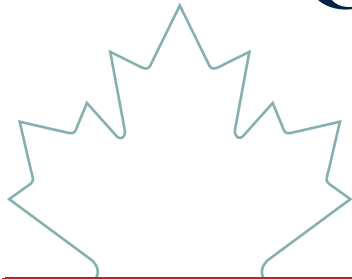


## Greetings from the President



**Kevin Kaardal**  
CASSA/ACGCS President



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

**A**s we enter the final weeks of summer and prepare for another school year, we hope that our staff and students will return rested and energized from vacation. While this will be true for some, we know that many of our communities will see the start of September still displaced, stressed, and uncertain after a summer of devastating wildfires from coast-to-coast-to-coast. As I write this, over ten thousand people are under evacuation order here in the Central Okanagan as we are dealing with wildfires that have destroyed homes and businesses in West Kelowna, Kelowna, and Lake Country. Central Okanagan School District plays a role in both supporting the Emergency Operations teams during the fire and mostly the community during the recovery phase.

The Premier of British Columbia, David Eby, declared a Provincial State of Emergency due to the number of fires burning across B.C. Many of my colleagues are engaged in similar activities supporting their communities' Emergency Operations teams in whatever way they can. This extra work occurs as we are also preparing for school opening. In the Northwest Territories, tens of thousands are desperately fleeing their homes, and fires continue to rage in Ontario. All of this is taking place amid droughts and heat waves that threaten the most vulnerable in communities across Canada. As we witness the undeniable toll of climate change in extreme weather events, it should remind us that climate change is not a political issue but an existential issue; dealing with its increasingly destructive effects demands societal adaptation in which education has a central role. As the Global Youth Biodiversity Network (GYBN) points out, the ecological crises we now face are of our own making, and the Intergovernmental Science-

Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), as well as other experts worldwide, are calling for Transformative Change.

The IPBES recognizes the importance of education in forming values and behaviours as well as providing the information and skills that will contribute to the required societal change. I would add that the wonder educators have the power to inspire, the sheer awe and appreciation of our natural world, will also be key in creating a future where humanity lives in harmony with nature. The Government of Canada also recognizes that education is a vital but frequently undervalued component of climate change mitigation.

Ironically, this week I was scheduled to attend the Mainstreaming Environmental Literacy International Dialogue in Vancouver on August 21, 2023. Instead, I was home with our district leaders planning our response to the climate emergency that was impacting our community. I know that our work understanding critical incident response and trauma informed practice will be important for the team of leaders supporting their school communities, including students, staff, families, and caregivers.

As educators, we must listen to the thousands of young voices that are demanding change and recognize their value in shaping their own education. Transformative education can build on our unique opportunity to empower youth through knowledge, showing them that wherever their interests and abilities are, there is a path towards driving change both individually and collectively. We know that each learner in our care can go on to thrive as an engaged global citizen if we meet them where they are, continue to inspire wonder, and build agency. It is my hope for all of us that we return to school energized and eager to inspire the wonder that will lead us all to a brighter future.

# Greetings from the Executive Director

“We need allies – not saviors.”  
“Show them your heart before you ask  
for their hand.”

The Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) concluded its enormously successful annual leadership conference early this past July. Our keynote presenters brought their life experiences and reflections to help fulfill CASSA’s commitment to Truth and Reconciliation. The two above quotes were the most impactful that participants took away from our powerful speakers: Chief Cadmus Delorme, Andrew Stobo Sniderman, and Douglas Sanderson (Amo Binashi). Other important takeaway messages and strands included: the importance of relationships, education as a driver of hope, and that unequal outcomes have been normalized. We were reminded that leadership is about being

fearless and reminded of the importance of using our position of influence to effect change.

The conference theme was “Leadership from Coast to Coast to Coast.” The workshop presentations explored various aspects of school system leadership: equity, anti-racism, mental health, Indigenous Education, newcomers, and inclusive practices. Workshops were led by CASSA members from British Columbia to Newfoundland and Labrador. My sincere thanks to the workshop presenters who contributed to the success of the conference. Many of the presenters have shared their PowerPoints. Visit <http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/CASSA-presentations.html> to view the presentations, for those of you wish to follow up.

