

Greetings from the President

It is with a sense of satisfaction that I find myself writing my last newsletter message as president of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA). It has been an honour to serve as the president of this national association dedicated to strengthening the capacity of senior school system leaders through national dialogue and professional learning, and a vision of equity and excellence in education for each learner.

My sense of satisfaction is amplified by the recent strategic planning work of the CASSA Board of Directors (made up of representatives of each of the provincial and territorial school superintendent associations across Canada). Despite the inability to meet in person over the past two years, we have made strides in building a more solid national team, with greater collaboration with other national education organizations, an update to our vision and purpose, and a collective commitment to our strategic directions going forward:

1. Strengthening our governance and operations,
2. Strengthening communication and engagement with all members, and
3. Maximizing PD opportunities for all school system leaders.

I believe that each superintendent association has a duty and responsibility to serve CASSA, and I am grateful for the ongoing commitment of our executive director and board of directors accordingly.

Not only is my two-year term coming to an end, but this summer also marks my



Curtis Brown
CASSA/ACGCS President

retirement after 35 years as an educator in the NWT, the last 26 of those years as a school board superintendent. In both my roles, it brings comfort to know that the positions are being assumed by quality candidates. I offer my best wishes to Kevin Kaardal, Past President of the British Columbia School Superintendent's Association (BCSSA), as he transitions into the role of President of CASSA this summer. Kevin's experience and dedication to educational leadership make him ideal for leading our next steps. The future looks bright for CASSA!

I hope that the close of the 2021-22 school year is smooth and gratifying for all of you. One way to ensure that is by attending our national gathering at The Algonquin Resort in St. Andrews By-the-Sea, New Brunswick, from July 6-8, 2022. It's not too late to register: <http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/index.html>.

Curtis Brown
ACGCS/CASSA President



Équité et excellence en éducation
CASSA-ACGCS
Equity and Excellence in Education

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

Greetings

from the Executive Director



Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

The Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) has engaged the leadership facilitation skills of Jordan Tinney, retired Superintendent of Surrey, BC, schools. He put together the following overview of our leadership conference. My thanks to Jordan for his ongoing support and commitment to CASSA.

On July 6-8th, CASSA will welcome delegates and system leaders from across Canada to our Annual Leadership Conference. It's been two years since we've been able to meet face-to-face and as a result, this year's leadership conference will focus on our needs to re-connect and re-engage with colleagues on topics that are common to us all. This year's conference will focus on providing participants with structured time and opportunity to explore research and background materials on four key themes:

- **Contextual literacy:** what has happened over the past two years and how does your unique context shape your leadership?
- **Leading in times of ambiguity:** what is adaptive leadership and how do we face the leadership challenges ahead in times of ambiguity, volatility, and chaos?

It's been two years since we've been able to meet face-to-face and as a result, this year's leadership conference will focus on our needs to re-connect and re-engage with colleagues on topics that are common to us all.

- **Compassionate Leadership:** how do you lead with compassion and yet move ahead with the difficult decisions that are required of us all?
- **Leading for Equity:** those who need support the most have been hardest hit by the pandemic. How do we rebuild with equity at the heart of all we do?

Each theme will begin with a short, facilitated session to set the context and to provide background materials. After the introduction, participants will engage with colleagues at their table to explore the themes in depth guided by a series of questions.

In addition to the facilitated sessions, participants will have structured breakout opportunities to explore issues more in depth with

colleagues and peers. Breakout topics include Truth and Reconciliation, Mental Health and Well Being, Student Voice, Building the Capacity of System Leaders, A Focus on Equity, and Racial Equity and Educational Justice. In these breakout sessions, there will be background materials and guiding questions to structure the table conversations.

Finally, there are two interviews designed to highlight system leadership. The first interview is to provide a national perspective on leadership, and the second interview will be with local Indigenous leaders on the topic of Education for Reconciliation.

This conference is designed around participation and engagement. We look forward to seeing you there!

Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

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Collaborative Models of Decision-Making and Leadership:

In Conversation with ThoughtExchange’s Kai Kafrissen



Kai Kafrissen (she/her/hers), ThoughtExchange Education Partnerships Manager.

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

ThoughtExchange is the award-winning Canadian company behind the world’s only Enterprise Discussion Management platform powered by patented anti-bias technology.

CASSA’s relationship with ThoughtExchange goes back to some of the company’s earliest years. Members of the ThoughtExchange leadership team have also been familiar faces at CASSA conferences across Canada, from British Columbia to Newfoundland.

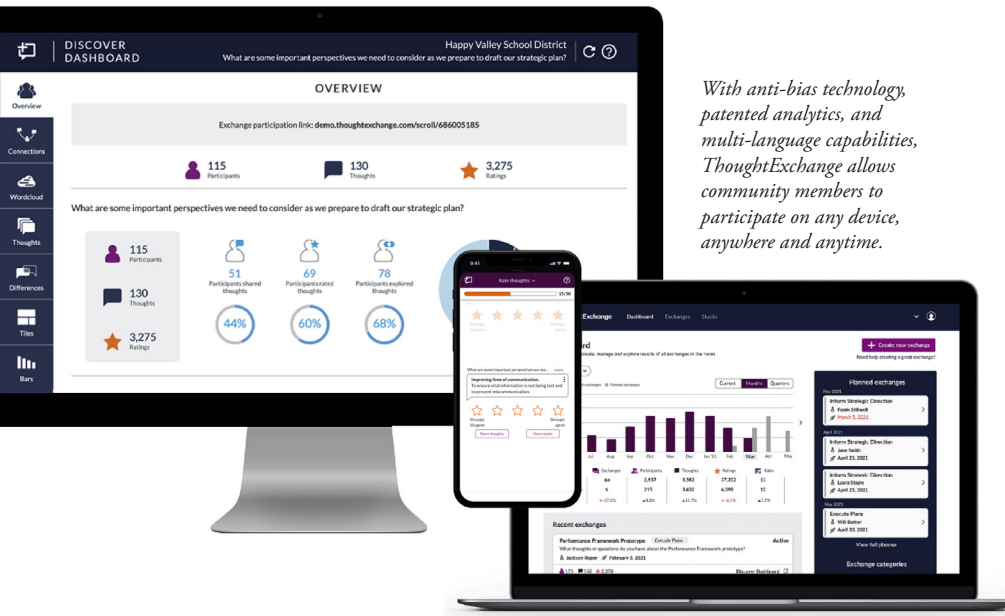
Recently Leaders & Learners had the opportunity to connect with Kai Kafrissen (she/her/hers), ThoughtExchange Education Partnerships Manager, to discuss collaborative models of decision-making and leadership.

The theme of the 2022 CASSA Leadership Conference is *Re-Imagining Education*. For some school system leaders, this might involve a more collaborative approach to decision-making, such as

actively seeking and supporting input from all levels of staff, from students and from the broader community. What are some of the tools that ThoughtExchange can provide to leaders to help them and the individuals and communities they serve to navigate these kinds of processes respectfully and safely?

The ThoughtExchange platform is a collective intelligence tool. What that allows leaders to do is to scale conversations and get actionable insights. What that looks like in practice is leveraging technology so leaders can make smart, faster, and more inclusive decisions, and they can do that in a landscape that is ever changing.

From a product perspective, there’s a tool I love called Differences. What this



With anti-bias technology, patented analytics, and multi-language capabilities, ThoughtExchange allows community members to participate on any device, anywhere and anytime.

tool does is work to understand where there are divergent opinions in a group but then, more importantly, what that group agrees on. There's a great opportunity to start the conversation in a place of agreement as we're moving into these harder issues.

