

Greetings from the President

In schools, students often exchange cards and perform intentional acts of kindness to celebrate Valentine's Day on February 14th. Our world sorely needs the kindness we seek to build in school communities today. The polarization of our society continues to cause

strife. Determined people interrupt public board of education meetings to voice opinions on vaccines, SOGI education resources, and ongoing global conflicts. Even though school districts' mandates do not govern provincial health policy, national human rights policy, or government response to international conflict, protestors seem to believe that public board of education meetings are appropriate settings to air their grievances. To ensure safety at public meetings, districts now regularly engage security firms, enact emergency evacuation and lockdown plans with police assistance, and move meetings online to complete board business.

Our response to angry people and disruptions requires leadership skills that include contextual literacy, intercultural competence, patience, and adaptive expertise. Each situation is different. We can start by listening, but we do not have to enter a debate. We can model civil discourse in disagreement, but we have a legal obligation to uphold the law and human rights. We must work against discrimination in all forms, continuing to celebrate diversity and promote safe schools. We can refer to our mandates to deliver provincial curricula and ensure students learn so they can thrive in a global community. If Canada and our global community are to survive, we must shift from polarizing discourse and focus on the humanity that binds us together; everyone can share the hope that our children live in a better world. That better world could start with the intentional teaching of kindness in schools.

Kindness requires a commitment to an act that supports another human. At the recent 2023 BCSTA Academy, Dr. John-Tyler Binfet delivered the final keynote at the conference. A professor in the Okanagan School of Education at UBC Okanagan, Dr. Binfet has conducted research on the impacts of creating



Kevin Kaardal
CASSA/ACGCS President

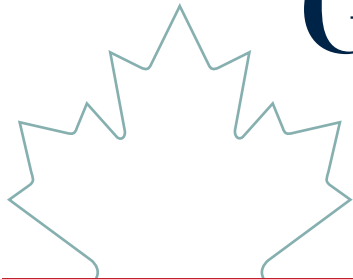
school cultures that encourage intentional acts of kindness. His research demonstrates that kindness improves school cultures, encourages students to engage with both peers and curricula, and improves academic performance. It makes sense: safe, caring school communities allow students to focus on learning rather than being worried about exclusion or bullying.

"Much has been written about random acts of kindness – acts performed spontaneously and often to strangers. The topic of kindness and the benefits arising from performing kind acts holds both empirical and applied interest in the fields of education and psychology. Encouraging students to reflect upon and perform intentional acts of kindness develops perspective-taking, increased social membership, and a structured way of encouraging kindness within the school context." (Dr. John-Tyler Binfet)

When we intentionally teach kindness in schools, we promote cherishing each human in our schools. We build habits of civility, empowering students and staff who see the enormous impact of small efforts. A concerted focus on teaching kindness also brings hope that future senior leaders can address public grievances without someone shouting them down with a bullhorn. It is uncertain and exceedingly optimistic to hope that building a kinder society through education may someday allow schools to focus on global sustainability and human cooperation. What is certain is the need for transformative leadership in complex times. Collectively, we are up to the task of being intentionally kind.

Reference:

1. Binfet, J. T. (2022). *Cultivating kindness: An educator's guide*. University of Toronto Press. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487536015>.



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

Greetings from the Executive Director



Ken Bain
CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

Each year, the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) Board of Directors meets in Toronto to engage in strategic planning meetings. The meetings began with a review of the implementation of the three strategic plan priorities that were established in May 2022 (Governance and Operations, Professional Learning, and Communication and Engagement). The session was facilitated by Natalie Zend, Principal, ZENDialogue. The session was divided into three parts: a look back at the previous process and work from May 2022, a review of the status of work from the three sub-committees, and a look at next steps for each priority. The meetings also include opportunities for board members to hear from and influence the work of other organizations with similar interests to CASSA.

