



CASSA-ACGCS
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

Greetings from the President

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

The pandemic is here, and it has forced us to realign how we live our lives. In our attempt to flatten the curve, we have had to practise living away from each other. Technology has become our most often used connector, but it is just not the same. Those simple moments that we took for granted, like shaking hands, hugging a grandchild, spending time with friends, gathering as a family, and so many similar human connections, are moments that we have come to long for.

I never imagined that I would not be allowed to gather to mourn and celebrate my father's life with extended family and friends shortly after his passing. Now we wait, and with family spread throughout North America, it seems like it will be a long time before we can hold our celebration of life and lay him to rest beside our mother. Yes, we have technology, and we use it to connect as a family, but it is not the same as hugging my siblings while we mourn and say goodbye to the man who helped shape who we are as human beings.

I am a fortunate grandfather as our grandchildren live in the same city and reside in the same part of town. However, connecting through the living room window has its drawbacks, and walking



Reg Klassen
CASSA/ACGCS President

to the park while physical distancing is not the same as carrying them on my shoulders or holding hands.

Recently one of my grandsons came running excitedly toward me to eagerly share what he was doing but, with a word from his mom, stopped short when reminded to practise physical distancing. He is 2.5 years old and knows what he has to do but doesn't really understand why. I long for the time when I am able to pick him up and hold him on my lap.

I know the human race will find their way through this pandemic, but it is not an easy journey. I, like all of you, impatiently wait for the freedom to hug a grandchild, hold a loved one while we mourn together, and see our children back in school. Hang in there!

Reg Klassen
CASSA/ACGCS President

Those simple moments that we took for granted are moments that we have come to long for.

Greetings from the Executive Director



Ken Bain
CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

I hope that this newsletter finds you and your families safe and healthy. Healthiness has many dimensions – emotional, physical, spiritual, to name a few. It is my hope that you are taking care of, as best as possible, all aspects of your health.

Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) President Reg Klassen's piece in this newsletter is an excellent portrayal of the personal challenges facing each of us as we live through this crisis. As a father, grandfather and son-in-law to an elderly father-in-law, the inability to physically interact is very difficult. Yet we must in order to return to a "new normal" at some point.

System leaders, along with school and classroom leaders, have been working long hours to ensure that all students can continue to learn at home. The pandemic has uncovered, or at least highlighted, inequities in our jurisdictions that we must not forget or lose sight of when schools re-engage. From food insecurity to the lack of access to technology and connectivity, the inequities across our districts have become glaringly obvious. The challenge of course is what can and will we do about it.

You are likely aware that we have cancelled the CASSA-ACGCS Annual Conference scheduled for July 2020 in St. Andrews by-the-Sea, New Brunswick. We are planning to reconvene in Montreal in July 2021, as long as it is safe to do so. In Montreal, we will use the same theme – *Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being* – and will ask our speakers and workshops to reflect on the lessons learned from this pandemic as they shape their presentations where appropriate.

We will return to St. Andrews in 2022 and look forward to the wonderful Maritime hospitality.

As systems and schools gradually reopen, I know you will attend to the healthiness of your communities, especially the social-emotional health as students return from many months of isolation and return to this new normal school experience.

Thank you for all you do to support the healthiness of your communities while ensuring continuity of learning in these extraordinary times.

Ken Bain
CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

From food insecurity to the lack of access to technology and connectivity, the inequities across our districts have become glaringly obvious.

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Students and staff at Evergreen Public School in Kenora enjoy cultural activities and teachings with local Elders.



Equity and Inclusion Initiatives in OPSOA Boards

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s members of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) are aware by now, the 2020 conference in St. Andrews by-

the-Sea, New Brunswick, has been postponed. Its theme of *Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being* will be brought forward to the 2021 event planned for Montreal. In this issue of *Leaders & Learners*, we are celebrating the work being done to support equity and inclusion for student well-being in four school boards within the Ontario Public Supervisory Officers' Association (OPSOA).

Greater Essex County District School Board

- Students: 36,500
- Schools: 55 elementary and 14 secondary
- Location: Windsor and Essex County, with district office in Windsor
- Director of Education: Erin Kelly

Leaders & Learners Newsletter



Students at Queen Elizabeth Public School engage with the sensory garden.



