

# Education workers unite in new call to keep children safe as schools reopen

Joint statement from ATA, AUPE, CUPE Alberta and Unifor

Everyone who works in Alberta's public K-12 schools share a common priority: Keeping the students and families safe.

Now that Albertans are preparing for schools to reopen, we as unionized workers have come together to issue this joint statement.

We are concerned about the Government of Alberta's deficient plan for school reopening.

As front-line workers, we know that the best way to keep the children safe is to have enough staff to do the work and to have these workers do the jobs for which they are trained.

That is why members of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and Unifor all commit to focusing on their own work and not put children at risk by doing work for which they are not trained.

Teachers will stick to instruction and assessment; education assistants will stick to helping students; custodial workers will stick to maintenance and cleaning to keep the COVID-19 virus away.

We are concerned with recent comments made by the Premier that call on teachers to "tidy up" in schools as part of the plan to deal with the risks posed by COVID-19.

There is a difference between tidying up, which teachers do routinely, and the cleaning needed to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 that will need to be undertaken throughout schools over the course of the school day in an organized and systematic fashion by staff employed for this purpose.

In the face of this dangerous pandemic, our children and staff need to have all these important tasks done by those who are trained to do them.

The Alberta government and school boards must not cut corners by asking these workers to do their normal jobs and then to undertake extra duties related to COVID-19 for which they are not trained.

Schools have been chronically understaffed for years. Recent budget cuts imposed by the government mean funding is lower than at 2018 levels. Schools do not have the funding required to increase staffing levels to ensure students, staff and their families remain safe.

The government and school boards have a duty to ensure that there are adequate resources to ensure safety. That means having enough workers; enough masks and other required personal protective equipment; and enough sanitizers, soap and washing stations.

Anything less mean placing students, staff and Alberta families at unacceptable risk.



*The ATA represents 45,000 teachers in K-12 schools; CUPE represents more than 8,000 educational assistants, librarians, secretaries, custodial staff, and administrative support; Unifor represents more than 4,000 support workers; and AUPE represents more than 400 support workers.*