

Greetings from the President



Michael Helm
CASSA/ACGCS President

Collaborative, Adaptive Strategies

Supporting the mental health of both students and staff is more important than ever. While access to qualified professionals – such as counsellors and psychologists – is critical, we know that recruitment and retention remain significant challenges.

Hello everyone! I hope each of you has had a great start to the new school year. Those first days and weeks are always filled with a unique mix of energy, anticipation, and challenges. As you've navigated them, I'm confident our students are in excellent hands under your leadership and care.

As Canadian education leaders, we are called to champion well-being and lead with collaborative, adaptive strategies to address pressing issues such as mental health, school safety, and the growing teacher shortage. Creating inclusive, supportive learning environments demands open dialogue, a strong commitment to equity, and the courage to innovate. Education holds transformative power, and by focusing on student and staff well-being, meeting diverse learning needs, and maintaining transparency and accountability, we can build thriving

school communities and a resilient education system for all.

Supporting the mental health of both students and staff is more important than ever. While access to qualified professionals – such as counsellors and psychologists – is critical, we know that recruitment and retention remain significant challenges. In the meantime, we can continue to foster safe, supportive, and inclusive spaces that promote well-being, especially in the face of staffing shortages.

As we move through the school year, please remember that you're not alone. Our network of colleagues across provinces and territories is just a call, text, or email away. Together, we are stronger.

I look forward to staying connected throughout the year and hopefully seeing many of you at upcoming events.

Wishing you all a great fall!

Mike Helm
President, CASSA



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Inside this Issue

Greetings from the President,
Page 1

Greetings from the Executive
Director,
Page 2

Hopeful Leadership: Exploring
System Leadership Through the
Lens of *Ted Lasso* Part Two,
Page 3

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

Greetings from the Executive Director

A New Perspective on the First Day of School



Reg Klassen

CASSA/ACGCS New Executive Director

This year marks a quiet milestone in my life: my first September not spent in the familiar rhythm of a division office. As a retired Superintendent, the first days back after summer break was always one of my favorite times of year. In every school the energy was palpable. Students bounding off buses, teachers greeting one another with warm smiles, and hallways buzzing with stories of summer adventures – it was a symphony of renewal and possibility.

Now, I find myself watching from a different vantage point. Relaxing with a cup of coffee in hand, I observed through my living room window neighbourhood children gathering at the morning bus stop across the street. Their backpacks look just a bit too big for their small shoulders, and their chatter carries the same excitement I used

to witness firsthand. Off they go, climbing aboard the bus, unaware of the quiet observer who once stood at the school doors welcoming them in.

It feels strange, this shift. For decades, I was part of the heartbeat of that first week – visiting classrooms, sharing in the joy of reconnection, and watching the magic unfold as students and teachers reunited. The stories would pour out: tales of camping trips, new pets, visits to grandparents, and even the occasional exaggerated fish story. Each one a thread in the tapestry of a new school year.

Now, I experience that joy through a different lens – my grandchildren. I have five, and four of them are currently in school, from Grade 1 to Grade 4. Their stories are endless and delightful. One day it's about a new friend they made, the next it's a mystery about a missing lunchbox or a classroom pet. Their enthusiasm is infectious, and it reminds me of the countless students I've seen light up with similar wonder over the years.

There's something deeply pleasing about watching children embrace school with such eagerness. Their laughter, curiosity, and resilience are a testament to the enduring spirit of education. Even from afar, I feel connected to that spirit. Though I'm no longer walking the halls or popping into classrooms, I'm still part of the story – just in a quieter, more reflective way.

The adjustment is real, and yes, it feels strange. But it's also beautiful. Because while my role has changed, the joy of learning, the excitement of new beginnings, and the stories that fill the first week of school continue – and I get to witness them through the eyes of my grandchildren.

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Hopeful Leadership:



Exploring System Leadership Through the Lens of *Ted Lasso*

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

In the second part of our series on hopeful leadership, we're continuing the conversation with Steve Perchard and Ryan Kelley, two system leaders from Newfoundland and Labrador. Steve is the director of schools for NLSchools Family of Schools 3 and Ryan is the director of schools for Family of Schools 4.

Last spring, Steve and Ryan attended a uLead session in Banff on the leadership lessons in the Apple TV series *Ted Lasso*.

Inspired, the pair used their time on the flight home to begin developing what would become a custom 10-week program on a systems approach to hopeful leadership as seen through the hit comedy show.

