



CASSA-ACGCS
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

Greetings from the President

Inside this Issue

Greetings from the President,
Page 1

Greetings from the Outgoing President,
Page 2

Greetings from the Executive Director,
Page 3

Offering Support for Vulnerable
Students,
Page 4

Children and Youth in Our Care,
Page 6

Faces in the Crowd,
Page 9

New Advertising Opportunities,
Page 11

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

**This year, every
practice and routine
has had to be
reconsidered in light of
the pandemic.**

It is with a pronounced sense of humility that I find myself writing my first message as President of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA). I'm an introvert by nature, and my self-effacement is further reinforced as a result of being on the Board and attending

CASSA events for over 10 years, and in that time being exposed to so many amazing educational leaders from across Canada, including the "big shoes" of predecessors Anne O'Brien, Cindy Finn and more recently Reg Klassen.

Thanks to their leadership, and the intentional efforts of our Executive Director Ken Bain, among others, I also feel a great deal of pride in that CASSA has become financially stable and that the Board of Directors is now made up of representatives from all the affiliate superintendent associations from across Canada. Now, we just need to maintain and build on that through the pandemic!

At the beginning of every school year, each of us faces excitement and challenges. However, in most years, our schools were only closed for two months, not five months, and our challenges were limited in that there were standard practices and routines that provided a foundation for new personalities (turnover of staff and students) and our choice of new initiatives.

But this year, every practice and routine has had to be reconsidered in light of the pandemic. This can be overwhelming, time-consuming and energy-sapping, for everyone, certainly no less so for our school principals and staff. I reach out to you, and I think it important for us all



Curtis Brown
CASSA/ACGCS President

to reach out to schools, with compassion and understanding, as we expect them to do the same for students and their families.

All the best in the 2020-21 school year. Be kind to yourselves and others, especially in these tumultuous times. We've got this!

Curtis Brown
CASSA/ACGCS President

Getting to Know Our New President

Dr. Curtis Brown is the Superintendent of the South Slave Divisional Education Council in the Northwest Territories. He was named Canadian Superintendent of the Year by CASSA in 2011, was inducted into the N.W.T. Education Hall of Fame in 2012 and received the Polar Medal from the Governor General in 2019. He also currently serves on both the Advisory Council and the Editorial Board for the EdCan Network.

Greetings

from the Outgoing President

In my last newsletter article, I shared with you two personal experiences, the first about the passing of my father and, because of restrictions, how we were unable to get together with extended family to celebrate his life. The second was about being separated from my grandchildren and, when we did see each other, being unable to hug because of physical distancing expectations.

The good news is that I am now hugging my grandchildren once again. However, we continue to wait to gather as a family to celebrate my father's life, given the border between the United States and Canada is still closed.

Slowly parts of how we lived our life pre-pandemic have begun to return – simple things like riding with a friend on the same golf cart, getting a haircut and going to your favourite restaurant for lunch. Activities we once took for granted, we now cherish as we start to live our “new normal.”

During a recent Zoom cocktail hour meeting with friends made during a WE learning/working tour, we pondered the question of how the pandemic was affecting our mental and physical wellness and what adjustments we had made in our efforts to take care of ourselves.

There were a variety of responses as we reflected on our work and health during the past four months. As we might expect, each of us was affected differently, and in some cases, individuals had not paused to consider the personal impact and had just carried on doing their job.

During our conversation, it became evident that reflecting on our physical and mental well-being was, indeed, a very important consideration, and each of us left the meeting more keenly aware of our own physical and mental states. It was a worthwhile exercise among trusted colleagues, reminding each of us of the importance of looking after ourselves.

This is my last article in our newsletter as your President. Thank you for your support. It has been my honour to serve you in this capacity, and I look forward to serving as your Past President. I also want to thank you for your continued support of CASSA, as our organization does not exist without it.

And finally, in addition to taking care of CASSA, remember to look after yourselves and each other. Be well.

Reg Klassen

CASSA/ACGCS Outgoing President



Reg Klassen
CASSA/ACGCS President

Activities we
once took for
granted, we now
cherish as we
start to live our
“new normal.”

