2026 • Issue 1

# Leaders & Learners NEWSLETTER

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

## Unwavering Support

I begin today's message with a heavy heart. On February 10, 2026, the secondary school in Tumbler Ridge, together with its students, staff, families, and the wider community, faced an unimaginable tragedy resulting from terrible acts committed that day. The effects have extended far beyond a single school, resonating across the province and throughout the country. We offer our deepest condolences and unwavering support to everyone impacted during this profoundly difficult time.

In February, I attended the AASA Conference, where I participated in sessions that focused on communication and crisis management. The conversations highlighted how essential it is for our school boards/school districts to examine their readiness in response to unthinkable events. Clear communication, well-defined roles, and established protocols are not merely procedural requirements; they are fundamental to protecting students, staff, supporting families, and guiding communities through uncertainty.

These sessions prompted meaningful reflection on how we operate. Are our emergency plans current, comprehensive, and clearly understood? Have we provided adequate training and opportunities to rehearse our responses? Do we have systems that ensure communication is timely, accurate, and compassionate? Effective crisis response extends beyond immediate action – it requires steady leadership, transparency, and trust. Moving forward, I am committed to reviewing and strengthening protocols in schools.

The planning for the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) conference is well underway. The conference planning committee has been working hard since last fall to bring another educational and exciting line-up of keynote presenters and breakout workshops. As well, like last year, they have made sure to include a few added opportunities for networking and getting to know more about the host city of Saskatoon. I hope that you will take a moment to go to our website and start your planning to be at the 2026 CASSA Conference.

I wish you all well as winter leaves us and we welcome spring.

**Michael Helm**
CASSA/ACGCS President

# Greetings
## from the Executive Director
# Healthy Risk-Taking in Learning



Reg Klassen
CASSA/ACGCS New Executive Director

Over the past years, I've had the joy of watching my grandchildren learn to skate and play hockey. If you've ever observed children on the ice, you know it's a world filled with loss of balance, falls, determination, and eventually triumph. What stands out most to me is their willingness to take risks – leaning into a new skill, pushing a little faster, or trying a move they've only just imagined. Their enthusiasm is unmistakable, and their courage is contagious.

In school, our children often become cautious. They worry about being wrong, about grades, or about how their peers might react. Yet risk-taking is at the heart of meaningful learning. Whether a student is attempting a challenging problem, sharing an idea, or exploring a concept that feels unfamiliar, growth happens when they step beyond what they already know.

As the five- and six-year-old children came off the ice, parents were lined up all the way to the dressing room to give their child a high five or a hug and words of praise for putting forth such great effort. Everyone felt good. I wondered if this scene would look the same in 10 years. How do we keep that momentum going through their years in school?

As educators and caregivers, we play a crucial role in creating environments where this kind of risk-taking feels safe. When we celebrate effort, curiosity, and persistence – not just correct answers – we send a powerful message: learning is an adventure, and mistakes are part of the journey.

My grandchildren are old enough that they often want to teach me what they have learned. I must remind myself here is my opportunity to model for them that I am still a learner with the willingness to wrestle with new ideas, ask questions, and show that I, too, have the courage to take risks as I learn.

Watching children on the ice reminds me that they are naturally bold and eager to stretch themselves. Our task is to nurture that instinct, guiding it thoughtfully and helping them bring that same energy into the classroom. When we do, we empower them not only to learn, but to thrive.

**Reg Klassen**
CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director


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# *The View from* Saskatchewan:

## A Conversation with Ben Grebinski



By Tara Wittchen, Contributing Writer

*In this feature conversation leading up to the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) 2026 conference in Saskatoon, we talk with Ben Grebinski.*

*Ben is the executive director for the League of Educational Administrators, Directors & Superintendents (LEADS). LEADS is the professional and regulatory association for senior system administrators in Saskatchewan.*

*He is one of two LEADS representatives on CASSA's Board of Directors. Ben also serves on CASSA's planning committee.*

*Ben's roots are firmly grounded in this prairie province. He earned his B.Ed., M.Ed., and P.G.D. at the University of Regina. His many roles in Saskatchewan's Catholic and public school systems include classroom teacher, vice principal, principal, coach, superintendent, and director of education. He has also lectured at the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina.*

*Ben is a certified Public Sector Governor professional, Qualified Arbitrator, and Qualified Mediator. He has received a number of leadership, athletic, coaching, and officiating*



*Ben Grebinski, B.Ed., M.Ed., P.G.D, LEADS.*



*awards, including the University of Regina Crown Achievement for Professional Contributions.*

*Ben makes his home in Regina.*

### *Leaders & Learners:* Let's put LEADS in the spotlight. Describe the support it provides, and where it's been and where it's going.

