

# the CASS CONNECTION

The official magazine for the College of Alberta School Superintendents

## Professional Learning Through Accreditation:

Growing System Education Leadership in Alberta



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## The CASS Connection

The official magazine for the College of  
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Spring 2025

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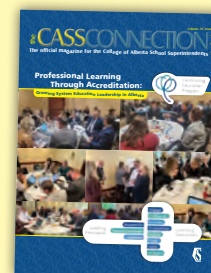
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## On the Cover:

This issue's cover features CASS members actively engaged in collaboration at a conference, exploring educational leadership strategies, exchanging ideas, and participating in workshops that support system-wide growth. The setting reflects a dynamic and collegial atmosphere, demonstrating the importance of accreditation through the Continuing Education Program's principles and learning outcomes in strengthening Alberta's system education leadership.





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# Message from the **Minister of Education**

**Demetrios Nicolaides** | Alberta Minister of Education

I believe education is the cornerstone of our modern world and backbone of our economy. Together, with your leadership, we are building an education system that meets the needs of today's students, while also preparing them to become tomorrow's leaders, innovators, and changemakers.

As the Minister of Education, I know how vital it is to have strong leaders driving our education system forward. That is why I am so passionate about the topic Growing System Education Leadership in Alberta.

Alberta Education is committed to cultivating effective system leadership through its superintendent leadership requirements and the Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard. As leaders in our education system, your dedication and hard work ensures quality school leadership, teaching excellence, and optimum learning for all students. Your continued success, growth, and learning is what ensures students can succeed as well.

To ensure excellence in both educational and administrative leadership, superintendents in Alberta must be certificated by the Minister of Education and hold superintendent leadership certification. The Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard sets out several requirements for superintendents including a commitment to ongoing professional learning – an ethos reinforced by the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) through its accreditation framework.

By adhering to these standards and maintaining continuous learning, we're ensuring those setting direction, establishing processes, and overseeing our schools are prepared to meet the challenges of our modern world. As superintendents, you shape the quality and direction of education in your school divisions, and across the broader education system. You are the chief executive officers of school

## Effective System Leadership Driving our Education System Forward

“As leaders in our education system, your dedication and hard work ensures quality school leadership, teaching excellence, and optimum learning for all students. Your continued success, growth, and learning is what ensures students can succeed as well.”

divisions, and are responsible for implementing policies, overseeing the administration of schools, and ensuring student learning aligns with provincial education standards.

CASS and its members have been invaluable partners in developing strong superintendents. Under the *CASS Act*, CASS focuses on developing and implementing continuing education programs and resources to improve the knowledge and skills of members, which are values aligned with those of Alberta Education. Together, our collaboration has enhanced the overall experience for Alberta students, underscoring why this partnership is so valuable.

Your unwavering commitment to ensure optimal learning for all students in Alberta's classrooms has helped shape policies and practices that benefit all students.

I want to thank you for the incredible work that you do. Alberta's education system is built on strong collaboration between the department and our education partners. The exceptional efforts from CASS and all school superintendents make a difference in the lives of Alberta students and help our education system thrive. I look forward to our continued partnership.

**Demetrios Nicolaides**  
Alberta Minister of Education





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# Message from the President

Dr. Clint Moroziuk | College of Alberta School Superintendents

**A**s educational leaders, we are committed to lifelong learning – not only for the students we serve but also for ourselves. Leadership in education is dynamic, requiring ongoing growth, reflection, and adaptation to meet the ever-evolving needs of our schools and communities. In this edition of *The CASS Connection*, we explore how professional learning through accreditation strengthens system education leadership in Alberta.

Accreditation is more than a credential, it is a commitment to continuous improvement, deepening expertise, and ensuring that leaders are equipped to navigate the complexities of education today. Accreditation provides system leaders with the tools to enhance instructional leadership, foster innovation, and drive student success, while at the same time providing assurance to the students, staff, and families whom we serve.

## Lifelong Learning, Growth, and Reflection

The importance of professional learning cannot be overstated. Our roles require us to be visionaries, problem-solvers, and advocates for quality education. Accreditation helps ensure that we remain grounded in research-based practices, responsive to emerging challenges, and prepared to lead with confidence and integrity. It also fosters a culture of shared learning, where leaders across the province can collaborate, mentor, and inspire one another.

In this issue, you will find reflections, research, and real-world

experiences that illustrate the impact of accreditation on educational leadership. These stories highlight how intentional professional learning strengthens not only individual leaders but also the entire system.

Thank you for your dedication to learning and leadership. Together, we continue to grow, adapt, and shape the future of education in Alberta.

