



CASSA-ACGCS
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

Greetings from the President

Inside this Issue

Greetings from the President,
Page 1

Greetings from the Executive Director,
Page 2

In Conversation with: Dr. Dennis
Carpenter,
Page 3

EXL Award Nominees,
Page 6

**All websites and email addresses are active.
Click them to connect immediately with
various resources.*

The word 'equity' is more firmly entrenched in the lexicon of school system leader discourse and focus, and I know CASSA will carry that vision of equity and excellence, for each learner, forward even after the pandemic.

One of CASSA's goals is to promote and provide opportunity for professional learning for the membership. CASSA addresses this goal through our monthly Board of Directors meetings, our *Leaders & Learners* newsletter (six issues a year, <https://www.cassa-acgcs.ca/Page/67>) and magazine (published bi-annually, <https://www.cassa-acgcs.ca/Page/64>), and our annual conference in July.

Our conference this year will be cohosted by CASSA and CSBA and delivered virtually on July 7-9, 2021. When you sign up and pay the one registration fee for your board (<http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/>), you will also receive a link where your school and system leaders and trustees can all register individually for free. Our good folks have arranged an impressive lineup of presenters on topics around our theme of *Equity and Inclusion for Student Well Being*, including Kevin Lamoureux (Indigenous Education and Reconciliation), Kike Ojo-Thompson (Anti-Racism in Schools), Dr. Kathy Short, Jen McCrea, Nathan Ip, and our very own past-president Cindy Finn (School Mental Health). You don't want to miss out on this one!

CASSA has also taken opportunity to bring awareness to other professional learning opportunities for our members facilitated by partner organizations such as Nelson, CMC Leadership, C21 CEO Academy, and the EdCan Network. I've had the pleasure of participating in a few virtual PD sessions of late, and I note that many of the



Curtis Brown
CASSA/ACGCS President

offerings are related to equity and inclusion, much to my satisfaction. It is comforting to know that CASSA's theme for 2020-21, *Equity and Inclusion for Student Well Being*, has resonated as a priority and focus for others as well.

It is also great to see that these webinars are featuring inspiring CASSA members such as Claire Guy, Patricia Garland, Randy Emmerson, Chris Usih, Gregg Ingersoll, Jordan Tinney, Chris Kennedy, Tom D'Amico, Elwin Leroux, Marianne Mazzorato, Kurt Sacher, Michael Borgfjord, Chris Fuzessy, Zoe Watson, and Tony Stack.

The pandemic has helped to highlight inequities, and my hope is that when the pandemic is behind us that we will not lose impetus for change and improvement. The word 'equity' is more firmly entrenched in the lexicon of school system leader discourse and focus, and I know CASSA will carry that vision of equity and excellence, for each learner, forward even after the pandemic.

Curtis Brown
CASSA/ACGCS President

Greetings from the Executive Director



Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

I hope this message finds you, your family, and your community safe and healthy. As we go into the summer season, CASSA continues to be involved in and supportive of several initiatives of local and national importance.

- **Canadian Healthy Schools Alliance:** Our vision is for every school in Canada to be a healthy school community. Visit our website <https://www.healthyschoolsalliance.ca> to learn more.
- **Canadian School Mental Health Leadership Network:** A network of school system leaders and trustees committed to enhancing school mental health throughout Canada with the support of mental health thought leaders.
- **French Teacher Shortage in Canada:** In cooperation with the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA), Régrouperment national des directions générales de l'éducation, Heritage Canada, and Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones, we are supporting the establishment of a national database for school boards to use to help address the shortage of French Language teachers on English

school boards and Francophone teachers on French school boards.

- **Public Safety Canada:** CASSA is cooperating with CSBA and the Canadian Teachers Federation in support of Public Safety Canada in its Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OCSE) campaign. The OCSE campaign targets youth in Canada aged 10-17, as well as parents and caregivers of youth aged 5-17. The campaign aims to increase the target audiences' awareness levels of online child sexual exploitation.

In addition, we are supporting the Public Safety Canada campaign to combat cyberbullying. The Cyberbullying campaign targets youth in Canada aged 12-17, as well as parents, caregivers and educators of youth aged 6-17. It aims to increase awareness of where youth and caregivers can get the help they need to deal with cyberbullying. In addition, the campaign will try to empower young people to take action to protect themselves and others from cyberbullying. The website can be found here: www.canada.ca/cyberbullying.

