

# **Teacher Assistant Training Options For Residents Of Northern Alberta**

Prepared for:  
Northern Labour Market Information Clearinghouse

Prepared by:  
Joni Heffernan

January 2002

## Table of Contents

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b>   | <b>1</b>  |
| <b>Section 1 – Teacher Assistant Training</b>   |           |
| <b>1.1 Distance Options</b>   | <b>3</b>  |
| Table 1: Options for Northern Residents Interested in Distance TA Programs<br>The University of Calgary<br>Red Deer College<br>Grant MacEwan College<br>Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Sciences & Technology |           |
| <b>1.2 On-Campus Options</b>  | <b>8</b>  |
| Table 2: Options for Northern Residents Interested in On-Campus TA Programs<br>Keyano College<br>Lakeland College<br>Portage College  |           |
| <b>1.3 In Development</b>   | <b>10</b> |
| Table 3: TA Programs in Development at Colleges in Northern Alberta<br>Grande Prairie Regional College<br>Northern Lakes College  |           |
| <b>Section 2 - Current Issues In Teacher Assistant Training</b>   |           |
| <b>2.1 The Provincial Scope</b>   | <b>12</b> |
| Chart 1: Approximate Number of TA’s In School Districts in Northern Alberta   |           |
| <b>2.2 The Northern Scope</b>   | <b>14</b> |
| <b>Section 3 – Recommendations and Closing Comments</b>   | <b>17</b> |
| <b>Footnotes</b>  | <b>19</b> |

## **The Clearinghouse Project**

The *Clearinghouse Project* is a collaboration between the Northern Alberta Development Council and five public colleges located in Northern Alberta. The purpose of the *Clearinghouse Project* is to provide on-going research relevant to the labour-market trends in Northern Alberta. The information collected through the *Clearinghouse Project* is intended to be used by the Colleges to assist them in determining strategies to meet the training and employment needs of the Region. Current members in the *Clearinghouse Project* include: Fairview College, Grande Prairie Regional College, Keyano College, Lakeland College, and Northern Lakes College. Twice a year these members convene to determine the research priorities of its Research Consultants. The following report is a result of this process.

### **Introduction**

During the 1970's financial pressures on School Boards resulted in the creation of "non-certified" staff employed at the school level that were collectively referred to as teacher assistants.<sup>1</sup> Initially this financial management strategy was directed at auxiliary services such as the library. Since its inception however, the term teacher assistant has developed into a precise job title referring to support staff that work within the classroom with the Teacher. Perhaps the biggest factor directing this change has been the coinciding integration of students with special needs into the regular classroom. As such the duties and expectations of Teacher Assistants have become directed to assisting the Teacher with lesson preparation, one-on-one instruction for students with special needs, small group facilitation, and behavior / crisis management. In essence a para-professional industry had emerged.

In response to this new group of support staff, Colleges began offering Teacher Assistant programs designed to meet the learning needs of this group of educational support staff. The primary intent of this report is to describe and critique those Teacher Assistant programs that are accessible to residents of Northern Alberta. It is anticipated that this information can be used by the *Clearinghouse* partners to gain an overview of who the competitors are for the Teacher Assistant market and what, if any, their recruitment advantages may be. A secondary purpose of

this report is to address current systemic barriers that may hinder the success of offering a Teacher Assistant program in Northern Alberta. Again, it is hoped that by identifying these barriers the *Clearinghouse* partners can incorporate these factors into their public relations and marketing strategies. This report is divided into three sections:

### Section 1: Teacher Assistant Training

A summary of the institutions that offer a distance and/or on-campus Teacher Assistant program to residents in Northern Alberta. An analysis of the recruitment advantages of each institution is included.

### Section 2: Current Issues in Teacher Assistant Training

A look at the perspective of the Educational system and how this factor influences recruitment.

### Section 3: Closing Comments and Recommendations

Throughout the report recommendations and comments are noted within the topic of discussion. This section will summarize the key recommendations with added comments.