**Dr. Clint Moroziuk**

President  
College of Alberta School Superintendents

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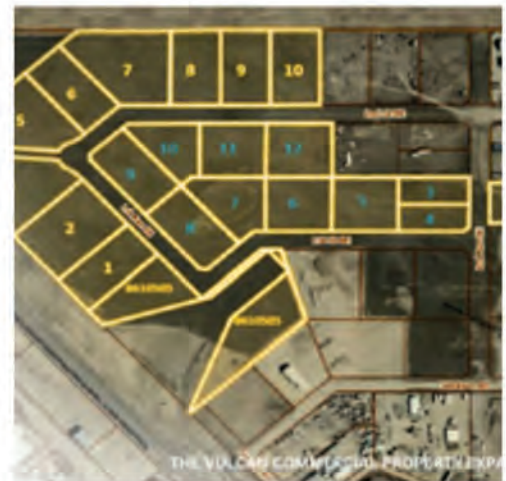


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# Message from the Chief Executive Officer

David Keohane | College of Alberta School Superintendents

## Shaping the Future of Education Through Continuous Learning

**T**he foundation of a strong and evolving education system lies in the commitment of its leaders to career-long learning. Membership within our college continues to attest through word and action that professional learning is not just a personal endeavor – it is a systemic responsibility that strengthens the entire K-12 landscape. This is why “college” was intentionally included in the name of our regulatory body – signifying a collective commitment to lifelong professional learning. All our regulated members, through a common professional learning program, agree to uphold the value of the aims and privileges of system education leadership – a unique component of Alberta’s education system that always functions in the public’s interest for excellence in education.

As this edition of our magazine highlights, the impact of structured professional

learning is far-reaching. From fostering responsive leadership to enhancing system-wide instructional excellence, the stories and contributions in this issue illustrate how accreditation through ongoing education goes beyond meeting professional practice standards – it amplifies their impact, ensuring student learning remains the central focus of every initiative in the education system.

The College of Alberta School Superintendents’ (CASS) commitment to annual and ongoing accreditation assures the public that every regulated member upholds a rigorous and consistent standard of professional learning. Our Continuing Education Program (CEP) reinforces that every competency within the Superintendent’s Leadership Quality Standard and the Leadership Quality Standard remains relevant, adaptable, and consistently applied across diverse educational contexts.

Therefore, our collective gratitude extends to the many contributors in this edition who share their insights, challenges, and triumphs in professional learning. Their voices reinforce the belief that education leadership is a shared pursuit, embodied by a common sense of dedication, adaptability, and a commitment to learning. Professional learning prioritizes research-based practices – both from local colleagues and insights from other jurisdictions – that have been proven to enhance student learning.

As we look ahead, CASS remains committed to ensuring that every school leader has access to the tools, knowledge, and networks needed to inspire great next practices in teaching and learning. Thank you to all who champion professional learning and contribute to the ongoing success of Alberta’s students.

**David Keohane**

Chief Executive Officer

College of Alberta School Superintendents

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# Learn It, Live It, *Light It Up!*

By Mike McMann, Fort Vermilion School Division

**T**he Continuing Education Program (CEP) isn't just a requirement for being a member of the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS); it is the lifeblood of our profession and the foundation of what drives us forward as educators and leaders. CASS stands as an organization dedicated to advancing leadership through professional learning, striving for systemic improvement that directly benefits students.

I have always believed that while your skill set may land you a job, it won't keep you in it. Longevity in leadership comes from growth, adaptation, and a relentless

pursuit of excellence – qualities that the CEP fosters in every CASS member.

I was fortunate enough to participate in a transformative course led by Danica Martin. One of the most profound moments was crafting a personal manifesto that would anchor my leadership philosophy. Here it is:

"The mountain before you is steeped in risk and uncertainty, yet it holds immense hidden potential – both in yourself and those around you. Embrace vulnerability as a source of strength, unlocking growth and possibility. Let your journey be defined by unwavering grit: the relentless combination of passion and perseverance, sustained

day after day, year after year, through both exhaustion and triumph. With this resolve, you will leave an indelible impact on everyone and everything you encounter."

This manifesto reflects my belief in the transformative power of vulnerability, grit, and a commitment to lifelong learning. It also mirrors how I approach the CEP through the lens of three distinct but interconnected phases: *The Reckoning*, *The Rumble*, and *The Revolution*.

## **The Reckoning: Shifting the mindset**

Transformation begins with the willingness to change – to reckon with our assumptions, biases, and limitations. For many years, I operated under the belief that



no one could fully understand my unique challenges, making me dismissive of outside perspectives. I was wrong.

My grandmother used to say, “Everyone and everything you encounter has something to teach you.” This simple yet profound truth shifted my mindset from compliance to curiosity. No longer do I see the CEP as a mere box-ticking exercise to earn credits; instead, I approach it with the question: *What can I learn today that will make my system better?*

This shift has been liberating. It transformed how I view professional development – not as an obligation, but as an opportunity to innovate and improve student outcomes. Shifting your mindset is not easy, but it is the catalyst for growth, allowing you to embrace new ideas and challenge the status quo.