I want to extend my appreciation to the members of the CASSA



**Ken Bain**

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

Professional Learning Committee: Lead Facilitator, Barb Isaak (Manitoba), Mike Helm (Quebec), Ben Grebinski (Saskatchewan), Michael Borgfjord (Alberta), Anna Villalta (Quebec), Krista Curry (Manitoba), and Joy Badder (Ontario). They were responsible for organizing the learning that occurred and contributed many hours on top of their day to day responsibilities to ensure an outstanding program and learning experience for our members.

We look forward to our next leadership conference from July 3-5, 2024 in Montreal, Quebec. I wish you all a wonderful start to the school year!

**Ken Bain**

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

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# The Journey Toward Reconciliation in the Valley of the Birdtail



*This is part one of a two-part article feature. The second part will be published in the next issue of Leaders & Learners. It will explore factors that led to the education partnership, key details of the partnership, and the results of the partnership on students, school staff, and the two communities.*

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

**T**his July, the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) was pleased to present at its annual conference a Keynote Address and Table Conversations delivered and led by authors Douglas Sanderson (*Amo Binashii*) and Andrew Stobo Sniderman.

Drawing on their national best-seller *Valley of the Birdtail: An Indian Reserve, a White Town, and the Road to Reconciliation*, Sanderson and Sniderman detailed the factors behind years of unequal outcomes experienced by Indigenous students in Canada. The authors told this story by focusing on lessons learned from the 150-year history of schools in the town of Rosburn and the Ojibwe community across the Birdtail River, Waywayseecappo First Nation, both on Treaty 4 territory in Manitoba. Profiles of the two authors appeared in the June 2023 issue of *Leaders & Learners*, and can be found online at <https://www.cassa-acgcs.ca/Page/67>.

Complimentary copies of *Valley of the Birdtail* (HarperCollins Canada, 2022), named the CBC Books 2022 Book of the Year, were made available to

all 2023 conference participants. CASSA members who were unable to attend the conference are strongly encouraged to read this powerful, engaging, deeply researched, and highly readable work. It is the authors' hope that the book will be taught to high school students across Canada.

In *Valley of the Birdtail*, Sanderson and Sniderman use a mix of modern-day interviews and archival material to tell the story of how deliberate policy choices have resulted in decades of unequal education opportunities and outcomes for Indigenous children across Canada.

"It turns out there is nothing accidental or inevitable about poverty in Indigenous communities," they note early in the book. "Schools on reserves have been grossly



Douglas Sanderson (Amo Binashii).



Andrew Stobo Sniderman.

underfunded for decades. To reckon with this appalling fact is to discard the comforting notion that discrimination against Indigenous Canadians occurred in the distant past, perpetuated by strangers who are long dead.”

While these are uncomfortable truths for many non-Indigenous Canadians to face and reflect upon, Sanderson and Sniderman do not shy away from detailing decades of deliberate policies that resulted in Indigenous children being subjected to neglect, isolation, cruelty, and sub-par education. For all of us in Canada to move forward from this shameful – and at times, still very recent – history, we must first be willing to learn about and acknowledge the harm done. Sanderson and Sniderman close

the book’s Authors’ Note section with the following:

“Reconciliation is a process, and that process must begin with an honest assessment of our history.”

*Valley of the Birdtail* presents detailed and contrasting portraits of Rossburn and Waywayseecappo. In Rossburn, first settled in 1879, the average family income is currently near the national average. More than half the adults in town have graduated from university. In Waywayseecappo, which had been formally established as a reserve two years earlier, the average family income is below the national poverty line. Less than a third of the adults have graduated from high school. Between the years 1965 and 1982, only a single student from Waywayseecappo graduated from Grade

12. From the years 1961 to 1981, 80 per cent of students from Waywayseecappo dropped out by Grade 8.

The authors meticulously trace these gaps in economic status and education outcomes to discriminatory and racist policies and laws set by federal and provincial governments for decades, including the Pass System, the Permit System, Indian Residential Schools and Day Schools, restrictions on Indigenous Peoples being able to hire lawyers to pursue any matter that would benefit an “Indian tribe or band” without the permission of the federal government, and restrictions on Indigenous ceremonies. For example, it remained illegal for Indigenous Peoples to dance and hold ceremonies in Canada until 1951.

In Canada, schools on reserves fall under the jurisdiction of the federal government, and Sanderson and Sniderman explain how they have systematically received less than provincially funded public schools. By the late 1980s, what was then known as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development was spending 15 to 25 per cent less per capita than what provincial governments were spending.

