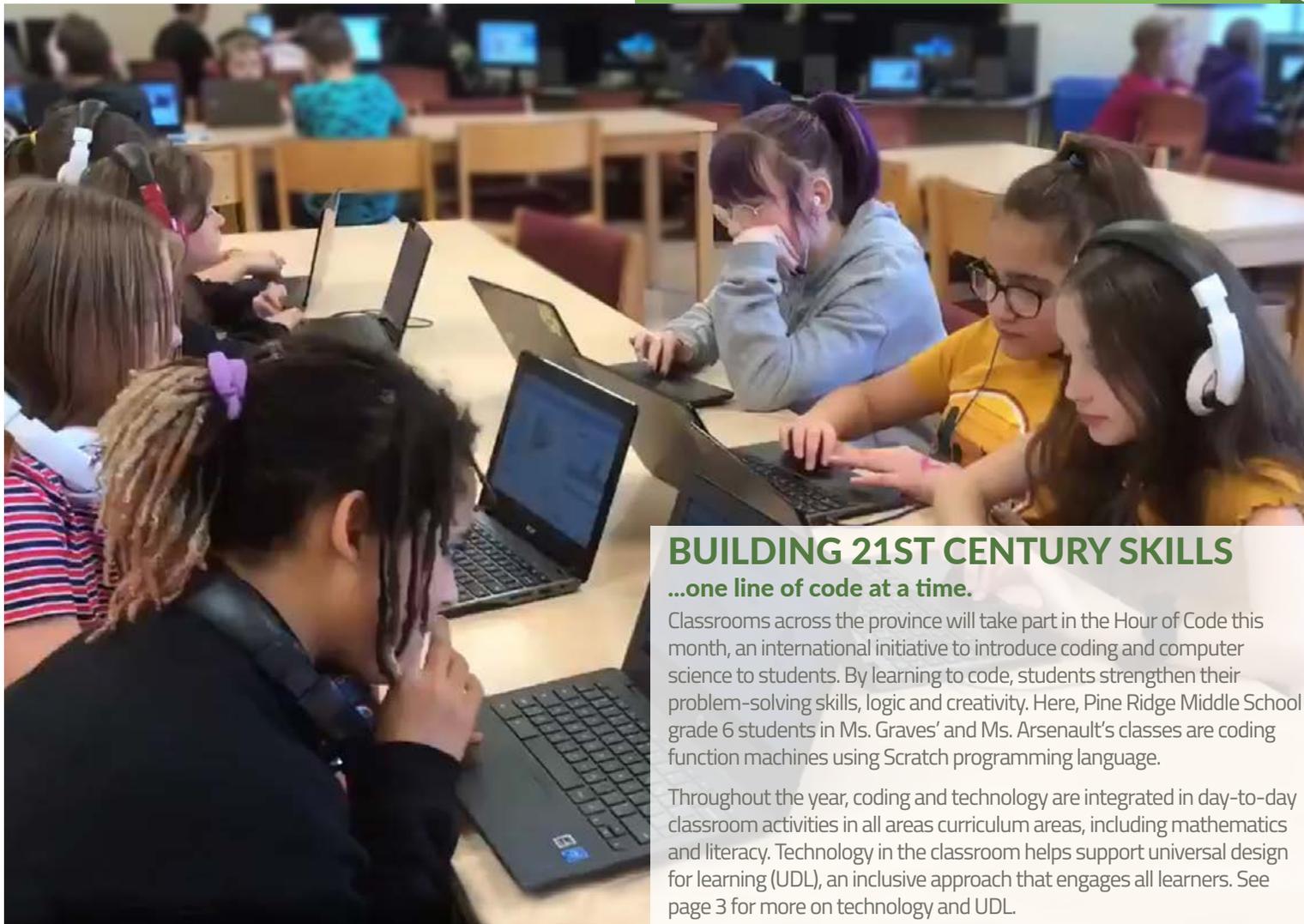


MONTHLY UPDATE

From the AVRCE Regional Executive Director of Education



Annapolis Valley
Regional Centre for Education



BUILDING 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

...one line of code at a time.

Classrooms across the province will take part in the Hour of Code this month, an international initiative to introduce coding and computer science to students. By learning to code, students strengthen their problem-solving skills, logic and creativity. Here, Pine Ridge Middle School grade 6 students in Ms. Graves' and Ms. Arsenaault's classes are coding function machines using Scratch programming language.

Throughout the year, coding and technology are integrated in day-to-day classroom activities in all areas curriculum areas, including mathematics and literacy. Technology in the classroom helps support universal design for learning (UDL), an inclusive approach that engages all learners. See page 3 for more on technology and UDL.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Celebrating Community: Message from the Regional Executive Director
- Wellness Day for five schools focuses on health, safety, self-care
- Technology supporting inclusion: Coding, technology and Universal Design for Learning
- Try it at home: Hour of Code resources for families
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- Learning to teach: Pre-service teachers in classrooms, learning from seasoned teachers, and students too.
- What does "Bus Driver Discretion" mean?

