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THE VOICE OF THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS/L'ASSOCIATION
CANADIENNE DES ADMINISTRATEURS ET DES
ADMINISTRATRICES SCOLAIRES

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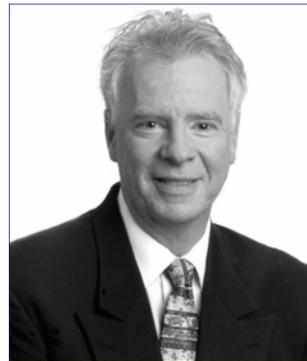
Upcoming CASA Events

- Annual Conference, October 13 to 15, 2006, Winnipeg
- Summer Leadership Academy, July 2007, Whitehorse

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

Message From The President: The Challenges Of Modern Communication

Mr. Watson, come here, I need you," were the first spoken words transmitted via telegraph by Alexander Graham Bell to his assistant Thomas Watson on March 10, 1876. Bell's words were the harbinger of instant communications on a global scale, yet he would be speechless at the advances made in communications over the last few years.



Bob Mills
CASA president

efficient for publishing: a blog, podcast, website, or a wireless devices such as the Blackberry, or even streaming video. All are considered superior to the beleaguered newsletter.

The challenges public education faces when dealing with methods of communications to meet the needs of parents, students, staff and the media are vast. Our schools, administration and political bodies are affected daily by these demands for information.

For myself (and I am sure for others), I can still conjure up the distinct scent of duplicating fluid; or the memory of the black cloud of toner from the photocopier, seemingly sentient, as it tried to attach itself to my clothes; or the wonders of a fax, as being the best means to communicate. That was not so long ago, was it?

What I find so dramatic about recent advances in communications is that they do not offer us the opportunity to create memories. The changes come too "fast and furious," creating ever higher expectations from our communities to immediately adopt and implement any new method that offers instant information in multiple formats.

Even as I write this article, I reflect on the current trends considered more effective and

demands for information.

Simultaneously, as an organization, we place the same demands upon ourselves to make sure that information is published and geared to reassure our communities that public education is a viable choice, as well as responsible and ever vigilant of their needs.

In my opinion, the greatest challenge is the creation of a viable, sustainable and honest relationship with your external and internal communities. The core component of a communications plan that works is the belief, collectively, that your communities are entitled to unconstrained communications that allow them to participate fully as stake-

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Message From The Executive Director: Open Communication Builds Trust With Your Community

Educators today must work more openly with their public than at any time in the past. Senior administrators should be very conscious in their planning and delivery that their school districts have clients—parents and students and taxpayers—and that those clients have expectations. The clients have a right to all components of positive and effective outcomes to the education process.

To build a trust with their communities, senior educators must be open in their communication. They must inform parents of what is best in the school of their district and they must comment on the achievement results. They also must promote clearly all plans for improvement and celebrate the successes of their students.

Most local boards of education have fixed communication strategies and a conscious plan for positive public relations. Senior leaders have an obligation to let principals and teachers know that the task of creating good public relations is one of the most important at every level.

Modern communication tools have enhanced our ability to communicate with parents and some of these are being used provincially.

A good example is the new board report card, based on eight common indicators of success, published by the Ontario Ministry of Education this August. Instruments such as this provide objective indicators of progress and a real snapshot of the local education scene.

Good public relations techniques are a valuable part of the skill set needed by senior educators across Canada. Let's share these with one another.



Frank Kelly
CASA executive director

Message From The President, continued

(Continued from page 1)

holders. By achieving transparency with your stakeholders, you build equity in your corporate identity and develop lasting partnerships.

We often feel that it is impossible to get the success stories published. Yet I have always been able to evaluate our communications successes by looking closely at the extent of involvement by our stakeholders. It becomes very apparent that when your stakeholders become deeply involved, your messages are not diluted. The goals you have set are more likely to be achieved due to your communities becoming partners in the process, rather than outsiders looking in. Striving for that partnership is well worth the effort.

A Feature Interview With Simon Vinet, continued

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in certain geographic areas. We must never forget the importance of face-to-face communications.

Is there anything you would like to add?

