



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.*

T

his morning, I woke up to -42 degree Celsius in Fort Smith, NWT. But that does not bother me, because I'm staying warm and cozy inside with my close family. The announcement of vaccines

has provided hope that restrictions might ease by the summer and we can once again travel to see our extended family, which we haven't had the ability to do since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Frozen fingers crossed that this happens soon!

That said, we are lucky to have jobs and to live in a time when we can connect digitally via telephone and video, when it works. So many of our homes across Canada still do not have devices or cell service, let alone connectivity to the Internet. The pandemic has accentuated this digital divide. Homes without reliable and affordable access to the Internet are even more disadvantaged when schools close and switch to remote and blended learning.

I am comforted to hear more public statements in favour of the need for universal access. Last summer, CASSA and the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) wrote a joint letter to Federal Ministers concerning this issue. More recently, Andy Hargreaves (2020) posits that "Access to the internet and to devices for learning should be a basic human right. It should be universal, public, inclusive and free." Chris Kennedy, a member from B.C., also argues that



Curtis Brown
CASSA/ACGCS President

"if we can ensure all houses have garbage pick-up, we surely can ensure that all houses have WIFI." If Estonia, South Korea, and Uruguay can do it, why not we?

Two weeks ago, we also confirmed an ally and were able to reinforce CASSA's stance on universal connectivity when we met with the Executive Director of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). The Government of Canada has also committed to bring high speed Internet to 90 per cent of Canadians this year and 98 per cent in 2026, but the CRTC indicates that less than half (only 45.6 per cent) of rural communities have such access now.

Five years is a long time. Our students need access now more than ever. Ensuring universal Internet connectivity is the single-most important strategy for pandemic-proofing education.

Curtis Brown
CASSA/ACGCS President

**“Access to the internet
and to devices for
learning should be a
basic human right.
It should be
universal, public,
inclusive and free.”**

Greetings from the Executive Director



Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

On behalf of the CASSA Board of Directors, I hope that you, your families, and the communities your serve, are safe and healthy.

Recently, the CASSA Board met with Chantal Beaulieu, Executive Director of the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC) with whom CASSA has an excellent relationship. This was Chantal's third annual conversation with our board.

CMEC is:

- A forum to discuss education policy issues;
- A mechanism through which to undertake projects, research and initiatives in areas of common interest for the provinces and territories;
- A means by which to consult and cooperate with national organizations and the federal government; and
- An instrument to represent the common education interests of provinces and territories internationally.

CMEC has several educational priorities including:

- Indigenous Education;
- Reimagining the Future of Education including Technology in Education, Student and Staff Well-Being and Global Competencies; and
- Canadian Education on the World Stage.

It is wonderful to see that CMEC has many of the same priorities as CASSA (notably student and staff well-being), including advocacy for increased and equitable access to internet connectivity and access to technology.

CASSA and the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) sent letters to federal ministers advocating for increased and equitable access to internet connectivity. I am proud that the CASSA board has advocated on behalf of many rural, remote, and Indigenous communities across Canada.

CASSA has become involved in some exciting new projects:

- With CSBA and RNDGÉ and Heritage Canada—a proposal to create a database related to teacher recruitment and

retention in Minority French Language and in French Immersion and French as a Second language programs across Canada;

- With School Mental Health Ontario and CSBA and thought leaders across Canada, a Mental Health Leadership Network; and
- With Nelson (<https://www.nelson.com>) and CSBA; a webinar on COVID-19: Lessons Learned, which is being held on Monday April 12, 2021 from 1-2:00 PM EST. Additional details to follow.

Thanks as always to the dedicated members of the CASSA Board who continue to support our national association of school system leaders from coast to coast to coast.

Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

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Designing a Self-Advocacy Course for High School Students

By Amy Komus, Teacher, Seven Oaks School Division; Marie Christian, Executive Director, VOICES; Kathy Levine, Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba

Youth who transition from the child welfare system to the world of independent living are markedly disadvantaged in terms of equitable access to health, education, housing, and employment services. Successful transition to adulthood requires several skills: being able to sustain oneself on a limited income, being able to navigate governmental services both in person and online, and being able to explore and engage with potential educational and employment opportunities. Unfortunately, youth who have been through multiple placements and multiple social workers are expected to undertake these transitions at a

non-negotiable point in time, in an absence of family support, and often with a history of negative responses to help-seeking. The question then becomes where do youth in care obtain this knowledge? It is imperative to develop accessible programs for youth in care to gain the knowledge that is needed to manage in their post-child welfare life.

Course Development

In a collaborative brainstorming session with the Seven Oaks School Division's committee for improving the educational outcomes for youth in care, the question was raised as to how to support youth transitioning out of care. As a former youth in care turned educator, Amy Komus understood the deficits that youth face regarding their lack of knowledge and power within the system that

dictates their lives and recognized that we could fill these gaps by hosting workshops as a structure for delivering the knowledge that is necessary to thrive within the child welfare system. After expanding on this idea and understanding an equity approach for youth in care, we decided to turn these workshops into a credited course and incorporate the collective expertise of professionals across the education and child welfare systems.

A working group consisting of representatives from the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth, VOICES, the advocacy organization for youth who were formerly in care of the child welfare system, a high school teacher, and researchers from the Universities of Winnipeg and Manitoba, developed the curriculum. The Pillars of Learning course was grounded within the UNESCO Pillars



of Learning, and was comprised of 15 modules or 110 hours that met the Manitoba Education requirement for a senior level full credit. A unique feature of the course was that it was offered to students across five different high schools in the division. In order to accommodate the differences in student schedules, it was held after school, twice a week, from 4-6:30 pm. The course was taught by Amy Komus with the assistance of three university student helpers. As the sessions extended into the early evening, dinner was provided for the group, including the presenters.

In the spirit of collective responsibility, we received an overwhelmingly positive response to our invitations to present from all community-based agency staff. The course began with an emphasis on community building and safe storytelling, as the students had never been in a group that involved solely youth in care. Most of the youth never had the opportunity to share their experiences of being connected to care and were eager to share their life stories. This required that students were taught how to share their stories in a way that was safe for themselves and others. Some of the youth found it quite surprising that other students had similar or vastly different experiences

than they did. From this, most of the youth established supportive friendships, and would help each other when life obstacles arose, such as when a few of the youth had to move placements during the course.

Curriculum

One of the key attributes that support youth with managing these responsibilities is their capacity for self-advocacy; defined as the ability to act in support of one's own interests. There are three elements that are critical to effective self-advocacy. First, youth must have access to information and understand that "knowledge is power," i.e., that having concrete and factual information facilitates more successful interactions with service providers. Second, knowledge of one's rights helped increase assertiveness and invites the courage to ask questions and challenge the authority of service providers in meeting youth's needs. Third, increased knowledge and assertiveness leads to the position in which youth can make informed decisions about their choices.

The first session of the course was a presentation by the Manitoba Advocate for Children and Youth on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and

how it applies to youth in the care of the child welfare system. There were several sessions that explored the issue of rights within the context of the residential school system through a visit to the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and a workshop hosted by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation at the University of Manitoba. A speaker from the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties facilitated an engaging discussion on several topics including Restorative Justice models.

The presenter conducted a "make a law" activity that prompted extensive discussion on human rights and how laws affect different groups in society. The session by Futures Forward, the provincial department that handles post-secondary funding for youth who have transitioned from child welfare, instilled a sense of optimism and future orientation in the group, knowing that there was some financial support for post-secondary education. Other modules focused on rights and advocacy within the context of the legal, mental health, post-secondary, and housing service systems. A reoccurring theme was introduced by students who stated that they do not see their social workers monthly, as required by the Child and Family Services Act.

A family law lawyer encouraged the students to be persistent when they try to contact their social workers because it is their right to do so. The need for self-advocacy was reinforced when students learned there is no lawyer in the system whose job is to advocate independently for youth because agencies would have to pay those lawyers. Students were connected with VOICES: Manitoba's Youth in Care Network and discussed the importance of having a sense of belonging, the power of sharing your story safely to help create a better system of care, and the value of building their own 'family of choice,' a network of support that could include friends and community members.

