

Strikes, at their core, are a form of disruptive protest—but uniquely, they are a disruption about consequences. Unlike blocking roads or vandalizing art, strikes force employers to face what happens when they can not support their workers. The recent educational assistant (EA) strike, and the possibility of the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) taking similar action, compelled the general public to acknowledge that the government—not just private employers anymore—are not sustaining essential services such as EAs, teachers, and even postal workers.

It is easy to see strikes as lazy or entitled behavior, but in reality, they are a last resort in an externally motivated society that often only responds when things break down. When EAs went on strike, I heard stories on the radio about kids stuck at home or facing medical risks because there was no trained staff to help them. Yet, I do not believe that someone who spends their life supporting vulnerable students prefers standing on a picket line while the public suffers, over supporting children through their education. The choice to strike only speaks to how necessary it must have been.

According to the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), some of the main reasons for the EA strike included wage stagnation, trouble recruiting and retaining staff, and a bargaining process that led nowhere. Wages have not kept up with inflation—which has gone up around 30% over the past decade—and Alberta's funding per student is the lowest in Canada at \$11,601. Teachers and support staff have been warning for years that this would lead to burnout, under-resourcing, and harm to student learning, and that is the truth everyone is seeing. CBC reports that while Alberta's Commission on Learning recommends class sizes of 17 to 27 students, actual class sizes often range from 37 to over 50.

Even in junior high, my teachers were already talking about how strained they were. As my age and understanding went up, so did these kinds of discussions. It was a kind of honour that my teachers considered me mature enough to understand their problems, and I felt reassured that they had a genuine interest in making my education the best it could be. Now I go to a small high school with under 400

students, but my core classes still have over 32 kids while the recommended class size is 27. I have sat in the front row and still felt like my teacher did not know my name, and simply because the attention of one person had to be split between over 30 other students. That environment pushed me to become an independent learner, but not every student thrives in those conditions. If the ATA does strike, I believe I can persevere as I always have. But most importantly, if it results in more support, and teachers who are not burning out, then I would rather miss a few weeks now and come back to an improved, sustainable system than have things continue downhill as they are right now.

### Citations

Alberta Teachers' Association. (2023, November 22). *Class size data indicate system under strain*. <https://teachers.ab.ca/news/class-size-data-indicate-system-under-strain>

CBC News. (2023, November 7). *Education support workers in Alberta go on strike over wages, workloads*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/alta-cupe-strike-1.7438005>

CBC News. (2023, March 3). *Edmonton public class sizes higher than usual amid teacher shortage, rising enrolment*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/edmonton-public-class-sizes-higher-than-usual-1.7092926>

Support Education Workers. (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions*. <https://supportededucationworkers.ca/faq/#q1>