

Education is Our Business



**An Interview with
Flavia Coughlan,
President of the
BC Association of
School Business Officials
(BCASBO)**

Whether it's a large urban location or a sprawling and diverse rural site, operating the business of a school district is complex.

BC's sixty school districts are geographical areas as defined by the School Act, and within each of those district offices staff work under the direction of a board of education (or school board) comprised of elected school trustees. The business officials who work in each district – Secretary Treasurers, Assistant Secretary Treasurers, Directors of Finance and other professionals working in finance, payroll, purchasing, human resources and information technology – are represented by The British Columbia Association of School Business Officials (BCASBO), a non-profit organization that engages and supports their 200 members in their professional learning, and promotes high ethical standards amongst its membership.

We spoke with BCASBO President Flavia Coughlan about the association's priorities, what's important to the membership and the challenges of leading during a pandemic.

Flavia has worked in the education sector since 2003, and is currently the Secretary Treasurer – the chief business officer – with Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows School District #42. In her role, she provides strategic leadership to the district's business division which is responsible for finance, facilities and support services for 22 elementary schools, six secondary schools and two alternate schools. That's a population of approximately 15,000 K-12 students and 2,000 staff, with a 2020-2021 budget of \$186 million.

Previously, Flavia was the Director of Finance for the Vancouver School District #39, and Accounting Manager in the North Vancouver School District #44. Flavia was drawn to the education sector for a number of reasons. "I strongly believe that public education is the cornerstone of democratic society," says Flavia. "I found the opportunity to use my knowledge, skills and abilities to contribute to the advancement of public education in BC incredibly appealing. I feel really fortunate to be able to observe the impact of my work on the next generation."

Flavia joined BCASBO's Executive Committee in 2012, and over the next four years she was the zone director for Metro, Fraser Valley and South Coast. In 2017, she stepped up as the Vice-President of the association and was prepared when the call came two years later. "When I was asked in 2019 to put my name forward for President, there was no doubt in my mind that I was ready to take on this role and help the association reach the goals set in our Strategic Plan."

From the beginning of her presidency, Flavia has served on numerous provincial committees, including the Funding Formula Review Panel, Technical Review Committee, K-12 Education Sector Leadership Development Working Group, Accountability Framework Redesign, Procurement Steering Committee for BC Education Marketplace, Executive Committee for ERAC, Accounting Advisory Committee, and the Government Organizations Accounting and Auditing Forum. "I started joining provincial-level committees early in

my tenure. I saw them both as learning opportunities and as a way to bring local knowledge and perspective to the provincial table to help shape better provincial policy. And I continue to volunteer my time at the provincial level because I believe that strong, knowledgeable, and representative voices with on-the-ground experience can make a difference for all school districts and all students in our province."

Flavia's work as President of the association has been guided by the priorities set in the BCASBO Strategic Plan. "Together with the executive of the association, and with support from members, we have been able to deliver high quality educational programs for our members, expand our membership and participate as key partners in a number of provincial committees that have supported government and all school districts during the pandemic." Like most organizations and businesses, the work of BCASBO has felt the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. "As an association we had to quickly adapt to the reality of not being able to meet in person anymore. Our May Annual General Meeting and Conference had to be cancelled and replaced with a series of online events. We held our first ever AGM via Zoom in May, and we had more than 100 members join us from across the province.

Flavia adds, "We also decided to create online opportunities for our members to connect and share their experience with supporting school districts during the pandemic, and to get updates both from Ministry of Education representatives and BCASBO executive members. These online sessions have been greatly appreciated by our members. We are continuing to work on creating online learning and networking for our members, and we look forward to being able to be together in one venue in the future."

Looking ahead, Flavia defines the long-term goals of BCASBO by the three goals in the Strategic Plan:

1. BCASBO will be meaningfully engaged by and

with education partners on provincial policy and plans for K-12 education.

