

September 7, 2020

Re: Back to school in Nova Scotia

Every year administrators in schools and Regional Offices throughout Nova Scotia lead the preparation and planning for the opening of the new school year. However, COVID-19 has significantly altered the planning processes and many administrators have experienced a summer of preparation like never before. With the release of the Back to School Plan on July 22nd, administrators began developing further guidelines and protocols to implement the Back to School Plan at the local level. Some have taken on extra work within their role and the vast majority gave up some of their holiday time in the best interest of the students of Nova Scotia.

Since March 13th we as an Association have been directly involved in conversations with the Deputy Minister, staff of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the leadership of the Regional Centres for Education and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial at various planning tables. These connections have enabled us to bring forward the perspective of administrators in Nova Scotia to address challenges that have never been faced before by our schools systems as a result of COVID-19.

As an association, the Public School Administrators Association of Nova Scotia has consistently sought to build upon firm foundational elements that can be relied upon, before and during this pandemic. To that end, we have focused our efforts on two guiding principles.

Firstly, we turn to the experts at the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health for guidance and procedures for dealing with all public health matters. Following the advice of Public Health has allowed our province to resume many activities while balancing measures such as mask use in public spaces and self-isolation protocols for those entering from outside the Atlantic Bubble. This is further evidenced by the very low number of active COVID-19 cases in the province and the successful testing that is confirming cases when they develop.

Secondly, we believe that schools will be prepared to welcome students back when three components are present and maintained. Preparedness will depend on:

- supplies and the human resources available for a safe return to school consistent with Public Health standards;
- procedures in place to manage the movement and supervision of students;
- participation of all employees within their roles and responsibilities.

Over the course of the last month, these are precisely the measures that Principals, Vice-Principals and Central Office administrators have been working on.

Anecdotally we have heard from many administrators that their schools are prepared. We recognize that all of us to varying degrees are experiencing a level of concern, anxiety, or worry. As we have been told, this is normal during these unprecedented times. Schools that are in need of further support, or who have gaps in preparedness are connecting with their RCE or the CSAP to address the challenge in order to be prepared for students tomorrow and beyond.

On Friday, in a conversation with administrators, Dr. Strang and his colleagues from Public Health provided answers to a number of priority Public Health questions. Having answers to these questions will provide a level of detail necessary for administrators to respond to inquiries from staff, students, parents and guardians.

We anticipate that over the coming week there will be a need to rework practices that are in place, reconsider assumptions about how measures will function, and augment supports where deficiencies are identified. While there are new challenges in the mix this year, this work is directly aligned with the expertise and leadership skills that administrators have developed throughout their careers. All the best planning can only be assessed when it is put into practice. We are fortunate in Nova Scotia that we have a plan that gives all students access to in-school high quality instruction. In the event of any future upward trend in the presence of COVID-19, the Back to School Plan also outlines a range of responses.

As schools welcome back students tomorrow administrators will continue to do what they do best - lead, plan, inspire, collaborate, adjust, retool and respond to the needs of students and staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. Simony', with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Tim Simony  
Chair