Communications personnel in schools and school boards play an important role in enabling and promoting student success.

For example, our board has been putting much emphasis on informing students from grades 7–12 of the path-

ways to success: work, trades, college and university. From our online quick polls and focus groups, we see that students, staff and parents are changing their perceptions. In return, our students are making better choices and having more success. Such is only one example of the important role played by communications personnel in schools today.

Thank you, Simon.



Effective communication is 20 per cent what you know and 80 per cent how you feel about what you know.

—Jim Rohn

The Role Of Communications In Public Education: A Feature Interview With Carmelle Steele

Carmelle Steel is the communications coordinator for the Livingstone Range School Division in southern Alberta. The division serves over 4,500 students in 16 regular schools and 12 Hutterite colony schools, in an area from Fort Macleod to Crowsnest Pass east to west, and from Nanton to Waterton north to south.

Carmelle has worked with the division for eight years. She has also worked in the public relations and communications field for the past 17 years for non-profit, corporate and media organizations. She is a graduate from a college public relations program and is an accredited member of the Canadian Public Relations Society.

She is also the incoming president of the Canadian Association of Communicators in Education (CACE), which is a national association of professionals committed to encouraging and enhancing excellence in communications in education. CACE is a bilingual organization that offers its members a national conference, regional workshops and networking opportunities. CACE members are communications professionals working in school boards, school board associations, universities, colleges, teacher organizations and provincial education ministries. They support teaching and learning through effective communication, for the benefit of students across Canada.

In this issue of *Leaders & Learners*, Carmelle graciously shares her knowledge about the art of effective communication for senior administrators in public education, and shares her thoughts on the challenges and rewards of her work.

How would you describe the current communications culture at your division?

Communications fills a different role in each central office. Some of that role is dictated by the size of the school division—the number of students and schools. In larger divisions, there would be several staff members with one senior communications director, while in most rural divisions, like LRSD, the communications office is a one-person office.

In LRSD, my role covers media relations, website management, special events and the design and publishing of all division materials. I also provide public relations advice for a variety of departments and/or committees.

What is the role of a communications director [or equivalent position] in a school division?

The role of the communications officer (for lack of a better term) in any school division is to enhance the programs and services offered by the division through the use of a variety of public relations tools.

Basically, it comes down to the sharing of information between internal and external audiences. Sometimes I have compared it to “standing in the doorway,” between the outside community and the organization: listening to both, trying to represent each to the other and finding ways of closing the information gaps that exist.

School divisions and schools have a responsibility to tell parents and taxpayers how schools are spending their

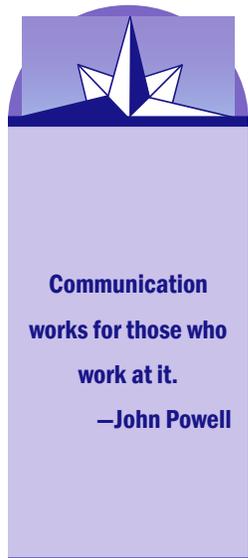
money and to seek their input on helping the school division deliver cost-efficient, quality programming. Public relations tools will help to do that and will also help to build trust and show that we are doing the best for all children in our division.

My first superintendent said this about communications: “If people know what is going on in our schools, they will be more supportive of our children and our schools. This, in turn, will create better learning environments resulting in improved student learning.” Eight years later, I still believe the statement to be true.

Some of the ways we work include:

- information dissemination: electronic (web pages, email), print (annual reports, school newsletters), writing for the media, face-to-face meetings with stakeholders
- school district imaging and marketing to promote the division and its strengths
- community relations liaison: sometimes, because we are not

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The Role Of Communications In Public Education: A Feature Interview With Carmelle Steel, continued

(Continued from page 3)

educational staff, the community sees us as a closer link to their groups or organizations

- training all staff and board members in basic communications practices—especially in a one-person office, you can't be everywhere at all times; all staff need to know how their actions contribute to, or detract from, their schools' image or reputation
- planning for annual communication needs and communications in the event of a crisis; since we have the relationship with our media already, we sometimes are called in to assist with the media during a crisis
- researching or surveying public attitudes or opinions as a basis for planning and action



“Communicate early and often, and inform staff, schools and parents as soon as possible.”

