

Leaders & Learners



CASSA-ACGCS
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

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Message from the President: A Legacy of Learning and Leadership

By Cindy Finn, incoming CASSA President, 2014-16

I WOULD LIKE to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Ed Wittchen for his work with CASSA over the last several years. Ed lives the oft-quoted adage that education is all about relationships. Throughout his time at CASSA, Ed worked hard to connect people who share his passion for student success and excellence in education. We are most appreciative for the many contributions Ed has made to our organization.

Ed has played many roles in CASSA, all of which were instrumental in building and

strengthening the organization. He articulated a vision of what a national organization of school system leaders should look like, and he never wavered in his efforts to achieve that goal.

In his most recent role as director of professional development, Ed created a culture of learning in a climate of collegiality and friendship. Under Ed's leadership, the CASSA annual conference has evolved into one of the premier professional learning events in Canada. Not only does this conference help education leaders stay abreast of current



From Whitehorse to Whistler, from St. John's to Quebec City, from Winnipeg to Halifax, Ed Wittchen brought together groups of creative and hard-working people to produce outstanding conferences. The Calgary conference will be his last as CASSA's PD director.

OUR PURPOSE

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

OUR MISSION

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

Message from the President: A Legacy of Learning and Leadership, continued

pedagogical trends, but it also permits a deeper understanding of what unites us as Canadians: the belief that public education is a rich resource for students of all ages.

Organizing a conference during the summer months in various locations across our great country was important to Ed, and he worked hard to attract attendees and their families.

He ensured that the conference program was rich and diverse with Canadian content, and he was devoted to planning social outings that were fun and educational. He was committed to making sure all attendees truly enjoyed their CASSA conference experience, and we all owe Ed a debt of gratitude for his efforts to promote



On the road again

professional development for our membership.

On the board of directors, Ed was a determining voice that helped guide the organization through financial challenges and set a course for making CASSA stronger. Ed worked tirelessly to secure partners and sponsors to support CASSA and

ensure that we had the means to offer quality products and experiences to our membership. Ed made sure that our publications and conferences were available for all by being committed to keeping our database up to date and making himself available to talk with prospective

affiliate provincial associations about the benefits of CASSA.

It has been an honour to get to know and work with Ed over the last few years. What I have appreciated the most in Ed is his quiet and steadfast leadership; I will certainly miss his voice around the CASSA table. We wish you well, Ed!

CASSA's Retiring Director of Professional Development: Tributes to Ed Wittchen from his Colleagues

THERE ARE LOTS of stories of Ed, but one that stands out in my mind is his ability to make seemingly impossible things happen.

I remember the Toronto CASSA event that was held at the Hockey Hall of Fame. I suggested that it would be nice to be able to hold the Stanley Cup and even better if we had a Stanley Cup-winning player in attendance. Ed said, "I'll get Johnny Bower!" I suggested that this might be somewhat difficult, given his age and the number of times he had been hit by the puck, given they didn't wear masks back then.

Sure enough, Ed got Johnny Bower and the Stanley Cup, and we all had our photos taken with him. Johnny was a wonderful speaker and it was a great evening.

Ed always made sure that both the venue and guest speaker emphasized a part of Canada and a Canadian hero. Through his innovative approach to celebrating the area where the conference was being held, Ed has almost single-handedly restored CASSA to its previous glory, and I suggest it is a stronger, more collegial organization than it has ever been.

*~Jim Gibbons,
former CASSA president,
2006-2008*



Left: Are they possibly the same shoe size? Visiting the Royal Tyrrell Museum in Drumheller, Alberta.
Centre: Notice the ubiquitous camera, even in the dark Atlas Coal Mine.

Right: At the Calgary Stampede's Indian Village with son-in-law Jon Hutt. (All photos from Calgary 2009.)

ED HAS BEEN so dedicated to growing and enhancing the strength of our CASSA organization that we will never be able to adequately acknowledge his efforts. I have known Ed for all of his career as a superintendent, and have viewed firsthand his continuous commitment to others and his relentless work ethic. His unselfishness and teamwork have resulted in his desire to provoke top-notch professional opportunities for his staff and colleagues, and this has always been an integral part of his role as superintendent and CASSA's PD director. He takes great pride in watching others grow professionally and is always very proud of others. His commitment to our organization's PD events will be dearly missed.

*~Barry Wowk,
CASSA's AASA western representative*

CASSA WILL BE forever grateful for the tireless dedication that PD director Ed Wittchen has made to the organization. When I think back to my first CASSA conference, it was Ed who greeted me so warmly, camera always at the ready to take photos capturing the excitement. One year, Ed met me at the Whitehorse airport and personally helped me with luggage and my transfer to the hotel!

