



**CASSA-ACGCS**  
Promoting Quality Education for Our Students

## Greetings from the President

### *Inside this Issue*

Greetings from the President,  
**Page 1**

Greetings from the Executive Director,  
**Page 2**

In Conversation With: Dr. Dennis  
Carpenter,  
**Page 3**

CASSA Conference: An Update on the  
Virtual Presentations,  
**Page 6**

CASSA Awards: Recognizing  
Outstanding Leadership,  
**Page 8**

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

“We would love to hear from you. If you like one of these themes, or if you have any other suggestions, please do not hesitate to share them with your provincial or territorial representatives on our Board of Directors.”

# W

hether you use the equinox or the groundhog’s shadow to determine the first day, it will be spring by the time of the arrival of this newsletter.

I hope you are feeling energized by the fact that the sun is shining more and more each week.

By now, you are heavily engaged in planning for next school year, 2021-22. Budgeting and teacher staffing has begun, school year calendars are probably set, and staffing assignments are being considered. You would probably also love to know for sure which pandemic restrictions may be in place in September, as that has an impact on planning—we are hopeful for an easing of restrictions given the approval of another vaccine in Canada.

Speaking of planning for next year, CASSA has engaged in a few brainstorming exercises, including a recent ThoughtExchange in response to the question, “What theme or focus would you like CASSA to consider as we plan ahead for 2021-2022?” We are keen to identify a theme that draws your interest, and amass quality practitioners/writers and presenters for our *Leaders and Learners* magazine editions in 2021-22 and our conference scheduled for St. Andrews by the Sea in July 2022.

Responses so far have been in favour of ‘Lessons Learned from the Pandemic,’ followed by a considerable interest in ‘Resilience and How to Thrive in Challenging Times.’ Executive Director Ken Bain tossed



**Curtis Brown**  
CASSA/ACGCS President

out the great idea ‘Reimagining Education’ as an option for us to consider for our theme for next year, as that captures the input received and does not limit us to a continued focus on the pandemic after it is hopefully long gone. Former CASSA President Cindy Finn made a few more excellent suggestions:

- Navigating a Sea Change in Education: Opportunities for Transformation;
- Shifting Sands: Reshaping Education for the Future; and
- Navigating Change: Re-Inventing Education in Canada.

We would love to hear from you. If you like one of these themes, or if you have any other suggestions, please do not hesitate to share them with your provincial or territorial representatives on our Board of Directors. A comprehensive list of representatives can be found on page two of this newsletter.

**Curtis Brown**  
CASSA/ACGCS President

# Greetings from the Executive Director



**Ken Bain**

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

I am hoping that you, your family, and the communities you serve are healthy and looking forward to spring and summer, and a return to whatever “normal” looks like in September.

CASSA, along with CSBA and School Mental Health Ontario, launched our Canadian School Mental Health (SMH) Leadership Network in early March 2021. The network is comprised of school system leaders (administration and trustees) from throughout Canada.

The three main goals for the Canadian SMH Leadership Network Goals are: to enhance the quality and consistency of decision-making amongst Canadian system leaders in the area of school mental health; to advance mental health knowledge and confidence amongst Canadian system leaders; and to deepen relationships across provinces, researchers, and networks in order to better mobilize shared knowledge for front-line education staff.

Network leaders are being informed by an amazing group of thought leaders, including:

- Jean M. Clinton, B.Mus., MD., FRCP (C), Clinical Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University;

- Deineria Exner-Cortens, Ph.D., MPH., pronouns : she/her/elle, Tier II Canada Research Chair, Childhood Health Promotion Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Faculty of Arts; Adjunct Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Work; Joint Appointment, Department of Psychiatry; Cumming School of Medicine, University of Calgary;
- Kathy Georgiades, Ph.D., David R. (Dan) Offord Chair in Child Studies and Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioural Neurosciences, McMaster University & Offord Centre for Child Studies;
- John C. LeBlanc, M.D., M.Sc., FRCPC, Associate Professor, Pediatrics, Community Health and Epidemiology, Psychiatry, Dalhousie University;
- Brenda M. Restoule, Ph.D., C.Psych., CEO, First Peoples Wellness Circle; and,
- Michael Ungar, Ph.D., Canada Research Chair in Child, Family and Community Resilience, Dalhousie University.