*—Carmelle Steel,
communications coordinator
for Livingstone Ridge
School Division*

What are your school division's greatest communications accomplishments? What are its biggest challenges?

Our division does a lot of communications work for a small division. We work hard at communicating with our taxpayers and our parents. Because the schools are at the heart of our small rural communities, it is important to have good relationships with our neighbours and our community partners.

A couple years ago, our school board initiated community meetings, held once per year in each of our towns. We have invited representatives from our local town councils, local and regional health representatives, parent councils, RCMP,

and other organizations relevant in the community. These meetings have been very successful in enhancing those partnerships and working together to solve some of our issues. Sometimes just meeting face to face over a coffee helps with problem solving between organizations.

The challenge in any work we do is communicating across the large area that our division covers. Travel time and changes in technology both present challenges in communicating effectively and in a timely manner for our staff, students and parents.

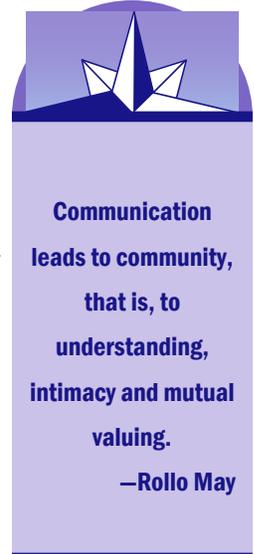
Another challenge we face is shrinking budgets due to declining student enrollments. We always try and complete communications work electronically to decrease the paper, and when we decide to print, we do it in the most cost-effective way possible.

We also realize communicating totally by the internet is not the answer as it is not going to reach all of our parents or community members. We look at each project and determine how we can best reach our audience.

What are some effective strategies an educational leader such as a school superintendent should employ to deal with public criticism from the public, the school board or the media? What role should someone in your position play?

Criticism is inevitable in today's society. By nature of the work they do, schools are under intense public scrutiny from both parents and the media. One way the superintendent can prepare for this is by being a proactive communicator, ensuring that staff are aware of what is going on within the division. Division staff are our best ambassadors when they have correct, timely information.

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Communication leads to community, that is, to understanding, intimacy and mutual valuing.
—Rollo May

The Role Of Communications, continued

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I think it is also important that the superintendent be active within the schools, meeting parents and students and hearing the concerns first hand.

Understandably, that has its limits, especially in larger school divisions; however, creating key communicator networks will serve the same purpose. By gathering key members from each community, and meeting with these people on a regular basis, concerns may show themselves long before they turn into larger issues or crises. This also creates a sounding board for new ideas or reliable channels to get messages back out to parents in each community.

In a nutshell: Communicate early and often, and inform staff, schools and parents as soon as possible about anything that has affected their jobs or their students.

How does your division share its success stories, whether they are about students, staff or division leaders?

Celebrating success was one of the reasons the board of trustees created the communications position. They felt it was important to recognize the accomplishments of our staff and students across the division. We began with a divisional newsletter and have also tried a variety of other ways to celebrate.

Currently, there is a section at each regular board meeting that highlights student or staff success. Presentations are made by student groups or by teaching staff to explain what they have been working on or to receive recognition from the board of trustees for accomplishments. This information is always covered by our local paper and we issue news releases to those media outlets not able to attend.

How does your division handle challenging scenarios, such as a tragedy or controversy within the division?

Again, we follow: "Communicate early and often, and inform staff, schools and parents as soon as possible about anything that has affected their jobs or their students."

We have a process to communicate any crisis situation from our schools to central office senior management. We then work together to assist the school in communicating the incident to parents and the media.

It is always better to get the bad news out quickly and frame



The beautiful Livingstone Range mountains, from which Carmelle Steel's school division takes its name.

it from our perspective. This allows us to state the facts, our position and what we will do to follow up on the situation, hopefully building credibility and trust with our parents.

