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# LEADERS & LEARNERS

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

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## Upcoming CASA Events

- Summer Leadership Academy, July 2006, Toronto
- Annual Conference, October 2006, Winnipeg

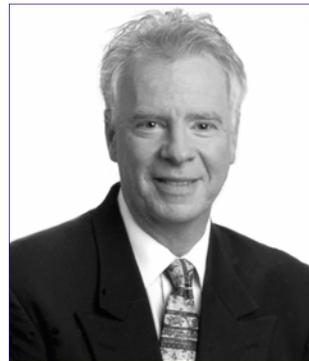
Details on CASA events will be posted at [www.casa-acas.ca](http://www.casa-acas.ca).

## Message From The President: The Tale Of A One-Room Schoolhouse

Having spent my entire professional career in an urban and suburban environment, I find it challenging to be preparing a brief article on rural education. On a rather academic basis, I am aware of some of the unique aspects of rural education and of some of the current difficulties faced by those living and working in the outlying areas.

Although diversity, isolation, small enrollments, and unique cultural legacies may be features of rural education, I believe that we share many common characteristics across the country. These include underfunding, enormous infrastructure needs, attracting and retaining qualified staff, rapidly-changing expectations, and more. Articles in this edition of *Leaders & Learners* will further explore some of these aspects.

It is interesting to note that



Bob Mills  
CASA president

the Lester B. Pearson School Board, one of the largest English school boards in Quebec and one that serves an urban and suburban population, is responsible for the operation of what is, in effect, a one-room schoolhouse in St. T el ephore.

The roots of this unique school can be traced back to 1825. A fire of questionable origin (it was rumored that some recalcitrant students burned it to the ground) took place in 1832, giving rise to the first public school, now known

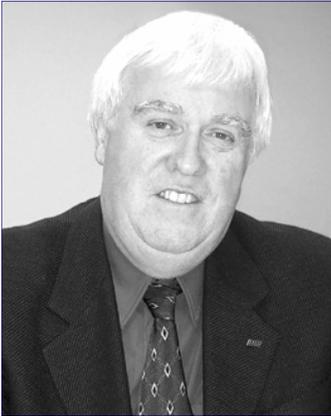
as Soulanges School. In 1919, a new building was erected at a construction cost of \$1,900. This structure serves as today's school.

Enrollment has varied from 7 to as many as 27 students, from kindergarten to grade 6. Current students are from families on working farms and from families living in areas that have become bedroom suburbs of Montreal. All families are committed to the small school concept, to the open learning environment and to the values inherent in the one-room school cooperative learning approach.

The intensity of the identification with the school is remarkable. When the threat of the school's closure arose due to increasing costs, the parental community raised sufficient funding and resources to construct a second classroom area for the school.

(Continued on page 2)

## Message From The Executive Director: Examining The Role Of Rural Senior Administrators



Frank Kelly  
CASA executive director

**T**his vast country of Canada has such a variety of communities, from the

large urban centre to the small rural and often remote region. Public education serves them all, and faces different issues and priorities in each.

The supervisory officer of the rural school district is most often a generalist working with a small administrative team and with limited resources. In this circumstance, a number of things become significant to maintain a high level of service:

- setting priorities and developing programs in keeping with available

skills and resources

- establishing a strong network of associates with good experience and similar portfolios
- knowing where to contact experts in each specific area of your portfolio
- adjusting initiatives to meet community characteristics

The job of the rural senior administrator is quite similar in all provinces of Canada. Declining enrollment is a reality. Keeping local schools viable is a major part of leadership.

In this issue of *Leaders & Learners*, CASA looks at some of the features of the rural district. We look forward to further response from our members across the country.

## Finding The Past And The Future At Soulanges School

*(Continued from page 1)*

The school has become immersed in technology, allowing the children to participate in the electronic classroom, and to range the continent and the world as do their urban counterparts. The teachers who have led the school have always been strong. They are capable and comfortable with the multiplicity of demands placed upon them.

I marvel in the history of such a community

school. How wonderful it would be if all schools could benefit from such intense parental and community support! Seldom can a conversa-

tion about Soulanges School take place without reference to “family atmosphere,” “care and concern,” or to “warmth and support.” I wonder if we can find the magic bullet with which to infuse all of our schools with such qualities.



