



November 2005  
Volume 1, Issue 7

# LEADERS & LEARNERS

THE VOICE OF THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF  
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS / L'ASSOCIATION  
CANADIENNE DES ADMINISTRATEURS ET DES  
ADMINISTRATRICES SCOLAIRES

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- Upcoming CASA Events**
- Join us at the 2006 Summer Leadership Academy in Toronto, or come up to Whitehorse in 2007. Exact dates TBA.
  - The next CASA Annual Conference is in Winnipeg from October 13-15, 2006.
  - Details on other future CASA events will be posted at [www.casa-acas.ca](http://www.casa-acas.ca) and listed in upcoming newsletters.

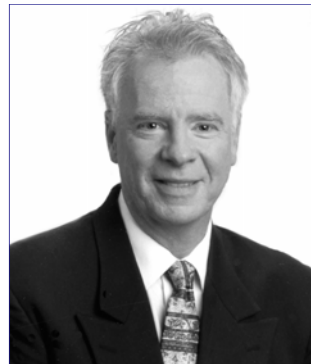
## Message From The President: Successes In Special Needs Education

**T**his month, our newsletter focuses on special needs education. I'd like to share some of the experiences we've had at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

The Lester B. Pearson School Board is one of the largest English school boards in Quebec, serving a student population of approximately 30,000 on the western part of the island of Montreal and extending westward to the Ontario border.

Since its creation from six founding school boards in 1998, we've been consistently committed to providing all students with quality educational service to encourage them to strive towards and to reach their full potential.

The Board follows its *Special Needs Policy* that establishes a commitment to inclusion and to the success of all. This policy is consis-



Bob Mills  
CASA president

tent with the parameters of the Quebec Education Plan and the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport (MELS) *Special Education Policy* and *Plan of Action: Adapting Our Schools to the Needs of All Students*. It promotes respect for diversity and emphasizes shared responsibility in helping students reach their goals.

Normally, all special needs students are integrated into a regular classroom structure throughout their elementary and secondary years, and each is accorded additional resources as

indicated by his or her Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). These resources are many and varied, with an initial focus on modification or adaptation of the educational service provided. Specialized personnel are also available to support the student, teacher and family. This is accomplished within the funding framework provided by MELS.

A brief description of our approach will be quite similar superficially to arrangements that are in place across the country. Thus, I have chosen to describe one facet of our approach in somewhat greater detail.

The Family and School Support and Treatment Team (FSSTT) was initiated 10 years ago as a pilot project designed to provide support to school staff, therapeutic intervention to families and students, and professional development  
*(Continued on page 2)*

## Message From The Executive Director: Raising Learning To New Plateaus

**T**hink how significant it would be if all students learned everything presented to them by their teachers. Imagine if half of them were creative learners, able to go beyond the factual to conceptualize. Then think of the unlimited possibilities to improve knowledge delivery by using new and developing technology!

More than 100 educators came together to consider

these possibilities at the CASA Annual Conference in Quebec City this October. They also learned how some Canadian and American school districts are extending the ability of students.

**Angus King**, former governor of Maine, addressed the group. He explained why his government, based on the advice of visionary **Seymour Papert**, agreed to fund a one-to-one computer project for students in grades 7 and 8.



Frank Kelly  
CASA executive director

Such innovation is what moves learning to new plateaus. It challenges teachers and communities, and capitalizes on the untapped abilities of our students.

CASA is pleased to offer these networking opportunities for educators across Canada. Future sessions will focus on special education and Aboriginal education. We hope you'll join these discussions.

## Lester B. Pearson SB's Commitment To Integration

*(Continued from page 1)*  
to those working with students having social, emotional or behavioural difficulties. This has now grown to include 20 schools.

Each professional involved in the life of a referred student is a member of the Treatment Team and part of the intervention plan that is developed and carried out. The multi-disciplinary team consists of a full-time coordinator and part-time services of psychiatrists, psychologists and family therapists. Each school has a behaviour resource person.

Additional natural extensions of the team are the school psychologists, student services personnel, resource and classroom teachers, social workers, nurses and other external professionals.

Actual interventions can take various forms: on-site proactive interventions by the behaviour resource person; consultation with members of the multi-disciplinary team; family and/or student psychiatric assessment where required. In addition, research is being conducted collaboratively with McGill University and the Montreal Children's Hospital.