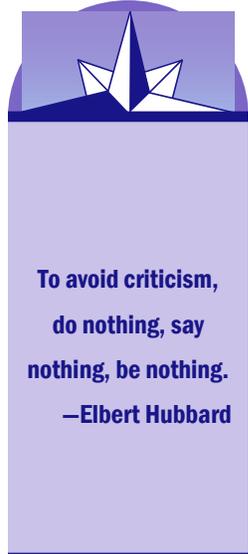
What lessons has your division's leadership and communications staff learned from both successful and unsuccessful communications strategies from the past that could prove valuable to colleagues across the country?

Being unorganized always has its price. We've been caught in situations where we simply did not have enough details of a crisis to respond to the media. All you can do is say we are investigating and will get back to you with more information. No one likes it when that happens, but occasionally it does.

What strategies have worked from day one that you would like to share with colleagues?

One concept I've tried to get across is that my job is to make everyone else look good. I work to ensure that we are communicating accurate and timely information.

For a superintendent, the relationship with your communications staff can assist in making you look good or making you look great. From pre-



The Role Of Communications In Public Education: A Feature Interview With Simon Vinet

Simon Vinet is the director of communications services (or *directeur, service des communications*) for the Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'Est ontarien (CSDCEO). This district encompasses 33 elementary schools, 7 high schools, over 12,000 students and close to 1,500 staff members. Its schools are located in communities in eastern Ontario between Montreal, Ottawa and Cornwall. He is starting his fourth year with CSDCEO this fall. Simon is also the treasurer and francophone representative for the Canadian Association of Communicators in Education (CACE).

Here Simon kindly shares his expertise on the role of communications in public education, particularly as it applies to senior administrators.

How would you describe the current communications culture at your division?

[We are] elaborating a culture of communications internally and externally, with emphasis on helping schools achieve their goals, which enables the school board to achieve its goals.

What is the role of a communications director [or equivalent position] in a school division?

To oversee all aspects of communications internally and externally.

What are your school division's greatest communications accomplishments?

Recognition in the province, in Canada and in the USA for particular projects that we have done with schools.

What are its biggest challenges?

To actually see the culture of communications emerging in schools and at the board!

What are some effective strategies an educational leader such as a school superintendent should employ to deal with public criticism from the public, the school board or the media?

Be honest. Give information that is available. Have regular communication, not just in times of crisis.

How does your division share its success stories, whether they are about students, staff or division leaders?

Board press releases (48 in 2005–2006), school press releases (128 in 2005–2006), websites for all our schools, printed materials (information sheets) sent directly to parents. As part of Professional Learning Communities, sharing success is very important.

How does your division handle challenging scenarios, such as a tragedy or controversy within the division?

Be honest. Give information that is available. Have regular communication, not just in times of crisis. Always have the



Simon Vinet, director of communications services for the Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'Est ontarien

students' well being at heart. The CSDCEO and our schools have a lengthy procedures manual that outlines potential challenging scenarios. In the past, this manual has proven itself to be up to date and relevant.

What lessons has your division's leadership and communications staff learned from both successful and unsuccessful communications strategies from the past that could prove valuable to colleagues across the country?

Empowering schools, with support from the board, is the key to effective communications.

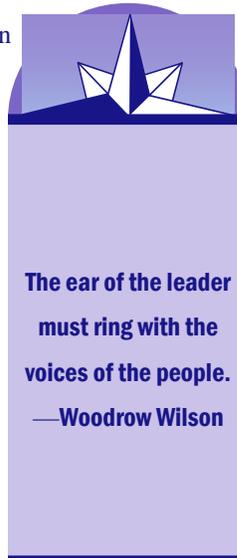
What strategies have worked from day one that you would like to share with colleagues?

We have a tool box with examples, templates and strategies that have been created and that can be re-used by schools. It is called the TOOLBOX. They love it! These samples are professional and ready to use. Schools appreciate that they do not have to start from scratch. It is accessible via our intranet.

What role does technology play in an effective communications strategy?