What is important is to have the intention of a safer space and a deeply respectful environment, and so a lot of that is leadership coaching and intention setting with the introduction feature of a ThoughtExchange, and we have a great moderation tool that ensures the conversation stays respectful and doesn't name anybody. That is a safeguard.

Finally, one thing that I think is special for ThoughtExchange is the empathy that's built into the rating or "Star" stage. There's a lot of group learning that happens and this unique feature helps to expose participants to other perspectives, as if you're going to have coffee with 20 of your closest friends. It's being able to get at the heart of the collective priorities.

What is participatory decision-making?

Participatory decision-making (PDM) is using community engagement to inform and to legitimize the decision-making process. It's saying that to have a robust decision that the stakeholders will feel is valid, we're going to need to include them in the way that the decision is made. The outcome of that is trust and confidence and greater buy-in.

What would that look like for senior leadership of a school district and community stakeholders?

Strategic planning is a good example. There are so many decisions that go into strategic planning. You can think about it in different stages: inform, implement, and reflect.

In the informing stage, we bring people in to inform the plan; what the directions, goals, and actions are, and ask people for their input, what's most important.

Moving into implementing, that's asking superintendents, directors of education, teachers, what do you need to be successful, what are the resources that are going to best support you, how can we accomplish the shared goal, and what do we as leaders need to do to support you?

In the reflection stage, we're seeking to understand what else we need to do. What's the next action we need to take? What's working? What do we need to improve on? It's keeping the conversation alive and keeping that strategic plan off the shelf. At every stage, we're asking for feedback, we're bringing folks in, and demonstrating a commitment to that collaborative process.

Some older models of leadership are based on only one person or a small group of people making decisions. How does PDM support a more collaborative model of leadership?

There was a great client I was working with who gave me this anecdote: snow melts at the edges. What they meant was change happens at the fringes. The most innovative insights are going to happen in the places that are hardest for leaders to access. If you want to make someone feel valued and respected, ask for their input on a decision that affects them. As a framework, PDM really centres getting that collective buy-in as the way to do that.

What is leading from behind, and why might it make an ideal way to respectfully engage the community in decision-making?

I was thinking about it as a visual. You have a jug of water and you're pouring it and the water is cascading down. That's our traditional model of top-down leadership. What if leadership looked like the jug to contain that water and leading from behind might be part of that?

It's active leadership, it's very involved, and it's truly collective leadership in its highest form. Leading from behind includes servant leadership, creating space for employees, students, parents and guardians, and community to step into that process. What that looks like is creating your goals together, then solutioning together, then sharing that responsibility. It's creating your action plans together.

Leading from behind is a form of participatory decision-making. If we're creating the space for being that vessel and we are inviting people to come fill it up, it's thinking about if I'm a leader and I want to operationalize our strategic plan, what stage am I at? What do I need from participants? What do I need from my community? How do I ensure that there's that same sense of ownership from the people who are affected by this decision?

If we know that one person doesn't have all the answers, we need the on-the-ground insight. Leading from behind is the framework from which you can capture that. It's creating space and inviting people in, and then helping them get to where you are together and where you want to go.

To learn more about ThoughtExchange, visit thoughtexchange.com. You can also follow the company on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram.

Faces in the Crowd:



Rohan and his family. From left to right: His wife Heather, his son Hunter, Rohan himself, and his daughter Asia. Photo courtesy of Rohan Arul-pragasam.

Rohan Arul-pragasam

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

Rohan Arul-pragasam is the Vice President of the British Columbia School Superintendents Association. He is also the Superintendent of Schools for the Chilliwack School District, a post he has held since November 2018, and previously served as the district's Assistant School Superintendent. Rohan first came to work for the Chilliwack School District in 2004 as principal of Rosedale Middle School and later worked as principal of Vedder Middle School.

His career in education has included teaching and administration roles at four other districts in BC: Maple Ridge, Sunshine Coast, Surrey, and Richmond. Rohan's own path of learning saw him earn a Bachelor of Science in Applied Mathematics from Concordia University, a Bachelor of Education in Secondary Mathematics from the University of British Columbia, and a Master of Education in Education Administration and Leadership from the University of Victoria.

