

Winter 2017-2018 Leaders & Learners

The official magazine of the Canadian
Association of School System Administrators

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Oakville, Ontario L6H 5M1
Tel: 905-845-2345
Fax: 905-845-2044
www.cassa-acgcs.ca

PUBLISHED BY:

Matrix Group Publishing Inc.

Return all undeliverable
addresses to:
309 Youville Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba R2H 2S9
Toll-Free: (866) 999-1299
Toll-Free Fax: (866) 244-2544
www.matrixgroupinc.net
Canada Post Mail Publications Agreement Number:
40609661

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The LeadON20 Forum will support school leaders through conversation and collaboration to develop innovative ideas that will create equitable, future-focused learning communities.

It is an honour to serve as your President again this year during this dynamic era in education, where we have much to celebrate within our school systems from our broad range of programs and services to meeting the unique needs of each and every student.

This fall, our President-Elect Reg Klassen and I had the privilege of joining fellow school system administrators in walking in the footsteps of our service men and women on the beaches of Normandy and on the hallowed ground at Vimy Ridge with EF Canada Tours. It was extraordinary to reflect on Canada's role in the First and Second World War and discuss how a strong grasp of our past can help us better understand our present and future.

Beyond the sobering beauty and grandeur of commemorative monuments, the thrill of visiting iconic sites like the Louvre and Eiffel Tower, and the opportunity to practice our French, was the ability to live and truly understand the impact of experiential education for all learners. The educational tour experience was a platform for us to bring cross-curricular learning to life and to envision the many ways our educators could help students achieve a better understanding of the world beyond their classroom and school community, themselves and themselves in the world.

Central to the theme of this issue, "Supporting Each Student," is our need to highlight their safety and well-being through daily activities in and outside of the classroom. For system leaders who joined us in Halifax, Nova Scotia, for the 2017 Annual Conference in July on "Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities, Healthy Future,"—you had an opportunity to hear from our presenters on maintaining a culture of well-being in our schools and workplaces. The sessions offered valuable learning which can be applied in many ways through daily physical activity, mental health training and curriculum, suicide prevention and more.

Further to this theme, I also had the privilege of attending the recent conference hosted by the Canadian Education Association. It was another eye-opening event focused on the safety and well-being of students and educators. Thanks to our keynote presentations on Trust: Truth and Reconciliation; Making Connections Between Youths' Social Media and Well-being; and Pursuing Joy in a Complex World, I was inspired by stories and breakout sessions that provided tools which promote the safety and well-being of students.

Another extension of mental health and well-being that we are accountable for as school leaders is the practice of our emergency preparedness protocols. This fall, at the Canadian Association of Communicators in Education (CACE) conference, it was clear that we do not have to look far to see living examples of how schools and systems across the country have been impacted directly or indirectly over the past few months and years. Whether it is hurricane relief, evacuation plans or heightened levels of security due to an isolated emergency, we have made great progress in guiding our school communities to prepare for various situations.

I encourage all leaders to take your safety and emergency preparedness practice another step forward and involve parents and guardians in these exercises. While students are practicing lockdown, hold and secure, fire and other safety drills regularly, caregivers must have equal opportunities to become educated in the language, terminology and means of communication used during an unexpected or critical event. By taking the time to bring familiarity of our protocols to parents and guardians, they too will be better prepared to recognize various states of emergency and feel a greater sense of security and confidence in our systems.

As we prepare for the turning of a new year, may you continue to celebrate the success of each student. I look forward to our ongoing dialogue as colleagues in educational leadership.



Anne O'Brien
CASSA/ACGCS President

The educational tour experience was a platform for us to bring cross-curricular learning to life and to envision the many ways our educators could help students achieve a better understanding of the world beyond their classroom and school community, themselves and themselves in the world.



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I recently attended two very significant and related conferences. Thanks to the Lawson Foundation, I attended the International Play Association (IPA) Triennial Conference in Calgary, Alberta, and thanks to CASSA and the McConnell Foundation, I attended the Towards a Better Way stakeholder meeting and the PHE Canada Healthy School Communities National Forum in Ottawa, Ontario.

At the IPA Conference, we heard from Psychologist Dr. Peter Gray who has documented the rise in anxiety disorders amongst children over the last 50 years, directly corresponding to the decrease in children's free time to play (Dr. Peter Gray, Freedom to Learn). Play was defined as activity that is freely chosen, self-directed and intrinsically motivated.

The theme for each of the conferences was clear...children's physical, emotional, spiritual and mental health and well-being is enhanced through opportunities for play and physical activity. Our role as educators is to create the best conditions for that to take place!

In Ottawa, we also heard from Dr. Michael Ungar who leads the Resilience Research Centre at Dalhousie University. He defined resilience as "the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to the psychological, social, cultural and physical resources that sustain their well-being."

Excerpted from his book, *"I Still Love You"* are nine things that all young people need to become resilient:

1. Structure;
2. Consequences;
3. Parent-child relationships;
4. Lots and lots of strong relationships;
5. A powerful identity;
6. A sense of control;
7. A sense of belonging/culture/spirituality/ life purpose;
8. Rights and responsibilities; and
9. Safety and support.

Do we see a responsibility to provide these in our roles as parents/guardians and educators? The theme for this year's magazines and our annual conference is "Supporting Each Student." A previous phrase that CASSA had endorsed was "supporting **all** students" but the board of directors changed it to "**each** student" very



Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

intentionally. The hope is that educators provide support that is individualized to each student's needs, interests and aspirations.

The articles in this edition of *Leaders & Learners* offer a glimpse into current practices across the country that exemplify support to students with a range of needs and interests. I thank the authors for their daily support to the youth of our nation and for making time to share their inspirational stories with all of us!

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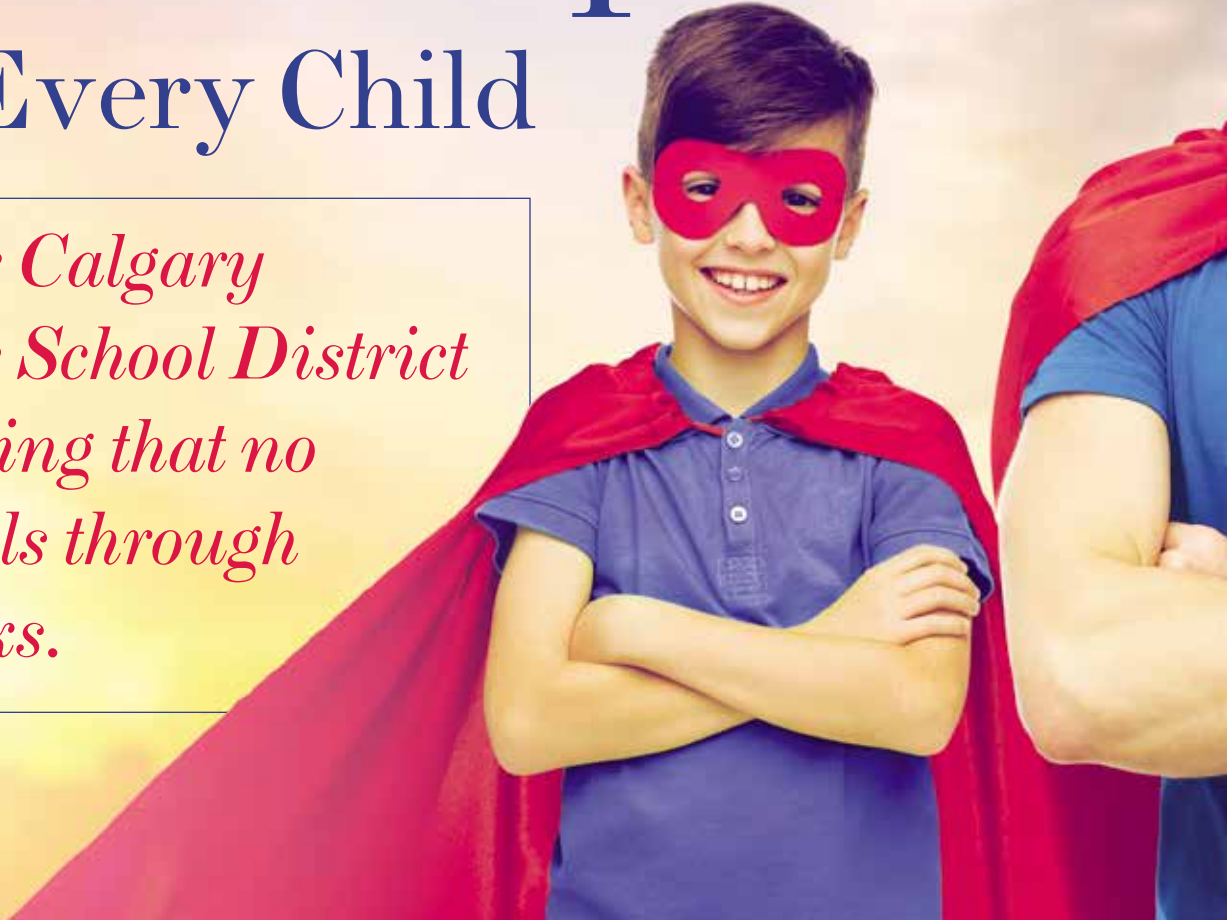
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A “Champion” For Every Child

*How the Calgary
Catholic School District
is ensuring that no
child falls through
the cracks.*



“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.” – Helen Keller

By Gary Strother, Calgary Catholic School District

Several years ago, our district was doing research on continuous improvement and how to change practice at our senior high school level. Something from *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (NASSP, 2004) stuck out in my mind as an opportunity that any teacher or staff member in a school could, and should, do for all of our students. As one of its cornerstone strategies to improve student performance, it spoke to “connections with students” and the need to “increase the quantity and improve

the quality of interactions between students, teachers and other school personnel...” (pg.3).

