



The Educator

A Newspaper for School Councils in Newfoundland and Labrador

May/June 2024



Message from the NLFSC President

Dear School Councils, Parents and Teachers,
As we approach the culmination of the academic year, I am delighted to share with you this end-of-year newsletter. These last few weeks of school provides us with an opportunity to reflect, celebrate, and express gratitude for the journey we've undertaken together in the education system in NL over the 2023-24 school year. I am grateful for your support over the past year. The educational concerns you expressed and school issues identified set the agenda for all meetings we had with the Minister and department officials.

As always, your involvement in your child's education is invaluable, and we look forward to continuing this collaborative journey in the upcoming academic year.

This has been a challenging year for NLFSC. While we continue to be included in discussions affecting education and are members of many provincial education committees, our future remains uncertain. We anticipate the Provincial Advisory Council on Education (PACE) will be in place when school reopens in September.

It is our understanding the board of PACE will be made up of both elected and appointed representatives. All appointed and elected representatives will be ratified by the Minister before they take office on the board of PACE. We have been told there will still be a role for NLFSC after PACE is established, however we are still waiting for additional details and confirmation. I have requested a meeting with Minister Howell for clarification.

Over the next few weeks many students will be marking another milestone in their life by graduating high school. This is an exciting and rewarding time in the lives of students and their parents. Graduation is a rite of passage that embodies both an end and a beginning. It's a celebration of achievements and a beckoning into a new phase full of possibilities.

Congratulations to all our graduates for all their hard work. You have shown remarkable perseverance and dedication, especially during the pandemic. As you venture into the world remember to always be kind, compassionate and fearless. Nurture your dreams and use your knowledge to make the world a better place.

Congratulations to parents for your unwavering support and encouragement during your child's academic journey. Your belief in your child's potential, along with your love and guidance, have been instrumental in their success.

On behalf of the other members of the NLFSC Executive, best wishes for a wonderful, safe summer holiday. We look forward to working with you in the fall

Sincerely,

Don

Don.Coombs@easternhealth.ca

2024-25 School Calendar

Holiday Schedule 2024-25

- September 2 - Labour Day
- September 3 - Administration Day
- September 4 - School Reopens/Students
- September 30 - National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
- October 14 - Thanksgiving Day
- November 11 - Remembrance Day
- December 20 - Last Day - Christmas
- January 6 - School Reopens
- February 21-24 - Mid Winter Break
- March 17 - St. Patrick's Day
- April 17 - Last Day - Easter
- April 28 - School Reopens
- May 19 - Victoria Day
- June 26 - Last Day - Summer
- June 27 - Administration Day



NLFSC President Coombs making cookies during Tim Hortons Annual Smile Cookie campaign. The event supports charities and community groups across Canada

Letter to Minister on Fundraising for Technology

Over the past couple of months many of our members have expressed concern on having to fundraise to cover the cost of technology at their schools. Below is a letter to Minister Howell on behalf of councils and parents, followed by excerpts from the Minister's response.

Dear Minister Howell,

The NL Federation of School Council is requesting to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss the issue of parents having to fundraise to cover the cost of replacing all laptops, desktops and WIFI Access Points in schools.

In the Fall of 2023 school administrators were informed Windows 10 would be expiring and needed to be replaced with Windows 11 by October 14, 2025. All current technology devices would also have to be replaced with new, and WIFI Access Points will have to be established. This technological overhaul will cost tens of thousands of dollars, and unfortunately schools are expected to bear the expense. Administrators were advised to use their schools' Instructional Budget to absorb the cost, however this is not an option for most schools who are already barely able to manage with what they have. With no extra funding left over from the Instructional Budget parents have no other choice but to fundraise to pay for new technology. Many feel this is very unfair and the government, not

parents, should be paying for the replacement of these necessary learning tools in schools.

Schools are government funded and should be resourced in the same manner as other government agencies and departments. Employees at the Confederation Building are not expected to fundraise or pay for laptops and internet access in order to carry out their work, nor should schools.

