

Leaders & Learners



CASSA-ACGCS
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

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KAW TAY WHEE SCHOOL

Innovation, collaboration and a high level of student input means dramatic improvements.

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF LEADERS & LEARNERS!

Message from the President: Report from AASA 2015

IN FEBRUARY, I attended the annual American Association of School Administrators conference. This event brings together hundreds of system leaders, and offers a rich and diverse program that looks at many educational issues. CASSA was well represented there.

One of the keynote speakers at this conference was **Dan Heath** from Duke University. His talk was based on his book *Decisive*, which explores the ways that people work toward outcomes and offers suggestions for improving decision making.

Dan Heath sympathized with the challenges faced by educational administrators who are asked to make tough decisions, all of which affect students. We work with many stakeholders in our system, and we are continually presented with diverse perspectives and competing interests. Having to make what Heath calls “trade-off” decisions significantly raises the stakes for decision makers. He spoke artfully about making decisions using what he terms “procedural justice.” Based on psychological research that demonstrates dissatisfaction is



Cindy Finn
President

greatest when people not only object to an outcome but also believe that the decision-making process was flawed, he suggests designing a process that is clearly outlined, duly followed and open for reconsideration if new evidence comes to light. Although the result may still be unpopular, people will evaluate a decision more favourably when rendered in such a context. His presentation was but one highlight.

Other keynote presenters such as **Cal Ripken, Jr.**, and **Consuelo Kickbusch** spoke of what we can achieve when educators set high expectations for students, encourage learners to persevere despite adversity and work with families.

In addition to the formal sessions, professional learning was enhanced through social media and other informal channels for networking. This conference reinforced the value of opportunities for colleagues to come together to share ideas and practices that benefit the students we serve. The next large-scale professional learning activity for school system leaders is in Montreal this July 2 to 4 at CASSA's annual conference. Please join us!

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 Executive Director: New Members and a New Set of Beliefs for CASSA

I WANT TO update you on some important news about CASSA.

First, on behalf of our board of directors, I want to welcome to CASSA the members of the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents of Saskatchewan, or LEADS, and the school system leaders from the Yukon. Our membership continues to grow and we look forward to the unique perspectives that leaders from these jurisdictions will bring to our table.

Second, at our strategic planning session in late January, the board confirmed its support for a new set of beliefs about CASSA:

- The role of school system administrators is essential in ensuring success for ALL students.
- CASSA is a learning organization that promotes individual and collective learning for its members.

- CASSA has a responsibility to participate in dialogue on educational matters of national significance.

- It is essential to communicate and collaborate with educational community partners to ensure excellence and equity in publicly funded education across Canada.

In addition, the CASSA board affirmed its commitment to a number of goals:

- to seek opportunities to participate in the national conversation about education
- to promote and provide opportunity for professional learning for its membership
- to promote communication and collaboration with partners having an interest in education



Ken Bain
Executive Director

You can see the CASSA board is committed to making sure CASSA has a strong presence within the national education scene.

I recently returned from the AASA National Conference on Education and had the chance to meet with executive directors from across the United States. Their role in education is

different from ours, as they spend a lot of time and resources lobbying at both their respective state legislatures and in Washington. There were some common themes, though, such as the high turnover in the superintendency and the financial pressures that they feel individually and collectively in their states and districts.

A reminder that our own national conference takes place in Montreal this July 2 to 4. Watch for updates at cassa-acgcs.ca.

2015 American Association of School Administrators National Conference on Education

By Barry Wowk,
AASA Western Representative

I ONCE AGAIN had the privilege of attending the AASA governance meetings on February 25 in San Diego. I was joined by **Nick Milanetti**, our other CASSA representative on the governance board. Our American colleagues in zone 4 were very welcoming and interested in our input.

We are very proud of the fact that we have one of our own, **Bob Mills**, as one of the two co-chairs of the AASA zone 4 governance committee. This makes him a part of the AASA executive team. Bob's term is up and it made us all very proud to see how appreciative our American colleagues were of his contributions over the years.



