

WHY CAS?

Assistant Executive Director Dr. Rosie O'Brien Vojtek provides a comprehensive answer to this important question



The brick and mortar building that sits on 30 Realty Drive in Cheshire, known as the home of CAS, looks and feels different this year.

What we thought would be two weeks, turned into three months. We are now on the eve of the eighth month of turmoil, and chaos is still drastically changing and challenging what used to be the normalcy of our lives. What once was predictable is unseen. Schools are different. CAS is different. Our world is different.

As we scramble to transform our physical presence to practice social and physical distancing caused by this pandemic, we are also forced to look deep inside and evaluate our core values and beliefs, our strengths and weaknesses, our targets and goals. Maslow's hierarchy has become the compass we need to chart our course, find our quest, and continue our journey to excellence.

"CAS provides opportunities for principals to get involved, to make connections and to support their buildings and their own professional growth."

- Victoria Reed, Principal
Wallingford Public Schools

The good news? Whether we are talking about a school or CAS, the brick and mortar building is simply the physical structure. Like your school, it is what is inside that counts. It is the people and the relationships that determine the climate, the culture, and the quality of life within the organization that leads to becoming a strong community.

More good news? We at CAS may see a semi-empty parking lot and hear the hollow echoes of empty rooms inside while staff work physically apart from each other; BUT, the CAS community is as strong if not stronger than ever and we, too, will survive! In fact, for months, we, as an association, have been listening to our members and are embracing this challenge as an opportunity to become even more connected and provide even better, just-in-time services to meet the demand and needs of our members whether we are virtual, in a hybrid model, and/or hopefully soon, back in person.

We at CAS recognize that, because of the additional costs associated with reopening schools this year in the middle of the pandemic, schools need to be judicious as they prioritize their spending. We at CAS also recognize and understand how the life of principals and everyone working with them has changed. We appreciate and applaud the difficult work you are doing to help all of your students learn.

Never before have principals and their staffs experienced such challenging and uncertain times, nor have schools needed to be as understanding and responsive to the needs of students, families and their communities as they do today. And it's not just the usual academic supports that we need to attend to. Now more than ever we must nourish the physiological, safety and security needs on Maslow's hierarchy. Principals are now wearing so many different hats that we haven't had to wear before, and we at CAS are committed to helping and supporting principals and their school communities as they weather the storms and navigate their way through these uncharted times.



I am a former elementary school principal having spent 20 years as lead learner at Ivy Drive Elementary School in Bristol. In my second year as principal, I was invited by a colleague to attend a CAS Fall Convocation Ceremony and became an active member of the association immediately thereafter. Like the schools across the state, CAS isn't the same as it was, even as recently as the beginning of last year. We have had to change the way we conduct many of our activities and events because of the need for social and physical distancing. Last spring, we held numerous ZOOM-INS and focus group meetings with administrators and listened to their needs and concerns. We continue to make CAS the "go-to" place for principals and school leaders to: network and learn with and from colleagues; get the latest information about state and national innovative and research-based best practices as well as state and federal guidelines and requirements; continue to keep our students actively engaged in student activities that help students find, speak out, and share their voices on critical topics; advocate at the state and federal levels for funding, resources, support, and policies to ensure equity and high quality teaching and learning; and recognize, celebrate and promote the great work that is being accomplished by principals, teachers and school communities.

Beginning last spring and continuing this year we have moved many of our Center for Leadership and Innovation professional development activities online. We record them live utilizing a Zoom webinar/meeting platform, so members can attend and participate live or watch the recording later. We also encourage principals to use relevant webinars with their teachers during faculty meetings and PD sessions. We have and will continue to provide services for FREE for our members including the following:

- We offer at least two virtual webinars per month on a variety of topics (e.g., legal issues, social emotional learning (SEL), trauma-informed practices, technology, equity and racial justice). One of our recent workshops that was extremely well-received was on Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and featured Dr. Alec Miller, co-founder and clinical director of Cognitive & Behavioral Consultants. The webinar included an overview of DBT and shared strategies for using it to build a school's capacity to address increasing depression and anxiety rates. A recording of this engaging and information-rich presentation is available [here](#).
- We recently hosted a full-day virtual conference, "Closing the Digital Divide: Access, Instruction, Equity," with opening remarks from Connecticut Commissioner of Education, Dr. Miguel Cardona. Our keynote speaker was Dr. Doug Fisher, 2020 Corwin Press book co-author of *The Distance Learning Playbook*. You can view the entire 6 sessions of the virtual conference on [our website](#).
- We have established and continue to add resources to our [CAS COVID-19 Resource Clearinghouse for Education](#). It is curated by the members of our professional staff and updated regularly.
- We publish and email a weekly CAS Newsblast to keep members apprised of CAS events and activities, to provide them with relevant resources and to share news and developments happening at the state and national levels.
- We have numerous student leadership and other activities for elementary, middle and high school students. This year, most if not all of these activities will be virtual, but will still be great opportunities for students to meet and connect with other students locally and across Connecticut. The many highly engaging student activities include (but are not limited to): leadership, debate, KiDSMARATHON, cheerleading, dance, the arts, esports, and robotics. Click [here](#) for a brochure showcasing all of our planned student activities for 2020-2021.



- We have a myriad of CAS recognition and award programs for students, educators, and schools. Unfortunately, at this time, we do not anticipate being able to hold in-person banquets due to pandemic concerns. We will, however, continue to find creative ways to recognize and celebrate our outstanding students such as airing media celebrations like we did last spring on FOX 61. If you missed the CAS High School Arts Awards or the CAS-CIAC Scholar Athletes Awards, you can watch the recordings on our [YouTube channel](#). Until we are able to celebrate our outstanding students, educators, and schools, we will continue to provide award certificates and/or plaques to schools to present to recipients.
- We constantly look for ways to recognize and celebrate education across the state. For example, CAS works with Channel 8 News (WTNH) on their “What’s Right with Schools” segment featuring schools across Connecticut from PreK-12. Click [here](#) to watch one of the latest segments.
- CAS also continues to advocate for and support education through statewide committee and advocacy work with the CSDE, legislators, and other education associations such as CAPSS and CABE. We are also actively engaged in federal relations work through our national principal organizations, NAESP, NASSP, NELMS and AMLE.

Finally, I learned a long time ago, you get from your membership what you put into it - and if you are like I was as a principal, probably a whole lot more! As a teacher, when I first thought about becoming a principal, my principal at the time told me, “Rosie, just remember, it is lonely at the top!” And, it is true. Schools like Ivy Drive Elementary, where I was principal, are their own silos within their bigger districts. Yet, it is easy to become isolated and disconnected from peers and colleagues when you simply stay in your own corner of the world. Some of my best friends and the educators I admire most are principals and school leaders that I met through CAS. Over the years, I learned so much through my networking with CAS colleagues and peers. I was able to hear what my colleagues were doing across the state, share ideas and resources, and most of all, know that I have friends I could call, text, or email if I had a question or just needed to talk with someone. I was a much better principal because I was an actively involved CAS member.

We at CAS welcome all of our Connecticut schools to not only become a dues paying member, but we strongly encourage and invite you to become more involved with CAS through our professional learning opportunities, our student activities, our networking and informal meeting opportunities, our committees and boards, our advocacy work, and our celebration and recognition events. Please feel free to call or email me or any of the staff members at CAS with questions or to discuss how we can help you and your school community become more actively engaged with us at CAS. My cell phone number is 860-965-8882 and my email address is rvojtek@casciac.org. You can also find the names, email addresses and phone numbers for other CAS staff members in the [staff directory](#) on the CAS website.

Finally, CAS is able to do what we do to help and support principals, school leaders and their school communities because of the volunteer efforts of people like you who become CAS members. Support from our membership allows us to continue to work with and for our members by continuing to be the hub, the go-to place, where you will find a variety of educational resources, activities, events, and celebrations. To that end, we strive to discover how best to help you: to stay connected and able to network with colleagues and peers; to stay informed with the latest research and best practices; and to virtually bring you resources, programs, student activities, celebrations and other events.

I hope that our current situation changes soon, and we are able to once again safely meet in person. I began my work at CAS last year with the lofty, but very rewarding, goal of visiting as many principals and schools as I could to get to know our members better and discover how we at CAS could better serve you and your school. Obviously, those visits stopped. But, I can’t think of anything I would like to do more, once it is safe to do so, than to continue my visits to Connecticut schools, talking with principals and school leaders, and meeting students, teachers, and staff.

Until then, please feel free to reach out to me and/or other CAS staff with your questions, suggestions, and most of all to let us know your interests so we can help you become more connected and involved.

...And that's WHY CAS!