Given that youth in the care of the child welfare system have, by definition, experienced trauma, it was important to include content focused on self-care. This was provided by two art and play therapists who used art, as well as a Lego® Serious Play® workshop facilitated by Brickstorming, as another way to explore their concepts of self and express their stories. Given that a critical aspect of self-advocacy is skill development, the Manitoba Theatre for Young

People developed a specialized workshop that included a number of role-play scenarios through which students practiced their communication and advocacy skills. The course ended with a weekend camp facilitated by Expressions Film Studio in which the youth learned how to present their personal stories of being connected to care as well as their perspectives on self-advocacy through the medium of digital story telling.

Challenges

The course was not without its challenges, including transportation, conflicting school schedules, and competition with after-school activities. Having involvement from already established in-school supports would have been helpful for addressing complex situations that arose during the course. The after-school model meant that these school supports were not available when needed. Lastly, many of the youth wanted their friends who were not in care to be able to participate, especially students who took longer to establish friendships within the class. Opening up the course to allies of youth in care, and not just youth in care themselves, would have assisted these youth in feeling connected to the class and would destigmatize being a youth in care, which is often simply a misunderstood narrative of what it means to be “in care.”

Benefits

There were several indications that bringing youth involved with the child welfare system together to create a sense of connection and counter some of negative perceptions of the “youth in care” label contributed to a sense of positive identity. By encouraging youth in care to speak out, they will challenge the core notions about passivity and dependence that are inherent in child welfare involvement.

It is a well-known saying that ‘it takes a village to raise a child.’ As young people approach the age of majority and begin to plan for life post-care, it is important that they have the knowledge of resources and supports available to them from the village. Being connected to their village broadens the scope of their opportunities and introduces them to varying perspectives that can help them as they grow and mature into adulthood. The knowledge of various social service organizations adds to the young person’s toolkit and their personal bundle of resilience.

As their relationships with the agencies and social workers who provide their care begins to taper off, their connections to community should ideally blossom, expanding to incorporate new professionals and friends.

The Pillars of Learning course demonstrated that self-advocacy for youth in care can increase awareness of their rights, knowledge of the roles and responsibilities of the systems in their life, where they can go for help, how to express themselves, how to use their experiences to impact their community (including other youth in care), and that they truly matter.

Although classes did not always go as planned, the value of the course emerged as students began to express themselves and apply their learning to their individual situations. In one instance, a student who was particularly reserved in communicating her thoughts and feelings wept openly while viewing her freshly completed digital story that empowered and honored her journey. In the session at the Manitoba Theater for Young People, one role-play focused on help-seeking from medical providers, who were deliberately not being receptive to the students. When one of the youngest participants spoke up on behalf of another student involved in the role-play, interjecting, “because it’s your right,” he demonstrated that advocacy extends beyond individual rights to helping others.

Many of the students stated that they wished they had the knowledge they gained throughout the course much earlier in their lives. For example, they wish they had known

that they were supposed to be involved in their case plans, that they could attend court, that they could use their voices to advocate to their social workers and ask questions that would produce answers. They wish they had known earlier that they could advocate to see their siblings, that they could ask how long they were going stay in their placements, that they could know the plan for when they turn 18. Many of the youth also realized that university or college was within their grasp, and a place where they could see themselves in the future, and now knew how to take the steps to make that a reality. Many of the students expressed that with their new knowledge, they indeed could have changed the trajectory of their lives much earlier.