At Lester B. Pearson, there is a deeply-ingrained, professional commitment to integration. It is perhaps summed up most effectively by **Diane McLean-Heywood**, the leader in the implementation of this philosophy, in remarks she delivered on her retirement in June 2005:

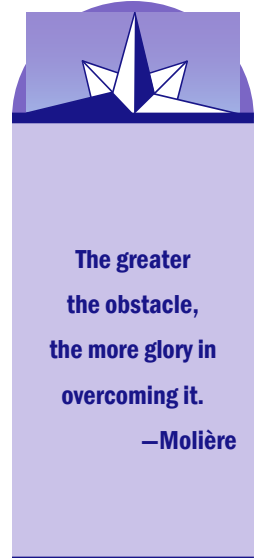
*"Some of us have been able to focus our work on those who are less able and more*

*vulnerable than most. We can be proud to have worked for a Board that has made it possible for all its population to be treated equally. That we have tried to correct the imbalance which exists when individuals do not possess all the skills that society requires. As someone once said, 'Nothing is more unequal than the equal treatment of individuals.'*

*Our Board has allowed needy children to come into contact with the very best teachers and students in the system. We can all be proud of that.*

*Just as one measure of the success of a society is how it treats its weaker members, so too is it a measure of the success of our Board that even with its impressive standing in academic achievement and high graduation rates, it has been able to also focus its attention on the more vulnerable in our community."*

I look forward to hearing about special needs education initiatives in your area.



## Rob's Story: One Family's Experience With Autism

**Rob** is 14 years old and in grade 9. Ten years ago, he was diagnosed as autistic. Here his mother **Janet** shares his story with *Leaders & Learners*. Janet is the communications officer with Northern Lights School Division, and a former journalist and newspaper editor. She and her husband **Rick** also have an older daughter, **Michaela**.

### *Tell us about your son Rob.*

He's growing taller daily, it seems. His light brown hair is curly, which makes him appear even taller. He is rail thin, despite the fact he eats enough to keep two or three people full. He spends his spare time playing on the computer, listening to his MP3 player and reading. He is a huge fan of music, but has never been one to watch much television. He does watch the weather, as that has been a long-time interest of his. Rob is also gluten intolerant, and does not eat products that contain wheat, oats, barley or triticale.

### *What was Rob like as a baby and as a young boy?*

Rob was a content little man. We have pictures of a bright, engaged one-year-old holding court at his grandparents' house. He made everyone smile. At 18 months he had some words—baby names for his mom, dad and sister.

By the time he was four, it was a little different. He didn't talk, he tended to become very focused on unusual things (like the baseboards in the living room as seen when reflected in a mirror) and people were starting to comment that he really preferred to be alone, rather than with other people. His uncle commented that sending this child out of his room was more of a punishment than sending him to his room.

*When did you realize that life with Rob was going to involve some unexpected challenges? Was there a moment when you also realized that Rob came with some unexpected rewards?* Rick always knew Rob would be fine. I struggled. I guess the first time I realized there would be unexpected challenges was when I pulled him out from in front of a bus on Jasper Avenue in Edmonton—he didn't seem to understand he could be killed by the bus, and he was four.

Unexpected rewards? He's taught me tons. He continues to be a role model for me as he struggles to learn things that come naturally to other children. I have learned to see more, both in my environment and people. I have learned that "normal" is just a word, and its definition really depends on its surroundings. I have learned that it really does take a village to raise a child, and this is not a bad thing.

Finally, I have had the unexpected joy of truly understanding how complicated a seemingly simple thing like speech is. Too often, I think we accept things as a whole—you know, like a



rose is a rose. In fact, a rose is a multitude of petals, a stem, some thorns...details can be fascinating, and observing these details can make for a better understanding of the whole. Rob has taught me to look at the details and not just the big picture, and I think that has made me a better human being some of the time.

### *What were some of your first experiences as Rob's parents like when he entered the school system?*

We were blessed with an extremely under-standing assistant superintendent in charge of special education and an innovative superintendent of schools. I was also lucky as I knew many of the people in the school division.

In the beginning it was horrendously hard, but still in many ways easy. We just brought him to school and left him in the aide's capable care. It was very scary—he was only four—but they seemed to know more about what to do to help him than I did. I felt like I didn't know anything; autism did not have the same exposure 10 years ago as it has today. I remember crying tears of frustration after IPP [Individual Program Plan] meetings, because people were making decisions for our son and I didn't feel I could offer meaningful input. I know in my heart they were

*(Continued on page 4)*



**With courage you  
will dare to take  
risks, have the  
strength to be  
compassionate and  
the wisdom to be  
humble.**

**—Keshavan Nair**

## Rob's Story: Working With A Mindset Of "No Limitations"

doing what was best for my child, but in the beginning, special education was a confusing, jargon-filled place. I was afraid to speak out because of my lack of knowledge. As I learned more about autism and special education, I felt more confident and comfortable giving input, and I found my input was often valued.

