

## **Superintendent's Report for DEC February 9, 2022**

### **ENDS #1: Provide a safe, healthy, and welcoming educational environment for learners, staff, families, and partners**

Since my January report to DEC there have been additional changes to ensure the health and safety of students during the pandemic. On-line/at home learning began on Tuesday, January 11, 2022. The January report reviewed the expectations for each level K-5, 6-8 and 9-12. As we worked through the first week some students were invited to be in school each day or for part of the day. Education Support Services teams and administrators worked to identify students for this initiative – students with individualized Personalized Learning Plans, those with significantly adjusted learning plans, newcomers with low language levels, students with individualized behavior plans, significant anxiety and mental health issues, high school students living in areas with no internet, and students in skills trades courses. These guidelines were developed by Superintendents in cooperation with the Department. Thank you to our ESS team, Directors and Subject Coordinators who collected numbers by school three times during the three weeks of learning from home. On average about 2 300 students participated (10%). EA's and other support staff worked to assist students, and feedback from schools was positive.

It was announced on January 24, 2022, that schools would be returning to in-person learning on Monday, January 31 for K-8 and Wednesday, February 2, 2022 for high schools, after their two Turnaround Days to prepare for new schedules and courses for second semester. There were updates to the EECD Winter Plan documents which had to be reviewed with our Principals and Vice Principals as they prepared to welcome students back. We quickly identified as a priority the need to mitigate against the threat of a staff shortage. As a District we had many unfilled staff absences in December as our case count increased and staff had to isolate with family or they were a positive case. The District employs many day-to-day casuals in all employee groups, however at this time many are choosing not to accept work. A thank you to Directors Peter Smith and Ryan Price, along with HR Director Susan Moffatt who worked with me to develop a multi-tiered plan to provide support to our 69 schools. To be pro-active we have secured a team of 75-80 supply teachers for this week and next and matched them with a school or between two schools to pick up any positions not filled through our regular absence management system. The next tier was to do similar with 39 of our teacher coaches/leads and they are paired with a school

or two and check in with those schools each morning to determine if they are required to teach. The Department also released 12 educators who live within ASD-S and they are matched with schools as well. The final tier of support is for the Principal to approach if staff who do not have classroom responsibilities and ask them to volunteer to cover (guidance, resource, a vice principal, behavior intervention mentors, EAL mentors/tutors). The goal is to keep schools open and if it becomes evident in the morning that we are not going to be able to operationally have in-person classes for all or some students. A decision will be made, in consultation with me, about dismissing all or some students to home as a last resort. Learning from home may be able to continue for some students that day if we have staff available. We understand this is not ideal for parents or students, and it would be a last resort. The Directors and I are monitoring this on a daily basis.

Schools/offices where positive cases have been identified are recorded at 5 p.m. daily on the Covid Dashboard on our ASD-S website. Weekend cases are included in our Monday report. The cases are reported to us by Principals and supervisors and no names are shared. Student absenteeism data is also being tracked and at K-8 the absentee rate was 11% Monday and on Tuesday 10% which is positive. Contact tracing is no longer happening, and we no longer have rapid test kits (POCT) to distribute which is a significant change for families and staff from December.

In keeping with our goals, family messaging was sent via Messenger on January 7, January 17 and January 28. We know the shifting guidelines make it challenging for families and staff. I was also available for an interview with CBC Information Morning on January 19 and with K-100/The Wave. We have also responded to requests from print media. Staff and students wearing masks all day is not easy and we hope that this guideline can soon be relaxed. On the other hand, having some student activities return is positive. The Department has provided us with a shipment of three-layer masks for staff, and most recently a shipment of KN95 masks.

