

Leaders & Learners



CASSA-ACGCS
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

VOL 12 ISSUE 80
APRIL 2018

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Message from the President: Representing CASSA Abroad

THIS SEASON, IT was a pleasure representing CASSA in Krakow, Poland, to speak about the Canadian education system. It was fascinating to speak on a panel along with colleagues from a number of other countries all over Europe and North America, hearing the similarities and differences in our systems.

It is amazing how much we have in common, particularly in areas of mental health, pathways for learning and public accountability.

I was also pleased to attend the annual American Association of School Administrators (AASA) conference in Nashville on behalf of CASSA. It was interesting to hear from guest speakers and thought leaders from across the border.

I extend thanks on behalf of CASSA to **Daniel Domenech**, the Executive Director of ASSA, as well as his team of representatives for opening their doors and hosting an inspiring event for continuous learning in the realm of education leadership.



Anne O'Brien
President

I also want to emphasize the importance for our own members to get involved in learning opportunities such as the upcoming 2018 CASSA conference in Ottawa this July 4 to 6.

The theme this year is Supporting Each Student. Our organizing committee is pleased to offer engaging

sessions with outstanding speakers from across the country.

I encourage you to stay informed of upcoming announcements as details continue to be unveiled on the conference website. You can register early to ensure the best conference, travel and accommodations experience imaginable.

Visit <http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/index.html> for regular updates. I look forward to seeing you in person at the event.

To sum, I must say what an amazing fast-paced two years I have had serving as your President. I must extend a heartfelt thank you to our

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OUR PURPOSE

CASSA is the Canadian organization of school system leaders that promotes and supports quality education for the success of each student.

OUR MISSION

CASSA strengthens the capacity of school system leaders and influences the directions that impact education and student learning.

Message from the Executive Director: Recognizing the Invaluable Support of CASS

I RECENTLY RETURNED from the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) conference. Activities included the annual general meeting and a reception to celebrate the CASS members who have recently retired or will retire in the next several months.

I was joined at the CASS event by CASSA board members **Kevin Kardaal** from BCSSA and **Karen Edgar** from OPSOA.

As I reflected on what I would say in my remarks, memories of the invaluable contributions that CASS members have made to CASSA jumped out. CASSA had previously experienced some difficult times, yet CASS (and a few other affiliates) stayed with the organization. We are now so very strong with representation from all 10 provinces. At this time, we also have representation from all three territories.

As I thought about the CASS leaders who contributed to ensure CASSA remained alive and well, the following names came to mind: **Jim Gibbons, Ed Wittchen, Lee Lucente, John Darroch, Roger**

Nippard, Barry Wowk and Kath Rhyasson. I am certain there were many more members of CASS who helped CASSA throughout the years but, in my experience, these were the leaders I came to know and admire from Alberta. CASS is currently very well served by its Executive Director **Barry Litun** and



Ken Bain
Executive Director

Past President **Colleen Symyrozum-Watt.** My personal best wishes and congratulations to St. Albert Public Schools Superintendent **Barry Wowk** on his upcoming retirement. Barry contributed 16 years of service to CASSA and last year was honoured with a CASSA Honorary Lifetime Membership.

Planning is well underway for our annual conference. We have finalized the names of our opening and closing keynote speakers.

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Message from the President: Representing CASSA Abroad

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Executive Director **Ken Bain** and the entire Board of Directors for their unwavering support and impact on the national educational agenda.

Their vision, intelligence and leadership have been evident and inspiring each month as we talked and learned from each other, developing strategy for the Canadian education conversations.

I welcome and extend best wishes to **Reg Klassen**, Chief Superintendent for Frontier School Division in Manitoba, as your next President.

I extend to each of you the best for a peaceful and successful spring season in your boards and with your schools. I leave each of you with an Irish blessing:

*May the road rise to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back.*

*May the sun shine warm upon your face,
The rains fall soft upon your fields.*

*And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.*

Message from the Executive Director: Recognizing the Invaluable Support of CASS

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The conference will be opened by **Dr. Michael Ungar**.

Dr. Ungar is a very engaging and thoughtful presenter who will speak about the importance of building children's resiliency. Please visit his website at www.michaelungar.com to learn more about him and his research into resilience.

Our closing speaker will be **Dean Shareski** from Discovery Education.

Dean is the Community Manager for Discovery Education Canada. He taught grades 1 to 8 for 14 years and spent 9 years as a digital learning consultant for Prairie South School Division in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. In addition, he is an adjunct professor at Wilkes University. His blog consistently ranks among the top educational blogs. In 2010, he won the ISTE

Award for Outstanding Leader of the Year. Dean has had the opportunity to speak to a variety of education audiences, both nationally and internationally. He has recently authored *Embracing a Culture of Joy* and co-authored *Different Schools for a Different World*. His passion remains helping teachers explore the affordances of technology for learning.

