

Greetings from the President



Michael Helm
CASSA/ACGCS President

Much like a thriving ecosystem, where each part plays a role in sustaining the whole, a strong professional network fosters growth for individuals and the broader education community.

With the arrival of spring, I've been reflecting on the intricate connections in nature – how each element, from the

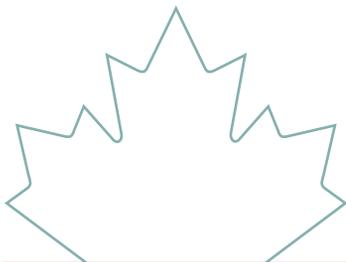
budding trees to the returning birds, plays a vital role in the changing season. Spring is a time of renewal, growth, and collaboration, reminding us that nothing thrives in isolation. Just as nature relies on an interconnected web to flourish, so too do we in our personal and professional lives. Networking, at its core, is about fostering these connections – building relationships that support, inspire, and create opportunities.

With the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA), networking is one of the key benefits of membership. It opens doors to new opportunities, whether it's a career move, a strategic partnership, or the simple yet powerful act of sharing knowledge and experiences. When we connect with others, ideas take root and grow, offering fresh perspectives

that can shape the future of education. Networking also grants access to vital resources – whether it's funding, tools, expertise, or simply the wisdom of those who have walked similar paths. Through these connections, we build support systems that provide mentorship, guidance, and encouragement when we need it most.

Much like a thriving ecosystem, where each part plays a role in sustaining the whole, a strong professional network fosters growth for individuals and the broader educational community. The more we engage, the stronger these bonds become, leading to trust, collaboration, and collective success. By participating in this network, we are not only investing in our own development but also contributing to a system that nurtures innovation and resilience across Canada's education sector.

This spring, as nature reminds us of the power of connection, let's embrace the opportunities networking, and thus CASSA, provides – learning from one another, sharing our strengths, and growing together.



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

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

Greetings from the Executive Director



Reg Klassen

CASSA/ACGCS New Executive Director

As the Executive Director of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA), I had the privilege of attending the American Association of School Administration (AASA) Conference in New Orleans from March 5-8, 2025, aptly themed “Future-Driven Leadership.” This remarkable gathering brought together leaders and innovators committed to shaping the future of education. I am always amazed by how similar the educational challenges are that we face in our distinct countries. While the political leadership in our two nations may currently struggle to collaborate, this was not my experience when connecting with American leaders in education.

During the conference, I had the pleasure of meeting AASA Executive Director David Schuler and incoming President David Law. We discussed our shared vision for education and the opportunities ahead. I am excited to

note that Mr. Law will join us in St. John’s this July, further strengthening the bond between our organizations. I also had the opportunity to reconnect with AASA President Dr. Gustavo Balderas, who graciously attended our CASSA Conference in Montreal. It was heartening to exchange ideas and reflect on the shared experiences that unite us as educational leaders.

On a personal note, I am deeply honoured to have been recognized for my achievements at the conference. Being celebrated as the recipient of the Nelson Excellence in Leadership Award in Canada this past July and being named the Canadian Superintendent of the Year at AASA are acknowledgments that reflect the collective efforts and excellence of our educational community in Canada. These prestigious awards on both national and international platforms are a humbling reminder of the collaborative work that drives meaningful change in education. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) for deeming me worthy of their nomination one year ago.

The conference was an inspiring experience, filled with insightful sessions, meaningful connections, and opportunities to reflect on the future of education. As we continue to collaborate and innovate, I am confident that our shared commitment to leadership and education will drive positive change for students and communities across North America.

Finally, I’d like to remind everyone that the application deadline for our CASSA Distinguished Service Award, Honourary Life Nomination, and the Nelson Excellence in Leadership Award is May 16, 2025. You will find guidelines and application forms for each award at www.cassa-acgcs.ca under the Awards heading. Please consider submitting an application from your organization.

