

The Educator

A newspaper for School Councils in Newfoundland and Labrador

Message from the NLFSC President



Hello Councils,

As we welcome the arrival of spring, we are reminded of the season's promise of growth, renewal, and new beginnings. Just as the world around us begins to bloom again, our schools continue to nurture the growth and potential of every student across our province.

Spring is a time when students are building on everything they have learned throughout the year. It is also a time when

encouragement, patience, and support from families, educators, and communities make an even greater difference. When we work together to support our schools, we help create environments where students feel confident, valued, and ready to succeed. Education is one of the strongest investments we can make in our future. By supporting our students today—through kindness, engagement, and advocacy—we help them develop the skills, curiosity, and resilience they will carry forward into their future .

The Federation of School Councils continues to advocate for the resources and supports our schools and students need to succeed. Strong partnerships between families, schools, communities, and government help ensure that every student has access to the opportunities and supports necessary for learning and well-being.

At the same time, we recognize the growing concern around behaviour issues in some schools and the disruption these challenges can bring to classrooms. Every child is entitled to an education and deserves the support they need to succeed. However, when disruptive behaviour significantly interrupts instruction, it can impact the learning environment for all students. Addressing these challenges requires appropriate resources, supports for educators and students, and collaborative efforts between families, schools, and communities. We are also concerned that some students are falling through educational cracks in the system, particularly when it comes to reading. Early literacy is a foundational skill that shapes a student's confidence and success throughout their educational journey. Ensuring that students receive timely assessment, intervention, and support in reading is critical so that no child is left behind.

On behalf of the Provincial School Council, I would like to thank our dedicated teachers, school staff, families, and community members who continue to champion

education and student well-being. Your commitment helps ensure that every learner has the opportunity to grow and thrive.

As the days grow longer and brighter, let us continue working together to support our students, strengthen our schools, and build a bright future for our children.

Happy Spring

Don

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Meetings

Some of the Provincial Committees NLFSC has attended:

- Next Steps for School Meals, led by Food First NL.
- Safe Schools Coalition
- Parents Advocacy Group for School Meals
- Premier's Awards for Excellence in Education
- Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence

NLFSC continues to support school councils and parents on a range of important issues, including mental health and addictions, bullying, school resources, the role of school councils, conflict resolution, and class size.

The organization also maintains a strong working relationship with the NL Teachers' Association. President Don Coombs regularly engages with the Minister and Deputy Minister of Education to discuss issues that arise throughout the year.

In addition, President Coombs has spoken with media outlets on topics such as school violence and school safety protocols.

NLFSC also continues to share information and collaborate with Home and School Associations in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. NLFSC received an invitation to attend an Annual General Meeting in PEI on April 18; however, due to financial constraints, the organization is unable to attend at this time.

School Council Handbook

On December 9, 2025, President Don Coombs and Executive Director Denise Pike met with Education Minister Paul Dinn and Deputy Minister Darrin Pike.

During the meeting, Don raised the issue of the revised school council handbook and emphasized the urgency of distributing it to council members. Many school councils continue to struggle with understanding their roles, and most have received little to no formal training.

Although the revisions to the handbook were finalized over 2 years ago, it has yet to be widely released. Department officials committed to checking on the current status of the handbook and providing a timeline for its release to schools.



NLFSC Requests Increase to Operational Budget

NLFSC has requested an increase to its operational budget to better support the work of school councils across the province. Currently, the federation receives \$40,000 annually from government—an amount that has proven insufficient to cover the essential expenses and initiatives required for NLFSC to function effectively.

So far this year, NLFSC responded to 331 emails and 287 phone calls from councils, parents, teachers, and administrators seeking guidance and support on issues affecting their schools and communities.

Many of these concerns are addressed directly by the federation, often resolving issues without escalation to the Department of Education or public attention.

This behind-the-scenes work underscores the vital role NLFSC plays in supporting schools and families across the province.

NLFSC is regularly invited to participate in provincial committees and initiatives, and government representatives consistently express that they value the federation's input and advice. However, this recognition is not reflected in our current level of funding.

