

EDUCATION

'It's something different for them to do and get them outside'



Robin Grant | Kings County Record

A winter game called crokicurl is helping Belleisle students get outside and have fun during the pandemic, while also learning a few things about science and physical education.

Belleisle Regional High School teacher Kim Giddens created a crokicurl rink last week after a neighbour of the school offered to let her students use their pond. The neighbour told her it would be a perfect surface for the popular Canadian game, a mix of the board game crokinole and curling, she said.

"It's something different for them to do and get them outside," Giddens said. "We went over one day and talked about velocity, glide and force so it worked right into my science course as well.

"They just love it. A lot of them have crokinole boards at home, and they know the game and of course, curling. Most of them have not curled, but they have seen it on television."

She said the aim is to try to get the block into the centre and knock out opponents, much like curling. This means students learn about strategy and target.

"They're having lots of fun with it. They're very competitive at times."

The outdoor game is also in line with the Anglophone South School District's COVID-19 directives to take certain classes outside wherever possible.

According to spokesperson Jessica Hanlon, physical education and music teachers take their students outdoors, if the weather permits.

"We have encouraged schools to find opportunities in all subject areas to learn outdoors, and we have provided numerous professional learning opportunities to our staff to learn innovative ways to extend the classroom into the outdoors, especially at grades K-8," Hanlon wrote in an email.

"Not only does outdoor learning support distancing and fresh air, recommended by the provincial COVID-19 safety protocols, it encourages students to interact with their environment and engage with the learning materials in new ways while promoting physical activity."

Giddens said crokicurl, accessible to all ages and skillsets, is an excellent pandemic activity.

"People can play this if you have a large enough surface because you can social distance," she said. "The course is divided into four quadrants like it is on a crokinole board ... and so you can play with someone in your bubble and you can have eight or however many people playing at once."

Giddens, who was recognized by the province last February for her dedication and service to the local fire department as well as the high school, said there isn't a lot to do in the winter months with the students, especially this year with very little snow.

"You have to be creative these days," Giddens said. "If you can find something to do to get them outside and interested and moving around, that's the whole idea."

COVID-19

'It just kind of blew up': Students' COVID documentary goes viral

Justin Samanski-Langille | Kings County Record

Grade 12 students across the province are experiencing a senior year like no other, and a pair at Sussex Regional High School have created a documentary providing a glimpse into that experience they share with their peers.

Seventeen-year-olds Maggie Melvin and Jadon Williams created the 10-minute mini-documentary as part of their writing class and decided to focus on the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the lives of their classmates.

"We wanted to get a student perspective, specifically from the grads because it is a pretty monumental year for us," said Melvin. "We wanted to capture the feelings we have and the stuff we are missing out on this year."

Williams said they wanted to help people outside the school system to understand what students are going through this year and to preserve their experiences for future generations who may find it difficult to understand what they experienced.

Most students experience the same struggles

After lots of planning and coordination, the duo went about interviewing their peers, recording additional footage and deciding how best to convey the emotions their peers expressed on camera.

What they found surprised them, both because of the honesty in their classmates' answers and in how similar each subject's experience was to their own.

"We just put our feelings into it and we found they were common feelings, and we just kept finding people who backed up our own feelings. I wasn't expecting every single student we spoke with to have almost the exact same thoughts," said Williams.

"We really wanted to be real and to make sure everything was truthful," added Melvin. "Nobody held back when they were giving their answers and I think you can really feel that when you watch the documentary."

In it, students talk candidly about how disappointing their social experience has become in what is supposed to be their most connected year of school. They share the difficulties of online and staggered in-person learning and the impact on their grades and mental health.

Interspersed with shots of empty hallways, physical distancing signs, and solemn piano music, students discuss their anxieties about how the pandemic will impact access to post-secondary. The ability to stay positive and get motivated has been difficult to muster, they say.

Documentary 'blew up'

The documentary has more than 3,000 views since it was posted to YouTube on Jan. 13. Williams and Melvin said their social media accounts have been flooded with positive feedback.

"It just kind of blew up more than we were expecting for sure," said Melvin. "I think the whole world is going through this right now and while people may be thinking about students, they might not be thinking about seniors, and that we are really missing out on a lot."

For Williams, he hopes the popularity of the documentary means it will grab the attention of people with the power to make changes to pandemic school life to improve the experience for students.

"There has to be a balance where we can still have some activities and we can still see our friends," he said. "If somebody important sees this and tries to figure out something better than what we have now, that would be great."

Adam Sherwood, the teacher who assigned the project as part of his writing class, said students were challenged to create something for a real-life audience.

"I thought Maggie and Jadon did an excellent job. They created a cohesive video that gave the audience a student perspective on what school is like this year. Our class actually had a friendly competition on all the finished products, and theirs won the 'Gold Standard' award for best all-around project."

School district seeing rise in anxiety

Anglophone South School District spokesperson Jessica Hanlon said in an email to the Kings County Record the district has seen an increased demand for mental health support over the past year as many students are experiencing increased anxiety.

"For safety reasons related to COVID-19, students are seeing their peers less, there are fewer opportunities for extracurricular activities that students enjoy and anxieties may be heightened in response to the pandemic and its impact on their families and the world," wrote Hanlon.

