



January 2026

The Educator

A newspaper for School Councils in Newfoundland and Labrador

Message from the NLFSC President



Dear School Council Members,

As we enter 2026, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude for the dedication, wisdom, and care you bring to our schools throughout the year. Your commitment to supporting students, families, and staff make a meaningful and lasting difference in our communities. Your voices continue to guide and strengthen our efforts to build inclusive, supportive, and successful learning environments for all students.

School councils play a vital role in this work. Your advocacy, insights, and commitment ensure that the perspectives of families and communities are heard and valued at every level. The connections you foster between schools and their communities are essential, and through your efforts, we continue to create environments where students can learn, grow, and thrive.

As you are aware, we have a new Government and a new Minister of Education, bringing both change and opportunity. These transitions highlight the importance of strong partnerships and open, ongoing communication as we work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for our students.

On December 9, 2025, I, along with Executive Director Denise Pike, had the privilege of meeting with Paul Dinn, Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, to discuss priorities and the future of education in our province. Deputy Minister Darrin Pike and Executive Director Walt Mavin also participated in the meeting. It was a constructive and candid exchange that allowed us to speak openly about the challenges and issues directly affecting our students, teachers, and schools.

Topics discussed included the Provincial Advisory Council on Education, classroom resources, student assistant supports, truancy, and literacy.

This open and honest dialogue was encouraging and reinforced the importance of collaboration and the shared responsibility we all have in shaping a strong and sustainable path forward for education.

The Minister is new to the role and we recognize that this is a period of adjustment, making our commitment to continued dialogue and mutual support even more important. We look forward to continuing these conversations and to meeting again in the near future.

Before I sign off, I would like to remind

councils and parents that this year's Teacher and Staff Appreciation Week will take place from February 9–13, 2026. This week provides an opportunity to recognize and celebrate the invaluable contributions of our educators and school staff and to acknowledge the vital role they play in shaping the intellectual, social, and moral foundations of our students.

From February 9–13, let us take the time to show our teachers and school staff just how much we appreciate the important work they do every day.

Warm regards,

Don

Email: Don.Coombs@easternhealth



Teacher/Staff Appreciation Week 2026

This years' Teacher and Staff Appreciation Week will be held from February 9–13.

Education Week will also be observed during this same time.

In the past, Teacher and Staff Appreciation Week in Newfoundland and Labrador was hosted by the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (NLFSC), while Education Week was hosted by the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA).

Having both Teacher/Staff Appreciation Week and Education Week occur simultaneously provides a meaningful opportunity to recognize and celebrate the contributions of educators and school staff, as well as the remarkable successes and vibrant learning experiences occurring in schools.

Our teachers and school staff go above and beyond, often sacrificing their time and personal resources for the benefit of their students. They provide guidance, mentorship, and support, empowering students with skills and knowledge that will shape their futures. Their dedication and selflessness are a testament to their passion for education.

Many school councils plan events and activities to celebrate Teacher/ Staff Appreciation Week. However, showing appreciation doesn't have to be costly—kind words and thoughtful gestures go a long way. An email, note, or a message is a meaningful gift because it shows that you took the time to reflect and share your gratitude. A face-to-face “Thank you” is even more memorable. Our teachers and staff play a vital role in the lives of our children and deserve to know just how much they are valued.

School councils should inform parents about Teacher/Staff Appreciation and Education Week in advance and encourage them to send messages of thanks via email, text, or handwritten notes. Thank-you messages can also be shared on a school's Facebook page. Simple gestures like these help our educators feel appreciated and recognized for their hard work and commitment.

Further information about celebratory activities for Education Week will be shared with school councils, parents, and students by their respective schools. This will allow everyone to take part, join in the celebrations, and show their appreciation for the important work recognized during Teacher/Staff Appreciation Week and Education Week.

Looking for Ideas for TSAW?

(Don't forget the Principal, Vice Principal bus drivers, secretaries, student assistants, custodians and district staff).

- Hang a "We Love Our Teachers/Staff" banner on the front of the school.
- Place an apple with a note from the School Council in each mailbox or on each desk.
- Breakfast (or lunch, or snacks.... food is always good!)
- A draw for prizes donated by parents and local businesses
- Engage students in showing appreciation by writing notes of appreciation.
- Place a basket of apples, cheese and fruit platters in staff room
- A Wall of Appreciation: posters or a banner demonstrating appreciation
- Host a 'Teacher and Staff Appreciation Tea/Lunch

School council members and parents are encouraged to post messages on the schools Facebook page and website.

