

This past year, educational assistants in Alberta, represented by CUPE Local 3550, initiated a strike, with the Alberta Teachers' Association considering similar action. These unions' decisions reflect a growing frustration in the Albertan public education system, rooted in three interlinked issues: unsustainable wages, underfunding, and overcrowded classrooms.

First, wages for educational support workers have become increasingly unlivable. CUPE 3550 president Mandy Lamoureux noted that the average salary for their members is \$34,000; well below the \$46,000 benchmark for a livable wage in Edmonton. Many workers haven't seen a raise in over a decade, even as inflation has soared by approximately 30%. These include educational assistants, library technicians, and cafeteria workers, who are all essential to a functioning school yet underpaid and undervalued.

Furthermore, chronic underfunding has led to a steady decline in educational support staff. A report from SupportEducationWorkers.ca explains that school divisions are legally bound by government-imposed wage caps that limit salary increases, even as operational costs rise. As a result, workers are leaving for better-paying jobs in other sectors, and positions remain unfilled. For students like myself who rely on support (like those with learning disabilities), this had real consequences. My Individualized Program Plan (IPP) provides exam accommodations for my ADHD, including a separate accommodation room, extra time and assistive technology. But when my educational assistant was absent during the strike, no substitute was provided. I had to write my exams in a noisy classroom during another period, making it hard to focus. Since staying home like some students was not an option for me, I had to rely on what was offered; resulting in poor performance and motivation.

Finally, the result of fewer staff is overcrowded classrooms. According to a 2023 ATA report, 85% of Alberta teachers said class sizes exceed the recommended limit, and 95% reported inadequate support for diverse student needs. In an interview with The Canadian Press, educational assistant Fran Robertson noted that the last nine years have seen dwindling numbers of education support staff due to aforementioned issues. This culminates in the remainder of assistants taking on more work than they can handle, for little pay. The result is a circle of underfunded school boards which cannot afford to pay staff the salary they deserve, thus causing a shortage of skilled professionals in public schools.

Though the strikes have had a negative impact on me and many others, I stand by their decisions. Many support staff love working with students and families to ensure they receive the assistance they need. I support calls for a properly funded education system that ensures an inclusive learning environment for students. While I was not aware of the importance of unions before, they are vital by advocating for educators' rights and interests; and they should have a say in the decisions that affect their classrooms and students. Education should be prioritized over political cost-cutting, and striking was a last resort to push for a future where students like me aren't left behind.

Works consulted

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[More education support workers vote in favour of strike action | Alberta Teachers' Association](#)

- The Tyee. “Alberta’s Education Assistants Are Losing the Classroom Battle.” July 2025.

[Alberta’s Education Assistants Are Losing the Classroom Battle | The Tyee](#)