It should be noted that technology is a powerful tool for redefining and transforming learning. The use of technology in schools engages students and opens all kinds of opportunities for students. In fact, most students use their laptops and technology as much as, if not more than, textbooks. Parents do not mind fundraising for sports events, field trips and extras for school, but they resent being forced to raise money for educational technology which is crucial to their child's academic success.

Parents say the cost-of-living crisis and competition for donations, particularly in rural areas, is making fundraising extremely challenging. Many families are struggling to make ends meet and the cost of paying for technology is compounding the stress they are already under.

School Councils have asked us to reach out to you to relay their concerns. We welcome the opportunity to do so in the near future.

Kindest regards,

President: Don Coombs

Response from Minister

The Department of Education and NLSchools understands the important role technology plays in society as a whole and therefore the part it plays in the daily work of teachers and the learning journey of our students. That is why government invested over \$20 million to ensure all Grades 7-12 students could be provided a chromebook and all teachers a laptop. This initial investment is further supported with additional funds as required to maintain the program. This initiative alone reduces the reliance on school devices for this large student population.

Schools have historically raised funds to secure additional devices for their school. However, we do acknowledge reliance on, demands and cost of technology have increased over the years.

In recent years, when possible, NLSchools (formerly NLESD) have supported schools who do not have the opportunity to easily raise funds. Such support was in the form of a cost share arrangement to upgrade in-school IT infrastructure such as access points, wiring and servers.

Regarding your concern about the expected end of life for Windows 10 devices in October 2025, I can assure you the IT team is working on a potential solution with our partners at Microsoft to extend the life of such devices. That extension will provide a much longer lead time to consider how we support the eventual replacement of these devices.



NLFSC President Coombs has been invited to be a member of the selection committee for Premier's Award for Teaching Innovation and the Minister's Award for Compassion in Teaching.

The Premier's Award for Teaching Innovation recognizes primary, elementary, or secondary teachers in all disciplines who have demonstrated innovation in instruction and a commitment to preparing their students for future success.

The Minister's Award for Compassion in Teaching recognizes inspirational and compassionate teachers at the primary, elementary, or secondary level who have demonstrated a commitment to supporting the social, emotional, and mental health of their students, colleagues or school community as a whole.

Nominations for these awards for the 2024 school year have been received and are ready for deliberation.

Support Mindful Futures: A Call to Action for Parents

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (NLFSC) is thrilled to endorse the Mindful Futures program, an innovative initiative spearheaded by the Canadian Mental Health Association - Newfoundland and Labrador (CMHA-NL). This program aims to significantly enhance the mental wellness of both students and educators across our province, addressing critical issues such as the alarming rise in youth hospitalizations for mental health reasons, and educator burnout.

This program will include mental health education for every high school student across the province with the aim of growing to include every student from K-12. Students will be involved in co-designing the curriculum that will then be deployed across the province by experienced mental health educators. At the same time this program will provide 1200 teachers and administrators with robust, evidence-based mental health training.

School Councils and parents, your support is crucial for the successful launch of Mindful Futures. We urge you to lend your voice to this vital cause by contacting the Minister of Education (ministeredu@gov.nl.ca) to express your support for this program. By doing so, you can help ensure that the necessary resources and attention are allocated to improve the mental health and well-being of our youth and educators.

For more information on how you can help, or to learn more about the Mindful Futures program, please contact CMHA-NL (lfeltham@cmhanl.ca).

Draft Email/Letter for councils and parents to send to Minister Howell to support the Mindful Futures program:

Subject: Support for the Mindful Futures Program

Dear Minister Howell,

As a parent and school council member, I am writing to express my strong support for the Mindful Futures program, an initiative designed by the Canadian Mental Health Association - Newfoundland and Labrador in collaboration with the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils. This program is poised to make significant improvements in mental health education and support for both our students and educators.