By the early 1990s, the federal government was investing even less in on-reserve education. Describing it as a temporary measure to help fight the deficit, the government put a two per cent cap on annual spending increases for services on reserves, including education. By



*Valley of the Birdtail: An Indian Reserve, a White Town, and the Road to Reconciliation* by Andrew Stobo Sniderman and Douglas Sanderson.

1998, even though it was back to running budget surpluses, it kept that two per cent cap in place, until 2016.

This and other discriminatory policies, the authors are careful to note, cannot be blamed on just one political party or the other. “Spending less was a choice that was made repeatedly, year after year,” by both Liberal and Conservative governments.

Interestingly, while these federal spending reductions were put in place, provincial governments (including Manitoba) were increasing their education spending. From 1996 to 2015, provinces bumped up their funding for public schools at about twice the rate that the federal government increased funding for on-reserve education.

The education funding discrepancy was, the authors explain, the norm for the hundreds of schools on reserve across Canada. The difference in per-student funding for children from Rossburn and children from Waywayseecappo was not at all unique and it had been happening for years. This was not ancient history but within the lifetime of students attending school today. In 2012, for example, barely more than a decade ago, Saskatchewan’s Minister of Education Russ Marchuk guessed that students on reserve in that province were receiving up to 40 per cent less funding than their peers in provincially funded schools. By 2016, the national funding gap between reserve schools and provincial public schools was reported to be about 30 per cent, a shortfall of \$665 million for that year alone.

In 2010, the Waywayseecappo band council received approximately \$7,300 per student from the federal government to cover education expenses. That same year, the Rossburn schools received approximately \$10,000 per student from the Manitoba provincial government, or over 40 per cent more funding per student.

Students in Waywayseecappo must leave the community to attend high school, as its on-reserve school only goes to Grade 8. The federal government at the time was still providing \$7,300 for Waywayseecappo students to attend the high school in Rossburn. The provincial school board overseeing Rossburn schools, however, charged Waywayseecappo about \$10,000 per student for educating them in its

provincial school. That \$3,200 difference came from the Waywayseecappo band’s education budget, which meant it had to direct funds away from its own on-reserve school.

Sanderson and Sniderman explain that even though fewer than a quarter of Waywayseecappo’s students at the time were attending provincial high schools, the band used more than a third of its entire education budget to support them to do so. The amount of money available per student attending the on-reserve school was therefore not \$7,300 but closer to \$6,300. This long-term funding gap has had direct and profound impacts on student achievement. In 2010, the results of a reading test given to Waywayseecappo students showed that of the 30 students in Grade 4, only one was reading at grade level. In Grades 1, 2, and 3, no student was reading at grade level.

Beyond outcomes such as significantly lower literacy, numeracy, and graduation rates, what this decades-long underfunding has done, the authors note, is suggest to Indigenous students that perhaps they don’t deserve anything better.

These two communities, Rossburn and Waywayseecappo, situated just a few kilometres apart from each other on either side of the valley carved by the Birdtail River, have for years served as powerful symbols of the funding gap between non-Indigenous and Indigenous students. That began to change on November 29, 2010.

On that day, following two years of negotiations between representatives of Waywayseecappo, the federal government, the Manitoba provincial government, and Park West School Division (the local school division that includes schools in Rossburn), a deal – or a partnership, as it came to be known – was reached to make sure that every student in Waywayseecappo would receive the exact same funding as every student in Rossburn. The partnership also saw the Waywayseecappo school brought into the Park West School Division.

“We hope that the partnership between Waywayseecappo First Nation and Park West School Division helps to advance Truth and Reconciliation among our students, staff, and

communities,” says Stephen David, who has served as Park West School Division’s Superintendent since 2017.

“The main message of our partnership is that we are stronger together than alone. As partners, we contribute to creating safe and inclusive spaces for all students, where similarities, differences, and identities are all affirmed and celebrated. This can lead to improved educational experiences for students while fostering understanding, empathy, and positive relationships in our communities and region.”