Despite operating with limited resources, the federation continues to provide guidance, resources, and support to councils and families—often going above and beyond what its operational budget allows.

Additional funding is needed to operate the office and continue supporting parents and school councils. Without an increase, maintaining the current level of service and engagement will become increasingly difficult.

We are hopeful that an increase will be included in the upcoming provincial budget. Ultimately, it would enhance our ability to support school councils and build stronger, more connected school communities.



Understanding School Violence in Canada

School violence is a growing concern across Canada, affecting students, families, and educators alike. While Canadian schools are generally considered safe, incidents of violence—ranging from bullying and physical altercations to more serious threats—still occur and can have lasting impacts on young people.

Recent events, including the tragic shooting in Tumbler Ridge, British Columbia, have deeply shaken communities and sparked renewed conversations about school safety across the country.

On February 10, 2026, a mass shooting at Tumbler Ridge School and a nearby home resulted in multiple deaths and injuries,

leaving the small community and the nation in shock. The tragedy, one of the deadliest school-related incidents in Canada in decades, has highlighted the importance of safety, mental health supports, and early intervention.

School violence does not always involve extreme events like this. In many cases, it includes behaviors such as verbal harassment, social exclusion, cyberbullying, and physical fights. These experiences can create an environment where students feel unsafe, anxious, or unwilling to attend school. For some, repeated exposure to violence or aggression can affect their mental health, academic performance, and sense of belonging.

Several factors can contribute to school violence. These may include peer pressure, difficulty managing emotions, exposure to violence at home or online, and struggles with fitting in socially. In some cases, students who feel isolated or unsupported may act out as a way of coping with their emotions.

The impact of school violence extends beyond those directly involved. It can affect entire school communities by creating fear and disrupting learning environments.

Students who witness violence may also experience stress or anxiety, even if they are not directly targeted. In the wake of the Tumbler Ridge tragedy, many communities have reflected on how quickly a sense of safety can be shaken and how important it is to support students both emotionally and physically. Preventing school violence requires a shared effort between schools, families, and communities. Promoting respect, inclusion, and open communication is key.

Schools can support students by implementing anti-bullying programs, teaching conflict resolution skills, and ensuring that students feel heard and supported.

There is also increasing recognition of the need for accessible mental health resources and early intervention when students are struggling.

Parents and caregivers can help by encouraging open conversations, monitoring online activity, and reinforcing positive behavior. It is also important for students to know how to seek help. Reporting concerns to a trusted adult—such as a teacher, school counselor, or parent—can prevent situations from escalating.

While serious incidents remain rare, even smaller acts of violence can have significant effects. The events in Tumbler Ridge have reminded Canadians that school safety cannot be taken for granted. By working together to build safe, inclusive, and supportive environments, we can help ensure that all students feel secure and ready to learn.

School safety is not just about preventing harm—it is about fostering a sense of belonging, respect, and well-being for every student.

Talking to Young Children About School Safety—Without Causing Fear

Conversations about school safety can feel difficult, especially with young children.

Parents and caregivers want to keep kids informed and prepared, but also reassured and emotionally secure.

The key is to approach the topic in a calm, age-appropriate, and supportive way.

Start by keeping the conversation simple.

Young children do not need detailed explanations about serious incidents.

Instead, focus on the idea that schools are safe places and that there are adults whose job is to protect them.

Using clear, gentle language helps children understand without overwhelming them.

Reassurance is essential. Let children know that they are safe and that many people—teachers, principals, and parents—work together to keep schools secure. Avoid introducing unnecessary fears or “what if” scenarios. If children sense calm confidence from adults, they are more likely to feel secure themselves.

It can also help to frame safety in terms they already understand. For example, you might compare school safety rules to everyday rules like wearing a seatbelt or holding a hand when crossing the street. This helps

children see safety as something normal and protective, not something to be afraid of.

Encourage questions and listen carefully to their concerns. Children may hear things from classmates or media and become confused or worried. Give them space to talk, and answer honestly while keeping explanations age-appropriate. If you don't know an answer, it's okay to say so and reassure them that they are safe.

