

Alarm Bells Ringing: Voices from Schools - February 2015

Public Interest Alberta's Alberta Schools Survey received responses from 434 individuals around the province. (A copy of the survey is appended to this document.)

The responses highlighted a range of serious concerns that have been organized into seven groups for the purpose of reporting on the results.

The purpose of the Summary/Background document was to provide a more brief account of "what we heard," and consisted of twenty-one selections that served to illustrate the main themes.

This document includes a larger number of selections (72,) as well as longer excerpts, also organized around the seven categories/themes. Its purpose is to give further illustrations of the pressing concerns expressed by individuals around the province about classroom and school conditions that are unfairly limiting the education of too many of Alberta's students.

1. Impact of large classes combined with complexity and high needs

- Teacher has too many children that have unique needs even beyond the special needs children. Supports for these children are not funded the same as children with special needs, requiring schools to pull resources for that pool to deal with it when the funds are for the special needs child. Everyone suffers. (Parent Gr 4 21-23 Blackfalds)
- Class sizes are much too large to actually assess Children in varied ways. Supports for inclusive education and the overwhelming numbers of ELL students entering our classrooms are leaving me feeling like I'm not meeting anyone's needs. (Teacher Gr 2 24-26 Edmonton)
- not enough adult time, many challenges for students both behaviour and academically, too many students in a classroom ... there is only occasional additional help. Support staff is "putting out fires" and not able to give consistent help to those students who need it. (Educational Staff Gr 1 24-26 Lethbridge)
- Too many children to reach. Small space. ESL students. Students with learning disabilities, students with low cognitive abilities, behaviour issues and gifted children. What happens to the average child? One adult .38 children. (Teacher JH 1-9 36-38 Calgary)
- 5 are coded to have mild-moderate cognitive delays and 3 of them are in lower grades, 7 are coded learning disabled, and 3 are coded as English language learners. I don't have any support staff. (Teacher Gr 9 27-29 Edmonton)

- Time. 36 students at a high level allows for little to no differentiation and personalization. 5 classes like this leaves even less. Further, there is little to no life for the teachers outside of school. I am taking a break from marking to fill this out - at 11pm, 3 hours after I started. At least another hour to go. (Teacher HS 33-35 Edmonton)
- My teacher doesn't have time to help me. I don't ... want to ask questions because it will take class time and then he has to rush through something else. (Student Gr 12 27-29 Lethbridge)
- The class has too many kids. There is 1 special needs kid (Autism) and 3 ESL kids....and numerous other kiddos with extra energy. Thankfully there is 1 aide in the class, however, that is still not enough to give enough time/help/guidance to those 4 that need more help nor the rest of the class. (Parent Gr 3 27-29 Edmonton)
- I can't talk or help all of my students during one class period. Too many students and not enough time. Then at a staff meeting we were told to make sure we didn't let any students go a day without a meaningful conversation with an adult. No support staff for any of my classes (Teacher HS 39 or more Lethbridge)
- Where to begin... not enough support for my students with special needs, too many bodies, not enough space, not enough resources, a school lacking in technology, horrendous parental involvement....There is never enough time to get to each student, by the time I make it around the classroom once, the period is over. Each day, someone gets left behind. (Teacher High school 36-38 students Whitecourt)
- There are too many students in one classroom, it makes it virtually impossible to give 1:1 support. We have several students with different codes, having 37 students is hard to help them... There are no support staff. (Teacher JH 36-38 Edmonton)
- The sheer number of students in the class makes it impossible to spend enough time with each child to support them in reaching their full potential. Add to the large class size, a variety of behaviour and social/emotional challenges and much of my day is spent managing behaviours rather than delivering engaging lessons and providing valuable, individualized feedback to my students.... Anxiety and social/emotional challenges make up the greatest area of special needs this year. However I also have a few students who are below grade level in literacy and numeracy skills, which hampers their success in all academic areas... I have no support staff. (Teacher Gr 5 24-26 Grande Prairie)
- One teacher 5 different groups of students (LA and Social). Currently, in my grade 7 class, there are 8 students with IPPs, 9 English Language Learners, 2 students with Learning Support Plans, and two students who have suffered severe emotional trauma. Because the class is large (31), much of my time is spent managing behaviour and doing paperwork. I currently work an extra 2 hours after school plus about 6 hours each weekend. Still, with all of this extra work, I do not feel confident that I am meeting the needs of all my students. I don't have enough time to plan for all