Students seeking mental health support can reach out to their school's guidance counsellors, or if more significant support is needed, the district's nine Child and Youth Teams are available, and consist of a mix of social workers, psychologists, resource teachers, and counsellors, Hanlon said.

Child and Youth Teams can be accessed through school guidance counsellors, or directly by phone in Sussex at (506) 432-2217, in Saint John at (506) 658-3737, and in Charlotte County at (506) 466-7380.

- *With files from Robin Grant*

Letter Exchange Cheers Students And Shannex Seniors

Saint John, NB, Canada / The Wave

Tamara Steele

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It's been a tough few months at Shannex Parkland Saint John after a devastating COVID-19 outbreak which was recently declared over by Public Health.

On a happier note, a group of residents have been exchanging letters with Grade 2 students at Princess Elizabeth School.

Principal Jennifer Carhart said the students and the residents are sharing a sense of connection.

"If you could have seen their faces this morning when their letters arrived. Even learning how do you open an envelope and how do you address an envelope. Things we don't spend a lot of time doing anymore because we are so tech-savvy," Carhart said.

One student got a letter where a resident spoke of their favourite treat: date squares.

"A huge conversation about 'what is a date square? What do they taste like? What do they look like?' Not a typical treat that kids would be interested in trying so now I've got that on my to-do [list] to bring in date squares," Carhart said.



Grade 2 students at Princess Elizabeth School open letters from residents of Shannex Parkland Saint John. The letter exchange has been a source of connection for the students and the seniors. (Photo provided by PES)



One example of the letters exchanged between PES Grade 2 students and residents at Shannex Parkland Saint John. (photo provided by PES)

Carhart said the whole thing came about because of teacher, Tobi McNamee, who was working on an engagement project last year where the students would visit with Shannex residents.

"That, for obvious reasons, was not an option. However, she was committed to making that connection happen and when she moved into Grade 2 classroom this year, she reconnected with her friends who work there to partner up the kids with pen pals," Carhart said.

The letter exchange will continue until the end of the school year.

EDUCATION

Traditional grad ceremonies scrapped for 2021



Sussex Regional High School senior Katelyn Taber said news that traditional graduation ceremonies would not be held this June was disappointing, having spent nearly 12 months since the pandemic started.

Photo: Submitted

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Justin Samanski-Langille | Kings County Record

Another class of high school graduates won't be walking across the stage or dancing the night away in celebration after the Anglophone South School District announced traditional graduation and prom ceremonies won't be held this June.

In a letter to Grade 12 families sent Feb. 18 and provided to the paper by the district, superintendent Zoë Watson said the activities will not just be postponed in the hope that public health restrictions will be relaxed. Instead, schools will be organizing alternative events that conform to the restrictions in place in June.

"I know this is disappointing for everyone and unfortunately we do not know what June will bring in our province," wrote Watson. "Please remember that last year, each high school worked hard to come up with innovative and creative ways to carry out their end-of-year events, either virtually, physically distanced with small groups, or both. The feedback was very positive, and each graduate was celebrated."

The letter said details of each school's plans will be provided by their respective principals, once they are finalized.

For Sussex Regional High School senior Katelyn Taber, the news was disappointing, but not surprising having spent nearly 12 months living and learning in the ever-evolving "new normal" of life with COVID-19.

"I understand rules are rules, and we have to be safe," said Taber. "[But] I was definitely sad because I dream of walking across that stage, and wearing a prom dress. I was almost feeling defeated, because I don't know what will be that final hurrah."

Taber said events like graduation ceremonies and prom are an important way for students like her to celebrate the major milestone, and celebrating with friends is something she has been dreaming of for many years. With the traditional versions of those events now cancelled, she fears her dream may never come true.

"We started at kindergarten, and we worked our way up, and for some people it's not easy reaching high school," she said. "I just think we need to be celebrated."

For the families of graduates, not being able to celebrate their loved one's accomplishments can be almost as big a loss as it is to the grads themselves.

"It's kind of the final moment when you watch them go across [the stage] and get that diploma," said Taber's father Greg Taber. "It's a little bit anticlimactic when you just get it in a parking lot, or whatever they case may be."

While alternative grad events are yet to be confirmed, the events held in June 2020 offer a look at what graduates and families like the Tabers could expect this year. While drive-in graduation ceremonies would be better than nothing, Greg Taber said his hope would be something closer to normal would be possible given all that has been learned over the past 12 months.

His daughter said the most important tradition she hopes to enjoy with her classmates is parading through town with family and friends gathered along the route to watch.

"I've dreamed for the past six years of being in that parade with my family watching and our snowmobiles up on the float with my friends," she said. "I'm almost scared that we won't experience that now."

ATLANTIC | News

Grade 2 students making connections with New Brunswick seniors thanks to pen pal project

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Pandemic pen pals: Kids and seniors connect



Students and seniors put pen to paper – to foster a sense of connection during COVID-19.

<https://atlantic.ctvnews.ca/grade-2-students-making-connections-with-new-brunswick-seniors-thanks-to-pen-pal-project-1.5324701>