The AASA conference followed. It was very special as it was the 150th anniversary of AASA. There were too many excellent speakers to mention them all. One that really had an effect on my thoughts was **Dan Heath**, who presented on research that has revealed that our decisions are disrupted by an array of biases and irrationalities. His book on being decisive is an interesting read.

The closing keynote address by Lieutenant Colonel **Consuelo Kickbusch** was an outstanding and very emotional presentation on valuing diversity. She truly is an exceptional presenter.

AASA also included in their recognition of Superintendents of the Year our CASSA winner, **Brent Kaulback**. It is always a special moment to see them honour our winner.

In addition, CASSA hosted an evening for Canadians attending the conference to get together and honour Brent. It was truly a special evening and a big thank you goes out to **Ken Bain** for organizing the event.



Barry Wowk, Cindy Finn and Bob Mills at the CASSA reception.



Baseball great Cal Ripken, Jr., was on hand to deliver the keynote address at the 2015 AASA conference.



Brent Kaulback, assistant superintendent for the South Slave Divisional Educational Council, was recognized as Canadian Superintendent of the Year by AASA president David Pennington and executive director Daniel Dominich.

What Does CASSA Mean to Me?

By Bob Mills

Association of Directors General of English School Boards of Quebec affiliate

AS THAT AGE bar continues to creep upwards, I find myself reminiscing on my early years as a teacher and administrator. I focus on the people who were wonderful examples of the professional I wanted to become. They were deeply committed to public education, were passionate about our profession, had remarkable faith in their students and their colleagues...and how I wanted to emulate them!

My first contacts outside of my school board were with the provincial association, where I learned that involvement, conference attendance and participation gave me wonderful and rich opportunities to learn.

At first, it was intimidating to mix with these experienced people. Gradually I learned that they too benefitted from my idealism at that time, as well as my energy.

By Steven Colpitts

Association of Administrators of English Schools in Quebec affiliate

A FEW YEARS ago when I became a senior administrator, I became involved in my local association. Soon after, I became president of the Association of Pearson Board Administrators (APBA).

During this time, I decided to get involved with our provincial association, AAESQ, by joining the

As my experience grew and my confidence took hold, I ventured from the provincial arena to the national level with CASA (as it was called at that time in 1997). Here I found much of which I sought. Here were leaders from across Canada, serving in the diverse regions that characterize our country. I met and interacted with leaders from metropolitan areas to rural divisions; from our Arctic to southern Ontario; from one-room schools (we still have one at Lester B. Pearson) to large comprehensive institutions in major urban centres across our nation.

These same benefits accrue to me with each conference I attend and with each journal I read. The issues we face are common but—as I learn from other districts—the solutions may be quite different.

CASSA also offered a major opportunity at the turn of the century for Canadian educators: to talk with our American colleagues through representation on their governing board at AASA. This

board of directors and then going on to the executive committee and becoming president-elect. This experience was enriching in so many ways. It gave me the chance to hear from other English school boards in Quebec and to share ideas and problem solve around common challenges.

When a position on the CASSA board of directors became available for a representative from AAESQ, I seized the occasion. I was eager to learn and exchange with other



Bob and Lisa Mills at a CASSA reception during the AASA conference in San Diego last month.

remains a very beneficial relationship today. Our student challenges and successes are remarkably similar, as is our commitment to the communities we serve.

In short, my membership with CASSA has been deeply enriching and continues to be so. This national organization and its dedicated members have served as an inspiration to me and I have grown from the interaction with so many leaders.

The national voice of the association is receiving increasing pan-Canadian recognition and I remain a proud member.

passionate educators from across Canada. That decision has served me well. CASSA is truly a forum for pan-Canadian exchanges on issues and best practices that affect all district leaders.