of the needs my students have nor can I contact all of the parents I would like to. As a teacher with 9 years of experience, I feel that in the last few years my job is getting harder, not easier. We are expected to meet new initiatives (Project Based Learning, Differentiated Instruction, 21st Century Learning) but our actual time to work on these things is not incorporated into our job in any way. We are expected to spend our own time preparing for these things. (Teacher Gr 7/8 Ft. McMurray)

- Too many children in one classroom. My daughter is only just learning how to read and write but if there is not enough time for the one and only teacher to check every single student, the class will move on to the next activity. If my child has a question but the teacher does not have time to help her then she never actually learns that concept. The class then moves on to the next topic with some students not even understanding the initial concept of that topic. It's very frustrating. My daughter was doing very good and then had troubles learning her "teen" numbers and when the class moved on to the 20's, my child was still stuck in the teens. There's too many children in one classroom for the class to flow properly. Some are going to be accelerating and others are going to be falling behind. As far as I know there is no support staff. Just one teacher. (Parent Gr 1 27-29 Edmonton)
- There are students in this class who are new to Canada who know minimal English, students who have physical and mental disabilities, and who do not receive assistance from an Educational Assistant. My child, who is academically strong, is asked to "tutor" other students in class because he finishes his work before many others. His learning is being affected because he is not being challenged or engaged. I do not feel his role should always be a "teacher" role. I want to make sure he is prepared for high school where classes are streamed according to abilities. It is not fair to him or the other students in class who want to learn, be engaged, etc. It is also unfair to students who struggle with learning. They are not ignorant to their challenges or struggles. Class sizes are too large, there are insufficient supports in place, and the levels of student ability in each class are too varied. Not an equitable learning environment for students. Some students have physical disabilities, and there are many who have cognitive delays.

The school is an inclusive site with 600 students. There are 4 EA's. One is with a group of 6 ELL students full time in a separate room. One EA is assigned to help in a math class. There are two EA's to deal with the other 550 students. (Parent Gr 9 30-32 Edmonton))

- A teacher is basically doing crowd control. There is no time to spend with students who are either struggling or need to be challenged. As integration of students with complex needs becomes more and more common, the teachers are expected to provide an education to all of these different types of learners with little support. It means that all the kids fall behind. The ones who are complex learners don't have enough support from a certified teacher, the ones who are average learners under achieve because they aren't getting the attention and encouragement they need and the advanced or gifted learners are bored. Hence we spend thousands of dollars in outside supports like Sylvan learning centre because my grade 4 student

can't read, my high school student can't spell... they are smart kids. They need a teacher. I don't blame the school staff. I blame the large class sizes.

Schools get PUF funding based on the child's "code" that Alberta Learning ascribes to them. However, some schools are unscrupulous. They will intake a child for the PUF funding and then not hire the staff so they can use the funds elsewhere and a child who is coded for 1:1 become 2:1 or 3:1. Worse, some schools will then turn a child away citing they can't support the needs and that child has to go to another school sans PUF funding which remains at the school. PUF funding should follow the student and should be directly applied to the PUF worker. (Parent Gr 2/4/9 Calgary)