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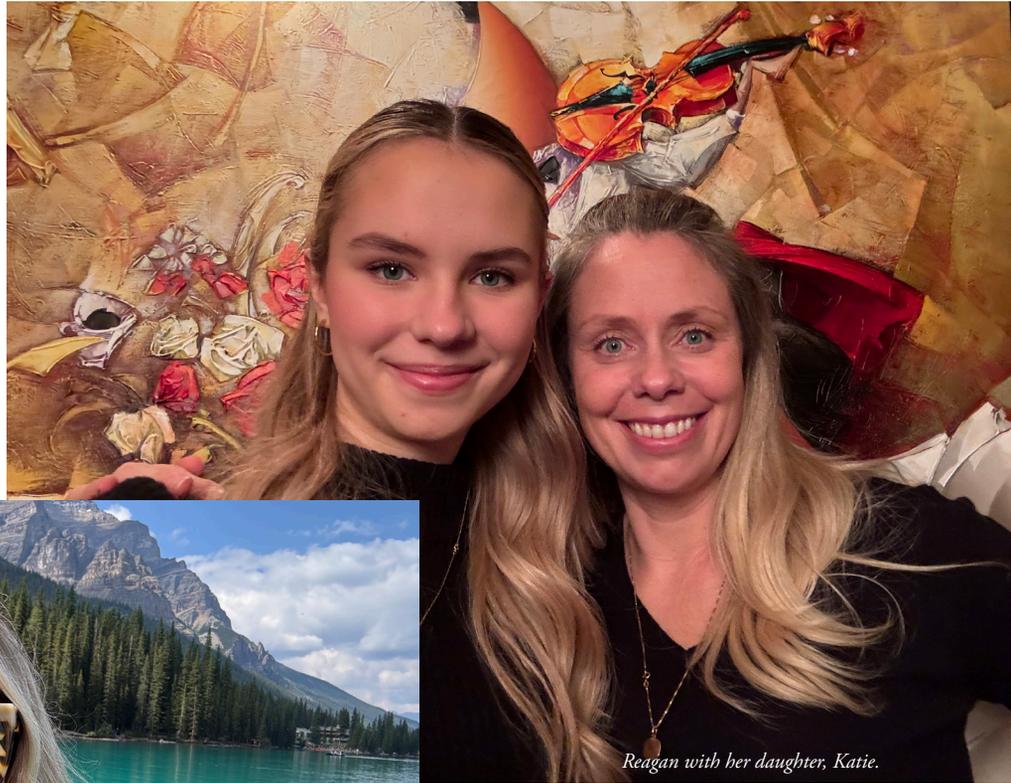
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Faces in the Crowd:

Dr. Reagan Weeks



*Dr. Reagan Weeks.
Photos courtesy of her.*



Reagan with her daughter, Katie.



Dr. Reagan Weeks.

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

From her first job as a lifeguard with the City of Medicine Hat to her years of service in public education, Dr. Reagan Weeks has dedicated herself to the southeastern Alberta communities where she has made her home. Her path to a career in teaching and school leadership included earning her education degree from the University of Alberta and

a master's degree in business administration from Royal Roads University.

Her first job in education was also in Medicine Hat. In 2001, she started as an elementary teacher at River Heights School with the Medicine Hat Public School Division. Her work in administration began in 2009 as a vice principal at Southview School, another elementary school in Medicine Hat. Two years later, she took on the role of principal for Elm Street School.

When Dr. Weeks first came to this inner-city school in River Flats, one of Medicine Hat's oldest communities, Elm Street was



Reagan and her son, Ethan.

facing numerous challenges. Attendance rates were low, and the school had the lowest grades of any elementary school in all of Alberta.

