

Greetings from the President



Michael Helm
CASSA/ACGCS President

The Challenges of Teacher Recruitment and Retention

In recent years, Canada has faced significant challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified teachers across its provinces. This issue has become increasingly pressing, with many provinces struggling to fill teacher positions. As a result, a higher number of non-qualified individuals or local permit holders are stepping into classrooms to fill the gaps. This trend raises concerns about the quality of education and its impact on student success.

One of the primary reasons for the shortage of qualified teachers is the large number of trained educators who have chosen not to pursue or continue in the profession. Factors contributing to this decision include low salaries, high stress levels, and a lack of support and resources. The demanding nature of the job, coupled with the increasing expectations placed on teachers has led many to seek alternative career paths.

The presence of non-qualified or local permit holder teachers in classrooms has significant implications on the quality of education. These individuals, while often dedicated and well-meaning, may lack the necessary training and expertise to effectively manage classrooms and deliver curriculum. This can lead to inconsistencies in teaching quality and negatively affect student engagement and learning outcomes. In many cases, there would be a positive impact in the classroom if these teachers could receive professional development to complete their teaching requirements.

Student engagement is a critical factor in educational success, and the current teacher

shortage exacerbates this issue. With fewer qualified teachers, students may not receive the dynamic and skilled instruction they need to stay motivated and succeed academically. Engaged students are more likely to participate actively in their learning, achieve higher academic standards and develop a lifelong love of learning.

To address these challenges, we must implement strategies aimed at improving teacher recruitment and retention, such as providing robust professional development opportunities and creating supportive work environments. Additionally, increasing access to classroom resources could also help alleviate some of the pressures associated with the profession. Governments must valorize the profession and ensure salaries reflect the work that is being done; they need to ensure that the citizens in our provinces view education as a priority.

Collectively, we must share best practices on our recruitment and onboarding efforts so that we can implement the most effective ways to attract teachers. Many school boards or districts, provinces, and CASSA have initiatives already underway; the matter of sharing and collaborating is what is now essential. By ensuring that classrooms are staffed with skilled and dedicated educators, we can enhance student engagement and success.

As we work toward these solutions, it is essential for education leaders and policymakers to reflect on their current retention strategies: are we doing enough to support and retain the talented educators who are shaping the future of our students?



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Greetings

from the Executive Director



Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

This month's message will serve as a follow up to the last October issue of the *Leaders & Learners* newsletter, in which I reflected on the key messages and my learnings as a participant in the Global Network of Deans of Education International Symposium.

Davide Ruscelli, Senior Project Officer (Co-ordinator) of the Teacher Task Force Secretariat hosted by UNESCO was our opening keynote speaker. He identified that 44 million teachers are needed to achieve universal primary and secondary education by 2030. His presentation was centred on the following premise: "Among the numerous determinants of quality education and learning outcomes, getting a qualified, supported and motivated teacher into each classroom is the single-most important school-based factor." Last month, I referenced his nine levers to reverse teacher shortages. He further identified nine ways to transform the teaching profession for a new social contract and note that these are based upon a global research project:¹

- Foster gender balanced profession embracing diversity,
- Enhance teacher motivation through enticing collaborative and relevant lifelong learning,

- Train teachers to fully profit from technology,
- Enhance teaching professionalism including initial teacher education,
- Transition contract teachers into permanent positions with the related qualifications,
- Find the balance between accountability and autonomy,
- Motivate teachers through horizontal and vertical ladders to enhance professional growth,
- Foster idea-sharing and innovation through collaboration, and
- Engage teachers in decision-making processes about professional development.

Davide finished his keynote by identifying six recommendations to mobilize international collaboration to address global teacher shortages.

1. Develop holistic teacher policies aligned to national priorities using a collaborative framework,
2. Collect more and better data to systematically report on the indicators agreed in the Education 2030 Framework for Action,²
3. Transform teacher education and professional development from course-based, individual endeavours to lifelong collaborative, and teacher-led processes,
4. Improve the working conditions for teachers to ensure they receive competitive compensation and benefits and ensure gender equality in pay and treatment,

5. Ensure adequate public, domestic funding that is consistent with the existing benchmarks of six per cent of GDP and 20 per cent of total government spending, and
6. Enhance international cooperation to engage different constituencies in collaborative efforts to address teacher shortages.

