

## *Inside this Issue*

Greetings from the President,  
**Page 1**

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

The French Language Teacher  
Shortage Data Infrastructure Project,  
**Page 3**

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

# Greetings from the President

**A**s I write this greeting, I am looking forward to our next meeting of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) Board of Directors. As you may know, the Board of Directors is made up of two representatives chosen by each of the provincial and territorial superintendent associations across Canada. We connect for at least an hour each month or two to collaborate and share. I look forward to reconnecting with returning directors and welcoming new directors this year. As you can imagine, the CASSA Board is a particularly impressive team of educational leaders from across the country and I am both humbled and inspired every time we meet.

I hope your first few months of the 2021/2022 school year have been calm despite the Delta variant and since the majority of the vulnerable population is yet unvaccinated.

This is an important time to be leaders in Canadian education. It is during crisis and pandemics that children—particularly our most vulnerable children—and their parents rely on us more than ever to create safe, welcoming places to learn and insist upon social justice. It falls to us to help teachers and administrators create the best possible environments for working and learning in our schools. As we continue to develop and embrace our shared vision for our work ahead, let us commit to one another that, in everything we do, whoever we are and whatever our task, we will continue to pursue excellence



**Curtis Brown**  
CASSA/ACGCS President

and wellness for ourselves, our staffs, and each student.

Finally, while you provide this kind of foundation in your jurisdictions, make sure that rest and relaxation is part of your schedule. The last 18 months have been unlike anything we, and any education leaders ever, have experienced. In the moments we carve out for gratitude, let's be thankful for having purpose in these extraordinary times, and let's continue to be energized as we strive for and contemplate healing for our families, our communities, our nations, and the world.

Thank you for all the work you do every day on behalf of the children of Canada. I echo the words of British Columbia School Superintendents Association Executive Director Claire Guy, "Here's wishing you all the appreciation you deserve!"

**Curtis Brown**  
CASSA/ACGCS President

**As we continue to develop and embrace our shared vision for our work ahead, let us commit to one another that, in everything we do, whoever we are and whatever our task, we will continue to pursue excellence and wellness for ourselves, our staffs, and each student.**

# Greetings from the Executive Director



**Ken Bain**

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

I hope that your year has started off as well as could be hoped and that you, your family, and the community you serve stays safe and healthy as we dive into the 2021/2022 school year!

Each year the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) Board of Directors experiences a turnover in membership. This year we express our thanks and appreciation to the following members who contributed to the national conversation and provided support throughout a very difficult time: Lori Naar (Ontario-Catholic), Pela Nickoletopoulos (Quebec), Wilco Tymensen (Alberta), and Zoë Watson (New Brunswick).

We welcome Morris Hucal (Ontario-Catholic), Scott Morrison (Alberta), Derek O'Brien (New Brunswick), and David Chisholm (Quebec). We also welcome back Jan Langelier (Quebec) to the board.

CASSA has had a busy year and summer supporting and participating in a number of local, national, and international projects along with partner organizations who share our same commitment to the students of Canada.

The list of projects includes:

- A Call to Action: Canada's French Teacher Data Project (Heritage Canada, CSBA, FNCSE, RNDGÉ). Last issue we featured the first part of this discussion, and we are pleased to present the second half this issue! Turn to page 3 to read more.
- Copyright and Fair Dealing (CMEC).
- Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Cyberbullying Campaigns (Public Safety Canada).
- School Mental Health Leadership Network (School Mental Health Ontario and CSBA).
- Leadership For Equity Series (CMC Leadership).
- Consensus Statement from Educator Organizations: Refocusing & Improving Education Systems after the Recovery from COVID-19 (Global Network of Deans of Education).
- Public Health Agency of Canada Immunization Partnership Grant (Foothills SD, Alberta).
- Concussion Prevention Week Toolkit (Federal/Provincial/Territorial Workgroup on Concussions in Sport).
- Effective Recruitment/Hiring Practices for FSL Teachers: Year Two Call for Pilot

Project Proposals (Ontario Public School Board Association).