Ed has been with CASSA for many, many years and helped it become the strong, healthy, vibrant, growing organization that it is today.

CASSA will simply not be the same without Ed and I am forever grateful that I was able to be part of CASSA while he was our PD director and communications director.

*~Ken Bain,
CASSA executive director,
2012-present*

CASSA's Retiring Director of Professional Development: Tributes to Ed Wittchen from his Colleagues, continued

OUR PD DIRECTOR Ed Wittchen and conference organizer Marion Holmes are moving on to other endeavours after our summer conference. Both have been instrumental in establishing a CASSA culture that is truly family oriented.

From ensuring that the conference is hosted in settings that are family friendly, intentionally moving it across the country (the conference in Whitehorse will always be my favourite), organizing pre-conference excursions for delegates and their families, and being the “face” of CASSA at all our events, they have been instrumental in growing the organization and engaging the many partners that have contributed to our success. Thanks, Ed and Marion.

~Roger Nippard,
*CASSA president,
2012-2014*

IT IS NOT an accident that Ed Wittchen began supporting CASSA when he was still a superintendent in Northern Lights School Division. This carries on today, years past his retirement from that division.

Ed was a table officer with the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) when he and others in Alberta’s leadership group became integral to the continuation and success of CASA (which later became CASSA). The



Left: Chatting with colleagues in an Edmonton airport lounge before flying to Whitehorse in 2007.



Right: Listening to an interpreter at Wendake First Nation in Quebec in 2010.

CASA organization was essentially bankrupt and approaching dissolution. Joining with our partners in the east, Ed and others took CASA from near-collapse to the current thriving and vibrant organization it is today.

Without Ed’s dedication and that of others, we would not have a national voice for senior system administrators. We would not have met and formed friendships across Canada. We would not have learned from each other. Through the opportunities created in CASSA, our leadership has been enhanced.

In the years I was a superintendent in a neighbouring jurisdiction, I often looked with awe and envy at the professional development offered to leaders in Northern Lights School Division. Ed Wittchen brought this passion for building and growing leaders to CASSA, and we have all benefitted from his service as our professional

development director. Thanks from all of us, Ed.

~Kath Rhyason,
*former CASS executive director,
2008-2013*

I FIRST MET Ed Wittchen in the summer of 1973, when I arrived in the northern Alberta community of Fort Vermilion as the newly appointed principal of the Fort Vermilion Public School, a grades 1-9 school with some 160 students and 8 teachers. Ed, I discovered, was one of several junior high teachers, the main physical education teacher, a young man always full of ideas and he became a lifelong friend and colleague.

Over the next three-plus decades, our paths frequently crossed as our professional careers took us to new challenges, expanded responsibilities and new communities. The common thread was our active participation and

CASSA's Retiring Director of Professional Development: Tributes to Ed Wittchen from his Colleagues, continued

involvement in CASSA, initially as members, then with leadership roles in zone executives, and eventually serving as members of the provincial executive.

As the new CASSA representative at the (then) CASA table in 2000, I discovered that CASA had incurred a significant operational debt of over \$200,000 that was owed to OPSOA. Repayment was expected, and it was the collective responsibility of the CASA board to decide how best to meet that obligation. In the face of member discontent and declining membership, we started by reviewing our options and the creation of a plan for retiring the debt.

Enter Ed Wittchen. Historically, CASA had "lent its name" to an annual summer conference that was organized and run by a commercial operator. CASA saw a small annual return but Ed, with his entrepreneurial spirit, creativity and personal commitment, suggested CASA could do much better financially if we were to assume the main responsibility for organizing the summer conference itself.

Of course Ed, with his ever-present cell phone, digital camera and a contact list of professional presenters and educators from across North America, was a natural for the position and agreed to take on the massive job as the inaugural professional development director.

With his constant enthusiasm, highly developed negotiating skills and ability to persistently never take

"no" for an answer, he enlisted the help of Marion Holmes and PD Pros to organize our summer conferences.

As he promised, CASA made a profit right from the very beginning, which allowed the organization to retire its debt to OPSOA in a very timely manner in just a few short years, while at the same time making the annual summer conference a must-attend destination event for educators and their families from every corner of Canada.

Through Ed, CASA's annual summer conference has allowed participants to travel the width and breadth of our great country while celebrating the educational excellence of every province and territory.

Now known as CASSA, the survival and financial success of the organization today is largely a testament to Ed Wittchen's volunteerism, personal commitment and unrelenting energy over more than a decade. He is the only PD director CASSA has ever known, and his legacy is that he certainly will leave the organization in a much healthier financial state than he found it. CASSA owes Ed a huge debt and his shoes will indeed be big ones to fill.