At this year's Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) conference in St. John's, they presented a version

of the program in a breakout session called Hopeful Leadership: System Leadership Through the Lens of *Ted Lasso*.

Here, Steve and Ryan reveal their favourite *Ted Lasso* characters and explore how concepts like shared vocabulary, curiosity, vulnerability, and authenticity connect to hopeful leadership.

(Part Two)

For readers not familiar with the series, what is the basic premise of the *Ted Lasso* series?

Steve Perchard: It's a fish out of water story where Ted is an American football coach who's hired to coach European soccer, and he literally knows nothing about it. The show works for me on two levels. There's the level where it's a sports show, it's overcoming adversity, it's watching Ted lead his team. That's interesting enough. But when you start to see the leadership styles and scenarios that are the undercurrent of most episodes, the show takes on a life of its own. As a school system leader, you can enjoy it for the entertainment. But if you want to use it as a gauge to challenge or check in on your own leadership, that's there for you as well.

Ryan Kelley: Watching it through that leadership lens offers something completely different, especially for school leadership. It allows you to create a shared vocabulary, phrases that you can use to connect with your people. It opens up that way of communicating in a very simple and effective way.

Steve: That shared vocabulary once came back to haunt me. We were dealing with a particularly complicated situation and at one point I might have gotten a little emotional, as you do in this job sometimes. Our senior manager Mike Tobin looked at me and said, "Steve, be a goldfish." I was like, "Mike, well played – I needed that." It was because we had both watched the show and had talked about those *Ted Lasso* moments that we could move on.

*"You know what the happiest animal on Earth is? It's a goldfish. You know why? Got a 10-second memory. Be a goldfish, Sam."
– Ted Lasso*

Which *Ted Lasso* character is your favourite? Whose story or transformation through the series did you most enjoy?

Ryan: My favourite character has to be Roy Kent, just for the entertainment value. [*Roy is the team's captain at the start of the series, an older player conscious of his looming best before date.*] The one that had the biggest transformation for me is Rebecca Welton. [*Rebecca is the team's owner who acquired the team through a nasty divorce.*] She came from a very angry place to a very positive place in the end, to a point where her core values shifted.

"Takin' on a challenge is a lot like ridin' a horse. If you're comfortable while you're doing it, you're probably doing it wrong." – Ted Lasso

Steve: I know Ted is my favourite character but I'm going to ignore him for a second because it's too obvious. To me, the Jamie Tartt and Roy relationship and the arc of how they both change together over the three seasons is freaking beautiful. [*Jamie is the club's top player, a conceited rising star in the league who is much younger than Roy.*] It's so well done. It's touching, it's heartwarming, it's real, and I love it. Both characters change, but you also see Ted's influence on that. That goes back to the leadership piece. You don't watch their change in isolation. Early on, Ted says to Coach Beard "that guy there" and he's looking at Roy Kent. "We've got to change that man's heart first." Like he's the first to fall and everything else will follow. That's how he starts winning people over, one at a time.

Ryan: He's not going to wait for him to leave, to trade him, or wait for him to retire, which reflects sometimes the way we have it in education. You can't wait for someone to retire. You have to be able to work with them and get the best out of them.

When did you decide to create the presentation you shared at the CASSA conference?



Stephen (on the left) and Ryan (on the right) in Spring 2024 in Banff, at the uLead Summit of Educational Leadership.

Steve: After we left the uLead school leadership conference in Banff in April 2024, we decided we were going to do this with our principals. We started last summer. We did a *Ted Lasso* session for ULearn, which is the NLSchools summer learning series, and then we presented a similar session to our new administrator conference in late August. We've been preparing and refining for almost a year. Sometimes we change the clips up and sometimes we change the questions, but what we presented at CASSA was what we started with a year ago.

Ryan: Depending on whether we are targeting team building, conflict management and resolution, or simply taking on a challenge, the clips change and even some of our questioning and what we want out of the conversations change. The goal for us was always to create a space where administrators were able to talk through some things in a focused and positive approach. Kirk Smith, one of our team's 10 directors and who is involved with CASSA, had actually seen what we were doing and he's a *Ted Lasso* fan. He recommended that we present it at CASSA.

How do you guide people toward that positive side and not let it get derailed or confused with toxic positivity?

