

Leaders & Learners



CASSA-ACGCS
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

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BEING A MEMBER of CASSA affords opportunities for leaders in education to celebrate their milestones and achievements—together. Gathering for our meetings, conferences and special events is perhaps one of the best ways to be involved and to grow together, united in our collective purpose: to promote and support quality education for the success of each student.

Moving through the 2017–2018 academic year, we continue to focus on reimagining health and physical education. At our February meeting, we heard from **Ted Temertzoglou**, who spoke about the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization's Quality Physical Education Policy Document.

With the growing emphasis on Daily Physical Activity (DPA) for students and adults across the country, the Healthy Minds, Healthy Bodies: Evidence-Based Approach is based on the concept that quality physical education programs support



Anne O'Brien
President

physical literacy, civic engagement, academic achievement, inclusion and well-being.

Mr. Temertzoglou shared with us how reimagining our approach to deliver a positive health and physical education experience will increase chances for all students to thrive and

flourish in a rapidly changing world.

We were grateful for the experience to learn from applied activities that showed

- how we can connect physical activity, numeracy and literacy as a strategy to encourage DPA
- how to discover connections between physical education and mental well-being
- the positive effects of exercise and moderate to vigorous movement on the brain

In other news, it was a pleasure representing CASSA recently in Krakow, Poland, to speak about the Canadian education system.

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OUR PURPOSE

CASSA is the Canadian organization of school system leaders that promotes and supports quality education for the success of each student.

OUR MISSION

CASSA strengthens the capacity of school system leaders and influences the directions that impact education and student learning.

Message from the Executive Director: News on CASSA Meetings, AASA Conference and More

THIS HAS BEEN a busy few weeks for CASSA and the board of directors.

Towards a Better Way: I participated in a national gathering of individuals and associations interested in promoting healthy school communities. CASSA was invited because of our commitment to student mental health and well-being, and our emerging partnership with PHE Canada, which began at the 2017 conference.

It was a very productive two days and concluded with a commitment to further consolidate the group and its goals to ensure we work together for healthy school communities. My thanks to Ontario Physical Health Education Association, Ever Action Schools, PHE Canada and the Joint Consortium for School Health for their leadership and stewardship in facilitating the work that began in Ottawa back in November 2017.

CASSA Winter Planning Meetings: Twenty-one members of the CASSA board of directors recently met in Toronto for two days of planning. I am pleased to report that we had representatives from nine provinces

and one territory along with the francophone directors general association from boards outside Quebec. CASSA President Anne O'Brien reports on the meetings in her message this month.

The board agreed that CASSA must continue to lead the way around student mental health and well-being by hosting resources from across the country on its website and by continuing to promote mental health as a topic at our conferences. The board also affirmed that CASSA can and should continue the partnership, described above, with those like-minded individuals and associations committed to the promotion of healthy school communities with a focus on healthy, active living and play. CASSA looks forward to our focused next steps.



Ken Bain
Executive Director

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Message from the President: A New Approach to Physical Education

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I also attended the annual AASA conference in Nashville this February on behalf of CASSA.

Finally, I extend a gentle reminder to save the date for our own upcoming national conference in Ottawa from July 4 to 6. The theme this year is “Supporting Each Student.” Details on conference speakers, sessions,



sponsors and social events will soon appear on the CASSA website and in the April and June issues of the newsletter. On page 12 of this issue, you can find details on how to apply to present at this year’s conference. Consider bringing your team to this year’s event.

CASSA President Anne O'Brien speaking about the Canadian education system at an event in Krakow, Poland.

Message from the Executive Director: News on CASSA Meetings, AASA Conference and More

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AASA: Seven members of our board attended the AASA national conference (“Education in the Digital Age”). There were many speakers and breakout sessions that I know we all enjoyed! The current administration in Washington has not been particularly favourable to public education in the United States, which in many parts of Canada is known as publicly funded education. Our American colleagues are proud of the work they do every day on behalf of the millions of students they serve in public schools across the US.

Ottawa 2018: “Supporting Each Student”: I would be remiss if I failed to mention the upcoming 2018 CASSA conference in Ottawa from July 4 to 6.

We have introduced some interesting changes to the format this year. The conference will be organized into five sub-themes that demonstrate how boards/districts/divisions support each student (Equity and Inclusion,

Use of Technology, Play and Active Living, Managing Resources, Agile Learning Classrooms/Critical Thinking Skills).

Workshop time slots will be one hour in length, with either two 30-minute or one 60-minute presentations filling the slots.

We have also reached out to our francophone leaders to offer workshops in French. We are currently accepting workshop proposals until the middle of March.