John Darroch,
*former CASSA president,
2003-2004*

ON BEHALF OF the Joshua family, I would like to express my sincere thanks and best wishes to the



Finding his inner Viking while touring the L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site in Newfoundland and Labrador at the 2005 CASSA conference.

amazing Ed Wittchen, PD director for CASSA, and to the wonderful Marion Holmes of PD Pros as they complete their incredible run with the CASSA conferences.

I recall the instant connection I made with both Ed and Marion at my first CASSA meeting in Calgary five years ago. With our two children in hand, my wife and I arrived at our hotel unsure of what to expect of the CASSA experience. All of the emails I had received spoke of the excellent networking opportunities with educational leaders from across the country, but we also came to experience firsthand what was described as a "family-oriented conference adventure."

CASSA's Retiring Director of Professional Development: Tributes to Ed Wittchen from his Colleagues, continued

In a matter of minutes in the hotel lobby, there he was in front of us: a friendly soul, camera ready, full of stories and directions and excitement. He quickly introduced us to his own family, helped us orient ourselves onto the first tour bus and off we travelled to take in Calgary and its beautiful surroundings like never before. The stories continued throughout the day, pictures were taken to capture the amazing memories, laughter everywhere, and we all knew that this was what family really meant, thanks to this fine gentleman.

Our girls also instantly connected with Marion Holmes—friendly, personable, caring—like someone you have known all of your life. Marion has brought this care and positive energy to everything she does. She is that special person ready to help at any time, whether you are in line for your conference brochure or trying to navigate your way through the streets in town after a full day of sessions.

Throughout the years and conferences in many different locations across Canada, both Ed and Marion have always been the first friendly faces to greet you, ensuring that you and your family are treated with the extra care that only they can provide with such excellence. Every year that we come to the CASSA conference, we know that once we see Ed and Marion, no



Always with a camera at the ready, Ed takes a moment to capture the beauty of Nova Scotia's Annapolis Valley during the 2008 conference in Halifax.

matter where we may be in this fine country, we feel we have arrived at home, with our CASSA family and ready for another exciting adventure.

All the best to you, Ed, and to you, Marion. It has truly been a pleasure to be in your great company.

~Peter Joshua,
*superintendent of Student Achievement,
Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board*

THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION of School System Administrators is an organization that allows senior education administrators across Canada to network and share expertise on the provision of learning for students of all ages. Through that organization, one gets to meet and know many outstanding educators.

Ed Wittchen and I shared some 20 years with CASSA (formerly CASA). We worked together on national issues, on development of professional development sessions, on strategic planning activities, on annual conferences and meetings.

Over all of those years, we collaborated positively and we built a friendship that has lasted beyond our time with the organization.

Some education leaders are passionate about learning within the confines of their school or district. Ed Wittchen was passionate about advancing learning across Canada and learning about every province. He brought to CASSA a contagious desire to experience great locations for our conferences and to learn in detail about the education and social culture of each location.

No one promoted Canadian regions more than Ed. His enthusiasm for St. John's and the province of Newfoundland, Whistler, Halifax, Whitehorse, Quebec City, Victoria, Winnipeg, Niagara Falls, Calgary and many other places was reflected in the involving programs he designed.

Not only did Ed lead us to exciting venues, but he recorded each session with his trusty camera skills, and those records appear as archives on CASSA websites.

Ed Wittchen has made an outstanding contribution to education leadership in Canada. His work will be long remembered by those who value significant professional development.

~Frank Kelly,
*former CASSA executive director,
2000-2012*

Thank You to Marion Holmes of PD Pros: “One of the Best Professional Learning Events in Canada”

By Cindy Finn, incoming CASSA President, 2014-16

WE HERE AT CASSA owe a debt of gratitude to Marion Holmes. Marion's efforts have helped to make the annual CASSA conference into one of the best professional learning events in Canada.

Over the years, CASSA conferences have become renowned for their rich program offerings and fun social outings, and Marion deserves recognition for all of her hard work to make each year's conference more successful than the last.

My first impressions of CASSA were shaped by her friendly and helpful nature. I first met Marion in 2009, when CASSA held its summer conference in Calgary, and I have not missed a CASSA conference since! I have fond memories of dinners and outings with Marion. A few years ago while in Whistler, Marion, Kath Rhyason and I spent a lovely afternoon at the spa chatting the time away while having pedicures.

We are very appreciative for all that she has done for CASSA. Best of luck in the future, Marion!

Editor's Note: This summer's conference in Calgary will be the last one organized by Marion Holmes of PD Pros. Marion has provided years of excellent service to CASSA. Thank you, Marion.



