

Superintendent's Report for DEC December 2, 2020

ENDS #1: Provide positive, safe, healthy, and inclusive learning and working environments for children, youth, and staff. On Friday, November 20 the Saint John Health Region was moved to the “orange phase” of recovery. Over the next 72-hours we had five schools with outbreaks (Hampton Middle, Rothesay High, Simonds High and Lakefield Elementary) and a potential exposure at Harbour View High School. This was a very intense time and my thanks to the Principals of the impacted schools – Theresa Ketchum Boudreau, Christina Barrington, Gary Keating, Michael O’Neill and Michael Butler and their VPs as well as the on-going support we receive from nurses Ann Hogan and Alberta Stanton. In November our Healthy Learners Nurse from St. Stephen Education Centre moved to a provincial role with the team leading COVID-19 for a 2-year opportunity. The questions after the announcement of moving to “orange” were many as masks requirements changed for K-12, field trips were cancelled, and more limitations with music and physical education activities. With the 5 school situations we had some teaching/support staff and six classes of students required to self isolate and work/learn from home. Our thoughts were with these staff and students during this time of uncertainty. The move to “orange” also meant revisiting the Operational Plan of the school. Our students are role models for mask use at all levels and we thank them for that. Schools in the Hampton, Kennebecasis Valley and Saint John areas saw an increase in student absenteeism the week of November 23, 2020 but improvements have been noted this week.

We want to assure parents/guardians that our schools are safe places – students are wearing masks and currently we are seeing no student to student transmission of the virus. Cleaning and sanitizing are happening regularly with special attention to high touch surfaces and each school has a very detailed operational plan on their website. We want students to have that socialization and routine in their lives.

Dr. Kim Barker, Regional Medical Officer of Health for our region had a one hour virtual TEAMS meeting with all administrators of ASD-S to talk about the virus from her perspective and to entertain questions from our school leaders. There were questions about Christmas 2020 and what might be possible to celebrate as a school. Dr. Barker’s expertise was appreciated.

With the move to “orange phase” we have seen an increase in medical documentation for students to have a “Home Learning Plan,” and also a few more applications for Home Schooling. Numbers for this program have increased this school year.

ENDS #2: Demonstrate continuous improvement by increasing engagement through innovative teaching and assessment practices, promoting mental fitness through social-emotional learning. The five Technology Coaches and Coordinator Darren White are participating this week in the International Society for Teaching in Education Conference being held virtually – this is the largest technology conference in North America.

Applications for innovation grants closed and in total 64 grants were awarded totalling \$60K with some additional funds coming from the FI Curriculum Team, the Literacy Curriculum Team and First Nations to bring the total of funds to \$73K. PLC teams could apply for up to \$2500 and individual teachers up to \$1000. A total of 42 grants were awarded in Saint John Education Centre, 5 in St. Stephen Education Centre, and 17 in Hampton Education Centre – 15 at elementary, 18 at middle level and 31 at high school. These funds are taken from our ASD-S self-sustaining funds and again this year a very positive initiative that directly supports our District Improvement Plan. Schools appreciate this investment.

A campaign has been launched to support mental fitness among staff based on science based strategies adapted from the American Psychological Association with the focus on reducing stress. Videos have been created and will be shared weekly in the staff newsletter, "Southern Exposure" and posters for schools are in development.

The 10th annual RING A BELL campaign takes place November 30 – December 4. The campaign is coordinated by DOTS NB/Partners for Youth, EECD and Bell Aliant and aims to raise awareness and support conversations in and outside of schools on the importance of mental health. The program culminated in ASD-S today (as this Friday is a student-free day) at noon as students showed their support by ringing bells virtually and/or in their classroom bubbles for one minute. Ringing bells draws attention to ensuring that mental health needs of children are met, and their voices heard. Lawrence Station Elementary School hosted the virtual provincial bell ringing ceremony. Last week the Directors and I had another opportunity to join our provincial colleagues in a one hour session with Kevin Cameron, a trauma specialist from Lethbridge, Alberta - his common theme during this pandemic is referencing the 3 R's of education this year as "RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS, RELATIONSHIPS!" He sees the focus on RELATIONS, CONNECTIONS, EDUCATE – and how we keep engaged with students. Relationships are key for everyone during these times of uncertainty.