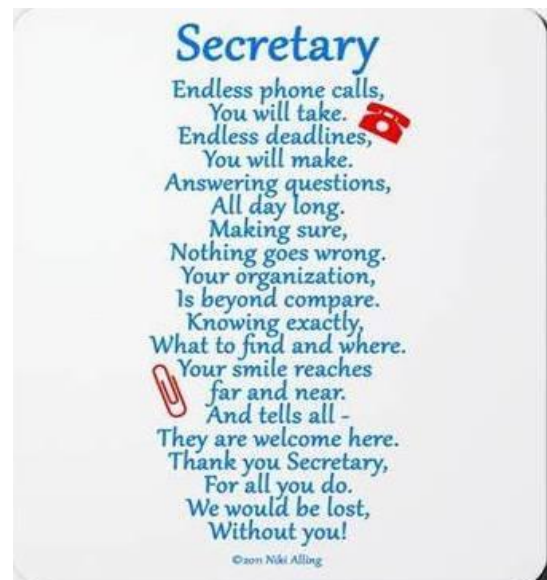
Councils are also welcome to post pics of your TSAW celebrations on our Facebook page

(www.facebook.com/nlfederationofschoolcouncils). We would love to showcase what is happening at your school during TSAW and throughout the year. Please include the name of your school and any other information.

Thank You Teacher Learning Assistants



Thank You School Secretaries



Thank You Student Assistants



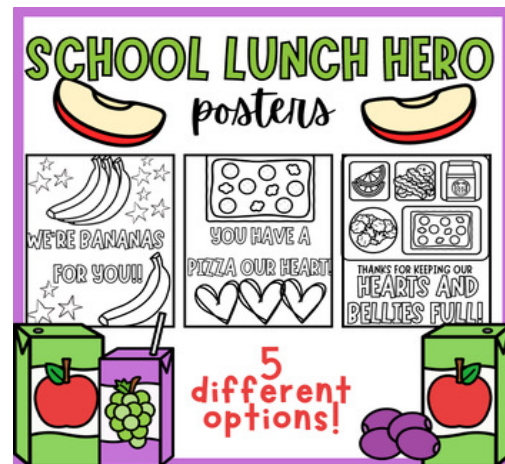
Thank you Custodians



Thank You Bus Drivers



Thank You Cafeteria/Lunch Workers



Honourable Paul Dinn

Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development



Minister Dinn was appointed Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development on October 29, and formally sworn in as MHA for Topsail-Paradise on November 25.

Minister Dinn was first elected as MHA for Topsail-Paradise in a by-election in January 2019. He has since been re-elected in three consecutive provincial elections. Originally from St. John's, he has called Paradise home for the past 33 years. He is a proud graduate of Memorial University of Newfoundland, holding bachelor's degrees in Commerce and Education. Minister Dinn has spent decades serving his community through both provincial and municipal public service. He spent more than 30 years in senior management roles within the public sector and previously served as Deputy Mayor of the Town of Paradise.

Outside of his professional life, Paul and his wife, Jennifer, are active community volunteers and proud parents of three daughters.

Deputy Minister of K-12 Education



Congratulations to Darrin Pike on his appointment of Deputy Minister of K-12 Education

Mr. Pike has extensive senior management and teaching experience in the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador. Since 2022, he has been with the Faculty of Education at Memorial University as the Field Coordinator. Prior to this position, he worked with the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association as an Administrative Officer. Mr. Pike has had previous experience as Deputy Minister of Education and Deputy Minister of Advanced Education. He was also the Chief Executive Officer/Director of Education with the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and Chief Executive Officer/Director of Education with Eastern School District.

About 2 in 5 Canadians living with mental health conditions say their mental health care needs are not met
October 23, 2025

A new report from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) reveals that in 2024, 41% of adults (age 18 and older) and 36% of children and youth (age 2 to 17) in Canada with diagnosed mental health conditions reported having their needs partially or completely unmet.

While work is being done in health systems across Canada to improve access to mental health and substance use services, the report also found that

- Only half of Canadians who were referred to community mental health counselling in 2024–2025 received care within 30 days of their initial referral
- Of those hospitalized for mental health or substance use, 70% received follow-up with a physician within 30 days of discharge

Current barriers Canadians face when accessing mental health care include availability of services, insufficient support navigating them, affordability and stigma.

Data collected by the system will enable health planners to identify and target areas for improvement including the expansion and accessibility of services, investments in digital care options, and recruiting more mental health professionals.

Suggestions for parents and caregivers to help kids manage feelings of anxiety

Validate their feelings, even if you don't quite understand where it's coming from. Your goal is to listen, seek to understand and normalize that feeling, even if it's not something that you think they should be getting anxious about. Try saying things like, "I understand what it's like to be scared. Tell me about what's making you nervous right now."