**In an effective classroom students should not only know what they are doing, they should also know why and how.**

**—Harry Wong**

## Superior-Greenstone District School Board: Profile Of A Small, Yet Large, Rural School District

Geographically, the Superior-Greenstone District School Board is the same size as France—a round-trip takes about nine hours—but is much less populous. The board serves 10 communities in the area east of Thunder Bay to White River along Highway 17, and from Nipigon to Longlac along Highway 11. There are 2,500 students and 445 staff including 200 teachers at Superior-Greenstone schools. There are high schools in five of the communities, with the largest having just 300 students. There is an elementary school in each of the 10 communities, some with as few as 75 students. It's not uncommon for there to be only 10 or 12 students in a course. The student population is multi-cultural, and a large number of students have Aboriginal heritage. Both First Nations and Catholic schools in the area go up to grade 8 and then students join the Superior-Greenstone high schools.

Communities along the north shore of Lake Superior face declining populations and a shrinking economic base. It's a major struggle to keep the population at a critical mass where the board can run effective schools. Director of education **Terry Ellwood** and superintendent of education **Patti Pella** share the district's challenges and achievements.

*Tell us more about your district's schools and the communities they serve.*

**Patti Pella:** Some of our schools are community hubs with daycare centres and Ontario Early Year Centres located in them. We encourage community use of our schools and they are used outside school days for sports, community and club activities. In order to provide additional courses at the secondary level, we use video conferencing.

*What are some of the unique characteristics about this school division?*

**Patti:** We have partnerships with Pukaskwa National Park to do cooperative recording projects with artists and students. Cultural money is provided to schools to support travel for sports and cultural events; travel to school in many cases requires daily transit on the Trans-Canada Highway, or at least crossing it, and school safety programs include bear awareness and what to do if there's a bear at your bus stop or playground!

There's a high use of technology to bridge the isolation factor; travelling itinerant teachers to provide support in each specific community; some triple grading due to a very small school size; the Doctors in the School program pilot where the family practice sets up in the high school one day a week; a 4:1 computer/student ratio and student email to support learning in the video conference classroom.

*[Editors note: In the past, the division has also offered video conference math courses for teachers, the Outers outdoor education program, Ojibway and First Nations culture courses, and an Elders' Room at Geraldton Composite High.]*

*What characteristics does it have that would be typical in any school division across Canada?*

**Patti:** A focus on literacy/numeracy/student success, computer/technology, positive energy, commitment to excellence, diverse program-

ming to meet individual student needs.

*What are some of the unique challenges that Superior-Greenstone faces, being a small, rural school division in a northern, isolated part of the country?*

**Terry:** Offering a wide course selection is a great challenge.

**Patti:** There is not a really wide range of co-op options in every community, so this requires travel as well. In terms of elective courses, often we have to offer alternating year choices or recruit specially qualified staff for French, math, shop, etc.

**Terry:** We're doing a great job at video conferencing; students at all high schools can take courses through video conferences.

**Patti:** Indoor recess is frequent due to wind chill. Exposing students to the arts usually requires travelling or bringing in musicians and artists. Declining enrollment and lack of support programs and services to students with needs that are hard to serve in schools. For example, anger management or counselling is not always readily available. School sports competition requires travel.

**Terry:** Getting together for meetings is a challenge, but  
*(Continued on page 4)*



**It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.**

**—Aristotle**

## S-G Schools: The Heart Of Their Communities

(Continued from page 3)  
trustees will video conference. There has been some difficulty in getting sustainable bandwidth, but things are going smoothly this year. It's been a real challenge for the IT branch. Also, when we lose people, sometimes it is difficult to replace them as the industry in their community declines.

### *What are some of the successes Superior-Greenstone has experienced?*

**Patti:** Excellent community partnerships. We really live the idea that it takes a village to raise a child, whether it be SEAC [Special Education Advisory Committee], Aboriginal advisory committee, Parent Council, Student Council, etc. There is a good community commitment to our schools, and a lot of parental involvement and interest in our schools. The schools really are the heart of our communities and are valued by our communities.

We recruit and maintain our teachers, provide lots of professional development and support to our teachers, leadership opportunities to staff, a feeling of family in our schools, welcoming/inviting schools, innovative ways to bridge the distance such as video conferencing, online learning, regional family of school learning teams and travelling itinerant teachers.

### *What positive effects has*

### *amalgamation had on the division?*

**Terry:** We're able to bring small communities that had common issues together to work on common solutions.

**Patti:** More ideas and people resources to draw on, more communities to serve and positive problem-solving to do.

### *What about negative effects?*

**Terry:** The huge geography. Trustees away from the central part of the board represent a very large area. For senior administrators to get out and visit schools takes two full days. Not to mention the hazards of the road.

Cell phone service is intermittent; it's good in the communities, but not outside. Blackberrys and things like that are not useful up here at all.