Chilliwack School District is in the eastern end of the Fraser Valley and operates

within Stó:lō unceded territory of the Pilalt, Sema:th, and Ts'elxwéyeqw tribes. Approximately 14,000 students from the communities of Chilliwack, Yarrow, Cultus Lake, Sardis, Vedder, Rosedale, and Greendale as well as 10 Indigenous nations attend its schools.

The district's motto is "Partners in Learning," which is exemplified by the way students; parents, guardians, and caregivers; staff; First Nations; and community members and organizations are included as important members of its education community. Each of these partners play a role in creating a culture of mutual respect that supports engagement and collaboration to work toward the shared goals of the district's Strategic Plan,¹ released in June 2021.

Recently Rohan took the time to share more of his story and that of the Chilliwack School District with *Leaders & Learners*.

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

I first got into teaching after I realized that I had the ability to teach colleagues while at university, tutoring as a part-time job. My ability at that time to teach to

diverse learning abilities created the curiosity to explore the possibilities of pursuing a Bachelor of Education degree many years later.

My desire to seek formal leadership opportunities stemmed from wanting to be part of a team to create learning and working cultures where staff and students are inspired to take risks, be curious as learners, and work toward supporting each other so we can thrive.

Have you spearheaded a particular program or initiative or been part of a team that brought about notable and positive change? Tell us about some of your personal points of pride as a senior administrator in public education.

I have championed a myriad of leadership endeavours over the past many years. These include building an inclusive alternative program that focuses on the strengths of individual students; a revised professional growth plan, supervision, and evaluation framework; and supporting reconfiguration of the school district, to name a few.

The most important initiative of all has been the creation of the Chilliwack School District's latest Strategic Plan, which is laser



A Statement About Learning

Learning must be engaging, relevant and meaningful, grounded in inclusive practices and First Peoples Principles of Learning, and committed to the growth of future-oriented citizens.



Strategic Plan Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework is designed to communicate the big ideas that we believe about our school district in a visual, holistic fashion.

Features of the framework include:

The framework is wrapped in First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL), using the colours of the cardinal directions of the medicine wheel: White, Yellow, Red and Black. The layers of 'Mission, Vision and Motto' as well as Governance are positioned at the outer edges of the framework, representing the important role of keeping our organization moving in the same direction as outlined by our Vision:

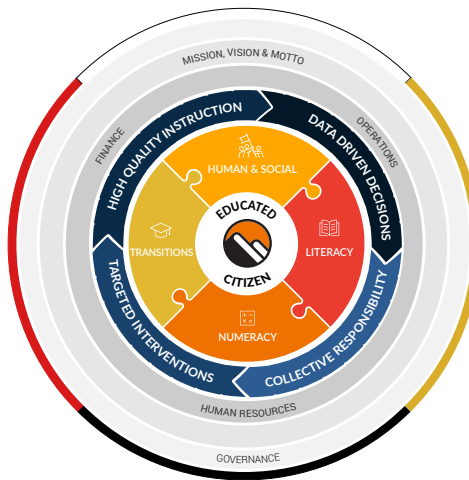
~Syó:ys lets'e th'ále, lets'emót~
(See EYE yees LETS - a - thala LETS - a - mot)
 ~One heart, one mind, working together for a common purpose.~

HIGH QUALITY INSTRUCTION

Innovative, inclusive and research based instruction and assessment practices support the well-being of all learners and their readiness to be inspired and engaged in life-long learning.

TARGETED INTERVENTIONS

Timely and targeted supports are the cornerstone in creating a culture of equity and belonging where all learners thrive and reach their potential.



DATA DRIVEN DECISIONS

The intentional collection and analysis of meaningful evidence ensures that actions and decisions directly support the success of all learners.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

Common core values and shared responsibility for student success promotes deep collaboration and commitment to growth as educated citizens.

focused and includes a conceptual framework designed to communicate the big ideas that we believe about our school district in a visual, holistic fashion.