Teaching simple, practical actions can also build confidence. Remind them to listen to their teacher, follow school rules, and speak up if something feels wrong. Emphasize that there are always trusted adults they can go to for help.

Pay attention to emotional cues. Some children may not express fear directly but may show it through behavior, such as trouble sleeping or increased clinginess. Gentle reassurance and maintaining normal routines can help them feel more secure.

Finally, limit exposure to distressing news. Repeated or graphic coverage can increase anxiety in young children. Being mindful of what they see and hear allows you to control how and when these conversations happen.

Talking about school safety does not have to be frightening. With a calm and thoughtful approach, it can instead help children feel informed, protected, and confident in their everyday environment.



The Importance of Parents and School Educators Working Together

A strong partnership between parents and school educators plays a vital role in a child's success and well-being. When families and schools work together, they create a supportive and consistent environment that helps children feel secure, understood, and ready to learn.

Communication is at the heart of this partnership. Regular, open conversations between parents and teachers help ensure that everyone is aware of a child's strengths, challenges, and needs. Whether it is academic progress, social development, or

emotional well-being, sharing information allows for early support and more effective problem-solving.

Consistency is another key benefit. When children receive similar messages and expectations at home and at school, they are more likely to develop positive behaviors and strong habits. This includes everything from respect and responsibility to how they handle challenges and interact with others. Working together also strengthens a child's sense of belonging. When students see that the important adults in their lives are connected and supportive of one another, it builds confidence and trust. They are more likely to feel safe reaching out for help and more motivated to engage in their learning. This collaboration is especially important when addressing challenges such as social struggles, learning difficulties, or concerns about behavior. By working as a team, parents and educators can develop strategies that are consistent and supportive across environments, making it easier for the child to succeed.

In addition, a strong home-school connection contributes to safer school communities. Open communication makes it

easier to identify concerns early, support students' emotional needs, and promote respectful, inclusive environments where all children can thrive.

Simple actions can make a big difference—attending school events, responding to teacher communications, participating in meetings, and encouraging children's learning at home all help strengthen this partnership.

Ultimately, when parents and educators work together, they create a powerful support system. This shared commitment helps children grow not only academically, but also socially and emotionally, setting them up for long-term success.

Disruptive Students Affect the Whole Classroom

Disruptive and violent behaviour in schools affects more than just the students involved—it can have wide-reaching consequences for the entire classroom community. When such behaviour occurs, it can significantly impact the well-being, safety, and learning experience of other students.

One of the most immediate effects is on learning. Frequent interruptions, loud outbursts, or aggressive behaviour reduces valuable time and makes it harder for students to concentrate.

Teachers often need to pause instruction to manage behaviour, repeat material, or redirect attention. Over time, this can slow progress for the entire class and make it harder for students to stay focused and engaged. Students who are normally attentive may lose focus and fall behind academically. They may also feel anxious about speaking up or participating in class.

The emotional impact on some students is also significant. Witnessing aggression or ongoing disruptions can create stress, fear, or a sense of insecurity among peers. Some students may feel unsafe or worry that they could become targets themselves. Even indirect exposure—like hearing threats, witnessing verbal arguments, or seeing bullying—can increase anxiety and negatively affect mental health.

Students may feel resentment toward their disruptive peers and develop negative perceptions of school as a safe and

supportive place. Over time, this can erode trust and the sense of belonging that is critical for a positive school environment.



The Pressure on Teachers Managing Disruptive Students

The pressure of managing disruptive students is one of the most significant challenges facing educators today.

Across Canada, teachers report high levels of stress and burnout, with many feeling overwhelmed by the sheer volume of responsibilities in the classroom. Managing behaviour, delivering lessons, meeting curriculum goals, supporting students' emotional and social needs, and documenting progress can create a workload that is difficult to sustain over time.

