

MONTHLY UPDATE

From the AVRCE Regional Executive Director of Education



Annapolis Valley
Regional Centre for Education



EXPERIENTIAL SCHOOLS: DISCOVERING POTENTIAL

Three schools in our region—West Hants Education Centre, Highbury Education Centre and Lawrencetown Education Centre—support students who have struggled in a traditional classroom setting. Through hands-on learning, outdoor and adventure education, and a close-knit, supportive environment, students at WHEC, HEC and LEC challenge themselves to discover their goals, strengths and abilities.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- Reaching milestones, connecting with community
- Celebrating and honouring African Heritage Month
- Engaging in literacy and culture
- Experiential schools: Discovering potential
- Should my kid stay home from school today?
- FEDS Program partnership enhances EA skills, supports for students
- Time to register for Pre-Primary and Primary!

COMING UP

- February: African Heritage Month
- February 4-13: High school report cards
- February 17: Heritage Day holiday
- February 19: African Youth Talent Show at Horton High School
- March 13: Elementary/Middle Level marking day
- March 16-20: Spring Break

REACHING MILESTONES, CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITY



Second semester is well underway and we are quickly approaching the 100th day of school. Congratulations to all students for reaching this milestone in the school year, and keep up the good work!

February is African Heritage Month in Nova Scotia. This year's theme, *The Ties that Bind: Faith, Family and Community*, recognizes the essential traits that sustain the strength, resiliency and togetherness of the African Nova Scotian community. This month and throughout the year, schools will host guest speakers, artists, musicians and community members to highlight the history, culture and contributions of African Nova Scotians.

This month, several Bridgetown Regional Community School students, staff, and members of our AVRCE senior leadership team were invited to visit the historic African Nova Scotian community of Inglewood, to speak with community members and Annapolis County Council about how we are supporting student achievement.

The Annual African Youth Talent Show is scheduled for Wednesday, February 19 at the Horton High School Performance Centre, showcasing the talents and skills of students in the Student Support Worker program. Details are shown in the event poster below, and everyone is welcome at this all-ages show.

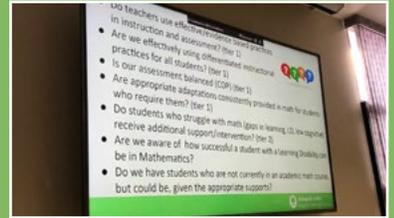
We are continuing to increase school community participation across our region through School Advisory Councils. Soon, I look forward to meeting with SAC chairs, our Regional Education Officer, and AVRCE staff to sign new SAC agreements, review our System Improvement Plan and build capacity for local voices in education.

Finally, Staff Appreciation Week took place this month, from February 9 to 15. I would like to thank all staff members for their continued dedication to students, families and our school communities.

Sincerely,

Dave Jones
Regional Executive Director of Education

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As part of our System Improvement Plan mathematics goal, school administrators took part in a session on effective instruction and assessment.



Students and staff connect with community members and Annapolis County Council in the historic African Nova Scotian community of Inglewood.



Dropped in to talk with Acadia B.Ed students about inclusive education, fundamental practices, the importance of relationships, and the roles they will play in students' lives. They all received a copy of our System Improvement Plan.

CELEBRATING AND HONOURING AFRICAN HERITAGE MONTH



This month and throughout the year, we honour and celebrate the cultural, historic, economic, scientific and social contributions of African Nova Scotians. Special events this month include student participation at Kings County Council, the annual African Youth Talent Show, class projects and school displays highlighting African Nova Scotian heritage.



ENGAGING IN LITERACY AND CULTURE

Three Mile Plains District School students who take part in the school's African Nova Scotian literacy support program are getting immersed in history, learning about culture, and finding new excitement for reading through drama.

Kate Goodwin, who leads the literacy support program, wrote a short play to re-enact Viola Desmond's challenge to racial discrimination when she refused to give up her seat in the segregated "Whites only" section of New Glasgow's Roseland Theatre in 1946.

