

Leaders & Learners



CASSA-ACGCS
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

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CELEBRATING
10 YEARS OF
LEADERS &
LEARNERS!

Message from the President: System Leaders Supporting Students

RECENTLY AT A meeting, I was asked to reflect on what education means to me. That is a broad question, and as I contemplated my answer, I kept returning to my belief in the power of education as a transformative tool.

As an educator working at a systems level in my school board, I am seeking to make a difference in the lives of the students, staff and parents we serve. How can we best accomplish such a goal? My participation in some recent activities reminded me of the pivotal role that system leaders play in fostering and supporting student success, which I would like to share with you.

In late October, Executive Director **Ken Bain** and I participated in an international symposium hosted by the Ontario Principal's Council and International School Leadership. In attendance were educational leaders from British Columbia, Ontario and Quebec, as well as those from around the world, including England, Finland, Australia, the



Cindy Finn
President

United States, Italy and South Africa. The theme of this symposium was System Change through School Leadership. Over the course of three days, keynote addresses by **Michael Fullan** (from Canada), **Steve Munby** (from England) and **Mary Jean Gallagher** (from Canada) provided stimulating food for thought and a basis for discussion.

Facilitators helped guide discussion groups that explored such topics as strategies for whole system change, the role of professional leadership associations and data from places around the world that have succeeded in improving student outcomes.

A particularly powerful presentation was given by Mary Jean Gallagher, recently retired Assistant Deputy Minister of Education in Ontario, who titled her talk "Hope, Reason and Action: The Role of Leaders and Their Associations."

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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: Fall News Roundup

CASSA ENJOYED ANOTHER successful conference in Montreal. Our keynote speakers, **Natalie Panek**, **John Malloy** and **Hall Davidson**, and STEAM-related workshops were well received. Thank you to our sponsors and exhibitors who help make our conference such a success.

Congratulations to **John Crocco**, Director of Education for the Niagara Catholic District School Board, the 2015 EXL Award recipient! John will be at the AASA Superintendent of the Year ceremony in Phoenix in February. We hope to have a strong contingent there to support him.

After an outstanding career in school board leadership in Quebec

and in recognition of his years of dedication to CASSA, **Bob Mills** received an Honorary Life Membership. We have deep gratitude for all Bob has done to make sure CASSA is a strong organization. We wish him a wonderful retirement with his wife **Lisa**.

A warm welcome to the newest members of the CASSA Board of Directors. Our two new Directors-at-Large are **Penny Prysnuik** from Yukon and **Shelly Pepler** from Nunavut. We also welcome back, albeit in a new role, **Reg Klassen** as a Director-at-Large. **John Waterhouse** is our new CASS



Ken Bain
Executive Director

member. The new ADGESBQ member is **Howard Miller**. **Loretta Notten** is the newest OCSOA representative, replacing **Simone Oliver** who is now the CASSA Eastern rep to AASA.

Our Board of Directors is focusing on student mental health and well being. There will be more news to share with you in future issues of our newsletter and journal, all leading up to our 2016 conference in Winnipeg. Our theme will be Hearts and Minds: Creating a Culture of Caring. You will also find more CASSA conference details at <http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/index.html>.

Message from the President: System Leaders Supporting Students, continued

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She provided a compelling argument that leading the charge for whole school or system reform takes three elements:

- optimism as evidenced by a growth-is-possible mindset
- reason as demonstrated by empirically evidenced data that guide our educational interventions
- action as shown by a commitment to support teacher and principal leaders who are working directly with students

In early November, Ken Bain and I attended the Canadian Education Association conference held in Quebec City. The theme of this two-day conference was *Dropping Out: What Neuroscience Can Teach Us*, and featured three sessions given by researchers who spoke on math instruction, the prevalence of neuroscience myths in education and the role of physical exercise in learning.

While the scientific content of these sessions was interesting and informative, what I found of equally high value were the rich discussions held after each presentation. In these discussion groups, it was clear that while the learning activities between teachers and students are of critical importance, we must not lose sight of how those of us in leadership positions also need to be aware of what the fields of cognitive and exercise science can teach us.