This is an impressive group of thought leaders whose expertise addresses many aspects of mental health within our schools, amongst both students and staff. We are indebted to the McConnell Family Foundation for its financial support to make this network a reality.

**Ken Bain**  
CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

## SAVE THE DATE for this year's Virtual CASSA Conference!

*Co-hosted with CSBA.*

Sessions offered will run for about three hours each day and will provide an opportunity to learn together with colleagues from CASSA and CSBA.

### Anti-Racism

Wednesday July 6, 2021

### School Mental Health

Thursday July 7, 2021

### Indigenous Education

Friday July 8, 2021

## 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 and  
Quintin Robertson

### MASS (Manitoba)

Barb Isaak and Pauline Clarke

### OPSOA (Ontario)

Joy Badder and Timothy Graves

### OCSOA (Ontario)

John Kostoff and Lori Naar

### NWTSA (Northwest Territories)

Yvonne Careen and Simone Gessler

### ADGESBQ (Quebec)

Mike Helm

### AAESQ (Quebec)

Pela Nickoletopoulos

### RNDGÉ

Valérie Morand and Anne Bernard-Bourgeois

### NBSSA (New Brunswick)

Zoë Watson

### BCSSA

Claire Guy and Teresa Downs

### 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),  
Gordon Miller (Yukon)

### Executive Director

Ken Bain



 **ThoughtExchange**

*When you create an opportunity for student voice, it is backed by real-time, positive results.*

# *In Conversation With:*

## **Dr. Dennis Carpenter**

**I**t has been over a year since schools in Canada first shut down in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Although students in some parts of the country have been able to return to in-person learning, the continued presence of the virus means that virtual learning is still a reality for many. During this time, the issue of digital equity has become more prominent. How can school districts make sure every student has access to the technology they need to not only learn but thrive? What can system leaders do to reduce and eliminate digital barriers to learning? And what exactly do “equity” and “digital equity” mean?

ThoughtExchange is at the forefront of supporting these kinds of discussions. Since 2009, ThoughtExchange has been helping school districts across Canada and the US align on top district policies, address student and staff success, and build trust with their



*Dr. Dennis Carpenter, Director of Education Operations at ThoughtExchange. Photos Courtesy of Emma Moran.*

communities. Whether engaging 10 stakeholders or a community of 10,000 or more people, ThoughtExchange’s anti-bias software allows leaders to quickly gain critical insights and improve decision-making for their districts.

Dr. Dennis Carpenter is the Director of Education Operations for ThoughtExchange. He comes to ThoughtExchange after more than 20 years working as an innovative, award-winning educator, including as a superintendent in Kansas City, Missouri. Last November, Dr. Carpenter hosted a ThoughtExchange Equity in Education virtual event on the topic of digital equity in the age of COVID. The nearly hour-long event featured his in-depth discussions with Dr. Adam Phyll, Director of Technology and Media Services for Newton County School





*There is no substitute for a caring, competent teacher in a student's life.*



Look out for the second part of this conversation between *Leaders & Learners* and Dr. Dennis Carpenter in Issue 3, coming in June 2021.

.....

To learn more about ThoughtExchange, please visit [thoughtexchange.com](https://www.thoughtexchange.com) or follow the company on various social media platforms including Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Twitter.

System in Georgia, and Dr. Mark Bedell, Kansas City Public Schools Superintendent, and included time for participants to submit and rate their thoughts on the topics. The event can be replayed at <https://www.thoughtexchange.com/virtual-events/digital-equity-in-the-age-of-covid/>.

