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Leaders & Learners NEWSLETTER

The official newsletter of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators

Greetings from the President



Michael Helm
CASSA/ACGCS President

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.*

Mentoring Teachers

Hello, everyone! I hope that things have all settled in for you in your province with the start up of the year. I do know that there are challenges that each province is currently facing, whether that be strikes, budget reductions, governance changes, and more. What I would like to touch on is looking at the positive impacts that can come from good teacher mentoring programs. I got to hear last week about how some provinces down to school boards or school districts are implementing such programs. It was really inspiring engaging in this conversation. I will share some of that with you and invite you to share any great initiatives around teacher mentoring with colleagues.

A discussion started around how teacher mentoring can be a vital component of a strong and thriving education system. By connecting experienced educators with new or developing teachers, fostering professional growth, confidence, and collaboration across the school community. Building relationships based on trust and shared learning, mentoring programs help teachers navigate the challenges of the classroom while promoting lifelong learning and reflective practice.

One of the most significant benefits of teacher mentoring is improved teacher retention. Beginning teachers often face steep learning curves and high levels of stress, which can lead to burnout or early departure from the profession. With the support of a mentor, new educators feel less isolated and more capable of managing classroom responsibilities. This guidance not only strengthens their instructional skills but also deepens their commitment to teaching, ultimately reducing turnover rates and ensuring stability for students, potentially improving student attendance.

Mentoring can in some cases enhance the overall quality of teaching. When mentors share strategies for lesson planning, classroom management, and inclusive practices, mentees gain valuable insights that directly impact student success. These exchanges create a culture of continuous improvement where both mentors and mentees learn from each other. In diverse classrooms, this collaboration is especially powerful in promoting equity, cultural responsiveness, and respect for all learners.

In essence, teacher mentoring is not just about guiding new educators – it is about strengthening the entire educational community. By implementing good mentoring programs, school boards/school districts can nurture more confident, skilled, and inspired teachers, ensuring better outcomes for students across the country. I hope this has resonated with you in some way.

Mike Helm
President, CASSA/ACGCS

Greetings
from the Executive Director
Courageous Leadership



Reg Klassen
CASSA/ACGCS New Executive Director

Leading a school division presents a complex blend of challenges and rewards that demand resilience, vision, and a deep commitment to education. One of the most pressing challenges is navigating the diverse needs of students, staff, and communities. As a school division leaders, we seek to balance academic goals with social-emotional support, equity initiatives, and resource allocation – all while managing tight budgets and evolving government policies. It is both exhilarating and exhausting, and at times not sure which one.

Other challenges involve fostering a positive culture across multiple schools. I believe it is our responsibility to ensure consistent standards while respecting the unique identities of individual schools. This requires strong communication, conflict resolution skills, and the ability to inspire collaboration among principals, teachers, and support staff, at times overwhelming. Additionally, the rapid pace of technological change and the growing demand for inclusive education places pressure on school and system leaders as we continually attempt to adapt and innovate.

And of course, the public accountability which is always one incident or issue away. As division leaders we are often in the spotlight, expected to respond to community concerns, media scrutiny, and political shifts. Decisions around curriculum, staffing, and safety can spark intense debate, requiring thoughtful engagement and transparent leadership.

Despite these challenges, the rewards of school division leadership are profound. We have opportunity to shape educational experience of thousands of students, influencing their futures in meaningful ways. If we have a hand in equipping them with skills to champion equity, promote innovation, and build systems that support lifelong learning, we experience success. In those moments when we observe students thriving, schools improving, and communities uniting around shared educational goals immense satisfaction races through the system.

Looking back, my time as school division leader was also significant for my own personal growth. Leaders have opportunity to cultivate strategic thinking, empathy, and resilience. The relationships we build – with educators, families, and community-become lasting and deeply impactful. Ultimately, while the path is demanding, the chance to lead transformative change in education is one of the most rewarding roles in public service. Blessings to all who have chosen this path.

Reg Klassen
Executive Director, CASSA/ACGCS

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Distinguished Service Award 2025

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer



Dr. Souhail Soujah accepting the Distinguished Service Award. (L to R): Reg Klassen, CASSA Executive Director; Dr. Souhail Soujah; Kelly Doyle, Director of Educational Partnerships, The Learning Bar; Christine Hole, Director of Educational Partnerships, The Learning Bar; and Mike Helm, CASSA President.

The 2025 Distinguished Service Award was presented to Dr. Souhail Soujah by The Learning Bar at the national conference this July in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. The Distinguished Service Award is intended to recognize any present or recent Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) member who has demonstrated outstanding ability and leadership.

Dr. Soujah is the Superintendent of Education for the South Slave Divisional Educational Council (SSDEC). He is also the recipient of the 2025 NWT Superintendents' Association Distinguished Service Award and was nominated for this year's CASSA's Nelson Excellence in Leadership Award.

He has been a member of CASSA for five years. His career in education has seen him serve students, schools and public school systems across Canada, including communities in British Columbia, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories.

He is known for his commitment to equity, inclusion, Indigenous language revitalization, and student well-being. In particular, he is a noted advocate for Indigenous and Northern education through programming and initiatives targeting literacy, numeracy, and social responsibility.