- First of all, student population has increased from an average of 23 students to 29 students in the past five years. There is no increased prep time or EA time since then where I teach. There are more ISPs and more EL learners. In addition, a move to increase the visibility of what we are doing is creating a false sense of the realities in a classroom today... But, I hear we have it better than other school divisions, so in other words, 'Shut up.' (Teacher Gr 6 30-32 Okotoks)
- ... Who are we kidding? NO ONE PERSON CAN DO IT ALL, and to pretend otherwise is to predicate our system on a lie. Any system that relies EXCLUSIVELY on the expertise of one individual at each step along the way is one that has FAILURE built in. Quit blaming the teachers for not being able to do it all--it is an unrealistic goal and we should stop pretending that it is realistic "if only teachers would try harder, get more PD, differentiate better"... I need time to sleep and recharge, and yet am constantly told I need to do better by my students, which of course is true, but not realistic. I pay for most of the books in my classroom library out of my own pocket, and all the things up on the walls in my classroom. If I want a set of classroom dictionaries, I have to buy it myself because there is no money in the budget. THIS IS NOT FAIR OR REALISTIC. I have spent THOUSANDS of dollars of my own money trying to make my classroom experience a rich learning environment. So the challenges are TIME, MONEY and having to do so much of it on my own in isolation. (Teacher Gr 3 21-23 Red Deer)
- ... As a teacher, I can't plan for the diverse needs in my classes and am doing little for those kids. I am not qualified to teach kids who fall below my differentiated instruction, because I am not trained in it. The so-called regular students are also significantly impacted because so much of my time is helping the severely struggling student. I would also add that in my diverse classes of 30+ students, I do not have any supports. The underfunded, overcrowded, inclusive system is not allowing anyone (students and teachers) to reach their potential.
In a class of 34 students, 12 have been coded for multiple reasons, and are working well below grade level. Three students cannot read beyond a grade 2 level. Two are new to Canada and are only learning the language.
There isn't any Support Staff assigned to this class. In fact, there are only three in a "fully inclusive" school of 550 kids! And, much of their time is spent in the office helping Admin. staff, not students. (Teacher Gr 7 36-38 Edmonton)

2. Challenges of dealing with impact of children with 'behavioural needs'

- In our school, the only students who receive time with support staff are the students with behavioural needs. They don't have codes or funding - just difficult to manage. The students with funding and diagnosed needs get no support time whatsoever (Teacher Gr 2 21-23 Brooks)
- Seems time is always the challenge... Our sons teachers have several "difficult" kids.. Each a tiny black hole of extra needs, while other kids are left to try and fend for themselves in understanding and comprehending the lessons. (Parent Gr 8 30-32 Edmonton)
- The 3 very loud, disruptive, frustrated kids reading, writing, spelling at an early Grade 1 level tend to monopolize my attention. The 5 quieter kids reading, writing, spelling at a late Grade 1 level tend to "suffer" in silence and I get to them when I can. The other 18 kids don't get enough of my attention. It's not fair. (Teacher Gr 3 24-26 Chinook's Edge)
- In the smaller classes there is minimal structure and children with behavioural issues are very distracting to the others. In the larger classes it seems the structure is excessive because of the need to control the possible chaos of 32+ students, and there is personal interaction/evaluation. The teachers seem like they are just trying to keep their heads above water and cope the best they can... My daughter in grade 1 has been told to ignore the Kindergarten boy who repeatedly punches other students whenever he is upset. She came home and said : "It was my turn to get punched today Mommy" ??? (Parent Gr 1 30-32 Parkland)
- 2 students with cognitive issues as well as ADHD and Oppositional/Defiant Disorder. They have explosive episodes including swearing and disrupting the class environment. I also have 1 student that has high anxiety is reading and writing at a grade 1 level, no behaviour problems. I have 3 students reading and writing at a beginning grade 2 level with no behaviour problems. I have 1 student that is struggling with a family situation... have 1 support staff all day for my 2 coded students. When 1 has an explosive episode that requires us to leave the class, or the student to leave the class the assistant is occupied with that student, leaving the other without support. (Teacher Gr 3 21-23 Calgary)
- 3 children in the school that need diapering, have no speech, one who usually rolls around on the floor and moans. Staff regularly bruised and bitten. Recently teacher was bitten so badly blood was spurting out of her arm. These three are so labour intensive that other children in other grades with special needs get no service. No proper services for the three children. No proper supports for the staff team being pulled in to keep finger in the dike. Staff have been issued protective arm sleeves. Give me a break. This is not the role of the regular classroom teacher. (Retired Principal Airdrie)
- Autism - limited verbal, screams high pitch screams often, runs every 7-10 mins, functions at about 3 yr old development level, funding only provides .5 assistant time ... The child cannot be left alone so two EAs are required throughout the day and funding is only providing .5 of an