## Section 1) Teacher Assistant Training

### 1.1 Distance Options:

If you lived in Northern Alberta and you wanted to do a distance program in Teacher Assistant you have four options.

| Program / Institution                                       | DistanceEd                                       | Curriculum                                  | Level       | ~Costs | ~Enrolled<br>* |
|---|--|---|-------------|--------|----------------|
| Teacher Assistant - complete<br>University of Calgary       | Teleconference*<br>S-On-line*<br>On-site options | 9 courses<br>1 portfolio                    | Certificate | \$2500 | 320            |
| Teacher Assistant - complete<br>Red Deer College            | Teleconference<br>A-On-line*                     | 10 courses<br>2 practicum                   | Certificate | \$5000 | 130            |
| Teacher Assistant - complete<br>Grant MacEwan College       | Correspond*<br>Satellite sites                   | 13 courses<br>2 practicum<br>1 conference   | Certificate | \$4000 | 112            |
| Teacher Assistant - complete<br>Sask. Inst. of Applied Tech | Correspondence                                   | 14 courses<br>2 practicum<br>4 certificates | Certificate | \$5000 | 15             |
| Education Assistant - partial<br>Medicine Hat College       | Two courses<br>D*                                | 12 courses<br>2 practicum                   | Certificate | NA     | NA             |
| Human Services - partial<br>Grande Prairie Regional         | 1 course D*<br>2 On-Line                         | 9 courses<br>1 practicum                    | Certificate | NA     | NA             |

#### Notes:

- 1) Teleconference = specified time/location to connect with instruction using phone/speaker boxes
- 2) A-On-line = asynchronous – the student logs-in at own convenience to access curriculum
- 3) S-On-line = synchronous – the student logs-in for “live” instruction/discussion
- 4) Correspondence = Study package delivered to home, self-directed typically with tutor assistance
- 5) D = described as distance in promotional materials; details of method not given.
- 6) Enrollment numbers are for distance education students only

**Table 1: Options for Northern Residents Interested in Distance Teacher Assistant Programs**

Table 1 gives some interesting insights into the current happenings in Northern Alberta as it pertains to accessing a distance Teacher Assistant program. First, there are four institutions that can offer a complete distance Teacher Assistant program to Northern residents. These four institutions are the University of Calgary, Red Deer College, Grant MacEwan Community College, and the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Sciences & Technology. Interestingly none of these institutions are based in Northern Alberta. Which means there is room for the *Clearinghouse* partners who have Teacher Assistant curriculums to consider expanding into this delivery mode. The next section will consider in detail each of the four institutions that offer a distance Teacher Assistant program and will highlight their novel recruitment advantages.

### **The University of Calgary <sup>2</sup>:**

By far the University of Calgary is the top achiever for enrolling Teacher Assistant students through distance education. With over 300 students registered (700 if on-campus is also included) in the distance option, the majority from Northern Alberta and NWT, we need to ask ourselves “What are they doing that is so effective in drawing students?”. A review of their curriculum content indicates this program is not superior from that of the Colleges. Also there is no upgrade advantage to taking the program at the University of Calgary; especially since the University discontinued its Bachelor of Education. As a matter of fact the upgrade option for U of C, which is with Athabasca University not with the University of Calgary, gives the student less credit in an Undergraduate Arts degree than that of Lakeland College, who has a similar upgrade option with Athabasca University for their on-campus Teacher Assistant program.

What is it then? There are three novel aspects of the University of Calgary program that may be giving them their recruitment advantage. First they don’t require a practicum, however in order to do the program the prospective student must be employed by a school or must have volunteer access in order to create a practicum experience. The practicum is actually entwined in every course, which requires classroom observations and/or hands-on practice of the concepts. The second advantage of the University of Calgary is that it is the cheapest of the four (U of C, Red Deer, Grant MacEwan & SIAST) institutions offering the distance education program.

The third advantage the University of Calgary has is that it collaborates heavily with School Boards to have the program perceived as a “workplace training” initiative instead of focusing

only on individual student recruitment. The personnel of this program emphasize “in-servicing” for Teacher Assistants to the Schools and they will bring their Instructors on-site for groups of Teacher Assistants at a particular School or District. These efforts are in combination with on-campus classes, teleconferencing (of which sites are available in Northern Alberta), and they are currently working on putting more courses on-line. The University of Calgary also strategically promotes itself as being “officially recognized by Alberta Learning”. Though what they mean by this is unclear because Teacher Assistants in general are not “officially recognized” by the Alberta Teacher’s Association, let alone by Alberta Learning.