Please use the following link if you want to submit a proposal: <https://airtable.com/shr2bYVMITBDjdTbl>.

Registration is not yet live but will be very soon. Continue to check the CASSA conference website for details: <http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca>.

Finally, here is the link to secure your room in the hotel room block as well as to take advantage of travel discounts: http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/CASSA-hotel_travel.html.

Faces in the Crowd: Profiles of Leaders

Jimmi Lou Irvine

Jimmi Lou is the Associate Superintendent—Teaching and Learning at Northern Lights Public Schools in northeastern Alberta. Her responsibilities include FNMI, Assessment, Inclusive Education, Literacy and Numeracy, Preschool and Out of School Care programs.

The executive team at Northern Lights is new, with a balance of outside experience and internal history. Jimmi Lou describes her personal style of leadership as servant leadership. As she has moved from teaching to school administration to senior administration, the number of individuals she serves has expanded. Whether senior administration can enact something that removes barriers so that teachers can better serve students or create connections in communities, she feels it is truly about being present and able to facilitate appropriate change and action for all the people they serve.

Jimmi Lou received her Bachelor of Education from the University of Alberta and her Master's degree in Leadership and Training from Royal Roads University. She started her first year in education teaching high school Social Studies and French as a Second Language. She transferred to a K–12 school as vice principal and eventually became principal. She later transferred to a small K–9 school as principal, where she had the opportunity to serve in a school where all three of her children attended.

She has a unique pre-education career history as a ski coach and a trick rider, which she credits for instilling in her a strong customer service mentality. As a ski coach, Jimmi Lou always wanted to make sure that athletes and their families were happy with the growth and development. Trick riding is a contract act, requiring that her show was developing and changing enough to be in demand; it became second nature for her to value the input and feedback from families and show committees. This has translated to Jimmi Lou's strong service orientation in education; she always welcomes ideas to improve and make sure that students are the beneficiaries of the actions taken by educators and system leaders.

Jimmi Lou also plays a significant role in her husband Doug's career as a chuckwagon racer. During her summer holidays, she becomes support staff for the Irvine chuckwagon operation. Jimmi Lou, Doug and their kids travel throughout Alberta, with a stop each in Saskatchewan and BC, going down the road with 24 thoroughbred horses, hired hands and family. Her contributions to the chuckwagon racing community were formally recognized in 2014 when she received the Ty Tournier Memorial Award, which is given to a woman who is involved and dedicated to the sport and displays nurturing and caring of people and horses.



Jimmi Lou and Doug Irvine with their three children.

System Leadership in School Mental Health: A Feature Interview with Dr. Kathy Short

*In this issue of Leaders & Learners, we are pleased to present the first of a two-part feature interview with **Dr. Kathy Short**. Dr. Short delivered the closing keynote address, “System Leadership in School Mental Health,” at the 2017 CASSA conference in Halifax. The second part of this feature will appear in the April 2018 issue.*

Dr. Short is a clinical child psychologist with research and practice interests that focus on school mental health promotion, knowledge mobilization and implementation science. She is the Director for School Mental Health ASSIST, a provincial implementation team designed to help Ontario school boards to support student mental health and well-being.

She was appointed to the Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care in Ontario, and is the chair for the Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Work Group for the Council. She also serves on the Student Well-Being Advisory Committee for the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Dr. Short is a member of the national School-Based Mental Health and Substance Abuse Consortium, and led the Knowledge Translation and Exchange Team for this association of Canadian researchers and school mental health practitioners on a national project for the Mental Health Commission of Canada. She is the Co-Chair of the School Mental Health International Leadership Exchange, also known as SMHILE.

In your keynote address, you asked delegates to imagine various paths to student well-being. One path included having educators practise and model self-care and balance, with the support of their school and system leadership team. What are examples of self-care and balance that educators can practise and model for their students?

Most strategies to support mental health at school rely on the involvement of adults in the building, explicitly or informally. Every day, school staff set the tone for welcoming and belonging, and teach and model skills that support social emotional development.

Whether it is the way that a school leadership team helps student council to safely introduce a mental health awareness campaign, how a teacher introduces curriculum material related to sensitive topics like eating disorders or suicide prevention, or the manner in



Dr. Kathy Short

which office staff respond when a struggling student arrives at the door, all of the daily work in support of well-being is mediated through caring interactions between staff and students. So it is important to help staff to feel calm, equipped, valued and supported when engaging with students in this sometimes challenging area of work. Building capacity and confidence among staff related

to their role in student mental health and well-being is important. But so too is attending to district and school conditions that can enhance staff wellness and can encourage personal resiliency among school employees.