assistant. School had to go thousands into debt to ensure adequate coverage. No extra support for the remaining students with high needs. (Teacher Gr 1 18-20 Edmonton)

- I have two students with extra needs. One is a behaviour student who throws tantrums and swears and kicks and throws things. No support. Will sometimes run from the classroom. Cannot keep up with grade one work. When it is difficult he begins to show behaviours, swearing or will run from classroom. The other student has severe speech and other needs. Cannot print name. You can only understand a few words. He needs constant reminders to stay focused. Was told I was getting an EA at the. End of last year. This year no EA. Very disappointing as both students need support. I cannot chase after a student when I have 17 others to teach. I feel like my time is mainly taken by the needs of these 2 students. Let alone many students are struggling with alphabet recognition and number recognition. (Teacher Gr 1 18-20 Grande Prairie)

3. Early learning challenges

- All you do is classroom management all day and little teaching (Teacher, K 24-26 Edmonton)
- Too many kids, too small a space not enough help (Teacher, K 27-29 Edmonton)
- The teacher is divided to thinly. There is not general extra support for these kids... A day home cannot operate with one adult being responsible for 24 children so why can a classroom? (Parent Gr K 24-26 Ponoka)
- The teacher is great but there are just too many children in the classroom for this age group. The children are learning little as a result of the class size. (Parent Gr K 24-26 Edmonton)
- Kindergarten - Several students with severe violent behaviors; screaming, kicking, biting, hitting, pinching, scratching, throwing things, flipping tables, punching, stabbing people with pencils and other objects, swearing, yelling, hurting others on purpose, refusal to follow instruction or rules. Other students who are non-verbal, need to be fed and diapered, who are in wheelchairs. Some who are non-verbal, run away, need constant supervision, do not communicate with others, can be easily upset and become violent. Some students with emotion disabilities who cry uncontrollably. Many students who do not understand social cues and acceptable behaviors. Students who do not speak or understand English so often exhibit negative behaviors. Several students who have undiagnosed learning disabilities or other problems that causes them to struggle to focus or meet classroom expectations both academically and socially. A few students who are very intelligent and would benefit from more challenging programming but still need to socialize with peers. (Parent Gr K Lethbridge)
- With only one teacher and one general classroom aide, children who struggle typically start falling through the cracks. When there are well behaved, quiet children who find it difficult to ask for help, they don't get the assistance to support and help them regularly in these younger

grades. The classes have too many children in them overall and the classes are very loud when the children are working on projects. This is overwhelming and stressful for the students as well as the educators. If the classes had fewer kids in them, more children would likely succeed in learning (providing an overall lower volume in the class, and the children would get more attention than in a larger class environment). (Parent Gr 1 27-29 Edmonton)

