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# Leaders & Learners

THE VOICE OF THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL  
SYSTEM ADMINISTRATORS/L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES  
GESTIONNAIRES DE COMMISSIONS SCOLAIRES  
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### Coming Up

- Issue 55 will feature the year in review, the American perspective on CASSA and more.

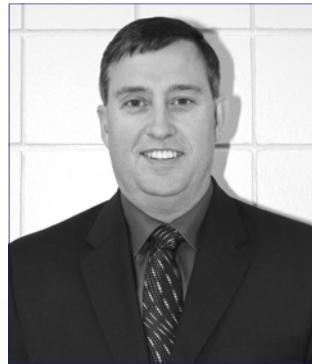
## Message From The President: Our Valued Relationship With AASA

Just as the mantra in real estate is “location, location, location,” the mantra in education is “relationships, relationships, relationships.” Nowhere is this best exemplified than in the strong, mutually respectful relationship that exists between our organization and the American Association of School Administrators.

Relationships require a personal investment. I want to thank those who have made it a priority to foster the CASSA-AASA relationship.

My AASA membership began when I moved into Northern Lights School Division in 2001. The division had a strong focus on professional learning. Staff were encouraged to take advantage of PD opportunities at the international level. As a newcomer, I came to appreciate the high quality and regular resources that I received.

When I attended my first AASA conference, I found that to maximize the “take away,” one needed to spend some dedicated time beforehand sifting through the sessions offered. In attending AASA events, I’ve always come away with a greater understanding of the realities faced by our American colleagues and, in many ways, a greater appreciation for the context in which I worked.



Roger Nippard  
CASSA president

It’s been interesting to observe how the environments in which our American counterparts work each day have been affected in recent years by national legislation such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top. The global economic recession that for the most part we here in Canada have been insulated from has also significantly affected the everyday work that our colleagues have had to deal with.

While our contexts and systems have characteristics that are very different, we have much that unites us and much that we can learn from each other. I would consider the lessons that I have learned from the materials provided by AASA, the conferences that I’ve attended and most importantly the friends that I have made in that organization over the years to be some of the best experiences that I have enjoyed as an educator.

I trust that you will enjoy learning more about AASA, one of our strongest partners, in this edition of *Leaders & Learners*.

I would also encourage you to look more closely at the resources they offer as part of the value added in terms of your CASSA membership.

Enjoy, and stay safe this holiday season.

## Message From The Executive Director: Reasons To Be A Member Of CASSA

One of the questions I am asked is “Why be a member of CASSA?” There are a number of answers to that question.

One that has always resonated with me is that CASSA provides school system leaders with a broad perspective on education leadership. While system leaders are always very in tune with local and provincial issues, there is a benefit to discussing and learning from leaders across the country, thus broadening one’s leadership lens.

As school system leaders, you can also develop and widen your leadership views through engaging in conversations beyond Canada. CASSA is proud to be a member association in the American Association of School Administrators (AASA).

As a member of AASA, CASSA has the opportunity to be actively involved in AASA activities including its Superintendent of the Year awards reception and ceremonies and its annual conference. We also have access to the many periodicals and research papers that AASA publishes. CASSA members must take out an individual membership with AASA, but CASSA, as an organization, has a great many opportunities to be actively involved with superintendents from across America.

I have attended many of the AASA national conferences and have enjoyed the many speakers and workshop sessions that have been offered. The speakers and presenters caused me to reflect on what I have heard and to reflect on my practice. At

times, my own thinking has been challenged. At other times, it has been affirmed. Regardless, the opportunity to participate with both American and Canadian leaders at the AASA conference has been a rich professional development experience.

The CASSA board of directors includes two AASA representatives. **Barry Wovk** from Alberta (CASS) and **Nick Milanetti** from Ontario (OCSOA) participate as members of the AASA governing board representing Region 4 alongside superintendents from the other states in that region.

In addition and most notably, **Bob Mills** from Quebec (ADGESBQ) has the honour and distinction of being the first Canadian to sit on the AASA executive committee. Given that there are very few seats on the executive committee, it is indeed quite an achievement and a testament to Bob’s leadership contributions across the continent.

CASSA membership enables you to access a broader national and international perspective on education and challenges your leadership thinking beyond your local context.



Ken Bain  
CASSA executive director

## Update On CASSA’s Evolution: Our URL, Logo And Other Identifiers

By Ken Bain

As I have mentioned previously, CASA is now known as CASSA, the Canadian Association of School System Administrators.

While much of our identity reflects the new name (for example, the website, the constitution and the strategic plan), some aspects do not.