Davide's opening keynote set the context for the presentations that followed.

References:

1. UNESCO. "Global report on teachers: addressing teacher shortages and transforming the profession." <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/global-report-teachers-addressing-teacher-shortages-and-transforming-profession>.
2. UNESCO. "Education 2030: Global Education Cooperation Mechanism." <https://www.unesco.org/sdg4education2030/en>.

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The New CASSA President: *Mike Helm*

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

Every two years, the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) selects a new president for its executive. For 2024 to 2026, that role belongs to Mike Helm. Mike is a familiar face to members of the Association of Directors General of English School Boards of Québec (ADGESBQ), as he has been a part of that regional affiliate for 11 years and recently served as the ADGESBQ representative on CASSA's board of directors.

His path to a career in public education was set early on. "I knew from a very young age that I wanted to become a teacher. I had an inspirational Grade 3 teacher, and I wanted to help others the way that he helped students succeed. It was from that point on that I worked toward getting my Bachelor of Education and Brevet [teaching license]."

After graduating from McGill University in 1997, Mike taught at Châteauguay Valley Regional High School for about eight years. "The greatest lesson that I learned while teaching was that every student can be successful," he reflects. "It is just being able to make that connection and support them where they are at. It is one day at a time and every student's needs are different."

He became vice principal at Howard S. Billings High School in 2004 and noticed right away the difference in how teachers and principals are perceived and how he should respond. "I learned early on that because I walked across that door into the office, I was expected to have answers for everything," he says. "But it was OK to say, 'I don't have that answer for you at this moment, but I will get back to you' and



LEFT: Mike Helm out fishing in Northern Ontario. Photos courtesy of Mike Helm.



BELOW: Mike's two dogs, Lincoln "Link" (the black lab), and Augustus "Aggie" (the goldendoodle).

then make sure to follow up – that went for staff, students, families, and community."

In 2007, he served as principal of Gault Institute Elementary School for two months, and then took on the role of principal at

Howard S. Billings High School for the next five years. Mike continued his own education and professional development, earning his Master of Educational Leadership from McGill in 2012 and then moving into

senior system administration with the New Frontiers School Board (NFSB). From 2012 to 2023, Mike served in various roles for the NFSB, including as its director of educational services and transportation; interim director of finance and material resources; assistant general director; and secretary general. In June 2023, Mike was announced as the director general.

The NFSB is based in Châteauguay in the southwest region of Québec. The board currently serves over 4,000 students at 15 schools and centres and at over 16 adult vocational programs. Its name reflects natural borders, such as rivers, as well as provincial and national borders. It also reflects a journey to expand the frontiers of education: literacy, technology, and lifelong learning.

“I am continuing to learn each and every day,” he says of his time in leadership with the NFSB. “There are so many changes in so many areas that we are constantly growing – I guess the greatest lesson though would be to care and be honest with people.”

Like many system leaders from across Canada, Mike’s first experience with CASSA was when he attended one of its national conferences. “I really enjoyed that and when the

opportunity came up to be the representative for ADGESBQ, I took it. Three years ago, there was the opportunity to become president-elect and be part of the executive, and I gladly accepted that.”

He praises milestones reached by CASSA in recent years. “The fact that we have representation from coast to coast to coast says a lot about the organization and the work that has been done by our [retiring] executive director Ken Bain. CASSA also provides great professional development opportunities to the members each summer at the conference, and networking in many key areas of education right now, such as the Mental Health Network and retention and recruitment efforts.”

Mike also cites work done with CASSA’s strategic plan as another significant achievement for the organization. He also recognizes the challenges CASSA faces at this time, including keeping representation from across Canada. “It’s important to have all the voices heard as well as to incorporate more opportunities to support the network with the needs of today through strong partnerships with other organizations,” he says, whether those needs relate to mental health

and wellbeing, artificial intelligence, staff shortages, or other issues.

“I believe that we are at a point in education where change is happening. Where teaching and learning in the classrooms is changing and it is more important than ever that educators from across the country need to be working hand in hand to share resources, expertise, networks, and innovation. The phrase ‘this is how we have always done it’ is not applicable anymore. We have so many incredible educators at every level in this country – it is just a matter of us sharing.”