- [Special needs] Autism, Down's syndrome, behaviour challenges, sensory disabilities, language and fine motor delays, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome ... Having one Educational assistant for a class of 30 students where 10 are identified as having special needs is not enough support. (Ed Staff Gr K 30-32 Edmonton)
- Every child in my class has a "special need". Some need me because they can't print their name, others need me because I am the only adult who listens to them and others need me because I am the only one who makes sure they have lunch every day. They all have needs and they are all special. ... I do not have any support staff in my room. And the ones at my school have no formal training/ education that relates to child development or working with children/ families professionally. (Teacher K 21-23 Calgary)
- The kids didn't even have room to each hang their coats up. They started their day with no room to get their shoes off and coats off, then had a super crowded learning environment. Kids start kindergarten at many different levels, such a key year to have a smaller environment.
- My son was PUF with autism and there were 9 other kids with special needs. 8 with IPPs and another child who had special needs but didn't get funding due to repeating kindergarten. Each of these kids had VERY different needs. Some were outward acting needs and others were inward acting. Kids with outward acting issues therefore got more resources than the inward acting kids...This class had a teacher and two untrained aides. They had no specialized training to be able to support autism, or any of the other disorders. My son lost his PUF year, because the support was not there for him and he spent a lot of time feeling stressed out. (Parent Gr K 27-29 Edmonton)
- My son has severe global developmental delay, is non-verbal, and is learning to use a Speech Generating Device. So far, it is half way through the year, and he has not been seen by a single therapist. We had the same problem last year in pre-K where the therapists didn't show up until half way through the year, and then he only saw the SLP three times, the OT once, and the PT twice. We have to provide all the support the teacher has to work with our very complicated child. We, the parents, even have to provide all his adaptive equipment this year, since the school will not purchase anything for him with his Severe Special Needs Funding without the order of a therapist. We purchased and maintain his SGD and do all the training for his EA and teacher including providing a second device for them to practice with and model with. This situation is appalling. Instead of waiting for the unlikely arrival of some hypothetical therapists from a thoroughly non-functioning government program, schools need therapists on staff. Therapists

need to be on site frequently enough to understand the children and their needs and to be available for teachers to consult and to create IPPs early enough in the year to actually make a difference. The teacher has so little help she can't even eat lunch some days. That should be illegal. (Parent Gr K 24-26 Lacombe)

4. English language learners

- High ELL students. Autism, refugees, learning disabilities. Not enough support. 39 students. (Teacher Gr. 11 39 or more Edmonton)
- Half of my class is ELL. Some will likely code out with learning disabilities throughout the next year, but resources for testing them are scarce ... No support staff available. (Teacher Gr 2/3 24-26 Edmonton)
- High numbers of students are ESL learners- almost 60% of my classes. As a math/science teacher I get no aid time to help with this. In addition to the above mentioned ESL learners. I have 4 students with learning disabilities - low IQ, dyslexia, and one child who is hard of hearing and requires a hearing aid and FM transmitter to hear me. 27-29 students. I get no support for my hard of hearing student, no ESL support at all, and one aid for a half hour every second day to help with math support for the 3 students with math learning problems. In addition to lack of support staff, we also lack consistent access to technology that could assist with the issues some of these students are facing. (Teacher Gr 8 27-29 Calgary)
- Each day I face an incredibly diverse group of kids. There are 8 Coded students, 12 English Language Learners, and several other students who require academic and emotional support. I struggle constantly with meeting the needs of everyone and have no classroom support to help with this. I feel terrible that I'm not able to read daily with my student who has just arrived from China. I'm also wishing I had more time for extension tasks with my gifted student ... There is no additional support in my room. Our AP takes some kids a couple times a week for guided reading. I'm hoping to get an education assistant soon. (Teacher Gr 5/6 27-29 Calgary)
- One of my students is a Level 1 English as a Second Language learner who gets only 90 minutes a week help since I assign an assistant to her to help build vocabulary. This is a very active and academically low class; too much of my time is spent on getting attention and keeping students focused and on task. It is IMPOSSIBLE to help each child reach potential. As a teacher of 25 years, this saddens me. (Teacher Gr 5 33-35 Calgary)