Final Thoughts

The Pillars of Learning course was the first of its kind, one that acknowledged the shift in the increasing awareness that youth from care deserve more education, more opportunities, and more support. As educators, we are in loco parentis of these children. As social workers, we are guardians. As community members, we are part of the collective village that raises these children. Supporting and empowering youth from care is not the duty of one system alone, but rather the collective responsibility of all the adults who surround them. As we ourselves learn how to advocate for youth in care to flourish, we teach them to do the same for themselves. This course demonstrated that when empowered, these young people can—and do—rise to the occasion. ○

Children and Youth in Our Care

Educational experiences and outcomes of children in care of the child welfare system represent a significant problem. Given that both social work and educational staff share responsibility for these students, efforts to facilitate inter-professional collaboration may result in more positive outcomes for youth.

This series of four articles describes the learnings that resulted from a partnership project between the Seven Oaks School Division, Child and Family Services, and a team of university-based academics in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The first article represents a timeline of how the partnership evolved between the education and child welfare systems. The second article describes innovative strategies that school leaders instituted to facilitate students’ transitions to new schools in a manner that was more responsive to the needs of youth in care. The third article outlines how school social workers and educators partnered to create support groups for youth in care across elementary, middle, and senior years. The fourth article describes the development and implementation of a senior credit course for youth in care that focused on learning and using self-advocacy skills.

We would love to hear from you! Please email me at Kathryn.Levine@umanitoba.ca if you would like to share your comments or request further information.

Faces in the Crowd:



David Keohane

David Keohane is one of two College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) representatives on the current CASS board of directors. He is also CASS's new executive director, following Barry Litun's retirement from the position. David has been a member of CASS for 21 years.

David's career in public education began with 17 years serving as a teacher, consultant, vice principal and principal, followed by 19 years as a superintendent in three jurisdictions. The last 11 of those years have been as the superintendent for Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools, from which he announced his retirement earlier this year. David's own education includes earning his Bachelor of Education from the University of Alberta and his Master of Arts in Education from San Diego State University.

Under David's leadership, Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools has received Gallup Global Great Workplace awards for the past

four years. This award recognizes the school division for standing out among 900 profit and non-profit organizations for demonstrating world-leading results in employee engagement. It also celebrates the division for demonstrating increased success in student learning, which aligns with current research about the organizational impact of highly engaged employees.

David was also personally recognized in 2018 and 2019 by the Gallup organization as a finalist for its Manager of the Year award. This award is presented to the top 10 managers that represent 42 of the highest employee-engaged organizations within Gallup's international database.

Leaders & Learners readers may recall that David was named the 2018 recipient of the CASS provincial EXL Award for Excellence in School System Leadership, the 2018 CASSA national EXL award and the 2018 AASA Canadian Superintendent of the Year award.

David is an avid golfer and is proud of accomplishing three holes in one, one of which was on a par four. He recently took the time to kindly respond to several questions for this

Faces in the Crowd profile. (To keep up with the latest news from CASS, be sure to follow the organization on Twitter @CASSAlberta or visit its website at www.cass.ab.ca.)

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

I was one of those people who, growing up, enjoyed the experience of school and learned so much from my teachers through the process. My father, who was a physician and surgeon, was extremely well educated but only used his success and the rigour of his training to convey that education is never wasted on anyone. Rather, it is the great equalizer in life when other elements such as friendships and financial well-being cannot be relied upon. These factors instilled a love for learning and passing it on to others in me.

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

I have been asked to present on a few occasions on the topic of building

collaborative system focuses in education and optimizing the engagement of staff, students and parents in the process. Being able to present to the National Public Education Support Fund, an influential network dedicated to influencing positive change for Kindergarten to Grade 12 education, and present on the topic in my own province as well as in British Columbia, have been rewarding experiences.

My personal bias about an appropriate system focus that improves student learning is that it needs to be based upon visible learning where educators promote and celebrate with others the actual evidence of system and school success in student learning based upon agreed-to indicators of effective teaching strategies. This focus needs to be complemented with the idea of responsive schools, where learning communities continually determine what is most important to students, staff and parents, based upon their feedback and respond to the recommendations provided.

How would you describe your personal style of leadership? What does leadership mean to you?

