

THE CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOLS
The 62nd Annual Meeting/Reception

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

By Dr. Karissa L. Niehoff

Good afternoon! I hope that you are enjoying the new annual meeting format... For my executive director's report, I would like to offer a few general reflections on the past year along with brief remarks about the upcoming year. The transition from year to year used to be marked by a bit of down time in the summer, but that no longer seems to be the case...it is more "seamless" now...so this report isn't necessarily "summative"...

First, thank you all for being here today, and for sharing your time and energy throughout this past year and many previous years. You are the core of our membership. Without your willingness to volunteer your time and offer your wisdom, CAS' direction would not be as clearly defined and we certainly would not be able to offer the number and variety of programs that we do.

Education in Connecticut also owes you a thank-you- for being outstanding leaders, especially at a time during which our global society, and the world of education, is changing at such a fierce pace. The author Mary Shelley wrote, "Nothing is as painful to the human mind as a great and sudden change."
(Frankenstein)

Every educational stakeholder group is experiencing anxiety as they each struggle to embrace new ways of thinking and new practices as part of education reform. Within each group there is some degree of overload and overwhelm, but I submit that the group/role that bears the greatest load in this work is the principal. To say that a principal's job responsibilities are endless is perhaps an epic understatement. Yet through all of the "noise" around reform in Connecticut, you have been arguably the steadiest and strongest...most tireless and tenacious...most relentless and realistic. You have looked not to gripe, but to grow.

John Galbraith said, “All of the great leaders have had one characteristic in common: it was the willingness to confront unequivocally the major anxiety of their people in their time.”

Congratulations to all principals who might be hearing this message (livestreaming!) for leading your schools through this time of change with wisdom and good faith, and a very human touch.

The concept of direction was a key theme for us this year. Late last spring the CAS administrative staff (CIAC and Unified Sports included) embarked on a yearlong examination of our mission, programs and services...a healthy and necessary exercise for any organization. We have grown tremendously in terms of the scope of our programs and services and we felt that we needed to pause for a self-audit-centered around the question, “Are we providing the services that our member schools need, and are we engaging as many of the member schools as possible?”

This was a terrific exercise which resulted in revised mission and belief statements, a well-aligned theory of action, a more sensible organizational structure, countless critical conversations about purpose and impact of our programs, and a better collective understanding of just what exactly each arm of the association and/or person really does.

It also helped us to redefine our potential role in the impressive body of work that exists, and the relationships that we have with other stakeholder groups. We took a hard look at how our resources are utilized- human resources as well as financial.

We listed every program and activity currently in place, did our best to anticipate areas of need for schools going forward, and developed ideas for new programs that we hope can come to fruition.

As a result of this work, we have enhanced ongoing commitments and developed new norms for the association which we intend to translate into the organizational practices, programs and services that best support schools through these challenging times.

Now I'd like to share a few reflections on the past year- I'll highlight areas of "new" work, as much of it will continue.

In his speech to military grads two days ago, President Obama talked about leadership, saying that, in addition to particular skills and attributes, leadership is also necessarily about alliances and diplomacy. Over the past few years, we have worked hard to grow in those areas, establishing solid relationships with colleague associations, and presenting ourselves as a diplomatic organization that brings the voice and situation of school leaders to the table via two lenses of perspective- practitioner and policy- kind of like bi-focals(!)