### **Red Deer College<sup>3</sup>:**

Last year Red Deer College hired a full-time staff person (Maria Cicman) to coordinate alternate delivery options for their Teacher Assistant program. Feedback from Maria Cicman indicated that approximately 130 students are enrolled this year. However, of those 130 students only 10 come from Northern Alberta - 2 in High Level, 1 in Fort McMurray, and 7 in Grande Prairie. Hence, it appears that they are not attracting a lot of our prospective students for their Teacher Assistant program. The biggest reason noted by Maria Cicman was that the School Boards in Northern Alberta tend not to recognize Teacher Assistant training. As noted by Ms. Cicman, it is difficult to market a program on a one-on-one basis when it makes no “perceived” professional difference to the employee (this barrier will be covered in detail in Section 2).

However, this may not be the only factor reflected in Red Deer’s low enrollment from residents of Northern Alberta. The majority of the Red Deer College program requires scheduled teleconferences, though two courses are available through the web (asynchronous). For the prospective distance student this requirement creates the inconvenience of planning around the institution’s schedule and, especially relevant to Northern Alberta, travel to the teleconference site. Red Deer is also more expensive than U of C and Grant MacEwan. Red Deer actually charges an additional \$100.00 for each course offered through their alternative delivery option. This extra charge increases distance costs by \$1000.00 as compared to on-campus costs.

A novel component of the Red Deer College curriculum is that the electives are the specialty courses (i.e. ... instead of the “generic” courses). This may actually be a recruitment advantage

for Red Deer in that it allows for the student to reference his/her own employment needs and to concentrate his/her academics based on the needs of the worksite/community.

#### **Grant MacEwan Community College<sup>4</sup>:**

Grant MacEwan is a College with a reputation that precedes itself. Known for its high quality programs and industry liaisons, it is not surprising that Grant MacEwan is a major competitor for the Northern Colleges. Of the 112 students currently enrolled in their distance Teacher Assistant program over half of them come from the Northern Alberta region (Merle Kennedy, TA – DE Instructor).

Unlike Red Deer College, the biggest recruitment advantage Grant MacEwan has going for it is that it has remained faithful to traditional correspondence (aka “get your course in the mail”). According to Merle Kennedy, they have received a few requests for on-line courses but the demand for “hard-print” remains very high and preferred by most students. Considering that certificate level training appeals to the lower income demographic (hence little discretionary funds to purchase a computer) and that Teacher Assistants do not have liberal access to the school after hours (hence limited access to computers) it comes as no surprise that correspondence is the preferred method of delivery. Of course we cannot forget the always-present transportation issues in Northern Alberta, which may also be a contributing factor.

A novel component of the Grant MacEwan Teacher Assistant program is that it requires students to attend an industry conference. This may be a recruitment advantage in that it creates the perception of professionalism and offers real networking / employment opportunities for students. It is also a very strategic public relations act that gets the students out into the professional arena and it increases industry awareness of their program.

Grant MacEwan is also involved in shared delivery collaborations with communities outside Edmonton. Grant MacEwan has numerous such agreements in which satellite sites deliver their curriculum for a fee. The most noteworthy in relation to this report being Northern Lakes College, which offers the Teacher Assistant program part-time on-campus in Grouard.

## **Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Sciences & Technology<sup>5</sup>:**

SIAST's Teacher Assistant program ranks as one of the best available in Canada and is completely accessible through correspondence. However, of the 15 students enrolled in the distance option only 2 come from outside Saskatchewan. Hence, SIAST does not appear to be a competitor for the Northern Colleges. The uniqueness of SIAST's program is that it includes four industry certifications in its graduation requirements: Crisis Intervention, First Aid, Level C-CPR, and Personal Care Skills. For distance students, local certifications can be transferred to the transcript. Aside from being 100% ready to step into employment, an added recruitment advantage is that the employer's in-servicing expenses are decreased – a great marketing strategy.

---

In summary, taking the novel aspects of each of the above institutions and merging their recruitment advantages for a distance Teacher Assistant program the resulting “best practices” description would look like:

A **correspondence** (GMCC & SIAST) **certificate** (all) program costing **less than \$4000.00** ( U of C, & GMCC) , which **weaves the practicum** (U of C) requirement into the student's current employment; that offers **choice in specialty courses** (Red Deer); includes a variety of **industry certifications** (SIAST); attendance at an **industry conference** (GMCC); and has the **support of the School District**.