Persistent disruptions can intensify these pressures. Teachers may spend substantial

portions of class time addressing behaviour instead of teaching, repeating instructions, or redirecting students. Over time, this can lead to frustration, fatigue, and even feelings of professional inadequacy, as educators struggle to meet the diverse needs of all students simultaneously.

Parental involvement—or lack thereof—can further complicate the situation. Some parents are unsupportive, critical, or resistant to following school policies, which can make it harder for teachers to enforce rules consistently. In other cases, parents may have unrealistic expectations or demand immediate solutions for behavioural issues, putting additional strain on educators. These dynamics can create tension and erode the collaborative relationship that is essential for effectively supporting students.

The cumulative effect of these pressures has led to alarming rates of teacher burnout in Canada. Many educators report exhaustion, emotional stress, and even mental health challenges as they attempt to maintain a positive and productive learning environment. This burnout not only affects teachers' well-being but can also impact

student outcomes, as stressed teachers may have less energy and focus to dedicate to instruction and support.

Supporting teachers requires a multi-faceted approach. Adequate resources, professional development in behaviour management, mental health support, strong school leadership, and smaller class sizes are all critical. Smaller class sizes allow educators to provide more individualized attention, better manage classroom behaviour, and build stronger relationships with students.

Equally important is fostering collaboration between parents and educators, ensuring consistent expectations and support for students both at home and at school. By addressing these pressures, schools can help teachers sustain their effectiveness, maintain classroom stability, and create a positive environment where all students can learn and thrive.

Feeling accepted by peers is a major part of growing up. For teens and preteens, fitting in is not just about social status—it plays an important role in their confidence, emotional

well-being, and overall development. Many young people struggle with this at some point. It is common for teens to feel unsure of where they belong, to worry about being judged, or to experience periods of loneliness or exclusion as they navigate changing social groups and expectations. When young people feel included, it helps build self-esteem and a sense of identity. They begin to see themselves as valued and capable, which can positively influence their behavior, motivation, and relationships.

Social connections also give teens and preteens the opportunity to develop important life skills. Through friendships, they learn how to communicate, listen, resolve conflicts, and understand others.

Parents and caregivers play a key role in supporting this process. Encouraging involvement in activities such as sports, clubs, arts, or community groups can help young people connect with peers who share similar interests. These environments often make it easier to form friendships naturally.

Why It's Important to Help Children Fit In

1. Builds Self-Esteem

When young people feel accepted, it reinforces that they are valued and likable. On the other hand, repeated exclusion can lead to self-doubt and low confidence that may carry into adulthood.

2. Supports Mental Health

A sense of belonging is strongly tied to emotional well-being. Teens who feel isolated are more at risk for:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Loneliness

Having even one or two good peer connections can act as a protective factor.

3. Develops Social Skills

Preteens and teens are still learning how to:

- Communicate effectively
- Read social cues
- Resolve conflicts
- Build and maintain friendships

Fitting in gives them real-life practice with these skills.

4. Encourages Identity Formation

These years are when young people figure out who they are. Positive peer groups can:

- Help them explore interests and values
- Reinforce healthy behaviors
- Give them a sense of identity and belonging

Without that, they may feel lost or unsure of themselves.

5. Improves School Experience

Feeling socially connected often leads to:

- Better engagement in school
- More participation in activities
- Greater motivation and attendance

When kids feel like they “belong,” school becomes a safer and more enjoyable place.

Encourage Belonging, Not Conformity

Make it clear they don't need to change who they are to be accepted. The goal is to find the *right* group, not just *any* group.

Guide them toward environments where friendships happen naturally:

- Clubs, teams, arts, gaming, volunteering, and involvement in community groups or youth programs

Shared interests make connecting easier.

Teach Social Confidence

You can support them by:

- Practicing simple conversation starters
- Talking about body language and tone
- Encouraging small steps (like saying hello or joining a group)

Be Emotionally Available

Let them talk about their experiences without fear of judgment.

- Listen calmly
- Validate their feelings
- Avoid minimizing their struggles

Feeling understood at home helps them cope outside of it.