**Share Your
Success
Stories!**

Write for the Winter 2020-21 and Summer 2021 issues of *Leaders & Learners* on the theme of *Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-being*.

Email Kaitlin Vitt, editor of the magazine, at kvitt@matrixgroupinc.net for deadlines and more information.

Greetings from the Executive Director



Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

Welcome back to another year of Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) newsletters! I am not sure how much downtime each of you had over the summer given the uncertainty around what the 2020-21 school year would look like. I am sure this was unlike any other summer you have had or any other September start-up you have ever planned. Hopefully, you, your families and your communities are healthy and remain so.

Each September the CASSA board experiences a natural turnover of members as associations change their executives, CASSA board member terms expire and retirements occur.

Leaving the board after many years of commitment to the importance of a national organization of school system leaders is Anne O'Brien. Anne spent the last six years on the Executive as President Elect, President and Past President. In her tenure, Anne represented CASSA nationally and internationally with honour and distinction. The board will miss her experience and sense of humour – both of which we so badly need.

Also leaving the board having served many years is Metro Huculak. Metro was the first CASSA Board member representing the Northwest Territories (along with Curtis Brown). Metro always brought forward updates and advocacy on behalf of northern territorial leaders and their communities of students. We wish him well in his retirement!

Barry Litun, Executive Director of the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), is retiring from that role. Barry has been an exemplary association executive director keeping his members actively engaged in the provincial association and representing Alberta school system leaders on the CASSA board. We hope Barry enjoys his retirement!

Although their terms were shorter, their contributions were strong and effective, and we express our thanks to Ab Falconi (Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association-OCSSOA), Allan McManaman (Ontario Public Supervisory Officers' Association-OPSOA) and Karen Shipka (CASS).

New to the CASSA board is David Keohane, the new Executive Director of CASS; Wilco Tymensen (CASS); Simone

Gessler (Northwest Territories Superintendents' Association); and Lori Naar (OCSSOA).

There are a few changes to the CASSA Executive. I welcome Kevin Kaardal to the President Elect role. Kevin previously represented the BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA).

I want to thank Reg Klassen (Manitoba Association of School Superintendents-MASS) who has served CASSA so well over the past two years in his role as President. Reg has always had the best interests of Canada's leaders at the forefront of his interactions here in Canada and the United States.

I hope your year starts off as well as possible given the extraordinary times in which you lead!

Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

CASSA Board of Directors

President

Curtis Brown

Past President

Reg Klassen

President Elect

Kevin Kaardal

CASS (Alberta)

David Keohane and Wilco Tymensen

LEADS (Saskatchewan)

Ben Grebinski, Domenic Scuglia and Quintin Robertson

MASS (Manitoba)

Barb Isaak and Pauline Clarke

OPSOA (Ontario)

Joy Badder

OCSSOA (Ontario)

John Kostoff and Lori Naar

NWTSA (Northwest Territories)

Yvonne Careen and Simone Gessler

ADGESBQ (Quebec)

Mike Helm

AAESQ (Quebec)

Jan Langelier

RNDGÉ

Valérie Morand and Anne Bernard-Bourgeois

NBSSA (New Brunswick)

Zoë Watson

BCSSA

Claire Guy

NLASSA (Newfoundland and Labrador)

Gerald Buffett and Andrew Hickey

AASA Eastern Rep

Cindy Finn

AASA Western Rep

Mike Borgford

Directors At Large

Bill Cooper (Nunavut) and Paul McFadyen (Yukon)

Executive Director

Ken Bain

Creative Partnership Offers Support to Students



The last few months of the 2019-20 school year were unlike any experienced before in public education in Canada. With most schools closed down by mid-March due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students across the country lost physical access to their usual school environments and classroom time.

Students frequently missed out on special in-person events, like class field trips, graduation ceremonies and other gatherings. For some vulnerable 2SLGBTQ+ students, the school closures also meant losing a connection to safe spaces and supportive peers.