Although some students are able to get through high school without any real personal connections, the reality is that all students need a supportive environment, some more than others. One of the recommendations was that every high school student would get a “personal adult advocate” to help navigate their school life and personalize their educational experience. This made too much sense.

Long-time educator Rita Pierson stated: “Every child deserves a champion: an adult who will never give up on them, who

understands the power of connection and insists they become the best they can possibly be” (Pierson, TED Talks Education, 2013). Dr. Jody Carrington has done some work with our district and she speaks to the notion that a child who is positively invested in a relationship will be more likely to take cues from and accept limitations imposed by an adult when that child loses control. Harvard University’s Center on the Developing Child looked at resilience and found that no matter the source of hardship, the single most common factor for children who end up doing well is having the support of at least one stable and committed



Students from St. Bernadette show the words that their teacher has given them representing their personal traits.



Patrick Lantz is principal at St. Rupert School where they use the traits of superheroes as virtues in their champion initiative.



To view a short video on the Champion Initiative go to:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_kQqIBIYCQ

relationship with a parent, caregiver or other adult (Center on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2015).

The research is clear, children need a caring, trusted adult in their lives and although many of our students get that from home, others do not. While some staff felt that being a “champion” was a natural function of being a teacher or working in a school environment, we understood that there were still students falling through the cracks, so something more formal was necessary to catch those outliers.

The Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) is an urban school board in Calgary, Alberta, that has coterminous boundaries with some rural towns and cities just outside the Calgary boundaries. Serving over 55,000 students in 112 schools, it is the largest Catholic school jurisdiction in

the province and the third largest district overall. Our academic results are some of the best in Alberta but we are always looking to improve.

The champion initiative came to be after we began seeing survey results in our schools showing that up to 20 per cent of some school populations did not feel that they had a trusted adult that they could go to if they had a concern or even something wonderful to share. This was a troubling statistic. Our largest school is almost 2,000 students, and if this was true, then around 400 children in that school alone wouldn’t feel that they had someone to talk to in a time of need or celebration.

On top of this, our number of requests for support for student needs is increasing dramatically. The complexities of our students are on the rise and resources can

be scarce at times. Student wellness is one of our four Board priorities due to these complexities and championing students became one strategy to help move us forward. Wouldn’t it make sense to have someone know each child on a deeper level and provide some support in a timely matter, even if it is just a caring shoulder to lean on? “The truth is, rarely can a response make something better—what makes something better is connection,” (Dr. Brené Brown).

The term champion could easily mean mentor, advocate, difference maker, coach; one of many words that describes a positive and stable caring relationship between a student and any adult in the school. The term itself doesn’t really matter; what matters is that every child has a one-on-one relationship with an adult in the school, and that the child knows who their champion is and the adult knows the children for which they are responsible.

In this program, an adult includes all staff members: teachers, administrators, caretakers, support staff—everyone. As district leadership, we have developed the frame in which parameters were set, but it is up to individual school communities to make it work in their particular context.

In *Planning a School-Based Mentoring Program*, Michael Garringer suggests that a critical ingredient of successful school-based mentoring programs is that you build a solid infrastructure for implementation of the program (Garringer, 2010). This is the rationale for ensuring that every school incorporates an actual plan to implement this initiative and report on that strategy to the district. All of the plans are being shared district-wide through an initiative dashboard so that schools can see what others are doing and either tweak or change their approach altogether should they wish to emulate that program. We are not willing to leave this to chance.

To get this initiative going, we decided to take it slow from the start and allow schools to have a full year to experiment through trial and error. We provided opportunities for our principals to discuss in large and small group settings as to how creating some sort of advocacy program in their particular setting might evolve and take shape. As schools began to move forward, exemplars were presented by principals to their peers to create buzz and further develop ideas. Not surprisingly, programs developed

with a great deal of staff input have shown to require much less buy in and more sincere results.

Our schools have been incredibly creative in developing this initiative. Examples of programs currently implemented include:

- Several schools, like St. Rupert and St. Augustine, are using a superhero approach to being a champion, utilizing the positive attributes of those heroes for their students.
- St. Mary's High School brings their First Nation, Metis and Inuit students together to attend leadership seminars and discuss what is going on in their lives under the guidance of their champion counsellor.
- St. Bernadette School teachers were asked to find a word that best described each student. Those students received a t-shirt with that word on the back. A special ceremony was held in the gym when the t-shirts were handed out and teachers described why the words were chosen for each student. Now, the shirts are worn every Friday.
- St. Sebastian School students chose champions and gave them a trophy

promise sheet. Champions sent personal letters and developed a special mailbox where students could send letters, notes and requests to their champions.

Some of the challenges of creating this type of initiative included finding the time to get champions and their students together; ensuring that all staff truly understand boundary issues and abide by them; emphasizing the need for a formalized approach as opposed to hit and miss, which has been used in the past; determining an appropriate process for choosing champions for students, or the students choosing their champion. All of the challenges we have seen have been overcome with creativity and a will to do what is best for our children.

We are already seeing the benefits of this initiative, especially with some children who have not fit into the regular mold in our schools. One elementary child was physically ill up to five times each day in school. She now makes it through the day and has found someone who will listen and give her the time and hope she needs to keep progressing. For some students, their best or worst six hours of the day can be

spent in our schools; we intend on making it the best! ○

Gary Strother has held the role of chief superintendent of the Calgary Catholic School District since March of 2012 and has worked since 1983 as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, vice principal, principal and superintendent.

Resources:

- *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform* (NASSP, 2004).
- *Planning a School-Based mentoring Program.* (Garringer, Michael, 2010).
- www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion (Pierson, Rita, 2013).
- Harvard University Centre on the Developing Child, www.developing-child.harvard.edu 2015.
- *The Power of Being Crazy About Kids in the Classroom*—A presentation to CCSD Administration (Carrington, Jody, 2017).

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Building People, Building Community

One division in Manitoba works to re-engage drop-outs with a creative solution that teaches skilled trades and provides possibilities for the future.

By Reg Klassen and
Tyson MacGillivray,
Frontier School Division

Frontier School Division, located in northern Manitoba, covers approximately 485,000 square kilometres, which makes it arguably the largest geographical school division in North America. However, the kindergarten to Grade 12 student population (in comparison) is only 6,800. Spread out over this vast region it becomes obvious that there are a multitude of variables creating challenges for our students.

One of these challenges was the high percentage of students who were dropping out of high school before they reached Grade 12. We needed to find a solution for these students, particularly for those who had been out of high school for a couple of years and now recognized that no Grade 12 meant fewer job opportunities.

Without graduating these students' prospects were bleak at best. We not only needed to keep our students in school, but we had to create an option for those who had already quit high school. In other words, we needed a creative solution that would bring them back to school and engage them.

Research told us that students were dropping out early and after several surveys in Frontier, we found this to be true. Large numbers of students were leaving high school after experiencing significant challenges. In addition to working with the students during school (about completing their education), we also began to search for strategies to reengage those students who had quit.

In spring of 2012, the Career Studies Department started a pilot program to

support students who had dropped out of school. This pilot included students from the community of Grand Rapids, Manitoba. The Grand Rapids Engaged Learners pilot project was designed to provide high school aged students with an opportunity to return to school.

In Phase One of the program 11 students attended a four-week introductory program at a wilderness camp near Cranberry Portage, Manitoba. This format was chosen as it was believed that students needed to make lifestyle changes. This would be very difficult to address unless the environment supported regular attendance and involvement.

Thus, we set up a controlled environment that would govern the actions of the

students. Students lived at the wilderness camp, going to bed between 11 and 12 pm each night and rising at 8 am in the morning. This ritual resulted in regular attendance and students who were rested and able to participate in the courses.

The Engaged Learners Program focussed on courses and activities that promoted student engagement and excitement, and were designed for student success. Building construction and mechanics were the core courses offered. Each day, students spent three hours in one of these courses. Students became very engaged and, without exception, they participated and succeeded in the projects they undertook. Students readily indicated that the reason they kept returning each week was that they were learning and enjoying the work. This was instrumental in helping these same students participate in classes that focused on academic skills; classes that had caused them to quit school years earlier.

Students also participated in workshops that addressed many lifestyle issues including first aid certification, smoking cessation, the role of the male in the family, HIV, harm reduction, the handling of grief, and diabetes and healthy living. Evening activities included carving, floor hockey, basketball, weight lifting, swimming, cross country skiing, movies, junior hockey games and building quinzies (a simple shelter made by hollowing out a big pile of snow. They can take several hours to build but are an effective way to stay warm when camping in the winter.).

This pilot had many contributing factors that helped bring about its success. The most important were:

- Students were provided a living environment that mandated them to adjust their personal schedule to accommodate the learning setting.
- Students were enrolled in courses that required their active involvement, culminating in concrete results.
- Students enjoyed the courses and the hands-on approach to learning.
- Students felt that they could do the work and were encouraged by staff on their successes.
- Students felt good about themselves and their accomplishments, which, over time, improved their individual self-esteem.
- Students began to see a future for themselves that was filled with hope and optimism.



ABOVE: Students have built three ready-to-move homes as part of the program.

RIGHT: Classes are focused on reading, writing and math, as well as trades/specialties, building construction, cosmetology, culinary arts, health care and early childhood education.



- Continued support from staff and home was instrumental in student success.