Guide Them Through Challenges

If they're being left out or struggling:

- Help them problem-solve instead of fixing everything
- Role-play difficult situations
- Reinforce resilience and coping skills

Watch for Warning Signs

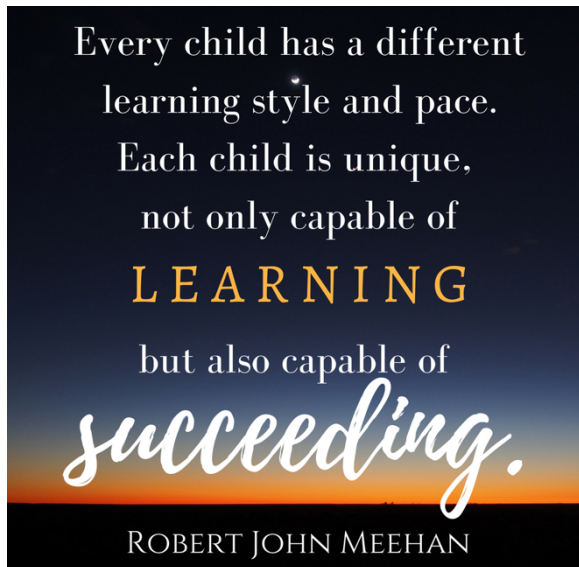
Step in more actively if you notice:

- Withdrawal or isolation
- Sudden mood changes
- Avoidance of school or peers

Extra support (like a school counselor) can make a big difference.

Helping teens and preteens fit in isn't about making them "blend in"—it's about helping them feel accepted, confident, and connected while staying true to themselves.

Those experiences shape how they see relationships, handle challenges, and value themselves for years to come.



2026 Volunteer Week

“Ignite Volunteerism” in Newfoundland and Labrador!

National Volunteer Week is April 19 to 25, 2026. The week, hosted by the Community Sector Council of NL, is set aside each year to recognize and thank volunteers for the time and energy they contribute to causes that benefit our communities. It is also an opportunity to promote the benefits of volunteering to individuals and society.

Over 210,000 individuals in Newfoundland and Labrador volunteer an average of 161 hours per year with 3,400 incorporated non-profits and 3000 plus informal community groups.

Each act of volunteering, whether a spark or a steady flame, helps ignite something larger than itself. In this International Year of the Volunteer, we celebrate how those sparks catch, spreading from person to person, community to community, until they become a powerful, shared fire of purpose.

Here in Newfoundland and Labrador, that spirit feels as natural as the salt air. Like lanterns lit along a rugged shoreline or signals passed between boats at dawn, one volunteer’s effort calls out to another. Momentum builds not just in waves, but in warmth, in connection, in the quiet certainty that people look out for one another.

When we ignite volunteerism, the impact travels far beyond the moment. It strengthens well-being, deepens social ties, and fortifies communities against whatever weather comes next. What begins as a single spark becomes something enduring, a living current of care and resilience carried forward by each new generation.



During Volunteer Week, we want to take a moment to extend our heartfelt thanks to our school council members. Your dedication, time, and commitment make a meaningful difference in the lives of our students, families, and staff.

From supporting school programs to helping plan events, providing valuable input on policies, and fostering a strong sense of community, your efforts are deeply

appreciated. Your volunteer work helps create a positive, welcoming, and enriching environment where students can thrive.

We recognize that your contributions often go above and beyond, and Volunteer Week is the perfect opportunity to celebrate your hard work. **Thank you** for your ongoing support, collaboration, and the countless ways you help make our schools a better place for everyone.

2026-27 Kindergarten Registration

Online Registration for Kinderstart (2026) and Kindergarten for September 2027 will begin in May (2026) for both the English and Early French Immersion programs.

This registration process is for children who will attend KinderStart in the upcoming 2026 / 2027 school year and Kindergarten in the following 2027 / 2028 school year.

Children must be five (5) years of age on or before December 31, 2027 in order to register.

Children registered in KinderStart will automatically be registered to attend Kindergarten.