Waterloo Region District School Board students participate in Pride Month.

These signs of support match the board's belief that when students have a positive school climate and feel safe and supported, they will experience greater success in all areas.

Earlier this spring, the Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB) hired its first graduation coach to support high school students who self-identify as black, African and/or Caribbean. The board's new Graduation Coach pilot project, funded through a grant from the province's Ministry of Education, aims to offer an in-depth and personalized level of support to complement what is already being offered to racialized and marginalized students through its Change Your Future (CYF) program.

The graduation coach will help students improve their academic performance and overall well-being to give them that added support to stay on track to graduate. CYF staff do this too – what is new is that the graduation coach specifically targets graduation for black, African and/or Caribbean students. The board's graduation coach is an Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT), and the position is a system-level one supporting all secondary school students, whereas the CYF staff are support staff working in select schools. Since the graduation coach is an OCT, they will have a full range of additional strategies to better support students. In the pre-pandemic days, this meant co-op opportunities for credit with black mentors or black-led businesses.

An intended outcome of this support is higher attendance and graduation rates as well as increased access to opportunities after graduation.

Dr. Venus Olla is the board's inaugural graduation coach. She works out of the Hon. W.C. Kennedy Collegiate Institute in Windsor. She first started working with the GECDSB in 2004 as a CYF counsellor and has taught science at W. F. Herman Academy, also in Windsor.

Olla's plans for the pilot project include visiting all GECDSB high schools to meet with students. Before schools across the province were closed due to the pandemic, she was already working with students at Kennedy Collegiate, Westview Freedom Academy and Leamington District.

During these one-on-one sessions, she spends time with each student to explore his or her purpose, intention and goals. Students who are struggling with daily classroom requirements as well as those doing well academically but are facing other systemic barriers are all eligible for graduation coach support.

Another of Olla's goals is to reach out to help parents feel welcomed in their child's school and engaged in the graduation coach support process.

Olla, who is of Nigerian descent, brings to the project her own experiences of what it is like to be a racialized person and an immigrant in Canada. That personal knowledge and understanding coming from a caring education professional offers students in-depth support and guidance. Even during the pandemic, Olla has continued to make contact with all of the students and families on her rapidly growing roster.

Renfrew County District School Board

- Students: 9,100
- Schools: 27
- Location: Renfrew County in the heart of the Ottawa Valley, with district office in Pembroke
- Director of Education: Pino Buffone

Outdoor play for students can be more than access to soccer fields or swing sets. It can also incorporate nature, creativity, music and even relaxation. That's part of the idea behind the sensory garden and inclusive play structures that opened in June 2019 at Queen Elizabeth Public School, a school serving students from junior kindergarten to Grade 6 in the Renfrew County District School Board.

The new gardens and play areas came about thanks to several years of fundraising efforts by students, parents and school staff. The support of community partners played a significant role as well. The Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) in Ottawa shared plans and ideas based on their own healing gardens. A number of individuals contributed their knowledge and talents with woodworking, landscaping (including creating calm spaces) and gardening with herbs and medicinal plants.

The sensory garden was created to engage the five senses. There are raised beds with a variety of plants to smell and see, for example, and musical instruments to touch, play and hear. It is also a space designed to enhance wellness for students, staff and community

members. The entire space is wheelchair accessible, including the raised beds and instruments. People may walk or roll along a pathway to watch for birds and butterflies. There are benches provided for sitting, meditating, visiting with friends, reading a book or other forms of relaxing.

The play structures offer a variety of pieces of equipment for climbing and exploring. They also include a Biba interactive board. This allows supervising adults to download the free Biba app onto their connected devices to access scavenger hunts, obstacle courses, treasure maps and games for the children.

The gardens and play structures that make up this innovative outdoor space are open to the entire community.

Waterloo Region District School Board

- Students: 64,000
- Schools: 121
- Location: Region of Waterloo, with education centre in Kitchener
- Director of Education: John Bryant

June is recognized as Pride Month in Canada. Since 2017, all institutions and organizations within the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) have flown the Pride flag throughout the entire month. The board's strategic plan notes that a focus on equity and inclusion can help it to meet the well-being of all students and staff. Raising the Pride flag across the district is an important way to show this commitment to everyone in communities served by WRDSB.