Move Towards Anxiety.

Avoiding the things that make us anxious or nervous makes anxiety stronger. Safely facing our fears makes anxiety weaker. The anxiety may not go away, but doing a task while being afraid is the most effective way of coping with anxiety.

Some ideas to move toward anxiety include:

- Helping your child break down a task they are nervous about into smaller steps.

- Helping them practice things they are anxious about in a safe setting.
- Challenging them to do one thing “afraid” this week.

Expressing confidence that you will be able to help your child through any challenge that comes along, and that they’ll feel less nervous the more they practice something new.

Teach them to evaluate the evidence

Our fears and anxiety often come from the way we think about ourselves and the world. You can teach your children to come up with the evidence for and against their anxious thoughts. It can also be helpful to use examples of things your child has mastered in the past that they were initially worried about.

Consider distraction

Find something to take your child’s mind off of what’s worrying them. For example, if you’ll have to wait some time for a doctor’s appointment that they’re nervous about, bring along an activity to keep their mind occupied, or bring up a game on your phone you both can play.

Relaxation exercises can be a great distraction for kids who are feeling nervous. Not only does it distract their scared thoughts, but it also helps relax the body. Try breathing or meditation

exercises. Practice relaxation techniques with your child while they are calm, then they will be even more effective when they are practiced during these high stress times.

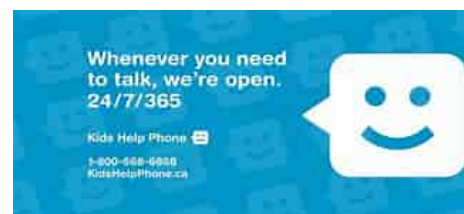
Avoid adding to anxiety

Sometimes, well-intentioned adults ask questions or make statements such as “Are you worried about passing that test today?” This can make a child feel anxious about something they may have not been thinking about. Instead, try asking more neutral questions like, “Are you feeling ready for your test?”

Similarly, spending too much time trying to convince a child that “everything will be OK” can also make the feelings worse. Over placating gives too much attention to a situation and can send a message to the child that there is something to be worried about.

Model healthy ways to manage anxiety

When adults provide good modeling of ways to manage anxiety, it shows kids they can do it too. Talk to the kids in your life about times when you feel nervous. Tell them how you manage your anxiety and get through it.



Kids Help Phone -NL

Kids Help Phone provides immediate help and hope that young people need and deserve 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Every day, Kids Help Phone counsellors answer calls and online questions from across Canada.

No matter what the problem or concern our counsellors are there to provide immediate and caring support, information and referrals to the kids who reach out to us.

The mission is to improve the well-being of Canadian children and youth by providing them anonymous and confidential professional counselling, referrals, and information through technologically-based communications media. Last year, Kids Help Phone helped Canadian kids in need well over two million times through our phone and online counselling services.

Kids Help Phone's professional team provides support on a range of topics (grief, sadness, stress, anxiety, depression, suicide, etc.) and questions that children frequently ask. Toll-free phone: 1-800-668-6868



Membership Renewal

Many thanks to the school councils who have renewed their 2025-26 membership with NLFSC.

If you have not renewed membership and would like a renewal form, please email us at nlfsci@gmail.com

Why should your school be a part of NLFSC?

Your continued membership will help support our mission to advocate for excellence in education for all students in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Your membership also allows NLFSC to continue to represent the concerns of School Councils.

The NL Federation of School Councils is the provincial umbrella group for School Councils, provides school councils and parent groups with a voice on education issues, and encourages positive parental involvement at all levels of education.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils also offers information, support, and guidance to parents and school councils to help them better understand the policies and procedures of their local schools, school districts, and the Department of Education.



Freedom to Read Week 2026

Freedom to Read Week (February 22- 28th) is an annual event that encourages Canadians to think about and reaffirm their commitment to intellectual freedom, which is guaranteed under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Despite having strong traditions of free expression and free inquiry, Canada also has a long-standing tradition of censorship.

Historically, books and magazines have often been quietly removed from libraries and classrooms.

Freedom to Read Week was founded in 1984 to challenge the covert nature of censorship, creating a broader awareness of these ongoing challenges to Canadian writing. It also encourages Canadians to actively defend their right to publish, read and write freely and to widen their understanding of the negative effects of censorship, not just on readers but on writers and publishers as well.

Over the years, Freedom to Read Week has become a regular feature of the annual programming of schools, libraries and literary groups across Canada. From student video contests to large public readings of challenged

materials, participants have found creative and inspiring ways to show how important freedom of expression is to them.