**Patti:** There are much greater

distances to travel to visit or work with all schools; communities feel that the reduction of trustee representation is not a good thing. They would like more representation. Communities want the director and supervisory officer to be there, and it is not as easy with the additional geography to cover.

### *What advice would you like to share with other superintendents or directors of education of small, rural school divisions?*

**Terry:** When you get groups of teachers together to talk about student success, you get all kinds of creative solutions. I don't think you can show a willingness to lay down and die. You have to stay motivated and fresh, and generate new ideas. When you get people trying to problem solve, that in itself is a motivation to pull yourself up by the boot straps.

**Patti:** It would be helpful when comparing data/statistics to compare boards with similar demographics for meaningful information gathering. Often the data is based on large communities and has no relevance in our small communities. Little places can do big things: Look at what our students are doing in terms of the economic situation with the conference they are organizing in Nipigon-Red Rock.

Picking the right people is important. Our board builds loyalty in its staff by providing so many opportunities for our teachers to take on leadership activities. We promote a positive atmosphere.



Students at Manitouwadge High School, one of five high schools in the Superior-Greenstone District, participate in the annual canoe trip.



Good schools, like  
good societies and  
good families,  
celebrate and  
cherish diversity.

—Deborah Meier

## Battle River Online Offers Innovative Options To Learners

Battle River School Division (BRSD) is a high-performing jurisdiction in central Alberta, with excellent high school completion rates and high performance on provincial achievement tests. It serves the City of Camrose (population 16,200) and 21 other communities, and has a budget of just over \$60 million. The division's 28 graded schools range in size from 12 students in a somewhat remote village to 720 students at the Camrose Composite High School. BRSD also has six Hutterite colony schools, two outreach schools and two institutional schools. There are about 7,000 students, 430 teachers and 300 teaching assistants. While there are very few students from visible minority groups, there is quite a large diversity with respect to social economic status.

The major industries in the region are grain farming, ranching, and oil and gas production. The agricultural sector has been hit very hard with the recent drought, low grain prices and BSE. However, the oil industry is booming. The division is facing declining enrollments, and may have to consider closing some schools in the next few years. One method the division is using to continue delivering a broad range of programs to its students is Battle River Online, a virtual school. In this issue of *Leaders & Learners*, BRSD superintendent of schools **Dr. Warren Phillips** shares details of the virtual school model, and some of the successes and challenges his division has experienced with it.

### *What is Battle River Online?*

Battle River Online (BRO) is a virtual school that combines a variety of instructional approaches. The online part delivery system uses the Elluminate software, which provides for email between the teacher and students, chat rooms for group discussions, whiteboard functions, voice and video clips. The program runs on very low bandwidth, and so can be used in almost every location. In addition, BRO provides face-to-face instruction, tutorials, direct telephone contact and the use of traditional print materials. Student assessments are posted online and can be accessed at any time by either the parents or students.

### *How, when and why did this school division come to have a virtual school?*

BRO was started nine years ago, but became a significant factor when the Elluminate software was acquired. We recognized that we were facing, and would continue to face, declining enrollments. This meant that our small schools would continue to get smaller, and that it would be increasingly difficult to provide the broad range of programs that students require. As well, we recognized that online programming was superior to the traditional home education, and so wanted to provide that option to parents who would have otherwise chosen the home education option.

### *What needs does it serve that could not be served within the traditional bricks-and-mortar school model?*

BRO delivers programs to a group of students that cannot attend or succeed in the traditional school. This could be students that are out of the country for a period—we provided service to a family who lived in Mexico for a year—or students that would otherwise be expelled from the traditional school. In addition, students who play on the junior hockey team or who work full time often complete their schooling through the Online program as it is more flexible

than traditional schooling.

BRO also allows us to offer high-need, low-enrollment courses in our small high schools. For example, calculus and grade 12 physics courses are available. The students access instruction and courses are marked online. The teacher visits the school on a regular, though infrequent, basis, to provide tutorial assistance. Labs, supervised by an in-school teacher, are done at the school. In addition, the students access audio-visual resources as directed by the online teacher.

### *In light of declining enrollments and amalgamation, how might Battle River Online be seen as a viable alternative to consider for rural boards across the country?*

BRO works because the teachers have consistently enriched the delivery system to insure that the instruction approaches meet the learning needs of the students first. The technology is only a vehicle to deliver the services. The staff recognized there is a need to build strong relationships between the teachers and the students, and to create a sense of community among the students. As a result, there are teacher visits, telephone conversations and school assemblies to complement the online delivery services. We believe the delivery system can be further enhanced through video conferencing, which would be used for seminars and some demonstrations, and have plans to add this [soon].