This spring, the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) worked with the Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (CCGSD) to make sure students had the opportunity to safely connect with each other and with trained facilitators through the Virtual Forum: Free to Be Me 2020 event.

Presented in previous years as in-person events, the June 2020 version of the program

gave students the chance to safely take part in online workshops and sharing sessions that provided education on inclusivity to help them normalize their feelings, identities and relationships. NLESD students in Grades 7 to 9 and Grades 10 to 12 had access to a variety of online sessions on June 2, 9 and 16.

On June 11, Rahim Thawer, a clinical social worker and psychotherapist based in Toronto, delivered the Virtual Forum's keynote address for both students and educators. Thawer facilitates anti-racism/anti-oppression, trauma-informed and 2SLGBTQ+ mental health training for organizations across Canada.

The Free to Be Me 2020 June programming concluded with a 2SLGBTQ+ Inclusion in Sports session just for educators on June 17. This last session included an overview of gender and sexual diversity and the history of homophobia and transphobia in sports. It also offered a conversation on increasing 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion and visibility within sport. All of these events were presented free of charge.

The NLESD represents all English-speaking students and schools in the

province of Newfoundland and Labrador, serving over 65,000 students. (The second part of this feature, which will highlight the district's perspective on the experience of partnering with the CCGSD and with its own Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation to create the online version of the Free to Be Me forum, will appear in the October 2020 issue of *Leaders & Learners* Newsletter.)

The CCGSD, founded in 2015, reaches over 250,000 people each year through its anti-discrimination programming in both Canada and the United States. Its mission statement notes that it "aspires to support and transform Canadian and Indigenous communities from coast to coast to coast in a shared vision of a discrimination-free gender and sexually diverse world." The centre's programming is delivered in a variety of formats, from full-day workshops to weeklong training forums with integrated yearlong projects.

Cameron Aitken, office manager and former acting executive director for the CCGSD, shared with *Leaders & Learners*

key information on how the centre worked with the NLESD, one of its school district partners, to transform in-person conferences and sessions to online events and meaningful support for students in isolation.

How did the relationship between the NLESD and the CCGSD develop?

The relationship began at the board level in 2017, as former staffer Amanda Myerson worked to plan events for 2017 and then the coming years with the NLESD. The partnership continued, and the CCGSD works directly with the Safe and Inclusive School Itinerants to schedule regional events.

Was the 2019 in-person forum in November the first time that the CCGSD worked with the NLESD?

In November 2019, the CCGSD actually ran five events in Newfoundland, and a sixth was planned but cancelled because of snowfall. The Department of Canadian Heritage through the Youth Take Charge and then Commemorate Canada funding streams supported both of these projects. These conferences had different mandates but an overarching goal of expanding the knowledge of participants around gender and sexual diversity.

How many public school districts has the CCGSD worked with in terms of forums or sessions?

It is difficult to say, as our work varies from year to year. For the 2019-20 school year, I would say we worked with over three dozen school boards in all provinces and territories. For the year prior, we worked with closer to five dozen school boards but had fewer events in the three territories.

Was the 2020 NLESD virtual forum originally scheduled to be another in-person event?

It was planned to be a make-up event and then potentially an event focused on GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) students. The planning shifted once everything went online, and we decided to start with a virtual conference and then work the following year to support a virtual GSA group. This experience also allowed us to hone our capacity to present workshops and longer virtual conferences.

How was the decision reached to create a new virtual event at the end of the school year, several months after most schools closed due to the pandemic?

We have a strong relationship with the NLESD, and we worked to ensure that we could still provide programming. From our end, we needed to test our virtual conferences and workshops before having a full rollout for programming in the 2020-21 school year.

With this in mind, it was an incredible learning opportunity with five workshops, debriefing sessions, a keynote presentation and then an extra professional development session for teachers. This will form the template for our future online events. For those interested in events featuring Queer History or our Regional Forums, please contact us at community@ccgsd-ccdgs.org and commemorate@ccgsd-ccdgs.org.

What are some of the key steps to successfully put on an event like this?