Conference registration for 2018 is now live at <http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/CASSA-register.html>.

Travel and accommodation details are at http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/CASSA-hotel_travel.html. There you will find hotel, airline and rail discount information and codes.

If you are interested in presenting at the conference, I ask you to use the following link to submit your proposal: <https://airtable.com/shr2bYVMITBDjdTb1>. Proposals will be accepted until mid-April.

I look forward to seeing you in Ottawa.

Faces in the Crowd: Profiles of Leaders

Amber Darroch

Amber is the Associate Superintendent, Learner Services, for the Horizon School Division #67 in Taber, Alberta. She has held this position since 2015. Her current portfolio has her overseeing Curriculum Implementation, Inclusive Education, Professional Development, Assessment, Literacy, Numeracy, English Language Learning, Student Achievement, Technology Services, Student Health & Wellness, Counselling Services, International Education and Off Campus Education. As a member of the senior administrative team, she is also involved with school modernization, teacher evaluation and policy development for the division.

Her journey in system leadership has spanned three school districts and included almost every aspect of system operations except for finance, transportation and facilities. After spending the majority of her teaching and school leadership career in Lethbridge School District #51, she first served as Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent for two years and then later as Director of Learning with Palliser Regional Schools, also based in Lethbridge.

Amber has maintained an exemplary record of service over a 20-year period as an educator in Alberta schools. She began her career in Yellowknife. She taught elementary, middle and high school students across a breadth of grades and subjects. She also served as a principal in elementary, secondary and alternative settings.

Amber earned her Bachelor of Education from the University of Alberta and holds a Master of Education from the University of Lethbridge. She is certified as a trainer for Alberta Health Services (Go-To Educator/Mental Health Literacy) and the Canadian Centre for Threat Assessment & Trauma Response (Level I Threat Assessment). Amber is also certified as a facilitator in the FranklinCovey “7 Habits of Highly Effective People” program. She has a strong practical and theoretical background in educational leadership and possesses a strong skill set for supporting work in the area of teacher mentorship and leadership development. She is committed to ensuring success for all students and is passionate about promoting highly effective teacher practice.

Since 2016, she has been the Zone 6 Chair for the College of Alberta School Superintendents and a board member for the Alberta Assessment Consortium. She also sits on the School Technology Advisory Committee for Alberta Education and the Child & Youth Care Advisory Committee for Lethbridge College, and is the Project Lead for the Alberta Research Partnership with the University of Lethbridge: Middle Years Math. She is a past member of the Provincial Leadership Community of Practice for Implementing the Learning & Technology Policy Framework.

In her spare time, Amber enjoys reading, travel, sports and spending time with her family. She has four adult children and her husband, **Clark Bosch**, now retired, has also served as an education system leader. (Longtime CASSA members may recall that Amber’s father **John Darroch** served as CASSA President from 2003 to 2004.)



Amber Darroch



Amber with her dad John Darroch.

System Leadership in School Mental Health: A Feature Interview with Dr. Kathy Short

In this issue of Leaders & Learners, we are pleased to present the second of a two-part feature interview with Dr. Kathy Short. Dr. Short delivered the closing keynote address, "System Leadership in School Mental Health," at the 2017 CASSA conference in Halifax. The first part of this feature appears in our February 2018 issue.

What evidence-based practices can you recommend leaders support at this time?

School mental health is best thought of using multi-tiered systems of support, with universal mental health promotion for all students, prevention services for some students at higher risk and intervention for those who are most vulnerable (within the school district and community). There are particular evidence-based practices that are shown to work at each of the tiers of intervention. System leaders should support, for example, the practices listed below.

Tier 1

Social emotional learning (SEL) is a very high-yield universal mental health promotion activity. It is best delivered in the regular classroom, by an educator, in a systematic and SAFE (Sequential, Active, Focused, Engaging) manner. There are many manualized programs available for supporting social emotional learning but they can be costly to scale. Common to the strongest SEL programs is a focus on

- identifying and managing emotions
- relationship skills
- positive motivation
- stress management
- self-confidence and identity
- executive functioning

In Ontario, we are developing a range of evidence-based, implementation-sensitive SEL offerings that are

designed to fit within the fabric of the school day (for example, curriculum support modules and everyday mental health toolkit for educators).

Other mental health promotion activities that encourage a sense of connectedness and belonging for all students, build resiliency, reduce stigma and facilitate help-seeking are also worthy of support. The most robust initiatives focus on skills related to positive mental health, take a whole school approach and are implemented in an embedded manner (with the intensity and duration sufficient to observe positive effects).