The board has also designated the #WRDSBpride hashtag on social media. Students and staff are encouraged and supported to share stories and pictures throughout Pride Month.

Although the Pride flag is flown only in June, work to support inclusion for the LGBTQ+ community is a year-round effort. Every secondary school within WRDSB has a Gay Straight Alliance, which offers safe spaces for students, staff and allies. Elementary students are taught about the importance of understanding and respecting things that are the same and different from each other. That includes learning about families who may look different from their own. These lessons about acceptance and inclusion are presented within health and physical education classes.

These signs of support match the board's belief that when students have a positive school climate and feel safe and supported, they will experience greater success in all areas. The

To become this society, we need to bear witness to the past and join in a vision for the future. This must be the goal of reconciliation.

board is also dedicated, through its display of the rainbow flag each year during Pride Month, to showing that discrimination and harassment of any kind is not tolerated in its schools. The WRDSB website also provides resources and videos for students and parents. You can visit www.wrdsb.ca/our-schools/safe-schools/pride-month to learn more.

Keewatin-Patricia District School Board

- Students: 4,800
- Schools: 17 elementary and 6 secondary
- Location: Northwestern Ontario, with head office in Kenora and a second office in Dryden
- Director of Education: Sherri-Lynne Pharand

Five years ago, Murray Sinclair, senator and former commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, stated, "To become this society, we need to bear witness to the past and join in a vision for the future. This must be the goal of reconciliation."

As part of its commitment to reconciliation, the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board (KPDSB) continues to increase its strategic partnerships with Indigenous communities. In recent years, the board has signed a number of Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with First Nations, councils and education organizations.

Two of these agreements have been with Nishnawbe Aski Nation and Windigo First Nations Council.

In 2017, KPDSB signed a MOU with Nishnawbe Aski Nation. The formalizing of this partnership is a key step in supporting equity in education for students from this community.

Some areas of focus in the MOU include:

- Putting in place strategies to support student safety and well-being;
- Efforts to increase the amount of First Nations history, culture, perspectives and language in daily learning; and
- Setting up strategies to support staff to meet the holistic learning needs of First Nations students and to provide

cross-cultural training and professional development for educators.

Plans to support student safety and well-being include:

- Programs addressing mental health, student transition and orientation;
- Initiatives for parent engagement;
- Mechanisms to support students living away from home;
- Strategies for student retention;
- Extracurricular activities; and
- Developing a program of a First Nations student anti-addiction education.

This partnership has also seen the board provide secondments for teaching and administrative staff in a number of remote First Nations schools.

In late 2018, following three years of negotiations, the board signed a MOU with Windigo First Nations Council. The goal of this agreement is to enhance First Nations control over First Nations education. It also focuses on achieving equity for Indigenous students at KPDSB schools, whether for social, emotional or academic opportunities.

Key priorities include:

- Making sure students have the social and emotional support they need to go to school while living away from home;
- Creating strategies and putting in place professional mentorship so disabled students can be identified and personalized education plans can be developed;
- Creating curriculums and strategies to enhance the inclusion and integration of First Nations history, culture, perspective and language for all students; and
- Developing strategies to support cross-cultural training and professional development for educators in the provincial education system.

The board has also put in place a number of other initiatives to make KPDSB schools safe environments in which to support and nurture self-identity in Indigenous students. These initiatives and the agreements with First Nations all contribute to the board now seeing Indigenous students graduating at the same rates as their non-Indigenous peers. ○

Faces in the Crowd:

Lori Wilder



She has served as the Central Region Director for the Ontario Public Supervisory Officers' Association (OPSOA) and the co-chair of the Grey-Bruce Children's Alliance, among other leadership roles.

Wilder received her bachelor of education and honours bachelor of arts degrees from the Western University in London and her master of science in education, administration and supervision from Niagara University.

Wilder notes she feels fortunate to have the support of her son Preston and her daughter Haley. She greatly appreciates the rural lifestyle and sense of community pride, spirit and civic engagement across Grey and Bruce counties where she works and plays. Here she kindly shares more of her story with *Leaders & Learners*.

