

CAS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

65th Annual Membership Reception

May 9, 2017



By Dr. Karissa Niehoff

I am grateful for the privilege of offering you a report as it gives me the opportunity to share reflections on this year, and even on past years- highlighting successes and considering the challenges facing our profession and the association in the future. It also allows me to say “thank-you” to all of you, on behalf of our entire staff, for being present today, and for all that you have contributed to the work of our association- work which impacts schools at all levels across the state.

As I sat down to prepare my remarks I couldn’t help but remember the CAS Annual Meetings of years ago- all day affairs which were well-attended. We had our business meeting, presented awards, and enjoyed a nice luncheon. The spirit was celebratory and relaxed. CAS-CIAC Boards and committees would frequently meet and then go out to dinner as folks seemed to have evenings free of activities. Gradually, as the responsibilities of school administrators have increased, time available for meetings and functions, and face-to-face interaction, has decreased. The “busy-ness” of our business means that schools are working harder than ever to meet the needs of students, staff and families. Despite the added demands, however, the passion and dedication of educational leaders has arguably never been stronger.

I don’t know about you, but when the school year comes to an end I like to go back to the beginning to reflect on the year’s journey; and look back even further. This is the end of my seventh year at CAS, so before offering remarks on the past year, I’d like to briefly take us back to the state of Connecticut education 7 years ago:

- The Commissioner of Education was Mark McQuillan and the CSDE was structured and staffed very differently.
- The NCLB deadline was fast approaching and “Race to the Top” was a national effort. Through rounds one, two and three, Connecticut failed in its bid for a piece of the fiscal pie- which now we perhaps acknowledge that our “failure” was actually a blessing in disguise.
- We formalized a commitment to SBAC and Common Core
- Six years ago, Governor Malloy appointed Commissioner Stefan Pryor in 2011, who initiated many changes at the CSDE. We saw the arrival of very bright young people who brought with them unique perspectives on educational policy and practice. The department was restructured and “revisioned”, so to speak, and seemingly overnight, the already hectic pace of educational life accelerated. We experienced not so much a

“roll out” of initiatives as a “blow out” and our collective level of anxiety rose to new heights, as did the public energy around educational issues.

- High school graduation requirements legislation raised the number of required credits and outlined prescriptive coursework to achieve them
- A massive piece of legislation in 2012 brought “Education Reforms”
- Connecticut’s ESEA Waiver outlined our plans for a revised Evaluation System- PEAC came into being; the SEED model and related evaluation technology were being developed.
- AND- a good number of administrators who are now in our schools were early in their teaching careers.

Fast forward to May of 2017. When we reflect on how we have performed as a profession over the years, I think we can say with the greatest confidence that school leaders in the state of Connecticut have performed admirably- with grit and with grace- and that we will continue in this manner through these challenging times.

And we have many challenges before us: Betsy DeVos is arguably the biggest. We will no doubt be mired in the issues around school choice and the threats posed relative to ESSA implementation and the funding of federal grant programs. In a recent interview with Fox News she said that ESSA “essentially does away with the whole argument about the Common Core.” And when she was asked whether or not she would withhold funds from states that move away from the CCSS she said, “There really isn’t any Common Core anymore.”

Utter brilliance.

There are a multitude of priority issues:

ESSA Reauthorization, Media Literacy, Multi-cultural education, SEL, gender identity issues, mastery-based learning, assessment, authentic engagement vs. compliant engagement, teacher and leader recruitment, retention and development- especially in minority areas- and of course, challenges to culture and climate.

In the last seven years, each of these issues has either newly emerged or has intensified in importance. And, of course, we have our state’s fiscal situation. To say that we are all “distracted” by this is an epic understatement. The financial emergency is forcing us to think about regionalization of services and collaboration across schools. We are truly immersed in a period of transformation for our schools- no matter what level, size, demographic or even type.

Despite these challenges, Connecticut principals are making a difference. As we see Lisa Eells say each day on Channel 3- There really is good news out there! We interact with you and our other member school leaders every day and we continually hear stories about the impact of

“best practices” on student learning, staff capacity and overall school improvement. We applaud your efforts; you are transformational leaders...because you are exercising your role based on certain characteristics which are far more important than just addressing any of the aforementioned challenges- I’ll mention four:

The first is *idealized influence*. You are leaders who are guided by your moral commitment to do the right thing in terms of your students, staff, other stakeholders, and yourselves.

The second is *inspirational motivation*. You inspire others to be their best, to achieve greater heights than they thought were possible and you foster their self-efficacy. You are the coach of the team; you encourage risk-taking and celebrate achievement.

The third is *intellectual stimulation*. As leaders you step back and not provide all the answers but challenge others to work out solutions for themselves and help them see things differently. You demonstrate your own commitment to learning and encourage others to deepen their own knowledge.