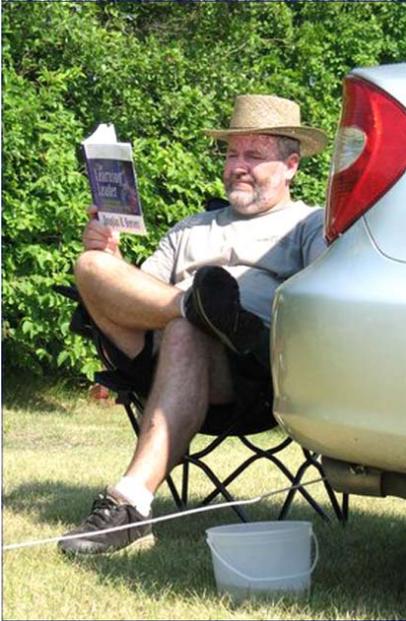
Technology, just as written materials, is an important part of the strategy. Technology cannot be solely relied upon due to particular circumstances

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**The ear of the leader
must ring with the
voices of the people.**
—Woodrow Wilson

CASA PEOPLE: Faces In The Crowd



Ted Fransen
Manitoba

Ted is the assistant superintendent for Pembina Trails School Division, an urban school division serving the students living in southwest Winnipeg. Prior to this, he was the superintendent of schools in the Western School Division for five and a half years. He is a graduate of the University of Waterloo, Brock University and the University of Manitoba.

He's the president of MASS, and has been vice president and treasurer. He sits on the board of directors of the Regional Health Authority—Central Manitoba Inc. and the Manitoba Teacher Education and Certification Committee, among others.

Ted and his wife Esther have visited all 10 Canadian provinces and the Yukon, as well as all 50 American states, Australia, western Europe and Morocco. They have three children and two grandchildren.



Larry Archibald
Ontario

Since 1998, Larry has been the superintendent of instruction with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. He is also an OPSOA regional director for eastern Ontario. Along the way to his current job, he has been a hospital emergency biochemistry technologist, science and phys. ed. teacher, school administrator and then, in 1997, became superintendent of what was then the Muskoka Board of Education.

Larry has been involved with the Muskoka Children's Aid Society, Community Arts Council Executive, and a men's choral group, and has coached basketball and soccer.

He grew up in Nova Scotia and now makes Bracebridge, Ontario, home. He and his wife Evelyn enjoy 10K charity runs, wilderness canoeing and hiking, mountain biking and golf. They have a daughter and two sons.



Sandra McCaig
Manitoba

Sandra has spent most of her life in the Winnipeg School Division, from her student days in the 1950s to her current job as director of student support services.

Her work now focuses on creating inclusive schools where everyone is welcome, can find success and achieve the skills required to live out their dreams. She has also served as speech language clinician and service director at the Child Guidance Clinic, among other positions.

Sandra is a published author, presents workshops in the school division and at conferences, and teaches courses at the University of Manitoba. She serves on professional boards and volunteers with the United Way. In 2001, she received the Easter Seal award in recognition of her work in building a better community for children with disabilities.

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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.

The Role Of Communications In Public Education: A Feature Interview With Carmelle Steel, continued

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pared key messages, to making sure your tie is straight or your hair looks good, our job is to make the school division look the best it can. Even in print design and production, I want to make sure every committee and every department has the best-looking materials of any division.

It's not about making the communications department look great; it's about using our skills to enhance every program and service our division offers.

What role does technology play in an effective communications strategy?

In today's work world, technology is a big part of any strategy. We need to always look at those audiences who prefer to get their messages by email and the internet, but always balancing that with rural families with dial-up connections or no internet service at all.

The urgency of some of the messages we send lends itself better to electronic means, but they are not always one hun-

dred per cent reliable. It always goes back to who is the audience, how do they like to get their messages and what is the most cost-efficient way of achieving that.

Is there anything you would like to add?

The role of public relations professionals in the field of education is relatively new; however, the role has many rewards. School districts are multi-million dollar operations with numerous facilities, diverse employee groups, intense public scrutiny and stakeholder groups from all walks of life.

Especially in single-person offices, this work is challenging and stimulating. The best part of the job is knowing that you are somehow making a difference in the way children are educated, not by being a teacher, but by ensuring that our communities and our families know the great work that is going on in our schools.

Thank you, Carmelle, for sharing your expertise and advice with Leaders & Learners.