**Note:** Of the seven recruitment advantages highlighted in the previous paragraph six of them are in the direct control of the curriculum designers of the College. However, the seventh component, support by the School District, is a sensitive issue in the educational system that requires an “impeccable public relations” strategy. This issue is a complex array of unionization, funding, and credibility. It is also an issue that can make or break the recruitment efforts of a College. Section 2 of this report will examine this issue.

---

## 1.2 On-campus Options:

If you lived in Northern Alberta and you wanted to go to a classroom to do a program in Teacher Assistant you currently have four options.

| Program / Institution   | Length  | Curriculum                                | Level       | ~Costs |
|---|---|---|-------------|--------|
| Educational Assistant<br>Keyano College   | F/T - 10 Months<br>P/T available                                  | 12 courses<br>2 practicum                 | Certificate | \$4000 |
| Teacher Assistant<br>Lakeland College   | F/T - 32 weeks  | 13 courses<br>2 practicum                 | Certificate | \$4000 |
| Teacher Assistant<br>Northern Lakes College<br>(Grant MacEwan Program)                            | 10 month F/T program offered on a P/T basis at the Grouard Campus | 13 courses<br>2 practicum<br>1 conference | Certificate | \$4000 |
| Educational Assistant<br>Portage College  | F/T - 36 weeks  | 15 courses<br>3 practicum                 | Certificate | \$4000 |
| <b>Table 2: Options for Northern Residents Interested in On-Campus Teacher Assistant Programs</b> |   |   |             |        |

### Keyano College<sup>6</sup>:

Keyano's Educational Assistant program is a comprehensive academic program that is offered on-campus either full-time or part-time. Keyano's part-time offerings are strategically offered during "after school" hours; a strategy directed towards currently employed Assistants. Keyano has also started the "impeccable public relations" needed to attain School Board support for their program. To date, the Fort McMurray Catholic School Board offers wage incentives for program completion, and the Public, Catholic, and Northlands School Boards are considering tuition reimbursement for staff interested in the program. A huge achievement in recognition from the educational system!

### Lakeland College<sup>7</sup>:

Lakeland's Teacher Assistant program is by far the program of choice for students wanting to specialize in *Signing Exact English*. This innovative offering places Lakeland in the unique

---

*Teacher Assistant Training Options For Residents Of Northern Alberta – Heffernan*

position of being a potential foundation program for persons interested in pursuing advanced education in Sign Language Interpretation. Alberta Learning's *A Review of Special Education in Alberta: Final Report* identified that "there is a serious shortage of qualified and trained interpreters working with the deaf".

The Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada (AVLIC) is the national governing body and administers certification evaluations. The Nova Scotia Community College offers a good beginning for reviewing curriculum content and national certification in this field. Graduates of the NSCC two-year diploma are prepared to take the first stage of AVLIC's certification process, the Written Test of Knowledge (WTK). The final part, Test of Interpretation, is generally sought after five or more years in the field. This may be a potential area for expansion for Lakeland College, as there are very few options available in Canada that offer such training.

Lakeland also has the added advantage of having 30 credits from its certificate program being transferable to Athabasca University's Bachelor of Professional Arts – Human Services. This is quite an accomplishment!

### **Portage College<sup>8</sup>:**

Portage's Educational Assistant program is an ideal choice for the prospective student who envisions taking a leadership role; both in the classroom and in the para-professional field. The curriculum content emphasizes decision-making, assessment, behavioral observations, and program development. Though the role of assisting the Teacher is noted in the program description, the roles of one-on-one instruction and small group leadership are obvious in the course descriptions. Interestingly Portage is the only institution that does not offer a course focused on the secondary role of the Teacher Assistant in classroom. It would come as no surprise if the first unified Teacher Assistant group comes from graduates of Portage College.