The website’s URL is still casa-acas.ca and the logo still includes the CASA identity.

The board of directors plans to meet in late January to con-

sider the next phase of our evolution and refresh as they review the mission, vision and beliefs as well as the logo.

Our organization is on the move to an entirely new identity, and we appreciate your patience and understanding as we make the transition.

I welcome your questions or comments. I can now be reached at [ken\\_bain@cassa-acgcs.ca](mailto:ken_bain@cassa-acgcs.ca).



## A Series On The Relationship Between CASSA And AASA: Friends, Neighbours, Colleagues

In this issue and the next, we're exploring the relationship that has been built between CASSA and its American counterpart, the American Association of School Administrators, or AASA.

First in the series, we're showcasing the insight of three Canadian leaders: **Barry Wowk**, **Nick Milanetti** and **Dr. Curtis Brown**.

Barry and Nick serve as CASSA's Western and Eastern AASA reps, respectively, and have attended several AASA conferences in the past few years.

Curtis was CASSA's 2011 EXL Award winner (along with **Linda Fabi**) and as such was invited to attend the 2012 AASA conference as (along with Linda) their Canadian Superintendent of the Year.

In this issue, each of these three leaders shares their thoughts on the importance of the relationship between these two national organizations, as well as their reflections on how they've experienced each of the national conferences.

Barry, Nick and Curtis talk about why it's important for CASSA to have a presence at the American conference, and what Canadian leaders can bring to that annual event.

Next issue, we'll run similar pieces featuring the current AASA president **Amy Sichel** and executive director **Daniel Domenech**. We'll also include comments from former CASSA executive director **Frank Kelly**.

As well, we'll share the unique insights that **Bob Mills** has gained as the first ever CASSA member to be invited to sit on the AASA executive board. It's quite the honour for Bob, and a reflection of the high esteem in which AASA holds our organization.

We'd love to share your thoughts and experiences on this relationship.

- What are your thoughts on the relationship between CASSA and AASA?
- Have you ever had the opportunity to attend the American national conference?
- Have you interacted with the AASA president at our national conference?

Consider contributing to *Leaders & Learners*, CASSA's national newsletter. Get in touch with the editor by emailing [tarawittchen@eastlink.ca](mailto:tarawittchen@eastlink.ca) by January 20, 2013.

## The CASSA-AASA Relationship: A Conversation With AASA Western Rep Barry Wowk

**Barry Wowk** is in his third year serving on AASA's board of directors and as CASSA's Western Rep for the American Association of School Administrators. Barry is also the superintendent at St. Albert Public Schools. Here he shares his thoughts on the relationship between CASSA and AASA.

**How would you describe your role/duties as a governing board member on the AASA board of directors?**

As the governing board, we consider and vote on recommended motions that come to us from the executive board. This process is used to develop position papers and/or set policy for AASA administrators to utilize in their advocacy efforts, etc.

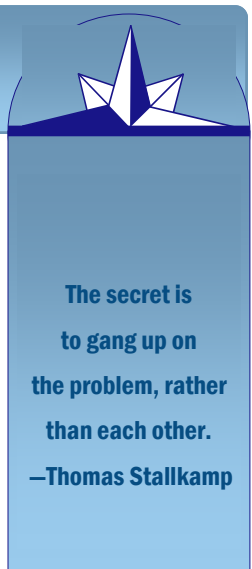
Some good examples over the last few years were the development of a position paper on school safety, which included a recommendation to Congress to pass gun safety legislation. This position paper came to us on two occasions, and was of course a very emotional discussion, especially after Newport.

**Why is it important for CASSA to have a presence on the AASA board?**

I believe it does show AASA that we are engaged partners. It also definitely gives CASSA a presence in a more global community.

**What years did you attend the AASA conference? Where were those conferences held?**

I attended the conference in Hous-  
*(Continued on page 4)*



## The CASSA-AASA Relationship: A Conversation With AASA Western Rep Barry Wowk, cont'd

(Continued from page 3)

ton in February 2012, and the conference in Los Angeles in February 2013. I will be attending the 2014 conference in Nashville.

**How does the American national conference compare to the Canadian conference? In what ways are the two events similar? Different?**

The AASA conference is much larger, so it is somewhat difficult to compare. They do use roundtable breakout sessions to try and provide participants an opportunity to engage.

Unlike our conference, they have a number of keynote speakers, some smaller sessions, and then, as mentioned, some roundtable discussions. Prior to the conference, they also host some think tanks.