Recently, Dr. Carpenter made time for a phone conversation with *Leaders & Learners* to explore these topics and the role ThoughtExchange can play in supporting school system administrators who want to address them too. Near the start of his Digital Equity in the Age of COVID-19 session, he shared an expression of the Maasai people: “And how are the children?” This provided an interesting starting point for a conversation about digital equity during COVID-19, the first part of which is featured here. This conversation will continue in Issue 3 of *Leaders & Learners* newsletter, coming in June 2021.

**Why is it so important for senior system administrators to be thinking**

**of a question like “And how are the children”?**

The reason I think that question is so important is because student success should not be defined by a child’s address or the financial conditions the child is born into. We are in a time in which technology is the primary tool for this generation’s production and consumption of knowledge. Schools, by nature, are designed to give all children an appropriate education, and that primary tool of technology continues to become a driver of knowledge production and consumption. It is our professional responsibility to make sure that students stay connected in a way that inspires creativity and effective collaboration.

I always say to people that the COVID-19 pandemic didn’t create inequity. It shined a magnifying glass on inequity, and that magnification comes into focus when we go from face-to-face instruction to hybrid or virtual instruction—especially when school district communities, for a plethora of reasons, cannot invest in a one-to-one type of technology

for all children. We realize that there is this growing chasm. Where school districts have filled in the gap, we saw less of an impact, though there is still an impact because there is no substitute for a caring, competent teacher. But when school districts, for whatever reason, had not invested in that kind of technology, we saw significant gaps. We are going to be chasing that learning loss in my mind for many years to come.

**Your co-presenters Dr. Phyll and Dr. Bedell mentioned the importance of including student voice and elevating it, of making sure they are really heard. Why is it so important to include and elevate that student voice?**

There is no one who has a greater stake in the education of a child or student than the child or student themselves. But unfortunately, in too many different schools, we give them little say in how that instruction is delivered. Oftentimes, we utilize our own experiences in school to craft and set up a school experience for young people. That leads to a model of schooling that is dated. This is because we are living in a time that many scholars refer to as the Age of Agility. During this time, the only constant is change. And ultimately, if the teaching and learning mode we use with our children does not meet current social, emotional, and academic needs seamlessly, outcomes will not be maximized.

When we engage student voice, we create greater agency in terms of how they will participate and ultimately demonstrate success in the school environment. I think there's lost opportunity around agency when we don't incorporate student voice in the educational process, especially considering the vast amount of time that our children spend engaging with technology. In addition, if you don't engage student voice in those critical

You would not find a leader out there that would not aspire to this, and now there is a tool in the marketplace that can allow you to do this in a very effective manner.

conversations, you can trust that they are having those conversations anyway. Do you want our students talking about their school experience in a not-so-positive way or would you rather be talking with them about a school experience that can set them up for greater long-term success and provide lots of agency?

When you create formal processes to have these conversations, and students feel like they are heard and furthermore when they see things changing based on their participating in these conversations with leadership and with the adults in the school setting, then you have an opportunity to quell some of the more negative conversations that will find their way into the broader school district community. I have seen student bodies create hashtags on social media outlets, which end up going viral. These hashtags are related to their thoughts about negative and/or ineffective experiences that they are placed in a position to endure in schools. If an organization and its leadership can formalize processes to have those conversations, you can avoid some of those negative pitfalls.

**You have had quite a lot of experience helping other leaders to use ThoughtExchange to bring student voice into that conversation. What role can ThoughtExchange play in elevating student voice into conversations about digital equity?**

ThoughtExchange allows organizations to create a cadence or a speed to their improvement, whether it's improving the strategies they're employing, their overall performance, or simply improving their culture on the level of collaboration that they have in the organization. What ThoughtExchange does as a tool is create a friction-free environment to scale conversations. You can have a robust conversation with as many as 10,000-plus people or you can have that conversation with as little as 5 to 10 people. The beauty of the platform is the patented anti-bias technology that is built into it.

Put another way, when you are placing your thought into the platform and you are rating the thoughts of others, it is done effectively and inclusively in a non-biased way in which no individual thoughts are being centred in the conversation. You as the participant get to have your voice around introducing a thought and you get to have your voice around rating the thoughts of others.