Registration Dates:

Starting **Monday, May 11, 2026 @ 9:00 AM** and ending on **Tuesday, May 12, 2026 @ 11:59 PM** for Families of Schools 1-6 (formerly Central, Western and Labrador regions); and Starting **Wednesday, May 13, 2026 @ 9:00 AM** and ending on **Thursday, May 14, 2026 @ 11:59 PM** for Families of Schools 7-10 (formerly Avalon Region, including the St. John's Metro area)

To complete the registration process, proof of address and confirmation of MCP number must be provided to the school on or before **May 30, 2026**.

Early French Immersion

French Immersion is a program designed for non-francophone children. Parents/guardians interested in registering a child for the French Immersion Kindergarten Program must select their zoned school. If Early French Immersion is not offered in the zoned school, parents/guardians must select the school closest to their place of residence that offers Early French Immersion (EFI).

Early French Immersion Kindergarten registration takes place on a **first-come first served basis for a limited number of seats**. This applies to all areas of the province however, it is dependent on the number of families who have registered.

Applications will be dated and time-stamped upon submission of the online application form. All students are entitled to a program in English so if your child is waitlisted for EFI at a school that is not your zoned school, space will be held at the school within your zone for the English program.

Parents/guardians will be provided with further information once class lists for EFI are finalized in September.

If you have any questions regarding the KinderStart/Kindergarten program and registration process and details, please contact your zoned school administrator for assistance.

Kindergarten

Kindergarten is a non-mandatory in Newfoundland and Labrador and is offered as a full day program in public schools throughout the province. There is a class size limit of 20 students for Kindergarten. A child must start school in a year when he/she is six years of age on December 31.

Kinderstart: Frequently Asked Questions

1. When should I register my child for KinderStart?

Registration for KinderStart is automatic when parents/caregivers register their child for Kindergarten at their designated school. Registration takes place in the calendar year a child becomes four years of age. Parents/caregivers should watch their local newspapers and school newsletters for more details regarding Kindergarten registration in their area.

2. How do I register my child for KinderStart?

Registration for KinderStart is automatic when parents/caregivers register their child for Kindergarten at their designated school.

3. What does my child need to know before going to school?

Children arrive at KinderStart at different stages of development and with a multitude of embracing, experiencing new things and promoting independence will have given their child the necessary skills for school.

4. My child has a disability. Is there anything I should know before registering him/her for KinderStart?

Should a parent have a child with a disability entering school and the child already has an ISSP, a transition meeting with members of the school attending should happen prior to registration for KinderStart. The child may need additional support such as student assistant, itinerant or special education.

If the child does not have an ISSP the parent may initiate the process by contacting the school where the child will be registered and begin the collaboration process.



\$10-a-Day Child Care Extended Through 2026–27

The \$10-a-day child care will continue through the 2026–27 fiscal year.

To support the program’s success, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will establish a steering committee to recommend improvements for early childhood educators. These recommendations will focus on enhancing benefits and working conditions to help recruit new educators and retain those already in the workforce.

The Early Childhood Educator Steering Committee, requested by the sector, will include representatives from educator groups across the province, as well as the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador. The committee will help inform updates to the wage grid and workforce policies, contribute to the development of a benefits

implementation plan, and identify current workforce challenges along with potential solutions. As part of its work, the committee will also conduct consultations.

Individuals interested in being part of the steering committee can contact

educommunityrelations@gov.nl.ca.

This initiative builds on recent investments in the sector, including increased meal rates per child to reflect rising food and grocery costs, and the introduction of the Early Learning Gateway. The Gateway helps connect families on waitlists with available child care spaces while reducing administrative workload for providers.

Additionally, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will launch an early childhood educator portal within the Early Learning Gateway, providing professionals with up-to-date information related to the field.



Congratulations to all graduates across Newfoundland and Labrador!

On behalf of the executive and members of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils, we celebrate your remarkable achievement. Completing your studies reflect your dedication, perseverance, and hard work—and it is a milestone worth savoring.

We also want to extend our sincere gratitude to the teachers who have guided, challenged, and inspired you along the way. Your passion and commitment have made a lasting impact on these graduates' lives.