CASSA conferences are more personal, mostly because of the smaller size. It is a strength of CASSA's conference that is difficult to match but of course it would not have as much choice for participants.

However, I found the topics to be fairly similar (e.g., diversity, social media, personalizing learning, teacher evaluation and growth).

**Is there an aspect of the AASA conference that you would like to see incorporated into CASSA's conference?**

We might want to consider the think tanks that are held prior to their conference.

**In the years that you attended the AASA conference, what were some of the most memorable moments from the breakout sessions, keynote addresses and other formal parts of the conference?**

It is hard to pick one or two, because I had many great sessions.



Barry Wowk, CASSA's AASA Western Rep

But if I had to pick one or two, it would be the keynote session by **Jim Collins**, the author of *Good to Great*. I truly enjoyed his session.

As for the breakout sessions, I attended three last year that dealt with social media and enjoyed all three immensely.

**Based on your experiences, is it important for CASSA to continue to develop its relationship with its American counterpart? Is it important for CASSA to have a presence at the AASA annual conference and on its board of directors? If so, why?**

I truly think it is remarkable that they invite us to be part, and to pay our expenses for attending the July meetings. Yes, I think it is a key element to keeping our partnership vibrant.

They have made me feel very welcome and always make me feel that my opinions are valued. They often

ask for the opinion of the two Canadian members.

I also think it is phenomenal that they have elected **Bob Mills** to be part of the executive board. That is a real tribute to Bob but also to CASSA.

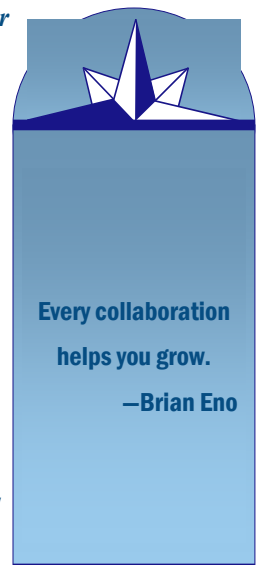
**What value do you think there is for AASA having a Canadian contingency present at its annual conference and on its board of directors? What can Canadian superintendents bring to the discussion?**

As mentioned, they are always very interested to hear our perspective.

I think it is always important for us to have a contingency there—we have a lot to learn from them as well.

**Thank you for sharing your thoughts on the relationship that has developed between CASSA and AASA.**

“[AASA] have made me feel welcome and always make me feel that my opinions are valued.”



## The CASSA-AASA Relationship: A Conversation With AASA Eastern Rep Nick Milanetti

**Nick Milanetti** has, for the last two years, sat on the board of directors for the American Association of School Administrators. He also serves as CASSA's AASA Eastern Rep and is the superintendent for the Dufferin Peel Catholic District School Board. In this issue of *Leaders & Learners*, he shares his thoughts on the experiences he has had working with the two national organizations.

**How long have you been on the AASA board of directors?**  
This is my second year.

**How would you describe your role/duties as a governing board member on the AASA board of directors?**  
I attend the board of directors meeting annually and attend the national conference.

My role includes public relations linking CASSA and AASA and linking to the Canadian system. I have a voice and vote on the board of directors. This leads to a better understanding of the American school system and sharing of the Canadian system.

**Why is it important for CASSA to have a presence on the AASA board?**  
It brings prominence and profile to CASSA, and keeps our organization connected to the larger organization.

**What years did you attend the AASA conference? Where were the conferences held those years?**  
The 2005 conference in Hilton Head and the 2013 conference in Los Angeles, and I will attend the 2014 conference in Nashville.

**How does the American national conference compare to the Canadian conference? In what ways are the two events similar? Different?**

The size differs: AASA is massive. CASSA works more with vendors and vendor appreciation, and the locations of CASSA are more beautiful, more personal. Speakers are great at the AASA conference, and are internationally recognized. The closing activities at CASSA are excellent.

**Is there an aspect of the AASA conference that you would like to see incorporated into CASSA's annual conference?**

**“It is important for CASSA to continue to have a presence at their events. One way to do this is through active involvement on the board of directors.”**

The opening gathering of conference delegates with wine and cheese, and the gathering of the executive by-invitation wine and cheese meeting.

**What do you most remember about the social gatherings, recreational opportunities and other informal moments?**  
Having an opportunity to meet colleagues from the US and show areas of concern and mutual interest. Their issues are quite similar to ours.