There are many ways to demonstrate a commitment to wellness at the board and school level. For example, setting norms for meetings that encourage inclusion and voice, encouraging healthy expectations for email

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IMAGINE...

...that every child and youth in Canada would receive a warm greeting from staff and fellow students as they arrived at school each day.

...that students would begin the day ready to learn, after a check-in from teachers who take the emotional temperature in the classroom prior to starting lessons.

...that students would learn and practise social-emotional development skills each day at school, as part of the regular curriculum.

...that students went out of their way to watch for and help other students, through formal peer mentoring and individual acts of kindness.

...that parents and families would be engaged in student learning and school life, and that the school would be a hub for community activity.

AND IMAGINE...

...that all educators in Canada would understand their role in supporting student well-being, and would practise and model self-care and balance with support of their school and system leadership team.

...that all educators would feel comfortable and confident in talking about mental health and mental illness with students and colleagues.

...that all educators would be equipped with skills to notice when something is wrong, and to provide caring support in the classroom.

...that all educators would be familiar with the district and community pathways to care, and would work with partners to collaboratively support vulnerable students to, from and through services as needed.

AND THEN IMAGINE...

...if we could collaboratively achieve this vision, what an amazing place Canada would be for children and youth to grow and learn, with a strong sense of belonging, meaning, purpose and hope.*

- from "System Leadership in School Mental Health" PowerPoint presented on July 7, 2017, at the CASSA conference by Dr. Kathy Short

* "Belonging, meaning, purpose and hope" is wording from the First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework. http://www.thunderbirdpf.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/24-14-1273-FN-Mental-Wellness-Framework-ENO5_low.pdf

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communication, giving space for workplace wellness promotion activities and modeling self-care at all levels of the system. When school staff see system and school leaders practising self-care while at the same time maintaining a productive work schedule, it provides both permission and healthy examples to follow.

In a similar way, when students watch their teachers, principals and office staff taking time for healthy active living, engaging in practices that help with stress reduction, collaborating and co-teaching, and explicitly modeling effective coping techniques, they are learning what they can do to maintain their own well-being.

It can be very powerful for students to observe an educator showing resilience in the face of stressful life events, and equally valuable to watch as adults cope with smaller daily hassles, like having trouble finding something needed for a lesson or running late. Our students are watching and learning from us within the teaching and learning relationship. Supporting and encouraging staff wellness assists in moment-to-moment interactions and contributes to a whole school approach to mental health and well-being.

How might system leaders support educators as they work toward enhancing student well-being at school? Can you highlight examples of this kind of support at the leadership level happening in Canadian school districts right now?

System leadership related to mental health and well-being can be enacted in many ways. In Ontario, an implementation science approach has been adopted, whereby school districts “build the ramp” for effective

programming by setting organizational conditions and building staff capacity prior to investing in specific mental health promotion and prevention programming.

This approach is designed to avoid a fragmented patchwork of unsustainable initiatives. It requires that system leaders actively support the uptake of a set of organizational conditions that are associated with sustainable high-quality mental health and well-being programming at school. Such conditions include

- visible system leader commitment
- a district mental health and well-being leadership team
- a clear and focused vision
- communication and shared language
- ongoing assessment of need, resources and capacity
- standard processes
- systematic professional learning in mental health
- a mental health strategy and action plan
- broad collaboration
- continuous learning and improvement monitoring

For example, visible and sustained system leader commitment to student mental health and well-being is a key enabling condition for effective practices at the school level. When wellness is valued by system leaders, as demonstrated in both words and actions, it is more likely to be valued and supported by school leaders and, in turn, classroom staff. When system leaders routinely point out the link between student well-being and academic/post-secondary achievement, and encourage the use of techniques that reduce stress and enhance readiness to learn alongside rigorous instruction, educators feel that their efforts in this regard are appreciated.

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As a second example, having a district mental health and addictions strategy that aligns with the wider board improvement plan is another essential condition for ensuring a systematic and intentional approach to student well-being. In Ontario, mental health leaders and superintendents with responsibility for mental health work with their leadership team to create a three-year strategy and one-year action plan to guide their work. When system leaders help to ensure that this is integrated with other board efforts to enhance safe and healthy school environments, equity, achievement and staff wellness, the result is coherence and alignment.

As a third example, when system leaders encourage and support the use of standard processes and protocols across the district, this provides clarity across schools and helps to avoid fragmentation and uneven quality. For example, a key deliverable within Ontario school districts is to ensure a clearly articulated, up-to-date suicide prevention, intervention and postvention protocol. Having a clear set of guidelines for supporting students who are experiencing a mental health crisis is essential. System leaders need to review these protocols to understand what is expected of school leaders and school staff, and also to be prepared to enact their role in supporting school leaders in this difficult area of work and in responding in circumstances of postvention when public communication may be required.