To the parents and families who have stood behind these students—cheering them on, supporting them through challenges, and celebrating their successes—thank you. Your encouragement and unwavering support

have been a cornerstone of their achievements.

Education is the key to unlocking your potential. Continue to embrace learning as a lifelong journey, and you will graduate not only from school, but from life itself with confidence and success.

We are immensely proud of every graduate and look forward to seeing the incredible contributions you will make to your communities and the world.



Join the Fight!

April is Daffodil Month – The Canadian Cancer Society's national fundraising campaign to raise funds for the fight against cancer. During April, Society volunteers raise vital funds for the fight against cancer. Money raised during Daffodil Month helps local patients living with cancer and their families. Donations fund life-saving research, support services and other important work that means fewer Canadians will be touched by the disease.

Newfoundland and Labrador Advances

Bill 1 for Disability Advocacy

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is taking steps to better support people with disabilities by moving Bill 1, the Disability Advocate Act, forward in the House of Assembly.

This bill would create a new, independent Office of the Disability Advocate. This office would help protect the rights and interests of people with disabilities.

The bill was shaped by feedback from disability organizations, following the principle “Nothing About Us Without Us.”

The Disability Advocate would support individuals and families by:

- Looking into issues affecting people with disabilities
- Reviewing and analyzing services
- Investigating concerns
- Making recommendations to improve access to services

The advocate would be appointed through a public, merit-based process and approved by the House of Assembly.

To qualify for the role, the person must:

- Have a disability, **or**

- Be a parent, caregiver, or guardian of someone with a disability, or
- Have experience working with people with disabilities or related organization.

Administrative Professionals Day – Honoring School Secretaries

Observed on the Wednesday of the last full week of April, Administrative Professionals Day celebrates the essential work of administrative staff. In schools, this day is especially meaningful for recognizing school secretaries—the backbone of daily operations.

School secretaries are often the first point of contact for parents, students, and visitors. They manage calls, emails, and sensitive situations with professionalism, while keeping the school organized, welcoming, and running smoothly.

The NLFSC sincerely thanks its school secretaries for their dedication and the vital role they play in supporting the entire school community.



The 2026 World Autism Awareness/Acceptance Day

The 2026 observance of World Autism Awareness Day (WAAD) will take place on Thursday, April 2—a moment for the world to come together in recognition, reflection, and renewed commitment. Guided by the theme **“Autism and Humanity – Every Life Has Value,”** this year’s observance celebrates the richness of human diversity and affirms that every autistic person is an essential and valued part of our shared future.

In a time when misunderstanding and harmful narratives can still take hold, this

global observance rises as a powerful call to action: to listen more deeply, to include more fully, and to champion a world where autistic people are not merely accepted, but respected, empowered, and celebrated. It invites each of us to move beyond stereotypes and to embrace a vision of humanity grounded in dignity, equality, and belonging.

Established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, World Autism Awareness/Acceptance Day continues to shine a global light—one that inspires hope, advances understanding, and reminds us that true progress is measured by how we value and uplift every human life.





World Autism Awareness & Acceptance Month

Observed throughout the month of April, World Autism Awareness/Acceptance Month is a time for reflection, recognition, and renewed commitment to inclusion. It celebrates the richness of neurodiversity and affirms the dignity, rights, and inherent worth of autistic individuals as part of our shared human community.

The 2026 theme, **Celebrate Differences**, calls on us to move beyond awareness toward meaningful action—fostering understanding, challenging stereotypes, and building societies where autistic people are fully included, respected, and empowered. It is an invitation to embrace differences not as barriers, but as strengths that enrich our collective future.

Together, it reminds us that true inclusion is not simply about acceptance, but about ensuring that every autistic person has the opportunity to belong, to contribute, and to thrive.

Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder: 2026 Perspectives

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a complex neurodevelopmental condition that shapes how individuals communicate, interact socially, and experience the world around them. The term “spectrum” reflects the wide range of characteristics, strengths, and support needs among autistic individuals—recognizing that no two people experience autism in the same way.