While the list is quite varied, the topics and themes underscore how CASSA is viewed as a key voice and supporter of equity and excellence in education.

Mark your calendars for what hopefully will be, an in-person conference next July in beautiful St. Andrew's By-The-Sea, New Brunswick, running July 6-8, 2022. This year's theme is "Reimagining Education!" We look forward to sending out the call for presenters and workshops in January and hope to offer a range of presentations that highlight how various districts have reimagined how education can be provided with innovative programs and instruction strategies.

**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 Scott Morrison

### 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 Morris Hucal

### NWTSA (Northwest Territories)

Yvonne Careen and Simone Gessler

### ADGESBQ (Quebec)

Mike Helm

### AAESQ (Quebec)

Jan Langelier and David Chisholm

### RNDGÉ

Valérie Morand

### NBSSA (New Brunswick)

Derek O'Brien

### BCSSA (British Columbia)

Claire Guy and Teresa Downs

### NLASSA (Newfoundland and Labrador)

Gerald Buffett and Andrew Hickey

### AASA Western Rep

Mike Borgford

### AASA Eastern Rep

Cindy Finn

### Directors At Large

Bill Cooper (Nunavut),  
Paul McFadyen (Yukon)

### Executive Director

Ken Bain

# French Language Teacher Shortage Data Infrastructure Project

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

## INTRODUCTION

*In the last issue of Leaders & Learners, we explored the development of a Canadian Data Infrastructure project that aims to collect, house, and share data about the French language teacher shortages across the country. As was noted in the article, the project marks the first time this kind of data has been collected through a collaborative pan-national effort.*

*In this issue, we share perspectives from Ontario and British Columbia. Pino Buffone and Claire Guy offer their reflections on the French language teacher situation and the data infrastructure initiative.*



### A Conversation with Pino Buffone

The Renfrew County District School Board's (RCDSB) previously declining enrollment must be included in any examination of French language staffing. "When I became director in Renfrew County, one of the things that trustees asked me to do was to grow programs and services," Director of Education Pino Buffone explains. "It wasn't just declining enrollment in rural areas, it was also loss of market share. They asked me to look at a number of program options."

At the time, the RCDSB didn't have a system-wide French immersion program despite parents requesting it throughout the county. "They knew it was beneficial to their

children, being very close to a large urban centre as well as across the river from a predominantly French-speaking population. There's context there for a really healthy, vibrant, bilingual environment."

The district began working on a visioning exercise, starting with the elementary level. It's now working on the same exercise for its secondary schools. This exercise included stakeholder involvement from community partners, parents and guardians, staff, students, federation partners, and the board of trustees. It resulted in a multi-year expansion of programs and services at the elementary level, principally around French-as-an-Additional Language programming. While the district doesn't yet offer





immersion in every school, by next year it will have introduced immersion across each of its seven families of schools.

“We’re going into the third year in a row where enrollment has actually increased, and it’s increased without, quite frankly, stealing students from other districts,” Pino says. “We’ve tried to look at creative solutions to address any challenges, and we’ve been able to manage that program expansion for four to five years.”

Some of the stakeholders raised concerns about the ability to staff this kind of program expansion. “Are we going to start a program that we then have to shut down? There was a real legitimacy to those kinds of queries. Part of what I think has been our success is the establishment of our own internal French-as-an-Additional Language

task force. We looked at that multi-year expansion like an accordion. We would accelerate or decelerate, depending on the context. We thought it through well enough that we’ve just kept it moving along. It allowed us to chunk out some of our challenges in a reasonable enough manner that we could see the goal ahead of us for the next year, go out and grab it, without it being so far out that we’re struggling.”

Pino notes that this kind of pace was important to him as a leader. He wanted to avoid the expansion being associated with any negativity.