Whether you are from the east or from the west, the current educational challenges can be similar. Some of the differences speak to our rich territorial and cultural diversity. CASSA unites Canadian school leaders with a common goal of doing what is best for students to succeed!

Students, Staff and Community Working Together to Make a Difference at Kaw Tay Whee School

Kaw Tay Whee School is a small community school in Dettah, Northwest Territories. It serves the First Nation of the Yellowknives Dene and is governed by a locally elected board of officials known as the District Education Authority. The Authority contracts superintendent services from Yellowknife Education District Number One.

Over the past seven years, the school has seen dramatic improvements in enrollment, student engagement, achievement, attendance and programming. The school staff at Kaw Tay Whee has been consistent and believes in a whole-child philosophy. All school activities, events and initiatives are co-constructed with students, as is all criteria. Students take a high level of ownership over the school and have input into almost everything.

In this feature, we take a closer look at some of the programs and projects behind these improvements.

KAW TAY WHEE School staff fully believe that parents and guardians are the first and most important teachers of their children, and that all parents do the best they can. A strong belief in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and a high level of initiative are also present. In this spirit, the school offers a no-fee breakfast, hot lunch and snack program each day to all students.

The school and board have much support and continue to nurture relationships with many stakeholders, including parents, community members, the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, many outside agencies and members of the private sector. The school designs and carries out a variety of unique programming made possible through proposal writing and acquired grants.

The school has earned many awards and accolades over the past few years. These include the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence Certificate of Achievement, a Ministerial Literacy Award and a Science Teaching Award. Most recently, principal **Léa Lamoureux** was named An Outstanding Principal by the Learning Partnership.

While school staff are very happy with the school's progress, they continue to strive toward further growth and



The On Time By Nine visual tracker.

student achievement. Following is an outline of some programming that has made a difference for students at Kaw Tay Whee School.

On Time By Nine & Alarm Clock Program

It is a struggle for some children to wake up in the morning to attend school, or to attend school on time. An alarm clock program was introduced. The oldest sibling in each family, or the only child, was taught how to use the alarm clock and instructions were written as part of an expository writing lesson. After demonstrating that the students knew how to use it, an alarm clock was given to each family. There is an ongoing battery replacement program.

School staff also offer other supports to help students to attend school on time, including phone calls, texting, door knocking, or networking with extended family members to find creative and respectful ways to help children arrive "On Time By Nine."

A special program to celebrate and increase on-time attendance called On Time By Nine was developed. It is tracked in a prominent area in the school. Attending school on time by 9am a certain number of days in a row makes sure the student gets a recognition seat at a pre-determined

Students, Staff and Community Working Together to Make a Difference at Kaw Tay Whee School, continued

event (chosen by the students as a group). Past events included Wii Fit and popcorn, cake decorating, skiing, painting and nachos, a salad bar party, a Lego bash, bowling and spooky surprises. This program is funded through proposals written by the principal. In September, to set the stage for a strong year and with the goal of on-time attendance becoming a habit, several special draws and extra events are held.

Since this program was implemented, there is an average of 80 per cent on-time attendance each day. Notice that attendance is not just expected; being on time is.

Being “On Time By Nine” and present all day are criteria for participating in extracurricular clubs and activities.

On occasion, to celebrate and support families who have shown an improvement in on-time attendance, recognition is given through special notes, certificates or “Family Nights Out” with tickets to the movie theatre and a gift certificate to a local restaurant. This is done privately, along with a phone call or meeting with those parents or guardians.

Culture, Language and Aboriginal Role Model Program

Each month, the school learns about a monthly culture-related theme from the guiding curricular document *Dene Kede*, as well as a traditional Dene law to promote character education.

Students also participate in instruction in the local Willideh language on a daily basis, and have increased both their ability to speak and write the language. This is a work in progress; the addition of exciting “Willideh Mystery Words and Phrases” on a weekly basis has increased the use of resources related to learning the local language.



A student learns how to clean and prepare duck at an on-the-land cultural experience.