### The Rumble: Harnessing research and technology

Once the mindset shifts, the work truly begins. This is the phase I call “The Rumble,” where we dig deep into research, data, and technology to create actionable change. Research is the backbone of

My grandmother used to say, “Everyone and everything you encounter has something to teach you.” This simple yet profound truth shifted my mindset from compliance to curiosity.

effective leadership, informing everything from instructional strategies to system-wide policies. However, implementation without analysis is a recipe for failure.

Let me share an example. In our district, we adopted the Fountas and Pinnell reading program, believing it would revolutionize literacy. Instead, it fell short because we didn’t rigorously assess its alignment with best practices. The lesson? When we know better, we do better. Research must be an ongoing process, not a one-time checkbox.

Technology has become my greatest ally in this process. AI tools now allow me to synthesize

countless studies, summarize key findings, and explore possibilities tailored to my specific context. For example, when designing policies or administrative procedures, I use AI to gather insights, analyze scalability, and refine strategies. This approach creates a feedback loop of continuous improvement – a concept reinforced during another impactful course with Scott Morrison and Jacelyn Hempel.

The strategic integration of research and technology fuels the proverbial bus I’m driving. With these tools at our disposal, the barriers to innovation are eroded, empowering

*Continued on page 12*

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*Continued from page 11*

us to push forward in systemic improvement for students. The rumble is not always easy – it's messy and challenging – but it is essential.

### The Revolution: Evolving thought and practice

When mindset and tools align, revolution becomes inevitable. This final phase represents the evolution of thought and practice within CASS, as well as the impact of the CEP on our organization.

Through our commitment to ongoing professional learning, CASS has become

a vibrant, forward-thinking community. The introduction of continuing education credits has elevated us to a new level of professionalism, fostering an environment where growth is not only encouraged but celebrated. This is where the true power of the CEP lies – in redefining what success looks like, not just for ourselves but for the students we serve.

However, to sustain this momentum, we need full participation. This is not about compliance – it's about contributing to the collective evolution of our organization. Every course taken, every insight

gained, and every credit earned becomes a building block in the foundation of CASS's future.

### Lighting It Up: A call to action

As I prepare to step into the role of CASS president this July, I am filled with excitement and anticipation for what lies ahead. Our organization is already one of the leading professional bodies in the province and country, but I believe we are just scratching the surface of our potential.

To truly light it up, we must:

1. **Change our mindset:** Embrace vulnerability and approach every learning opportunity with curiosity and openness.
2. **Leverage research and technology:** Use data-driven insights and cutting-edge tools to inform and refine our practices.
3. **Commit to growth:** Make professional development a priority, not just for ourselves but for the betterment of the systems we lead and the students we serve.

Let's stop thinking of the CEP as an obligation and start seeing it as a privilege – a chance to leave an indelible impact on our schools, communities, and the future of education. ■

*Mike McMann is the Superintendent of Schools for Fort Vermilion School Division.*

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Administrative collaboration at Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools. Photos courtesy of Dr. Andrea Holowka.

# Building a Data-Informed Culture of Continuous Improvement

*By Dr. Andrea Holowka, Christ The Redeemer Catholic Schools*

The Our Lady of the Snows Catholic Academy administrative team attending a meeting where teams gathered to work together, planning their next steps as a division.



In May 2023, I had the privilege of being appointed as the superintendent of Christ The Redeemer (CTR) Catholic Schools. After working in neighbouring school divisions for decades, I had long been an admirer of CTR's successes, results, and leadership team. Becoming superintendent of this high performing school division was a great honour that incited both excitement and consternation. Joining an organization with stellar results and a legacy of strong leadership did not require significant systemic change. However, remaining static as an educational organization was also not a viable option as changes in society and in the educational landscape do not allow for a passive vision. Thus, I relied upon my past experiences and fresh perspective to envision a future for CTR.

Change for the sake of change is unsettling and needless, particularly with new



leadership. However, the timing of my arrival coincided with the release of the spring Alberta Education Assurance Measures, followed by the fall release of student achievement results. This data set, combined with anecdotal feedback from senior leaders, school-based administrators, and trustees, provided an impetus for further improving student outcomes. Equipped with this data and a stellar leadership team, we were able to develop a vision for continuous improvement to guide our next steps.

Creating a pathway toward continuous improvement required an identification of CTR's current reality, the future desired state, and the processes required to achieve this vision. Articulation of the current reality reflected the foundational success of the division by leaders and educators committed to achieving student success. Processes were already in place to focus on data-informed reflective practices, such as monthly in-person meetings with senior administration and school-based administrators, "Catholic Learning Community" professional learning for all teachers at each school on Friday afternoons, and division-led provincial achievement test and diploma exam review conversations with each administrative team. Providing a more detailed review of each school's results framed within a mindset of wonder and curiosity required several refinements and additions to these processes.