As a leader in an organization, when you create that opportunity for student voice or any other voice in your organization, it is backed by real-time analytics and live results and insights that can really allow your organization to get aligned and crisp on the decisions and the strategies it is employing. I think that is beautiful. You would not find a leader out there that would not aspire to this, and now there is a tool in the marketplace that can allow you to do this in a very effective manner. ○

**ADVERTISE  
HERE!**



**CASSA is excited to offer several options to advertisers interested in showcasing their education-related expertise and services:**

- The *Leaders & Learners* magazine;
- This *Leaders & Learners* newsletter; and/or
- An advertisement on our CASSA website that clicks to your website!

**This is a great way to reach thousands of educational leaders across the entire country!**

**For more information, email [sales@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:sales@matrixgroupinc.net) or call 866-999-1299.**

# CASSA Conference:

## An Update on Virtual Presentations



**W**hile CASSA members will not be able to gather in person for the 2021 conference, they will still be able to have meaningful exchanges and take in informative sessions during a virtual edition this July. Watch the CASSA conference website for updates on how to register your team for this online experience, which includes three distinctly themed sessions. All times listed are Eastern Standard Time.

### **Wednesday, July 7, 2021 12:00–4:00PM**

This session features a two-part anti-racism presentation from Kike Ojo-Thompson. The first part will focus on the issue of racism in school districts in their structures, policies, practices, and procedures. The second segment will focus on what school system leaders should and could be doing with more of a focus on potential solutions.

Kike Ojo-Thompson is an award-winning expert in equity, inclusion, and diversity, and specializes in developing, facilitating, and carrying out innovative solutions for creating equity at an institutional level. As the founder and principal consultant of the Kojo Institute, she has helped both public and private organizations work toward creating more equitable cultures and outcomes using her signature balance of tact and honesty.

She is the former project lead for One Vision One Voice, a first-of-its-kind initiative created to address anti-Black racism in the child welfare system, and the senior facilitator for Ontario's carding review team. Kike is also a former secondary school teacher and has supported a number of boards of education throughout Ontario. Kojo Institute clients include the Toronto District School Board, Canada's largest grocery retailer and public health organizations in Canada and the US.

### **Thursday, July 8, 2021 2:00–3:45PM**

This session will feature a discussion led by a mental health expert panel featuring Dr.

Cindy Finn, Nathan Ip, Jennifer McCrea and Dr. Kathy Short.

Dr. Cindy Finn is the Director General of the Lester B. Pearson School Board, one of the largest English-language school boards in Quebec. She was previously the Director of Student Services at the board and has worked as a school psychologist in Quebec and the US. Cindy has served as president for both CASSA and the Leadership Committee for English Education in Quebec. Her leadership skills and commitment to school mental health has been recognized through a number of awards. She is passionate about creating and supporting healthy learning environments for students and staff. Cindy believes that relationships are at the root of educational success and that students can best succeed when they are meaningfully connected to the adults in their lives.

Nathan Ip is a trustee with the Edmonton Public School Board. He is a mental health advocate and the program manager of HEADSTRONG-Alberta with the Mental Health Commission of Canada. Nathan has over 10 years of experience in program devel-



opment and health promotion in mental health, youth engagement and public education. A first-generation Canadian, he has first-hand experience with the stigma surrounding mental illness in many racialized and cultural communities. Nathan, along with the HEADSTRONG team, has worked with community partners to launch the first-ever HEADSTRONG summits for racialized and cultural communities in Canada. He is leading the development of HEADSTRONG Inspire, an experiential learning program designed for youth by youth that aims to help young people develop resiliency skills. Nathan has served on many non-profit boards, including the Community Services Advisory Board for the City of Edmonton, Our House Addiction Recovery Centre and the City of Learners Initiative with the Edmonton Public Library.