In 2012, Kaw Tay Whee introduced the Aboriginal Role Model Program with the intent to promote careers and post-secondary education. Students co-constructed criteria related to what they thought a role model should be and decided that high school graduation, current full-time employment and going on a vacation were the requirements. Students have had guests including famous Aboriginal authors, singers, Elders and a naturopathic doctor. Other Aboriginal special guests who do not fit this criteria also visit the school, and teach about traditional skills and arts and share stories.

Students also participate in a variety of on-the-land activities, including canoeing, spring and winter fishing, dogsledding, birch water camp (where they are part of a cooperative and

produce their own birch syrup from tapping trees for a two-week period), and traditional and key cultural experiences related to the cleaning and preparation of local animals such as rabbit, duck, ptarmigan and others. Students participate in a variety of traditional arts as well, and in 2013 each student designed, beaded and sewed a pair of moccasins with the guidance of our Respected School Elder.

Sleep Study

Many students were arriving at school too tired to learn. Students identified this fact aloud, and we decided to do some research to find out how much sleep our bodies really need to function. The sleep study is linked closely to self-regulation, which is a big focus in education in the Northwest Territories.

Together, we examined the sleep recommendations from the Canadian Paediatric Society and started tracking our sleep on a nightly basis. Students set a weekly sleep goal based on their research and created charts. Then they recorded the time they went to sleep each night and the

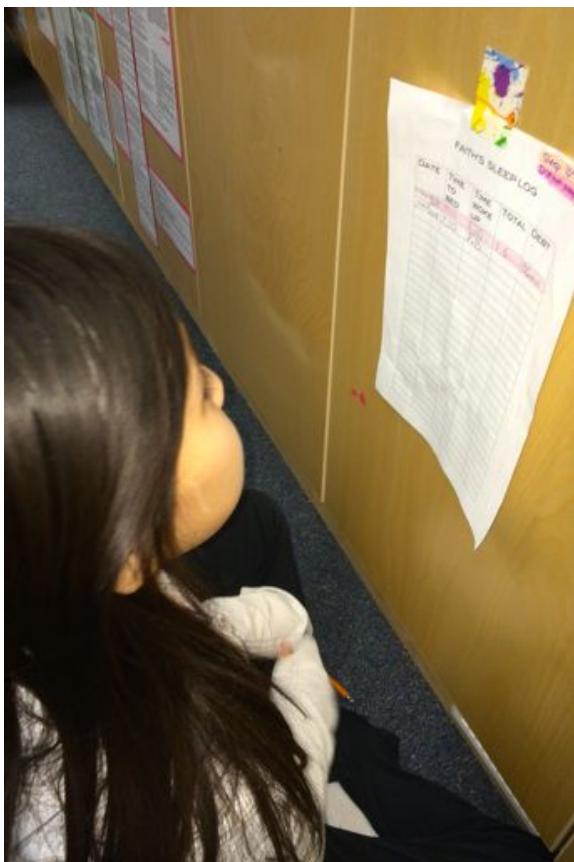
Students, Staff and Community Working Together to Make a Difference at Kaw Tay Whee School, continued

time they woke up each morning. Next, they calculated to see if we were carrying a debt or surplus.

This work fits nicely with our learning outcomes in math, health, English language arts and ICT. Students tracked their sleep for two weeks at a time and created a plan to “pay themselves back” if they were in debt; students also learned how to build up a surplus in advance of a big planned event like a sleepover.

Class discussions about bedtime routines, use of wake-up methods and sleep hygiene take place as part of brainstorming sessions on how to improve. Discussions focus on how adequate and lack of sleep can affect our brains and our ability to learn.

The school had positive comments from family and board members about hearing children talking about their sleep and making plans to get to bed earlier.



A Kaw Tay Whee School student looks over a sleep study tracking chart.