Interestingly, we have learned that those who cultivate these conditions at a district level and continue to attend to the integrity of foundational structures and processes over time are well positioned to also reinforce these practices at the school level. For example, all school districts in Ontario now have a mental health

leadership team responsible for developing and implementing an aligned and integrated system-wide strategy in this area. Many districts are now deepening this approach to create school-level parallel structures and processes that are aligned with the system-level work. This leadership team cascade, from province to district to school, brings a coherence and sense of shared momentum across Ontario. System leaders are an integral part of condition setting and maintenance for the district and school.

Your keynote address cautioned delegates “mental health programming is not neutral.” What does that warning mean, within the context of public school systems in Canada?

There is currently heightened interest in mental health and well-being in Canada, and with this has come a wide range of associated programming. While typically well-intentioned, there is uneven quality among these offerings. Travelling alongside excellent evidence-based social emotional programming, we find many products and services that are benign, untested and even potentially harmful.

It is worth noting that many people who are offering services in this space are not trained mental health professionals and may lack the knowledge to develop and design resources that are safe and supportive for all students. For example, there are many efforts designed to raise student awareness about mental illness, which is generally good, but attention to how this is done to ensure that vulnerable students are not put at greater risk is essential. School Mental Health ASSIST has created a suite of Decision Support Tools to help

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districts and schools select mental health awareness initiatives, school-based promotion and prevention programming, and educator mental health literacy.

What risks do system leaders need to be aware of when it comes to mental health practices in schools? Are there practices that should be avoided?

There are indeed risks to be aware of with respect to mental health practices in schools, and there are certainly practices to be avoided.

Risks for Students Who May Be Vulnerable

Whenever considering a program, service or event designed for all students (such as an assembly), it is important to consider how it will be received by students who are struggling with a mental health problem. Often the messages and content will be helpful for most students. If there is a possibility that it could be triggering for a student who is depressed, anxious or experiencing suicidal ideation, however, then it should be avoided.

This is why mental health professionals express caution about large assemblies that cover difficult topics like mental illness and suicide. It is not that they disagree with the intent of raising awareness and reducing stigma through large-scale events but rather that there can be unintended consequences for staff and students who may be more vulnerable.

Risks for Groups That May Be More Vulnerable

There are specific populations that may experience mental health problems at a higher rate or in a different manner because of their social and historical circum-

stances. For example, students who identify as LGBTQ2S; who are from Indigenous or immigrant, refugee, ethnocultural or racialized communities; or who have certain disabilities may be more vulnerable to developing a mental health problem, depending on their personal risk and protective factors.

Those designing mental health and well-being programming in the board need to be attentive to the unique experiences of students to ensure that offerings are sensitive to their needs. This is best achieved by co-creating resources with community representatives that will resonate and be seen as supportive.

Also note that school communities that have experienced a death by suicide may be more vulnerable generally. It is important to consult with a school mental health professional prior to selecting mental health programming during this sensitive time of postvention.

Risks for Students Who May Be Less Vulnerable

There is increasing interest in engaging students in mental health promotion initiatives, which can be a very positive way to build youth leadership and voice. However, without any close supervision, student leaders can stray into areas that are beyond their scope and may find themselves carrying bigger burdens than they should. Meaningful youth engagement includes students in decision-making and initiatives but also ensures that adult allies monitor closely to keep everyone safe and supported (for example, debriefing before, during and after mental health initiatives). The area of peer helpers and peer “gatekeepers” needs to be approached with considerable caution as the evidence in this area is still very new.

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Risks for Staff

Educators have an important role to play in supporting mental health and well-being at school. They can create mentally healthy classroom environments that are welcoming, inclusive and that support social emotional skill development for all. They are often the eyes, ears, and hearts that first notice and help a student who may be struggling with a mental health problem.

Of course school leaders and staff need to know and understand their professional boundaries, and must leave the diagnosis and treatment of a mental health problem to regulated health professionals. However, it is appropriate for educators to observe student emotions and behaviours, record and share their observations with appropriate school staff and parents/guardians, and actively listen to students when they express concerns, directing them to other sources of help if needed. Being a caring and supportive adult in a child's life can make all the difference for a student who is struggling.

Remember that staff are not invulnerable to mental health problems and that at any given time several members of the team are likely to be managing or caring for someone with a related difficulty. School

leaders need to be thoughtful about introducing mental health programming and may need to be flexible with expectations. For example, avoid signing up staff members for suicide gatekeeper training based on their role. Rather, describe the opportunity fully and allow choice for participation in the training session. Support staff as they engage with this difficult topic.