The framework is wrapped in First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) using the colours of the cardinal directions of the medicine wheel. The layers of mission, vision and motto as well as governance are positioned at the outer edges of the framework, representing the important role of keeping our school district moving in the same direction as outlined by our vision:

Syó:ys lets'e th'ále, lets'emót
 (See-EYE-yees LETS-a thala-a-mot)
 One heart, one mind, working together
 for a common purpose

I am also proud to be part of a district leadership team that has a collective focus on building a climate of trust with all leaders, teachers, support staff, and parents in the district that is based on its core values: equity, kindness, inclusion, collaboration, and innovation. This climate of trust has been instrumental in engaging in meaningful conversation that is centred on the use of assessment data and focusing on areas where we need to change our practice with the goal of supporting all students.

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

The art of leadership is empowering members of your team to engage in dialogue that is a conversation where people start to think together in a relationship, to travel down a path that they never thought was possible. This all starts with creating a space where people can feel safe and vulnerable and engage in conversation where we can push on each other's thinking to create new ideas. I have always believed in the notion that we need to be "hard on the problem and soft on the people," all while creating space where we can learn to thrive as opposed to survive.

Please tell our readers about your personal history: your family, your hobbies or interests, travel, and so on.

I have been married to my wife Heather for over 25 years, and we have two children. My son Hunter has just finished his first year of a science degree at the University of Toronto on a volleyball scholarship playing for the Toronto Varsity Blues. My daughter Asia is working as an education assistant in Abbotsford.

We love to travel as a family and have travelled internationally to Paris, Venice, Rome, London, and Colombo, Ceylon. We also love travelling and exploring the Maritimes and are in awe of the beauty of the land.

One of my earlier passions was to fly planes. When I was attending university in my

20s, I acquired my private pilot's licence. At that time my goal was to obtain my commercial licence and embark in a career in aviation. Pretty soon my finances ran out and I realized it was not feasible to continue. I flew recreationally with friends at that time as I loved the sense of freedom and joy while in the sky.

I grew up in Colombo, Ceylon (Sri Lanka), and I attended a large boys' school with about 9,000 students from K-12 called Royal College until the age of 17. Royal College was the first public school in Sri Lanka. It was founded in the British public school tradition. Its motto is *Disce aut Discede*, meaning "Learn or Depart" in Latin. Upon reflection, the motto of the school was exclusionary, which is antithetical to our practice in schools in Canada where we collectively embrace and celebrate the diversity in our schools where all students belong, feel valued, and thrive in their school communities. ○

Reference:
 1. Chilliwack School District Strategic Plan 2021-2025. https://stratplan.sd33.bc.ca/sites/stratplan.sd33.bc.ca/files/2021-06/Chilliwack%20School%20District%20Strategic%20Plan%20Summary%202021-2025_Final%20Web.pdf.

CASSA Welcomes You to Charming St. Andrews By-the-Sea!



CASSA extends a warm invitation to its membership to attend the 2022 CASSA Annual Leadership Conference in Canada's first seaside resort town, St. Andrews By-the-Sea, New Brunswick, from July 6-8. This is an in-person event.

The CASSA conference is a unique event that brings together school system leaders from publicly funded school districts across Canada. The theme this year is *Re-Imagining Education*. Our conference keynote addresses, panel discussions and breakout sessions provide many opportunities for personalized learning and peer-to-peer sharing on related topics. Delegates, guests, sponsors, and exhibitors are also presented with many chances for networking.

The early bird registration fee for CASSA members is \$599. Non-members early bird rate is \$670. These rates will be offered until May 27, 2022. Registration fees after that date are \$705 for members and \$875 for non-members. Please note: If you need to cancel your registration, refunds less a \$150 cancellation fee are available until June 7, 2022.