Grades 3 to 8 students now track their sleep for two weeks after any school holiday. We feel that this is helping bring more mindfulness to the need for sleep and that it is empowering students to make positive, healthy choices and benefitting their overall ability to focus and learn.

Experiences Program

In an effort to make sure there is a wide general knowledge base and that our students have a variety of engaging, student-centred learning experiences, students at Kaw Tay Whee School participate in an attitudes and beliefs/experiences survey outlining things they'd like to try each school year. The survey is basic, and includes many open-ended questions. Younger students are interviewed, and older students are given the survey to complete by hand. Many of our experiences are funded through partners in other agencies or in the private sector.

In the past seven years, in addition to local and culturally relevant experiences, students have

- completed cycles in modern, jazz, hip hop and interpretive dance and yoga
- made hand-formed pottery
- recycled glass to produce art
- gone swimming
- attended the theatre to watch live performances



Going grocery shopping can be an adventure for a young student, and it's part of the Experiences Program at Kaw Tay Whee School.

Students, Staff and Community Working Together to Make a Difference at Kaw Tay Whee School, continued

- visited the local museum
- eaten in restaurants
- gone grocery shopping
- written scripts
- filmed/produced/edited videos
- planned annual Family Nutrition Fairs
- made robots and rockets
- gone skiing
- researched/shopped for/cooked/eaten food from numerous cultures
- worked with a variety of local artists

Because of the Experiences Program, our school now has an annual Super Duper Razzle Dazzle Show, Piñata Day and an annual Spirit Week. We also offer a BMX Bike Program, a Canoeing Program, a Gymnastics Program, a Winter Outdoor Education Program that includes skiing, snowshoeing and ice fishing, and a year-round indoor food garden using natural and artificial light and hydroponics.

Our students from grades 1 to 8 have personal blogs and use Twitter to share their learning experiences and connect with the wider world.

Family Outreach

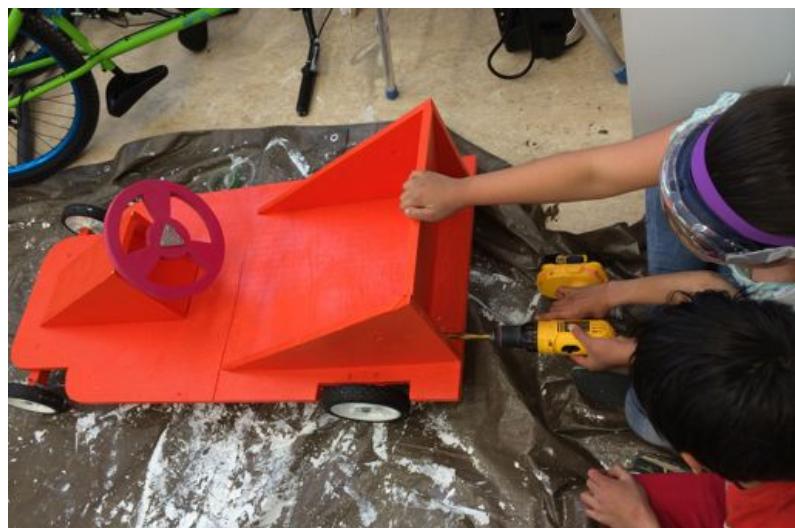
Kaw Tay Whee School has also set up several special events and support packs for families over the years.

- *The Family Library Project:* This is designed so that each family in the community gets an individually designed home library to keep. The home library includes a variety of books directly related to the interests and reading levels of children in each home. It also includes books and resources to grow into. Each kit includes a dictionary, thesaurus, several atlases, a math dictionary and a selection of culturally relevant texts.

- *The Family Dental Health Project:* This project included a teaching component and a community event. It culminated with each family taking home a Year Long Family Dental Pack. This pack included a one-year



Students learning how to shop for school supplies, part of the activities included in the Experiences Program.



Building soap box racing cars is a beloved childhood activity, and it's one made available to students at Kaw Tay Whee School through the Experiences Program.

supply of toothbrushes, toothpaste, dental floss and age-appropriate books related to teeth, dental care and health for each member in a household.