I am sure you will agree that these initiatives are of critical importance. CASSA looks forward to supporting communities throughout Canada.

Please join us on July 7-9, 2021, for our virtual conference that we are co-hosting with CSBA. This year's theme is *Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being*. Over this three-day event, sessions offered will run for about three hours each day and will provide an opportunity to learn together with colleagues from CASSA and CSBA on the topics of Anti-Racism (July 7), School Mental Health (July 8), and Indigenous Education and Reconciliation (July 9).

In consultation with your local CSBA member, register your board now: <http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/CASSA-register.html>. We look forward to seeing you there!

Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

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 ThoughtExchange

In Conversation With: Dr. Dennis Carpenter

Our previous issue of *Leaders & Learners* featured the first part of a conversation with Dr. Dennis Carpenter, ThoughtExchange’s Director of Education Operations. In that article, Dr. Carpenter addressed issues ranging from student voice, inclusion, equity, digital equity, and the role that ThoughtExchange can play in supporting system administrators to lead conversations on these kinds of topics.

In part two, Dr. Carpenter describes in more detail how the ThoughtExchange platform supports open, positive, and anti-biased discussions, and explores the meaning of terms like inclusion, equity, and digital equity.



Dr. Dennis Carpenter, Director of Education Operations at ThoughtExchange. Photos Courtesy of Emma Moran.

How does the ThoughtExchange platform invite and support people to get their thoughts and ideas and wishes out there, and to not have them quashed by more dominant participants?

The dominant person, the person in the room with the most prestige or social capital or the fanciest title—we’ve all been a part of those experiences. When the question is placed into our software, then that individual we’ve just described with the title or the social capital or the loudest voice, their thought is just one thought, just like everyone else’s thought.

During the rating phase, if people agree with the thought, the anonymous rating will show agreement with that thought. If it’s not and another thought emerges, it might



Missed the first part? To read the beginning of this conversation between *Leaders and Learners* and Dr. Dennis Carpenter, check out 2021 Issue 2 which is available on www.cassa-acgcs.ca/Page/67.

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To learn more about ThoughtExchange, please visit thoughtexchange.com or follow the company on various social media platforms including Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

emerge from a person in the room who is a quiet person, unassuming, but when people see their thought and it resonates with them, that theme will emerge. We have in essence as a company created a system whereby the silent majority can be heard, and no single voice is more important than another.

So, you're removing a lot of that power and distributing it more fairly through the software?

Removing that power, distributing it fairly and really getting us as a society out of what some researchers call our lazy brain. It's our lazy brain that follows groupthink, where just because I'm in a relationship with an individual, automatically I start to agree and create this agreement of thought. That's what happens with our social networks. I had an opportunity

to watch the movie *The Social Dilemma*, and it shows us how once we create patterns in our own line of practices that show what we agree with, then the social platforms start feeding us more of that. It starts placing us in a community with people who believe the same thing, and, if we're not careful, we then go into this space of allowing our brain to simply be lazy. ThoughtExchange takes us outside of that space of only using the lazy component of our brain that quickly leans toward groupthink.

How can ThoughtExchange help superintendents, directors of education, and other senior leadership to set up these conversations about digital equity, in terms of students of varied backgrounds, needs, and interests,

and to stay involved and not exactly in control, but to keep it going forward in that positive, productive, unbiased way?

In addition to our patented technology, we also have a very competent team of account managers and customer success managers. One of the gifts they bring to the customer experience is helping customers generate the right questions and an effective cadence to asking those questions.

Put another way, if you're moving an organization along a strategic continuum, then you want to build up capacity by way of questions. How do we help customers build up a sequence of questions that can get the organization moving on a particular issue like diversity, equity, and inclusion? You may think you've got to jump right into the deep end of that conversation around white privilege or systemic racism, but really the question could be a lot more amenable to more people and still generate the beginning of a conversation that needs to be had. That takes a level of sophistication. That takes a level of day-to-day interaction with exchanges and results and building of questions, and that's what our team can support. We've been doing some of that work through the ThoughtExchange virtual events series.

If you're going to go into a deep topic, one thing you might want to start with is do we have common working definitions around this topic. Because if we don't, we may think we're having one conversation but based on an individual personal definition around the topic we may be having a very different conversation around the same question. So how do we as an organization make sure we avoid that pitfall by asking questions that lead us in terms of strategy development and building trust versus placing individuals in survival brain first time out, first question?