ASD-S also had 16 schools with no central ventilation system receiving portable hepa-filter units Back Bay, Lawrence Station, Sir James Dunn, St. Stephen Elementary, and part of St. George Elementary in St. Stephen Education Centre. Norton is the only HEC school and in SJEC – Barnhill, Bayview, Beaconsfield, Centennial, Grand Bay Primary, Hazen White-St. Francis, Inglewood, Prince Charles, Princess Elizabeth, St. John the Baptist King Edward.

**ENDS #2: Improve student engagement and achievement by embedding research based best practices in a variety of learning environments.**

Saint John Education Centre is fortunate to have the “When Children Succeed Project,” supported by BCAPI (Business Community Anti-Poverty Initiative, Living SJ, EECD and ASD-S). The goal of the initiative is to close the achievement gap at K-2 in the seven schools with highest rates of childhood poverty (Glen Falls, Princess Elizabeth, Hazen White-St. Francis, Seaside Park, Centennial, SJ the Baptist-King Edward and Prince Charles). The three-year research project began in 2018-2019 and the data collected up until the closing of schools in March 2020 showed improvements in some areas. The project ended at this time. It was updated and re-started in fall 2021. In each school additional teachers have been added – each has a co-teacher who organizes the support within that school, and assists classroom teachers in providing quality, research-based instruction to students using a differentiated targeted-instruction model. The schools may have some additional resource and guidance allocation or administration time for the Principal. The District team supporting the project include our Literacy and Numeracy Subject Coordinators, the School Improvement Subject Coordinator, Melissa Savoie, Ryan Price and I have regular meetings with BCAPI and with the Deputy Minister to report on the project.

Data has been collected and monitored for numeracy, literacy and attendance. A baseline was established in September and progress is measured based on the results in relation to that baseline. The baseline showed at grade 1 and 2 these students began this school year behind grade level standards, however the December data sweep showed students on a trajectory to gain at least a years’ worth of learning by end of June. Attendance does remain a challenge for many of these students. The rate of chronic absenteeism is more than double the rate of other schools at K-2 in ASD-S. The next scheduled data collection is the end of February. We know the three weeks of learning from home will likely impact our results. The DEC may be interested in learning more specifics on this initiative.

In February, Subject Coordinators are offering two evening PD sessions for all ASD-S high school SPR’s (Special Positions of Responsibility). It is an optional session but to date 40 of our 60 SPR’s are participating. The focus will be on the instructional leadership component of SPR work (setting goals, empowering teachers to self-assess, and to effectively deliver feedback). The sessions were developed based on Strategy 2.1 in the DIP and feedback provided by the SPR’s.

During the three weeks of on-line learning the four technology coaches supported teachers by setting “office hours,” in addition to responding to emails and meeting through TEAMS. They supported 42 teachers during office hours January 11-13, mainly elementary/middle teachers. This time, more requests came on emails (approximately 75). Most questions centered around the controls teachers have with regard to students in their meetings – i.e. their ability to prevent students from chatting or starting meetings on their own. In response to this, the coaches put together a document about the controls available to teachers. No face to face PD was held but the coaches hosted virtual PD and hosted several staff and PLC groups focused around TEAMS and the new SmartNotebook software.

**ENDS #3: Engage system's leaders in improving mental health and resiliency for both learners and staff through proactive strategies such as Positive Education and Social Emotional learning.**

The main strategies under goal one and two have been placed on hold as we are not able to select new schools for Restorative Practices and PBIS (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports) due to face-to-face PD not happening since December and our shortage of casual teacher staff during the same time period. The plan has shifted to one of supporting schools that began the journey in 2019-2020 (Apohaqui, Beaconsfield, Bayview Elementary, Blacks Harbour, Fairvale and St. Stephen Elementary). These two strategies will need to be re-started post-pandemic.