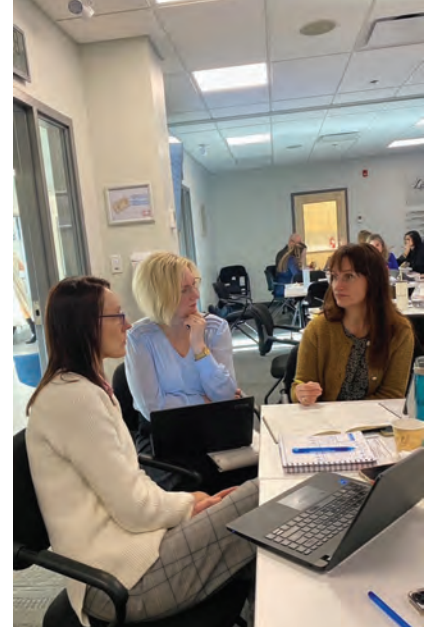
Edgar Schein's (1996) model of psychosocial change suggests that cognitive redefinition is required to invoke significant change by stimulating a mindset shift through cognitive dissonance.<sup>1</sup> Data that does not align with a currently held mindset can provide such provocation. In the case of CTR, a high performing school division, the overall data summary demonstrated excellence, with all areas scoring above the provincial average. However, moving into deeper subject specific analysis demonstrated areas below the provincial average and therefore allowed for the experience of cognitive dissonance, redefining the current reality and identifying areas of growth needed to achieve the required future vision. Creating the conditions for exploring school-based data at the granular level within an environment of safety required the acknowledgement of our principals as instructional and visionary leaders with their own staff. Two structural changes were enacted to allow our school-based administrators to explore their

data more deeply. Questions on a division-wide data analysis template were adjusted to invoke teachers' curiosity about their students' learning rather than placing teachers in a position to defend or justify their teaching actions. The revised questions asked:

- What have you learned about your students?
- Reflecting on your teaching and learning throughout the process, how will this inform your next steps?
- How will you continue to find areas of growth to build upon those areas of strength?

Rephrasing the questions refined an established methodology to become student-centered and oriented toward future teaching actions in response to data. Changing the template allowed our school-based administrators to engage in discussions with teachers on both areas of strength and those that require change. This led to the second structural change in adding an additional administrative meeting in early November discretely focused on data review. The morning session provided an opportunity for the senior administration to share provincial and division-level data trends and allowed school-based administration to review their school-based data at a granular level. The afternoon was an optional session for admin to work on their school-based Annual Education Results Reports and was attended by almost all administrators. These two structural changes elevated the importance of data as an impetus for change, while giving the conditions of time, space, and safety to reflect and plan for future success.

The final component of continuous improvement was embedded in the superintendent leadership quality standard (SLQS) competency of "building a professional learning community" through building a shared understanding of trends and needs within the educational system. With over ten years of experience as a system leader, I understood the limits of my own agency to impact student results. Thus, the importance of building relationships, shared understanding, and prioritizing professional development among those with direct connection to students was critical to promoting continuous improvement in schools and as a system. With a common area of focus in secondary mathematics, we engaged in collective data exploration and practice refinements. Our Provincial Achievement Tests (PAT) acceptable results,



The St. Mary's School administrative team.

although above provincial, still demonstrated scores lower than our own standard as a high performing school division and our diploma exam excellence scores were below provincial. Our focused efforts brought together our secondary math teachers (situated across 400 km in Southern Alberta) to consider pedagogy in terms of differentiated instruction, productive struggle, and assessment. One year later, our focused efforts in Grade 9 and 12 mathematics have yielded improved acceptable and excellence results, with increased engagement, performance, and teacher collaboration across the division.

CTR's overall data story one year later shows even stronger results than in my first year with the division. With a senior administrative team deeply embedded in professional learning through CASS' Continuing Education Program, significant individual and collective growth of our senior learning team has allowed for a focused and committed approach to achieving change within our high performing organization. This opportunity gives us the strength to walk alongside our extraordinary school-based administrators as they lead our 17 schools across Christ The Redeemer. ■

*Dr. Andrea Holowka is the Superintendent of Christ The Redeemer Catholic Schools.*

## Reference:

1. Schein, E. H. (1996). Kurt Lewin's change theory in the field and in the classroom: Notes toward a model of managed learning. *Systems Practice*, 9, 27–47. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02173417>.