In one of many instances of her supporting education partnerships, Dr. Weeks worked with Medicine Hat College to develop an innovative music program for Elm Street students. The program included in-school visits from talented local musicians and opportunities to take part in out-of-school music festivals. This infusion of creativity resulted in not only improved attendance and grades but an increase in parent involvement at the school. In 2014, Dr. Weeks received the Alberta Excellence in Teaching Award in recognition of her dedication to the profession and to her students.

Two years later, she moved into senior system leadership positions. From 2016 to 2021, she served as assistant superintendent and deputy superintendent with Prairie Rose Public Schools, which has its administrative offices in Dunsmore, Alberta. Prairie Rose serves a small rural population with a unique cultural mix of students from communities spread out over 29,000 square kilometres. During her first year as assistant superintendent, Dr. Weeks completed her doctorate in education from Johns Hopkins University.

In her system leadership roles, she continued to develop and support creative opportunities and partnerships to benefit students at Prairie Rose schools. These included collaborations with local municipalities, post-secondary institutions, and Hutterite Brethren, and unique learning programs including a hockey academy, pilot training, a firefighting academy, and options focused on agriculture and the arts.

In 2021, she was named superintendent of schools for Prairie Rose, a role she continues to hold today. At the time of her appointment, Dr. Weeks noted that what drew her to the position was the school division's commitment to putting students first and creating innovative ways to make learning meaningful – both values that aligned with her own approach.

Dr. Weeks is the second vice president and Zone 6 director for the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS). She also serves as one of two CASS representatives on the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) board of directors. Following her two-year term on the CASSA board, she will take on the role of CASS president. ○



Prairie Rose Public Schools in profile

Prairie Rose Public Schools (PRPS), based in the southeastern corner of Alberta, offers both traditional academics and custom, innovative education programming. Created in the mid-1990s following amalgamation of four school divisions, PRPS serves 3,300 mostly rural students from junior kindergarten to Grade 12. It includes

- 18 public schools
- 18 Hutterite Colony schools
- a secondary distance learning school operating in partnership with Medicine Hat Public Schools and the Medicine Hat College
- the Home Plus Learning Network for online supported, shared responsibility, and full parent-driven home education options

The division is located on Treaty 7 and Treaty 4 territory of the Blackfoot confederacy: Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, and the Îyâxe Nakoda and Tsuut'ina nations. The division also acknowledges the Cree, Sioux, and the Saulteaux bands of the Ojibaxa peoples. The territory is home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3 within the historical Northwest Métis homeland.

The region served by PRPS also includes a significant number of Low German Speaking Mennonite (LGSM) students. Prairie Mennonite School, based in Medicine Hat, offers an Education Through Immersion program, which exposes students to activity and community learning initiatives that are highly valued in the Mennonite culture. PRPS also operates another LGSM school in the community of Burdett.

As well, 70 per cent of students attending the division's Ralston School are of British descent whose parents serve in the British armed forces. The school was originally run by Defence Research Establishment Suffield and then the Department of National Defence.

PRPS offers a number of speciality programs, including the Dave Rozdeba South Alberta Flight Academy, a partnership with Super T Aviation that offers students the opportunity to earn a private pilot's licence along with their high school diploma, and the South Alberta Fire Rescue Academy, a two-year hands-on firefighter certification training program in partnership with the Town of Bow Island and Cypress County.

Student athletes are offered a number of options for completing high school credits while developing elite-level skills in their sport, including the Badlands Baseball Academy, the Foremost Rodeo Academy, the South Alberta Baseball Academy, and the South Alberta Hockey Academy.

A number of agriculture-focused learning pathways are available, highly relevant in this farm-rich region. These include the Foremost School Agricultural Resource Model (also known as FARM), the Oyen Agriculture Project, the Senator Gershaw Farm Program, and the Irvine School Agricultural Discovery Centre.

Other custom options include the Butte Student Entrepreneurial Program, the Health Care Aide Program, Jenner Skills and Outdoor Classroom, Ralston – Learning from the Land, the Seven Persons Academy for the Fine Arts, Seven Persons Outward Pursuits, Try New Things (TNT), the North Agriculture Project, UAV (drone) Certification and Agricultural Research Program, Warren Peers Archery, and Warren Peers Makerspace. PRPS also welcomes international students to eight of its schools, hosted by local Canadian families through the Homestay Program.