***There are strong opinions on the issue of children with special needs in the classroom. What are your feelings on these debates? Are we even framing the issue with the right questions?***

Here's my strong opinion—we owe each child nothing. But as these children are our future, it does benefit us to ensure that we teach each child in a manner in which they can learn and best demonstrate their interpretation of what they have learned. That being said, it is impossible to do in a classroom. One student needs absolute quiet, while the one next to him needs music blaring. The good news is that that's the real world, too. We have to put up with that kind of thing at work, on the bus, in the mall.

We had a child who learned quickly that screaming would have him removed from the classroom. I supported removing him from the classroom initially, as I worried about the other students, but you can't teach a student who isn't there. Once we began addressing this awful behaviour with the appropriate measures—stop rewarding him by removing him from the classroom—it ended. Once he realized there were other ways to communicate whatever it was his screaming was trying to say, he stopped screaming. He has never been removed from a classroom since—in fact, he is one of the better behaved students in the class.

Are we framing the issue with the right questions? No. The real question, to me, is who decides that these kids can't learn? Have they looked at all the factors involved? If it's a behaviour issue, is it masking the fact the child can't read? Do we really want a society of all round pegs, or do we want a diverse society? If we claim to want diversity, then why do we persist in trying to pound square pegs into round holes?

***Have any of Rob's achievements surprised his family, teachers, or school and division staff?***

Rob continues to learn and grow. When you operate from the premise of "no limitations," it is hard to say that any of his achievements have come as a surprise to either family or staff. However, I know I found sudden tears in my eyes during a concert last year. Something happened, and Rob and the other bell ringers had to stop playing, then pick up the selection in the middle of the song unexpectedly. In the past,



this might have meant the end of the bell-ringing session for Rob—he has always been one who prefers to know what is happening more than a moment before it happens. The fact that he just leaped back into the song, without missing a beat or getting upset, showed tremendous growth, and reminded me again of how far he had come.

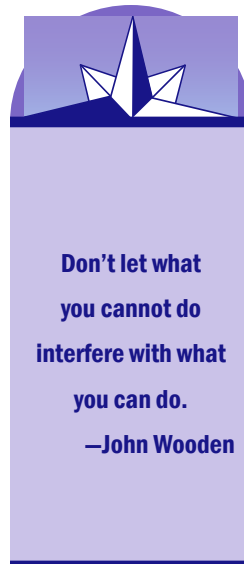
It is tempting, with special needs kids, to be constantly vigilant and try to protect them from the dangers of everyday life. Occasionally, I need to be reminded that this is not

necessary, that Rob is of an age where he can and should be mowing the lawn, for example. The schools have been good about providing chances for him to achieve things I may not have thought about. Is anyone surprised at the achievement? I don't think so—they are proud of this young man for continuing to try new things and pleased at his success.

Rob set us up for this mindset at an early age. He illustrated a knowledge of math that appeared to be beyond what we thought he could understand in the early elementary grades, writing number progressions (1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 16, 19...) on the blackboard very quickly as a relaxation exercise during speech exercises focused on helping him learn single, discrete sounds one morning. It showed us early that the uneven development that is a hallmark of autism requires a "no limitations" mindset—while he was delayed in communication skills, he was advanced in math skills.

***What do you think is at the root of Rob's successes as a student and as a member of his community?***

I think that Rob's innate intelligence, persistence and doggone stubbornness probably stand him in excellent stead. Rob has done best when people have not tried to limit his learning with their own expectations of him. From day one, we said he'd be in the 50 percent of autistics who did talk. We did not allow the label "autistic" to limit his success. That said, he also sees the most success with people who do recognize that his was an uneven development,  
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**Don't let what  
you cannot do  
interfere with what  
you can do.**

**—John Wooden**

## 2005 EXL Awards Presented At Quebec City Conference



Left to right: **Linda Lucas** (Xerox), **Barry Stangeland** (CASS), **Diane McLean-Heywood** (AESQ), **Edie Wilde** (MASS), **Wayne McNally** (OPSOA), **Chris Gonnet** (Yukon) and **Randy Brydges** (Xerox). Not pictured: **Don Drone** (OCSOA).

**T**he 2005 EXL awards were presented in October at the CASA Annual Conference in Quebec City. Since 2002, CASA has teamed up with Xerox Canada to recognize the outstanding leadership of superintendents across Canada.

This year's national winner is **Edie Wilde**, who represents the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS). Wilde has been the assistant superintendent (special education) with the Seven Oaks School Division in Winnipeg since 1998. As president of MASS in 2003-2004, she advanced the participation of women in MASS and in division administration.

"There was a time when I was the only woman on the MASS executive," she says. As well as working toward gender parity, Wilde has personally mentored aspiring superintendents.

