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LEADERS & LEARNERS

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CANADIENNE DES ADMINISTRATEURS ET DES
ADMINISTRATRICES SCOLAIRES

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Upcoming CASA Events

- Join us at this year's Summer Leadership Academy. It takes place at the Delta St. John's in St. John's, Newfoundland, from July 14 to 16, 2005.
- We are holding the CASA Annual Conference at the Delta Quebec City in October 2005.

Details on CASA events will be posted at www.casa-acas.ca.

Message From The President: Facing Our Common Challenges Together

During the frosty month of February, CASA members attended the American Association of School Administrators annual conference in warm and welcoming San Antonio, Texas. This was a chance to connect with Canadian educators and discuss current issues with American friends.

While there may be regional differences between us, we face common challenges: declining enrolment, fewer resources, greater accountability, the achievement gap, and improving student literacy and numeracy skills.

Senior administrators across both countries are rising to meet these challenges. Working together strengthens our ability to find effective solutions. CASA's annual conferences, leadership academies and newsletters are designed to strengthen leadership and showcase



Ruth Mattingley
CASA president

successful practices across the nation, focusing on key priorities that our members have identified.

That brings me to our latest initiative. We will be inviting members to share on our CASA website the programs and strategies that they have found effective in addressing specific issues. We'll focus on a topic over a specific period of time, based on priorities identified at past national forums. Then we'll post summaries of the fine work being done across our nation in those areas. We'll

even supply contact names for easy follow-up.

We will launch our virtual forum with "Improving Student Literacy Skills," a top priority for us all. Literacy is a foundation for learning, success in school and for later educational and life choices. If we create learning environments with high expectations that all children will achieve proficiency in literacy, we can close the gap in student learning and give all students the power to achieve their personal goals.

As an affiliate member, you can share success stories, effective programs and proven strategies. We'll post these on our website so that we can support and learn from one another. You'll soon find more details on this initiative through your Affiliate Council members and the CASA website. Together we will continue to lead the way in improving education for all of our students.

Message From The Executive Director: Sharing Individual Solutions to Common Challenges



Frank Kelly
CASA executive director

Canada is a vast and varied country. As Canadian educators, we try to serve our students with a local curriculum, but we must always

mind the broad national and world cultures that affect our learning.

CASA members handle these broad issues in ways that are appropriate to their local populations.

Safe school practices in the inner city schools of Toronto differ widely from those of rural schools in northern Manitoba and Ontario. Literacy has a common meaning across Canada, but aspects of it are emphasized differently in Alberta than in Newfoundland. Second language offerings are quite different in Quebec and in inner city schools with multiple lan-

guages. In some schools, achievement means getting into preferred courses in university; in others it means passing basic exit examinations. At-risk students are identified very differently in various parts of Canada.

Our leaders must provide for the different learning performances of all of our students. They must make programs inviting and rewarding to retain students to graduation and direct them along career paths.

While Canadian education is not structured nationally, the solutions to many of our common issues can be shared and transported from one region to another. Almost all of the best solutions for Canada's students come from CASA members. Our sharing can be very powerful.

Through *Leaders & Learners* and the CASA website, we will highlight good work and good programs in each Canadian affiliate. This sharing and networking will spread successful practices across Canada in a positive way.

Colleagues in Newfoundland Experience Drastic Changes

On March 30, 2004, Newfoundland's Minister of Finance **Loyola Sullivan** stood in the House of Assembly to deliver the provincial budget. What he ended up delivering was a serious blow to Newfoundland school boards.

"The Minister of Finance reduced the number of school boards from 11 to 5," explains **Leo Whelan**, executive director of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Directors of Education (NLADE). This was, to say the least, a very trying time for everyone at NLADE and at the district level.

"After you get hit with a nuclear weapon, there's not much left," Whelan says.

Newfoundland's school districts have gone through two previous reorganizations in the past 10 years (there were 25 districts in 1994). Unlike the past, however, this time there was no warning.

"There was zero consultation with school boards, parents or anyone with an interest in education. This was totally done within government, within the executive level of the Department of Education. They offered no explanation other than to say this was for purely budgetary reasons."

Everyone at the district office level became redundant immediately, as were the school boards and school board members, he says. There were no guarantees for re-employment or even job interviews. Some people were able to retire with honour, Whelan says, but they didn't all necessarily want to retire then.