“What I mean by that is what if we weren’t able to get enough qualified French teachers and so the program starts out weak? What does this do to English programming over time? My intention was not to put

anybody out of their livelihood. I assured the federation union partners that we would accelerate or decelerate to manage our English staffing positions so that as retirements happen, and there’s a greater increase in the likelihood that French immersion will be a popular choice of parents and guardians, we will manage those positions with retirements and maternity leaves, for instance, so that positions are managed respectfully and sensibly throughout the process. That brought a major stakeholder on our side. When you don’t have that kind of support, the whole initiative can be much more difficult. They’ve been really great partners with us in seeing this through successfully.”

The team examining French immersion expansion was advised to come to the table with only new ideas. One of those ideas was





a multi-pronged communication strategy with an “open for business” approach. Pino explains they wanted to get across the message that the board is making a commitment to having these programs here for the long term. “It pulled us right out of any doubtful thinking. That’s acquired us personnel.”

Another idea was looking for new partnerships in terms of recruitment. In one such partnership, the board reached out to private headhunting firms that were outside of the usual education job fairs. “They helped us look at our advertisements and advised us on how to tweak them to make them more attractive.”

A second partnership was with the French Embassy in Canada, where the board sought out opportunities to hire teacher assistants.

A third was through a five-year agreement with Académie Clermont-Ferrand, a regional educational authority located in south-central France. This partnership includes student exchanges (both in-person and through technology) and staff exchanges, as well as information sharing by staff and twinning between schools.

“We also looked at a strategy that provided a personalized touch. Even at job fairs, we followed up with all the people we met with a personalized phone call from a superintendent. It was interesting how many candidates said it’s one thing to get a little bit of swag from the district but it’s another when a senior staff member calls you to speak about the opportunity in a district.”

That strategy seems effective—last year the district had more interest in the positions than positions to offer, Pino confirms. He adds his district’s greatest strategy is that they aren’t sticking with just one solution.

“We’ve got this accumulation of all these little opportunities that get us the dozen teachers we need each year. We can’t just put out a simple ad in the *Renfrew Times* that says, ‘12 teachers needed’ and then we’ve got them next week. We’re chipping away to get three, then two, this one over here, and that gets us to the dozen.”

Especially now that the RCDSB is well into its expansion of French immersion programming, he sees a definite advantage to connecting with the French language teacher shortage data infrastructure project.

“I think we’re going to need to monitor trends over time. I’d love to share some things that have worked with us, and I’d also love to learn from other districts. There are neat ideas coming from elsewhere in the province and the country that we could easily apply to our context.”

While he’s very interested in the data and trends analysis that can be accessed through the data infrastructure project, he also likes how such data can improve accountability. Leaders can’t just declare a program is great without being able to show the data and the trends that back up such a statement, he says.

“In education, we’re often faced with questions about how you can prove this or that. There’s not much we can prove with absolute certainty, but once you start seeing numbers and trends at this kind of level, you can really leverage that to encourage people and reassure them.”

He also sees value in how the project offers seeds of opportunity. “The potential that emerges from conversations that happen, that is the greatest potential value for me as a senior leader. You never know what suggestion could spark an idea in your own organization. It’s both a qualitative and quantitative endeavour—both elements could add value. I can learn things quantitatively from the data and the trends that are happening, but I can also learn qualitatively from the formal and informal conversations.”

He encourages colleagues in senior system leadership across the country to take part in the data infrastructure project, especially if their district faces a teacher shortage or is looking to expand programs.

“I’m sure we all could learn from listening to one another.”



### A Conversation with Claire Guy

*[Editor’s note: For the purposes of this article, Claire Guy is speaking from her own experiences in French-language education in British Columbia. The views expressed here are her own and do not necessarily represent the official views of the British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) or that of all superintendents in BC.]*

Not unlike those in other western provinces, school districts in British Columbia are facing a shortage of immersion and FSL teachers, says Claire Guy, Executive Director of the British Columbia School Superintendents Association. The problem is particularly acute in rural and remote areas. “It’s very difficult to find language teachers, and the challenge we have is complex.”