5. The need for support staff

- Our school has wonderful support staff who are stretched to the limit looking after severely high needs students (Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy) so that the many with moderate needs simply can't be accommodated as needed (Teacher Gr 12 39 or more Edmonton)
- Zero support staff for my class, which is pretty much the norm at my school. (Teacher Gr 1 21-23 Edmonton)
- Educational assistants were worked hard, until they quit, one after another. (Teacher Gr 3-12 Fewer than 18 Cold Lake)
- Too many high needs, not enough support staff...every year it is the same. We are stretched so thin we wonder if we are actually making a difference (Ed Staff Gr 3/4 21-23 Lethbridge)
- The students require much support. Even in a specialized setting, there are not enough resources, paraprofessionals, or supports. In the "regular " classrooms, teachers are overwhelmed with inclusion with NO support... The per student funding has been decreasing for 4 years. Fewer dollars means less assistants (Teacher HS Special Ed 18-20 Calgary)
- The class size is too large to give each student that individual help that they deserve. The students' needs are so diverse and there is not enough support to help them... I have 6 students on full Individual Program Plans and 4 Mild/Moderate Individual Program Plan. One of my students has autism and requires the one full-time aid that I have... There is only one educational assistant and one of my students requires her one-on-one for safety and health reasons. (Teacher Gr K 24-26 students Edmonton)
- Support staff have been phased out over recent years for mild/moderate students, regardless of how many, even if 50% of students have mild/moderate special needs (Teacher Gr 1/2/3 Fewer than 18 Palliser)
- 9 kids - 2 years of more behind in reading comprehension 4 -ELL (2 just landed in August - 1 from Russia) 5 FNMI 8 coded students - including 2 severe 2 low cog ... [aide time] 1 hour 4 x per week (Teacher Gr 6 18-20 Sherwood Park)
- I have in a class of 38 usually about 7 students with special needs. In every class this would include English as second language learners, behaviour needs students LSP, and learning disabled students LSP, as well as MAX students... I have only had three classroom aids in the last 8 years of teaching at my current school, each for one period of teaching time out of four blocks only, for one semester of the year only. With the number of students in my class being consistently at this level of needs and quantity, this is unacceptable. Because I don't teach one of the four core

areas, I am left alone the majority of time to try and support these students. (Teacher High school 36-38 Calgary)

- Several students in the class are coded and require the support of an educational assistant. Educational assistants at my school are so overextended that they are unable to dedicate an adequate amount of support for these kids... I have one student with a severe physical disability and four additional students with mild to moderate learning disabilities in this particular class... The EA assigned to my student with the severe physical disability is supposed to be dedicated to him full-time, but has a list of several others who she is also expected to support (some in my classroom and others in different classrooms). This is obviously impossible for her to achieve. (Teacher Gr 12 33-35 Edmonton)
- [Special needs] 8 - "Code 54" - Learning Disability 3 - "Code 42" - Severe Emotional / Behavioural Disability 5 - English Language Learners 4 with a possible Learning Disability ... One EA who can't help me help everyone. We are exhausted. (Teacher Gr 7 30-32 Ft McMurray)
- Large class size. Behavioural and focusing issues. 60 hour report cards. Not enough time to effectively plan for all needsThree coded kids... Finally after 2 months I now receive an hour support a week. Not enough but better than before. ((Teacher Gr 3 27-29 Cochrane)
- High behaviour children clustered. Putting out fires all day the average child gets little attention. No matter how hard we all try. The teacher is amazing but has been given an unrealistic workload with Special needs students and kids with fine motor and speech needs clustered in... We have 6 special needs children I have one with ASD one to one he is wonderful but the high behaviour kids with little to no support take up all the teachers time and cause the other children to be fearful. It is a safety concern and I think there needs to be better policy in regards to students threatening or harming other students and disturbing a healthy learning environment. (Ed Staff Gr K Lethbridge)
- The classroom does not have an educational assistant. Currently there is a behavioral itinerant working with one child with severe behavior but she will be leaving at the end of November (they only stay for a 3 months period). So this child will now go from having the highest level of support to zero, how does this make sense? What will it take for the district to provide him with an educational assistant? Does it take him actually hurting himself, another student or a classmate???? I know all of this situations listed above took place last year as I work at the school. It is all well documented. Why does this process need to start from scratch? How is this what is best for kids?? (Parent Gr 1 24-26 Lethbridge)
- With a class with such diverse needs the students do not get the individual attention needed to succeed. The developmental and social diversity is also a challenge for the teacher. Students do not have enough social/emotional support which impacts their academic success. I firmly believe that every elementary classroom should have an Educational Assistant. One adult to more than