Top right: Aye, aye, captain! There's nothing to fear when you've got Marion at the helm of your ship. (Photo from Quebec City 2010.)
Centre right: She was a real lifesaver with the bug spray up in Whitehorse in 2007.

Bottom right: Marion picking up another skill to add to her already impressive repertoire while in Newfoundland in 2005.

Bottom left: Meeting renowned children's author and Member of the Order of Canada Budge Wilson, who spoke about her writing process at the 2008 conference in Halifax.



My Hard-working and Dedicated Friend Marion Holmes: A Personal Tribute from Kath Rhyason



Conference buddies Marion Holmes (left, both photos) and Kath Rhyason at Niagara Falls in 2011.

MARION HOLMES IS hard working and dedicated to all her professional development conferences, not the least being the CASSA conference each summer. In fact, when she started working for CASSA, there were two conferences each year.

My experience with Marion Holmes is a very personal one. I met Marion in 2005 during the Newfoundland pre-conference tour with Northern Lights School Division up on the northern peninsula. Ed Wittchen's introduction went like this: "Kath, this is Marion; Marion, this is Kath. You two will be sleeping together tonight and for the rest of the tour." I'm sure he and the others in our cabin regretted it as we laughed and talked all night long. We have been laughing and talking together ever since.

Marion starts planning a CASSA conference two years before it is held. Her planning begins as soon as the CASSA board decides on location and theme. Often the conference is in the east and she is up at the crack of dawn to make contacts for venues, pre-conference activities and transportation. During this time, she is juggling both the current conference and the future one.

Marion has done a lot of work behind the scenes to ensure the success of each

event. For example, she has created a master email list, information packages for sponsors and contacts for printing the program. During the conference, Marion is liaising with all service providers, helping delegates and finding things for Ed Wittchen. It is a good

thing they are lifelong friends or the fur would really fly. (Ask me about ice cream in Whitehorse.) Each night, she goes back to her room and works on the computer until the wee hours, making sure the upcoming day will go smoothly.

For the many years since I met Marion, I have roomed with her and can attest to the professionalism and effort she puts in on our behalf. I sincerely hope CASSA can find another PD services provider of Marion Holmes's calibre.

Kath Rhyason was the executive director of the College of Alberta School Superintendents from 2008 to 2013. Prior to that, she served as the superintendent for Fort McMurray Public Schools. She and Marion will probably be up all night laughing again this year.



Above: Marion Holmes, Mandy Pusey and Kath Rhyason, ready for the Calgary Stampede in 2009.

Left: Kath Rhyason, Andy Fediuk, Patti Christensen and Marion Holmes on an ATV at a mountain-top salmon bake in Whistler in 2012.

Sponsoring Partner Profile: Thoughtexchange



thoughtexchange

CASSA CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS may recall meeting Thoughtstream staff at previous events. The company will be at this year's conference, too, but with a new name: Thoughtstream has become Thoughtexchange. The shift to a new name is a significant one for the company, and denotes what sets them apart in the world of stakeholder engagement. The new name captures the company's unique and authentic way of identifying underlying thoughts, exchanging those thoughts and being able to discover what matters most to a community, before that community initiates a change.

Thoughtexchange is **The Group Insight Platform**, and that platform empowers a community to work toward hearing its thoughts, to surface and develop the best ideas, and to gain valuable insights from within itself.

Along with *The Group Insight Platform*, Thoughtexchange has revealed its new process steps where stakeholders **Share** their thoughts, **Star** what others have to say and **Discover** what matters most. By leveraging the best and most effective aspects of crowd wisdom and the principles of collaborative negotiation, Thoughtexchange is able to empower communities to achieve what matters most: greater insight for a greater good. Learn more about Thoughtexchange at its new website: thoughtexchange.com.

Alex Chapple is the director of communications for Thoughtexchange. In this Q&A feature, she talks about the unique relationship Thoughtexchange has developed with CASSA.

Will staff from Thoughtexchange be attending this year's CASSA conference in Calgary?

We are really excited that four of our team members are gearing up to attend this year: Dave MacLeod, president, as well as director of sales Kevin Skelcher, director of service Lea (Thuot) Scherck and senior account executive Neil Schuler.

What are they most anticipating?

All are really looking forward to seeing those people they know and to making new connections. They are most excited for Dave MacLeod to present with John Deausy, superintendent, finance and business/secretary-treasurer for the Calgary Catholic School District, in an interactive session focused on the benefits and dangers of shifting toward robust online consultation.

Have staff from Thoughtexchange (formerly Thoughtstream) attended previous CASSA conferences?