From our perspective, one of the most important factors is to partner with a non-governmental organization (NGO) or a community-based organization. At CCGSD, our mandate and our funding allow us to offer free workshops based on gender and sexual diversity. The Safe and Caring School Itinerants are experts at supporting their families of schools and work effectively to schedule regional events.

Before COVID-19, our strategy was to work together to host various regional events across Newfoundland and Labrador. This goal remains the same, although we have opted toward virtual programming for the foreseeable future.

For the virtual Free to Be Me forum, were there any challenges from your perspective in terms of helping students?

We found it difficult to connect with students, as they had little to no contact with teachers across the NLESD. To compensate, we used mailing lists from our past events in 2019, and this allowed us to get in direct contact with students. We also ran Facebook ads and performed some outreach with provincial organizations to further promote the event.

Overall, we had a lower attendance than anticipated, and we attribute this to reaching students directly as opposed to through their

classroom or school environment. As schools reopen in a variety of capacities, we hope this will improve our ability to reach even more students through our virtual programming.

Please tell our readers about the session facilitators this year.

With the exception of Rahim Thawer, the presenters for the event were all from the CCGSD. This included Educational Co-ordinator Eliot Waddingham, the office manager (me) and our Social Media Co-ordinator Janani Suthan. These folks are all seasoned facilitators and worked together to present a variety of workshops and have various educational backgrounds. Thawer gave the keynote address, which was offered to students and teachers and was centred on mental health during and outside of COVID-19.

What sort of feedback did you receive about how people felt about the virtual format?

NLESD ran the feedback tool, and this functioned through a platform called Thoughtexchange (a previous CASSA conference sponsoring partner). This platform was used to generate a variety of textual responses to questions or themes. Overall, everyone was thrilled with the quality of sessions and the facilitators. There was also overall consensus that more needs to be done on an ongoing basis to support students across Newfoundland and Labrador, such as starting a virtual GSA in 2020.

What would you most like senior system leadership in public school districts across Canada to know about this event and supporting the 2SLGBTQ+ community within public education?

We are interested every year in promoting our free programming across Canada. In particular, as we work through COVID-19, we want to stress to administrators and school officials that diversity-based education is crucial during every school year. To that end, we want to work with regional partners whenever possible to present one-off workshops or longer virtual conferences.

For school system leaders wanting more information, please email me at community@ccgsd-ccdgs.org or visit our website at www.ccgdsd-ccdgs.org to view more of our resources. ○



Collective Responsibility of Child Welfare and the School Division

Manitoba currently has the highest number of children in care of the child welfare authorities in Canada. In 2005 in Winnipeg, the Seven Oaks School Division (SOSD) initiated a collaboration with the four provincial Child Welfare Authorities in order to improve the educational outcomes of children in care.

What resulted was an ethic of collective responsibility that was shared between both professions. Collective responsibility is a characteristic of a professional community that has a strong desire and shared belief about a particular issue, in this case the educational outcomes of children in

By Sharon Halldorson, Seven Oaks School Division; Verland Force, Seven Oaks School Division; Raymond Babb, Winnipeg Child and Family Services; and Dawn Sutherland, University of Manitoba

care. Collective responsibility is developed by balancing perceived responsibilities with the efficacy to meet these responsibilities. Over a 15-year period, the Community Connections Committee has shifted from adopting an organizational-led approach to facilitating an individual ethic of collective responsibility with greater school and teacher self-efficacy in responding to the needs of children in care.

During this time, the SOSD recognized the necessity of improved collaboration between services to meet the needs of students who were in care of Child and Family Services (CFS) within its schools. The catalyst

for this collaboration emerged from the findings and recommendations of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry in 1999.

The most egregious finding from this inquiry was that Indigenous children were disproportionately represented within the child welfare population. Although Indigenous children constitute about 15 per cent of the population in Manitoba, they represented about 90 per cent of children in care of the child welfare system. The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative (AJI-CWI) was designed to transition child protection and family support services to the Indigenous people of Manitoba.

