The Cuffer

A Newspaper for School Councils in Newfoundland and Labrador

Fall 2026



Message from the NLFSC President



Welcome to a New School Year

As we begin a new school year, there is a sense of excitement and anticipation throughout our schools. Classrooms are once again filled with students, families are settling back into routines, and teachers, administrators and school staff are preparing for another year of learning, growth and opportunity.

On behalf of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils, I want to welcome students, parents and guardians, teachers, administrators, support staff and all members of our school communities to a new school year.

A new school year also provides an opportunity to look at what we can do together to make our schools stronger, safer and more supportive places for everyone. School Councils can have a role in achieving this goal.

NLFSC is pleased to see the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and Education Minister Paul Dinn placing a focus on school councils and providing opportunities for school council members to access training and professional development.

The need for annual training for school councils has been an item on the agenda of the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils for a very long time, and we have raised this issue with numerous Ministers of Education over the years. We believe that providing school councils with the information, resources and training they need is an important part of strengthening parent engagement and ensuring that councils can effectively carry out their role within their school communities.

We are therefore pleased to see virtual online training opportunities being offered this fall by Patricia Emberley, (Program Development Specialist for School Development and School Councils, Evaluation and Research Division, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development).

The scheduled sessions are: Thursday, October 15 — 6:30–7:30 p.m.
Tuesday, October 20 — 6:30–7:30 p.m.
Wednesday, October 28 — 6:00–7:00 p.m.
Tuesday, November 3 — 6:00–7:00 p.m.

These sessions provide an excellent opportunity for school council members to learn more about their role, ask questions and gain information that can help them become more effective advocates for students, families and their school communities.

We encourage school council members, both new and experienced, to take advantage of these training opportunities.

I also encourage parents to get involved with their school council. If you are already involved, invite another parent to join you. If you are not currently involved, consider attending a meeting and finding out how you can contribute. School councils are an important part of our education system. They provide parents and guardians with a voice and an opportunity to work alongside school administrators, teachers and staff to strengthen their school community.

You do not have to be an education expert to participate. You simply need to care about your children and their school. Whether you attend a meeting, volunteer at an event,

share an idea or support a school initiative, your involvement makes a difference.
School councils create a valuable connection between home and school. They provide a place for parents to raise concerns, ask questions, share ideas and celebrate the successes taking place within their schools.

I feel one of the most important issues facing our schools today is safety.
Violence and aggression in schools is increasing, and many students, parents, teachers, administrators and school staff are concerned and, in some cases, feel unsafe.
This is not something we can ignore.
The NLFSC is proud to be part of the Provincial School Safety Coalition, working alongside government departments, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Union, police services, social development organizations and other community partners.
The Coalition recognizes that school safety is complex. There is no single solution, and no one organization can address these challenges alone.
Government has a responsibility to provide the resources, supports and policies needed to keep schools safe. School administrators and staff have an important role in creating safe and supportive learning environments.
Parents have a responsibility to work collaboratively with schools and to model respectful behaviour. Students also need to understand that their actions and words have an impact on others.
School safety is about more than preventing physical violence. It is about creating environments where students feel safe to learn, teachers feel safe to teach, and school staff feel safe doing their jobs.
It means addressing bullying, intimidation, harassment, aggression and violence — whether they occur in the school, online or within the broader community.
It also means ensuring that students with complex needs receive the appropriate support before situations reach a crisis point.

The NLFSC will continue to bring the voice of parents and school councils to the Provincial School Safety Coalition. We believe parents must be part of the conversation and part of the solution.
We may not always agree on every issue, but we share a common goal: we want our children to be safe, supported and successful.
As parents, we can make a difference by staying involved, supporting our schools,

communicating respectfully and working with educators and administrators when concerns arise.

As members of our school communities, we can choose to build each other up rather than tear each other down.

And as a province, we must continue to work together to address the challenges facing our schools and ensure that the people who learn and work in them have the support they need.

As we continue to move into this school year, I encourage every parent to get involved, join your school council, make your voice heard and be part of creating a stronger school community.

School safety is everyone's responsibility. We all have a part to play.

The NLFSC looks forward to working with school councils, parents, educators, government and community partners throughout the coming year.

Let's make this a safe, positive and successful school year for everyone.

Don Coombs
President
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils









School councils are mandated organizations composed of parents, teachers, community members, and students (high school level) that facilitate parental participation in our schools.

Sections 25 and 26 of the Schools Act, 1997, provides the legislative authority.

A school council's effectiveness depends, to a large extent, on how it develops and utilizes the capabilities of its members.