---

## Section 1.3 In Development

Feedback from the following institutions indicated they are currently the in process of developing a Teacher Assistant program.

| Program / Institution   | Proposed Delivery Options  |
|---|--|
| Teacher Assistant<br>Grande Prairie Regional  | Proposed to include Distance Education options<br>Program proposal submitted to Alberta Learning<br>Proposed start date – September 2002 |
| Teacher Assistant<br>Northern Lakes College   | Proposed to include Distance Education options<br>Proposed start date – Spring 2002  |
| <b>Table 3: Teacher Assistant Programs in Development at Colleges in Northern Alberta</b> |  |

### Grand Prairie Regional College<sup>9</sup>:

GPRC submitted a proposal to Alberta Learning for a Teacher Assistant program. The start date is targeted for Septmeber 2002. Interestingly, Grande Prairie Regional College started offering a Human Services Certificate / Diploma in September 2001. This program is marketed as graduating multi-disciplinary front-line human service support that would encompass employment as a Teacher Assistant. There are currently 8 students enrolled in the program. The Human Service program is an innovative example of designing a curriculum to meet the needs of the industry. The core of the program, developing Behavior Analysis and Crisis Intervention skills, are two needed skills frequently cited by Teachers. Betty Barton, Instructor for the GPRC Human Services program, indicates that Grande Prairie Regional College may consider distance options in the future.

A potential expansion of GPRC's Human Service program is to create a post-graduate diploma that specializes in Behavior Management. The target group could be Undergraduates with majors in Psychology, Criminology, Social Work, and even Education. Memorial University of Newfoundland has a similar program that could serve as a prototype.

### **Northern Lakes College<sup>10</sup>:**

Another innovator about to hit the market is Northern Lakes' Teacher Assistant program. Northern Lakes is in the process of branching off from Grant MacEwan's satellite campus in Grouard to merge "best practices" for a new distance Teacher Assistant program. The College intends to compliment its delivery model with instructional tutor support throughout its geographical catchment and various satellite campuses. This program is designed with the house/community bound student in mind (i.e.. Northern Alberta). The targeted start date for the Northern Lakes College program is Spring 2002.

## Section 2 – Current Issues in Teacher Assistant Training

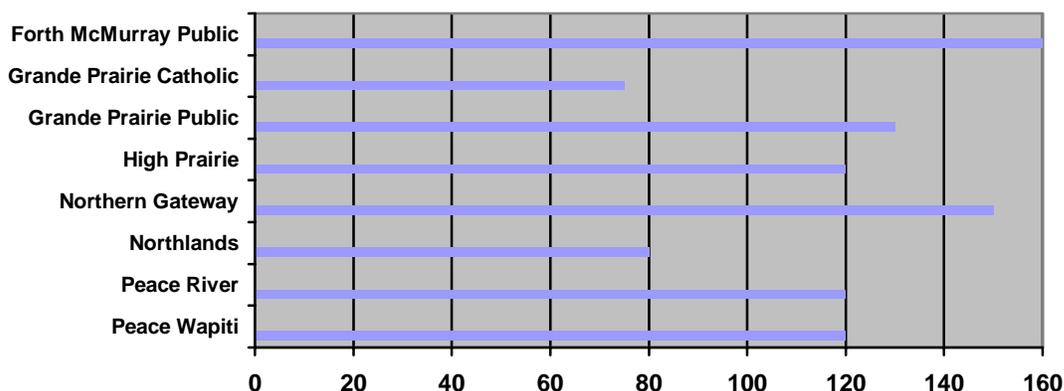
### 2.1 The Provincial Scope

In 1995 the Alberta Teacher's Association – Educational Trust Fund sponsored a research project to determine the role the Teacher Assistant was serving for the educational system. The research project was a collaborative venture of Medicine Hat College, Grant MacEwan Community College, and Red Deer College.<sup>11</sup> The results of the research project were to be used to design curriculums that reflected the needs of the industry. However, the findings indicated such a wide variety of roles and backgrounds that the data revealed few patterns that could direct future program development. However, there were two key points that could be extracted from the data: 1) Teacher assistants are used more frequently in the elementary grades as opposed to junior/senior, and 2) Teachers associate Teacher Assistants with special needs students. The *Clearinghouse* partners should consider a similar research project.