Key recommendations included restructuring the child welfare system in order to ensure that the rights and interests of Indigenous children and their families were protected. Over the following five-year period, the child welfare system was restructured with the intent to return control of child welfare services to First Nations and Métis communities. Subsequently, the SOSD established the Community Connections Committee, partnering with Winnipeg Child and Family Services, to better serve the children in care in the division, particularly those who identified as Indigenous.

During initial meetings in 2011, the committee identified three primary responsibilities: to create connections with child welfare organizations; to improve or integrate services already available so that access to services is more efficient; and to develop relationships and improve communication between systems. In the early years of this committee the emphasis was on keeping children in care in school and improving their educational experiences.

The initial mechanism to address these identified responsibilities was through information-sharing. First, each organization at the table was asked to explain their roles and responsibilities. The focus was on understanding the complexities of the child welfare system, which is comprised of a number of different child and family services agencies, including Indigenous and Métis agencies, all of which operate under the direction of one of the four Child Welfare Authorities.

Information-sharing was further achieved through school division Sharing Days. The objective for these Sharing Days was to share the knowledge that was generated from the local committee within the broader Seven Oaks community, including administrators, educators, school social workers and other service providers. In addition, the Sharing Days were opportunities to build common ground about the needs of children in care and to provide information on accessing services. Throughout the early years of this committee, the importance of relationship-building was consistently emphasized, and the committee set out to foster these relationships in a variety of ways.

In the fall of 2013, the Superintendent and Clinical Director of the Seven Oaks School Division attended the presentation *Joint Education and Child and Family Services Protocol for Children and Youth in Care*, presented by Manitoba Education and the Métis Child and Family Services Authority.

After this presentation, the CFS/SOSD Collaborative Committee was formed and included representatives from the agency level (i.e. supervisors and foster placement coordinators) as well as the educational liaisons from the policy-making entities: the General, Métis, Southern and Northern Authorities. The school division was represented by divisional superintendents, school principals, teachers, school social workers and the Director of Educational and Clinical Support Services.

Continued on next page

Children and Youth in Our Care

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

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

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



At this time, there was a shift in the priorities of the committee, emphasizing a strengths-based perspective of children in care and their families; an expansion of the committee to include representatives from other child-serving organizations, including mental health services; and the importance of promoting positive relationships between educators and child welfare social workers.

The focus of the committee was on ways in which school staff and social workers could collaborate on better supporting children in care through identifying underlying issues associated with poor educational outcomes, including something as basic as attendance.

In the 2014-15 school year, the committee's priorities expanded yet again to improve educators' understandings of Indigenous culture, identity and language; better support children's families and caregivers; provide cultural awareness for non-Indigenous foster families and students; prioritize school continuity; and facilitate a broad range of professional development activities, including cultural awareness, intergenerational trauma and trauma-informed practices.

In 2015, the Manitoba Centre for Health Policy (MCHP) published *Educational Outcomes of Children in Care in Manitoba*. The MCHP provided clear data on what many in education and child welfare already knew: the educational outcomes of children in care were abysmal. For example, whereas 89 per cent of children who have not been in care graduate from high school, only 33 per cent of children with child welfare involvement do so.¹

In the fall of 2015, the committee partnered with a research team from the University of Manitoba to document and further develop the committee's work to improve educational outcomes of children in care. Through this process, the group created three interprofessional teams to examine three issues: understanding the school experiences of children in care from their own standpoints; improving the intake process when children in care transition to a new school; and creating a visual graphic for children in care, summarizing the resources available for them. Critically, the committee's discussions recognized the importance of respecting the rights of birth parents and more actively engaging them in school activities.

The Community Connections Committee was prescient in facilitating relationships that were subsequently identified by the two

government departments (education and families) as important for improving the outcomes of children in care. The Manitoba Task Force on Educational Outcomes of Children in Care concluded that minimal information sharing, multiple care placements, school transience, absence of meaningful connections to culture and a lack of school connectedness all contribute to poor outcomes for this group.² Significantly, the Task Force reinforced the position that enhancing interprofessional collaboration was critical to addressing these barriers for children in care.