With the Engaged Learners Pilot project demonstrating such a high level of success, the division put the necessary resources in place, allowing the program to continue. Over the past four years the program has grown to an enrollment of 45 to 50 students per semester. Programming during this time has focused on workforce development and opening up the possibilities regarding numerous vocational paths.

The Engaged Learners Program is intended for students aged 15 to 21. Students are bussed to the facilities in Egg Lake, Manitoba, where they live for two or three weeks, attending classes on a regular

basis and participating in a variety of extra-curricular activities.

Classes are focused on basic life skills (reading, writing, math) as well as trades/specialties (power mechanics, building construction, cosmetology, culinary arts, health care and early childhood education), in the hopes that students can find a direction they'd like to pursue.

We realize that all students are different and require individualized approaches. Some are interested in returning to school and we offer support to help them achieve their academic goals. Other students simply want a skill set that will allow them to find a job and earn a salary. We do our best to support them post-program in finding

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sustainable employment. It's important that these young people are back in school, attending, learning and acquiring credits towards graduation, something that seemed unattainable when they quit school.

In addition to the course work, students are immersed in a variety of extra-curricular activities during the evening (some mentioned earlier). It is vital that evening activities are engaging and entertaining as they help build a sense of community within the program and promote social development in all students.

To date, we have had great success with our program and many of our graduates are now attending school full-time or are actively employed in the work force. During their time away from the Engaged Learners Program, students are expected to attend to their home programming component. This includes individualized programming that could involve a combination of community service, regular stream academics, adult education modular type programming, or some other approach that fits the individual student. Exceptions can be made for students who are employed. However, all students are expected to have a plan as to how they will complete their academics.

The program has encountered significant program and capacity expansion over the past five years. Carpentry has become our flagship program and has, to date, built three ready-to-move homes. Students who enroll in carpentry build greenhouses, garden sheds, ice shacks and small bunkhouses.

Attendance is above 90 per cent, credit acquisition is above 80 per cent and entry into the workforce is approximately 50 per cent. It is important to remember these students were not succeeding in the traditional education system and were likely on track for social assistance. The Engaged Learners Program has provided students with purpose and meaning in their lives, as well as an opportunity to contribute to society. This non-traditional program has been well received across the province and is a model of consistency with a proven track record.

The Engaged Learners Program has many educational partners who contribute to the success of the program. These partners include University College of the North, Opaskwayak Cree Nation, Manitoba Housing, Manitoba Hydro, Northern Manitoba Mining Academy, Northern Sector Council, Office of the Fire

Commissioner, Manitoba Conservation, Employment Manitoba, Manitoba Tourism Education Council, Rural Health Authority, Service Canada, and Dewalt.

The strengths of the Engaged Learners Program are not limited to the exemplary students who find new meaning and purpose for their lives in education. The caring staff is also a strength of the program; a staff that takes time to build a relationship with each student generating an organic feeling of family, where everyone looks out for and cares for each other. ○

Reg Klassen is the Chief Superintendent of the Frontier School Division and is President-Elect of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators. Tyson MacGillivray is the Assistant Superintendent, High School and Career Programs, with the Frontier School Division.

Please go to www.frontierbuilders.org to obtain more information pertaining to alternative programs being provided by Frontier School Division.



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If you walked into any one of the eight schools in the South Slave region of the Northwest Territories and asked a teacher about their students' academic achievements, behavioural trends, attendance patterns and interventions, they would be able to pull up all this information at a moment's notice and be prepared to talk about it.

That's because at the South Slave Divisional Education Council (SSDEC), a small school board serving 1,300 students, we use a locally developed and simple—yet powerful—spreadsheet tool called Classroom Assessment Records (CARs).

In the school and classrooms, and long before data collection and analysis were ingrained in educational practice, Program Support Teacher (PST) Carolyn Carroll instituted a system for collecting valuable student data (prior year attendance, lateness, reading level, standardized test results, current year monthly reading levels, etc.) and placed it all in an easy-to-read, colour-coded class record.

Carroll, who was a 2017 winner of Canada's Outstanding Principal title, has been driven by data since her early days as a teacher. She would go into the school in August and look over all the data available on her incoming students, such as their reading and math levels and attendance trends. Knowing this baseline data

helped prepare her for the year. When she moved into a leadership role as a Program Support Teacher, and had the opportunity to assist with the management of data for every classroom teacher, she determined that a similar, school-wide system would be of great value to her colleagues.

"I felt that new teachers needed to hit the ground running, and if they had a variety of assessment results in front of them, that would be very helpful," explains Carroll.

Originally, the system took a few weeks of intense work to set up, but once that initial work was done the system was easy to build on and update with new data through the year. This data collection and analysis system was so effective in revealing

Using Data to Determine Educational Direction

A small region in NWT uses "living documents" that visually support teachers, parents and students as they track strengths and stretches.

trends, engaging stakeholders, informing decision-making and improving results, that the system was adopted in all schools throughout the South Slave region.

Carroll's CARs have become the tool for creating a culture of ongoing participatory action-research in classrooms. "It's grown over the years as our district and school focuses and assessment needs have changed," she says, noting that now the CARs include information on behavioural interventions—something that wasn't on the radar 10 years ago.

The CARs are living documents that are updated continuously throughout the school year and move with the students from grade to grade—and occasionally from school to school. They are used by teachers and school leadership teams to collate the strengths and stretches of each student, provide the knowledge that teachers need to become more strategic and precise in their instruction and assist staff in accurately reporting to parents.

The CARs spreadsheet is organized to allow teachers to enter and then observe their broader classroom data at-a-glance, and then just as easily focus in on individual students. When student achievement data is entered, the conditional-formatting built into the spreadsheet allows each cell to be colour-coded. For example, "does not yet meet grade level expectations" is highlighted in red; "approaching" in yellow; "meets" in green. This provides a strong visual for knowing each student's strengths and stretches.

This visual is a powerful tool for goal setting, collaborative planning, differentiated instruction, celebration and reporting. Using quality classroom-based assessment data and specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART) goals, focuses education partners (including teachers, parents and students) on maximizing achievement outcomes for students, with goals reviewed and reset every four to eight weeks.

This evidence-based commitment ensures staff understand each student, in relation to expectations, to know where to differentiate and apply interventions to maximize student achievement. From there, accommodations are applied for students who need additional supports in the regular classroom and a pyramid of interventions are applied for students in

“Our students do not fall through the cracks because of the CARs. We see immediately when a student’s progress slows. We know exactly where interventions are needed.”

need of more intensive Tier 2 and Tier 3 supports. In these cases, positive relations have resulted in student support meetings including district consultants, occupational therapists, speech and language pathologists, counselors and social workers.

Beginning and experienced teachers alike have responded positively, saying they feel supported and more confident that their students are receiving a quality education due to early identification and interventions.

“Our students do not fall through the cracks because of the CARs. We see immediately when a student’s progress slows. We know exactly where interventions are needed,” commented one teacher. The visual component of the tool also helps teachers identify, within a few weeks, if an intervention is working or if something different needs to be tried.



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Other teachers have said they appreciate the time the CARs save them. When they start school in September, they open the previous year's data and have assessment profiles and history on all their students. Teachers new to the school can dive right into the school year by building on the previous year's data.

In a profession where accountability requirements seem to be ever-increasing, the CARs are a breath of fresh air, a tool that simplifies tracking, reporting and goal setting, and saves a significant amount of time.

The CARs were introduced regionally to coincide with the launch of the SSDEC's award-winning Leadership for Literacy initiative, which was developed to address the low literacy results plaguing the region. In 2007, when the initiative began, only half of South Slave students were performing at or above Canadian standards in reading and in math.

Today, following a decade of consistent monitoring, reporting and using research-based best practices, results have improved, at minimum, 20 per cent across the board. This success was made possible by the CARs tool, which has helped keep the entire school community on track to success.

Not only have student achievement results and graduation rates been on the rise, confidence has also increased in South Slave schools; parent satisfaction is at 93 per cent across the region, up from 67 per cent in 2008.

This tool is particularly valuable for discussion with students and parents. Providing up-to-date and honest reporting to parents is more likely to result in a team of people invested in each child's education, and helps to ensure that every child is supported and given the best possible academic advantage.

As one parent said, "It is really amazing to have this much information on my child. I know exactly how he is doing in school and where I can help him."

"It is comforting and impressive for parents to see all of the information, nice and neat, in a spreadsheet," Carroll notes. When a parent calls the school and wants to meet that same afternoon, the stress and the scrambling is no longer a part of the preparation. Instead, the teacher only has to open their spreadsheet and pull a few pieces of supporting evidence from the student's portfolio. A process

that used to take hours now only takes a couple of minutes.

"While there are a variety of competing socio-economic factors affecting our students, such as inter-generational trauma due to the lasting impacts of the residential school system, we have always believed that with a balance of support and expectations, our students can succeed," says Carroll.

"The CARs have become a critical part of the way we do business in our region, and it has stood the test of time," Carroll adds. "The accountability it provides is so important and it builds confidence in our schools."

"It can be an overwhelming job if you don't find a way to tie it all seamlessly together," summarizes Carroll, who, in looking for a way to support every student also found a way to support every teacher, parent and school. ○

Carolyn Carroll is the Principal of Harry Camsell School and Princess Alexandra School in Hay River, NT. She was named one of Canada's Outstanding Principals in 2017. Sarah Pruys is the Public Affairs Coordinator for the South Slave Divisional Education Council.