The title for LEADS came about many years ago when the organization was an amalgamation of different professional associations across the province. Senior leadership in the education sector had organizations based on professional development and networking.

Those organizations joined into one professional organization that received legislative authority to be a regulatory body. That change happened in 1991. We became like any other professional designated regulatory body, like a law society or medical association.

We were given the authority and the responsibility to license our members, to determine currency of practice and accreditation, to conduct internal investigations, and deal with our internal disciplinary processes. We also ensure that that staff who were employed as senior leadership within the education sector in the province of Saskatchewan were there for the public good.

To serve in a senior educational leadership role within Saskatchewan, you must be a member of LEADS. There are 27 publicly funded school districts in our province. Every leader who has a responsibility within the education profile must be a member.

In addition, they must also have a professional teaching certificate. Local school boards have the authority to hire, of course, but they must hire based on the credentialling that has been established by LEADS by legislation.

We were the only province in the country to have that regulatory right and responsibility for senior leadership in the education sector until recently. In Alberta, the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) received a regulatory right and responsibility a couple of years back. We worked extensively with them to become regulatory as well.

### *L&L:* Tell us more about that responsibility.

We must ensure that our members maintain currency of practice. We have certain requirements with what we call an accreditation program. Members must complete required modules within a certain period of time of their initial assignment to this role. They must maintain a certain amount of professional development, professional learning, and training. This is approved by an adjudication committee struck by our executive board.

It's rigorous but it's to ensure the public that leaders in the education sector are people who are qualified to lead such an honourable profession.

Like many other regulatory bodies, we have an established investigative process should complaints come in from the general public or from other members. We have a protocol, a set of standards, that we follow with respect to how we treat those complaints.

We also have our own quasi-judicial structure where we have discipline hearings. We have a panel of individuals who are trained in investigations. That's one level. Should it be moved up to a sanctioning potential, it goes to a hearing process. That is made up of a panel of adjudicators who would decide based on evidence presented against and defended by the individual member about a particular issue that may have surfaced during the hearing.

If you have the right to determine accreditation and membership, you also have the responsibility to ensure that all individuals are following the high standards of what our expectations are with respect to the code of conduct.

### *L&L:* How long have you been involved as a practising system administrator and within the LEADS organization itself?

I've had the great fortune to work inside the LEADS organization and reap the benefits of the professional organization as a practitioner and to serve as the executive director.

I have been a practitioner working in the field of K to 12 education as a senior leader for 20 years. I served as a superintendent and as a director of education – both of those were roughly 10 years a piece. I was a member of CASSA too because I was a practitioner in the province, and now as the executive director of the LEADS organization. It will be eight years this October that I have been in the role as executive director.

My experiences with LEADS began when I was called on to give presentations on different topics of research and interest that I had. Then I was elected by the membership to the executive board. I served on that executive board for four-plus years. I was then elected as president-elect and served in that capacity for one year before serving as president for one year and past president a year following. I was appointed as executive director in 2018.

### *L&L:* How would you describe your role as executive director?

I serve as the official registrar of the regulatory body to ensure compliance with respect to accreditation and as a liaison of the professional organization to all other partner groups.

We have the Saskatchewan School Boards Association, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, the universities, and other educational partners within the province. I also work closely with the Ministry of Education and the Government of Saskatchewan on all initiatives.

I also ensure that the members who are responsible for adjudicating committees are supported professionally. I support the professional relations committee, which is the investigative committee to conduct investigations and call witnesses around potential complaints or allegations of misconduct. My responsibility is to ensure proper training for the discipline committee and that proper governance occurs with respect to preparing the board for meetings, documentation of appropriate items, and bylaw and policy reviews.