Virtual PD sessions for Curriculum Coaches continue in the area of positive education and the integration of social-emotional learning into curriculum outcomes. Coaches work directly with teachers, and it is critical they have this knowledge. Coach Christine Morgan-Ahearne has facilitated virtual PD sessions on social emotional learning with several schools including Barnhill, Bayside, Beaconsfield, Belleisle Regional High, Fundy Middle and High, Grand Manan, River Valley and Sir James Dunn). Christine has also been coaching Family Dynamics teachers at Harbour View, COMPASS, and Rothesay High. Coaching has been provided to teachers at Bayside on using Zones of Regulation. Christine has also been providing weekly lessons on SEL in Southern Exposure focused on knowledge and awareness but will now switch that focus to skills/capacity.

A guidance coach has prepared a 4-week series of social-emotional lessons for use by elementary guidance and teachers to have for the return to school this week – it is focused on

coping with the challenges students have been facing. The guidance coaches problem solve with teachers if they are faced with difficult questions by students in relation to covid. Students ask about classmates getting sick and having to isolate, some students may feel anxious.

The two counselling coaches spend considerable time supervising guidance interns – ASD-S has a cohort of 17 working with UNB to obtain their Masters in Counselling in May 2022. It has been positive to have UNB offer this training in ASD-S as it builds our guidance capacity for the future. This role has been very important since the start of the pandemic and it will continue in the coming years.

Child and Youth team members have participated in many PD sessions – for example “One at a Time” Counselling which is a form of single-session therapy that maximizes the use of limited time with students, cultural competency training to provide counselling to students from various cultures, most will be trained in family assessment which will allow them to better provide supports by understanding the context of the students’ family, two members received advanced trauma training to name a few.

For staff we are reminding them of the supports available through our EFAP provider Home Wood Health, and for teachers specifically our two NBTA Counsellors – Ronna Gauthier in SJEC/SSEC and Carmen Meehan in HEC. An important week is coming up with Staff Appreciation Week, during the week school Principals and parent groups will have many ideas to recognize and say thank you to staff members. Our management team have been focused on this as well. The week is well positioned in the calendar as we welcome our students back to face-to-face learning as case numbers remain high in our area and the restrictions and guidelines remain. As always, we appreciate the work of each employee group – educators and support staff as well as our 69 Principals and Vice Principals who provide that day to day leadership through the many phases of this pandemic.

**ENDS #4: Ensure all members of the school and district community are welcomed, respected, accepted and supported.**

Various First Nation book studies are on-going virtually, with titles such as “Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act,” with 36 participants, “Son of a Trickster” (33 participants), “Taapoategal and Pallet” a Mii’maq novel (27 participants).

On-going collaboration with curriculum coaches to support the embedment of First Nations culture and perspectives into curriculum – including a grades 3-5 exploration unit, a grades 6-8 middle school social studies unit plan on Indigenous world views, land and treaty education, a drum program for music, First Nations elementary math using Wabanaki stories, math through beading, using the drum for counting, angles with the eight point star to name a few.

We were approached by the SJ Newcomer Centre to participate in an education session they are offering on women wearing a hijabi. Seven newcomer women are volunteering to offer the virtual session to educate school and District participants and respond to any questions we have. One participant is an EA at Saint John High School, and another supply teacher in our District. The Centre explained to us that in southern NB there have not been any violent encounters however, there are many questions asked. We are pleased to make this opportunity available on Sunday evening February 6, 2022.

Our Anti-Racism and Equity Coach, Therese Trofimencoff to date has visited or communicated virtually with 26 of our 69 (37%) schools. Once again, face to face PD and meetings have been limited since early December. Therese continues to contribute articles for Southern Exposure. She consults with guidance counsellors on individual situations (e.g. starting a GSA, book selection to promote antiracism/equity). Therese does introductory virtual staff PD sessions on antiracism and equity and has visited some schools twice in this way. She also was a guest on a pod-cast “Talking Racism” with Dr. Manju Varma, Commissioner for Systemic Racism in New Brunswick.

**OTHER:**

ASD-S had 17 teachers receive Educational Leaves for all or part of next school year. It is important to build the capacity of our teachers, and we see this as a valuable program.