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By Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells and Jennifer Pellegrini, Niagara Catholic District School Board

To a casual observer Joe Sciarra's classroom may seem chaotic. There are, after all, 130 students in the Niagara Launch Centre on any given morning. Students from Niagara Catholic's eight secondary schools attend classes at the Centre, where they learn about opportunities in the trades and pathways to 21st century careers, through apprenticeships, college, university or direct entry into the world of work.

It's noisy, too. Machines hum, engines rev, hammers pound and saws and torches sear their way through wood and metal all day, every day. Sciarra, a Construction teacher with the Niagara Catholic District School Board, wouldn't have it any other way.

"Noise means people are working, people are learning, people are doing things," he says. "We have an unconventional environment that allows students to express themselves and learn in many different ways."

Sciarra is one of five teachers at the Niagara Launch Centre, a 12,000-square



Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne speaks with students and staff at the Niagara Launch Centre about the new skills students are learning during her visit in October.

foot, state-of-the-art centre for innovation, largely designed and built by Niagara Catholic students inside a repurposed Target store at the Seaway Mall in Welland, Ontario. The Niagara Launch Centre, which is "Powered by the Niagara Catholic

District School Board," is the brainchild of Marco Magazzeni, Niagara Catholic's administrator of Alternative Programs and Community Partnerships.

Magazzeni, along with colleagues Ivana Galante and Jennifer Pirosko, brought a



Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne poses alongside Niagara Catholic's Board Chair (to her left) and Vice-Chair (to her right), Student Trustees, Director of Education and Senior Staff during her visit to the Niagara Launch Centre in October.

wealth of unique workforce experiences to their roles at Niagara Catholic and are passionate about sharing their knowledge with students. Galante and Piroosko work closely with secondary school staff and business and industry in Niagara, ensuring that students who attend the Centre receive the most current instruction in their areas of interest.

The Centre has been widely praised by everyone from industry insiders to Ontario's Premier Kathleen Wynne, who joined the celebrations for the Centre's grand opening in October 2017.

"We're not just building the capacity for learning in schools here, we are also building it in the community," said Wynne.

Niagara Workforce Planning Board Executive Director, Mario De Divitiis, praised Niagara Catholic for finding ways to fill future worker shortages and keep students in Niagara. "I can tell you with the utmost confidence ... that this Centre is truly one of a kind," he said. "This is an example where Niagara Catholic and the Niagara Region has been a best-practice example, where we are leading before the need is coming."

Magazzeni didn't have much pitch work to do to sell the idea of the Niagara Launch Centre to Niagara Catholic's Director of Education, John Crocco, Senior Administrative Council or to the Board. During the opening celebration Board Chair, Father Paul MacNeil, spoke enthusiastically about trustees' support for the Launch Centre

and how it successfully sets up students for the next stage of their journey after graduation.

"I am sure you will agree that the community partnerships you see woven throughout this space are one of the most elaborate and innovative examples of collaboration in education in Ontario," MacNeil said. "Our mission is to provide innovative and creative training and inspiration to students in all pathways. Our vision is to fuel student interest through exciting and engaging education that leads to valuable skills development and career prosperity. Perhaps we are seeing something of the future (at the Launch Centre) today."

In crediting the team's commitment and dedication to the Launch Centre, Crocco called it "something unique in all of Canada."

"What really makes this happen is leadership," Crocco said. "It takes a lot of hard work, it takes risk, it takes belief, and it takes innovation to create something from nothing," he said. "We have gone into the community to form all these partnerships, and that is really what brings communities together; the hub that really makes these opportunities first and foremost for students."

And for their part, students appreciate the Board's commitment and dedication to alternative student learning.

Matthew Beni, a Grade 12 student at Notre Dame College School in Welland, first took a technology class in Grade 11

and opted for Transportation Technology. "I had a little bit of interest before, and then in Grade 11, I took the class and I really liked it, so then after that I took it again, and I think it's something that I might want to go into post-secondary," he said, noting he will likely complete a fifth year of high school to obtain his SHSM Red Seal, before applying to a Transportation Technology program at one of Ontario's community colleges or an apprenticeship.

Alexander Goulbourne is in Grade 11 at Notre Dame College. This is his first year at the Centre, where he attends the two-period Construction class every morning. "I was interested in the trades before because that was something that runs in my family, and then I decided to take this course to help me out with that," he said. "I really like it, so hopefully I'll follow up on that in Grade 12."

The Niagara Launch Centre is one of three highly unique, highly specialized community-based learning initiatives offered by Niagara Catholic. The Niagara Launch Centre, Saint Kateri Tekawitha Centre and the Pope Francis Centre are key components of the Board's System Priority for 2017-2018 to "increase student engagement and student voice in achievement, well-being and mental-health awareness."

Some students have significant obstacles to overcome to successfully complete their education. These programs are designed to help them succeed.

In its document *Achieving Excellence, a Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, the Ontario Ministry of Education recognizes some Indigenous students, youth in care, students with special needs, and transitioning students struggle, while others are at risk of not succeeding.

Niagara Catholic opened the Pope Francis Centre in 2015, and the Saint Kateri Tekawitha Centre, home to the Soaring Eagles Indigenous Secondary School Program, in 2016, in response to these needs.

While the Launch Centre primarily provides students (those with an interest

in joining the skilled workforce) a location where they can explore future career pathways, the students who attend the Pope Francis and the Saint Kateri Centres have different needs. They have individually designed programs which integrate technology, in-class instruction and special attention from child and youth workers, social workers, an attendance support counsellor and the Board's Mental Health Lead, to meet their unique learning needs.

The Saint Kateri Centre provides alternative education to students who identify as First Nations, Metis or Inuit. They, like the

students who attend the Pope Francis Centre, struggled to find their place in a conventional school setting but thrive in an alternative setting that caters to their individual needs. Students earn credits online, using assistive technology and audio books to support their learning.

Saint Kateri teacher Kelsey Dick, who is Metis, believes "the land-based learning supports the traditions of Indigenous students, and connects them to Mother Earth."

One of the students at the Saint Kateri Centre describes school as a home away from home. "It is a place where you can come to receive support while working towards your goals in all aspects of life. It is a place to keep you motivated, to get you out of the chaos of life for a bit, to give you a safe, comfortable place to focus on yourself and your progress," she said.

Students at the Pope Francis Centre face their own obstacles to learning in a traditional classroom. At the Centre they are welcomed with open arms. Some are young parents whose children are cared for in the Blessed Mother Teresa Nursery while their parents complete their educations.

"We apply a 'no-stigma' approach to our students," said Pope Francis Centre teacher, Ryan Dudley. "It is all about the student, because they each have their own story. We want each of our students to excel, graduate and move on with their lives in a positive way."

Young mother Megan Latour should have graduated high school in 2015. Instead, she left school before finding the support she needed at the Pope Francis Centre. She is now on track to graduate in 2018.

"I like the Pope Francis Centre more than regular school, as it has allowed me to take my time to learn, to work with teachers and use many resources for my education," she said. "I hope to pursue the Personal Service worker program or hairstyling after I graduate."

Which, as Premier Wynne says, is what these programs are all about.

"We don't need some students to succeed," she said. "We need all students to succeed." ○

Lee Ann Forsyth-Sells is a Superintendent of Education with the Niagara Catholic District School Board. She is also a former President of CASSA. Jennifer Pellegrini is Niagara Catholic's Communications Officer. She is a former reporter and author of Something You Should Know: A Gen-X Mother's Guide to Life.

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The Problem with Cash in Schools

Anglophone East School District's journey to online payments for its families

Given how school-raised funds are an important source of funding for schools, a report by the Auditor General was conducted for the New Brunswick Department of Education, focusing on the administration of school-raised funds across the province's school districts. Among the many findings, the report noted that:

“School raised funds are more susceptible to theft or mismanagement than other financial transactions as they are comprised of a high-volume of cash transactions with limited staff in schools trained to administer and manage the funds.”
— Report of the Auditor General

The Backpack Express

Part of the problem lies in the sheer numbers provincially, whereby—every year—\$27,000,000 in school-raised funds flow through an estimated one million cash transactions (in small denominations), shuttled through the backpacks of approximately 98,000 students, through to 5,800 teachers and hundreds of administrative staff. The scope of all this volume introduces complexities and inefficiencies in accounting for and managing the funds.

Among the outcomes that resulted from the audit, it was recommended that the Department evaluate online revenue collection and the use of a school cash computerized system.

One of the districts to respond to the problem by implementing an integrated accounting and online payments solution across all its schools was the Anglophone East School District. The district's Director of Finance and Administration recently took the time to discuss the impact the School Cash Suite by KEV Group has had at his district.

Reflections on the School Cash Suite:

By Aubrey Kirkpatrick, Director of Finance & Admin, Anglophone East School District

In 2012, Anglophone East School District implemented a cashless online payment system called School Cash Online. The system is a simple, secure method for parents to make fee payments with a credit card or e-check and to manage and view the history of their child's school expenses online. Instead of sending cash with children, parents can safely pay online anywhere/anytime for their students.

Frank L Bowser School has the highest parent adoption rate of 87 per cent which means most of the parents are able to receive information about school events and activities online and able to pay for their student's fees and activities online 24/7.



The primary goal was to improve accountability and provide more security for students and their parents paying fees. The Auditor General's report recommends the use of an online revenue collection and school cash computerized system (such as the School Cash Suite by KEV Group) to better safeguard and account for school raised funds.

An important secondary goal was to reduce teacher and administrative time spent on managing money and to increase time for important educational matters. Schools are reaping the rewards of time and resource savings with the reduction of coins, cash and cheque handling with event accounting done automatically as payments are received automatically and accounted for in the School Cash Accounting module of the software suite.