More information on Freedom to Read can be found on their website at :

<http://www.freedomtoread.ca/kits.index.htm>



English School District Weather Protocol

The main goal of any closure or delay, be it for weather or a mechanical issue, is to ensure the safety of students. With respect to weather, the District recognizes that it cannot account for every conceivable circumstance and that families are in the best position to judge whether a student can travel safely to and from school and bus stops.

The Decision Makers

Authority to close schools and/or school zones due to weather is delegated to the authorized zone administrator - which is usually a principal or assistant principal. Where a school system (that is schools in close proximity) is impacted, the authorized zone administrator is advised to

consult with the other school administrations. In areas where District Offices are located (St. John's Metro, Gander, Corner Brook, & Happy Valley - Goose Bay), delays or closures are managed by District staff.

The Time Frame

Closure or delay decisions are generally announced between 6:30 a.m. and 7:00 a.m. Communication will be made through local media - generally radio - as well as through Status Central on the main page of the District's Website. Many schools also use Synervoice technology and Twitter.

Notices of closure will normally indicate that there will be a further update later in the morning, generally around 10:30 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. Delays should be communicated for a specific number of hours - for example, one or two hours.

If a morning delay is longer than one-hour, scheduled Kinderstart sessions for that morning will be cancelled.

Typically, closures for the entire day are only announced in the circumstance of a major weather event.

Schools may not necessarily close early because the weather is deteriorating while school is in session. It may be prudent and safer for students to remain in school during the peak of a storm.

Weather criteria taken into consideration when deciding a delay or closure include: snowfall; wind; visibility, temperature; and, road conditions.

Authorized zone administrators are provided weather forecasts from a contracted weather service and they can also consult with their student transportation staff or contractor, local municipalities or the Department of Transportation and Works.

The weather policy provides wind chill temperature thresholds at which schools will close. These are:

Grade	Temperature
K - 3	-45°C
K - 7	-50°C
K - Level III	-55°C

Occasionally, as with anyone making decisions dependent upon weather and a forecast, things can change quickly and the District attempts to make prudent decisions in the best interest of student and staff safety.



Weather Safety Reminders

As we all know, Newfoundland and Labrador weather is highly unpredictable and can cause challenges for families and schools. Here are some safety reminders to help everyone be prepared for our weather. **Parents and Guardians are in the best position to judge weather, road, and safety conditions for their children.**

- All students should be appropriately dressed for the season, particularly winter weather and changing conditions.
- Families should have alternate/back-up arrangements in place should an issue occur with student transportation, such as a delay caused by poor weather or road conditions.
- Families are reminded that in most circumstances, Kindergarten students must have an adult present for after-school drop off by the bus.

NL Schools

NL Schools is an entity of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador tasked with the education of all English-speaking students and K to 12 public schools in the province.

As of January 1, 2024, NL Schools includes:

- Over 63,000 students;
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- Over 250 schools, including five alternate sites; and
- Over 10,000 employees.

There are four NL Schools regional offices, located in:

Happy Valley-Goose Bay (1-709-896-2431)

Corner Brook (1-709-637-4000)

Gander (1-709-256-2547)

St. John's (1-709-256-2547)



February is Heart Month

Make time and take charge of
your heart health.



Recipients of the Safe, Caring and Inclusive Schools Special Initiatives Grants 2025-26

Bishop White School Port Rexton

The Learning Loft – A comfortable space for students to work together, fostering social-emotional learning through communication, cooperation, and respect for self and others.

Carbonear Collegiate Carbonear

Comfort Spaces – The school community will work collaboratively with the residential construction class to propose ideas for benches and other features that enhance the aesthetic appeal of both indoor and outdoor spaces.

Dunne Memorial Academy St. Mary's

Project Inner Peace: The Compass – A calm, inclusive space that supports emotional regulation and mindfulness, where students can de-escalate, refocus, and build self-awareness.

École Rocher-du-Nord St. John's

Différents mais Unis: Célébrons nos Diversités Different but United: Celebrating Our Differences – Through creative and collaborative activities, this project fosters an inclusive and respectful school environment by celebrating the unique identities and cultures within our French school community.

Elwood Elementary Deer Lake

The Kitchen Table -Inclusive outdoor play kitchen promoting communication, cooperation, and imaginative play, with visuals and sensory-friendly design to ensure all students can participate and thrive.

J.R. Smallwood Middle School
Wabush

Respect Checks -Recognizes and celebrates students who demonstrate positive behaviours that foster wellness, responsibility, and healthy relationships within the school community

Memorial Academy
Botwood

Sensory Support Spaces – Provides inclusive, calming environments that promote wellness, focus, and positive relationships for all students.