# A Strong Foundation and an Optimistic Future



By Alexander (Sandy) McDonald, Grande Prairie Public School Division

**E**ffectively planning for and managing operations and continuous improvement across a school system is complex work. Since I became a member of the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) in 2010, the professional learning facilitated by CASS has played a key role in helping to simplify some of that complexity. The purpose of this article is to highlight key learning opportunities provided by CASS during my career as a system leader and share thoughts about the future of professional learning, in the context of CASS' status as a professional organization.

## The early years (2010 to 2018)

Participation in CASS events and opportunities allowed me to build my understanding of system leadership directly from expert researchers. One of the most impactful resources to influence my learning early was Dr. Kenneth Leithwood's 2008 review of

the research into the *Characteristics of High Performing School Districts*<sup>1</sup> (available online in the CASS library). The 10 characteristics identified by Leithwood, later distilled into *9 Practices of Strong District Leaders*<sup>2</sup>, significantly shaped my vision for system leadership, and that research remains relevant today.

CASS's leadership in that era was also evident in the *Moving and Improving* professional learning initiative, which incorporated the work of Michael Fullan and others, and introduced other important system-focused research to our membership. *The Alberta Framework for School System Success*<sup>3</sup>, by CASS colleagues Jim Brandon, Paulette Hanna, Rick Morrow, Kath Rhyason, and Sig Schmold, was another strong influence on my thinking. As an emerging system leader, the impact of CASS facilitating the opportunity to explore research by engaging with the researchers and experienced leaders from across the province was significant. CASS members are highly knowledgeable, skilled, and have a collectively

wide range of experience. Every CASS event, at the zone or provincial level, was a mentorship opportunity that allowed me to explore how colleagues apply their personal leadership knowledge and skills in the context of leading their division.

## Alberta's professional practice standards (2018 to current day)

CASS' leadership and the professional learning offered to members was also a key support for the development and implementation of Alberta's<sup>3</sup> Professional Practice Standards. While the day-to-day life of a system leader in one division can differ from that of a leader in another division, CASS' support for implementation of the practice standards highlighted the important common elements that exist in our system and our shared responsibility to ensure optimum learning for all students. It was during this period, at an event facilitated by CASS, that I first had the opportunity to engage with

As an emerging system leader, the impact of CASS facilitating the opportunity to explore research by engaging with the researchers and experienced leaders from across the province was significant.

the *Coherence Framework*<sup>4</sup>, developed by the Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University. That framework, shown in Figure A, became a core support for helping stakeholders in our division understand our system. In recent years we have experienced significant changes in our provincial system, as governments change, and societal beliefs and behaviours evolve. The professional learning organized by CASS allowed us to navigate those changes by evolving our professional practice and modifying our systems and structures to continue to prioritize optimum learning for our students.

### Looking forward (2024 and beyond)

I am grateful for the leadership and vision of our CEO, David Keohane, the CASS staff, the CASS Board, the Consortia, and the many consultants, colleagues, and others who are leading our current learning as a professional organization. The preparation of CASS' new bylaws, administrative procedures, the Continuing Education Program (CEP), and the other structures and processes required of a professional organization mirrors the transition from school leader to system leader. Just as it was a new opportunity for an individual to move from school leadership to system leadership and apply their learning in context, so too is the opportunity for new learning in the new context of our organization.

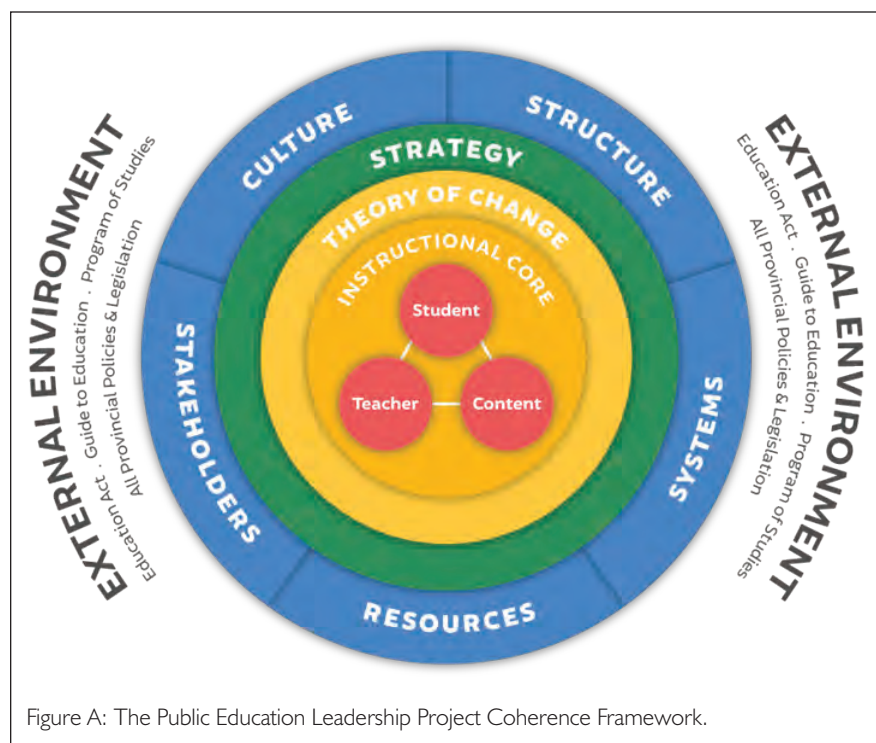


Figure A: The Public Education Leadership Project Coherence Framework.