Social Media Can Make a Difficult Situation Worse

Social media has become an important part of how parents connect, share information and support one another. Private Facebook groups can be valuable spaces for parents to ask questions, share reminders, discuss school activities and help one another navigate the school year.

But there is another side that deserves attention.

Increasingly, private parent groups are becoming places where teachers, administrators and other school staff are criticized, blamed and, in some cases, personally attacked. Concerns that may have been resolved through a simple conversation are instead being posted online, often before the teacher, administrator or school has even had an opportunity to understand or respond to the situation.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (NLFSC) has seen an increase in situations where educators and school staff are being discussed negatively in private social media groups. What may begin as one parent expressing frustration can quickly become a much larger conversation, with assumptions, one-sided information and personal opinions being repeated as fact.

The NLFSC believes parents have every right to raise concerns. In fact, parents should raise concerns when warranted, but how those concerns are raised matters.

A social media post should not replace a conversation with the person involved. It should not become a trial by public opinion. And it should never become an excuse to bully, harass or publicly shame someone who works every day to support our children.

This is not about protecting teachers from accountability. It is about ensuring concerns are addressed fairly, respectfully and through the appropriate channels — while recognizing that teachers, administrators and school staff are people too.

For teachers and administrators, being criticized online can be particularly difficult. School staff often cannot respond publicly because of their professional responsibilities

and their obligation to protect the privacy and confidentiality of students and families. They may see comments about themselves circulating online but be unable to provide the full story or correct inaccurate information.

What may seem like a simple Facebook post can quickly become something much larger. One negative comment can lead to others, with assumptions and accusations building until a situation becomes personal. Teachers and administrators can be left feeling helpless, defeated, embarrassed or heartbroken — particularly when they know they cannot publicly defend themselves, but the impact does not stop with the individual being discussed.

When negative or inaccurate conversations take hold online, they can affect relationships between parents and educators, create tension within school communities and make it more difficult for everyone to work together in the best interests of students.

Students are ultimately at the centre of these relationships. When trust and respect between families and school staff are weakened, the effects can reach the entire school environment. It can create division, increase stress and make it more difficult to build the positive partnerships that children and youth need to feel supported, included and safe.

Parents, teachers, administrators and school staff may have different perspectives, but they share a common goal: supporting students and helping them succeed. That requires open communication, mutual respect and a willingness to have difficult conversations directly and constructively.

The NLFSC encourages parents to pause before posting, consider the potential impact of their words and, whenever possible, bring concerns to the appropriate person or school so they can be addressed fairly. A private social media group may feel like a safe place to vent, but once something is posted, the impact can extend far beyond the original concern.

Creating healthy school communities is a shared responsibility. How we communicate about one another matters — not only for teachers and school staff, but for parents, students and the entire school community. When we choose respectful dialogue over online criticism, we create stronger relationships, safer schools and better environments for everyone.

Remember Who Is Listening

Adults sometimes forget that children are listening.
Students hear what adults say about their teachers and school staff. They notice how adults respond when they are frustrated, disappointed or upset. Negative comments about teachers and school staff can shape how students view those individuals and can influence relationships within the classroom and school community.
If we want children to treat others with respect, we have to model that behaviour ourselves.

Disagreements are a normal part of life. So are mistakes. What matters is how we handle them.
"Private" Doesn't Always Mean Private
A private Facebook group may feel like a safe place to vent, but private does not necessarily mean confidential.
Posts and comments can be screenshotted, copied or shared outside the group.
Something that feels like a private conversation can quickly make its way to the person being discussed, their colleagues, the school or the broader community.
Personal attacks and accusations can cause significant emotional and professional harm.

In some circumstances, statements made online may also have legal consequences.
Before posting about a teacher, administrator or school staff member, take a moment to consider:

Would I be comfortable saying this directly to that person?
If the answer is no, it may be worth stepping away from the keyboard and having a conversation instead.

Teachers Are Human Too

The NLFSC recognizes that the vast majority of parents and school council members are supportive of teachers and school staff. However, even a small number of negative voices can have a significant impact.

Teachers and school staff work hard every day. They support students, navigate challenges, communicate with families and often go above and beyond what is expected of them.

Online criticism and personal attacks can affect morale, confidence and overall well-being. They can also contribute to people questioning whether they want to remain in a profession that increasingly exposes them to public criticism.

Teachers are not perfect. Neither are parents, administrators or students.

When something goes wrong, accountability matters. But accountability should also include an opportunity to explain what happened, listen to one another, acknowledge mistakes and work toward a resolution.

Talk Before You Post

The NLFSC encourages parents to speak with teachers and administrators before turning to social media.

