

Highlights: 2026 CASS Annual Learning Conference

Overview

The 2026 CASS Annual Learning Conference, held March 18–20 at the DoubleTree by Hilton, West Edmonton, welcomed over 300 delegates, representing 90% of Alberta’s school authorities. Participants engaged in professional learning aligned with the *Leadership Quality Standard* (LQS) and *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard* (SLQS).

The pre-conference featured three CEP courses: Developing Leadership Capacity at the System Level: The Ripple Effect facilitated by Danica Martin and Mark Siemens; Supporting Effective Governance: Hacks and Heuristics facilitated by Dr. Scott Morrison and Dr. Andrea Holowka; and Visionary Leadership in Action: Implementing a Continuum of Supports and Services to Ensure Optimum Learning for All Students, facilitated by Loriann Stienwand and Dr. Dianne McConnell.

The conference opened Wednesday evening with remarks from CASS President Michael McMan, followed by an opening blessing from Chief Gary Kipling and Diane Kipling. The Minister of Education and Childcare, Demetrios Nicolaidis, delivered remarks with a Q and A

opportunity. Dr. Kerry Bernes then delivered a keynote address on *Enhancing the Lives of Young People: Career and Mental Health Obstacles and Opportunities*. On Thursday morning, delegates participated in Communities of Practice to foster professional competence, reflective leadership, and networking. Throughout the remainder of the conference, delegates selected from 28 breakout sessions focused on system education leadership.

As reflected in the feedback highlighted in the following pages, the conference demonstrated a high level of satisfaction and provided a high-quality, impactful professional learning experience. For additional details about this and previous conferences, please visit the [CASS Conference Program Archives](#).

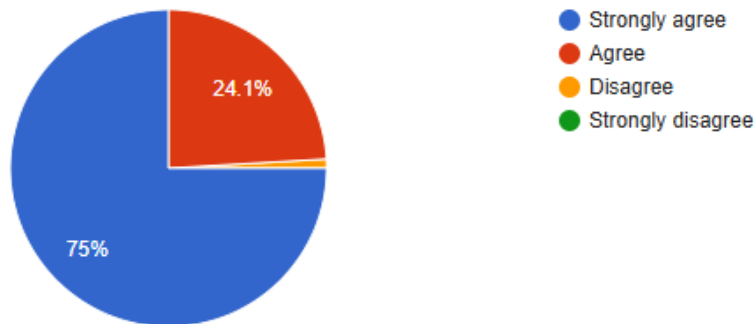


Feedback: 2026 CASS Annual Learning Conference

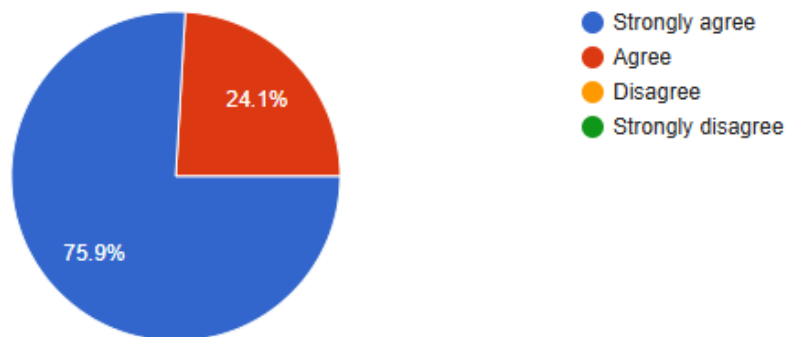
Thirty-six percent (36%) of the conference delegates responded to the 2026 Learning Survey for the Annual Learning Conference.

Reflections on My Professional Learning

1. *This professional learning opportunity contributed to my growth and understanding of system education leader professional practice.*



2. *I plan to apply my learning in my school authority.*



3. An aspect of this learning opportunity that made it meaningful is:

- **Collaboration, Networking, and Peer Learning:** Respondents overwhelmingly identified collaboration and networking with colleagues as the most meaningful aspect of the experience. The opportunity to share practices, learn from peers across school authorities, and engage in professional dialogue was consistently emphasized as highly valuable and, in many cases, the most impactful aspect of the conference.
- **Community of Practice (CoP):** Communities of Practice were highlighted as particularly meaningful. This format enabled focused, relevant discussions with peers in similar roles, fostering deeper dialogue, shared problem-solving, and sustained professional connections.
- **Practical Application and Relevance to Role:** Many respondents valued sessions that were directly applicable to their current work. Practical strategies, real-world examples, and immediately usable ideas enhanced the perceived impact of the learning, with several noting they could implement insights right away in their school authorities.
- **High-Quality, Relevant, and Timely Sessions:** Respondents highlighted the overall quality, relevance, and variety of sessions, particularly those addressing current issues, system priorities, and emerging challenges. Timely topics and alignment with professional responsibilities contributed to a strong sense of value and engagement. The range and diversity of session offerings allowed participants to tailor their professional learning to their interests and needs. This flexibility contributed to a more personalized and relevant experience.
- **Interactive Learning and Dialogue-Rich Structures:** Interactive formats, such as table discussions, workshop-style sessions, and built-in reflection time, were seen as enhancing professional learning. Respondents appreciated opportunities to actively engage, exchange ideas, and build on presented content through dialogue.
- **Alberta Stories of Professional Practice:** Hearing about practices, structures, and strategies from other school authorities was identified as meaningful. Respondents valued the openness of colleagues in sharing processes and resources, which supported broader system thinking and innovation.