Also in 1995, the University of Calgary piloted a course to Teacher Assistants of the Golden Hills School District. This pilot course was so successful that the U of C began offering the course through teleconference to other school districts. In the span of one year, what started out as one course had developed into a 9-course certificate program available across Alberta and the NWT through teleconference. The first class graduated in September 1998. As of June 2000 there have been a total of 220 graduates. Incredibly, the enrollment for 2001 peaked at 700.<sup>12</sup>

With such an interest in Teacher Assistant training it would appear to be a viable program investment for post-secondary institutions. Feedback from School Districts in Northern Alberta appears to reinforce this perception. School Districts that responded to a questionnaire indicated that on average there are over 100 staff employed as a Teacher Assistant's (Chart1) with a wage range of \$9.00 up to \$16.60.<sup>13</sup> For some Schools the total number of Teacher Assistants is very likely to be half or more of the total number of Teachers in the school. And the Alberta Occupational Growth Projection for this job indicates that the demand for Teacher Assistants is above average.<sup>14</sup> This trend is expected to continue across 2001-2005.

**Chart 1: Approximate # of TA's In School Districts of Northern Alberta**



Given the above information one would think that offering a Teacher Assistant program would be a guaranteed moneymaker. Herein lies the caution! Just because the School Districts have a high number of positions for Teacher Assistants doesn't mean there is support for training. Though there are numerous individuals in the educational system who advocate for Teacher Assistant training, there are just as many who harbor an "anti-TA" sentiment. These individuals are the gatekeepers of public education who attack any action that has the potential to lead to "de-professionalizing" Teaching. The Teacher Assistant issue is wrapped up with Charter Schools, Diploma level Teacher Certification, and corporate sponsorship. Caution is noted in the following ATA policy "*Long Range Policy 12.A.8* – The ATA opposes the utilization of TA's when such utilization may effect a reduction of professional staff"<sup>15</sup>. Teacher support for formal training of Teacher Assistants may be viewed as one step closer to the demise of the Teacher.

A review of publications referring to Teacher Assistants from Alberta Learning and the Alberta Teacher's Association shows contradictions of position; both with each other and with themselves. For example, in Alberta Learning's *A Review of Special Education in Alberta: Final Report* (2000) the issue of inconsistencies across the Province in the role of the Teacher Assistant had been identified as a concern by the Provincial Review Board.<sup>16</sup> Yet, the ATA has, and continues to, recommended "specific functions and duties of Teacher Assistants should not be defined by statute or departmental regulation"<sup>16</sup> (ATA-*Long Range Policy 12.A.3*)<sup>17</sup>

A few paragraphs below this policy is *Policy 12.A.9* which recommends “public colleges ensure that their education programs for TA’s prepare them for the integration of students with special needs”<sup>18</sup> *Current Directive 12.B.1* of the ATA “urges school jurisdictions to develop enforceable standards of conduct of non-certified staff”.<sup>19</sup> The ATA’s policy recommendations for the education of students with special needs include “ provided that ...appropriately trained TA’s are provided...”(*Long Range Policy 17.A.1-e*).<sup>20</sup> *Current Directive 17.B.7* “encourages Teachers to protest placement of students with behavioral disorders until appropriate resources and support are provided...”<sup>21</sup> While *Current Directive 17.B.8* “urges school boards to ensure that an adequate number of TA’s are available to assist Teachers in meeting the needs of students with special needs”.<sup>22</sup> For an Association that appears to have a pretty heavy reliance on the continued presence of Teacher Assistants they have a strange way of acknowledging this inter-dependency.

While some may feel that the ATA is at fault, it is Alberta Learning that must ultimately be held responsible for its lack of leadership. The disparity within the educational system with regards to training Teacher Assistants is reflected in Alberta Learning’s lack of regulations for recruitment standards across School Districts, there is no data collection on recruitment numbers or roles, the non-existence of a para-professional sub-committee within the Alberta Teacher’s Association, in-serving for Teacher Assistants that is dependent on the attitude of the Principal, and no unified collective agreement. All of these factors contribute to discouraging individuals from pursuing training in this field. Unfortunately they also influence the success of any such program offered.

---

## **2.2 The Northern Scope:**

Ironically for the School Districts in Northern Alberta the disparity in the educational system works in their favor; at least from a recruitment perspective. If the School Boards in Northern Alberta required Teacher Assistant training as condition of employment they could theoretically lose a high number of their current staff. Also the vast majority of the Teacher Assistants in Northern Alberta reflect a more consistent labour pool than the Teaching pool; especially in the more remote communities. This is because the Teacher Assistants tend to come from the

community, they know the families and children, and their lack of education makes them less mobile. A survey was forwarded to the School Districts in Northern Alberta. Below are two questions that were on this survey and a summary of the responses received.