Ryan: I think *Ted Lasso* lends itself that way. We built a strong framework for our sessions. We always asked for cameras to be on. Having the ability to see each other was important. We started with a lesson from the



previous episode, then we had an ice breaker that came out of the episode as a gateway for people to open up. Then we played a clip from the show, and Steve and I led a guided conversation. From there, we went to breakout spaces where we would pose questions. And the breakout spaces were different people every time. They had a specific question they worked to answer but their own experiences were taken into those questions. There was a vulnerability that happened within the breakout spaces that made people feel good after.

Steve: We were very specific in how we crafted those questions, and we had a lot of conversations about how we could keep this positive, how could we focus on actions and approaches to leadership versus just getting in and venting. It's something we were cognizant about – if we felt it getting negative, we'd push back against that and try to steer it in a positive direction.

When you brought this to the national conference, how did people react to the overall session and to the smaller table talk sessions?

Steve: We had a feedback form, and one of the comments that came back was they really enjoyed the table talk sessions and wanted to dive into those clips

a little bit more. Ryan and I aren't trying to create an environment where we're in front of people telling them "here is what the leadership lesson is" or "here is what you should get out of this." We're setting things up and saying, "here is a leadership situation, discuss that at your table and then bring that back to the full group and learn from each other."

Ryan: Giving everybody a chance to speak at their tables and to learn from one another, I think people enjoy that. We're creating a sandbox, so to speak, but they can play wherever they want inside that sandbox.

Why is the vulnerability part so crucial to this type of work?

Steve: It's difficult to talk about leadership with school leaders and ignore that there are problems in their buildings or within the system, or that they're not dealing with challenges. We need to acknowledge that right off the bat. If we're going to have a real conversation about leadership, we also need to talk about obstacles that are getting in our way of doing the work. For me, as a leader, talking to my principals or when I was a principal talking to my teachers, you lose that authenticity if you can't acknowl-

edge that there are problems in the school that you're leading. It's OK as a leader to say, "we're doing A, B, and C well, but we have an issue here that we need to fix."

Ryan: There was a time when we looked at leaders and they were the ones with the answers, the ones charting a path, the ones making decisions. They were the ones who were supposed to know it all. That was an unhealthy and unrealistic expectation. You get a lot further when you acknowledge that you don't have all the answers and you go back to servant leadership and distributed leadership. Part of that is saying, "I need your help to do this." That's how you build a team and create that sense of consensus. People are more likely to follow leaders if they're being authentic and can say, "I'm not really confident in this area, but let's work on this together."

"Heck, you could fill two Internets with what I don't know about football." – Ted Lasso

It's OK as a leader to say, "we're doing A, B, and C well, but we have an issue here that we need to fix."

You ask people to talk about small actions with big impact. What are some of those actions for you when you're visiting schools or sharing time with colleagues?

Ryan: It's a simple one but just the importance of knowing names. I never go to a school without knowing the secretary at the front desk. That's the person I connect with every time I walk into a school building.

Steve: A big thing for me is gratitude and trying to acknowledge the good work that people are doing. As a principal, one of the things I used to try to do was my vice principal and I had a Google Doc where we tried to capture all of the good things that were happening on a weekly basis – people going out of their way to do things to make the school run. We used to start our weekly memo with the shoutouts for the week. We were intentional in trying to see all of these things that were happening. It takes time to do that, but the payoff is huge when people realize that their actions are noticed and that they're appreciated.

Let's talk about the quote from Ted Lasso where Ted says, "For me, success is not about the wins and losses. It's about helping these young fellas be the best versions of themselves, on and off the field." He is speaking about the players for AFC Richmond, but this can apply to the work of leading a team or a large organization such as a public school system. How do you take that sentiment of helping teachers, principals, the folks you lead in the system to be their best selves, especially if you have a Roy Kent in that mix, someone resistant to change or who is an obstacle to moving forward as a team? What do you do to help them be their best?

Ryan: Sometimes you have to be in the trenches with your people, with your staff or with students, and you've got to go through

some rough times for you to be able to come out the other side in a better place.

Steve: The relationship piece is important – building those relationships. But somewhere along the line, I just started asking people if they are open to feedback. And if they don't want to hear it, maybe I won't offer it. But most of the time they'll say sure. I'll say, "I think I understand why you did this but I'm wrestling with this on my end – help me justify where your decision was." Sometimes that conversation alone can help. I'm being curious but not judgemental.