COMING UP

- December 9-15: Hour of Code
- December 10: International Human Rights Day
- December 20: Last school day before Winter Break
- January 6: First school day after Winter Break
- January 27-30: High school exams
- January 31: No school for students (high school marking day, elementary/middle level inservice day)

CELEBRATING COMMUNITY



Schools across the region are organizing events and activities that bring us together to celebrate kindness and community in December. We are thankful throughout the year, and especially around the holidays, for the support of families and school communities.

Earlier in November, the province announced that a new building will be purchased and renovated for West Hants Education Centre. WHEC is one of our three experiential schools offering a hands-on, experiential learning approach to middle level and high school students who learn best in a non-traditional setting.

I was pleased to take part in a stakeholder tour and discussion at 14 Wing Greenwood recently. It was a valuable experience to meet with Canadian Forces members, who are an important part of our region and school communities. We are proud to be able to support the military families who call our region home while assigned to the base.

Earlier in November, I joined Holly Meuse, Coordinator of Mi'kmaw Education Services, and Pat Murphy, Director of Programs and Services, to attend a meeting of the Chief and Council of Glooscap First Nation. I thank Chief Sidney Peters and Council members for welcoming us.

Another significant event recently was the Delmore "Buddy" Daye Learning Institute's *Ancestral Roots Regional Summit* at Acadia University, which brought together learners of African descent in grades 9 to 12 to discuss education from a holistic, Africentric perspective. The participants brought forward many thoughtful, challenging questions based on their lived experiences related to racism, self-esteem, bullying, and feelings of not belonging in educational settings. I truly appreciated hearing their voices as we continue to make schools and classrooms places where everyone feels included and valued.

Best wishes for a safe and happy winter break,

Dave Jones
Regional Executive Director of Education

@DaveJones_AVRCE · #WorkingTogetherforStudents · #AVRCEProud



Students of African descent in grades 9-12, Student Support Workers, and discussion panel members at the Ancestral Roots Regional Summit



Before and After Program Survey for Future Pre-Primary Families

If you plan to register your child for Pre-Primary starting in September 2020, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is looking for input on your before/after program childcare needs. Qualified survey respondents will be entered in a grocery gift card draw.

For more information and to access the survey, visit <https://bit.ly/3894AEI>. Please share with any future Pre-Primary families!



WELLNESS DAY

Students from five schools took part in a Wellness Day at the Louis Millett Centre in New Minas recently, learning about a wide range of safety, health and self-care topics.

Organized by the staff of Highbury Education Centre (HEC) and SchoolsPlus (Horton family of schools), with set-up help from HEC students, the event brought together over 60 students for workshops and discussions.

The idea for the event started two years ago, when HEC principal Stephen Rovers and RCMP Constable Jennifer Britton wanted to give students access to experts in mental health and addictions.

The event grew this year to include students from HEC, Kings County Adult High School, West Hants Education Centre, Horton High School, Central Kings Rural High School and Northeast Kings Education Centre for sessions on human trafficking, sexual consent, mindfulness, addictions, physical fitness, nutrition, and archery, plus a meet-and-greet with therapy animals from Dragonfly Therapeutic Farm.

Thanks to the organizers and presenters, student participants say the day was positive and informative, equipping them with tools and strategies for well-being.



TECHNOLOGY SUPPORTING INCLUSION

Classrooms across the province will take part in the Hour of Code this month, an international initiative to introduce coding and computer science to students.

Throughout the year, coding and technology are integrated in day-to-day classroom activities in all areas curriculum areas, including mathematics and literacy. Teachers have access to a lending library of the latest classroom tech tools, such as kits for robotics, coding and science, through our regional Innovation Centre.

Technology use in the classroom has grown from traditional uses like typing out a book report, to daily, interactive use that prepares students for the future and makes learning inclusive and accessible for everyone.

Courtney Daniels is our P-6 Technology Integration Mentor. She visits classrooms daily, introducing new technologies to students and helping teachers to enhance their skills and comfort level.

“We’re teaching kids to code and to use technology not only because they need skills like resilience and growth mindset for their future careers, but because it removes barriers to inclusion,” explains Daniels.

Technology integration supports universal design for learning (UDL), an approach that helps give all students an equal opportunity to succeed. UDL is an important part of our System Improvement Plan. It calls for flexibility in the ways students access material, engage with it, and show what they know. It’s similar to the idea of designing a building with a ramp instead of stairs, so everyone can come inside.

“If everyone is using technology to participate, it looks like everyone is doing the same thing; no one feels singled out for having an adaptation that helps them participate. It’s also easier for the teacher to differentiate a lesson,” says Daniels.

For example, Daniels introduces teachers to classroom apps like Flipgrid, which students can use to record and submit short video responses to a question or assignment. When everyone in the class uses it, it empowers learners who have challenges expressing their thoughts, or who feel shy raising their hand. The app enables them to share their ideas in an equal way as the students who are able and comfortable to speak in class. The technology is interesting and engaging for everyone while encouraging equal participation.