Additional highlights of Dr. Soujah's professional accomplishments can be found in the awards coverage in the September 2025 issue of the *Leaders & Learners* newsletter. A longer profile of Dr. Soujah appeared in the first newsletter issue of 2025.

We gratefully acknowledge the support of the award's inaugural sponsor, The Learning Bar. CASSA is pleased to partner with a Canadian company so deeply committed to the wellbeing and successful learning outcomes for all students.

Founded in 2004, The Learning Bar has worked with education partners in every province and territory across Canada to help children thrive in the school setting. The company is based in Fredericton, New Brunswick, located in the traditional unceded territory of the Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) Peoples. The Learning Bar also has offices in Boston, Massachusetts, and Newcastle, New South Wales, Australia.

CASSA members may recall company founder and president Dr. J. Douglas Willms delivered the opening keynote address at the 2014 CASSA conference in Calgary, Alberta, "Student Engagement, Learning, and Mental Health in Canadian Schools."

The Learning Bar products and services include:

- The Confident Learners program, which spans three years and offers two different models to guide educators,
- The Early Years Evaluation (EYE), which assesses the skills of children ages three to six and offer educators the data they need to support young learners and reduce long-term literacy failure, and
- The OurSCHOOL surveys, which help to capture student, parent, staff, and teacher voice to create a thriving school community.

The Learning Bar also offers a suite of professional development courses. To learn more, visit www.thelearningbar.com. ○

Honourary Life Membership Award 2025

By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

We are pleased to announce that the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) have recognized Ken Bain with the Honourary Life Membership Award. Ken is CASSA's former Executive Director, serving in this role from 2012 until his retirement in 2024.

Ken received this award at our 2025 national conference in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. Prior to him being called up on stage, conference organizers played a new video highlighting all that CASSA is and attributed much of its progress to Ken's dedication to the association.

Ken's many years of leadership supported the growth of CASSA, the affirmation of existing relationships and the development of new partnerships. He guided CASSA's membership through some challenging times, helping to pivot key meetings and the national conference to virtual and hybrid models when required. Among the many highlights of his time with CASSA's executive is the successful outreach to non-member affiliates and increase of the association's overall profile.

A look back on Ken's personal and professional journey appears in the September 2024 issue of the *Leaders & Learners* newsletter. The same issue also features multiple tributes from colleagues to Ken and his legacy in senior system administration as he moved into retirement.

The Honourary Life Membership Award is presented to recognize excellence in education at the national level and is intended to honour individuals who have contributed significantly to CASSA. The award is not necessarily presented each year.

This award has been made possible thanks in part to the support of its inaugural sponsor, Clarify-ed. We are pleased to have the opportunity to develop this relationship with a company that holds beliefs closely aligned to our own. Clarify-ed's values include:

- Empower through innovation,
- Evidence-based excellence,
- Inclusivity and accessibility,
- Professional respect and collaboration, and
- Responsible usage of AI.

Clarify-ed's leadership includes Colin Wood, chief executive officer; Phil Stubbs, chief academic officer; and Rob McLoughlin, chief technology officer. Together with the Clarify-ed team, they have developed innovative and accessible classroom tools that use student voice to maximize impact and learning.

The company's approach is based on evidence and informed by research. It draws on the insights of thinkers such as John Hattie and Michael Fullan as well as principles from Visible Learning and Deep Learning. Hattie's concept of "students as their own teachers" is supported by Clarify-ed's platform, enabling students to see their goals, track their progress in real time, and act on immediate feedback.

Clarify-ed strives to create an inclusive and effective educational experience by empowering teachers and including all students. By offering tools that bring high-impact strategies to life, Clarify-ed helps teachers close the gap between intention and impact. It also gives students the clarify and confidence they need to thrive.

To learn more about Clarify-ed, visit www.clarify-ed.com. ○



Clarify-ed

Ken Bain receiving the Honourary Life Membership Award. (L to R): Reg Klassen, CASSA Executive Director; Ken Bain; Colin Wood, CEO of Clairfy Ed; and Mike Helm, CASSA President.









CASSA 2025 Conference

Thank you to the amazing presenters and sponsors who made this year's conference happen! Here is a gallery of photos from the event in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, in July.













Write for *Leaders & Learners* Magazine!

Leaders & Learners reaches readers every summer and winter, sharing stories about how your schools, districts, and community partners are supporting each student through programs, partnerships, and professional development. Articles may highlight new technologies, curricula, PD opportunities, outdoor learning lessons, Reconciliation, learning for new Canadians, recovery learning after the pandemic, etc., from across Canada!

We are currently looking for topics for our Summer 2026 issue. This magazine will be mailed out in Summer 2026!

Details:
To come: Check out future issues of our newsletter to stay up to date on our magazines!

If you have an article idea that you wish to submit, please send an abstract to Jenna Collignon, editor of the magazine, at jcollignon@matrixgroupinc.net, and copy reg_klassen@cassa-acgcs.ca.

Note:
If your abstract is accepted, you will be notified and provided with a word count and further details. Articles cannot be company or product promotional.





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