Prairie Rose recently launched new strategic priorities: Ignite minds, kindle hearts, forge futures. These support its continuing traditions of academic excellence, recognizing its rural roots, and providing its students with future prospects.

Riding the Tide of Educational Leadership in St. John's This Summer



By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

Join your colleagues from across Canada this July as the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) explores the theme of Waves of Innovation: Riding the Tide of Educational Leadership at its annual conference in St. John's, Newfoundland!

The CASSA conference is a national gathering for school system leaders from publicly funded school districts across the country. This year, professional learning, networking, and socializing with delegates, guests, sponsors, and exhibitors will take place at the Sheraton Hotel Newfoundland.

Registration fees for CASSA members are \$810. Non-member fees are \$995. HST will also be charged. Register by April 15 for a chance to win a free night at the Sheraton Hotel Newfoundland. Two winners will be drawn.

CASSA conferences include time to take in unique local community and culture, and this year's gathering is no exception. Don't miss the pre-conference Gatherall's Puffin and Whale Watch Boat Tour on July 2. Learn about and observe puffins, humpback whales,

and other local sea life from expert guides on this evening cruise at the Witless Bay Ecological Reserve. Both delegates and guests are welcome. The tour costs \$100 plus HST.

Conference registration and the annual general meeting start things off on Thursday, July 3, followed by lunch and a brief welcome from CASSA leadership.

The conference's first keynote address will be delivered by Dr. Chief Mise'l Joe. Mise'l Joe is the recently retired administrative chief of Miawpukek Mi'kamaway Mawi'omi, a First Nation at the mouth of the Conne River on the south coast of Newfoundland. He is a recipient of the Order of Canada and a long-time advocate for reconciliation and the preservation of Indigenous language and culture.

Enjoy the best of St. John's that evening with a historic tour that includes stops at Cape Spear, Cabot Tower, Signal Hill, Quidi Vidi Village, Jellybean Row, and more. This tour will end in the heart of downtown where you have your pick of wonderful restaurants and pubs for a late evening meal. This tour costs \$81 plus HST per person.

Registration and breakfast once again kick things off on Friday, July 4. All delegates are invited to Re-Balancing the Scales: Strengthening Educator Well-Being for Sustainable Schools, a session facilitated by Laura Sokal and Lesley Eblie Trudel of

the University of Winnipeg. Friday's events also include two breakout sessions, another keynote address, the Nelson Excellence in Leadership Award presentation, and a good old-fashioned evening Kitchen Party featuring folk and traditional music by Tarahan.

Saturday, July 5, starts with breakfast and a brief welcome before the conference's final breakout session. Tom D'Amico, the director of education for the Ottawa Catholic School Board, will lead a session on Navigating AI Education Transformation.

A CASSA conference discount group rate of \$279 per night (and up) is available for rooms at the Sheraton until April 30. WestJet is offering five per cent off Econo and 10 per cent off EconoFlex and Premium for guests travelling within Canada. WestJet is also offering two per cent off Econo, five per cent off EconoFlex, and 10 per cent off Premium base fares for those travelling from outside Canada. Travel codes are on the conference website. Air Canada is offering five per cent off standard fares, 10 per cent off flex fares and higher, and 10 per cent off standard international fares and higher.

Additional details about sessions and speakers will continue to be added to the conference's website, easily found by the link on CASSA's website. We hope to see you in historic St. John's this July! ○

CASSA Awards:

Recognizing Outstanding Leadership

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

For over two decades, the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) has recognized the extraordinary efforts of Canadian school system leaders through the annual presentation of a national leadership award. Since 2024, this award has been known as the Nelson Excellence in Leadership Award. CASSA recognizes and is grateful for the support of this award by Nelson Canada, Canada's leading K-12 educational publisher. (The award was known for its first two decades as the EXL Award.)