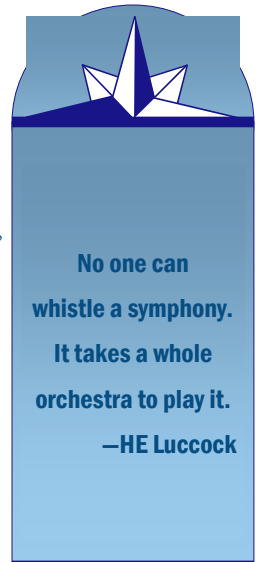
**Based on your experiences, is it important for CASSA to continue to develop its relationship with its American counterpart? Is it important for CASSA to have a presence at the AASA annual conference and on its board of directors? If so, why?**  
It is important for CASSA to continue to develop a relationship with AASA and have a presence at their various events.

One way to do this is through active involvement on the board of directors. If not, then they may not see us as a “sister” organization or an umbrella of the larger group.

**What value do you think there is for AASA having a Canadian contingency present at its annual conference and on its board of directors? What can Canadian superintendents bring to the discussion?**  
It has great value. We are respected and seen as having a very strong educational system. They often ask how we do so well internationally, ask about our thoughts on standardized testing, ask about Catholic school systems that are fully funded, etc.

We bring knowledge and depth to all conversations with the exception of having to fight annually for funding dollars through the lobbying process.

**Thank you, Nick, for sharing your thoughts here.**



## The CASSA-AASA Relationship: A Conversation With Dr. Curtis Brown

**Dr. Curtis Brown** has provided innovative educational leadership in both the Northwest Territories and Nunavut for more than 23 years. In 2011, he was awarded CASSA's EXL Award for Canadian Superintendent of the Year (**Linda Fabi** was also presented with this award, making 2011 the first year the award had two winners). As part of his EXL win, Curtis was also designated (along with Linda) the 2012 Canadian Superintendent of the Year by AASA.

He is also the 2006 recipient of the Premier's Award for Excellence, the 2009 recipient of the Premier's Award for Collaboration and the 2009 recipient of the Excellence in Education Award.

Here Curtis shares his thoughts on his experiences with the AASA and CASSA conferences.

*What year did you attend the AASA conference? Where was the conference held that year?*

I attended the 2012 AASA national conference on education in Houston, Texas.

*How does the American national conference compare to the Canadian conference? In what ways are the two events similar? Different?*

The Canadian conferences I've been to have been good but have a smaller number of sessions.

The AASA conference is remarkable in terms of sheer number and diversity of sessions to choose from. Aside from the annual CASSA conference, this really is the only other North American conference I am aware of that is specifically dedicated to school board superintendents.

I went because I was being presented with an award, but I was also pleasantly surprised at the quality of the sessions that spoke to me directly in terms of how to do my current role more effectively, not to mention the tremendous opportunity for networking.

*Is there an aspect of the AASA conference that you would like to see incorporated into CASSA's annual conference?*

CASSA does not have thousands of school board superintendents to draw from to fund such a big conference.

AASA can host in a warm southern city that draws superintendents from across North America but also from South America and Europe as well, I noticed.

"I am so glad I learned about CASSA and AASA and their respective conferences because I have learned a great deal from them."

Notwithstanding the smaller size and number of sessions, the CASSA conference sessions have been as or more often relevant to me and my context (not focused on the No Child Left Behind Act, high stakes testing, common core that are not in place in Canada).

*In the year that you attended the AASA conference, what were some of the most memorable moments from the breakout sessions, keynote addresses and other formal parts of the conference?*

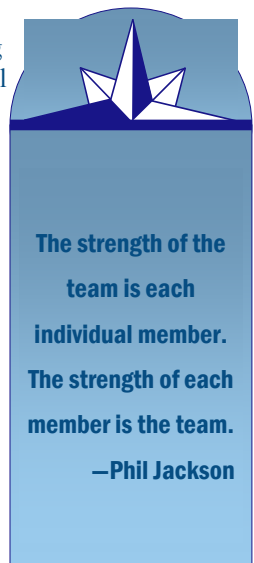
One session I went to that I found particularly valuable was a **Richard Dufour** session on professional learning communities. I have seen him before, but this session was more specifically geared to the actions that districts and superintendents might take (as opposed to schools or principals) to improve schools throughout the district.

There were several other good sessions on how to successfully lead systemic change and improvement across an entire district or jurisdiction that I found valuable.

There were also numerous sessions on how to work with your governing board that I was interested in, as well as several on personnel supervision and evaluation as related to creating a culture of data-based decision-making and ongoing improvement.

One of the benefits I found at this conference was the further building of professional language to support initiatives and beliefs I have about education and leadership.