"When you have zero preparation time and you're in your 50s, life becomes very interesting," he says dryly. "Everybody learned it when the Minister stood in the House of Assembly and announced it. So the individual learns it and his family learns it at the same time. You phone home and your house is in turmoil."

Since the local school boards
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**Don't judge each
day by the harvest
you reap, but by the
seeds you plant.**

**—Robert Louis
Stevenson**

The AASA National Conference on Education: Learning and Laughter in San Antonio, Texas

By Ruth Mattingley
CASA President

The American Association of School Administrators' 137th National Conference on Education was recently held in San Antonio, Texas. Delegates from around the globe enjoyed a wide range of keynote speakers, distinguished lecturers and featured presentations. Speakers urged us to challenge the status quo, strive for excellence for all students and continue to create innovative environments that meet the needs of all students.

The conference opened with **Consuello Castillo Kickbusch's** moving address, where she shared her personal view of leadership. Kickbusch framed her comments in the context of her childhood spent in the roughest barrio neighbourhood in Laredo, Texas, and the lessons she learned from her parents. She stressed the im-



San Antonio is a city with a rich cultural heritage, as these traditional outfits illustrate.

portance of being a servant leader: a leader who passes on what they learn and who takes great pride in seeing others succeed. Kickbusch reminded the delegates of the importance of reaching out to communities, getting parents truly involved in their children's education and knowing their communities well.

Rick Dufour spoke on the big ideas of a professional learning community and how leaders bring them to life. Dufour stated that the key to an effective school is keeping one simple goal in mind: All children will learn at high levels.

Peter Senge talked about school systems as learning organizations. He opened his address by challenging the wording in the conference's program booklet describing his talk. Senge said he was surprised that the role of educational leaders was described as "providing education." His view of educational leadership would be one of creating a climate for innovation.

On the lighter side, **Paul Houston**, AASA's executive director, presented his Top 10 Thoughts for School Administrators to Live By. They



The Alamo, San Antonio's most famous site.

went something like this:

10. It's better to be over the hill than to die on it.
9. It's important to be sincere, whether you mean it or not.
8. To err is human, but if you wear out the eraser you may be overdoing it.
7. Half the people you meet are below average.
6. He who must always have the last word may end up talking to himself.
5. The school administrator who always smiles probably got a good deal on Botox.
4. Forty-two point seven percent of all statistics are made up on the spot.
3. The sooner you fall behind, the more time you'll have to catch up.
2. If everything seems to be going well, you've probably overlooked something.
1. If you want the rainbow, you have got to put up with the rain.

The conference offered great opportunities to experience the Tex-Mex atmosphere, meet new friends, share some laughter and expand our professional knowledge. AASA gave senior educational leaders an excellent learning opportunity to reflect, refresh and rejuvenate.



**A candle loses
nothing by lighting
another candle.**

—Erin Majors

The (Very) Big Picture: Talking About Urban School Divisions in Canada

In this edition, we delve into some of the issues facing Canada's urban school divisions. Our three respondents, Janet Schubert, Brendan Croskery and Bill Gerth, kindly share with our readers the unique challenges and rewards of their work environments. Here is just a sampling of their thoughts; you'll find more on the CASA website.

Janet: Chief Superintendent of the Winnipeg School Division for three years; with the division for 34.
Brendan: Chief Superintendent of the Calgary Board of Education for four years; with the division for seven.
Bill: Director of Education of the Waterloo Region District School Board for two years; with the division for two.

If you only had one word to describe your school division, what word would that be?

Janet: Innovative.

Brendan: Focused.

Bill: Responsive.

Tell our readers what makes your school division unique.

Janet: We provide services to 34,000 students who come from a wide variety of backgrounds. Some of our students are refugees, speaking little or no English; others have been born into poverty while others are from middle and high income families. The division serves the "poorest of the poor," with 42 percent of our families having an income less than \$25,000 per year. Twenty-two percent of our families are new immigrants from approximately 100 different ethnic/cultural groups. Almost half of the city's Aboriginal families live within the division.

Brendan: The CBE is highly focused on making a positive difference in the lives of almost 100,000 students. We are strongly committed to improving the learning outcomes for a student body with an extremely broad spectrum of characteristics, abilities and needs. Resisting the temptation to be all things to all people, our prime focus is on the cognitive, emotional and social development of our students.

Janet: The [Winnipeg School] Division is renowned for its leading-edge educational and community support initiatives. Providing appropriate and effective programming and supports for such a diverse population while balancing the expectations of governments and society in general within limited resources relies on the individual and collective expertise of our staff.