The fourth is *individualized consideration*. You empathize, listen and genuinely care for others. Relationships matter.

Your great work, and the great work of other transformational leaders is paying off outside of the school environment as well. The body of research citing the critical role the school leader plays in student achievement continues to grow, as does the research about the role itself-based on evidence! We better understand that the job of the school leader is misunderstood; that it is as demanding as rewarding; that the school level is the fulcrum as we leverage district transformation; and that school leaders have been neglected in terms of acknowledgement and support.

Our Commissioner and state department staff have prioritized school leadership in their programming, our relationships with other stakeholder groups continue to strengthen and our Legislature has become better attuned to the voice and situation of school leaders.

This is perhaps an appropriate segue into reflections about CAS-CIAC as there are a number of things of which our association can be proud.

- We have continued to strengthen our presence in the larger community- especially in Hartford- and our reputation for being a knowledgeable, diplomatic, professional organization continues to expand. When I say “organization” I mean the membership in its entirety. CAS is continually invited to participate on legislative and state task forces and committees.
- We continue to strengthen our relationships with CAPSS and CABE especially, but also ConnCAN, CCER, the PTA and the CFSA. Our CT Coalition for Public Education which includes CABE, CABSS, CAS, CEA, AFT, CFSA and the PTA developed Principles of

Agreement regarding many areas of educational policy. Our “Big Six” minus the CBIA drafted Guiding Principles for Funding Public Education that were recently endorsed by the State BOE and have attracted the attention of many legislators.

- We continue to increase our influence in the Legislature. Many bills have been drafted, “re-drafted” or even destroyed as a direct result of our influence. We were a lead in drafting bills to change the graduation requirements, delay the student data privacy act, implement relief from multiple mandates and prevent the addition of new ones. We think we have closely avoided legislative intervention with the CIAC...

In terms of specific division highlights there are simply too many to mention in our short time together today. We will be sharing reports from each of our divisions once our year draws to a close. Significant highlights:

- Marie Salazar Glowski- Revision of the Executive Coaching Program- SPED and EL leaders; contracts with the Turnaround Office; support of the CALAS group.
- Ev Lyons, Donna Schilke, Roxanne Augelli collaborating across levels. The CAS Board recently approved changing the name of the Principals’ Center to the Center for Leadership and Innovation.
- Jenn Buckley and Dave Maloney- Student Activities- tremendous growth in programming around diversity issues; growth in student group work.
- Dale Bernadoni is leading the UCAPP Clinical experience which is growing.
- Mary Lee Weber has joined Stephanie Ford in sponsorship and marketing work and has brought us new contacts and sponsorship dollars.
- The CIAC- Tremendous success at Mohegan; stayed out of court... We are watching the magnet school enrollment situation that was recently publicized...Transgender student-athletes “issue” is emerging...Steve will be retiring but we hope to have a candidate selected soon.

Our organization is highly regarded on the national level- academically and athletically- and our state has many folks serving on national boards and committees (Vicki Reed- NAESP)

I must say that I am continually amazed at the number of initiatives going on within the broad scope of our work. Feedback from program participants and member school leaders continue to inform and inspire all that we do within the association. Many of you are an integral part of our work; please accept our gratitude for your contributions!

Like most organizations we have not only successes but also challenges. Fiscal resources can fluctuate based on grant monies, sponsorships and even weather during tournaments. Our member schools are struggling with restricted budgets and costs associated with program implementation continue to rise. Thus, our biggest challenge at the present time is trying to maintain relevancy and provide impactful services while keeping costs to member schools at a minimum.

We are in discussions with potential new sponsors, investigating additional grant opportunities and are working on marketing strategies that will hopefully attract more support from the business community and higher attendance at events.

Looking ahead, we have high expectations for our association because we know the expectations for all of you are higher than ever before:

- We are committed to directing our energies and crafting our programs around issues and challenges that you face, such that we enable your success, build your capacity, and grow the educational leadership profession overall.
- We are intent on engaging our membership more frequently and in new ways. We want to continue to bring principals together to discuss significant issues “in person” but we also want to host meetings and discussions via technology. In addition, we plan to host more events at sites around the state; bringing programs to people.
- We will do our best to communicate with our colleagues and the folks in Hartford; sharing the needs and concerns of school principals, as well as the ideas and strategies. When it comes to school change, your voice should continue to guide the direction of CAS, and ultimately, the direction of education in the state of Connecticut.
- We will continue to strengthen relationships with colleagues, and while we may not agree on everything, we will look to find common ground and model collaboration at the association level.

These are just a few of the important commitments we are making for our members. We exist to support you!

In closing, thank-you for the dedicated work you do in your schools and for all you have done for our association. We hope that you can find some time for relaxation and much needed recharging over the summer!