Common Characteristics and Traits

Autistic individuals may display a variety of behaviors and patterns, including:

- Repetitive movements such as hand flapping, rocking, or spinning (often referred to as *stimming*)

- Intense focus on specific interests or particular aspects of objects
- A preference for routines and challenges with unexpected changes
- Echolalia, which involves repeating words or phrases
- Unique sensory experiences, including heightened or reduced sensitivity to sounds, textures, tastes, or visual stimuli
- Differences in social communication and interpreting non-verbal cues
- Masking or camouflaging autistic traits in social settings, particularly common among girls and women
- Recognizing autistic individuals as complex people with unique strengths and perspectives
- Creating environments where neurodiversity is celebrated, not merely tolerated
- Removing barriers to full participation in education, employment, healthcare, and community life
- Listening to and amplifying autistic voices, centering self-advocacy
- Supporting different ways of communicating, self-expression, and sensory regulation
- Understanding autism as a natural variation in human neurology rather than something to be “fixed”

The Acceptance and Neurodiversity-Affirming Movement

Autism acceptance goes beyond awareness by emphasizing respect, inclusion, and the value of neurodiversity. This approach promotes:

This evolving perspective makes 2026 especially meaningful, as more communities embrace acceptance, inclusion, and the idea that differences are an essential part of our shared humanity.



Celebrating Differences

NLFSC and School Councils embrace and support the themes for Autism Awareness & Acceptance Day and Month because it calls us to go beyond simply acknowledging that autistic people exist. It challenges us to actively recognize and value the unique qualities, perspectives, and strengths that autistic individuals bring to their families, schools, workplaces, and communities.

Consider this: autistic people often experience and interpret the world in ways others may overlook. They bring deep focus, creative problem-solving, strong pattern recognition, honesty, and a remarkable

passion for their interests. “Celebrate Differences” is not about minimizing the real challenges associated with autism—it is about refusing to define anyone solely by those challenges.

How to Observe World Autism Awareness Day

- Wear autism acceptance apparel. Even a simple t-shirt with a message can spark meaningful conversations at school, work, or in everyday settings.
- Share information on promoting inclusion on social media.
- Attend or organize a school or community event. Many schools and organizations host activities on or around April 2.
- Start a conversation. Use the day as an opportunity to talk with students, colleagues, friends, and families about autism with openness and respect.
- Support the community. Engage with neurodivergent-friendly initiatives, support autistic-led organizations, or volunteer your time.

Start Conversations That Last Beyond April

This is one of the most important steps. Autism acceptance should not be limited to a single month. NLFSC and School Councils encourage everyone to use the momentum of April to build habits that continue throughout the year.

Continue learning from neurodivergent voices. Share inclusive stories with students. Keep conversations about neurodiversity ongoing in classrooms and communities. Support inclusion through your actions, your voice, and your choices—every month.

April is the starting line, not the finish.



Support Program

Applications are now open for the Community Garden Support Program.

Eligible municipalities, schools and community groups can avail of nearly \$133,000 in non-repayable grants to help boost food self-sufficiency and access to fresh foods. Under the program, up to \$750 will go to each eligible applicant and is limited to one grant per garden location. There is no deadline to apply, however, applications will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis. For more information email CGSP@gov.nl.ca.

*It's all about growing more of what we eat
and eating more of what we grow.*



Earth Day 2026

Earth Day on April 22, 2026, is a reminder of our shared responsibility to protect the planet. In Canada, our forests, coastlines, and natural resources make that responsibility especially meaningful. By taking part in Earth Day activities, you help preserve these landscapes for future generations.

You don't need major lifestyle changes to make a difference. Small, intentional actions—like joining local cleanup initiatives or adopting simple daily habits—can have a lasting impact.

With its vast freshwater and forests, Canada plays an important global role.

As the country works toward reducing emissions by 2030, communities nationwide

are stepping up—and you can be part of that momentum.

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

Annual membership dues are based on school enrollment. Individual subscriptions are available at \$15 per year.

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