It is also very welcoming for some folks who might be coming at it with a bit of suspicion, like "what are we doing, why do we have to do this, I just want to do my work," and not really thinking of it like if you just keep going the way you're going, the work is maybe not only not helpful but even harmful.

Absolutely. The beauty of it is once you get organizational voice and you start

looking at your data and your analytics around what is coming up for members of the group participating in the exchange, then as a leader, whether that be the organization's CEO or superintendent or as a departmental leader, you can start using the organization's language back when you start proposing solutions or decisions are being made. You can have a clear reference point to point back to as it relates to what was heard and the themes that emerged by way of a series of questions that have been posed during exchanges.

This process wins a lot of trust. This must be one of the cornerstones of an organization's culture—trust. What we find a lot is that our tool supports leaders who are transparent and who are committed to hearing multiple perspectives. When that's done and you close that feedback loop by sharing back out and talking about how the information that was generated has been used to employ strategy, influence performance and enhance strategy, collaboration and culture, you're building high, high levels of trust across the organization, that's extremely important to any effective leader.

You talked about the experience of having common working definitions. Would you share your view of what you mean when we talk about equity and what you mean when we talk about digital equity?

I've found over time that an effective working definition of equity in a place called school is giving every child what they need in every situation. So, when I talk about digital equity or when I talk about instructional equity, the goal is to always give the individual what they need to be successful in that particular area. If I'm talking about instructional equity, I'm giving every child instructionally what they need in every situation. This definition of equity becomes transferable across all of these areas. That's the definition that I've found to be based in simplicity and one that an organization can wrap its head around. It becomes applicable across all areas of the organization.

What is your working definition for inclusion?

I like to create the conditions where organizations can find agreement on these types of definitions. In the past, what I've

suggested to organizations is you're going to come up to some opposition to words like diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. If you are clear with the understanding that diversity is just a fact, however you want to define it. We have to honour the fact that diversity in the world we live in, it's a fact. Equity, what we just discussed, giving every child what they need in every situation, that's a definition I subscribe to, but I've also challenged organizations to understand that whether or not you're equitable as an organization, that's a choice. Diversity is a fact, and equity is a choice. There is no in between. It's an either/or. So now as an organization, you have to grapple with that. Are we going to be equitable or are we not?

When I think about inclusion, inclusion is an action. It's something you have to do. Ultimately do you want anybody in your organization feeling as if they do not belong, because a sense of belonging is the end game. Belonging is the outcome. If belonging is the outcome, start with diversity. That's just a fact. Equity, whether you're going to be equitable or not, that's a choice. And inclusion requires some intentional action because the outcome that we all should be striving for, and none of us would willingly accept anything different, is belonging. Belonging is the outcome.

When you are provided with these structures, organizations can build out their technical definitions based on the local context. So when you think about diversity, in some organizations the issue may be racial diversity. In other areas and locations, it may be more of a religious diversity that's driving the conversation. And the same is true with equity. If you notice with equity being a choice this work can become difficult because it comes to an either/or. That gives an organization a lot to process and work through. The behavioural change we ultimately look for organizationally is when we begin to critique those practices we employ because "we have always done it." This is where inequities oftentimes hide out in plain sight. And then inclusion, that's an action. You have to be intentional about being inclusive.

We know we've hit the mark on all three when everyone who engages with our organizations can say without a doubt that they experience belonging. In my mind, that's the ultimate outcome. ○

EXL Award Nominations

From 2002 to 2019, CASSA has recognized the extraordinary efforts of Canadian school system leaders through the annual presentation of the EXL Award. This award is presented through the ongoing support of Xerox Canada. In 2020, the award was not presented due in part to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cancellation of the 2020 CASSA conference. Several regional affiliates still announced local EXL Award recipients and nominees for the national award.

The recipients for both the 2020 and 2021 EXL Award will be announced at this year's virtual conference on Wednesday, July 7. Here are brief profiles of each of the deserving nominees. Congratulations to them all!

2020 NOMINEES

DARREL ROBERTSON, Edmonton Public Schools



Darrel is the Superintendent of Schools for Edmonton Public Schools (EPS). Before taking on this role in 2013, he served EPS as its Managing Director, Human Resources, and as its Director of Labour Relations, Compensation, Information Security, and HRMS.