With rising concerns about mental health crises among our youth and high levels of educator burnout, there has never been a more critical time to implement such a comprehensive approach to mental wellness in our schools. The Mindful Futures program offers practical, impactful strategies that promise to enhance the well-being of our entire educational community. I urge you to support the funding and implementation of this vital program.

Our children and their educators deserve no less than our full commitment to their mental and emotional well-being.

Thank you for considering this important initiative.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Address]

[Your Contact Information]

Kids missing more school since pandemic, CBC Investigates



Don Coombs, President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils, says student absenteeism has been a problem in the province for many years. (Katie Breen/CBC News)

CBC News asked 41 Canadian school districts with more than 30,000 students for rates of chronic absenteeism for both pre- and post-pandemic school years. We received complete data from eight districts, two provinces and found publicly available data for two territories. Four additional districts provided data for only one time period, either pre- or post-pandemic.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, two-thirds of secondary school students were chronically absent in 2022-23, up from just under half in 2018-19, according to figures provided by the province's Department of Education. For elementary students, the rate more than doubled, from 23 to 50 per cent over the same period. The number of children missing school in the province was already a concern before the pandemic, with the province's child and youth advocate releasing the [results of an investigation](#) into it in 2019. It identified learning disabilities, mental health problems for children and their parents, racism, poverty, substance abuse and violence in schools as some of the contributing factors.

Multiple parents in Newfoundland, who did not want to be identified, said in social media messages that their children faced significant bullying that made them afraid to go to school.

Don Coombs, president of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils, says the factors keeping children away are so wide-ranging it's impossible for schools to address them in isolation. Families, local governments and provincial departments of education and social services must work together to find out why children are missing school and help them, Coombs said, citing bullying as one example. "Communities have to be involved. People should not feel intimidated to go walk through the doors of the

school. It's a place of learning and it has to be a safe and friendly environment," he said.

The interruption of school during the COVID-19 pandemic may have made things worse by further weakening some students' already tenuous connection to school.

"I think once you become disconnected with school, it's hard to reverse," Coombs said. "These children often lose their social connections. You know, they drop behind in the curriculum and ... it's hard to catch up."



Toronto Star

April 28, 2024

Ontario Reveals details of Cellphone Ban in Schools

Ontario will ban cellphones in elementary schools for the entire day, and during class time for middle and high school students, under new rules to start this September that are being touted as the toughest in Canada.

The changes announced Sunday, which include a crackdown on student vaping, will also force school boards to remove all access to social media websites from their networks, and report cards will be updated to include comments on students' distraction levels.

Unless teachers want to use devices for learning, "when it comes to cellphones, our policy is 'out of sight, out of mind,'" Education Minister Stephen Lecce.

The move will mean kids up to Grade 6 have to put their cellphones away and on silent mode when at school. Those in Grades 7 to 12 will only have access between classes and at lunch.

Exceptions can be made with the "explicit" permission by an educator for learning purposes, as well as for students with particular medical or custody situations, Lecce said, adding parents can alert their schools to any such concerns.

If caught with their phone without permission, the phones will have to be "immediately surrendered," though Lecce noted it'll be up to teachers and schools to decide on how the policy is enforced.

"We will respect the professional judgment of teachers of when technology is appropriate and of when it's not appropriate," he said. The province is also cracking down on vaping and smoking, with new, mandatory reporting to parents if kids are caught using them on school property, as well as mandatory confiscation of any products. Lecce said the government also plans to put vape detectors in washrooms.

The changes will include training for teachers, new

signage in schools, and support for kids and parents, including an awareness campaign, Lecce said. “We need consistency. We need rigour in our schools. And we need to restore safety. Too many kids can’t focus because of the distractions in schools,” he said.

Lecce added that the new measures hopefully refocus student attention on academics like literacy and math while also combating student bullying, which he said is being worsened by cellphone and social media use.