The CASSA Board met with Michael Zinck, Assistant Deputy Minister in the

Federal Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change Canada, and Luc Tittley, Director Public Affairs and Communications – Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Canada. The Board received an update on the work undertaken by the ministry and its work with non-governmental organizations in Canada. Michael and Luc were interested in hearing how the federal ministry can influence K-12 education which, as we know, is the responsibility of each province and territory. Board members provided advice to the ministry representatives who, in turn, made a commitment to stay connected. Thanks to President Kevin Kaardal from Central Okanagan School District in British Columbia for making the connection and facilitating the session with the ministry.

This year, the Board also met with representatives from the Centre for Mental Health and Addictions (CAMH). CAMH is Canada's largest mental health teaching hospital. CAMH sets the standards for care, research, education, and leading social change.

CAMH has a large library of online mental health resources for healthcare practitioners. The reps who met with the Board were looking for feedback on how to make the tools relevant for the education sector, and in particular, principals, teachers, and other school staff. The Board brainstormed advice to the CAMH representatives.

Mark your calendars for CASSA 2024 Leadership Conference in Montreal from July 3-5, 2024!

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Faces in the Crowd: Jameel Aziz

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

Jameel Aziz is the Superintendent for School District No. 57 in Prince George, having assumed his role in early 2024. He earned his Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education at the University of Winnipeg, and his Master of Education at the University of Victoria. His career in education also includes roles as a teacher, coach, vice principal, principal, and district principal in rural communities in Manitoba and British Columbia. He has experience in secondary, elementary, French Immersion, and distance/online education.

Jameel is a results-oriented, student-focused leader who has been a key contributor to improved learning outcomes and academic and athletic excellence. Prior to his appointment, he served as the superintendent/CEO for the Yellowknife Education District No. 1, and as assistant superintendent for School District

No. 58 – Nicola-Similkameen in British Columbia. He has served in executive and governance roles with the British Columbia Principals and Vice Principals Association, where in 2010 his colleagues in British Columbia elected him as the association's president. He has also served as its executive director. In 2013, the board of the Canadian Association of Principals elected him as the association's president.

With his coaching background, Jameel notes he has been fortunate to have strong mentorship and role models throughout his career. He was part of the University of Victoria Vikes national champion men's basketball team in 1997 and a Canada Games gold medalist with Team British Columbia the same year.

Jameel was born in England and emigrated to Canada as a young person. He is married to a health care professional, and they have three sons together, two of whom are still in school. He describes himself as adventurous and a fortunate individual, and he has always loved to travel and see



Jameel Aziz, Superintendent, School District No. 28, Prince George.

the world. Jameel also enjoys physical activity and sports and connecting with positive people with similar interests. He especially enjoys hiking, running, and having adventures with a close group of friends. He has served as chair of the United Way on different occasions, and he enjoys working with the philanthropic sector.

Last fall, Jameel shared with *Leaders & Learners* his reflections on a variety of topics about his career in public education and school system leadership.

Jameel Aziz presenting an award.



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

My enjoyment of working with students through coaching camps first tweaked the idea for me to become a teacher; I had not considered it prior.

Through my teaching career, I made positive connections with students and at one point I was tapped on the shoulder around a leadership opportunity as a vice principal. Again, it was not something I aspired to but after serving in the role, I noted the influence positive leadership could have and continued to work through the system.

Have you spearheaded a particular program or initiative in your district? Were you part of a team that brought about notable and positive change? Tell us about some of your personal points of pride as a senior administrator in public education.

I am a servant leader, so most of the accomplishments are around supporting others to do the best work they can. I have been connected to Indigenous education as a focus throughout my career and have been involved as part of leadership teams that have positively changed course completion rates for students, increased graduation rates, and made a substantial and targeted change in post-secondary transition. I truly believe that public education has the ability to make life changes for students and families and feel great pride when I see that happen.