2. BCASBO will provide school business officials with quality professional learning, leadership, and networking opportunities that support their professional growth.
3. BCASBO will continue to diversify the disciplines in its membership.

Engagement with sector partners is a key goal for BCASBO. “Whether it’s related to provincial policy or to plans for K-12 education, meaningful engagement by and with education partners is one of the main goals of our association. We believe that together we can effectively problem solve and inform better decision-making at the provincial level. We are committed to continuing to strengthen relationships with all partner groups through participation in joint committees, and through sharing our expertise with other partner organizations and offering joint learning sessions.”

BCASBO’s motto is ‘Education is our Business’. Flavia sees that phrase as a simple but important

reminder of what can be done. “We often hear people in K-12 refer to the ‘two sides’ of school districts: education and business. Our motto reminds me and all our members that we are all working towards a common goal and that all school district staff are valuable contributors. Together we can – and will – achieve more.”

“We are a progressive association whose members incorporate current research, global trends, and a clear understanding of provincial and district cultures into our daily work. I see the impact of my work, and that of our organization, every time one of our members is successful in tackling a new role with an expanded scope, and I attribute some of this success to the professional development programs the member completed with BCASBO, or to the connections they made through our association.”

Those important relationships include the connections made with BC school leaders. “I want to thank all BCPVPA members for the amazing work that they do every day in schools around the province, and for their resilience and commitment to student success.”

iLLuMiNating conversations

Vi Hughes is a retired Principal who worked in the Vancouver School District #39. Through the years, Vi has gathered anecdotes about the qualities of an effective school leader, and is sharing just a few of these gems in this edition of Princip(ed)

Articulate a vision

“What does a Principal do exactly?” asked the grade 2 student.

We were sitting on a bench in the school basement during a heavy rainstorm while all around us the kids were running and screaming the lunch hour away.

“Well....uh...uh...,” I mumbled, trying to find words to explain my weighty Principal responsibilities to her.

I knew I was taking a long time to answer.

“Stuff?” she asked sympathetically.

“Yes ... stuff,” I sighed. “Lots of stuff.”

British Columbia Association of School Business Officials (BCASBO)

About

Established in 1958, the British Columbia Association of School Business Officials is a non-profit association dedicated to the highest professional standards of ethics, competence, and leadership, in school district corporate and business administration, to the promotion of the highest ethical standards amongst its members, and to the welfare of its members.

Structure

The Association is governed by an Executive Committee, elected by the members, consisting of Table Officers:

- President
- Vice-President
- Secretary-Treasurer
- Immediate Past President, and
- Five Regional Directors representing:
 - (1) Kootenay/Boundary
 - (2) Thompson/Okanagan
 - (3) North Coast/Northern Interior
 - (4) Fraser Valley, Metro and South Coast
 - (5) Vancouver Island

The Association is supported by a half-time Executive Director.

Members

BCASBO represents Business Officials supporting learning in all British Columbia school districts, including Secretary Treasurers, Assistant Secretary Treasurers, Directors of Finance and other professionals in the areas of Finance, Payroll, Purchasing, Human Resources, and Information Technology. As of September 2020, there are 200 members representing all 60 school districts in British Columbia.

Strategic Plan Goals

BCASBO will be meaningfully engaged by and with education partners on provincial policy and plans for K-12 education.

BCASBO will provide school business officials with quality professional learning, leadership, and networking opportunities that support their professional growth.

BCASBO will continue to diversify the disciplines in its membership.



BCASBO is dedicated to providing membership value, advocating for members and building relationships. We will:

- Represent and support members in their leadership roles
- Provide ongoing leadership development opportunities
- Engage members and provide relevant services
- Provide support for individual member welfare
- Provide opportunities for affiliation with other associations in the education sector
- Be a sustainable association
- Inform and collaborate with the Ministry of Education, other provincial ministries and partners through evidence-based, data-driven research
- Expand our voice, impact and involvement in education related issues
- Ensure active membership in public education decision-making committees

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