## “We need to be able to articulate it’s about communication, being global citizens, learning all languages and valuing all languages, and French just happens to be one.”

Even if districts are fortunate enough to recruit teachers, there are struggles in retaining them, she explains. It is not uncommon in BC to use a combination of hiring teachers from outside of the province while concurrently creating a “grow our own” approach to generate a cadre of local French language teachers.

“If we do get teachers coming from Quebec or other French-speaking jurisdictions, we then need to focus on keeping them in BC. Particularly in smaller districts or programs, French immersion teachers may be literally the only teacher in their area, both in their region as well as their subject content area. Consequently, they may experience feelings of loneliness and isolation, and they may not have a cohort community of people to support them.”

Adding to this, they are often required to teach several subject areas and the same students, sometimes year after year.

“There’s a lack of variety for the teachers, less access to French resources, and a demanding workload. You may get somebody who is young and excited, and then they get completely burned out after three or four years and either revert to teaching in the English program, leave the province, or worse, they leave the teaching profession.”

Attrition is another factor. The attrition rate in BC is significant, and from early immersion programs beginning in Kindergarten, it is not uncommon for districts to experience up to a 50 per cent attrition rate by the time students get to Grade 12. There are multiple contributing factors, and it is a complex problem. Ultimately, it can become difficult and more expensive to run the language programs. It is not unusual to find very small senior language classes with low enrollment, therefore it becomes challenging to run viable and vibrant programs with small enrollment. There is, however, the moral obligation to run these classes for the dedicated students who have followed the program throughout their school careers. It becomes a tricky situation for districts.

While BC residents realize that French is one of their official languages and there is ongoing significant demand for

French-language programs, French as a language is not always perceived to be the language that makes the most sense for BC students to learn. “The province is more connected in some ways to Asia and the Pacific Rim countries as opposed to provinces in central Canada, and families can be interested in additional languages other than French,” Claire says. Furthermore, there is a big focus now in BC on bringing Indigenous languages into schools. Districts are working with Indigenous communities to bring their languages back as part of BC’s focus and commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, and so this becomes another motivation for language learning.

For years, Claire’s felt that it’s necessary to completely reimagine language instruction and language programs. In her previous role as a senior leader in a school district, she was quite involved in trying to modernize French immersion programs, to make them more student-friendly, engaging, relevant, and hands-on. “Today there are so many exciting opportunities for students in education and much interest in topics like environmental and global education and social justice. We need to capitalize on this enthusiasm and offer these courses and innovative programs in French.”

“We need to really look at what’s going to appeal to kids and what’s going to appeal to teachers. It’s two-fold: How do we motivate them both to want to engage, and then how do we keep them there once we get them?”

It’s not a surprise that BC is already well underway in examining provincial data with the goal of recruiting and retaining French language teachers. There are currently efforts underway in several school districts to try to bring groups of teachers into regions and efforts to match their hobbies and interests to what each region in the province offers. There are several local and provincial initiatives aimed at addressing this need, so having a pan-Canadian database and focus on this work will only enhance what is already happening in BC.

It’s not a one-size-fits-all problem, she says, and it can’t be a one-size-fits-all solution. The data infrastructure project can



help by focusing on innovation, creativity, flexibility, and thinking outside the box. There is a lot to learn from exploring what is working in other jurisdictions, and the sharing of data and ideas with a national outlook will only serve to enhance the efforts that are already taking place.

“I think the data is helpful. It’s a starting point. If the data becomes the ending point, we’re not going to move the dial. It’s what we do with the data that’s going to make the difference. What are we learning from it and how are we going to respond to it? What’s going to be different now that we have this data? If we don’t move to the next place with the data and use it to make it better for students, better for teachers, and better for schools, then we’ve lost an opportunity.”