Jennifer McCrea, a public servant for more than 29 years, is the Assistant Deputy Minister of Learning Division with the BC Ministry of Education. Her team supports the transforming of education to make sure students in that province remain among the best in the world through leadership and support to school districts in the areas of Early Learning, Indigenous, Inclusive and French Education. It also has responsibility for student safety and wellness, with a strong focus on mental health. Jennifer is a leader, a motivator and a strategic communicator who achieves success by building skilled teams, articulating a vision, and implementing an effective plan of action. She is passionate about creating strong collaborative relationships. She is a member of the Compassionate Systems Masters Practitioners program at MIT and has recently worked with the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Global Education Leaders Program and the OECD.

Dr. Kathy Short is a clinical child psychologist with research and practice interests in school mental health promotion, knowledge mobilization and implementation science. She is the Executive Director for School Mental Health Ontario, a provincial implementation team supporting the uptake and sustainability of evidence-based mental health promotion and prevention programming in schools. The provincial advisory groups she has served on include the Student Well-Being Advisory Committee for the Ontario Ministry of Education, the Mental Health and Addictions Leadership Advisory Council for the Ontario Ministry of Health and the COVID-19 Mental Health and Addictions Advisory Table.

Dr. Short helps to lead the Canadian School Mental Health Leadership Network and co-chairs the School Mental Health International Leadership Exchange (SMHILE), a network of global leaders focused on key themes in mental health promotion. Dr. Short was featured in a two-part interview published in the February and April 2018 issues of the *Leaders & Learners* newsletter (Volume 12, Issues 79 and 80).

**Friday, July 9, 2021  
1:30–3:00PM**

The conference concludes with a session on Indigenous Education led by Kevin Lamoureux.

Kevin Lamoureux is an award-winning scholar with an impressive publication and

research grant record. He has consulted for governments, organizations, and institutions across Canada. Kevin is committed to reconciliation and contributing to an even better Canada for all children to grow up in. He has served as Education Lead for the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, Associate Vice President for the University of Winnipeg and as Scholar in Residence for several school divisions. He recently contributed his expertise on Indigenous approaches to mental and spiritual health to Dr. Jennifer Katz's book *Ensouling Our Schools*, which is being used by educators across Canada working to create inclusive spaces for all students and address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. ○

# Save the date!

**Joint CASSA – CSBA  
Conference and Indigenous  
Gathering**

July 7 – July 9, 2021



**EQUITY  
AND  
INCLUSION**

FOR STUDENT WELL-BEING

Wednesday, July 7 – Friday, July 9, 2021

CASSA and CSBA's joint online event invites you to connect with trustee and system leader colleagues throughout Canada. The theme for 2021 is **Equity and Inclusion for Student Well-Being**. Join us virtually this year from the comfort of your own home or office.

  


Learn more or register today at [www.conference.cassa-acgcs.ca](http://www.conference.cassa-acgcs.ca)

Thought Leaders include:

					
<b>Kike Ojo-Thompson</b> <i>Program Manager</i> Principal Consultant Kojo Institute	<b>Dr. Kathy Short</b> <i>Executive Director</i> School Mental Health Ontario Toronto, Ontario	<b>Dr. Cindy Finn</b> <i>Director-General</i> Lester B. Pearson School Board Montreal, Quebec	<b>Jennifer McCrea</b> <i>Assistant Deputy Minister</i> Learning Division, Ministry of Education Province of British Columbia	<b>Nathan Ip</b> <i>Program Manager</i> HEADSTRONG-Alberta with the Mental Health Commission of Canada Trustee, Edmonton, Alberta	<b>Kevin Lamoureux</b> <i>Education Lead</i> National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

[www.conference.cassa-acgcs.ca](http://www.conference.cassa-acgcs.ca)



# CASSA Awards

## Recognizing Outstanding Leadership

**E**ach year since 2002, CASSA has recognized the extraordinary efforts of Canadian school system leaders through its EXL Award. CASSA has also presented a number of Honourary Life Memberships and Distinguished Service Awards over the years. Since its inception, the EXL Award has been supported by Xerox Canada. CASSA recognizes and is grateful for this enduring partnership.