VOCM News Story

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils is applauding a ban on cellphone use in some Ontario classrooms.

In this province, various schools have their own policies related to cellphones in the classroom, most of which do not allow them.

However, Federation President Don Coombs says in some cases efforts to address the issue have been met with some pushback.

“I know of an administrator several years ago who wanted to remove cellphones from her school, or turn them in in the morning, and that didn’t go over very well with people,” said Coombs.

Many parents have called for bans on cellphones in class, saying they’re being used to access chat groups and porn, causing distractions for other students and overall learning in the school setting.

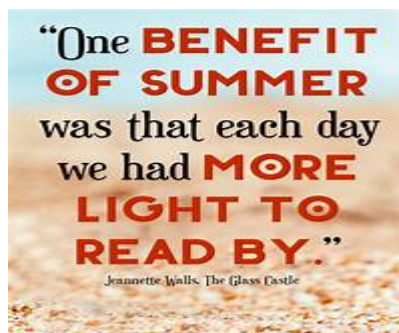


National Indigenous Day

In Canada June 21 is known as National Indigenous Peoples Day. This is a day for all Canadians to recognize and celebrate the unique heritage, diverse cultures, and outstanding contributions of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis’ people.

The Canadian Constitution recognizes these three groups as Aboriginal peoples, also known as Indigenous people.

Although these groups share many similarities, they each have their own distinct heritage, language, cultural practises and spiritual beliefs. In cooperation with Indigenous organizations, the Government of Canada chose June 21, the summer solstice for National Indigenous Peoples Day.



Education Accord Advisory Committee

President Coombs has been extended an invitation to be part of an Advisory Committee for the Education Accord NL.

The ultimate aim of the Education Accord NL is to achieve improved outcomes for students and learners, aligning with the Provincial Government's broader vision of positioning Newfoundland and Labrador as one of Canada's leading provinces by 2031.

As a member of the Advisory Committee, Don, along with other key stakeholders in education, will assist committee co-chairs Dr. Anne Burke and Dr. Karen Goodnough in the development of a comprehensive 10 year Education Accord for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Central to the mission of the Education Accord NL are four key pillars:

- 1. Early Learning and Childhood Development
- 2. Education Engagement and Transformation
- 3. Health and Well-being in Education Environments
- 4. Post-secondary Education and Learning across the Lifespan

Next Steps for School Meals

NLFSC Executive Director Denise Pike is representing school councils on an Advisory Group for Next Steps for School Meals, a provincial consultation process led by Food First NL.

Next Steps for School Meals is a province-wide consultation about a school lunch program in Newfoundland and Labrador. Once the consultation process is completed Food First NL will create a report with recommendations and options on how to best implement a school lunch program in NL.

Food First NL will be hosting focus groups and conducting interviews with parents, teachers, students, school meal providers over the next few months. Feedback and information compiled from the focus groups will be use to prepare a final report

Why It's Time to Focus on School Meals

The need for universal school meals in our province is clear. One in four children in Newfoundland and Labrador live in a food-insecure household. This is the highest rate of any province.

The good news is that funding is on the way. In the fall of 2023, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador announced school meal funding for all Pre-K to Grade 9 students. The first \$3million of this funding was announced in the 2024 provincial budget. Additional funding is forthcoming through

the federal government's promised National School Food Policy.

For more information contact Program Coordinator

Ashley Byrne at ashley@foodfirstnl.ca, or call

(709) 237-4026



June is Pride Month

Pride Month spans the month of June each year, this year beginning on Saturday, June 1 and ending on Sunday, June 30. Pride celebrations – including parades, festivals, parties and picnics – are held throughout the month in different cities across Canada

Pride Month provides a great opportunity for people from Newfoundland and Labrador to celebrate in support of and in solidarity with the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

It symbolizes the promotion of self-affirmation, dignity, equality, and increased visibility of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community.



Newfoundland and Labrador
Federation of School Councils

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