An immediate priority for Darrel on becoming Superintendent was to bring EPS together around a set of values that would be foundational to his leadership going forward. These Cornerstone Values—integrity, collaboration, equity, and accountability—have been the catalyst to meaningful positive cultural change in the division. A notable part of this work included setting up the Equity Fund, a collaborative and equitable way to let principals respond to unique or emerging challenges and strategically put additional

resources where they are most needed across the division. This fund has helped thousands of students, particularly those who are most vulnerable.

Darrel also introduced a division-wide K-12 initiative called Career Pathways to help students develop self-awareness and explore options for their lives beyond school through competency-focused learning experiences. He has also prioritized the enhancement of EPS's Leadership Development Framework to make sure all staff can explore their own leadership, learn about leadership, and prepare for leadership opportunities.

He is known, trusted, and widely respected for his formal and informal work as a mentor for senior leaders across Alberta. He served on the CASS Board of Directors and its Conditions of Practice Advisory

Committee for teacher negotiations. In 2015, he was an Education Research Development and Innovation panel participant, an invitation-only forum for business and education leaders. As a graduate student, he earned the Governor General's Gold Medal for highest academic standing.

Darrel has been a member of CASSA since 2013.

DR. RENEE CLOSS, Sahtu Divisional Educational Council



Dr. Closs is the Superintendent of Schools for the Sahtu Divisional Education Council (SDEC), which is based in Norman Wells, Northwest Territories (NWT). From 2012 to 2019, she was the SDEC's Assistant Superintendent. Prior to that, she served the council as its School Programs Consultant.

Dr. Closs is an advocate for North Slave Indigenous language revitalization and has led strategic planning to respond to the Sahtu's call for prioritizing Indigenous language learning. As a result, oral language and fluency in spoken Indigenous language and dialects of the Sahtu region are top priorities in SDEC schools. Recognizing that most Sahtu language educators are approaching retirement, Dr. Closs has developed mentorships between potential novice instructors and retiring educators and Elders. Her work to support education in NWT includes developing a comprehensive literacy program and establishing a comprehensive numeracy program.

In 2019, Dr. Closs received the NWTSA's Distinguished Service Award. Other honours include the Government of the Northwest Territories Long Service Award and the Citizen of the Year Award from the Town of Norman Wells for her community volunteerism. She has served one term as a town

councillor for Norman Wells, and sat on the governing bodies of the Child and Youth Care Counsellors Steering Committee; NWT Teacher Qualifications Services Committee; NWT High School Pathways Committee; NWT Student Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting Committee; NWT Curriculum Implementation Committee; Norman Wells Minor Hockey Association; and the Norman Wells Community Justice Committee. She has also been an instructor in the Continuing Education for Teachers program at Queen's University for several years.

Dr. Closs has been a member of the NWTSA and CASSA since 2012.

2021 NOMINEES

KURT SACHER, Chinook's Edge School Division



Kurt is the Superintendent of Schools for Chinook's Edge School Division, based in Innisfail, Alberta. He has served in this capacity since 2010. Prior to this, he was the Assistant Superintendent, People Services, for Wolf Creek Public Schools, based in Ponoka, Alberta, for eight years.

He played a key role in setting up the Zone 4 Aspiring Leaders Program, which provides training and leadership development for future school-based administrators. For this work, Kurt was recognized with an Honourable Mention for the Alberta School Boards Association Premier's Award. Through this work with CASS, Kurt has also mentored five new superintendents. Other honours include a National Award of Distinction from the Canadian Association of Communicators in Education and the National Communications Bravo Award.

Kurt's leadership focuses on building trust

and effective relationships and making sure stakeholders are heard. He has designed and facilitated structures across the division to achieve this, including the Teachers Matter Committee, Students Matter Committee, Support Staff Matter Committee, and the Parents Matter Committee. He is known for modelling and inspiring ethical behaviour that honours the principles of integrity, objectivity, and protection of the public interest. His belief that a child should have equal access to resources no matter what school they attend was a driving force behind the Chinook's Edge Resource Allocation Working Group process, resulting in schools being allocated funding based on need rather than simple student enrollment numbers.

Kurt is the former CASS President, serving in this role from 2018 to 2019. He has served the CASS executive since 2016 and has been a member of CASSA for 19 years.

SIMONE GESSLER, Yellowknife Catholic Schools



Simone is the Superintendent of Yellowknife Catholic Schools, a position she has held since 2019. Prior to that, she was the district's Assistant Superintendent of Learning for four years.