20 children is unacceptable in my opinion. Quite often students need one-on-one attention for social/emotional situations and they often do not have their needs met by the one adult in the room who is primarily responsible for their academic learning. (Parent Gr 3-6 Edmonton)

- We have to book support staff and if we need someone that day (or even the day before), they are likely already booked and we have to wait for another day. I have never gotten help from EA's with students who have behavioral IPPs as they are often assigned elsewhere. We actually had a decrease in EA's last year when our student body size increased by almost 200 students. (Teacher Gr 10/11 33-35 Red Deer)

6. Condition of schools and classrooms

- Our school is very overcrowded. We have eight classrooms sharing an open space. We are a K-4 school with 731 kids. (Parent Gr K 21-23 Calgary)
- Grade one class, very very limited space at that school for classroom, so the classroom had been divided into two separate classes, with the space size on my child's class of about only 300 sq ft. with about 22 kids in it, all in which are squished between two table that have fit into that classroom with all the other furniture. Table arrangements are close together and unable to see the boards from all seating areas. So students have to get up and stand to do writing information to be able to copy things down from the boards. (Parent Gr 1 21-23 Spruce Grove)
- It is difficult at times depending on if you have behavioral issues with a few students. If you are tending to these issues it leaves no room to help other kids academically. Resources and space to pull these kids out and help them individually is almost impossible. Sometimes we sit in the boot room when it is warm out and do work. Sad and stinky. (Ed Staff Gr 3 39 or more Lethbridge)
- 31 classrooms out of 26 actual classrooms. How? the library was removed and turned into 7 more classroom. Yet the teachers keep giving us bullshit about early literacy, reading is important etc. wtf. the CBE is overcrowd... The classroom may not be full, but they've taken away the library, and the kids don't get gym time IN the gym except twice a week because there are too many classroom spaces needed and too many classes who share the gym. the physical activity one teacher provides is stretching in the classroom. not great for active 7 year olds. (Parent Gr 2 21-23 Calgary)
- This class does not have a classroom, as the portables expected for this school which were supposed to be completed by the summer have yet to be completed as of November 3rd. In the morning the class (call this class 'A') is split in half, and each half is then combined with another complete grade 4 class (classes 'B' and 'C'), making for a total of 35 students in two different classrooms for the morning. In the afternoon class 'A' is pulled out of the other classrooms, and reunited in a kindergarten classroom that is then available. As this is not actually 'their' classroom, the students must carry all their supplies and work in a shoebox from place to place. The teacher of class 'A' also has no permanent space, as she splits her time in classroom 'B' and

'C' in the mornings to be with her students, and then works from the kindergarten room in the afternoon . (Parent Gr 4 21-23 Red Deer)

- My son is not in a combined class; however, the other grade 4 class at his school is combined with grade 5 students. Red Deer adjusted the school regions with the construction of two new schools in the Timberland and Clearview Ridge sub-divisions. My son moved schools as a result. We were surprised to see 27 grade 4 students in his class, the largest at the new school. I contacted the principle and superintendent to discuss. I was puzzled at how a new school could already be filled to over capacity and wondered why we were forced to move schools and have a classroom of 27!!! I appreciated the discussion with the superintendent. ..

This isn't high school. The challenged will receive the extra support. My son is average and will count on us to find his strengths and excel. I see in the media now that my son's new school is in line for mobile (4) classroom after being open a short period of time. I can only imagine if I ran my business this way. Always reacting to situations, rather than being pro-active. (Parent Gr 4 27-29 Red Deer)