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

As a servant leader, my role is to empower others, remove barriers, and advocate for the tools and resources the system needs to better serve students and families. One of the values of education is knowing that you have influenced young people to be positive leaders, be successful citizens, and go out and make changes that impact the

Yellowknife Education District No. 1 in Profile

The Yellowknife Education District No. 1 (YK1) was created in 1939 as the Yellowknife School District No. 1. YK1 oversees eight schools in Yellowknife, Northwest Territories. It is on Chief Drygeese Territory in the Akaitcho region, the traditional territory of the Yellowknives Dene First Nation.

The district's first school opened in 1939. Known as the Log School House, the building was designated a Yellowknife Heritage Site in 1988. The Log School House is now located next to the school board offices. In 1974, Yellowknife Elementary School was renamed Mildred Hall School in honour of the Log School House's first teacher.

YK1's vision is "Education for life: We believe in and respect the diversity, identity, and growth of all learners." It has four strategic priorities:

1. *Wellness* – Build relationships and cultivate a culture of holistic wellness.
2. *Indigenous language and education* – Honour and celebrate Indigenous language and culture for all learners.
3. *Learning* – Ensure inclusive, equitable, and authentic learning experiences.
4. *Community* – Foster critical understanding of local, national, and global issues.

world. The riches of leadership come from those items and knowing that generational changes have been made for students and families.

How many years have you been involved with CASSA?

I first attended the CASSA conference in 2012 in Whistler, British Columbia. I was impressed by the passion of the membership and the professionalism I saw exhibited throughout. As a member of the BIPOC community, I noted the lack of faces that looked like mine present and hoped to impact changes to draw more underrepresented individuals to education leadership. We still have much work to do in this area.

How did you first become involved with CASSA and what made you want to work with the organization at the board level?

Having worked with a variety of boards, I wanted to have some influence and share some perspectives from my previous work and make sure that the voice of the Northwest Territories is clearly articulated at the CASSA board table.

What are you most looking forward to in your role on the CASSA board?

The sharing of perspectives from all jurisdictions across Canada, placing a greater emphasis on the value of public education, and working on national strategies that will benefit students and families in each province and territory.

Is there anything else you'd like to share with our readers?

I believe that a solid public education system is the foundation of a positive and successful society. I have much admiration for the positive educators and staff I have had the good fortune to work with throughout my career, and I thank each of them sincerely for allowing me the connection, wisdom, and passion that they have shared with me. I am indebted to so many of them.

Thank you for taking part, Jameel.

Jameel Aziz, hiking on the Elevator Trail.



We're Looking for a Few Faces in the Crowd



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Several times a year, *Leaders & Learners* publishes Faces in the Crowd. This long-running series features biographical profiles of our members. It has been a part of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators' (CASSA) national newsletter since the newsletter began in 2004.

What exactly is Faces in the Crowd? It is a section of the newsletter set aside to help CASSA members get to know one another. It is also a way for members to share highlights of their personal and professional journeys. This isn't always easy when our members only have a few opportunities each year to meet in person. Faces in the Crowd can help bridge the distances between us.

Over the last 20 years, *Leaders & Learners* has profiled superintendents, assistant superintendents, directors of education, and other senior system administrators in public education from coast to coast.

Do you know a CASSA member who deserves to have their story shared with our readers? Is there a colleague you would like everyone to know about? Perhaps you would like to share your own story. This is the space to do that. Please reach out to *Leaders & Learners* to share suggestions for future Faces in the Crowd.

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CASSA Awards: Recognizing Outstanding Leadership

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

Do you know a school system leader who deserves to have their work recognized by their peers at the national level? Is a colleague in your school district or regional affiliate making significant contributions to the work of senior system administration and public education in Canada? Now is the time to put forward their name as a nominee for the EXL Award!

The Canadian Association for School System Administrators (CASSA) has presented the EXL Award for over two decades to recognize the extraordinary efforts of Canadian school system leaders. We present the EXL Award at each of CASSA's national conferences. We will present the 2024 EXL Award this July in Montreal, Quebec. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) also recognizes the recipient as the Canadian Superintendent of the Year at the following year's AASA conference, where it announces the American Superintendent of the Year.

