Terms of Settlement", D. Howes, Teachers Alberta, https://teachers.ab.ca/sites/default/files/2025-04/mediators_terms_for_settlement.pdf.

⁵ K. Siever, "Mediator recommends pay increase for AB teachers", *The Alberta Worker*, April 4, 2025. <https://albertaworker.ca/news/mediator-recommends-pay-increase-for-ab-teachers/>.

⁶ "Mediator's recommendation: Your future, your choice", ATA News, <https://teachers.ab.ca/news/mediators-recommendation-your-future-choice>.

⁷ N. Brennan, "A system in crisis': What you need to know about possible Calgary teacher strike" *The Calgary Herald*, May 7, 2024, <https://calg-your-choice>.

⁸ N. Brennan, "A system in crisis"

⁹ News Staff, "Alberta teachers vote 99% in favour of strike authorization: ATA", *CityNews Calgary*, May 27, 2025, <https://calgary.citynews.ca/2025/05/27/alberta-teachers-strike-authorization-vote/>.

⁹ News Staff. "Majority of Alberta teachers vote to strike", *CBC News*, August 29, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alberta-teachers-strike-1.7557407>.

them until October 7th to announce an intent to strike.¹⁰ Negotiations between the province and the ATA continued in June and August .¹¹ In early September, the ATA announced their intention to strike on October 6 if a deal is not reached.¹²

RECOMMENDATIONS

We encourage the Alberta government to make as many alternative learning resources as possible available to students. There are numerous innovative policy options which could be implemented during the strike period to support students and families, and to prevent learning loss.

Recommendation 1: Provide direct support to all affected students during teacher strike. It is unreported how much Alberta spends in teacher compensation per day. During the 2020 strike, Ontario estimated spending \$60 million per day in teacher salaries.¹³ In the event of a strike, the Government of Alberta would be saving millions of dollars, which could be redirected to assist students in continued learning and to ease child care challenges which parents might experience. The province should use that money to give payments directly to parents for any kind of education-related expenses. Other Canadian jurisdictions have implemented this approach: both British Columbia¹⁴ and Ontario¹⁵ provided money to affected parents during their teacher strikes in 2014 and 2020, respectively.

The Ontario program had graduated levels of support depending on a child's age, level of schooling, and whether the child had special needs.¹⁶ Support fluctuated between \$25-\$60 per day depending on the circumstance, but unless a child had special needs, only children Grade 7 and below were covered.¹⁷ Meanwhile the British Columbia program had a non-taxable flat payment of \$40 per day to parents of children under 13 years old.¹⁸

These funds could provide a small offset to costs if parents want to pay for tutoring, move their child to an independent or charter school, or begin homeschooling or an online program.

¹⁰ N. Brennan, "Strike or lockout? Alberta teachers, province set to resume bargaining talks as school year nears", *The Calgary Herald*, August 8, 2025, <https://calgaryherald.com/news/with-teachers-strike-deadline-looming-provinces-bargaining-group-seeks-lockout-vote>.

¹¹ Brennan, "Strike."

¹² A. Antoneshyn and H. Kavanagh, "Alberta teachers to go on strike next month if no agreement reached."

¹³ S. Jeffords, "Ontario education minister announces \$25 to \$60 a day for child care funding during strike action", January 15, 2020, <https://globalnews.ca/news/6414637/ontario-government-child-care-funding-during-teacher-strike-action/>.

¹⁴ News Staff, "B.C. teachers' strike: \$40-a-day payments for parents due this week", *CBC News*, October 29, 2014, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/b-c-teachers-strike-40-a-day-payments-for-parents-due-this-week-1.2817471>.

¹⁵ T. Fraser, "Your guide on how to get compensation for the Ontario teachers' strike", *Toronto Star*, January 16, 2020, https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/your-guide-on-how-to-get-compensation-for-the-ontario-teachers-strike/article_c8860210-393f-5cce-afed-26715c743670.html.

¹⁶ Ontario, *Government Stands with Parents and Kids During Union-Led Strike Actions in Schools* (Ontario News Release) <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/55328/government-stands-with-parents-and-kids-during-union-led-strike-actions-in-schools>.

¹⁷ Ontario News Release, *Government Stands with Parents*.

¹⁸ British Columbia, *Registration opens for parent support program*, (BC Gov News) <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2014FIN0032-001275>.

Outside of tuition or other enrolment-related costs, these funds could be loosely modeled on home education funding, and could be used for educational field trips (for example, to TelusSpark or Head-Smashed-In Buffalo Jump); art, gym, or music classes; and books.

Recommendation 2: Specifically for younger (elementary-age) children, an additional payment could be offered as a means of addressing child care needs. Parents should be permitted to use these payments as they see fit: whether that is hiring a neighbour or grandparent to care for their child(ren), to use licensed care, or to use an unlicensed dayhome. Parents' judgement should be trusted to keep their children safe and cared for while they are out of school.

Recommendation 3: If the province chooses to not provide direct payments to parents, other initiatives to support education, recreation, and transportation should be explored. These include:

- Negotiating agreements with local museums, libraries, athletic centres, and even national parks, to offer free admission to all affected students.
- Waiving day pass fees to Kananaskis Country for students.
- Providing students with free public transit passes in their respective cities or areas to ensure that they can access educational experiences.
- Subsidizing memberships to online, ad-free learning resources for coding, languages, mathematics, and other subjects.
- Covering online course fees for high school students if they choose to enroll in a program that is still operating.
- Providing a discount code for students to buy textbooks or other educational supplies from school resource stores.
- Offering financial assistance and/or logistical support to organizations like municipalities, neighbourhood associations, non-profits, and universities to offer day camps for students during the strike.