- *The Family Night In Pack Project:* This was designed by school staff in consultation with a speech therapist, an occupational therapist and an early childhood consultant with a goal to improve and support the development skill sets for speech, fine motor and gross motor skills;

Students, Staff and Community Working Together to Make a Difference at Kaw Tay Whee School, continued

imaginative play; early literacy and numeracy skills; play and social and emotional skills. The project also aimed to reduce screen time and improve access to physical activity. The project included a teaching component. Each family received a three-month flexi-pass, which included unlimited no-fee access to the pool, rink, indoor playground and indoor track, a bin of board games, and age-appropriate art supplies, baking materials and a cookbook, Lego, blocks, origami paper and instructions, art books and a variety of pamphlets related to child development, safe screen time and resources for families.

- *The Family Garden Project:* This project gave students a way to share gardening skills learned at school with their families. Each kit included some high-quality, age-appropriate books about gardening, both fiction and non-fiction. They also included how-to pamphlets related to gardening. The focus was on container gardening food. Seeds for lettuce, beans, peas and potatoes were included, as was soil and the containers themselves. Parents were offered help to get the garden started and trouble-shooting was also made available.

- *The Pre-Natal Project:* This project provided books about healthy pregnancies and fetal development to pregnant mothers. The titles vary according to the mother's preference, and this allows for the respectful selection of books at a comfortable literacy level. The project also includes books about child brain development and parenting, as well as healthy cookbooks. A soft toy and wordless board and cloth books are also included. Other materials, like pamphlets about local resources such as public health, are also included in this project.

- *The Kindergarten Readiness Project* is a fun way for Kaw Tay Whee School to reach out to new families. When children register for kindergarten, they are given a school



As part of the Experiences Program, students from Kaw Tay Whee School learn valuable skills like spring fishing. Looks like these young guys are doing very well with their lesson!

t-shirt and some exciting materials to get those creative juices flowing! Scissors, paint, paper, glue, crayons, pencils, playdough and Wikki Stix get rave reviews from the youngest learners and help spark excitement for the learning to come when they enter the school system.

With very special thanks to principal Léa Lamoureux for providing the information for this article as well as the lovely photos. If you'd like to learn more about these highly successful programs at Kaw Tay Whee School, get in touch with Léa by email at lea.lamoureux@yk1.nt.ca. You can also follow her on Twitter @lealamoureux.



Time to Plan for Montreal 2015: Building Up S.T.E.A.M.

MONTREAL IS THE place to be in early July 2015. CASSA members, keynote speakers, breakout session leaders and sponsoring partners will gather at Le Westin in Montreal, Quebec, for three days of high-quality sessions on S.T.E.A.M.

In case you've not heard, our theme of S.T.E.A.M. stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math. Those subjects will be at the heart of conference presentations.

Are you interested in speaking at this year's conference? We are still looking for presenters to offer workshops on the theme of S.T.E.A.M. Now is the time to sign up to share your district's success stories. Contact our office to be a part of this engaging conference experience.

We are also seeking sponsors for the national conference. CASSA has enjoyed particularly strong relationships with our conference sponsors over the years. When you

attend the national conference as a sponsor, you're not just put in the corner with your display booth. You're part of the entire experience, from our zipline adventures on the west coast to our lobster dinners on the east coast. Our innovative sponsor passport program and partners dinner guarantee quality engagement with CASSA executive and members from across the country. Interested? Get in touch with our new CASSA conference planner Rachel Cleland at rachel.cleland@conferencedirect.com to discuss sponsor opportunities for Montreal.

As always, family members are welcome to join our sightseeing tours and receptions.

Watch for more detailed information on the 2015 conference in upcoming issues of the *Leaders & Learners* newsletter and on our website at cassa-acgcs.ca (click the "Annual Conference" tab).

See you in Montreal!



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