Xerox Canada has supported the EXL Award since we first presented it in 2002. CASSA recognizes and is grateful for this long-standing partnership with Xerox. Nomination forms are on the CASSA website. Please submit nomination packages for the 2024 awards before May 16, 2024.

The 2023 Canadian Superintendent of the Year and recipient of the EXL Award was Anthony "Tony" Stack. Tony was the CEO/Director of Education for the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) until he retired in January 2023, following a 25-year career in education leadership in the province. The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of School System Leaders (NLASSA) nominated Tony for this honour. We presented Tony with the award at our 2023 conference in Victoria, British Columbia. *Leaders & Learners* published detailed profiles of Tony and all the 2023 nominees in the September 2023 issue.

Previous EXL Award recipients include Bevan Daverne, Darrel Robertson, Dr. Renee Closs, Shannon Barnett-Aikman,



Photo originally featured in Issue 4 in 2023 of Leaders & Learners. Featuring Ken Bain, Siobhan Wright, Sandy McDonald, Tony Stack, Linsey Hope, and Kevin Kaardal.

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. The recipient list is updated each year on the Awards section of the CASSA website.

About the 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 they 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 lead-

ers, teachers, and caring parents help to determine the scope and quality of children's educational experiences.

- Children's attitudes toward learning and their perceptions of themselves as lifelong learners are established in their school years. Effective leadership, mentoring, and modelling determine whether the school jurisdiction effectively creates this environment.

CASSA also presents two other special awards from time to time: the Honourary Life Membership and the Distinguished Service Award. The nomination process and deadline are the same as those for the EXL Award.

About the 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.

About the 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. ○

Time is running out! Don't miss your chance to contribute to the EdCan Network's Pan-Canadian K-12 Workplace Wellbeing Survey!

Survey response deadline: **March 8th**

Your responses to this quick 3-MINUTE SURVEY are crucial for shaping EdCan's forthcoming Pan-Canadian K-12 Workplace Wellbeing Trends Report. Help us build a stronger, healthier educational community!

Share Your Insights:

- What are your top workplace wellbeing challenges and priorities?
- What workplace wellbeing support services and resources would you find most beneficial?
- What promising practices have enhanced your workplace wellbeing?

Take the survey now:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/X57NGQJ>

Thank you for being a part of our movement to foster healthier workplace environments that allow better outcomes for everyone in K-12 education.

Le temps presse ! Ne manquez pas votre chance de contribuer au sondage pancanadien sur le bien-être au travail du primaire au secondaire du Réseau ÉdCan.

Date limite de réponse au sondage : **8 mars**

Vos réponses à ce rapide SONDAGE DE 3 MINUTES sont cruciales pour façonner le Rapport pancanadien sur les tendances en matière de bien-être au travail du primaire au secondaire d'ÉdCan. Aidez-nous à bâtir une communauté éducative plus forte et plus saine !

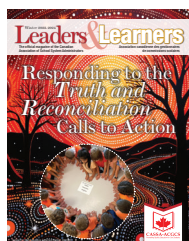
Partagez vos idées :

- Quels sont vos principaux défis et priorités en matière de bien-être au travail ?
- Quels services et ressources de soutien au bien-être au travail trouveriez-vous les plus utiles ?
- Quelles pratiques prometteuses ont amélioré votre bien-être au travail ?

Répondez au sondage maintenant :

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XFXNNBQ>

Merci de faire partie de notre mouvement visant à favoriser des environnements de travail plus sains qui permettent de meilleurs résultats pour tous dans l'éducation de la primaire au secondaire.



WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO WRITE FOR US!

The CASSA Board is looking for authors interested in writing for the upcoming Spring 2024 issue of *Leaders & Learners* magazine. If you have an article idea that you're itching to tell, please send an abstract to Jenna Collignon, editor of the magazine, at jcollignon@matrixgroupinc.net, and copy 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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