For example, **Douglas Reeve's** reference to schools often being "a mile wide but only an inch deep" in  
*(Continued on page 7)*



The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team.  
—Phil Jackson

## The CASSA-AASA Relationship: A Conversation With Dr. Curtis Brown, continued

*(Continued from page 6)*

their initiatives resonated for me, as our region is striving to focus and go deeper with improvements in just one or two key areas (literacy and numeracy) with carefully selected strategies and a commitment to results. Although I suppose we in Canada should make reference to being typically “a kilometre wide and only a centimetre deep.”

***What do you most remember about the social gatherings, recreational opportunities and other informal moments?***

What I appreciated the most about the networking and social gatherings was the intentional efforts by the likes of former CASSA executive director **Frank Kelly** to gather the Canadian contingent together for a few evening socials. I went to the AASA conference alone but had fun and felt more like a member of a wonderful team of Canadian superintendents by the end.

***Based on your experiences, is it important for CASSA to continue to develop its relationship with its American counterpart? Is it important for CASSA to have a presence at the AASA annual conference? If so, why?***

CASSA’s relationship with AASA adds a wealth of additional resources and credibility to the Canadian counterpart. Had I not heard of AASA and this particular conference through CASSA, I would not have known about it and would not have prioritized going to this conference.

I’d been a superintendent for more than 10 years before hearing of either of these organizations. I am so glad I did learn about CASSA and AASA and their respective conferences because I have learned a great deal from them, and from the networking and relationships built in the process of attending.



**Dr. Curtis Brown** (centre) as he receives his 2011 EXL Award from Xerox’s **Randy Brydges** (left) and **Louis Gagnon** at CASSA’s annual conference in Niagara Falls.

“I went to the AASA conference alone but felt more like a member of a wonderful team of Canadian superintendents by the end.”

***What value do you think there is for AASA having a Canadian contingency present at its annual conference? What can Canadian superintendents bring to the discussion?***

It is clear that AASA values its relationship with CASSA and superintendent associations from other countries as well, as evidenced by having a CASSA rep on its board, and by the recognition given to the Canadian Superintendent of the Year at its unveiling of the state and national superintendent awards gala each year.

The Canadian school system is considered one of the best in the world, with student achievement results bettering USA student achievement results in several measures, as noted in the literature.

I suspect AASA recognizes that some of the educational policy battles being fought in the US can be informed by the arguably more effective educational policies in Canada of late.

***Thank you, Curtis, for your contribution to Leaders & Learners.***

**Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean.**  
—Ryunosuke

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## Our Mission

CASSA exists to promote and enhance effective administration and leadership in the provision of quality in education in Canada.



## Our Beliefs

- School system administration is a noble profession.
- Effective leadership and administration of school systems are essential.
- Individually and collectively, school system administrators provide leadership for quality in education.
- Communication and cooperation with other stakeholder groups in education are vital.
- Individually and collectively, school system administrators can assist one another.

## Our Goals

- To provide a national voice on education matters.
- To promote and provide opportunity for professional development of the membership.
- To promote communication and liaison with national and international organizations having an interest in education.
- To provide a variety of services to the membership.
- To recognize outstanding contributions to education in Canada.

## The CASSA Constitution: What's New?

By Ken Bain

The CASSA board of directors realized the need to update the CASSA constitution to more effectively formalize matters concerning the governance and operations of the organization.

The board undertook a two-day strategic planning session in February 2013. Members discussed changes to the constitution and CASSA by-laws.

Themes and concepts were collated and rewritten with the help of **John Darroch**, retired superintendent from Alberta and former CASSA president.

CASSA members in attendance at the annual general meeting in Newfoundland this past July approved the revised constitution with a few changes.

Highlights and changes to the constitution are listed below.

- The organization would now be known as the *Canadian Association of School System Administrators*, or *Association Canadienne des Gestionnaires de Commissions Scolaires* in French (CASSA-ACGCS).

- Each affiliate member would be allowed two seats on the board of directors.
- Two CASSA representatives to AASA are members on the board.
- A process now exists to become an associate or an individual active member.
- Individual active members and associate members are allowed, subject to the approval of the board or executive director.
- A CASSA executive council was established.
- Roles and responsibilities of the president, president-elect, professional development director and executive director were clarified.
- An election process was also clarified.

The CASSA board is pleased with the new constitution. It provides an open and transparent governance and operational document to guide CASSA's important work. The complete document can be found on the CASSA website in the "About CASSA" section.

Thank you to the CASSA board of directors for their patience and commitment to this process, and to John Darroch for his work behind the scenes.