- **Immediate Learning Gains and Professional Growth:** Respondents reported gaining new insights, ideas, and perspectives that contributed to their professional growth. Many noted that each session provided at least one meaningful takeaway, reinforcing the overall effectiveness of the learning opportunity.

4. *An aspect of this learning opportunity that might be improved is:*

- **No Improvements Identified:** A notable number of respondents indicated that no improvements were necessary, indicating a high level of satisfaction with the overall design, organization, and delivery of the conference. Respondents reinforced the strength of the current model.
- **Relevance, Engagement, and Impact of Learning Experiences:** Some respondents pointed to variability in engagement and alignment to practice, and reinforced the need for consistently impactful content across all components of the program.
- **Time and Structures for Meaningful Collaboration:** Some respondents expressed a desire for more time and intentional structures to support deep collaboration and dialogue. While opportunities existed, some respondents indicated that expanding and protecting time for discussion would enhance the ability to apply learning within their unique contexts.
- **Session Design and Scheduling:** Some respondents identified challenges with concurrent sessions and program flow, noting difficulty choosing between valuable sessions and missed opportunities for professional learning. Suggestions included offering repeat sessions or adjusting scheduling to reduce overlap. Some respondents noted issues with session clarity, format, or execution, including misleading descriptions, preference for different presentation styles, and sessions attempting to cover too much content.
- **Learning Environment and System Alignment:** Some respondents pointed to both physical and system-level factors influencing the experience, including room conditions, acoustics, and opportunities for broader system engagement.

5. One thing I require to further support my professional learning is:

- **Satisfaction/No Additional Needs:** A significant number of respondents indicated that their professional learning needs are currently being met.
- **Time for Collaboration and Reflection:** Some respondents identified the need for more time, whether for connecting with colleagues, engaging in dialogue, reflecting on learning, or implementing new ideas.
- **Continued and Expanded Topic-Specific Learning (HR, Legal, AI, Mental Health, Finance):** Some respondents expressed a desire for continued and deeper learning in specific high-demand areas, particularly human resources, legal issues, AI, mental health, and financial literacy.
- **Practical, Applied, and Hands-on Learning:** Some respondents indicated a preference for professional learning that is directly applicable, including hands-on sessions, real data use, and practical strategies. Some respondents indicated they value opportunities to engage with tools, case studies, and real-world applications that can be transferred immediately into their local context.
- **Differentiation and Relevance to Diverse Contexts and Roles:** Some respondents noted that professional learning opportunities did not always align with their specific context (e.g., large urban vs. small rural divisions or varying experience levels).
- **Interest in Future-Oriented and Strategic Learning:** Some respondents expressed interest in forward-looking topics, including the future of education, system innovation, and long-term planning.

6. Which SLQS competencies do you feel are your areas of greatest strength? (Click all that apply.)

Respondents most frequently identified their top strengths in the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS)* as **Building Effective Relationships**, **Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning**, and **Leading Learning**.

7. On which SLQS competencies are you focusing your professional growth? (Click all that apply.)

Respondents are prioritizing professional growth in **Supporting Effective Governance**, **School Authority Operations and Resources**, and **Ensuring First**

Nations, Métis and Inuit Education for All Students in the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS)*.

8. Which LQS competencies do you feel are your areas of greatest strength? (Click all that apply.)

The most frequently identified LQS strengths were **Building Effective Relationships, Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning, Embodying Visionary Leadership**, and **Leading a Learning Community**.

9. On which LQS competencies are you focusing your professional growth? (Click all that apply.)

Respondents are primarily focusing their professional growth on **Developing Leadership Capacity, Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI), Managing School Operations and Resources**, and **Embodying Visionary Leadership**.

10. Comments/suggestions regarding the structure of this learning opportunity (e.g. facility, registration process, communication).

- **Overall Satisfaction with Organization and Logistics:** Respondents consistently highlighted the high level of organization across all aspects of the conference, including registration, communication, and overall logistics. The conference was widely described as smooth, efficient, and well-executed, with strong operational planning and coordination.
- **Minimal or No Suggested Improvements:** A substantial portion of respondents indicated no suggestions for improvement, often describing the experience as excellent or among the best they have attended, reflecting a high level of satisfaction with both the structure and delivery of the learning opportunity.
- **New Venue:** The venue received significant positive feedback, with many respondents appreciating the space, layout, accessibility, and overall atmosphere. Several respondents indicated a preference for the new location over previous venues, noting it supported networking and ease of movement. A small number of respondents noted minor areas for refinement, including room temperature, acoustics, and food quality.
- **Appreciation for CASS Team and Support:** Respondents acknowledged the professionalism, responsiveness, and effectiveness of the CASS team.