Another area is advisement to our members. It could be contractual issues, policy issues, relationship issues – I am the sounding board for our members.

It's a comprehensive role that takes me into many different sectors of the education sector. I have been in this sector continuously in Saskatchewan for 50 years as of April 1. I will be leaving the organization at some point this spring or summer. The board has asked me to stay on and provide some sort of transition and onboarding. I've agreed to do that.

### *L&L:* You retired as director of education for the Prairie Valley School Division back in 2018. Is leaving your role as LEADS executive director leading into an official retirement phase for you or are there other professional challenges ahead?

I hold designations as a Qualified Mediator and Arbitrator, and Public Sector Governance official as well. What I will do outside of this role remains to be seen but I do have those other designations.

I'm going to stay active in some way, somehow, within the education sector. It's hard to give up something that you truly love and enjoy. I've met so many wonderful people who are grateful for any kind of assistance you can give them. It's been very fulfilling.

### *L&L:* How would you describe your experience with CASSA?

The CASSA organization has certainly extended that opportunity and experience for me to meet other people across Canada.

The executive directors from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario meet frequently online, at least once a month. We exchange ideas, challenges, and strategies. That brings an interprovincial perspective. It's valuable networking.

When we get together nationally, the relationships continue to flourish. That's something that I'll always be grateful for. The learning has been exceptional. The camaraderie and the collegiality that exists is phenomenal.

### *L&L:* How long have you been affiliated with CASSA, both in terms of membership and with the leadership level of work that the board undertakes?

I was a member of CASSA when I was a practitioner in the field. At one point in time, individual members of LEADS were automatic members of CASSA. Then

Saskatchewan bowed out of membership for a period of time.

In the last 10 years or so, Saskatchewan has reunited its membership with CASSA, and I have been involved as a Saskatchewan representative on the CASSA board for eight years, the length of my tenure in this role. The president and executive director of the local association are automatic members of the CASSA board.

I've been on the CASSA planning committee for four years. It started off as a professional development committee to build capacity across the country for sharing administrative experiences and best practices. It's morphed into helping plan the annual CASSA conference.

### *L&L:* How would you describe the relationship and parallels between LEADS and CASSA?

The two organizations are similar in that they have the best interests of the children and youth that we serve in the education sector. You've got a group of senior leaders leading education from an administrative perspective.

Provincial governments run education. Individual provinces have their own legislation around education and their own curriculum development. There may be some commonality, but curriculum is also unique to each individual province based on the culture and the makeup of that particular province.

CASSA, as a national organization, brings people together for the common good of the country within the area of education. Even though we have different jurisdictions, practices, and policies, we all face similar challenges in the education world.

Here in Saskatchewan, LEADS does the same thing. It brings together 27 school divisions and a number of other education authorities. We invite membership from Indigenous communities and historical independent schools. The issues and challenges we experience are similar, whether it's funding, program development, inclusion, transportation… you name it.

People like to network and learn from each other. The CASSA planning committee I serve on is trying to build a more rigorous national network. We want to bring more people together rather than just the representatives from each province that get together with the CASSA board.

That's what we call a national professional learning community. You bring the best minds, the best experiences, the best practices together to share. It's the same challenges and same issues, but the practices and strategies that we deploy may be different. That's where the richness comes into play.

### *L&L:* Is there anything I didn't ask you about that you would like to share with CASSA members?

Every provincial or territorial organization that exists and is a member of CASSA has something to contribute. My hope going forward is that every jurisdiction that is a member of CASSA believes they can contribute with their local experiences to the national level. That will create a more robust network that everybody will benefit from.

Canada is often underestimated in the international education market. What makes our nation so strong is that we develop according to the needs we have. It's not one standard that everybody gets. It's what you need locally.

Saskatchewan is a prairie province that is sometimes forgotten about. We're a large province but our cities are not as large as some of the others in the country. We still have a big heart, and we still have a big contribution that we can make to the nation.

I hope when people come to Saskatchewan this summer for the national conference, they see the good things we have in our province. We look forward to hosting everyone and giving them the best possible experience that we can. ○


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