She also made the education of Aboriginal children a priority, resulting in a provincial conference that sparked a renewed dialogue among all educational institutions and stakeholders. She leads a school system that is the model for inclusive special education in Manitoba and Canada. Her innovative school community partnership Village Centre, which helps the community access an array of health and family services, is supported by the United Way.

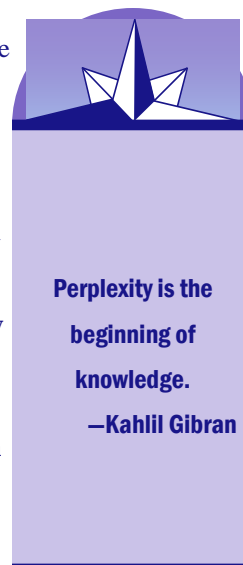
"This award...has allowed me to highlight issues and concerns that all superintendents face such as Aboriginal education, inclusion, early literacy, women in leadership and to champion public education," Wilde says. "It has allowed me to highlight the work of my colleagues within the division, within MASS and at CASA. It has all been rather amazing!" The EXL provincial award recipients were: Edie Wilde,

MASS; **Wayne McNally**, Ontario Public Supervisory Officials' Association; **Don Drone**, Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officials' Association; **Diane McLean-Heywood**, Association of Administrators of English Schools of Quebec; **Barry Stangeland**, College of Alberta School Superintendents; and **Chris Gonnet**, Yukon Department of Education. Congratulations to each of the winners.

"I am most pleased with my role in our district's 'School Improvement Plans (AIS),' which has caused everyone in our system to work toward student improvement," notes Stangeland. He adds he's pleased that as CASS president, he could help the organization move forward to become a professional organization, "which will enhance our role in public education within the province of Alberta."

Gonnet says he's honoured to be recognized with his colleagues across the country for the leadership and work they do. "It's also a recognition of the fine people that I work with within the Yukon Department of Education, as I am only one individual on a small team of very dedicated and talented educational leaders."

Xerox Canada representatives **Randy Brydges** and **Linda Lucas** were on hand to present the awards once again this year. Previous national award recipients were **John Darroch** (2002), **Roy Seidler** (2003) and **Ed Wittchen** (2004).



**Perplexity is the  
beginning of  
knowledge.**

**—Kahlil Gibran**

## Your 2005-06 CASA Executive Officers & Regional Directors

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## Our Mission:

CASA will advance quality public education and excellence in system level leadership through advocacy and national collaboration.



## Our Beliefs:

CASA believes that:

- Cultural diversity is a unique strength that enriches our nation.
- Communication and collaboration with parents and other partners is integral to successful student learning.
- Quality public education provides the best opportunity for a nation to enhance the lives of all its citizens.
- Effective system, provincial and national level leadership enables and supports excellence in teaching and learning.
- A comprehensive education, equitable and accessible to all, is the key to meeting the diverse needs and securing a successful future for our youth.

Specific strategies to advance the mission:

- Establish position papers on specific topics as they relate to the beliefs and interests of the association.
- Recruit new people.
- Establish a national representation.
- Establish a three-tier public relations and publications strategy.
- Establish a funding team to create an operating budget.

## Rob's Story: Thinking In Pictures

*(Continued from page 4)*

built on a shaky foundation. Sometimes, we have to build the foundation before we can add new learning on top.

I don't think this is unusual. I think all kids have areas where they didn't quite get it the first time. Rob may be more extreme than other kids, but I think the lesson he teaches is that we have to stop concentrating on the facts of the curriculum and start concentrating on how to teach kids how to discover facts as they require them. I don't remember Archimedes' principle, even

though I studied it. If I ever required it, however, I do know how to look it up and remind myself of its concepts. It seems ridiculous to me that we mark based on information retained rather than knowledge of how to learn—information is changing daily.

***If you could offer advice to parents who are where you were when Rob started school, what would you emphasize?***

Teach the child to read, particularly if the child is non-verbal. It will be essential for them to have these skills to communicate. Maybe you don't

teach them to read at the age of four when they are only on task for five seconds, but you teach the pre-reading skills. Expose them to a ton of experiences. Experiential learning is often visual and **Temple Grandin** says that autism is a "think in pictures" disability.

If what the consultants are saying doesn't sound like your child, speak out! Parents should not allow well-meaning "others" to impose things that they don't agree with on their children, including labels and expectations.

Make sure the child has chores. Rob is a good, basic cook, and does a variety of household chores. Why? Because he knows that one day he will live alone and have to do this in his own house. Mom and Dad will not be coming to do it for him every night. Having him do chores reinforces in him that we know he will be independent one day, and teaches him valuable skills at the same time. Few disabilities preclude a child from doing all chores. The satisfaction a child receives from doing a job well is worth the effort involved in getting them to start doing that particular job.