Bill: Our district is responsive to the needs of our students but also responds in a timely way to the demands and expectations of the local community. In addition, our organization is very aware of, and tries to respond to, the concerns and suggestions of our staff. One explanation for this is the con-

servative historical roots of our community and the ongoing impact of a large, active Mennonite population. There is a focus on building positive relationships and regard for others in Waterloo Region. This flows over into the school system.

Brendan: Recent boards of trustees have set a wonderful tone for the system through the passionate democratic values that drive their policy-governance model. Our learning community is focused on the directions they continue to set for public education in this growing city. We are building high credibility in the province and internationally as we strive to meet high standards for excellence, equity, access and choice in public education. This collective effort has produced some remarkable (and measurable) learning outcomes in the lives of our students.

What is your favourite part about working where you do?

Janet: Spending quality time in schools and classrooms talking about and observing good teaching and learning practices.

Brendan: Making a positive difference in the lives of our students.

Bill: The people.

What do you personally find to be the most challenging aspect of working in such a large school division?

Janet: Trying to ensure some consistency among very diverse schools, student populations and communities.

Brendan: The fabulous complexity and diversity of the challenges.

Bill: It is the same challenge facing

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the captain of a very large ship...getting a large object to slow down, speed up or change direction takes enormous energy and a fair bit of time. Direction from the top does not necessarily result in changed behaviour at the grassroots. It is just the reality when it comes to promoting continuous improvement in a large organization.

What is the greatest misconception about urban school divisions in Canada today?

Janet: That urban school divisions are gang-ridden and that schools in an urban setting are unsafe.

Brendan: Due to their large and unwieldy size, they have lost the ability to personalize the educational experience for students. The Calgary Board of Education has challenged that myth for decades. Over the last four years we have intensified our efforts to engage Calgary's diverse communities in building customized programs of choice within the rubric of public education. Our vibrant community schools continue to set the standard for harnessing community visions to public education. Moreover, we have developed an exciting array of new alternative programs that have captured the imagination and support of communities in search of more educational options for their children.

Bill: That large urban school systems are too large to focus on and care about individual students. I have worked in much smaller systems and I can say from experience that the large school system is every bit as warm and caring when it comes to our students.

What are some of the challenges urban school divisions must contend with?

Janet: A growing immigrant student population, particularly from war-torn countries. Expectations from parents and outside lobby groups for expanded services for special needs students.

Brendan: Competition (on an unequal footing) with charter schools and private schools. This is a big challenge in a corporate headquarters city like Calgary.

Bill: Financial challenges require a careful review of where we are using our resources, and a courageous reallocation of these resources from the "accepted and traditional" to the "forward-looking and innovative."

What approaches have you taken to resolve the challenges in your school division?

Brendan: We strive for transparency and plain speaking, and we try not to make excuses for weak performance. For example, for several years we experienced serious difficulty in building support and understanding for our efforts with exceptional learners and ESL students. Our people have

worked incredibly hard to build trust with these two constituencies. They have revamped their understanding of the resources available to serve these students, built new service delivery models, strengthened our relationship with Alberta Education and built instructional capacity in classrooms.

What is working for you that you would recommend to other urban school division administrators?

Brendan: Give great credit to your colleagues on the front lines of public education. Teachers, administrators and support staff are doing heroic work in very challenging circumstances. Thank them and support them as much as you can. Have some fun in your work and laugh as much as you can. How can you be miserable and dour in such a wonderful domain of public service?

Bill: I try to pick the brains of my more experienced colleagues in like positions regularly and often. They have fought the battles that I am facing for the first time. Their wisdom and experience is invaluable. I also try hard to avoid the trap of "leaving a mark with big innovations." Instead I try to remember that a river is made up of many drops of water. I focus on the drops of water...many small but important positive impacts.

What are the benefits of working in an urban school division? What unique benefits are there for your students?

Janet: The multitude of programs and support services available. The diversity in student population.

Bill: The size of the organization means a multitude of opportunities. There is something for almost everyone, staff and students alike.

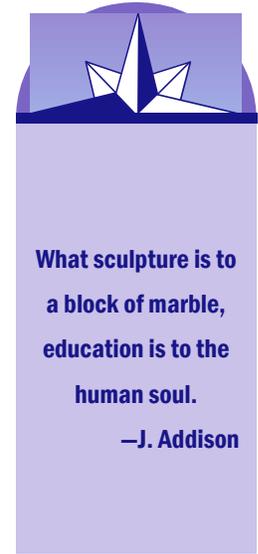
What are your division's greatest assets?