Give the person involved an opportunity to explain. There may be information you do not have. There may be a misunderstanding that can be cleared up. There may have been a mistake that can be acknowledged and addressed.

A conversation can often accomplish more than a Facebook post ever will.

Parents, teachers, administrators and school staff share a common goal: what is best for students.

That common goal should be the starting point when concerns arise.

How we speak about the people who work in our schools matters.

Before posting, pause.

Before assuming, ask questions.

Before criticizing someone online, have the conversation.

Put down the phone. Pick up the phone. Talk to each other.

Parent Facebook groups can be a valuable resource for school communities. Let’s use them to support our schools, share information, exchange information constructively and build stronger

relationships — not to tear down the people who work in them.

Our children are watching, listening and learning from how we handle disagreement. Let's make sure we're modelling the kind of community we want for them.

Replacement of Automated External Defibrillators at Schools

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is replacing outdated automated external defibrillators (AEDs) in schools across the province, helping ensure school communities are prepared to respond if a student, staff member, or visitor experiences a cardiac arrest.

Approximately $250,000 is being allocated to replace outdated AEDs and defibrillator pads, ensuring schools have access to current, reliable equipment when it is needed most. It's estimated that more than 100 AEDs are at or nearing the end of their operational life and require replacement.

A cardiac arrest is a life-threatening emergency that occurs when the heart suddenly stops beating. AEDs can deliver an electrical shock to help restore the heart's normal rhythm. When used along with calling 9-1-1 and performing CPR, an AED can significantly increase a person's chance of survival. Having accessible, up-to-date AEDs in schools is an important part of creating safer, better-prepared school communities.

Holiday Schedule 2026-27

- September 30 - National Day for Truth and Reconciliation
- October 12 - Thanksgiving Day
- November 11 - Remembrance Day
- December 22 - Last Day - Christmas
- January 4 - School Reopens
- March 25 - Last Day - Easter
- April 5 - School Reopens
- May 24 - Victoria Day
- June 24 - Last Day - Summer
- June 25 - Administration Day

Kids Eat Smart Funding

The Provincial Government is continuing its support for children and families across Newfoundland and Labrador with approximately $1.4 million in funding for the Kids Eat Smart Foundation Newfoundland and Labrador. The funding will help ensure students have access to healthy and nutritious breakfasts at school at no cost to their families.

With 275 Kids Eat Smart Clubs operating in schools and community centres across the province, the foundation provides approximately 47,000 breakfast meals every school day—more than 6.3 million meals each school year. This important investment, combined with the dedication of volunteers, school staff, community partners, and supporters, helps ensure children begin their day with a nutritious meal and are ready to learn, participate, and succeed

Universal Screening Supports for Students

The Provincial Government is introducing universal screening for the 2026-27 school year to help identify and assist students who may require additional learning support. Universal screening refers to evidence-based assessments used to identify students who require additional support. The screening process will be introduced for kindergarten and Grade 1 students using Acadience Reading and Acadience Reading Français screeners. These assessments are designed to measure early literacy skills and include six measures that assess the foundational skills students need to become better readers.

The screening will provide educators with additional information to better understand learning needs earlier in the learning process.

Universal mathematics screening tools will also be introduced for Grade 1 and Grade 2 students in both French and English. These assessments are designed to help educators better understand students' foundational mathematics skills and identify early indicators of learning challenges.

The changes reflect the department's commitment to strengthening student learning and providing educators with the tools needed to support diverse student learning needs.

Canada's Outstanding Principal

Do you have an outstanding Principal at your school? If so, show your appreciation to your principal for all their hard work by nominating them for Canada's Outstanding Principal Award.
This award recognizes the unique and crucial contribution of Principals in publicly funded schools.
Visit www.thelearningpartnership.ca for more information

Are You New to a School Council?

Welcome and thank you for getting involved in your education community in this way! We hope you enjoy your term.

One of the most important functions of school councils is to advise on the quality of the teaching and learning in the school. School councils are also responsible for advising the board on matters of concern to the school and to the school community.

School councils promote transparency as council actions and decisions are communicated to the school community through their meeting.

A school council is a means to facilitate communication and cooperation between home and school.
The principal is responsible for the direct management of the school and, therefore, has responsibility for the development and implementation of school-based policies.

School councils act in an advisory capacity whereby they advise on how to implement such
policies. This advisory role provides school councils and the school community the opportunity to improve the teaching and learning environment of the school.
If this is your first year on a council be sure to locate a copy of the School Council Handbook, or download it at:
www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/publictions/k12/Handbo
ok2ndedition.pdf

This document is an invaluable resource in assisting school council members to understand their roles and responsibilities.