### *What advice do you have for any*

*(Continued on page 6)*



**Every student can  
learn, just not on  
the same day, or the  
same way.**

**—George Evans**

(Continued from page 5)

**administrators or board trustees who might be interested in pursuing this type of school model?**

First, the emphasis must be on the pedagogy, not the technology. Decide what services you need to provide to help the students be successful, and then get the technology that will help you do that.

Second, be sure that the program is well funded. There are considerable developmental costs, and the delivery is quite expensive as there is a need to fund a number of components that are not found in traditional schools. As well, other schools will not access the services, at least initially, if they have to pay for it. Thus, the costs for the online school need to be supported as a division project.

**Why has BRO been successful, whereas other similar projects in other jurisdictions have not experienced the same levels of stability or success?**

We were very fortunate to hire the right teachers and principal. The teachers who work in an online setting need to have many of the same qualities as a successful classroom teacher—he or she must be knowledgeable about the subject, understand pedagogy and want to establish caring, yet demanding, relationships with students. The teachers must be innovative, as the technology is constantly changing, and must have the ability to adapt materials to the online format.

The principal needs to be able to create partnerships with the individual schools—the philosophy has to be that the online school supports, rather than competes, with the other schools in the jurisdiction.

**What benefits have come from having this virtual school within BRSD, for students, for staff and for the community at large?**

The two biggest benefits have been the increase in flexibility in delivering programs to students and in enriching the subject offerings in our smaller schools. Through BRO, we can deliver almost any high school course students want at the time they want it, and to the location of their choice. As well, we now have the opportunity to offer courses to small groups of students that would be prohibitive due to the high costs if we tried to deliver these in the traditional way.

**What challenges remain?**

The greatest challenge is to build on the partnerships within the traditional schools and within the communities to expand the services that can be provided to the students. BRO has enabled us to provide enriched program choice and greater flexibility in our schools. This has helped keep our small, rural schools viable.

(For more information on Battle River Online, visit [www.brsd.ab.ca/news/2005/coast.htm](http://www.brsd.ab.ca/news/2005/coast.htm).)

## CASA Professional Development Activities Update

**C**ASA members, get out your calendars and Blackberrys and mark down these upcoming events. These are opportunities to come together to share ideas and best practices, and hear from powerful speakers at CASA national events.

This July, the CASA Summer Leadership Academy takes place in Toronto. The theme will be “Students At Risk.” As always, and especially so in Canada’s largest city, there will be plenty of opportunities for social and cultural events outside of the formal conference structure. Consider bringing along your family. As well, school division leaders may want to bring younger staff—their up-and-coming leaders—to this event. Watch for more detailed information on the academy in upcoming editions of *Leaders & Learners*.

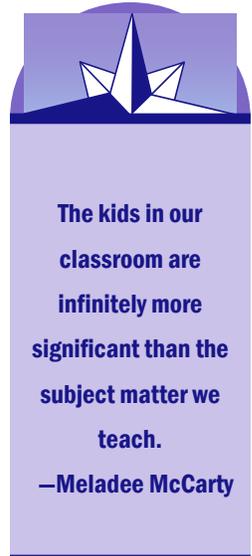
In October, we’ll be holding the CASA Annual Conference in Winnipeg. The theme will be “The Value of Public Education.” Of special note: The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents has invited CASA delegates to attend a special afternoon session with **Stephen Lewis**. Stephen Lewis is the United Nations special envoy for HIV/

AIDS in Africa. Among many distinguished positions, he has served as deputy executive director for UNICEF and as Canadian ambassador to the UN. In the 1960s and ’70s, he was an elected representative to the Ontario Legislature and leader of the provincial NDP.

Other sessions will include The Financing of Public Education, Diversity in Public Education, Advocacy for Public Education, Corporate Involvement in Education and Dealing with the Media.

Looking ahead—and north!—to 2007, the next CASA Summer Leadership Conference is in Whitehorse. The theme will be “Aboriginal Education.”

For more information, contact CASA PD coordinator **Ed Wittchen** at [ed.wittchen@nlsd.ab.ca](mailto:ed.wittchen@nlsd.ab.ca).