System leaders play a key role in shaping initiatives that schools undertake, whether it be in emphasizing the importance of numeracy and physical activity or in



cautioning those who wish to adopt strategies and interventions that are not grounded in good science.

Although both conferences served to raise the significant challenges faced by many of us working in education right now, such as school improvement and

Those of us in leadership positions need to be aware of what the fields of cognitive and exercise science can teach us.

drop-out prevention in a time of public pressure and financial austerity, there was also an undeniable spirit of positivity and optimism shared by those in attendance. Educators strive to make a difference on a daily basis with students; those of us fortunate to work as system leaders also share that desire to have a positive and lasting impact on the children and youth we serve.

Faces in the Crowd: Profiles of Leaders

Barb Isaak is the Superintendent of Sunrise School Division and past President of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS). From 2003 to 2015, she was the Assistant Superintendent with River East Transcona School Division.



Barb Isaak

Barb earned both her Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education at the University of Winnipeg, and her Master of Education in Curriculum (1997) and Educational Administration (2003) at the University of Manitoba. Her accomplishments as Superintendent include district-wide ongoing professional learning in classroom-based assessment, district-wide implementation of standard technology expectations for all teaching staff and a partnership with external organizations to provide a summer camp focused on career development for students ages 13 to 16.

Barb has also served on a planning team that organized provincial conferences for the superintendents' association and partner groups that focused on sustainability, social justice, and mental health and wellness. She is proud of being part of MASS, an organization that deeply supports all learners and focuses on high-quality public education for students; the organization is currently focused on Aboriginal education, mental health and wellness, and early childhood education.

Barb enjoys cycling, walking, reading, and live theatre and concerts. She has her Master Gardener's certificate and is an avid traveller, having recently visited Iceland, Germany, Austria and the Caribbean.

Randy Fox is the Director of Education for Living Sky School Division in Saskatchewan, a position he has held since 2010. Before this, he was Assistant Director for the division.



Randy Fox

Over the course of three decades, Randy's career has taken him to all corners of Saskatchewan. He has worked as a teacher and school administrator before his career in system administration. He is particularly proud of the efforts and accomplishments of schools in his division to focus on meeting the holistic needs of all students, and by addressing these needs, see overall student achievement improve. Through the collaborative efforts of many individuals, including central office staff, support staff and teachers, the school experience continues to improve for all students.

Randy is one of two Directors in Saskatchewan to serve on the C21 Canada CEO Academy. He has served as the President of the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents of Saskatchewan, a LEADS Executive Zone Representative, and a member of the LEADS Professional Relations and Educational Leadership committees. He was the first board chair of the Saskatchewan Educational Technology Association.

Randy and his wife Susan live in North Battleford. They have two adult children; Marisa, the other teacher in the family, and Nolan, working in Saskatoon in recreational sales. Randy and Susan are blessed with two grandchildren, Jori, son of Marisa, and Lennon, son of Nolan and his wife Brittani.

Natalie Panek: Taking STEM and STEAM to New Heights

CASSA CONFERENCE PARTICIPANTS had the privilege of hearing **Natalie Panek** deliver an inspiring keynote address on this topic on July 2 at Le Westin in Montreal. The amazing rocket scientist, explorer, pilot, aspiring astronaut and champion for women in STEM and STEAM shared her suggestions for a foundation of success in those subject areas with school system administrators from across the country.

Panek is an engineer at MDA's Robotics and Automation division, where she works on Canadian space robotics and other Canadian space exploration programs. She has also worked for NASA and the International Space University. She received her M.Sc in Aerospace, Aeronautical and Astronautical/Space Engineering from the University of Toronto in 2009 and her B.Sc in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Calgary in 2007.

Early in her keynote she recalled the first book she read when she finished her academic programs and was finally able to put down her textbooks. That book, *Failure is Not an Option: Mission Control From Mercury to Apollo 13 and Beyond*, details former NASA flight director **Gene Kranz's** experiences in mission control and had a significant impact on Panek. Kranz details what he believes was the foundation for success needed for reaching historic goals like going to the moon: teamwork, competence, toughness, discipline, responsibility and confidence.