Daniels says that integrating technology also helps students to learn some important lessons about problem-solving and resilience, because teachers are often learning to use it alongside their students.

“Many teachers are new to the technology we’re using in classrooms. Letting kids see that their teacher can struggle with something new can be a great life lesson to show that we’re all lifelong learners.”



Grade Primary-1 students at Dwight Ross School program Dash robots using basic coding skills.

Try it at home!
Hour of Code
resources for
families

- Learn to Code with Google/coding.org <https://csfirst.withgoogle.com/s/en/home>
- Khan Academy Hour of Code www.khanacademy.org/hourofcode
- Kodable Hour of Code www.kodable.com/hour-of-code

NOT-SO-RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

Community, kindness and togetherness are common themes through many cultural traditions that hold celebrations in December. All month, students and staff are sharing acts of kindness and meals together, to help make the season bright for all.



Avon View High School students organized a winter clothing drive.



Port Williams Elementary students collected food bank donations.



Clark Rutherford Memorial School P-1 students made cards for deployed Canadian Armed Forces members.



Regional office staff collected gifts for families receiving support from community organizations.

LEARNING TO TEACH

Pre-service teachers are in classrooms in November and December, learning from AVRCE teachers (and from students, too!)

Every year, AVRCE schools welcome pre-service teachers to work alongside experienced AVRCE teachers. Currently, there are 117 pre-service teachers from Acadia University in classrooms throughout our region. We also host pre-service teachers from Mount Saint Vincent University, St. Francis Xavier University, and Université Sainte-Anne. As part of their training, they learn directly from seasoned educators—and from students, too!

“We rely on AVRCE teachers to help mold our pre-service teachers into the qualified, experienced teachers of tomorrow,” explains Everett MacPherson, Acadia’s pre-service teacher placement coordinator and a former AVRCE administrator and teacher. “We feel confident that our Acadia students bring a level of energy, creativity, knowledge and skill to classrooms in the valley. However, it is when they get out in schools and work with experienced practitioners that they develop into the teachers we want in AVRCE classrooms.”

Although these classroom placements are meant to give pre-service teachers hands-on experience, Berwick and District School teacher Jason Spinney says everyone benefits. Pre-service teacher Gaelen Olinski is working with Spinney in his grade 7 classroom for the coming weeks.

“It’s neat to see this injection of new people who are eager to be part of the profession,” says Spinney. “It’s a huge, rewarding part of the job to work with student teachers and see that level of eagerness. But what the kids get out of it, it’s a fresh face and a new approach.”

Olinski has been leading lessons on media literacy, culminating in students delivering product pitches to demonstrate their understanding of media and advertising. Spinney says Olinski’s approaches have engaged staff and students throughout the school.

“With Gaelen doing this unit on media literacy, it’s so high interest, and the kids are so engaged with what he’s brought to the classroom. When they started talking about social media, I learned a lot. We try to stay up on best practices all the time, but [Gaelen] has brought a new level to that, and has connected me with new ideas around social media.”

This is Olinski’s second year in the Acadia University Bachelor of Education program, and his second classroom placement. He says his experience with Spinney and the grade 7 students has been tremendously positive, with some valuable lessons.

“You learn so much from teachers and students. We learn from each other and grow together. Everyone—from my associate teachers, students, the school staff—has been incredibly welcoming and inclusive. When I first started, I didn’t realize how much of teaching is like coaching. It’s not just about delivering content—that’s half the job. It’s about making connections, having conversations, being kind, good to each other, and respectful. The relationships are an aspect of the job I didn’t think about, but it’s one of the most important things I’ve learned.”



Acadia University pre-service teacher Gaelen Olinski works with Berwick and District School grade 7 students on product pitches as part of their learning about media literacy.

What Does “Bus Driver Discretion” Mean?

Sometimes we make an early morning announcement that bus drivers will use discretion on roads. This means that road conditions are generally good, but some roads may be unplowed or slippery. A bus driver may not travel on a road if they are concerned about road conditions. The bus driver will report roads not travelled to our transportation staff, who then work to identify affected stops and provide notice to schools. If a bus doesn’t travel a road before school, it will not travel that road after school.

For more information, visit

www.avrce.ca/storm-daysschool-cancellations

Resources for Families

The following resources are available to support families:

- AVRCE’s Parent Navigator, Tammy Ring, is available at 902-844-2816 or tammy.ring@avrce.ca
- SchoolsPlus works collaboratively with other agencies and offers a range of services to all school communities. Visit www.avrce.ca/schoolsplus to find contacts for your area.
- School administrators can help put you in touch with community organizations and services.

Questions or Concerns?

If you have a question or concern about something at your child’s school, we want to work with you to resolve it. Please start by speaking with your child’s teacher. Then, follow up with the principal if needed. If more action is required, contact AVRCE at 902.538.4617. For more information, visit www.avrce.ca/parentguardian-concerns.

Get in touch with AVRCE

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