System Risks

As noted above, though often well-packaged and marketed, not all mental health promotion and prevention programming is effective. Some offerings have the potential to be harmful. Resources that are untested, benign or too costly/complicated to implement to scale with sustainability also carry risks at a system level in that investments in these areas may prevent the uptake of higher-yield programming.

Using evidence-based programming that is also implementation-sensitive (for example, programming that fits within the fabric of school life, is low cost to introduce and sustain, and includes ongoing coaching and mentoring) allows the school district to optimize its investments in this area.

SOME SPECIFIC PRACTICES TO AVOID

- Large student assemblies with potentially triggering content
- Programming that is based on scare tactics
- Messaging that runs the risk of glamourizing or romanticizing mental illness or addictions
- One-off speakers or events (particularly where there is no student and teacher preparation or follow-up)
- One-off professional development for educators focused on mental illnesses rather than on their role in wellness promotion and student support
- Harmful, unproven or costly mental health promotion/prevention programming
- Lengthy, non-structured, non-evidence-based counselling interventions



Instantly access your School Board's specific emergency response procedures and utilize key emergency response tools

Emergency Response Plan



Mobile Access

All of your personnel will have instant access to your emergency response procedures, as well as maps and safety-related how-to documents, right from their mobile devices.

Role-based Checklists

Every staff member will have actionable sets of instructions that can be individualized based on each staff member's role within the organization. As a staff member completes the steps in their checklist, the Safety Team is informed of their progress.

Emergency Communication

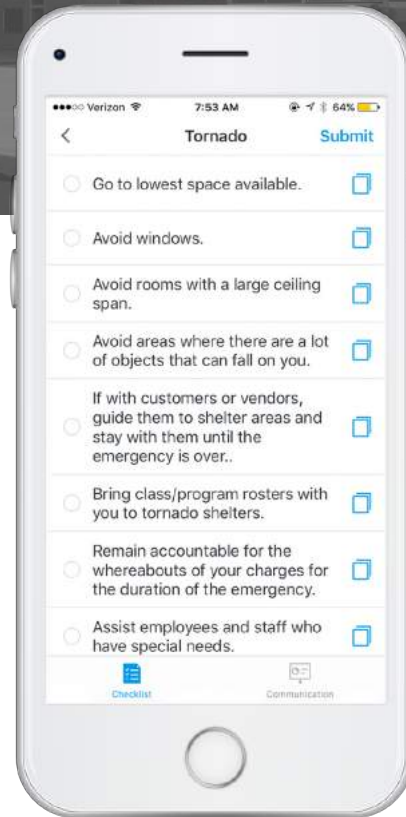
During crisis situations, your Safety Team can utilize the messaging tool to send out information through message groups to teachers and staff, students, and parents.

"CASSA supports the health and wellness of students and staff. Safe and accepting schools promote the goal of student and staff health and well-being."

Ken Bain Executive Director
Canadian Association of School System Administrators



Download the CrisisGo app for free
Learn more at www.crisisgo.com/education



CrisisGo's App turns your mobile devices into mobile safety assistants

Benefits

- Safety Teams can set specific emergency instructions for every staff member through the checklist and observe their progress during a crisis.
- Through our messaging tool schools can keep their staff, their students, and the community continually informed.
- You can upload an endless variety of easily accessible maps and how-to documents that will be useful during a crisis.
- The checklist feature allows staff to follow instructions based on their role in the organization and report progress in reaching those objectives
- Staff will have instant access to emergency response procedures that have been developed for your organization

CASSA Conference 2018: Call for Presentations

ARE YOU READY to present strategies and success stories from your school division to a national audience of peers? Now is the time to put forward your application to lead a session at the CASSA conference in Ottawa this July 4 to 6.

The 2018 conference theme is “Supporting Each Student.” Presentations should relate to at least one of the following five conference strands:

- Agile Learning Classrooms/Critical Thinking Skills
- Equity and Inclusion
- Managing Resources
- Play and Active Living
- Use of Technology

CASSA conferences include individual presenters as well as team-led sessions. There are 30- and 60-minute slots available, and sessions may be presented in either official language.

Online applications are now open on the CASSA website. Presentation abstracts and presenter biographies are a mandatory part of each application.

For more information, or to submit your proposal to present, click on the “Annual Conference” tab on the CASSA website and then select “Call for Presentations” from the menu. We hope to see you and your team in Ottawa!



One of the breakout sessions from the 2015 CASSA conference in Montreal.

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