What inspired you to work in public education and, in particular, to work in senior administration?

I believe if you make a child feel good about themselves in any way, big or small, they will not only learn, but they will also want to learn. The same can be said for staff. Working in senior administration I am able to have an impact on staff well-being, which in turn supports student wellbeing. By ensuring staff feel appreciated, respected, valued and that their voices are heard, they will be engaged in supporting our students and organization to the very best of their abilities.

Please tell us about some of your personal points of pride as a senior system administrator in public education.

I am very proud of the work that has been completed by our board in the area of equity. A few years back, I was able to introduce the Bridges Out of Poverty program to our board, and the staff uptake in supporting our students and families was and continues to be incredible.

I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to support the Indigenous portfolio. We were able to successfully negotiate Education Service Agreements with both Saugeen First Nation and Nawash Unceded First Nation. These agreements outline how we collectively support our Indigenous students.

Our schools have also progressed significantly in providing safe places for students to meet, support each other, talk about issues related to sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and work to end homophobia and transphobia.

How would you describe your personal style of leadership?

I model a leadership style that emphasizes the importance of establishing trusting relationships, using effective communication strategies and supporting highly successful teams. ○

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ori Wilder will be appointed Director of Education for the Bluewater District School Board at the end of October 2020. She is the

board's current Superintendent of Education, Human Resources, and will take on the role of Director Designate at the end of June.

The Bluewater District School Board serves approximately 16,000 students in 50 schools in mostly rural communities in Ontario's Bruce and Grey counties. Its central office is in Chesley, south of Owen Sound.

Wilder's career in public education began as a teacher at Georgian Bay Secondary School. She has also served as a vice-principal and principal. In 2005, she became Student Success Leader for the board, which saw her take on many responsibilities at the system level.

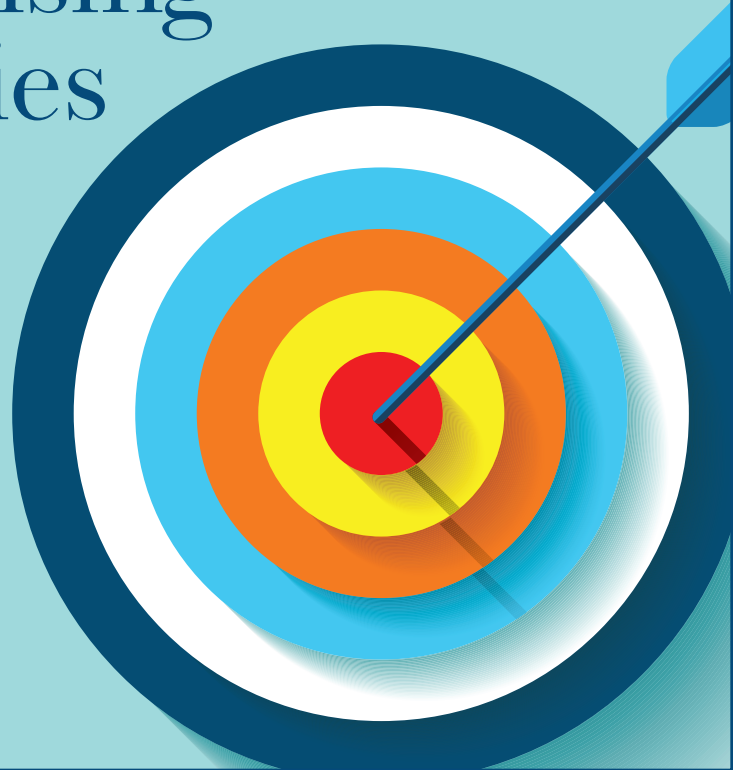
Her senior leadership portfolio includes elementary and secondary schools, special education, student mental health, parent involvement, supporting the student voice, adult education, skilled trades and human resources. Major professional accomplishments for Wilder include working to create school communities of inclusion and acceptance by implementing Gay Straight Alliances in many of the board's schools. She is also known for championing Indigenous learning for students and staff and for her support of student athletics.

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