---

**Do you require a minimum of qualifications in order for someone to work as a Teacher Assistant in your School District?**

No (5)

We would like to see Teacher Assistant training but this is not a prerequisite as each child is different and we need to fill the position with the best assistant to meet that child's needs.

Grade 12

Early Childhood, LPN, etc ... depending on the need of the child

**Does your School District offer professional development for Teacher Assistants?**

Yes (3)

We offer PD within our computer labs.

PD is encouraged outside the District. Travel expenses are reimbursed depending upon that particular school's policies (site based management).

We provide PD as needed.

As long as it is locally based.

\$100.00 a year plus other District sponsored activities

---

Note that none of the School Districts indicated that they “require” a Teacher Assistant to have a College program, however the School Districts are open to the idea of professional development. For a College to suggest to a Northern School District that they - first support a TA program, - then hire graduates from such classes, - then offer incentives to staff to complete such a program, and - ultimately require a TA program as a condition of employment (the surefire situation for enrollment into the College’s program) is basically asking that School District to “shoot itself in the foot”. Northern Alberta has enough difficulty as it is in recruiting for Teachers, Nurses, and other human service professionals, let alone creating another vacuum in a para-professional industry that technically doesn’t exist!

So how does a College make inroads at the employer level? For the Colleges in Northern Alberta the most effective avenue is to advocate for standards at the Provincial level because unless there are directives from the top there is little incentive for the School Districts to change. This approach needs to be combined with current program offerings plus an added concentration to in-service schools in the Northern Region, (i.e. on-site seminars, CEU’s, industry certifications), summer institutes, and perhaps even grandfathering (i.e. Prior Learning Assessments) some of the more experienced Teacher Assistants.

Local advocacy can be facilitated through current Teacher Assistants who can be molded to advocate for themselves. The Colleges would continue to lay the foundation through academic offerings while those with a vested interest in professional recognition (current staff and students) are encouraged to create their own peer association. Once a peer association is formed emails, newsletters, conferences and even standards begin to take a life of it own (a similar model of dynamics that took hold in Early Childhood Education in the 1980’s).

### Section 3: Recommendations and Closing Comments

Following is a summary of the key points and recommendations.

- 1) U of C and GCMM are the two main competitors in the Teacher Assistant market for Colleges considering a distance education program.
- 2) TA distance programs in Northern Alberta should be correspondence.
- 3) For students with access to schools, TA programs should not require a separate practicum. Instead each course should require on-the-job applications that can be a component of evaluation.
- 4) Offering a choice of specialty in the TA program allows for school/community needs to be addressed within the student's academics.
- 5) TA programs should include industry certifications.
- 6) Students should be linked with professional associations; either through conference attendance, guest speakers, membership requirement etc ...
- 7) Keyano College can serve as a role model for endearing support for local School Boards.
- 8) P/T, on-campus, TA courses should be available 3:30pm – 6:00pm (after school hours)
- 9) Lakeland College should consider advancing into a Sign Language Interpretation program that could be marketed across Canada.
- 10) GPRC should consider a post-Bachelor's certificate/diploma in Behavior Analysis that is designed for undergrads with Psychology, Criminology, Social Work, etc.
- 11) The Alberta Occupational Growth Projection for Teacher Assistant is above average.
- 12) The *Clearinghouse* partners should consider an industry research project similar to the one designed by Medicine Hat, Grant MacEwan, and Red Deer in 1995.
- 13) Alberta Learning and the ATA both acknowledge they are dependent on the presence of TA's in the classroom. However, neither governing body has created professional regulations pertaining to the recruitment, training, and compensation for this group.
- 14) There are inconsistencies in standards, roles, and wages across the Province.
- 15) Because Northern Alberta has a difficult time recruiting, it is in their favor that there are no standards for TA recruitment. This advantage is a disadvantage for Northern Colleges.
- 16) In general, School Districts in Northern Alberta do not recognize TA training.
- 17) Northern Colleges need to advocate for change at the Provincial level.

18) Northern Colleges need to include PD seminars for TAs and deliver them to the schools.

These seminars should link to the College's TA program through a CEU mechanism.

19) Current TAs would benefit from summer institutes.

20) Northern Colleges should consider a grandfathering process for experienced TAs.

21) P/T courses can be delivered at Schools to groups of TA's.