Planning to fly to New Brunswick? CASSA is pleased to announce we have arranged conference discount rates with both Air Canada and WestJet!

Air Canada is offering discounts on flights to Saint John, New Brunswick, for travel between June 29 and July 15, 2022. Discounts range from 5 per cent for standard fares to 10 per cent on flex fares and higher. For international travel, there is a 10 per cent discount on standard fares and higher. Use code Y2ERP4J1 in the Promotion Code Box.

WestJet is offering discounts on flights to Fredericton or Moncton for travel from within Canada from June 28 to July 15, 2022. Discounts range from 5 per cent off EconoFlex, and 10 per cent off Premium fares, and 2 per cent off Econo, 5 per cent off EconoFlex, and 10 per cent off Premium base fares for those travelling across the border. No discounts are available for Basic or Business class bookings. Use coupon code C62ED61 (travel agents only: YBB05).

Shuttle transportation from Saint John to St. Andrews is also available.¹ The shuttle costs \$65 + HST per direction to book a small group transfer or \$195 + HST per direction for private transfer. Transport service from other airports is also available for an additional fee.



All CASSA members are welcome to attend our AGM on July 6, 2022, from 1:00-2:30pm. Join us at the CASSA east coast-style kitchen party, featuring casual cocktails and local entertainment, from 5pm to 6pm, followed by the conference opening and keynote address. This last event will include a short retrospective on the past two years.

Thursday begins with breakfast, a morning welcome, and a brief **Setting the Stage** session. Note that the conference is built on the concepts of choice and participation. Each facilitated session will begin with a short presentation explaining the language and background of the concepts. Time will be allotted at each session for dialogue at tables where participants will be given guided questions to facilitate sharing. CASSA is pleased to introduce Jordan Tinney, Superintendent/CEO of Surrey Schools, as its 2022 Conference Lead Facilitator.

Thursday's facilitated sessions include **Contextualized Literacy** and **Adaptive Leadership**. CASSA Honorary Life Memberships and the Xerox EXL Award will be presented during a sit-down lunch ceremony. Thursday afternoon includes a **Celebrity Interview** session that features reflections,

thoughts, and insights from leaders from across Canada and a choice of sessions on themes including **Truth and Reconciliation, Student Voice, Building the Capacity of System Leaders, Outdoor Education and Sustainability, A Focus on Equity for All Learners, and Racial Equity and Educational Justice**. Closing remarks will end the day.

Friday also opens with breakfast and a morning welcome, followed by facilitated sessions on **Compassionate Leadership** and **Equity**. After lunch, conference participants are invited to sit in on an **Indigenous Interview** session, an opportunity to hear the perspectives, wisdom, and learnings from Indigenous leaders and then consider the steps we all should be making as we move to Truth and Reconciliation. There will be a brief transition break followed by a choice of themed session. The conference's closing plenary is scheduled for 2:15-3:00pm, and will provide time to reflect on conference themes, think about lessons learned, and consider how to take these important connections and learnings from the conference forward to the next school year.

The 2022 CASSA Annual Leadership Conference will be hosted at the historic


Algonquin Resort,² one of the most impressive resorts in Canada. World-class amenities include a full-service spa, indoor and outdoor pools, a three-storey indoor waterslide, complimentary bicycles and community shuttle, dining venues, gardens, beach access, and a legendary golf course.

Group rates for staying at the Algonquin Resort range from \$220 to \$432 CAD per night. You can find the most current details and links for reservations on the CASSA conference website.³

We look forward to seeing you and your senior leadership team in beautiful St. Andrews By-the-Sea this July! ○

References:

1. Canadian Association of School System Administrators. <https://app.groupize.com/e/canadian-school-of-system-administrators>.
2. The Algonquin Resort. <https://www.algonquinresort.com/>.
3. CASSA-ACGCS Annual Conference. <https://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/>.