Among other details, the 2010 deal saw the federal government match the provincial funding standard right away. This resulted in a more than \$1 million increase to Waywayseecappo’s annual education budget. The partnership was, at the time, a unique experiment to see what could happen if students on and off reserve received the same level of education funding and services.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its final report, with 94 calls to action. These calls to action serve two purposes: to acknowledge the full, horrifying history of the residential school system and to create systems to make sure these abuses can never happen again. The first 42 calls to action acknowledge that cultural genocide against Indigenous Peoples took place, detail how it took place, and show the lasting effects on Indigenous communities in areas including child welfare, education, language and culture, health, and justice.

Seven of the first 42 calls to action are specific to education, including number eight:

*We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.*

By 2021, more than a decade after the partnership was created, the federal government was providing students on reserves across Canada with about the same funding as their peers in provincially funded schools. The authors note there have been no discussions about how all the previous years of underfunding will be addressed. ○

# EXL Award 2023

**S**ince 2002, CASSA has recognized the extraordinary efforts of Canadian school system leaders through the annual presentation of the EXL Award. This award is presented thanks to the ongoing support of Xerox Canada.

The recipient for the 2023 EXL Award, Tony Stack, was announced at this year's conference in Victoria, British Columbia, on July 6, 2023.

Here are brief profiles of each of the deserving 2023 nominees. Congratulations to all of them. We are grateful for their excellent leadership in public education!



**ANTHONY "TONY" STACK, 2023  
EXL AWARD RECIPIENT  
NLESD**

Tony has served in many roles and leadership positions over a 25-year career in education leadership in Newfoundland and Labrador. Most



*The EXL Award recipients. From left to right: Ken Bain, Siobhan Wright, Sandy McDonald, Tony Stack, Linsey Hope, and Kevin Kaardal.*

recently, he was the CEO/Director of Education for the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD), retiring this past January.

Tony began his education leadership journey as an assistant principal and principal with the former Eastern School District (ESD), which served communities on the Avalon Peninsula. He then moved on to the role of Senior Education Officer and then Assistant Director of Education for Programs, both with the ESD.

Once the province amalgamated the four English school districts in 2013, Tony served as the newly formed NLESD's Assistant Director

of Education (Operations and Student Transportation) and then as its Associate Director of Education (Programs and Operations). With the latter role came expanded responsibilities, including overseeing the entire Programs division across the province and leading its teams of regional assistant directors of Programs and senior education officers. He was hired as the NLESD CEO/Director of Education in 2017.

Tony also served in many leadership roles and on many missions with the Canadian Armed Forces for 38 years until his retirement in 2016. At that time, he held the

# Congratulations to all of the 2023 nominees. We are grateful for their excellent leadership in public education!

rank of Brigadier General. His last position was in the post of Deputy Commander with the Canadian Army Doctrine and Training Centre. Tony was the Chief of Civil Military Cooperation Operations for the multinational NATO International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan in 2004, the Commander of Operation LAMA during the joint response to the aftermath of Hurricane Igor in Newfoundland and Labrador in 2010, and the Chair of the Canadian Corps of Commissionaires, Newfoundland and Labrador Division.

Among his honours, he has been a Fellow of the School of Graduate Studies at Memorial University of Newfoundland, the 2011 Alumnus of the Year for Gonzaga High School, an Officer of the Order of Military Merit in 2012, and a recipient of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2013.

Tony was an advisor to the executive committee of the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of School System Administrators, a panel member of the Memorial University of Newfoundland Education Research Presentations, and the Chair of the Director's Principal Advisory Group with NLESD from 2017 to 2019. He has also served on the advisory panel of the Canadian Education Association Network (EDCAN), and as a member of the C21 CEO Network and the Education, Research and Development Corporation (ERDI). In 2018 and 2019, he was part of a three-person provincial Transition Team that advised the Minister of Education and government on reorganizing the NLESD.

His lasting and positive impacts as a system leader include introducing summer ULearn professional learning sessions for educators, providing steady guidance throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and essential leadership as the Provincial Education Plan was carried out, and always providing consistent, critical, and reassuring leadership for his school district. He is described as a consummate professional and mentor, and he is noted for his efforts to

lead by example while always making sure students and staff are at the centre of all decisions.

Tony's foresight led him to lead NLESD into Deep Learning, starting with a partnership with Dr. Michael Fullan. In 2021, he was recognized as a Deep Disrupter and was invited to share his vision on the world stage at that year's Global Deep Learning Lab. Deep Learning has continued to grow in the NLESD, and system leaders from across the country and beyond have sought support from Tony. In 2022, he was a leader of learning at the Global Deep Learning Lab.