- Not enough netbooks allocated for each student. Overcrowded school/classroom. Textbooks not available for each child. Library being used as a classroom. Students are asked to purchase their own netbooks for use in school. Playgrounds not provided to the students. (Parent Gr 6 30-32 Beaumont)
- Yes, there are 2 teachers but our room is not made for 36 students. Not enough adequate work space. Some children just can't focus with distractions and with that many students in tight quarters, there are bound to be distractions. Students have no "quiet" or personal space. Grade 1 students have many needs, academically and social. We find it difficult to reach each one and give them the support they each deserve. Some days I go home and ask myself "did I even talk to student A today?" (Teacher Gr 1 36-38 Calgary)
- Most of my students have had to have their fees waived due to low income. We were given a budget to buy school supplies for them. It's November and we are almost out of pencils. I've had to buy my class basic supplies like paper, pencils, white board markers, bandaids, and erasers. I have only 2 prep periods of 40 minutes with which to complete all my planning, marking, and evaluation for this diverse set of learning. I don't have the time, despite my best efforts, to meet the needs of my students. Despite working until 6 most evenings and never taking a day off on the weekends, I'm behind. I'm working with a computer that is over 10 years old. My classroom technology is even older than that. I have 5 laptops (4 that work) which have to be shared with other classes (66 students in total). Most of my students have to bus over an hour just to get to school. They're exhausted from being up so early when they arrive at 9, and are just as spent when they leave at 3:45.

I have half a dozen with ADD, one with ODD, one with Aspergers, one with a cognitive processing delay, 3 speech delays, and 10 ELL students (only 3 are LP3 or below though). Then there's the one whose family has been through more trauma (violence, death, illness, flooding, homelessness) that somehow he doesn't know how to read, there's another student whose parents abandoned him so he lives with his grandparents that needs constant reassurance that he's ok. Then there's the kid that has two parents who work nights and aren't home to send him to school every day. He has to make sure he and his 2 younger siblings are fed, ready, and out the door on time. Sometimes he complains of being hungry, sometimes his classmates say he smells a bit off, but they all understand the situation and try to support each other. (Teacher Gr 5/6 21-23 Calgary)

7. The importance of getting the right conditions

- My classroom is VERY diverse. I enjoy teaching children with special needs and I'm very good at it. I have my Masters of Ed in Disability studies and I taught for 7 years in an exceptionalities classroom. However, I am overtaxed but the sheer amount of special students that I have. Because I can "handle it" I get the most special of our special students. I get the ones that have undiagnosed disabilities but because I can program effectively and personalize for all levels I get overloaded. Honestly? I could do it ALL -- if I just had fewer kids. Give me 20 kids and I'll rock each and every one of their worlds in education. I'll open their eyes and minds to their personal possibilities. But those 5 extra? Or those 8 more last year? Just that few more means I can't. I can't conference with each and every kid when they need it. I can't teach specific social skills to my students on the autism spectrum. I can't because I don't have the time because there are too many of them. (Teacher Gr 4 24-26 Calgary)
- Special needs. LY Cairns. Graduated year 12 in June 2014. Our beautiful system in Alberta allows him extra education until he is 20!! ... It takes a very special kind of person to teach special needs. LY Cairns is a publicly funded school with pretty spectacular staff!... LY Cairns is a completely public funded special needs schools. The only one in Western Canada from what I understand. And my gratitude can't be measured! (Parent High school Edmonton)
- My Down syndrome student has full assistance, so that gives me the time to get to the other children in my class. In addition, I have a very small class size this year. Each day is a dream and I feel like a real teacher this year. I am able to have a positive impact on my students compared to past years where I was just putting out fires in my over populated under supported high needs class. I do not want this year to end! (Teacher Gr 4 18-20 Edmonton)
- Thankfully this is the first year our Early Literacy Assistant is working with grade 2 students and she has been a HUGE help! She is trained in speech and language development so she is really making a difference in my students' education. (Teacher Gr 2 18-20 Medicine Hat)

- I have one educational assistant who works mainly with the autistic student. This is the first time in several years that I have had an EA and it has made a world of difference. I have had up to 29 students in the past 4 years, with extreme high needs students, and no EA assistance. This year I feel like I can actually breathe! (Teacher Gr 6 21-23 Claresholm)