Another goal was to improve communications between the school and home by automatically emailing parents of upcoming events and activities while providing them the convenience to choose to pay online. From the parents' point of view, the system is very easy to use. Parents can easily sign up by going to the school website to register. Once they've signed up, logged in and found their child's school and profile, they can see what fees are payable, with explanations on what the money is for. Parents are saying

“It was very easy to register and the convenience to pay online and keep track of fees is great.”

ASD-E is encouraging all parents to register and go cashless.

In a previous year, ASD-E had over \$650,000 in school raised funds paid online; 84 per cent paid by credit card and 16 per cent paid by e-check. For the first two weeks of September 2015, approximately \$187,000 was collected online, meaning that amount of cash and coins did not filter through students, teacher and administrator hands and went directly into the bank account and was credited to the right project accounts at the school automatically. Principal Nick Mattatall of Bessborough School said:

“This system improves our communication home by automatically emailing parents of upcoming events and activities while providing them the convenience to choose to pay online for items their children are involved in and earn reward miles or other incentives at the same time.”

According to Mattatall, there's more security and convenience for parents, and school finances are easier to track electronically:

“I am a big fan of the system. We have integrated the School Cash Register so that has been another bonus, as receipts are printed instantly, teachers no longer handle cash, and all money is kept in one secure locked location with minimal access, thereby significantly reducing the risk of theft.”

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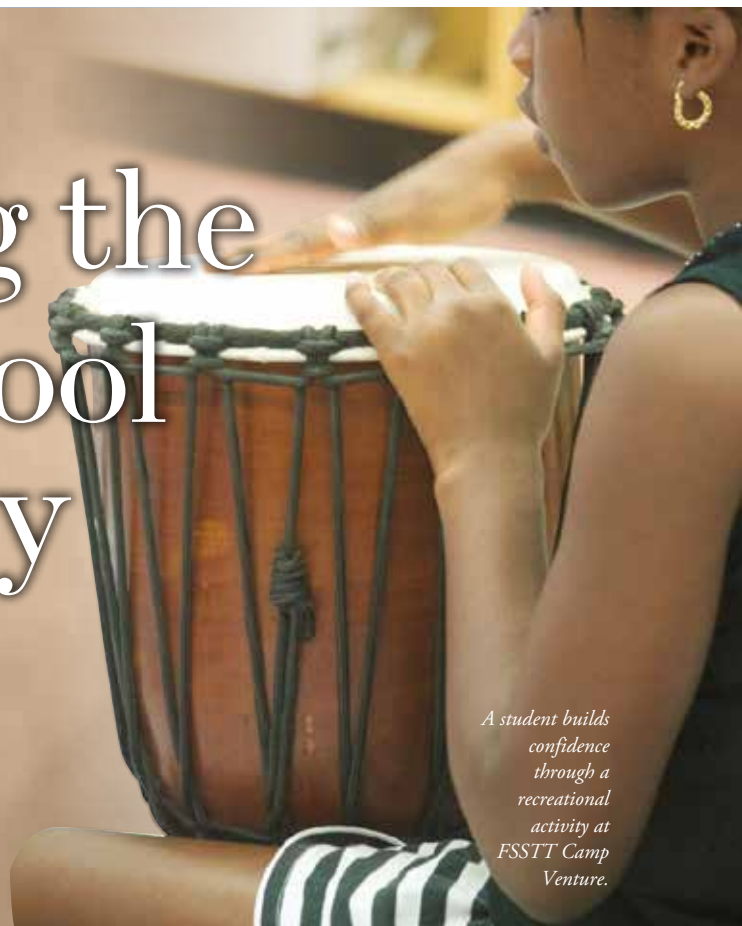
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Supporting the Entire School Community

The Family School and Support Treatment Team within Lester B. Pearson School Board provides a holistic approach to mental health.



A student builds confidence through a recreational activity at FSSTT Camp Venture.

By Dr. Elana Bloom, Maureen Hunt and Janna Gillis, Family School and Support Treatment Team

The Family School and Support Treatment Team (FSSTT) is a holistic approach to supporting mental health and wellness among students, staff and families. Formally in 18 schools (13 elementary, five high school) within the Lester B. Pearson School Board, Student Services Department, Montreal, Quebec, we also provide supports as needed to all schools in our division. Adopting a framework that recognizes the instrumental nature of attachment theory (Bowlby), relationships (Neufeld) and ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner), in a child's life (family, school, community) social work technicians support student's social-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health.

Each school is equipped with a social work technician to support students, families and school staff by enhancing student engagement and well-being. This, in turn, positively impacts motivation, learning and student outcomes.

Our team also has Link Consultants, a group of behavioural/pedagogical consultants whose role it is to support social work

technicians, school staff and administrators within each school. They also support students individually and systemically in classrooms, as well as families. The consultants have varied backgrounds and areas of focus, including family engagement, school climate, bereavement, physical activity and well-being, and trauma-informed practices.

Our team has an Art Therapist, whose primary role is to develop an art therapy program designed to support students individually, but at times group, classroom or school-wide initiatives may ensue. Through the creative process, students can learn to communicate their thoughts and feelings, reconcile emotional conflict, foster self-awareness and enhance wellness.

At the high school level, our team offers the support of a Youth Outreach Consultant to re-engage students at-risk of dropping out by providing support to schools, students and families. School teams identify students who are not regularly attending school and for whom alternative strategies need to be explored.

As part of our team, the Consultant in Addictions Prevention supports and implements board-wide prevention initiatives,

coordinates service agreements with specialized organizations to facilitate student access to addictions treatment and supports the implementation of external research initiatives in schools. She also provides professional addiction-related training to teachers, school staff and professionals. In addition, she provides direct intervention and psycho-education to students, and support to parents and staff.

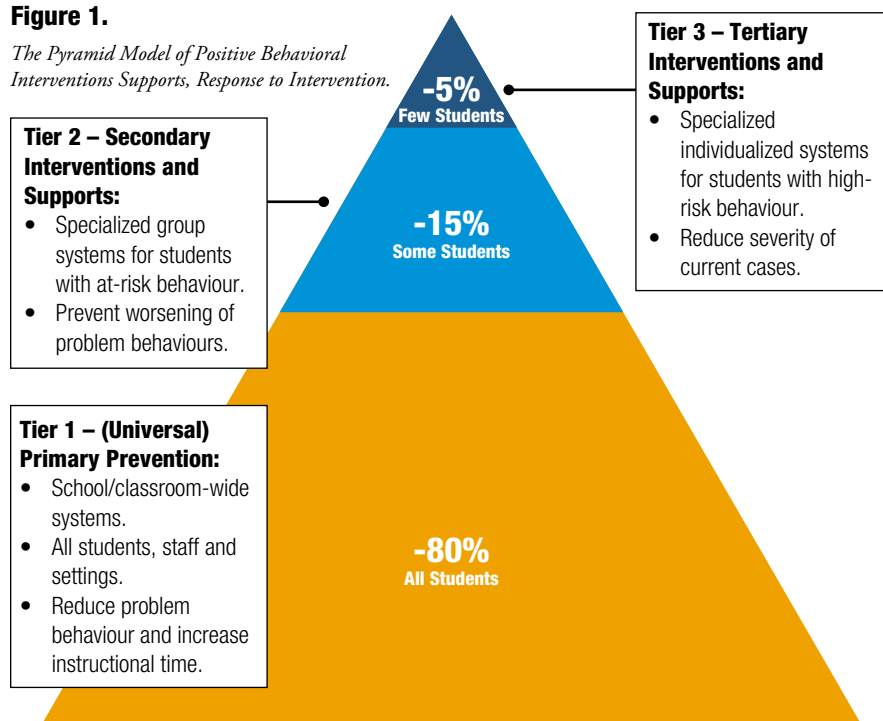
Our team is interdisciplinary, with the psychologist playing an important role in helping to guide and mentor the social work technician. This may take various forms depending on the school context, needs and professionals involved. Social work technicians may refer complex cases to the psychologist, or seek guidance on interventions. Additionally, the psychologist and social work technician may co-animate groups or initiatives to help support students and families with mental health and SEL needs.

Guiding principles: individual interventions, classroom and school-wide initiatives

Our guiding principles provide therapeutic support to students and their families, engage

Figure 1.

The Pyramid Model of Positive Behavioral Interventions Supports, Response to Intervention.



the system by focusing well-being, and offer professional development for school personnel in the areas of SEL and wellness. We intentionally focus on the overall mental health and on the well-being of the child, help to decrease stigma, use the student's strengths to foster success, assist educators in understanding the nature of the child's difficulty and modify environmental variables to accommodate needs.

Our interventions respond to the student's needs at three levels (Figure 1) working directly with classroom teachers and school staff. At the universal or primary prevention level, we focus on school and classroom-wide initiatives benefiting all students and school climate. This may include leading an achievement/kindness assembly, supporting zones of regulation in a classroom, helping teachers facilitate a classroom meeting, supporting restorative practices, physical activities such as skipping, or coaching a relaxation exercise.

At the secondary level students may require more structured or targeted interventions. Specific examples include breakfast clubs, groups that focus on physical activities and breathing, cooperative games, conflict resolution, decision-making, friendships or helping students with emotional awareness.

We also provide interventions at the individual level, whereby students are taught specific coping skills such as managing and regulating emotions. All our interventions, regardless of targeted level, focus on one or more of the SEL competencies by the Collaborative for

Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (Figure 2). Specifically, they aim to enhance self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making.