According to Gallup research, leadership has four dimensions to satisfy when it is leveraged to make a difference for others. It must be relational, strategic, made evident through

execution, and have the capacity to influence others to share in the required work, or take a new course of action. I self-assess all tasks and projects through this lens and endeavour to dedicate my strengths to the required dimensions. I believe that anyone wants to be part of a leadership function when the goal at hand is aspirational, people get to do what they do best to contribute to it and their opinions count through the process.

How many years have you been involved with CASSA and CASS? How did you first become involved with CASSA and what made you want to work with the organization at the board level?

My eyes have especially opened up to CASSA by getting a sense for how it works through my current role. Too often a local context for engaging in problems of practice leads people to believe that they are the only ones that are endeavouring to find solutions. But I am currently finding that when I discuss matters with provincial counterparts, many issues have already been addressed somewhere else.

I have always believed that the best educators have never had original ideas but have in the end made them original by bringing worthwhile applications of what they witness

and experience into new contexts. As a national organization, CASSA broadens horizons and possibilities to all provincial system leaders by casting its net wide enough to capture one’s accessibility to more leaders and therefore greater possibilities within education.

What are you most looking forward to in your role on the CASSA board?

I am looking forward to making connections with my colleagues and their work so that I can learn from them and make a bigger difference in my service to the CASSA board and other system leaders who I encounter through my work.

Please tell our readers a little bit about your personal history.

I grew up in a family that immigrated from the Republic of Ireland when I was a young age. I’m blessed to have my wife Glenda as my biggest fan, and to have experienced my three grown children develop in unique but mutually supportive ways.

I am passionate about skiing and golf, and try to cover a full year of athletic pursuit in Canada by committing my spare time to these sports. I am crazy about roots music of any kind, play guitar as a hobby, and irritate Glenda greatly when one more iteration of that musical instrument finds its way through our doors. ○

CASSA’s Annual Conference is Going Virtual in 2021!

July 7-9, 2021

Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being





CASSA-ACGCS
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

Topics discussed will include anti-racism, school mental health, and indigenous education.

Presenters include Kike Ojo-Thompson, Dr. Cindy Finn, Nathan IP, Jennifer McCrea, Dr. Kathy Short, and Kevin Lamoureux. You can read their full bios here: <http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/CASSA-presenters.html>.

The CASSA Annual Conference will look a little different this year, BUT it will still be an amazing way to connect school system leaders from across Canada to learn and share information on current topics in education. We hope you’ll join us!

Learn more here: <http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca>.



Faces in the Crowd:

Lorrie Naar



From an early age, Lorrie Naar knew she wanted to work in education. “I was that typical child growing up, pretending to teach on a blackboard at home in my basement,” she says.

Now Superintendent of Education, School Services, for the Halton Catholic District School Board, Lorrie’s career in public education began as a teacher for Grade 1 students. She’d always wanted to work with younger students and was particularly keen to teach within the context of a Catholic education.

“Working with our parish priest to help kids prepare for their sacraments or even in preparing them for the Christmas Eve mass where they re-enacted the story of Jesus’s birth was one of the favourite parts of my teaching vocation early on,” she recalls.

Lorrie also taught students in Grade 4 and 5 before moving into administration.

“I found that I was becoming more involved in school-wide initiatives and was energized by seeing them have an impact on the school,” she says.

She pursued her Master’s degree in Religious Education from St. Michael’s College in Toronto (her Bachelor of Applied Science is from the University of Guelph and her Bachelor of Education is from York University), and then entered a vice principal role. This led to her taking positions as a principal and supervisory officer. She has been a Family of Schools Superintendent, working with schools from Kindergarten to Grade 12 in her district, and has held various portfolios for the system including her current portfolio of Leadership and Staff Development, and Faith Formation.

“I have always been so grateful about the experiences I have had both as a student

and as an educator in our district,” she says, reflecting on her inspiration to work in senior administration. Lorrie grew up in the Halton area and attended school in the Halton Catholic District School Board. (Her current office is actually in the building that used to be her school in her first year of high school.) “Our ultimate mission is to ensure that our kids have the best possible opportunities to grow into productive, healthy and fulfilled individuals who go out into the world with a mindset of justice and love.”