A key issue identified by both the committee and the Task Force was the disruption of schooling resulting from changes in children's residential placements; when children change placements they were often required to change schools and frequently became the responsibility of another school division. This disruption often resulted in delays in new school registration, delays in information sharing, a change in or removal of educational and social supports and the lack of relational continuity for the child.

In response to this problem, a significant accomplishment of the Community Connections Committee was the development of an interdivisional protocol that addressed the movement of children in care between school divisions within the city. This meant the six metro Winnipeg school divisions agreed to a protocol whereby respective superintendents would continue to maintain the student's school placement even when students were moved out of their division's catchment. This represented a major change in policy resulting from the interprofessional collaboration of the committee.

Although the leadership and the activities of the committee developed at the divisional level, they created a context in which individual schools were encouraged to initiate specific practices that reflected the dynamics of their individual school communities. These ranged from inviting birth families and social workers to school activities, providing safe spaces for family visits and initiating home visits to encourage school attendance.

In the spring of 2018, the Sharing Day of the past was renamed Working Together to Support Children in Care. The change in name represented the committee's increased commitment to interprofessional collaboration and reflected the shift in thinking about shared responsibility for children in care.

The Working Together conference included keynote speakers, a gallery walk of

students' art and writing pieces expressing their experiences as children in care, breakout discussion sessions and sharing circles. Child welfare social workers, educators, mental health support workers, students, foster families and biological families all participated. The focus for the day was derived directly from the Manitoba Task Force report highlighting school connectedness. The subsequent year, the conference focus was on "student voice," in which sessions were planned specifically for students themselves, including self-advocacy workshops and information sessions on resources and opportunities to support youth in ageing out of care.

The Child Welfare Authorities and Seven Oaks School Division have forged a partnership over the past two decades that has been successful in improving the school experiences of many of our children in care. Our collaborations, sharing days, research partnership with the University of Manitoba and rich discussions over the years have set us on the right path, but we know that we have much more work to do if we want to continue to enhance the educational outcomes and, indeed, the lives of our children in care. The following three articles in this series will describe other initiatives that emerged from this committee's work. ○

Sharon Halldorson is the Director of Student Services at the Seven Oaks School Division. Verland Force is the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services at the Seven Oaks School Division. Raymond Babb is a Unit Supervisor at Winnipeg Child and Family Services. Dawn Sutherland is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba

References

1. Brownell, M., M. Chartier, W. Au, L. MacWilliam, J. Schultz, W. Guenette, J. Valdiva (2015). *The educational outcomes of children in care in Manitoba*. Manitoba Centre for Health Policy. Retrieved from http://mchpappserv.cpe.umanitoba.ca/reference/CIC_report_web.pdf.
2. Christensen, T. and K. Lamoureux (2016). *Manitoba Task Force on the Educational Outcomes of Children in Care*. Retrieved from www.edu.gov.mb.ca/edu/docs/ed_outcomes_report.pdf.

Faces in the Crowd:

Gaëlle Absolonne



Gaëlle Absolonne is the Director General of the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board (SWLSB), a position she has held since 2018. The SWLSB's administrative offices are based in Rosemère in the Greater Montreal area. The board, part of the Association of Directors General of English School Boards of Quebec affiliate, includes over 40 schools and centres that serve approximately 15,000 students. It is the third largest English school board in the province.

Absolonne began her career in public education as a physical education teacher and a high school French second language teacher.

By the age of 29, Absolonne had become vice-principal in an elementary school and soon moved to vice-principal and then principal of a high school. These opportunities in administration led her first to the position of Director of Adult Education and Vocational Training and then Director of School Organization and Transportation at her board's head office.

"I have been privileged to experience the various management roles available in a school board, which gave me a good overview of the different areas where students and staff can thrive," she says.

She was then assigned the position of interim Assistant Director General of the SWLSB but soon left to follow an opportunity as Assistant Director General at the Commission scolaire de Laval, the third largest school board (including both English and French boards) in Quebec. Two years later, she returned to the SWLSB as Director General.