Family engagement

Our team highly values family input, connection and involvement. We are often the bridge between school and family, helping school teams understand family strengths and struggles, supporting families in navigating the education, health and social service networks, and providing psycho-education on child development, mental health and SEL.

Many of our interactions with families occur informally and much time is invested in developing relationships. Our social work technicians/link consultants also meet formally with families and our team provides workshops to families within our schools and system.

Professional development

Professional development is another primary tenant of the FSSTT. We provide opportunities through professional development, modeling and front line support to build capacity by raising awareness of socio-emotional needs with a view to acquiring a greater understanding of these needs within the school system, the family and students in need. Consultations among school professionals and educators, as well as ongoing professional development in mental health, well-being and SEL, are key tenets of the team's work.

By providing psycho-education and contextualizing complex situations, we, in turn, enhance the well-being of staff, which results in increased student motivation, learning and family engagement. The activities are eclectic and meant to address needs using multiple modalities:

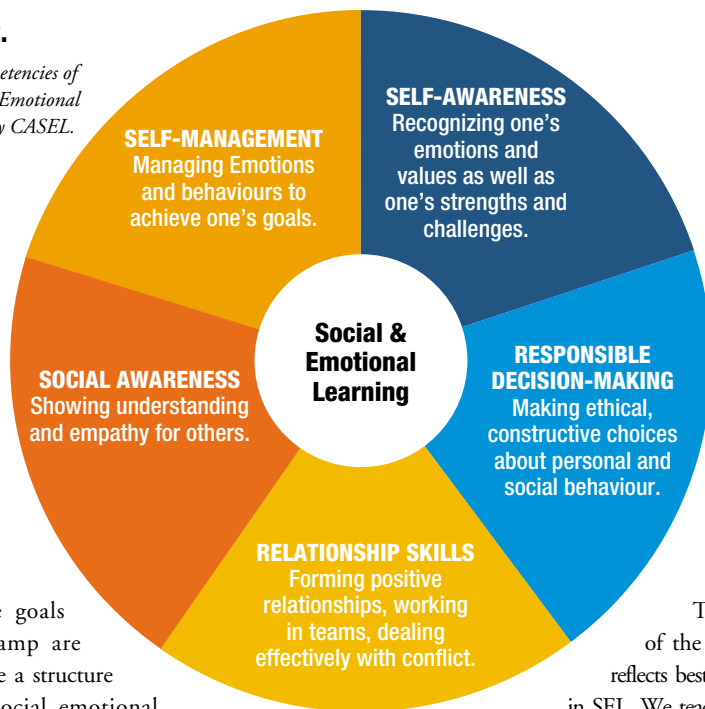
- **Peer supervision:** Our social work technicians and link consultants meet throughout the year in small groups. The goal is to discuss complex student or family presentations as well as school-based issues. Using peers to explore ideas and strategies is an effective model of support.
- **School-based psychiatric consultations:** The goal of the school-based psychiatric consultation is to help school teams better understand the inner psychological world of the student. This approach enables teachers and staff to share their concerns about a student, be guided by our psychiatric consultant and to reflectively think beyond the presenting behaviors to what might lie underneath. Strategies may ensue to be further developed by the school team.
- **Lecture series:** Our team, in collaboration with the Centre of Excellence for Mental Health (CEMH), offers evening lectures during the school year. Experts in the fields of SEL and mental health present engaging information on research and intervention.
- **Connections newsletter:** We publish an electronic bilingual newsletter three times per year. This newsletter serves as a resource for evidence-based research and practice in the areas of mental health, well-being and SEL. Psycho-education activities and initiatives within these areas are shared.
- **Stagiaire/internship programs:** Following a professional learning community model, CEGEP-level stagiaires and university-level interns are placed with our social work technicians. Our social work technicians also have the opportunity to intern within the Department of Child Psychiatry at the Montreal Children's Hospital, McGill University Health Centre. They integrate what they have learned when working with students, families and staff.
- **Library:** Our library includes journals, books and resources on relevant topics, including mental health, well-being, social and emotional learning, and school climate.

Summer camp builds real-world skills

Our team coordinates a summer camp at an elementary school for students six to 12 years

Figure 2.

Core Competencies of Social and Emotional Learning by CASEL.



old. The goals of the camp are to provide a structure for pro-social emotional development activities in a recreational setting, bridge the gap between summer holidays and a new school year, and teach the students something new, thus building a foundation of confidence in their burgeoning intellectual growth.

The focus of the program reflects best practices in SEL. We teach, model and reinforce important skills, such as emotional regulation, and how to develop and maintain pro-social relationships and conflict resolution. Research suggests that recreational activities, as well as music and art, serve therapeutic functions which greatly benefit students.

As such, innovative arts and physical activities are woven throughout the day. Ideally, the students realize that the skills are not just applicable at camp but at school, on a field trip, and, most importantly, in building relationships when faced with new interactions.

The World Health Organization defines wellness as “A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. ... Wellness is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a more successful existence.”

Our team continues to develop initiatives that infuse wellness to support each student, our staff and families. ○

Dr. Elana Bloom is a Psychologist, the Coordinator of the Family School and Support Treatment Team, and Coordinator of the Center of Excellence for Mental Health.

Janna Gillis is a Behavior Consultant with the Family School and Support Treatment Team with an interest in bereavement support to students and families.

Maureen Hunt has been part of the Family School and Support Treatment Team since its inception, with an interest in social and emotional systems change.



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Community Connections



Students check out baby chicks at a local farm.

By Teresa Di Ninno and
Jeney Gordon, CAPE Public
Charter School

The Centre for Academic and Personal Excellence's (CAPE) program is grounded in a partnership between parents, staff and community. As such, CAPE's learning environment reaches into the community, building relationships which are not only conducive to student engagement, but also foster a sense of belonging and of citizenry. These relationships promote life-long learning, global-ethical citizenry and the entrepreneurial spirit.

They also support a culture of collaboration and develop student knowledge of the community. Competencies increase as students engage within their community; noting its strengths and weaknesses and ways they may contribute. Students become integral members of the community and can thus support their community for the benefit of all its citizens.

Interactions with community role models allow for learner-mentor relationships to develop. These role models provide experiences that support successful engagement. From kindergarten through Grade 9, these experiences increase in complexity and scope. Not only do our children and students venture

Student success soars when strong partnerships are built with the community.



Students, parents and staff participate in multi-cultural day.



Students hone their chef skills making pizza.



Exploring science!

The children are exposed to activities that build appreciation of the arts. The passion and enthusiasm that artists, actors, and musicians share with the children, help develop a desire to learn more about art, drama and music.

into the community but community members also come into our classrooms regularly.

Even though kindergarten is not a mandatory program, nor is it intended to be full-time, CAPE believes that learning at the kindergarten level is the foundation for success in the elementary years. Therefore, our kindergarten program is delivered full-days, every day. Community exposure for preschoolers focuses on the provision of basic needs through hands-on, experiential activities. The benefit of on-site learning is the authenticity it brings.

Our kindergarten children interact with members of our farming community, our city services, safety programs, grocery stores and physicians, among others. For example, children learn where their food comes from, which foods come from other parts of the

world, how to make healthy food choices and how food costs different amounts. Children learn how to play safely, whose job it is to keep them safe, who will help them if they don't feel safe and who will assist them if they become injured.

The children are exposed to activities that build appreciation of the arts. The passion and enthusiasm that artists, actors and musicians share with the children, helps develop a desire to learn more about art, drama and music.

In early elementary the experiences from kindergarten expand to include a historic component. In our history-rich community there are multiple sites where students can learn about the past; from the historic clay district, to heritage homes, to the Esplanade archives. By studying the various parks in

the community, and viewing commemorative sculptures and monuments, the students learn about historical events and people. Members of historical societies visit the school and enrich the learning.

At this division level, exposure to groups that support science begins. Through the direct involvement of organizations such as PRAXIS, and a plethora of members of the scientific community, the learning is hands-on, experimental and open-ended.

The upper elementary students gain a broader exposure of the community and its complex issues. Local political systems are viewed through the eyes of taxpayers, counsellors and the mayor. Students visit local political sites including the city hall theatre. They interact with local elected officials both inside and outside of the school. Our students invite candidates during election times to hear the various platforms and ask questions about important issues. Mock elections are conducted with support from local sources and Elections Canada.

Multiculturalism is another big idea which links our students with the community. By interacting purposefully with people from other parts of the world the students learn about other cultures.

As students prepare their mandatory science fair projects they are mentored by individuals within our scientific community. During Heritage Fair members of historic communities, parents and archivists offer regular input from historic perspectives by mentoring students in their area of expertise. Other individuals come into our classes to promote public speaking skills and assist students in refining their presentations.

In junior high the community engagement is not as pre-planned as in the younger grades. Rather, students initiate community connections and indicate areas of interest within the community. There is a distinct interest in financial literacy and business and so banking organizations and Junior Achievement are frequent presenters. In addition, students request repeat visits from artists and musicians as well as police officers and physicians, to increase their awareness and skills within chosen projects.

As students move through the grades they gain a great deal of exposure to the community and thus show interest in contributing through volunteerism. Students have been recognized for their volunteer efforts as Leaders of Tomorrow, Peace Week medallion



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recipients, workers with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), cadets and more.

Within the contexts of Science Fair and Heritage Fair, students actively look for mentors within the community and engage in interviews and online learning to benefit their unique projects and interests. The student connections to community also expand past our civic boundaries as students attend regional, provincial and national competitions and events. Our school is regularly represented at national science fairs, national Young Citizens forums and international online contests.

Personal initiatives, not necessarily tied to our school, such as dancing with the Toronto ballet, fitness and skills competitions and international historic travel, also become more prominent.