Reflecting on our first year as a professional organization, CASS' development of relevant and effective professional learning to support the continuing education of the membership illustrates the same commitment I observed in my first year as a member. I believe current efforts and the ongoing development and refinement of the CEP, driven by a desire to build professional competency and align learning opportunities with membership needs, will be as successful over the next 15 years as I consider the last 15 to be. I believe the professional learning facilitated by CASS is an underacknowledged factor in the success of Alberta's K-12 education system. While the future of public education in Alberta is sure to continue to evolve, CASS' commitment to providing responsive planning based on the needs of individual members and the larger system inspires confidence for the future. ■

*Alexander "Sandy" McDonald has been the Superintendent of Schools for the Grande Prairie Public School Division since the 2015-2016 school year and prior to that served as vice principal, principal, director, assistant superintendent and deputy superintendent in the division since 1997. In addition to the work in his division, Sandy served on the CASS Zone 1 executive for several years, in all positions, served two terms on the provincial Board as CASS Zone 1 Director and was the 2022-2023 recipient of the EXL award for school system leadership.*

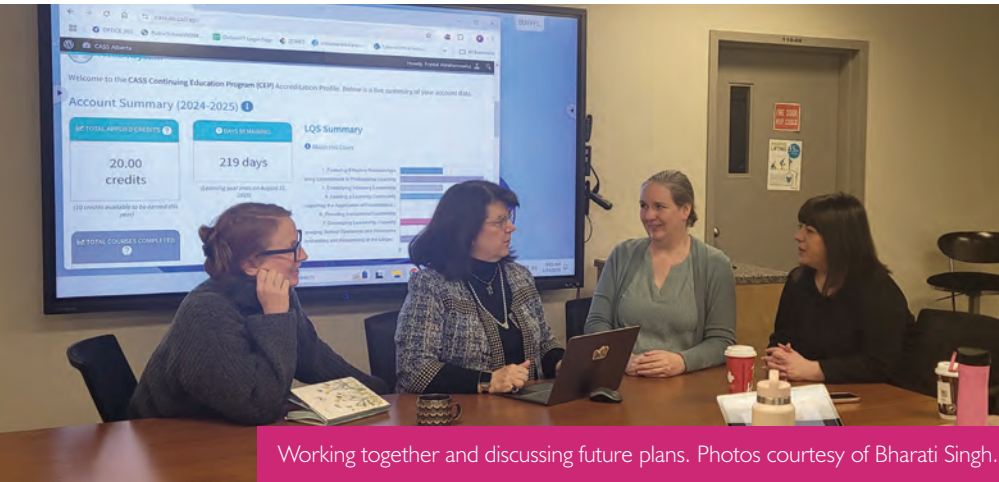
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# Fostering Systemic Growth: How Continuing Education Programs Support System Leadership Development

By Bharati Singh, Denise Budgen, and Krystal Abrahamowicz,  
Foundations for the Future Charter Academy



**T**he newly launched Continuing Education Program (CEP) addresses legislative requirements and supports the professional development of system education leaders. The CEP is grounded in the fundamentals of *“Leading from the Middle”* and is specifically designed for the professional learning of system leaders. Its built-in flexibility allows members to choose from various learning opportunities such as mentorship, regular events, conferences, and a variety of resources and research. This variety provides members with the flexibility to select options

that best meet their needs and comfort. A deliberate focus on professional learning for system leadership supports the ongoing learning for system leaders as system leaders require unique skills and competencies to guide and support the system goals and changes. Following is the journey of three system leaders in a Charter School Board as they connect their professional learning to their leadership role.

## System leadership: leading from the middle

Bharati Singh is the coordinator of instruction and school support at the Foundations

for the Future Charter Academy (FFCA). She moved into the system leader role after being a site-based educator and an administrator for more than a decade. The shift away from direct interaction with students, teachers and parents led to feelings of a reduced impact on student learning. The new role of a system leader requires unique skills and competencies to guide and support the system’s goals and changes.