Simone's leadership journey includes her role as principal of Weledeh Catholic School, which she began in 2010. While in that position, she was honoured with the NWT Ministerial Literacy Award (Educator Category) and was named as one of Canada's Outstanding Principals by The Learning Partnership in 2014. She is also a 2021 recipient of the NWT Superintendents' Association Distinguished Service Award.

Her time as a leader at Yellowknife Catholic Schools has been distinguished by

innovation, initiative, dedication, commitment, and a willingness to be a risk-taker and team player among her peers. She is passionate about technology, inquiry-based learning, and 21st-century skills, and has worked to provide innovative educational leadership and professional development for teachers and educational leaders in the NWT and across Canada. Her involvement in organizations outside of the NWT have resulted in her bringing back new knowledge and expertise, particularly in the area of student-centred learning and technology integration. Simone has developed several workshops and courses to support educational leaders to embrace their power to transform traditional systems of education

and to positively disrupt the learning environment.

Simone has long been committed to creating, nurturing, and supporting leadership at all levels, such as when she developed the Empowering Courageous Leadership project targeting and supporting leadership for students, teachers, and administrators. She is a certified Google Innovator and a graduate of the Rotman School of Management Executive Leadership Program. She earned her Master's of Educational Administration from St. FX University.

She is the current Executive Director of the NWTSA as well as the current NWTSA representative on the CASSA board of directors.

DENISE ANDRE, Ottawa Catholic School Board



Denise is the former Director of Education and Secretary Treasurer for the Ottawa Catholic School Board. She retired last summer after 42 years with the board. In that time, she also served as the OCSB's Deputy Director of Education, Assistant Secretary Treasurer, and its Superintendent of Human Resources, Curriculum, and Student Success.

She is highly respected for her accomplishments in system leadership, including her role in developing the OCSB's new strategic commitments to wellness for students and staff. Denise has played a vital leadership role supporting the work of the board's all four external achievement centres, which serve pregnant teens, disengaged or underachieving Grade 12 students, homeless youth and those involved in the criminal justice system.

Her leadership philosophy of leading from the heart helped to create a district that welcomes the challenges that come with equity and inclusive education priorities. Denise created conditions for staff to be as creative as they want their students to be, and she invited staff to take risks while working together and supporting one another while the district transitioned to a focus on deep learning.

Denise has taught many aspiring system leaders through the Eastern Ontario Staff Development Network's Supervisory Officer Qualification Program, as well as many aspiring school administrators through the University of Ottawa's Principal Qualification courses.

Among her many commitments beyond her home school board, she was a board member and chair of the EdCan Network,

Save the date!

**Joint CASSA – CSBA
Conference and Indigenous
Gathering**

July 7 – July 9, 2021

**EQUITY
AND
INCLUSION**

FOR STUDENT WELL-BEING

Wednesday, July 7 – Friday, July 9, 2021

CASSA and CSBA's joint online event invites you to connect with trustee and system leader colleagues throughout Canada. The theme for 2021 is **Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being**. Join us virtually this year from the comfort of your own home or office.

Learn more or register today at www.conference.cassa-acgcs.ca



Thought Leaders include:



Kike Ojo-Thompson
Program Manager
Principal Consultant
Kojo Institute



Dr. Kathy Short
Executive Director
School Mental
Health Ontario
Toronto, Ontario



Dr. Cindy Finn
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Lester B. Pearson
School Board
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Jennifer McCrea
Assistant Deputy
Minister
Learning Division,
Ministry of Education
Province of British
Columbia



Nathan Ip
Program Manager
HEADSTRONG-Alberta
with the Mental Health
Commission of Canada
Trustee,
Edmonton, Alberta



Kevin Lamoureux
Education Lead
National Centre
for Truth and
Reconciliation

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a member of the Council of Directors of Education, a member of OCSOA, the chair of the Eastern Ontario Catholic Curriculum Cooperative, an Academy Leader for the C21 CEO Academy, and an Education Partner for Education Research Development and Innovation (ERDI). Denise has been a member of CASSA for 16 years.

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL OF THE NOMINEES, AND GOOD LUCK!



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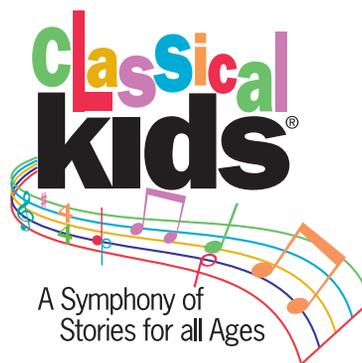
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