When Mike isn’t at work, he can often be found outdoors; spending time with his two dogs; and with his wife, Claudine, and his three children, Asher, Jean, and Leah. As he assumes the responsibilities of president, he is looking forward to the work that lies ahead. “I look forward to engaging in conversations with our partners, working with our strategic plan, and being a participant representing CASSA as my predecessors have. We are very fortunate to have an extremely strong board of directors and executive committee, all dedicated to CASSA.” ○



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New Executive Director Reflects on CASSA's Continuing Evolution and Its Relationship with Manitoba Affiliate

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer



As noted in the September 2024 issue of *Leaders & Learners* (“Announcing the Recipient and Nominees for the Inaugural Nelson Excellence in Leadership Award”), the new executive director of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) served a crucial role in renewing CASSA’s relationship with the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS).

It was during Reg Klassen’s time as MASS president that discussions began about possibly returning to the national organization. “When MASS left CASSA, they outlined very clearly what they were not pleased with and stated these issues needed to be corrected if they were to consider returning,” Reg recalls.



Reg Klassen, Chief Superintendent, Frontier School Division.

The MASS executive director at the time got a call from then CASSA executive director Ken Bain. Ken invited MASS to join CASSA for the year – at no cost. “After that trial year, it became clear that CASSA had made the changes and more that MASS had

asked for when we left,” Reg says, “and so I pushed for us to return.”

Those changes included working toward bringing all provinces and territories into the national organization, continually improving on the quality of conferences offered each year, making sure the organization was financially stable, and committing to developing a national voice with the support of the regional affiliates.

“Ken invited us to come and experience CASSA with the changes they had brought about,” he says, adding that Ken’s consistency has been one of the organization’s strengths. “He patiently led CASSA, never losing sight of what it needs and what it can yet become.”

As the MASS executive was considering whether to return, Reg met with two MASS past presidents who had been part of the decision to leave. “They wanted to know what was going on. I was happy to share

with them the positive impact and changes they had on CASSA, and as a result we were returning to the fold.”

Reg went on to further support CASSA as its president and as a director-at-large. Fast forward to about a year ago. Reg was thinking about announcing his retirement as a superintendent when he was invited to apply to become CASSA’s next executive director. He admits the role wasn’t of interest to him at the time. Following many discussions with CASSA’s executive members and hearing their enthusiasm for the future, however, Reg reconsidered not just his place with the organization but what his path to retirement might look like.

“This shift in thinking also coincided with the fact that I was planning to fully retire, and I wondered what that meant for me, and it scared me a little.”

After talking about it with his wife, he decided to take on the executive director role. “I had already caught the bug and the passion I had for what CASSA could accomplish when I was president, and there was no turning back. I believe I bring an energy and enthusiasm that will help

maintain CASSA’s momentum or even help it gain strength.”

Reg brings to the role years of experience leading a number of organizations as well as his commitment to serve CASSA. While he recently retired as the chief superintendent for the Frontier School Division in Winnipeg, he is currently serving as interim superintendent for the Seine River School Division, based in Lorette, Manitoba. He previously served as superintendent for Rolling River School Division and Garden Valley School Division.

He recognizes the support he will have from the many others involved in CASSA’s mission. “CASSA is made up of phenomenal people who are dedicating their lives to making the world better by educating children across the country,” he says. “Every system organization across the country that is a CASSA member serves a different master. Each province leads their education and therefore the members of CASSA are often at different places facing diverse issues.”

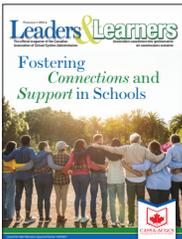
What one province faces is invariably experienced by others, he says, and CASSA has opportunity to be a national voice on

issues in education by sharing its system experiences. Communication and providing time and space for members to connect is key to CASSA’s success.

“The work of a system leader is all consuming,” he says. “It is hard to carve out time for your own professional development. The same is true when it comes to simply having time to discuss issues a system leader needs to work through and resolve while leading a large educational organization.”

How does Reg envision CASSA sustaining itself? “Healthy participation by the member organizations who see the value in CASSA as a national voice on education. In return, CASSA will need to remain relevant to the membership. It will require an ongoing commitment from both sides.”

It will also require listening to one another. “Everyone has a story about their journey through life. Along the way we are shaped, bent, discover our strengths and weaknesses, and in some cases, life has left some of us badly wounded or even broken. It is through listening and asking questions to gain greater understanding that we see more clearly.” ○



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