Andy Hargreaves highlights the significance and potential of these skills and competencies in *“Leadership from the Middle.”* He highlighted the crucial role of system leaders in driving educational transformation. System leaders offer first-hand knowledge of practices to top-level leaders and foster collaboration across schools. This middle-level leadership creates coherence, increases efficiency, and enhances performance in complex systems. They build networks to share existing knowledge and empower school-based leaders.

As a new College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) member and a participant in CEP, Bharati found this deliberate approach to professional learning very helpful in navigating the change in her leadership context. She is working with her assigned mentor to set goals to lead and support the administrators at various divisional levels. The mentorship webinars offered her opportunities to interact with experienced system leaders who shared their expertise in developing educational leadership capacity and skills.

## Leading the collaboration for inclusion

Krystal Abrahamowicz is the Coordinator of Inclusion for FFCA. Coordinating her own team of inclusion staff, she also is responsible for leadership that supports the campus-based Administration, Inclusion Facilitators, Counselors and Educational Assistants at each campus. Hers is a new role within the district, created just three years ago. As she’s navigated the implementation of the role and the work in the district, she’s followed Hargreaves’ advice that, “the closer we get to the practice, the more we

know about the practice, the better we can lead the practice. The closer we get to each other in our relationships, our knowledge, the more effectively we can work together.”

Modeling her own leadership of the various inclusion teams after the CEP model, Krystal emphasises collaboration, choice, and just in time learning to support the growth and shared understandings of her teams. She herself has appreciated these aspects of the CEP model most.

For Krystal, as a leader of inclusion, one of the most powerful advantages of the CEP model is the value that’s placed on professional collaboration. Hargreaves talks about Leadership from the Middle and notes that, “the biggest predictor of successful inclusion is...how well [leaders] collaborate with each other across their schools.”

The annual summer learning conference provided her with an opportunity to collaborate and shared meaning making with other system leaders, which is at the heart of effective inclusion practices. Hargreaves notes the power of connection, too, stating, “there’s a culture of collaboration and of working together and of finding shared solutions that means everybody is moving in the same direction, bringing their



Experts sitting in on a Leadership Development and Career Growth presentation.

diverse experiences into the same effort to make positive change.”

### System leadership in charter school context

Denise Budgen is one of the Coordinators of Instruction and School Support for FFCA. She moved into this role, September 2022, after over twenty years as a site-based administrator. She leads various initiatives so that teachers “can collaborate purposefully, responsibly, and transparently” which is essential to the culture of FFCA. Denise works “in the middle” of teacher teams to develop new curriculum instruction and assessments. She supports elementary

administrators with system priorities such as EAL benchmarking, kindergarten intake, and core literacy and numeracy pedagogy and resources. Her portfolio also includes contributing to FFCA’s Charter Evaluation and renewal requirements.

Having joined CASS prior to the full implementation of CEP, Denise’s transition to system work was initially supported through the CASS mentorship program. In addition to participating in the mentorship program, the *Women in Leadership Book Study* provided additional perspectives on system leadership and concrete examples of practical structures and strategies. Denise

*Continued on page 20*

## Write for *The CASS Connection*!

*The CASS Connection* reaches readers every spring and fall, sharing stories of best practices, challenges and how they’ve been overcome, thoughts of leadership, and much more! If you would like to write for the Fall 2025 issue, please send an abstract to the lead editor Jenna Collignon at [jcollignon@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:jcollignon@matrixgroupinc.net). Include your name, position, and division, and two to three sentences on your topic.



### Here are the details for the Fall 2025 issue:

Theme: To Be Determined  
Abstracts due May 30, 2025  
Final articles due early September, 2025

**Notes:** 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.



Continued from page 19

was excited about the more structured learning opportunities embedded in the CEP. In August, Denise attended the inaugural *Leading Learning* module. High expertise teaching was identified as the most significant variable in student achievement and the leadership of the principal is key in making sure expertise grows according to one of the course's articles.

Lanoue & Zepeda (2018) speaks about the importance of creating the highest alignment of agreement about instructional practice as paramount to aligning a school system. *The FFCA Teaching and Learning Framework* provides FFCA with "...a way to talk about instruction that is shared by everyone." It allows teachers and leaders to describe in

depth their practices, commonalities, and challenges. In their roles as coordinators, Bharati, Denise, and Krystal support site-based administrators in clearly communicating Charter expectations and identifying non-negotiable instructional and school-level practices while responding to local contexts.