Vehicle Idling on School Property in NL English School District Policy Directives:

1. The District shall deploy “Idle Free” signage posted in a visible location on District property to alert drivers that engines should be turned off when a vehicle is on District property.
2. All Division Directors who have staff or contracted individuals/entities accessing District property on a regular basis are to communicate idle free policy requirements and to ensure they are aware of this policy.

3. School Administrators shall ensure all parents/guardians/students receive notice of

this policy at the beginning of each school year.



A conviction for failure to stop for a school bus with lights flashing, stop arm extended, is a $500-$1200 fine and six demerit points.

To report an Emergency or a Bus Service Delay, please call:

- Labrador Region
  Tel: (709) 896-6025 (Includes all of Labrador)
- Western Region
  Tel: (709) 637-4040 (Ranges from Northern Peninsula to Southwest Coast to the Baie Verte Peninsula)
- Central Region
  Tel: (709) 256-2547 Ext. 238
  (Ranges from Badger to Arnold's Cove, including Bonavista and Burin Peninsulas)
- Avalon Region
  Tel: (709) 729-8200 (All the Avalon Peninsula)

Skilled Trades Opportunities for High School Students

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is increasing the number of opportunities for skilled trades education in high schools for the 2026-27 school year, which will provide more students with exposure to strong career pathways in skilled trades.

The expansion creates additional hours of teaching time ranging between 6.25 hours and 12.5 hours per week. The increase allows more flexibility for students to add skilled trades courses when enrolling in courses for the school year.

Skilled trades courses are being increased in 21 schools throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. They are:

- Elwood Regional High in Deer Lake
- Corner Brook Regional High
- Discovery Collegiate in Bonavista
- Stephenville High in Stephenville
- Lewisporte Collegiate in Lewisporte
- Lakewood Academy in Glenwood
- Jane Collins Academy in Hare Bay
- Glovertown Academy in Glovertown
- Marystown Central High
- Heritage Collegiate in Musgravetown
- Prince of Wales Collegiate, St. John's
- Carbonear Collegiate
- Crescent Collegiate in Blaketown
- Holy Trinity High in Torbay
- Waterford Valley High, St. John's
- St. Michael's Regional High, Bell Island
- St. Catherine's Academy in St. Catherine's
- Exploits Valley High in Grand Falls-Windsor
- J.M. Olds Collegiate in Twillingate
- Pasadena Academy in Pasadena
- Indian River High in Springdale

The skilled trades courses being increased include Design and Fabrication 1202 and 2202, Skilled Trades 1201, Residential Construction Technology 2201, and Power and Energy 3201.

In addition, skilled trades courses have also expanded to six additional rural schools through the Centre for Learning and Development Innovation. All waitlists have been eliminated for skilled trades, creating more options for students.

MUN Offering Pilot to Help Get First Year Students Up to Speed on Math Skills

Media Release

MUN Offering Pilot to Help Get First Year Students Up to Speed on Math Skills

Students entering Memorial University who are struggling with math despite graduating from the K-12 system, will be offered some extra help thanks to funding being provided through the Hibernia Project.

MUN President Dr. Janet Morrison says it's a trend that's been recognized at the university for some time, and providing additional support in math can help improve student numeracy skills, and ensure that the subject is seen as a pathway to success, and not a barrier.

She says up to 25 per cent of first-year math students require extra help, and it can become a barrier to their studies.

She says the Hibernia Project has provided the university with $1.9 million for a three-year pilot to help students build confidence and strengthen their math skills.

"Twelve-hundred students this fall will have access to small group tutorials and review sessions, and they will be automatically enrolled. Where previously the ratio might have been 150 learners to one instructor, it will now be 30 to one, so a significant improvement."

Students will also have access to summer bridging programs, and pre-semester boot camps. The data gathered will help to redesign MUN's first-year courses.
how we can support people living with autism, their families and their caregivers.

Cyberbullying Statistics Canada

- 35% of Canadian adolescents experience bullying.
- 47% of Canadian parents believe their child is being bullied.
- 1 in 10 Canadian children experiences online harassment.
- 17% of Canadians aged 18 to 24 suffer from cyberbullying.
- 89% of Canadian teachers believe cyberbullying is the number one safety issue in public schools.
- 7% of adult Canadians experience cyberbullying.
- 89% of teachers believe that cyberbullying in Canada is the leading safety issue in public schools

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 the NLFSC.

Editor: Denise Pike
Contact Information
P.O Box 23140
St. John's NL
A1B 4J9
Tel: (709) 764-8993