Tony has been a member of CASSA for 12 years.

## SIOBHAN WRIGHT



## OCSOA

Siobhan is the Superintendent of Education – School Leadership and the Superintendent of Safe Schools for the York Catholic District School Board (YCDSB) in Ontario. She has been with the board for 21 years, with roles including kindergarten, primary, and junior high teacher, vice principal, and principal.

Earlier this year, Siobhan was recognized with the OCSOA EXL Award for Excellence In Leadership for her outstanding contributions to equity in education. These include creating the Catholic Black

Educators' Network of YCDSB, leading the first Dismantling of Anti-Black Racism Committee at YCDSB, and securing the first Black Student Graduation Coach (Excellence Coach) for the district, a role created to promote the well-being and academic achievement of Black students and enhance their post-secondary pathways. She has also published and presented numerous times on Anti-Black Racism and Allyship.

Siobhan's community involvement includes taking part in events in her parish, serving as Secretary for the Ontario Basketball Association's board of directors, sitting as a committee member on the federally and provincially funded Cross Over Youth partnership, mentoring Caribbean youth and connecting them to their culture through the arts, and leading humanitarian efforts to support families in St. Vincent and the Grenadines affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and the volcanic eruption in 2021.

She has been a member of CASSA for three years.



## ALEXANDER "SANDY" MCDONALD CASS

Sandy is the Superintendent of the Grande Prairie Public School Division in northwestern Alberta, a role he has held since 2015. He previously served the division as Deputy Superintendent

and Assistant Superintendent – Human Resources.

A dynamic and innovative leader, Sandy excels at achieving sustained, long-term, and meaningful growth for a school system and is deeply committed to student achievement. He is an active member of the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS), including serving two terms as a zone director and as a CASS New Members Academy presenter and superintendent mentor. He has given his time and expertise to the Alberta School Boards Association, the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta, and Alberta Education in a number of roles. He has published five articles on school effectiveness, system improvement, and emerging technologies.

In addition to his work in education leadership, Sandy has also volunteered with the Rotary Club of Grande Prairie, the City of Grande Prairie Opioid Task Force, and the Community Foundation of Northwest Alberta.

He has been a member of CASSA for 11 years.



**LINSEY HOPE**  
NWTSA

Linsey is the Director of Education for the Tliche Community Services Agency (TCSA), Northwest Territories. She started her career as an educator in the Tliche region in 2002, with roles including junior and senior high teacher and the TCSA Curriculum, Assessment, and Special Projects Coordinator. Linsey has also served as a Curriculum Coordinator with the Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education.

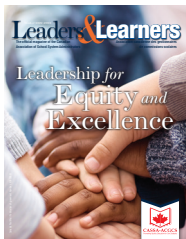
A servant leader, she is well respected by her peers and colleagues. Linsey is also highly committed to building and

maintaining strong relationships within the Tliche region, including her efforts to build local capacity within the TCSA. This has resulted in local staff continuing their education, mentorships, and professional development to expand their job roles and be promoted.

Linsey embraces the Tliche region's vision of "Dǫ Nàke Lani Nàts'etso... Strong like Two People" and enriches it through a shared leadership philosophy that emphasizes evidence-based decision making. She has long advocated for and taken part in developing Tliche language and culture resource materials, including the Tliche History Project, the Camp Guidebook for on-the-land learning, core Dene Kede curriculum, and locally developed courses, books, digital resources, and other teaching and learning materials.

She is the mother of three active young boys. She has been a foster parent for over a decade and has volunteered with the NWT SPCA since 2013.

Linsey has been a member of CASSA for four years. ○



### WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO WRITE FOR US!

The CASSA Board is looking for authors interested in writing for the upcoming Winter 2023-2024 issue of *Leaders & Learners* magazine. If you have an article idea that fits into a theme about leadership, please send an abstract to Jenna Collignon, editor of the magazine, at [jcollignon@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:jcollignon@matrixgroupinc.net), and copy [ken\\_bain@cassa-acgcs.ca](mailto:ken_bain@cassa-acgcs.ca). We are looking for features and success stories from each region of Canada: Eastern Canada, Quebec, Ontario, Western Canada, and Northern Canada.

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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)  
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