Absolonne's formal training includes a bachelor's degree in physical education, a certificate in French as a second language, DESS (diplôme d'études supérieures spécialisées) in administration of education and a master's degree in administration of education.

She is a strong believer in the importance of inclusion and diversity and feels it is crucial to promote and invest in public education and the

quality of dedicated and passionate employees that leaders like her have the pleasure of working with.

"We live in a complex world with various needs. Developing an educational environment where everyone has a place, a voice and quality services is paramount," she says. "This begins by ensuring equal access to education for all. The more diverse we are, the richer we are."

Despite the extra concerns that every senior administrator in public education is responsible for at this time, Absolonne generously took the time this summer to share more of her personal story with *Leaders & Learners*.

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

I was fortunate to personally benefit from a quality public sector education. Having the opportunity to give back to my community and to the public sector is both inspiring and rewarding.

Teaching is an act of ongoing exchange and ongoing learning, and I am inspired through helping others and learning from others. We are in the business of human beings and lifelong learning. There is so much talent within our student population and our staff that it inspires me to be at my best and take advantage of every opportunity to grow and give back.

The challenges, however, are multiple for administrators but they are also rewarding. I have always felt it was a privilege to be in a position where you are surrounded by many stakeholders. Mobilizing a team, creating relationships, highlighting talent and fostering teamwork are what motivates me.

Have you spearheaded a particular program or initiative within your board?

When I returned to the SWLSB as Director General, I presented my CARS model, which represents the following four core values: communication, accountability, rigour and

solution-oriented. The CARS model is our vehicle to success!

Based on the CARS values, with a group of administrators accompanied by an outside consultant, we created the administrators performance appraisal process. Our entire management team contributed and inspired us to identify 16 key indicators (observable behaviours) we look for in an administrator at the SWLSB.

We will implement this evolving model within our management team during the 2020-21 school year. We have also begun to recruit based on it, enabling us to identify our corporate posture as a team of administrators. I think one of the main roles of a leader is to harness the talent of each individual in an effort to contribute to our collective intelligence.

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

Leadership is about actions, not titles. It's about empowerment and inspiring others to lead and be the best version of themselves. It's about building trust and relationships, being vulnerable and staying true to your words and actions, and expecting the same in kind. It's about seeing the big picture – I call it the helicopter view – to make the best possible decisions for the system in place.

We need to keep in mind that we are servicing a variety of learners and educators. And sometimes you also need to make the tough decisions while never forgetting to listen before you act. Communication is the first core value of the CARS model, after all! ○

Faces in the Crowd: Sean Monteith

Sean Monteith is the Director of Education for the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board (HPEDSB), a post he began in August 2019. The board serves approximately 15,000 students at 40 schools and covers an area of over 7,200 square kilometres. The board's education centre is in Belleville, Ont.

Before joining the administrative team at HPEDSB, Monteith was the Director of Education for the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board (KPDSB), which has its offices in Kenora and Dryden. His 25 years with KPDSB included serving as Superintendent of Education with a portfolio that included special education, secondary schools, student success, Indigenous education and human resources.

As a leader, Monteith is known for his commitment to all students and to removing systemic barriers to provide them with equity of opportunity and outcomes. One result of his efforts is an increase in graduation rates for Indigenous and rural/northern students at KPDSB. The Four Directions Graduation Coach program resulted in the biggest gains among First Nations students in all of Ontario and the establishment of provincially funded Indigenous graduation coach programs.

His commitment to First Nations students and communities included negotiating partnerships and tuition agreements, new teacher induction mentorship agreements and provincial/federal education service agreements with Indigenous tribal councils and First Nations. Some of these partners included the Nishnawbe Aski Nation, Seven Generations Education Institute, Keewaytinook Okimakanak Board of Education and Northern Nishnawbe Education Council.