- SEED was a huge area of focus: we are the managing organization for a two million dollar plus grant; Ev Lyons and Mike Galluzo are lead trainers for administrators.
- We are partners with LEAD Connecticut: Susan Kennedy, Mike Buckley, Tim Breslin, Pat Howley and I are involved in various LEAD initiatives - first cohort of principals and coaches, Policy Fellows; leadership development in Alliance districts
- Early Childhood Education: Regina has done extensive work with SDE and Office of Early Childhood prior to its official establishment yesterday around emerging Pre-K standards and leadership development programs, and has helped CT and CAS to become recognized as a national leader in this area.
- Crisis Response Team: Earle has spearheaded this initiative along with many programs targeting middle level school climate and best practices workshops

CIAC-

- We worked extremely hard to shape the concussion legislation and will be the lead association in providing educational materials for all schools; cardiac arrest legislation as well. We were a key voice in killing the pesticide bill. We are embarking on a new realm of influence as we reach down into middle and elementary schools.
- Joel, Matt and Stephanie strengthened relationships with media representatives. Joel has been the point person for information on the CIAC website; Matt is recognized as a national leader in technology for state associations; and Stephanie secured new significant sponsorships.
- NFHS Network a terrific success!

- Joe Tonelli and Bob Lehr successfully managed multiple sport committees - Joe, the Officials Association; Bob, national awards.
- We were one of three states to pilot risk management training program for after school activities, presenting at a national conference in July.
- Steve Wysowski joined us in January and immediately became a strong influence in our programs; his Hall of Honor committee is underway.

CSAC-

Dave Maloney and Jenn Buckley, new to CAS this past year, have grown student leadership programs at all levels, with high school robotics exploding and the State Student Advisory Council achieving a much stronger presence.

The Unified Sports® Program has seen new programs and national and international recognition. George Synott, Paul Mengold and Bob Hale will all be in new positions in the coming year.

We have strengthened relationships with many groups, including CAPSS, CABE, SDE, CCPE, WWOCL, PEAC, EPAC, Center for School Change, New Leaders for New Schools, LEAD CT, and many other coalitions and committees around education issues, leadership, athletics, student activities, higher education preparatory programs.

Our legislative influence has grown dramatically. We are well-known and highly respected. This year more than ever before, our opinion was sought out and our presence requested in the early stages of legislative conversations.

GOING FORWARD-

Programmatic Areas of Focus

Each of the four strands of the Principals Center will feature new initiatives:

- Future School Leaders- Expanding Future Leaders Academies- new districts with their own cohorts, and a cohort of candidates combined from smaller districts.

- Career Principals- Evaluation work, Calibration training, Community of Practice around Coherence
- Critical Issues- State BOE identified three priority areas in its comprehensive five-year plan: High quality pre-school education; high academic achievement for all students in reading, writing, math and science; and high school reform. We will certainly be advocating for legislative changes in that area. We also hope to be involved in policy development around recommendations from the Achievement Gap Task Force.
- Recognition-In addition to established awards, increasing coverage of news and events in member schools, we will be instituting a Hall of Honor under the direction of Steve Wysowski.

CIAC:

- Staying ahead of issues in student-athlete health and safety; concussion legislation, pesticide bill, etc. and education in those areas.
- Ongoing review of by-laws and regulations that may be challenged
- Constantly promoting the values of education-based athletics and activity programs through communications and program evaluation efforts.

CSAC:

- Grow leadership programs in urban settings; increasing numbers in all programs K-12.

New Norm for CAS

- Transitioning from a red ocean to a blue ocean strategy by responding to RFP's-in collaboration with others or even as a single entity – and pursuing new funding sources with the help of Jenn Buckley as a grant writer
- An enhanced commitment to outreach to new principals and stronger efforts to engage schools in areas of the state with whom we might not have a strong connection

- Involvement in all of the national and state issues - Evaluation, Assessment, Early Childhood Education, High School Reform, Middle Level Reform, School Leadership, Coaching, School Climate and Safety, School leader and educator preparation, College and Career Ready standards

Most importantly, we want to be your resource organization, reflective of your voice and responsive to your needs. We are committed to offering programs and activities that support the needs of school leaders; we invite you to communicate your needs to us.

And finally, we want you to feel that when you walk through the doors to the CAS building or to a CAS event, you will be spending valuable time with professional friends; that when you reach out to us you will be met with “open ears,” open minds and open hearts. We are here - and out there - for you!