Confidence is a trait that has served Panek well. Working as an engineer and in the aerospace industry, she is often the only woman in a room full of men. She knows the odds have traditionally been stacked against her. Women are statistically less likely to take a risk

“Every hour I spent on that internship, I spent 10 hours trying to get there.”



Natalie Panek leads the room in a hands-on exercise to help her audience understand more about space robotics.

than men, including pursuing goals in so-called “non-traditional” STEM or STEAM careers.

But Panek could not reach some of her most impressive goals with confidence alone. Her personal foundation of success starts with perseverance. Without it, she said, she could not have attained the accomplishment she is most proud of: landing her first internship at NASA's Goddard Spaceflight Center.

For four years in a row, she explained, she applied for and was rejected for a scholarship to take part in that internship. In her final year of eligibility, instead of taking those rejections as a sign of failure, she boldly took matters into her own hands.

“I thought I may as well call NASA and find out what they had to say,” she recalled in her address.

She called the Chief of the Office of Higher Education at NASA.

“Within two minutes, they offered me an internship,” she said. Through that experience she

Natalie Panek: Taking STEM and STEAM to New Heights, continued

learned firsthand that “failure is not the be-all, end-all. Every hour I spent on that internship, I spent 10 hours trying to get there.”

There was another unexpected bonus to that internship, she noted, referring to the “A” in the conference’s theme of STEAM.

“NASA has a rich history in the arts. I didn’t know about this before,” she said. The NASA Art Program was started in 1962, just four years after the agency’s creation, as a way to share NASA’s discoveries and research to the public in an accessible way.

To help illustrate the important role of the artist, Panek shared a quote from writer, inventor and explorer **Arthur C. Clarke**: “The astronomical artist will always be far ahead of the explorer. They can depict scenes that no human eye will ever see, because of their danger, or their remoteness in time and space.”

Panek shared slides of moving pieces of art created through the NASA Art Program, including **Chakaia Booker**’s 2006 *Remembering Columbia* sculpture, created with pieces of a space shuttle tire donated by NASA, and an **Annie Leibovitz** photo of **Eileen Collins**. Collins was NASA’s first female shuttle pilot and first female shuttle commander.

Panek’s personal foundation of success also includes what she calls peak moments. She referred to five questions:

- What was a time working on a project that you felt full of life?
- What were those conditions?



Natalie Panek: Rocket scientist, explorer, pilot, aspiring astronaut and champion for women in STEM.

- Was that a peak moment?
- Are you moving toward or away from those conditions?
- What do you need to do to get back to those conditions?

“What was my peak moment?” she asked, and then told the story of an amazing skydiving adventure on one of her days off. She was going to take part in a tandem jump from 18,000 feet. There were 12 individuals in that cargo plane and she was to be the second person to jump. She recalled being in sensory overload, about to turn around and jump, when she caught a glimpse of **Yi So-yeon**, Korea’s first astronaut. Yi gave Panek the thumbs up and a smile.

The next slide Panek showed in her presentation featured an incredible image of the two women, back on the ground after the flight, leaping into the air together, smiles as big as the blue sky overhead. These are the

Natalie Panek: Taking STEM and STEAM to New Heights, continued

moments that help Panek to learn and move forward, to determine what she needs to succeed.

Panek then emphasized the importance of multidisciplinary collaboration and shared the example of the University of Calgary's solar-powered car team she worked on. The car was entered in a race from Texas to Calgary, and while many of the other teams had been doing this sort of work for decades, the U of C team had just nine months to prepare.

What gave the team strength, she noted, is that it wasn't made up of just engineers but also included experts from the life sciences, from kinesiology, from

**“What you learn from failure
is what leads to success.”**

art, from business. The overlap between disciplines contributed to the larger goals of the project. This wasn't just about making the car fast but about making this technology practical. The team needed people who could think about designing a vehicle with room for passengers and cargo, for example. Not every idea was a good idea but all of the ideas contributed to the team's overall success.

“Failure happens and it's OK,” she said. “But what you learn from that failure is what leads to success.”

Another key component to success for Panek is good science communication.

“It's important to have people who can communicate what you are doing,” she explained. “It's important to get the public interested and aware of what we are doing. The language we use is important.”