Although Claire says she realizes that this data infrastructure project is intended to explore and address factors explicitly related to French





language teacher shortages, she adds the benefits can reach beyond just this single issue.

“How can we use this project and French as the tool to look at language learning in general, to look at how we can develop other languages, including Indigenous languages, to how we can develop and appreciate diversity here? To really bring people into the conversation, it needs to be more than just about French, it needs to be about language learning as a means to global citizenship and innovation.”

It’s important to be able to articulate the why of this project, she notes: Why does French language learning matter? “We need to be able to articulate it’s about communication, being global citizens, learning all languages, and valuing all languages, and French just happens to be one. We need the right motivation, and we have to be in it for the right reasons.” ○

#### ABOUT THE EXPERTS

*Pino Buffone has been the Director of Education for the RCDSB since February 2017. Prior to this, Pino was the Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction for the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board. He began his career in education in 1994 and first served as a classroom teacher in the Western Quebec School Board. His work with the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board includes serving as a teacher, vice principal, principal, and supervisory officer.*

*Pino has also served as the chair of the board of directors for the Eastern Ontario Staff Development Network, a member of the board of directors for the Ottawa-Carleton Education Network, and as part-time academic staff with the University of Ottawa’s Faculty of Education’s Teacher Education Program and Indigenous Teacher Education Program. He has also worked as an education officer and coordinator of English-language Assessments for the Ontario Education Quality and Accountability Office.*

*The RCDSB serves communities in the largest county in Ontario. Renfrew County is just west of the National Capital Region. It sits along the Ottawa River across from Quebec and is home to the Pikwakanagan First Nation. The region includes a mix of rural and urban communities, with a history of farming, forestry, and related trades.*

*The RCDSB has approximately 10,000 students enrolled in its schools. The board currently includes 24 elementary schools. It also supports seven secondary schools and four continuing education sites. To learn more about the district, visit [www.rcdsb.on.ca](http://www.rcdsb.on.ca).*

---

*Claire Guy is the Executive Director of the British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA), a position she has held for almost five years.*

*Prior to this, Claire was an Assistant Superintendent of Schools for the Langley School District. Her background includes experience at all grade levels of the K-12 system. She has served as a classroom teacher, an administrator, a senior district leader, and a curriculum developer for the BC Ministry of Education. Claire has been a French teacher and the principal of a French immersion school, and her work for the Ministry includes co-leading the writing team for the BC French as a Second Language curriculum. She has also dedicated much time and effort on committees working to recruit and retain French teachers.*

*She has held nearly all portfolios in public education and is passionate about promoting student well-being and safety, inclusion, and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) education in the province.*





Équité et excellence en éducation  
**CASSA-ACGCS**  
Equity and Excellence in Education



## Mark Your Calendars for CASSA's Annual Conference in 2022!

**July 6-8, 2022**

**St. Andrew's By-The-Sea, New Brunswick**

The CASSA Annual Conference is hoping to meet in-person in beautiful St. Andrews By-The-Sea in 2022. It is going to be an amazing way to re-connect school system leaders from across Canada to learn and share information on current topics in education. We hope you'll join us!

---

*The theme for 2022 is  
reimagining education.*

*Make sure to save the date!*

---



Photo by  
George Girnas  
on Unsplash





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

## ADVERTISE HERE!



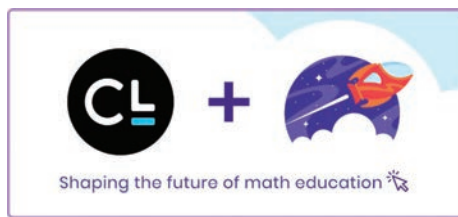
CASSA is excited to offer several options to advertisers interested in showcasing their education-related expertise and services:

- 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.

## Please support this Newsletter's sponsors!



Équité et excellence en éducation  
**CASSA-ACGCS**  
Equity and Excellence in Education

**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)