We present our awards each year at CASSA's national conference. We will present the 2025 Nelson Excellence in Leadership Award this July in St. John's, Newfoundland. You can find details about this year's conference on page 5 of this issue.

Our American counterparts in the School Superintendents Association (AASA) also recognize 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. CASSA's 2025 Nelson Excellence in Leadership Award recipient will be recognized in Nashville, Tennessee, in February 2026.

Nomination forms for the Nelson Excellence in Leadership Award are on the CASSA website under the Awards tab. Please submit nomination packages by May 16, 2025.

The 2024 Canadian Superintendent of the Year and recipient of the inaugural Nelson Excellence in Leadership Award was Reg Klassen. We presented Reg with this award at our 2024 conference in Montreal/Tiohtià:ke on July 4. Reg was also named CASSA's executive director in 2024. (Readers may recall the recent feature on Reg in the December 2024 issue of *Leaders and Learners*. Short profiles of all 2024 nominees appeared in the October 2024 issue.)

Previous EXL Award recipients include Tony Stack, Bevan Daverne, Darrel Robertson, Dr. Renee Closs, Shannon Barnett-Aikman, David Keohane, Dr. John Malloy, Joan Carr, John Crocco, Brent Kaulback, Kim Jenkins, Robert Mills, Linda Fabi, Curtis Brown, John Mackle, Johanne Messner, Geoff Williams, Carol Gray, Ron Canuel, Edie Wilde, Ed Wittchen, Roy Seidler, and John Darroch. The recipient list is updated each year on the Awards section of the CASSA website.

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

About the Nelson Excellence in Leadership Award

CASSA members who have exhibited exemplary leadership ability and who have enhanced school administration are eligible to receive this award. The award includes an honorary life membership in CASSA.

A Nelson Excellence in Leadership 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 will have had at least five years of membership in CASSA.

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. ○

We're Looking for a Few Faces in the Crowd

Do you know a Canadian superintendent, director of education, or other senior system administrator who should have their story shared with their peers across the country?

Would you like to share the story of your own journey in education and leadership?

Faces in the Crowd is the space to do that.

Faces in the Crowd is a long-running series in *Leaders & Learners*, the national newsletter for the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA). The series has featured profiles of dozens of leaders from across Canada since the newsletter first began in 2004.

We profile members of CASSA and regional affiliates, including

- The British Columbia School Superintendents Association (BCSSA),
- The College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS),
- The Saskatchewan League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents (LEADS),
- The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS),
- The Ontario Catholic Supervisory Officers' Association (OCSOA),
- The Northwest Territories Superintendents' Association (NWTSA),



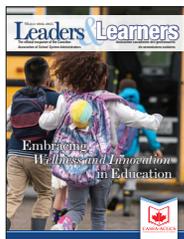
- The Association of Directors General of English School Boards of Québec (ADGESBQ),
- The Public School Administrators Association of Nova Scotia (PSAANS),
- Le Regroupement national des directions générales de l'éducation (RNDGE),
- The New Brunswick School Superintendents' Association (NBSSA), and
- The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of School System Administrators (NLASSA).

Faces in the Crowd, as with CASSA's annual national conference, helps CASSA members and their colleagues in senior system administration get to know one another better despite distances and jurisdictional differences.

The series also gives members the chance to highlight initiatives and milestones in their local school district or regional affiliate in addition to their own personal achievements and interests.

Consider suggesting a colleague or yourself for a Faces in the Crowd feature in an upcoming issue.

Reach out to *Leaders & Learners* contributing writer Tara Wittchen at taraleewittchen@gmail.com to share your ideas.



WE WOULD LIKE YOU TO WRITE FOR US!

The CASSA Board is looking for authors interested in writing for the upcoming issues 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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