Panek works with space robotics, building robotic arms that can help fix broken satellites in orbit. These



Nearly the entire room stood up when Panek asked who recognized celebrity names like Kim Kardashian.



Nearly everyone sat back down again when she asked who recognized the names of women in science.

are satellites that are vital to radio, television, cellphone, GPS and weather services.

(Readers may be familiar with Canadian achievements in space robotics like the Canadarm, Canadarm 2 and Dextre, the third Canadarm, all developed and built by Panek's employer MDA.)

She loves the technical work but she is also enamored by the opportunities she has to inspire others about that work.

Natalie Panek: Taking STEM and STEAM to New Heights, continued

Sometimes hands-on experience is the best way for scientists to help non-scientists understand their work, she said. By way of demonstration, she then asked CASSA conference participants to join in a truly hands-on exercise, using their own arms to experience what the robotic arm does. That type of simple exercise, she said, often communicates more than complicated technical language.

Mentorship is another important part of that foundation for success, Panek said.

“Often I am the only women on these teams. It occurred to me how important it is to have role models in STEM, especially women,” she added. “We also need to get the media to play a role.”

She then asked her audience to stand up if they recognized the names of women Panek read out from a list. Most people were able to stand up for celebrity names like **Kim Kardashian** and **Honey Boo Boo**. It was an apt metaphor when no one was able to stand up for the names of women doing great work in science.

“These are incredibly inspiring women and nobody knows who they are. We need to shift the focus. This is why it’s important for women like me to share our stories of opportunities. This is why it’s important to introduce the young women in your life to a real-life woman in STEM,” Panek said, offering to give anyone in attendance examples if they needed them.

“That is what will get the next generation interested.”

To learn more about Natalie Panek’s ongoing adventures, explorations and advocacy work, follow her on Twitter @nmpanek. She has a website, The Panek Room, that serves as a personal blog and a resources directory for women

in STEM and STEAM: www.thepanekroom.com. It also highlights her speaking engagements and interviews.

To see some of the slide images Panek used in her CASSA presentation, including the inspiring “jump shot” of her and Korea’s first astronaut Yi So-yeon, visit <https://www.auto21.ca/userImages/files/Panek.pdf>.



Natalie Panek took time after her speech to speak with CASSA executive and members alike.



CASSA President Cindy Finn thanked Natalie Panek for her inspiring and informative keynote address.

Perspective: On Building Relationships and Servant-Leadership

By Reg Klassen

Building Relationships

I distinctly remember two teachers who, based on their ability to connect with me when I was a student, gained my trust and respect. As a result, they were able to inspire me and leave with me the desire to be challenged.

I believe we will have difficulty becoming good educators without the skills to build good relationships.

I see relationships at the centre of how we live and work with others—relationships that recognize and respect our diversity, relationships that continually seek understanding of the person who is across from

us. Invariably, students will succeed best in school if they have the chance to build relationships with those who teach them. These relationships provide us with better opportunity to support all students in their development of skills and independence required to live as contributing community members. Relationships have the power to bring about great success, and as educators I believe we cannot pass up on this opportunity.

Those two teachers who had an impact on my school life did two things no other teacher did. First, they accepted me for who I was, and second, they joined me in my life's journey. In doing this, they provided me with an education that went beyond the classroom curriculum. Good relationships are filled with acceptance of the other person as a human being, thus creating a pathway for mutual respect to occur.

**Learning occupies no finite space;
rather it is always moving and
our task in education is to
ensure it moves forward.**

This mutual respect allows us to see each student as important and unique. Similar relationships must exist in a school division so that employees and trustees can work collaboratively toward the fulfillment of the mission and belief statements.

Building these relationships requires us to know who our students and colleagues are as human beings. It requires us to listen to their voices and work to understand them so we are able to appreciate and participate in the journey they are on. In my first

teaching position, I worked with a principal who constantly stated that, “He could work with what is.” I did not understand him at first, but the idea, over time, came to find a place in my thinking as well. I was amazed at how he always

recognized where the student, teacher or parent was in their journey, and then moved forward with them from that point. From this I realized that learning occupies no finite space; rather it is always moving and our task in education is to ensure it moves forward.