ENDS #3: Ensure all members of the school community to be welcomed, respected, accepted, and supported and to address heterosexism and discrimination. EECD Policy 713 (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identities) was launched this week and the introduction and implementation will support this Ends Policy of DEC.

Subject Coordinator Amy Marshall has a book study group of 32 participants reviewing "Cultivating Genius." The group has met three times.

A living library book list was developed to help teachers find more diversity for their classroom libraries. This is being done in conjunction with a classroom library audit that many middle and high school teachers did with the books in their class libraries.

ENDS #4: Maximize the engagement of families and the community through effective communication and outreach. A pilot school has been selected for the development of the new website and we are in the process of migrating new information over to the new website template for testing.

Media documents for October/November have been attached to meeting materials, as well as a list of family communications. We continue to make very good use of School Messenger, Twitter and our Face Book site to get timely and accurate information to families.

On the evening of November 16 Dr. Kim Barker facilitated an information session for families and staff members from Campobello Island Community School as there were many questions after virus outbreaks in Maine.

Most community partners are maintaining some form of engagement with our students and are offering full support with Christmas activities; a few examples are summarized below:

- At Princess Elizabeth School the city of Saint John typically provides a Christmas Pancake breakfast however this year they are providing a pizza party to students in their classroom bubbles and Santa will visit outside the building.

- Many schools are proceeding with some form of Christmas Dinner Celebration but the meals will be delivered to classroom bubbles.
- There have been generous donations of winter coats, hats and mittens by several partners and these are being dropped at the school by partners and distributed to the students that need them.
- At St. Stephen Elementary and Milltown Elementary the Scholastic Book Fair continued, enclosing everything with plexi glass and all Covid guidelines were followed. This allowed the students to shop in their classroom bubbles and the students pointed to what they wanted. Thanks to the Community Schools Coordinator.
- St. Stephen Elementary is holding their annual Christmas Bazaar for students to shop for their parents in a way similar to the book fair. Students can come and shop and point to what they like, and the item is bagged for them.
- In the past, Christmas hampers were created within the Saint John area by our PALS partners for all Saint John Community Schools and distributed to families in need. This year the families will receive gift cards to purchase their Christmas dinner and these will be provided by PALS partners.
- Several of our schools held virtual Career Fairs where video recordings were made of people in our community from their work place speaking about what they do for a career. These videos were shared within classroom bubbles.
- The Hub Kitchen in Saint John is now serving 5 schools and received a grant of \$24,000 from the Brewer Foundation. The vision is to expand to other schools in winter 2021.
- Mentoring with students continues and students have been meeting virtually with their mentees.

Other:

This Thursday evening and Friday morning (December 3 and 4, 2020) is Parent Teacher for all K-8 families and as with the high schools on November 19-20 will be held virtually. This is being done using Microsoft Bookings – the link to sign up for a conference was sent to families and they could book an available time. An email confirmation is received and reminders as the time nears. This is a secure platform. Parents can note topics they wish to speak about during the conference. Schools are very accommodating for families who do not have technology or reliable wi-fi and a telephone conference can be arranged.

Moving from the yellow to the orange phase of recovery, many plans for annual holiday celebrations this month have had to change as singing, woodwind instruments and assemblies are not permitted. Our schools are being so creative to make this month special for students and staff - for example decorating your desk for the month, virtual staff parties with ugly Christmas sweaters and virtual bingo, concerts with poems, class plays, and rhythm band instruments. Other schools have decided to delay any concert until later in the winter or spring when our situation may be different.

It is important for us to recognize all of the work being done by staff to keep schools open and safe – teachers, early childhood operators and educators, school leaders, drivers, custodians, EAs, administrative assistants, community school coordinators and SIWs, our facilities team, nurses and the list goes on. It really has been about everyone coming together. Everyone has been appreciated by ASD-S!