Educators have a great privilege to be able to make that happen, she adds, and they have to get it right for their students.

“My continued learning has always been for that reason and has always moved me into new roles to be able to help that happen in some small way,” she says. Lorrie and her husband Scott have

two sons, Connor and David, and “a crazy dog” named Marley. In her spare time, she enjoys spending time in her backyard gardening or reading a good book. As a 2019 recipient of the OCSOA Distinguished Leadership Award, Lorrie took time from a busy fall schedule to respond to several questions from *Leaders & Learners*.

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

I have been involved on the ground floor with establishing a formal partnership between seven Catholic districts, including our French Catholic district, our diocese (the Diocese of Hamilton) and our local Catholic university (St. Jerome’s University). This partnership has now been in place for eight years and has grown into a partnership that truly supports Catholic education across our diocese from kindergarten through to university. I currently co-chair that partnership.

We have created a partnership that shares and develops resources to support our schools, and to provide learning opportunities for our staff. Our partnership has led to many projects and resources that have impacted students across our diocese. We have partnered to bring Christian meditation into our schools. This has had a tremendous impact on our students and families.

We have also developed a program that brings leaders from across district school boards in our diocese for a two-year leadership program focused on faith formation. I am proud of our development of a comprehensive faith formation program for our staff across the district. As a Catholic district, it is important to us that we invest in our staff to support faith formation so that they, in turn, can bring an authentic faith experience to our students.

Finally, I think that we have developed a strong leadership program in our district that supports our leaders at every stage of their development. It is important to always be planning and setting direction for the next 10 years, and we do so by investing in the development of our leaders for the next generation. We have developed a program that supports those discerning leadership, those awaiting formal positions in leadership and mentoring those currently new to leadership roles.

I really believe that the best planning and visioning exercises come out of conversations... When conversations can be honest, I find that the best plans and learning can evolve.

How would you describe your personal style of leadership?

One that revolves around relationships. I really believe that the best planning and visioning exercises come out of conversations. This is possible when you build up relationships with a number of people who can come together with various perspectives and talk in an open and honest way about the successes and challenges that are happening in education. When conversations can be honest, I find that the best plans and learning can evolve.

I believe that our work in education is like being on a journey. Along the way you meet colleagues, students and families who help to shape you and guide you along the path. Our greatest asset is our staff who are working on the ground with our students and communities. It is through positive relationships that we can cultivate a strong culture of caring staff with high expectations and solid pedagogy to serve our students.

How many years have you been involved with CASSA and its regional affiliate OCSOA?

This is my first year being involved with CASSA directly. I am currently the Past President of OCSOA. I have been a member of the OCSOA board of directors for the past seven years.

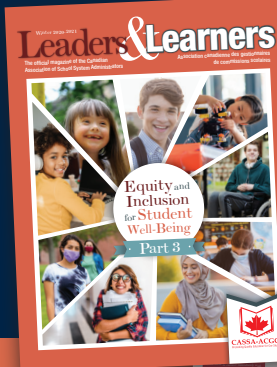
I became involved with OCSOA shortly after experiencing the mentoring

program put on by OCSOA for new supervisory officers. I found the program to be a tremendous support to me as a new supervisory officer. As well, our organization puts on an annual retreat each year so that our members can come together to strengthen our relationships with each other and to spend time together renewing ourselves in faith. With such a supportive organization, I found that I wanted to be a part of that support network. I became involved in the Mentoring Program as a mentor to new supervisory officers and then later on the Mentoring Steering Committee. As well, I chaired the Faith and Leadership Committee. The work in these committees eventually led me to become a board member.

What are you most looking forward to in your role on the CASSA board?

I am really looking forward to hearing about the important issues that are taking place across our country in education. I find that hearing about successes and challenges that others are experiencing helps me to think about directions that we can be pursuing so that we are always on the cutting edge of ensuring our children will be provided the best opportunities to further their wellbeing and development, both academically and spiritually. I love to learn, and I am always energized talking to educators. ○

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