While some activities are planned to enhance grade-specific curriculum, other activities are developed to enhance the school as a whole. One key component of our school is technology. One-on-one computing has been an element of our program since the school's inception in 1994. Guests that bring expertise with word processing, design,

presentation, animation and programming visit regularly and have offered after-school clubs for interested students.

Annually, our school selects three charities to support through student initiatives; one local, one provincial and one global. One of our annual local charity collections was started by Uzair, a student council president with a desire to "leave a legacy." Students work tirelessly to meet the needs of our community food bank and women's shelter, and by "Stacking the Sleigh" with much-needed, donated items.

Our students eagerly become involved with activities in support of the wider Canadian community. Jump Rope for Heart, walking for MS, running for Terry Fox, donning moustaches for Movember and cutting hair for cancer are only a few examples.

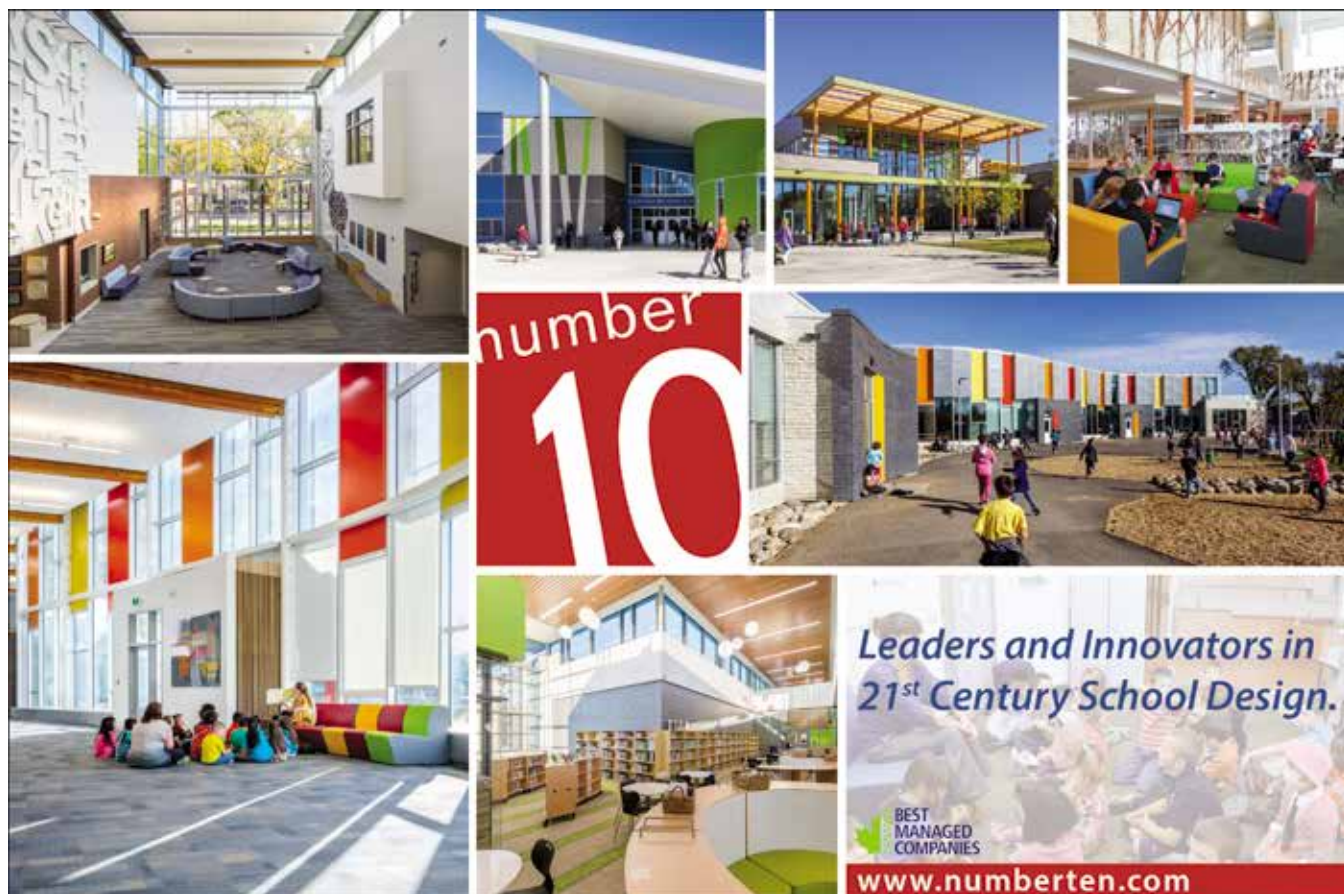
Bi-annually, the school becomes a flurry of activity in preparation for the school-wide drama production. Choreographers, speech coaches, Bollywood teachers, sound and light techs, photographers and designers of sets and costumes, expose the students to a wide array of skill sets needed to present a memorable play.

As one of our three program supports, the community connections are a vital

component to CAPE's uniqueness. On an annual basis, support from close to 150 community individuals and organizations, enriches and expands the learning for our students. Extremely high satisfaction rates on our annual teacher, student and parent surveys are indicators of the effectiveness of our community partnerships. The experiences our community partners offer our students, directly supports the Ministerial Order on Student Learning and competency building, and are instrumental in the development of the whole child. ○

Teresa Di Ninno, B.A., B.Ed., M.A., Diploma of Collegial Studies and an alumnus of McGill University and the University of Toronto. Teresa began her teaching career in Alberta in 1980. She is also the Founder, past Principal and current Superintendent of CAPE Public Charter School, one of the first charter schools in Alberta.

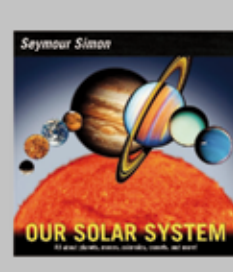
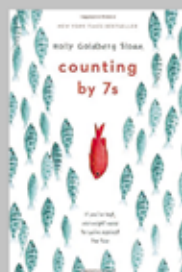
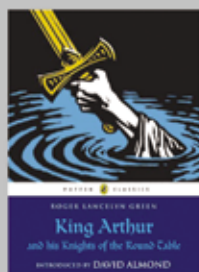
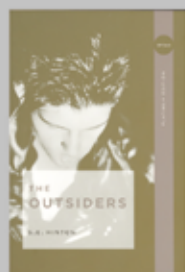
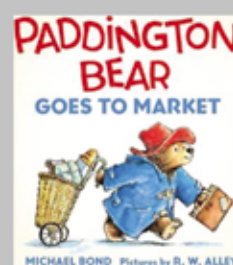
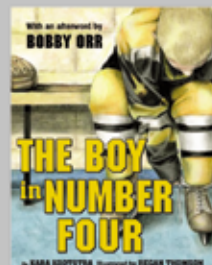
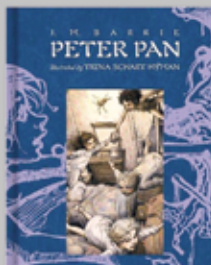
Jeney Gordon, B.F.A., B.Ed., Diploma of Vis. Com. and an alumnus of the University of Lethbridge. She started her teaching career at CAPE in 1995 and spent all but three of those years teaching there. Jeney has been the Principal of CAPE for the last 14 years.



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A Universal Design for Learning

Supporting every student means celebrating strengths and ensuring the curriculum is accessible to all students.

By Karen Shannon and David Giroux, Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

Over the past five years, the question of how to best support high levels of achievement and wellbeing for every student in the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board (ALCDSB) has been at the centre of discourse in evaluating all system initiatives. Over this time, multiple site visits to every school by teams of superintendents, principals and vice principals have taken place, generating feedback for school and system staff on the efficacy of district and school improvement planning initiatives.

This process also provided an opportunity to consolidate our thinking, concerning what was working well and what challenges or barriers remained for our students and staff in ALCDSB. We celebrated the many strengths and innovations evident in professional practice across the district, yet recognized that a lack of consistency within and across schools in student-centred pedagogy and evidence-based practice would be our growing edge.

Student-centred pedagogy refers to designing learning opportunities so that students can achieve learning goals while making choices about how they best engage with the content, access the information they need and communicate

their learning. Educators must understand that learner variability is the constant not the exception in every classroom.

The principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), when incorporated in instructional tasks, provide entry points for all students and position them in the driver's seat of their educational journey. Becoming more aware of the barriers individual students encounter in the classroom and providing alternative means to achieve goals, makes higher levels of achievement accessible to all students.

Assessing systemic barriers and assets to leverage in moving the entire system forward requires a shift; from having students complete the same task, at the same time, in the same way, to student centred learning. This has been the work at hand in ALCDSB.



Students working on an assignment in a breakout room, off of the Learning Commons. This allows for small groups of students to collaborate and utilize resources available to them.



Dr. Jon Mundorf, an international leader in UDL teaching and learning strategies, working with ALCDSB staff.

As a geographically diverse Catholic school system, our mix of urban and rural schools (five secondary, 32 elementary and five adult learning sites) span across 16,000 square kilometres in south-eastern Ontario. The distance between the various schools, and the opportunities to collaborate with colleagues teaching in similar contexts, often pose challenges.

Our model of Special Education service delivery provides a common framework of full inclusion with students educated in their most enabling environment. Believing that diversity of learners in the classroom is beneficial to all and that all students are capable of deep learning, are core values in ALCDSB and are consistently lived out in all of our school communities.