22) TAs need to start their own peer association. This is the group that will effect change at the local level.

## **Closing Comments**

The Council for Exceptional Children (CES) is the foremost professional association for persons working with children with special needs. The CES consists of an international membership; it hosts conventions around the world, facilitates the creation of regional chapters, and produces academic journals covering current issues in Special Education. In April 2000 the Council for Exceptional Children (CES) held its National Convention in Vancouver. During this convention a group of CES members, who were a mixture of Special Education Teachers, Teacher Assistants, and University Professors from Canada and the United States, met in a boardroom to outline a plan of action to create a Para-educator division within the CES. <sup>23</sup>

This group of innovators is setting a foundation for Teacher Assistants all over Canada, including Alberta. Though there are systemic barriers in Alberta, especially in Northern Alberta, for Teacher Assistant training to be recognized, these barriers are getting fewer and fewer as TA contemporaries outside Alberta advocate for change. School Districts are not denying that training Teacher Assistants makes them better in the classroom. The point that the Colleges need to advocate is that the School Districts and Alberta Learning need to support this agreement through proactive regulations.

## Footnotes

- 1) Alberta Teacher's Association – *Teacher Assistants. Position Papers*, 1973 – 2000.
- 2) University of Calgary – Distance Education Division - Teacher Assistant Certificate Program. Webpage – <http://www.fp.ucalgary.ca/TACP/>
- 3) Red Deer College Teacher Assistant Program.  
Webpage – <http://rdc.ab.ca> Contact: Maria Cicman, Coordinator of Alternate Delivery
- 4) Grant MacEwan Community College – Teacher Assistant Program.  
Webpage <http://www.gmcc.ab.ca> Contact: Merle Kennedy – Distance Education Instructor
- 5) Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Sciences & Technology – Teacher Assistant  
Webpage <http://www.siastr.sk.ca/virtualcampus>
- 6) Keyano College – Educational Assistant Program  
Webpage <http://www.keyano.ca/childhood/education>
- 7) Lakeland College – Teacher Assistant  
Webpage <http://www.lakelandc.ab.ca/programs1.html>
- 8) Portage College – Educational Assistant Certificate.  
Webpage <http://www.portagec.ab.ca/>
- 9) Grand Prairie Regional College – Human Services Program  
Webpage <http://www.gprc.ab.ca/programs> Contact: Betty Barton, Instructor – Human Services
- 10) Northern Lakes College - Teacher Assistant Program  
Webpage <http://www.northernlakescollege.ca/> Advertisement for Distance Instructors / Designers - 11/2001, Record Gazette
- 11) *The Role of The Teacher Assistant in Alberta* – Summary Report 1997 – ATA Educational Trust Fund – Project # 218 Schools to Be Surveyed on Role of Teacher Assistant. ATA News. Vol.31/14 1997.

- 12) The University of Calgary – Teacher Assistant Certificate Program – Profile Fort McMurray Public – Melissa Thompson - Education Department  
Grande Prairie Catholic – Karl Germann  
Grande Prairie Public – Evelyn Seewalt – Human Resources Coordinator  
High Prairie – Brenda Perry – Financial Services Department  
Northern Gateway – Janice Allen  
Peace Wapiti – Sheldon Rowe  
Peace River – Sandra Marcellus – Assistant Superintendent Instruction/Curriculum
- 13) *Alberta Occupational Growth Projection Charts 2000-2005*. Alberta Learning Information Services. Webpage <http://www.alis.gov.ab.ca/career>
- 14) *LRP 12.A.8. Policy*. Alberta Teachers’ Association–*Shaping the Future For Students With Special Needs: A Review of Special Education in Alberta-Final Report 2000*. Alberta Learning.
- 15) *ATA LRP 12.A.3. Policy*. Alberta Teachers’ Association
- 16) *ATA LRP 12.A.9. Policy*. Alberta Teachers’ Association
- 17) *ATA CD 12.B.1. Policy*. Alberta Teachers’ Association
- 18) *ATA LRP 17.A.1-e. Policy*. Alberta Teachers’ Association
- 19) *ATA CD 17.B.7. Policy*. Alberta Teachers’ Association
- 20) *ATA CD 17.B.8. Policy*. Alberta Teachers’ Association
- 21) CES - 2000 National Convention – Vancouver, B.C.