Yes, Dave MacLeod, Kevin Skelcher and Lea Scherck have all attended in the past.

What brings Thoughtexchange back each year to support CASSA and its annual conference? What benefits does the company receive from working with CASSA, and what do you believe CASSA gets from working with Thoughtexchange?

We attend many conferences in North America, and we are proud to say that we particularly love working with CASSA. CASSA provides a unique opportunity for meaningful interactions, thanks to the focus on relationships. This is a great fit for us. Being at CASSA makes us feel like family, and there is a great deal of respect for the need to support relationships between business partners and education leaders.

We are also really happy to be working with CASSA to present workshops and facilitate online engagement processes where we all get to learn from each other about critical education issues in Canada. This is mutually

Sponsoring Partner Profile: Thoughtexchange, continued

beneficial and we look forward to partnering with CASSA for many years to come.

Is there anything else you'd like to comment on in terms of the relationship between CASSA and Thoughtexchange? Anything you'd like conference participants to know?

In a world of long-distance conference calls and web meetings, we really value the opportunity CASSA provides for us to spend time face to face with people we work with and the people we are getting to know. Many members and conference participants are long-time customers of ours and have helped define how we can best serve their needs and the needs of their peers.

We love when members stop by our booth and talk with us about how we can help them continue to engage their stakeholders successfully. We like to take time during the conference to learn how we can refine strategies and provide better tools to inform decisions and gain buy-in from those most affected by district decisions.



Thoughtexchange's Lea (Thuot) Scherck (left) and Kevin Skelcher (right) during a photo op at the 2013 CASSA Partners Dinner in Quidi Vidi, Newfoundland.

CASSA manages to balance casual interactions with meaningful professional development in a way that keeps us coming back—and telling other businesses they should come along next year.

Thank you, Alex, for sharing this with us.

Message from a Long-time Sponsoring Partner

RANDY BRYDGES IS a familiar face at CASSA conferences. Not only is Xerox Canada a long-time sponsoring partner of the conference, but Randy, Xerox's director of Western Canada sales, has always been on hand to personally present the EXL Award each year. Here Randy recalls his relationship with the organization and his 20-year relationship with Ed Wittchen, CASSA's PD director.

I wanted to have the opportunity to thank Ed for the long-term business and personal relationship we have had.

I have known Ed for 20 years, since he was superintendent with Northern Lights School Division. Over this time, Ed demonstrated his visionary leadership and embraced a workplace culture of respect, trust and openness. He fostered collaborative working relationships internally and externally, and was a visible participant in activities and functions at the school level and in the community at large.

We have had a long-term partnership between our two organizations. This partnership consists of an integrated

XEROX.

document management solution to allow staff and students in Northern Lights School Division to capture, store, manage, share, distribute and print documents internally and externally.

From this partnership, Ed and his staff shared their knowledge with other education institutions and organizations Canada wide.

I have also had the opportunity to work with Ed to develop the EXL Award for CASSA, to recognize excellence among members of the superintendency. The EXL Award was first presented in 2002.

I would like to wish Ed the best as he moves forward to a new chapter in his life.

From the CASSA Photo Archives

From Whitehorse to Whistler, St. John's to Quebec City, Winnipeg to Halifax.

From dog sleds to chuckwagons, kayaks to four-wheelers, tour buses to ziplines.

Here's to many great conferences in the past, and to many great conferences still to come.





Scenes from CASSA conferences in Whitehorse, Calgary, Niagara Falls and St. John's.

Message from the Editor

"The function of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers." ~Ralph Nader, activist/advocate

I'VE GROWN UP observing my Dad's particular style of leadership. I've noticed that he's the kind of leader who somehow convinces you that it was your idea all along to take on a project you now find yourself heading up. The kind of leader who always seems to know the right people to get a particular job done, then gets out of the way and lets them shine.

Dad's also the kind of leader who likes to leave things in better shape than he found them. That philosophy also applies to the people lucky enough to be part of his team.

Dad believes in working hard and he expects his team to work hard too. But he also likes his team to have fun at work. It's no accident that CASSA conference participants find themselves playing with sled dogs or going for midnight canoe rides.

The real key to Dad's leadership style, however, can be summed up in three words: relationships, relationships, relationships. From the late, great Fraser Mustard to a young principal at her first conference, Dad welcomed all these great leaders and learners to the CASSA family.

I'm glad I got to be there too.



The Grampa/Dad side of Ed.
(Yes, that guy wears a camera all the time too.)

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**NEWSLETTER
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Photos by Tara Lee Wittchen, Jon Hutt, Marion Holmes, Tim Murphy and (of course) Ed Wittchen.

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