The national EXL Award was not presented last year, marking the first time in its nearly two decade-history a national recipient was not selected. This was due in part to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cancellation of the 2020 CASSA conference.

Several regional affiliates still announced local EXL Award recipients and nominees for the national award. The recipient for the 2020 award as well as the 2021 award will be announced at this year's virtual conference. The presentation is scheduled for noon (Eastern) on July 6.

Do you know a leader whose work deserves to be recognized at the national level? Is a colleague in your school board or regional affiliate making significant contributions to the work of senior system administration and education in Canada? Consider putting their name forward for one of CASSA's three national awards. Nomination forms for each award can be found on the CASSA website. Nomination packages are accepted between October 1, 2021, and May 16, 2022.

### **Honourary Life Membership**

This award recognizes excellence in education at the national level. It is intended to honour individuals who have contributed significantly to CASSA but may also be presented to those who have made a difference at the provincial affiliate level. The latter will only happen when those provincial affiliate contributions relate to and support CASSA and its national mandate.

### **Distinguished Service Award**

This award recognizes any present or recent CASSA member who has demonstrated outstanding ability and leadership. Please note this award is open to leaders at

all stages of a career in senior system administration. It is not restricted to only those who are retired or nearing retirement (the CASSA Honourary Life Membership would normally be more appropriate for those individuals). These guidelines do not exclude those who are approaching retirement from receiving the Distinguished Service Award.

### **EXL Award**

This award recognizes the outstanding leadership of superintendents and directors of education from across Canada. CASSA members who have shown exemplary leadership ability and who have enhanced school administration are eligible to receive this award.

An EXL Award nominee will have brought honour to themselves, their colleagues, and their profession. They will have given exemplary service to their provincial, territorial, or national professional association. They will have made significant contributions to the field of education through their service, writings, or other activities. They serve as role models and teachers to others and have at least five years of membership in CASSA.



CASSA is committed to highlighting the work of extraordinary leaders in education for several reasons:

- It is important to acknowledge the dedication and enthusiasm of administrators who guide children's educational experiences. Recognition is a powerful instrument for building pride in accomplishment and continued determination to pursue excellence.
- System leaders who establish the character of a particular school system's programs through the important work with school boards, school leaders, teachers, and caring parents help to determine the scope and quality of children's education experiences.
- Children's attitudes toward learning and their perceptions of themselves as lifelong learners are established in their school years. Effective leadership, mentoring, and modeling determine whether the school jurisdiction effectively creates this environment.

Previous EXL Award recipients include Shannon Barnett-Aikman, David Keohane, Dr. John Malloy, Joan Carr, John Crocco,

Brent Kaulback, Kim Jenkins, Robert Mills, Linda Fabi, Curtis Brown, John Mackle, Johanne Messner, Geoff Williams, Carol Gray, Ron Canuel, Edie Wilde, Ed Wittchen, Roy Seidler, and John Darroch.

EXL Award nominees and the national award recipient are profiled in this *Leaders & Learners* newsletter. The system leader

who receives the EXL Award is also invited to attend the annual AASA conference in the United States as the Canadian Superintendent of the Year. Please watch the CASSA and AASA websites for details on how this recognition may look different this year, in light of the COVID-19 restrictions and conference adaptations. ○

*Do you* know a leader whose work in public education deserves to be recognized at the national level?

Nominate them for one of CASSA's awards!

Each year at the CASSA Annual Conference, awards are presented to education leaders from across Canada.

Visit [www.caasaa-acgcs.ca](http://www.caasaa-acgcs.ca) for more information.

Distinguished Service Award • Honourary Life Membership • XEROX – EXL award



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](mailto:ken_bain@cassa-acgcs.ca)  
[www.cassa-acgcs.ca](http://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](mailto:editor@matrixgroupinc.net)  
[www.matrixgroupinc.net](http://www.matrixgroupinc.net)