Recognizing that all students are unique learners, we began to redesign learning spaces in our schools, creating flexibility in the physical environment to better support collaboration, access to resources and choice for students. The transformation of all traditional library spaces to Learning Commons, designed for multi-purpose dynamic inquiry, took place over the same four to five-year period. Positive impacts on student engagement were clearly evident.

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The integration of technology in all learning spaces, and thoughtful decisions about the purpose and function of devices in support of achievement, created another building block for developing continuity in instructional practice and learning resources for students.

Listening to the aspirations of students and parents/guardians within ALCDSB, and seeking their advice on how to support high levels of achievement and wellbeing for all students, has been key in affirming our vision of student-centered learning. With clarity and consensus on our vision for teaching and learning, we began to explore ways to engage in the professional learning we would need to move forward.

In the summer of 2016, a team of nine (two superintendents and seven program and special education consultants), participated in a week-long course on Universal Design for Learning at Harvard University, co-facilitated by the Centre for Applied Special Technology (CAST). This small, core team began to work together differently, identifying and removing barriers to cross-departmental collaboration, extending their learning, building UDL resource banks



Students working together on a French project in the school Learning Commons.

and sharing their learning with like-minded colleagues.

Planning professional learning for our system and going deeper in our learning were early priorities. The absence of Canadian communities of practice necessitated further collaboration with colleagues in the United States. Bringing the experts to ALCDSB enabled us to provide engaging professional development in our district. Additionally, principals and vice principals, organized in four formal Learning Networks, initiated professional reading and

exploratory exercises in UDL and introduced the principles to their staff.

Investments in capacity building have continued with multiple training opportunities provided to principals, vice principals and designated teachers in all schools; elementary and secondary. The core team has expanded and deepened their knowledge and expertise by learning with colleagues in more advanced stages of practice in districts within the United States.

The principles of UDL have been incorporated in all embedded professional

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learning, including the Renewed Math Strategy and intervention planning facilitated by student services. A team of 17 educators, including representatives of the four Principal Learning Networks, classroom teachers and central program staff, participated in a three-day UDL conference facilitated by CAST in the summer of 2017.

The knowledge and capacity building of staff in understanding and leveraging the principles of UDL continue to gain momentum in the 2017-2018 school year, with student-centred pedagogy embedded at the core of the Board Improvement Plan for Student Achievement and Wellbeing (BIPSAW).

A free conference open to all educators, community members and guests within the region was hosted by ALCDSB in early November featuring Jon Mundorf, an international leader in UDL practice. Formal staff development and training for school teams has continued to take place. School Improvement Plans for Student Achievement and Wellbeing (SIPSAW) reflect school based plans to advance UDL principles in all classrooms.

Our instructional coaches are working with math learning partners across all elementary schools. Part of their collective work is planning for student learning in mathematics through the lens of Universal Design for Learning. At the secondary level, our Differentiated Instruction Partners have received professional development around UDL. Opportunities for small teams of secondary educators to explore and learn more about UDL is available to our secondary schools this year.

Exploring and actioning UDL principles in all schools has been championed by the principals and vice principals within ALCDSB. Their instructional leadership is key to achieving consistency in student-centred pedagogy in all classrooms. A principal-led Professional Development Committee has been established to align resources and learning opportunities, supporting advancement of the work of the SIPSAW.

Principal Learning Networks are supporting high levels of collaboration and a web-based forum has been developed to share effective tools and resources used with staff. Principals continue to

identify the support they need to further their capacity building to lead the instructional program.

Developing a cadre of central staff facilitators and establishing networks of practice for educators at like levels of implementation of UDL practice, are the next steps in our plan to extend student centred pedagogy across our district. This includes honouring the need for multiple entry points for adult learners in this learning journey.

We are growing professionally in our understanding of the conditions which promote high levels of achievement and wellbeing for every student. We are becoming more skilled at identifying and removing barriers for individual learners and are energized by the positive impacts we are seeing in teaching, learning and engagement of ALL students. ○

Karen Shannon and David Giroux are Superintendents of School Effectiveness with the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board in Napanee, Ontario. They are collaborating to remove barriers for all learners across the district through the lens of Universal Design for Learning.

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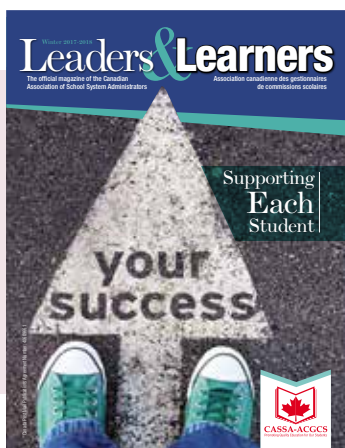
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SUBMIT YOUR ABSTRACT

Like what you've read in this magazine? Thinking you might have a great story or initiative to share? We are currently accepting abstracts for the Summer 2018 issue of *Leaders & Learners*. This is the edition that is distributed at CASSA's annual conference in July, and as always, will be direct-mailed to school boards across Canada.

To submit:

- Proposals are due: **January 29, 2018**
- Final articles are due: **April 23, 2018**
- Theme: **Supporting Each Student, Part 2**
- Email Editor-in-Chief Shannon Savory (ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net) and copy CASSA's Executive Director Ken Bain (ken_bain@cassa-acgcs.ca).
- Send 50 to 100 words describing what the article will discuss.
- You will be notified if / when your abstract is accepted, and will be provided a word count that must be adhered to.

Specifically, we are looking for articles about how schools, school districts and school boards are supporting every student, be it through programs, community partnerships, professional development for principals/teachers, etc. We are looking for features and success stories from each region of Canada: Eastern Canada, Quebec, Ontario, Western Canada and Northern Canada.

Articles proposals may have been written previously by a member in the jurisdiction, or you may provide a new article by someone with an expertise or experience in this area, or someone developing a program for a district or province.

We look forward to learning about how you are supporting each student!

CASSA AWARD WINNERS

Congratulations to these award recipients, who were recognized at the CASSA Annual Conference in Halifax, July 2017.



Honourary Life Membership, in recognition of excellence in education at the national level, honours individuals who have contributed significantly to CASSA. Here, CASSA Executive Director Ken Bain (left) presents the Honourary Life Membership Award to Barry Wowk, Superintendent of St. Albert Public Schools in Alberta.



CASSA members who have exhibited exemplary leadership ability and who have enhanced school administration are eligible to receive the **XEROX – EXL Award**, which includes an honorary life membership in CASSA. Recipients are those who have brought honour to themselves, their colleagues and their profession; given exemplary service to their provincial or national professional association; made significant contributions to the field of education through their service, writings or other activities; and who therefore serves as a role model and teacher to others. Here, John Malloy, Director of Education from the Toronto District School Board, accepts his XEROX Canada EXL Award as Canada's School System Leader of the Year.



CASSA Board of Director Changes

CASSA is excited to welcome two new organizations as well as new members to the Board of Directors! British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) is represented on the board by Executive Director Claire Guy. Kevin Kaardal, a BCSSA member, was already on the board as a Director at Large.

Regroupement national des directions générales en éducation (RNDGÉ) is represented on the board by Executive Director Roger Paul and Vice President Monique Boudreau. RNDGÉ represents the Directors of Education of the 28 francophone school boards located in nine provinces and three territories outside of Quebec.

Leaving the board were: Barry Wowk (CASS), Simone Oliver (OCSOA), Loretta Notten (OCSOA), Howard Miller (ADGESBQ), Guy Leblanc (ANSEA) and Eldred Barnes (NLASSA). I thank them all for their dedication to CASSA!

Joining the board are Deb Crawford (OCSOA), Brett Lough (MASS), Michael Chechile (ADGESBQ), Margo Tait and Gary Adams (ANSEA) and Gerald Buffett (NLASSA). In new positions on the board are Cindy Finn who, in addition to being past president, becomes the Eastern Rep to AASA and Mike Borgfjord who becomes the Western Rep to AASA. We look forward to everyone's contributions as we continue the work of CASSA!

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Leaders & Learners publishes twice in 2018; the Summer 2018 edition will be available to attendees at CASSA's Annual Conference in Ottawa, Ontario in July, and the Winter 2018-2018 will be available to attendees at the CEO/CFO Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) Annual Conference in January 2019.

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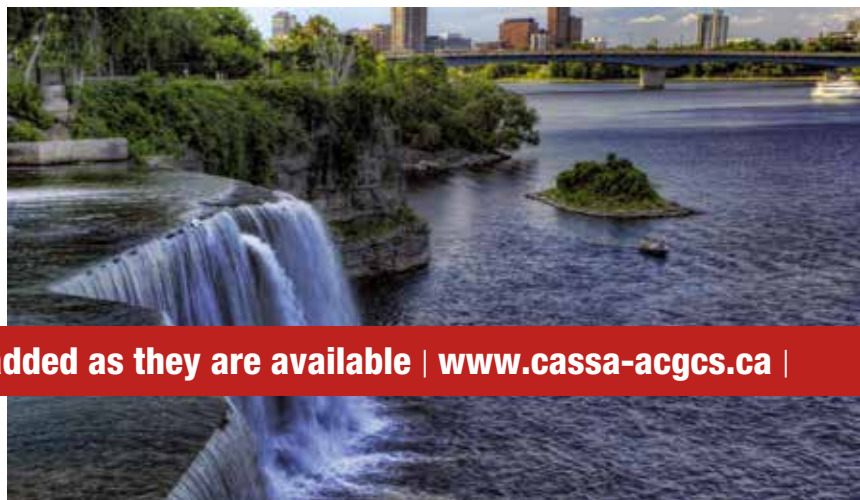
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