### Conclusion

Andy Hargreaves (2024) asserts that the complexities faced by schools require "agile, responsive inclusive solutions." The need to prepare system leaders to address and lead the change is real and urgent. The CEPs provide professional learning to enable system leaders to bridge the gap between policy and practice, empowering schools to thrive. ■

*Bharati Singh, MSc., M Ed., is the Coordinator of Instruction and School Support; Denise Budgen, BA, B.Ed., M.Ed., is the Coordinator of Instruction and School Support; and Krystal Abrahamowicz, BGS, M.Ed., is the Coordinator of Inclusion; all for the Foundations for the Future Charter Academy.*

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# Continued Learning and Wellness Supports through ASEBP



*The Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) is an employee life and health trust governed by 10 Trustees. It offers a wide variety of health benefits and promotes programs that sustain healthy lifestyles and workplaces for more than 64,000 covered members and their dependants.*

**A**SEBP recognizes the significance that continued education and accreditation play in ensuring the education sector is ready to meet the needs of students across the province. As a partner in supporting the publicly funded K-12 education sector for more than 55 years, ASEBP consistently evaluates its current offerings and seeks innovative opportunities to enhance its services.

ASEBP is committed to helping covered members and their dependants understand their benefits and how they can use the ASEBP Plan to support their mental and physical wellness. One of the ways ASEBP ensures covered members receive information and resources is through benefit presentations. ASEBP partners with employers to book these presentations to ensure employees feel supported in accessing the comprehensive health benefits and services designed specifically for them. Every spring and fall, ASEBP offers presentations about the MyRetiree Plan to help education workers prepare for retirement.

ASEBP also extends an opportunity for employers to learn more about premium rates, cost drivers, and cost containment



*By Jocelyn-Plakas Lock, ASEBP*

strategies through an annual Employer Premium Presentation in the spring. Recently, ASEBP has expanded these presentations and provided similar information to stakeholders in the education industry such as the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) and the Alberta School Business Officials of Alberta (ASBOA).

To support the professional learning and growth of education workers, ASEBP offers flexible Wellness Spending Accounts to non-teacher education workers that cover professional development

and learning. This spending account category is intended to financially assist education workers and covers courses provided by accredited educational institutions, books and texts required, professional fees and licenses, and more.

Furthermore, ASEBP recognizes that education workers have a high risk of exposure to secondary trauma and has continued to partner with the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Werklund School of Education (University of Calgary) on studies regarding compassion fatigue and burnout in the education sector. ASEBP is committed to continuing to provide in-kind contributions that may include expert advice and counsel to inform data analysis, promotion of surveys, focus groups, or participant interviews to covered members. ASEBP is honoured to be an active participant in this work, as practice gained from this study has the potential to positively impact the health and well-being of individuals within the education sector.

## **Supporting workplace wellness**

It is essential to ASEBP to collect health data around trends in the province in order



to understand how best to support covered members. By providing benefits to 96 per cent of the school boards in Alberta, ASEBP is able to leverage detailed and relevant data and shares these insights with employers on a regular basis through reports. ASEBP's Workplace Wellness Consultants work directly with employers to provide specialized support and build wellness programs tailored to their employees, based on these reports. One of the ways ASEBP is taking steps to enhance workplace culture is by delivering Let Compassion Lead the Way training to division leaders.

Workplace Wellness Consultants also meet with provincial partners including Alberta Health Services, University of Alberta, Everactive Schools, and Apple Schools to understand other supports in the education sector, refer clients when appropriate, and look for opportunities to collaborate.

### Employee and family assistance program (EFAP)

Another way ASEBP looks to support education workers and their dependants, is through its Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP). This program

connects covered members and their dependents with additional resources like clinical mental health professionals, registered nurses, legal and financial experts, and more.

This spring, ASEBP's EFAP provider will be undergoing a rebranding from Inkblot by GreenShield to GreenShield Health. The branding update will only impact the look and feel, and covered members and their dependants will be able to access existing programs and services as usual. The rebrand will also come with some enhancements to current EFAP offerings, including:

- **Access Mightier, a game-based mental health program built for kids:** Mightier is clinically validated to help all children explore their emotions and build coping skills through play.
- **Noojimo Health and GreenShield Partnership:** Noojimo, in partnership with GreenShield, is the first and only all-Indigenous virtual mental wellness clinic.
- **GS Digital Cognitive Behavioural Therapy:** GreenShield offers Digital CBT anxiety and depression programs for employees to complete at their own pace.

ASEBP has been working closely with GreenShield to ensure the transition from Inkblot to GreenShield is as seamless an experience for employers and covered members as possible.

ASEBP remains committed to supporting the evolving needs of the education sector through continuous improvement. Coupling innovative solutions with systems thinking, ASEBP is positioned to address the unique needs and challenges of our covered members and employers for years to come. ■

*Jocelyn Plakas-Lock is the Acting Chief Executive Officer at the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP), overseeing daily operations of the organization and ensuring its alignment with the strategic direction. She has more than 25 years working in the not-for-profit sector, with 13 of those years being in the benefits industry specifically. Jocelyn holds a Bachelor of Science with Specialization in Psychology from the University of Alberta and a Master of Social Science (Human Services) from the Queensland University of Technology.*



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## COMMENTS

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