## CASA PEOPLE: Faces In The Crowd

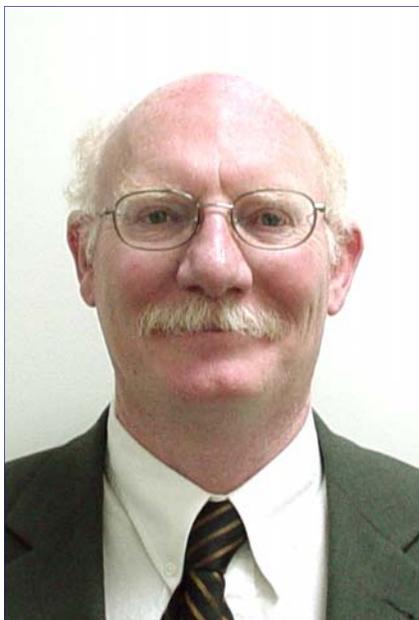


**Ken Thurston**  
Ontario

Ken is the president-elect of the Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association, having served on the board of directors for the past two years. Ken has been a member of OPSOA for 12 years.

Ken is the coordinating superintendent of education with the York Region District School Board, and has been with the board since 1999. Prior to this, Ken was the director of policy and research with the Education Improvement Commission. He has also served as superintendent in the former Muskoka Board of Education, and a teacher, consultant and principal with the former Victoria County Board of Education.

Ken enjoys skiing and curling in winter, and gardening and all things "cottage" in the summer. He has two grown children. His granddaughter was born this February.



**Greg Penney**  
Manitoba

Greg started teaching in Newfoundland, where he was a principal for 25 years. He spent time at all levels of the system, from elementary to high school. Greg was active in the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association and was president of the School Administrators' Council. He spent two years in Lahr, Germany, as principal of the DND school.

Greg moved to Manitoba where he started as principal, then went to the board office. He is now superintendent of schools with Mystery Lake School Division, and a member of the executive of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents. He chairs the MASS curriculum committee and is the prairie representative on the CASA executive.

Greg enjoys hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, canoeing and trips into the wilderness. He has three daughters.



**Jim Gibbons**  
Alberta

Jim is the superintendent for Chinook's Edge School Division in rural central Alberta. CESD was recently selected as one of Alberta's top four performing divisions in terms of improved student achievement.

Jim recently served as president of the College of Alberta School Superintendents and is the president-elect of CASA. He is chair of the Council on Alberta Teaching Standards, and sits on the Senate of the University of Calgary.

Jim has served as associate faculty for both the San Diego State and Royal Roads universities Master's programs. He is a trainer/facilitator for Franklin Covey, and serves on various provincial committees.

Jim and his wife Judy live on a 300-acre horse ranch in the foothills west of Sundre. They have two daughters.

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## Our Mission:

CASA will advance quality public education and excellence in system level leadership through advocacy and national collaboration.



## Our Beliefs:

CASA believes that:

- Cultural diversity is a unique strength that enriches our nation.
- Communication and collaboration with parents and other partners is integral to successful student learning.
- Quality public education provides the best opportunity for a nation to enhance the lives of all its citizens.
- Effective system, provincial and national level leadership enables and supports excellence in teaching and learning.
- A comprehensive education, equitable and accessible to all, is the key to meeting the diverse needs and securing a successful future for our youth.

Specific strategies to advance the mission:

- Establish position papers on specific topics as they relate to the beliefs and interests of the association.
- Recruit new people.
- Establish a national representation.
- Establish a three-tier public relations and publications strategy.
- Establish a funding team to create an operating budget.

## A Good Idea From Manitoba

**T**he Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) has developed a series of quarter-page ads for school newsletters, division newsletters and division websites. A new ad was revealed each month last year. They plan on using the series again this year.

“It’s good visibility for the organization, is seen as supportive of schools, teachers, kids and parents, and is relatively inexpensive,” says **Coralie Bryant**, MASS executive director.

The ads were developed with the help of a small firm, the same one that designed the MASS website.

“Our public relations committee decides on the topics, and selects some resource people the firm can talk to in creating the ad,” Bryant says. “We as a committee give feedback to the draft and sign it off each month.”

The ads are then distributed electronically by the superintendents each month.

To view the series, visit [www.mass.mb.ca/pages/communications.htm](http://www.mass.mb.ca/pages/communications.htm).

The ads were developed

### Everyone has a place in public education

Your public school is a safe, secure place where your child is celebrated and invited to learn, grow and discover what it means to be part of a diverse community. A place where all children are treated fairly and with respect, and each learner's individual talents, opinions and abilities are welcomed and encouraged.

Public schools are a place for families to connect with each other and what's going on in their neighbourhood, as well as their school. Public schools are the foundation for healthy communities and a strong society.

Get connected to your community by getting involved with your public school. Find out about your school's parent council, talk to your children's teachers and principal and be visible. Advocate, support and encourage. **We all have a role to play in keeping our public schools strong.**

Connecting through public schools  
**MASS**  
A message from the **Manitoba Association of School Superintendents**