Monteith also developed a regional Northern Students Achievement Strategy that focused on wraparound services to support student attendance, engagement, achievement and graduation. This successful strategy was eventually funded



and supported by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Monteith's support for northern students and communities also included advocating for the building and construction of a \$31 million high school in Sioux Lookout, the largest education capital construction project in northern Ontario. Under his leadership, KPDSB was recognized with the Charities Community Partner Award for its Hockey Canada Skills Academy and other financially accessible physical fitness programming.

Another of Monteith's professional achievements was his taking part in a nationally recognized regional research project on students with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD), which led to provincial recognition of FASD as a priority for supporting educators and school boards.

He also oversaw steady improvements in KPDSB student measurements and outcomes, including Grade 3 and Grade 6 assessments measured by Ontario's Education Quality and Accountability Office. He set up an Efficacy

Working Group that included representatives from all board staffing groups, adopting a servant-leadership model to inform and recommend developmental planning to senior and executive administration.

Monteith has also previously worked as an elementary and secondary school principal and elementary and secondary teacher. He earned his bachelor of arts (honours) from the University of Ottawa and his bachelor and master of education degrees from Lakehead University. He is currently pursuing his PhD through the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

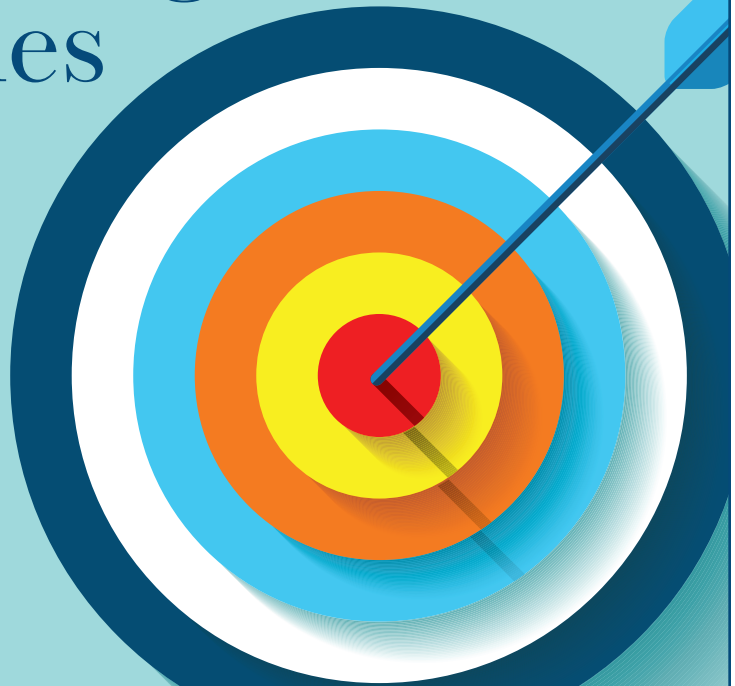
An outdoors enthusiast, Monteith greatly appreciates the time he spends at his cabin on the traditional territory of the Lac Seul First Nation or on the land fishing and hunting with friends and family. Monteith contributes regularly to his Director of Education blog on the HPEDSB website. You can read his messages at www.hpedsb.on.ca/sean-monteith-director-of-education. ○

New Advertising Opportunities

Target your products, services and expertise to Canada's educational leaders.

Now available! A new bundle allows you to advertise in this newsletter, the *Leaders & Learners* magazine and CASSA's website at a great rate!

Get in touch for details:
sales@matrixgroupinc.net
866-999-1299



Read past issues of this Newsletter and the *Leaders & Learners* magazine at <https://www.cassa-acgcs.ca>.

Please support this Newsletter's sponsor!



Solution Tree
Education Canada



CASSA-ACGCS
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

Published for the Canadian Association of School System Administrators

1123 Glenashton Drive
Oakville, ON L6H 5M1
Tel: 905-845-4254
ken_bain@cassa-acgcs.ca
www.cassa-acgcs.ca

Articles written by Tara Wittchen

Published by Matrix Group Publishing Inc.

309 Youville Street
Winnipeg, MB R2H 2S9
Tel: 866-999-1299
editor@matrixgroupinc.net
www.matrixgroupinc.net