Tier 2

There is strong support for brief, school-based cognitive-behavioural preventive interventions with students who are at higher risk, or may be showing signs of mild to moderate problems with anxiety, conduct or depressed mood. There are many structured psychotherapy programs that can be delivered in individual or group format in the school setting. This level of programming is best delivered by a regulated mental health professional (for example, school social worker, psychologist or psychological associate). Schools are well situated to offer preventative services.

Tier 3

Ideally students with more significant mental health concerns, or who are in crisis, receive treatment and support in community mental health settings. Often it is the school mental health professional who serves as the

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Dr. Kathy Short presenting the 2017 closing keynote address in Halifax.

Lester B. Pearson School Board in Montreal, Quebec, provides a centralized leadership structure and system of supports for nine English language school boards. The WellAhead initiative in BC has similarly helped to identify and to scale up

bridge supporting the student and their family to, from and through these services, perhaps also offering continuing care to support the student over time. In communities in which the school has to take a larger role in providing clinical interventions, regulated mental health professionals can select from a range of empirically supported treatments to serve individual students.

The School Mental Health ASSIST team helps Ontario school boards promote student mental health and well-being. Are there organizations doing similar work in other provinces or territories?

There is an increasing recognition that mental health and well-being is a complex area, and that school districts benefit from a central implementation team that can offer guidance and ongoing technical assistance. Though there are currently no province-wide initiatives of this nature other than the Ontario model, there are several regional approaches that follow a similar path. For example, the Centre for School Mental Health at the

promising well-being practices.

It is important to note that several provinces have other exciting and important initiatives that support school mental health, like cross-sectoral coalitions, repositories of high-yield programming, websites for educators, support for pre-service teachers, and many more.

Also, there are national initiatives of note, such as the Positive Mental Health Toolkit from the Joint Consortium for School Health. Canada has a rich tapestry of resources and many exemplary initiatives worthy of consideration by school system leaders.

What steps would you advise school system leaders take if they want to help develop or support something similar to the School Mental Health ASSIST model in their own province or territory?

Thinking back to earlier phases of development, I recall that it was helpful for us to “think big but start small.” We began our work with 15 of Ontario’s 72 school districts (varied by region, public/Catholic,

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French/English). We learned together over the first year and then applied this knowledge as the next cohort of 15 districts joined the project. All of the accumulated learning from this smaller community of practice informed the model as it has scaled up and been applied across the 72 districts in Ontario. This growing-to-scale concept works equally well when thinking of this from a district lens, scaling up and learning together across schools in a systematic manner.

Secondly, our ability to “lead from the middle” has provided a helpful advantage. Working alongside the Ministry of Education and partner ministries, while at the same time gathering input and forging relationships across levels of the system, has allowed us to mobilize much more quickly for action than would otherwise be possible using a completely top-down or bottom-up approach.

At a district level, system leaders may find that if they pave the way for those with mental health and well-being expertise who are poised to lead from the middle in their districts then these ambassadors may be able to stimulate the sort of alignment, coherence and uptake that leads to positive outcomes for students more quickly.

More specifically, we have recently done an analysis of the core elements of the SMH ASSIST model, with support from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. The preliminary data and evidence that we have accumulated suggests that the following aspects of the model (ACQESS) are most critical to success at the district level:

- **Alignment:** explicit alignment and integration with related ministry and cross-ministry initiatives

- **Consistency:** implementation coaching offered across and within districts that draws on a set of common resources, language and messaging

- **Quality:** senior mental health clinicians in every school board (mental health leaders) who help the board to select and implement evidence-informed practices

- **Engagement:** co-creation of resources and supports with provincial and local stakeholders, including system and school leaders, school mental health professionals, educators, students and families

- **Scalability:** evidence-based, implementation-sensitive approaches to mental health promotion and prevention that are designed to “reach every student”

- **Sustainability:** use of implementation science to build systems and practices that last, founded on the 10 organizational conditions

If system leaders have questions about the model, we would be pleased to offer further information.

Your address listed ways that leaders can create the conditions for effective practices that promote student mental health. These methods included co-creation, implementation teams, coaching, feedback loops, staff well-being norms and relationships. Have you seen examples of these in particular initiatives or programs?

Implementation Science is at the root of all our work within Ontario and as such there are many examples of how this approach is enacted in districts around the province. We try to model these practices provincially and have been pleased to see how this has taken hold more locally as well.

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For example, provincially whenever we are approached to create a resource or tool, we begin the development process by engaging stakeholders to co-create, test and disseminate this with us.