St. Mary's Elementary
St. John's

Strengthening Connections – Communication Boards will be installed in outdoor play areas to help all students communicate, connect, and engage in positive social interactions during play and learning.

St. Michael's Elementary
Stephenville Crossing

St. Michael's Craft Club – Offers students a creative space to learn new skills, practice mindfulness, and build

positive relationships through engaging activities like sewing, knitting, and beading.

Topsail Elementary
Conception Bay South

Connecting Voices through Communication Boards – The boards will be installed in outdoor play and learning areas to ensure students can express themselves and be understood, creating a sense of belonging for all.

William Mercer Academy
Dover

Indoor Buddy Area – Three benches to be constructed in key grade-level areas to create safe, welcoming spaces where students can connect socially throughout the school.

NLFSC congratulations the recipients for making their outstanding work in creating safer, more inclusive schools. We are so proud of you!



2026 Pink Shirt Day

Bullying can affect our schools, workplaces, homes, and online communities.

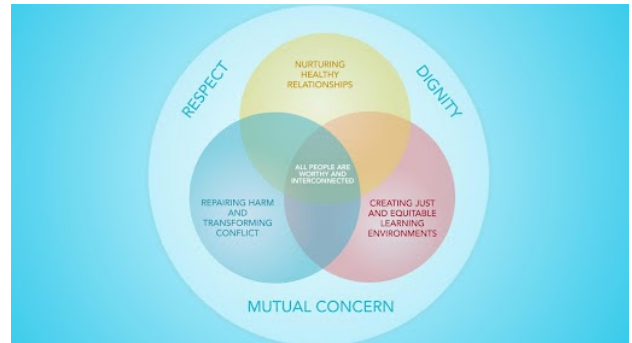
On February 25, the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (NLFSC) encourages everyone to wear pink. This simple act shows that we, as a community, stand together against bullying and will not tolerate it anywhere.

Pink Shirt Day began in Nova Scotia in 2007, when two Grade 12 students - David Shepherd and Travis Price - stood up to defend a young school mate. The students took a stand by wearing pink shirts to show solidarity, and handing out pink shirts to their classmates.

into a national campaign aimed at raising awareness about the power we all have to prevent bullying. In Newfoundland and Labrador, this day is used to highlight the harmful effects of bullying and to demonstrate that bullying of any kind will not be accepted. You can join the sea of pink! The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (NLFSC) invites you to take this opportunity to address the issue of bullying with your children or teens—

whether by wearing pink, planning an event or activity, or simply having a meaningful conversation.

Restorative Justice



Restorative justice in schools represents a transformative approach to discipline that focuses on repairing harm and rebuilding relationships rather than punishing students for misbehavior. This practice is based on principles of empathy, respect, and accountability, encouraging students to understand the impact of their actions, take responsibility, and actively participate in the healing process.

The goal of restorative justice is to “build community and repair relationships while supporting reflection, communication, and problem-solving skills for staff and students,” which can lead to more effective learning and teaching. It emphasizes dialogue and mutual agreement, involving all parties affected by a

conflict—including victims, offenders, and the wider school community—to address issues collaboratively.

By shifting from a punitive model to one that seeks to understand and resolve the root causes of behavior, schools implementing restorative justice report significant reductions in suspensions, improved student behavior, and better overall school climate. This approach not only helps in managing individual incidents of misconduct but also fosters a culture of care, respect, and community, essential for educational success and social development.

Since 2014, significant work has been made to re-imagine education delivery through a restorative justice lens in Newfoundland and Labrador by **Relationships First NL**. Many of the schools, with the support of the Department of Education, are engaged to varying degrees to help promote and implement restorative justice principles and practices. This includes NL Schools, Indigenous schools, independent schools, and the Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial.

To learn about Relationships First NL, and restorative justice in education, visit: www.rfnl.org

Prime Minister's Award Selection Committee

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (NLFSC) has been invited to

participate in the evaluation of nominations for the 2024 Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence. This prestigious award recognizes outstanding teaching in Canada and honors educators who make a significant difference in the lives of their students.

As part of the selection process, NLFSC will carefully review nominations to help identify teachers who demonstrate exceptional dedication, innovation, and impact in the classroom. This is an important opportunity to celebrate the outstanding contributions of educators in Newfoundland and Labrador and across the country.

The Educator is a benefit of membership in the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils.

The views expressed or implied in this publication are not necessarily official positions of the Federation.

The mention of any program, organization, resource, product, person, place, or school does not constitute an endorsement by NLFSC.

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