As teachers and leaders we often have expectations of others. These expectations will only have credibility in the context of a relationship that includes honesty, integrity, fairness and transparency. Relationships built on these principles can overcome all the obstacles and find meaningful solutions regardless of their level of difficulty. If this is true, and I believe it is, then everyone has the capacity, in varying degrees, to learn and acquire knowledge. For me this is tremendously important and guides many aspects of my work in education and how I live my life. With this as a premise, my approach to teaching, learning and leading has the

Perspective: On Building Relationships and Servant-Leadership, continued

potential to be a great deal more creative than it might otherwise be. Armed with the understanding that each of us learns and works differently, my creativity should know no bounds as I search for ways to problem solve, work collaboratively and have opportunity to lead in education.

Servant-leadership

In spite of what is currently understood about leadership, there still exists today a belief that if a person has fought and clawed his way to the top of the ladder he must deserve to lead, or if he has been promoted because of his outstanding work, he deserves to lead. Another commonly held belief assumes that a person can lead, should be leading, or should have first opportunity to lead because he has the most education.

Leadership has become more demanding over the last while, particularly in education. Leaders are no longer seen as having all the answers, and they do not fare well if they make that claim. Today leaders need to have an understanding of power, collaboration, inclusiveness, sustainability, serving, regulations, teaching and learning, and this list is by no means exhaustive. To that end, I believe servant-leadership has a great deal to offer leadership in the public education system.

The premise of servant-leadership is the belief that one needs to serve first. Servant-leadership can only be practised by serving others, about paying attention to others and treating them right based on group purpose and core values. This response to others is to everyone's advantage because it is in this context of caring for each

other that one acts, and this action creates community and community is connectedness.

Servant-leadership is the opposite of a top-down hierarchical system; rather it seeks to involve others in decision making, giving voice to those who are being served and being led. This collaborative style is inclusive, from students to trustees, from parents to community members, all promoting a sense of community.

Serving makes for a better society and a better life for everyone. This thinking runs counter to the

commonly held belief that we should look out for ourselves first. Margaret Wheatley makes the case that we have a need for each other and that together

Servant-leadership seeks to involve others in decision making.

we are the best resource to go into the future. K.M. Keith says that in serving and being served we build relationships that offer meaning and hope. I believe true servant-leadership has the very real potential to guide our future as a human species.

Through serving each other and building positive relationships we can improve student learning. As educators and leaders, our duty is to help those around us, and particularly our students, acquire an ever-expanding understanding of our world and use it in such a way that humanity will have a better chance of living together in a global community, responsible to each other for the collective in our lives.

Reg Klassen is the Chief Superintendent of Frontier School Division and a current CASSA board member. From 2008 to August 2015, he was the Superintendent of Rolling River School Division.

Leadership for Literacy: Recognition for an Innovative Program

By Cindy Finn

ON NOVEMBER 5, a face familiar to many at CASSA was on hand at the Canadian Education Association (CEA) conference in Quebec City to receive an award on behalf of his team.

Curtis Brown, Superintendent of the South Slave Divisional Education Council in Fort Smith, NWT, participated in a panel discussion and described his team's literacy initiative that garnered third prize as part of the Reader's Digest/CEA Canadian Innovators in Education Award program.

The Leadership for Literacy (L4L) project was launched in response to the desire to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes for students in the eight schools in the South Slave district.

By hiring a literacy coach to work directly with teachers and creating resources to preserve the indigenous languages of the various Aboriginal communities, the district saw a dramatic increase in literacy test scores within a few years.

An additional benefit was the increased pride and sense of identity among students in this northern school division, 75 per cent of whom are Aboriginal.



Curtis Brown, Superintendent of the South Slave Divisional Education Council in Fort Smith, NWT, and 2011 CASSA EXL award winner, with CASSA President Cindy Finn and CASSA Executive Director Ken Bain. The South Slave division's Leadership for Literacy project recently won third prize as part of the Reader's Digest/CEA Canadian Innovators in Education Award program.

Curtis Brown is a distinguished educator in his own right. In 2011, he was the recipient of the CASSA EXL Award, a national distinction that recognizes excellence in senior educational leadership.

Congratulations to Curtis and his team for their award-winning work!

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