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Published for the Canadian Association of School System Administrators
1123 Glenashton Drive
Oakville, ON L6H 5M1
Tel: 905-845-4254
ken_bain@cassa-acgcs.ca
www.cassa-acgcs.ca

Articles written by Tara Wittchen

Published by Matrix Group Publishing Inc.
309 Youville Street
Winnipeg, MB R2H 2S9
Tel: 866-999-1299
editor@matrixgroupinc.net
www.matrixgroupinc.net

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EXL Award Nominations 2022

From 2002 to 2021, CASSA has recognized the extraordinary efforts of Canadian school system leaders through the annual presentation of the EXL Award. This award is presented thanks to the ongoing support of Xerox Canada.

The recipient for the 2022 EXL Award will be announced at this year's conference in St. Andrews By-the-Sea on July 7. Congratulations to each of the deserving nominees!

Bevan Daverne CASS

Bevan is the Superintendent for the Golden Hills School Division (GHSD) based in Strathmore, Alberta, a role he has held since 2011. Prior to this, he was the GHSD Division Principal and Director of Technology from 2004 to 2011, and a school principal from 1995 to 2004.

From 2019 to 2021, Bevan served as the President of CASS. He has also served on the Alberta Technology Leaders in Education Board of Directors and sat as a member of Education Research & Development Corporation (ERDI), the provincial Infrastructure Capital Funding Advisory Committee, the provincial K-6 Curriculum Implementation Advisory Council, and the Alberta Rural Education Steering Committee.

Bevan's many leadership accomplishments are connected to and a result of his strategic vision for GHSD. He has collectively created a values-driven, collaborative, and supportive district culture that is focused on meeting the educational needs of every student. At the same time, this culture values and empowers staff to make a significant difference in the lives of their students, school, community, and division.

He has been a member of CASSA for 11 years.

Philippe Brulot NWTSA

Philippe is the Superintendent for the Dehcho Divisional Education Council (DDEC), which has its head office in Fort Simpson, NWT. Before taking on this role in 2018, he served as a principal and superintendent in several districts in BC and NWT. He has also contributed his time and expertise to many committees and associations in BC, including those serving the BC Principals' and Vice Principals' Association and the BC Ministry of Education.

On first joining the DDEC, Philippe started a broad public consultation to revisit its vision. After a year of working closely with staff, parents, local district authorities, local Indigenous governments, and the Dene Nation Grand Chief, he implemented a whole child vision of education. This vision is based on guidelines he created called Teaching from the Heart. It is grounded in the belief that to help students stay in school, they must be given opportunities to shine and experience new things. For Philippe, that meant introducing district-wide music and sports programs that had not existed before, for example, and implementing the Social and Emotional Learning curriculum.

He has been a member of CASSA from 2008 to 2011 and from 2018 to the present.

Rob Buttas ADGESBQ

Rob is the Director General for the New Frontiers School Board (NFSB), based in Chateauguay, Quebec, a position he has held since 2013. Rob has been the Assistant Director General and Director of Continuing Education for NFSB, and previously served as a school administrator with the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

He is the Past President of the ADGESBQ and the current Chair of the English Language Vocational Education Council. In 2012, he received the Distinguished Service Award from the Quebec Provincial Organization of Continuing Education Directors English.

Rob has been a leader in advancing vocational training curriculum and opportunities throughout Quebec, serving on various Quebec Ministry of Education committees. He leads the Entente Canada-Quebec committee involved in distributing Heritage Canada grants that have been awarded to English school boards in Quebec. He has also forged strong working relationships with the local First Nations community of Kahnawá:ke to improve educational offerings and community ties.

He has been a member of CASSA for the last 12 years.


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- Perspectives on Workplace Wellbeing: The View from the Ground

Featuring district leaders and subject matter experts

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mary Ann Baynton Claire Guy Jennifer Turner Christina MacKinnon Brian Andjelic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charlie Naylor Mali Bain Michael Bowden Izli Loveluck Pam Rannelli
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