The *Leading Mentally Healthy Schools* resource, for example, was created by and for school leaders, and we have been working with a group of practising principals and vice principals representing the three Ontario principal associations to unpack and release related products over the past three years. Recently, with support from the Knowledge Network for Student Well-Being, these principals prepared a package of printed *Leading Mentally Healthy Schools* resources for every school in Ontario that was disseminated via each district's mental health leader according to their professional learning and implementation plan.

Within boards, mental health leadership teams have used similar design protocols to co-create local resources with principal and teacher partners, across departments, and often in collaboration with their community partners, parents and students themselves. The SMH ASSIST website is updated regularly with spotlight stories that highlight the range of ways that school districts are bringing their mental health and well-being strategy to life.



Are there any additional resources you would like CASSA members to know about to help them promote positive student mental health in their school districts?

There are many excellent, free resources in Canada that may be helpful to school

system leaders. For example, the Positive Mental Health Toolkit from the Joint Consortium for School Health provides an excellent grounding in Tier 1 universal supports that fit within the school setting. The UBC Social and Emotional Learning Resource Finder is also a useful repository of knowledge (and a good complement to the US site, Consortium for Academic and Social Emotional Learning, or CASEL). The Teach Resiliency site from PHE Canada, the Centre for School Mental Health at Western University, and CAMH has been designed to help teachers to embrace their knowledge related to mental health and is continuously being enhanced as the field grows.

School Mental Health ASSIST is currently working to make many of our internal resources more accessible for practising system and school leaders and classroom educators. Stay tuned!

Thank you, Dr. Short, for sharing your insights, strategies and resources.

Learn more about School Mental Health ASSIST:

* Follow on Twitter @SMHASSIST

* Visit www.smh-assist.ca



Instantly access your School Board's specific emergency response procedures and utilize key emergency response tools

Emergency Response Plan



Mobile Access

All of your personnel will have instant access to your emergency response procedures, as well as maps and safety-related how-to documents, right from their mobile devices.

Role-based Checklists

Every staff member will have actionable sets of instructions that can be individualized based on each staff member's role within the organization. As a staff member completes the steps in their checklist, the Safety Team is informed of their progress.

Emergency Communication

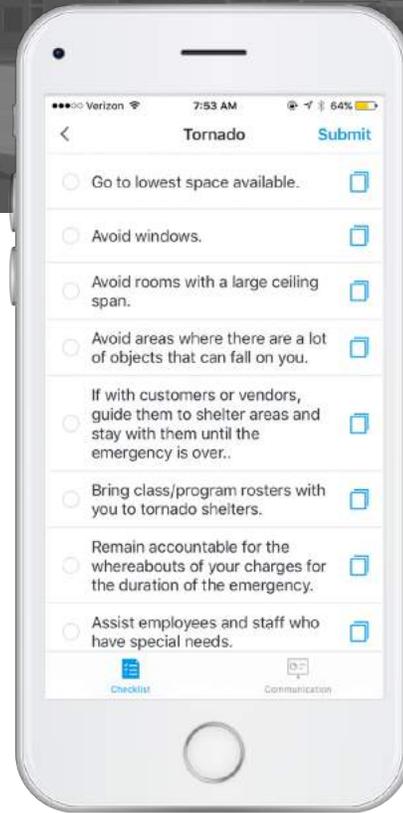
During crisis situations, your Safety Team can utilize the messaging tool to send out information through message groups to teachers and staff, students, and parents.

"CASSA supports the health and wellness of students and staff. Safe and accepting schools promote the goal of student and staff health and well-being."

Ken Bain Executive Director
Canadian Association of School System Administrators



Download the CrisisGo app for free
Learn more at www.crisisgo.com/education



CrisisGo's App turns your mobile devices into mobile safety assistants

Benefits

- Safety Teams can set specific emergency instructions for every staff member through the checklist and observe their progress during a crisis.
- Through our messaging tool schools can keep their staff, their students, and the community continually informed.
- You can upload an endless variety of easily accessible maps and how-to documents that will be useful during a crisis.
- The checklist feature allows staff to follow instructions based on their role in the organization and report progress in reaching those objectives
- Staff will have instant access to emergency response procedures that have been developed for your organization

CASSA Leadership in Photos: AASA, CASS Conference and the Winter Planning Session



CASSA President Anne O'Brien and Executive Director Ken Bain on Nashville's famed Broadway.



Anne O'Brien and CASSA Past President Cindy Finn at the 2018 AASA Discovery Education reception.

Barry Work, a longtime member of the CASSA executive, was recently honoured in Edmonton at a CASS retirement dinner. OPSOA/CASSA board member Karen Edgar and CASSA Executive Director Ken Bain joined in the celebration.



CASSA members gathered in Toronto recently for the annual winter planning session. Representatives from almost every province and territory were on hand for this productive gathering.

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