Janet: The students and a committed, enthusiastic staff complement.

Brendan: A superb, dedicated, ethical and visionary board of trustees; an outstanding, highly qualified and dedicated workforce; a world-class city that wants public education to succeed; families that produce thousands of very special students; a proud tradition of more than a century of service to Calgary students; and a passionate and pervasive commitment to public education.

Bill: Same as I indicated above...the people!

Visit www.casa-acas.ca for more!



CASA PEOPLE: Faces In The Crowd



Gillian Van Zant
Ontario

Gillian has enjoyed working as CASA's executive assistant for the last eight years. Previously, Gillian worked with her local school board, both in the school environment and the speech language pathology support service.

Gillian also works with the Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association (OPSOA) and the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) in the OPSOA offices in Oakville, Ontario.

Gillian enjoys travelling and makes annual trips to her native England, as well as supporting local and national theatre. The proximity of Oakville to Toronto allows for regular visits to the city to take advantage of the attractions and gastronomic variety available. A favourite pastime is walking along nearby Lake Ontario, a short distance from where she lives.



Good Catch, Chris!
We figured Chris was interested in schools. We didn't realize that meant schools of fish, too.

Chris Gonnet
Yukon

Chris Gonnet is the director of learning (Secondary Programs) for the Yukon Department of Education. He and his family moved from eastern Alberta to the Yukon in 1992 for a two-year adventure. Back then, Chris didn't even own a fishing rod. Today he owns many, and his basement looks like a fly-tying factory. Guess he hasn't reached that second year yet!

The Yukon education system is unique, in that it is managed by the Department of Education. This means Chris must provide educational leadership to administrators, school staff and parents, as well as political bodies.

Chris has been and remains passionate about advancing experiential education programs throughout his career. He's proud of the programs developed in the Yukon.



Coralie Bryant
Manitoba

Coralie Bryant retired five years ago as assistant superintendent in Seven Oaks School Division in Winnipeg.

After serving as a consultant to schools and adjunct professor in the Department of Educational Administration at the Faculty of Education, University of Manitoba, she moved to her present position as executive director of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents in August 2004.

Coralie holds degrees from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, Harvard University and the University of Waterloo. She serves as vice-chair of the Manitoba Arts Council and past-chair of the Alliance for Arts Education of Manitoba.

She has three grown children, Ben, Jessica and Cristiana, and a grandson, Ethan.

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Our Mission:

CASA will advance quality public education and excellence in system level leadership through advocacy and national collaboration.



Our Beliefs:

CASA believes that:

- Cultural diversity is a unique strength that enriches our nation.
- Communication and collaboration with parents and other partners is integral to successful student learning.
- Quality public education provides the best opportunity for a nation to enhance the lives of all its citizens.
- Effective system, provincial and national level leadership enables and supports excellence in teaching and learning.
- A comprehensive education, equitable and accessible to all, is the key to meeting the diverse needs and securing a successful future for our youth.

Specific strategies to advance the mission:

- Establish position papers on specific topics as they relate to the beliefs and interests of the association.
- Recruit new people.
- Establish a national representation.
- Establish a three-tier public relations and publications strategy.
- Establish a funding team to create an operating budget.

A Year of Turmoil in Newfoundland: School Districts Reduced From 11 to 5

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ceased to exist, the government effectively eliminated its opposition, he says. A year later, nobody in the province has a contract yet, he says, even though the Schools Act says a person must have a contract in place to be employed.

“The terms of one’s employment are iffy, salary offers are iffy,” he says. NLADE’s financial and legal resources were used a lot this year, he adds.

When asked if anything positive has come out of

this, Whelan is very direct.

“Not that I can think of,” he says. “I don’t know how the services of our schools managed to improve.”

A school district is governance and service, he explains.

“It’s impossible for four people to provide a level of governance that was previously done by 12,” Whelan says. “From the point of view of the public, many of them will now have to go overnight just to attend a school board meeting.”



See You On The Rock!

You’ll hear firsthand further details on this story and more when you join your colleagues in St. John’s this summer. The 2005 CASA Summer Leadership Academy takes place from July 14 to 16.

Registration information is available through PD PROs at (403) 386-3860 or holmes3@telusplanet.net. You can also find more information at www.casa-acas.ca and in the previous issue of *Leaders & Learners*.