Ryan: I'll give Don Perry, one of our directors of schools, a shoutout here. One of his phrases he uses all the time is, "I have a wondering." That's all he says, and that invites the conversation in a non-confrontational way. You might have thoughts on it already, but this is not how we're opening this conversation.

You asked participants at the conference to explore their core values by choosing one word to use to guide their work and maintain hope as a leader. Let's talk about the words that came out in that CASSA conference session.

Steve: Together, hope, empathy, communication, connections, inspire, nurture, loyalty, listen, care, trust. Those words are great ways of boiling down to the core value that we need in our practice.

Ryan: Steve and I have done this several times now with a lot of different groups and we've seen the gamut of words that are used. But there's nothing more empowering than to be on a virtual call or walking into someone's office and seeing that word posted on their door or behind their desk. That's been really eye-opening for us to see how many of those people actually take that one word and one piece of paper and post it in their office as a reminder for them. What we talked about earlier with the short ways that Ted uses to connect, that's down to one word and why he had the word "believe" over his door. He has a word that he uses to bring everything down to one core value.

Steve: I've got the "believe" sign in my office, and Ryan does too. We have to believe in what we're doing, that our schools can be successful, that our students can be successful, that our administrators can do their jobs, that their teachers can do their jobs, that we can make the system better. If you stop believing that, then you become ineffective in your job.

"I think it's the lack of hope that comes and gets you. See, I believe in hope. I believe in belief." – Ted Lasso

Why does hopeful leadership matter so much right now?

Steve: It was obvious to me at the CASSA conference, talking to school system leaders from all across Canada in a couple of breakout sessions, where the problems we were talking about were problems that could have been in my 25 schools. We're seeing the same types of issues, coast to coast to coast. We can't pretend the system is perfect. The problems were in the system before COVID, but COVID exasperated those problems. We're still rebounding from that. To go back to the idea of hope ties very deeply into that. Maybe hope is another way of saying believe. Finding a way to see things optimistically sometimes gives you the strength or ability to get through an obstacle that you can't if you have that negative mindset, and to see an issue as an opportunity to get better and to grow. ○

You can find Steve and Ryan's Canva presentation from this summer's CASSA conference on our website. Look in the 2025 Conference Presentations section under the Annual Leadership Conference tab.

To reach out to Steve and Ryan about their Hopeful Leadership program, contact stephenperchard@nlschools.ca and ryan Kelley@nlschools.ca.

Write for *Leaders & Learners* Magazine!

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We are currently looking for topics for our Winter 2025 issue.
This magazine will be mailed out in January 2026!

Details:

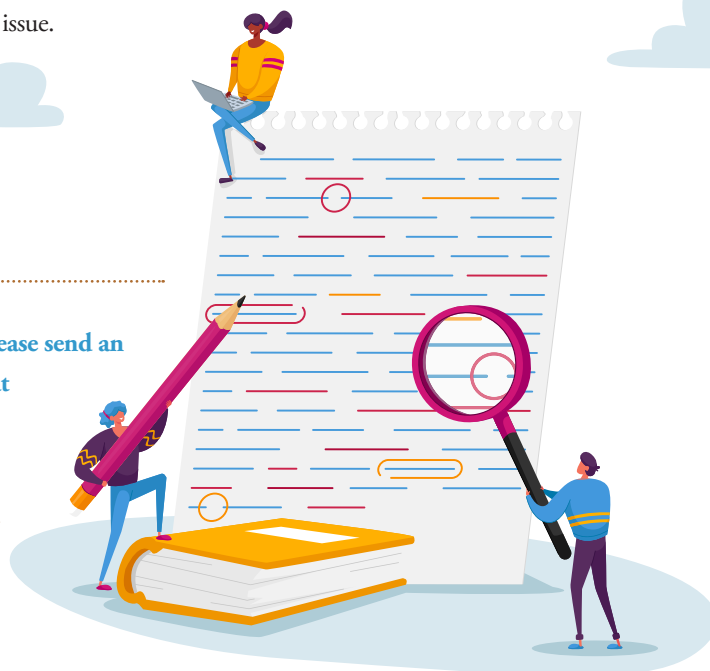
Abstracts due October 6, 2025

Final article due November 10, 2025

If you have an article idea that you wish to submit, please send an abstract to Jenna Collignon, editor of the magazine, at jcollignon@matrixgroupinc.net, and copy reg_klassen@cassa-acgcs.ca.

Note:

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Published for the Canadian Association of School System Administrators

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