"I wanted to try to come at literacy from a different angle, not just reading," explains Goodwin. "The students were more excited to work on a play. They really enjoyed it, they were very engaged and took it seriously."

The students have been working since October to learn their lines, as well as the history and context of Desmond's courageous actions. This month, with the help of Avon View High School student videographer, Kaghlen Roberts, they recorded the play at Windsor's Mermaid Theatre, using costumes supplied by Quick as a Wink Theatre and music teacher Keshia Laffin. A video of their performance has just been entered in the Delmore Buddy Daye Learning Institute's African Nova Scotian History Challenge contest. Regardless of the contest outcome, Goodwin says the experience has been transformative.

"It helped them to imagine the story, to feel the emotions that Viola Desmond experienced in that moment. It really came alive. And the students surprised me, too. They developed strategies to learn lines and they helped each other. This experience really encouraged them to step out of their comfort zones and to build confidence."



Jahmira Brown played the role of Viola Desmond, Adonia Sampson was the Theatre Owner, Kaiah States was a Witness, Hayzen Small played the Police Officer, and Derrick Schofield played the part of a Reporter.



EXPERIENTIAL SCHOOLS: DISCOVERING POTENTIAL

Highbury Education Centre (HEC) in New Minas, Lawrencetown Education Centre (LEC) in Lawrencetown, and West Hants Education Centre (WHEC) in Windsor are a little different than a typical school. Students still take the same courses, earn credits, and meet the same academic requirements as a regular middle or high school, but these three schools offer a different approach for students who, for a variety of reasons, have not found success in a traditional classroom.

Established in 2004-2006, these experiential schools are part of the inclusive education mix—LEC was even cited as an example in *Students First*, the 2018 provincial Commission on Inclusive Education report. All three schools offer high school programming; WHEC and LEC have a middle level program, too. Students are usually referred by their home school, although families and community agencies can also refer a student.

The experiential learning model incorporates academics, wellness, outdoor education (learning outside in any form), adventure education (activities like backcountry camping, hiking or rock wall climbing), and service learning. Lessons are designed to be hands-on; for example, WHEC's Global Geography 12 course just completed a class trip touring Windsor, Wolfville, and Halls Harbour to identify common features of different communities. At the core of the experiential approach is a focus on strong, positive relationships.

"We're providing students with a place to take healthy risks, to push their boundaries and see what they're capable of. We work on creating strong relationships between peers and with staff. That's critical to students achieving their goals, and being accountable to one another," explains HEC principal Stephen Rovers. "A lot of kids who come to these programs are capable of being really successful, they just need a different path, and someone who helps them get there."

Jamie Peppard, principal of LEC, agrees. Getting to know each student and building trust is necessary to help students discover their own goals and motivation. "You have to know everything about [each student]. We visit their home, meet the people in their life, go on pro-social outings, and have one-on-one meetings. Putting in that time pays off because once you build trust, students want to do their best and don't want to let their group leader down."

Although many students who choose to attend an experiential school are considered at risk for a variety of reasons, there is no "typical" experiential school student.

"Everyone has their own story, and their own reason for wanting to attend. It looks different for each student," says WHEC principal Dylan Irvine. "In one way or another, they are at risk of not being in school, and haven't responded to traditional schooling models. Our goal is to help students address life events they need to work on to get back on track and keep them academically, socially, emotionally and physically engaged."

Although staff work hard to build deep connections, students are ultimately responsible for their own success.

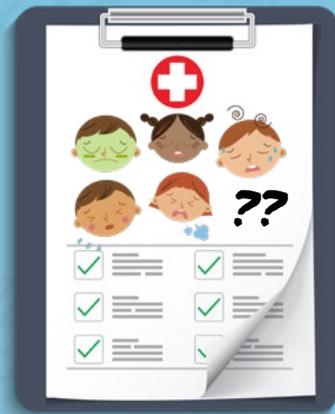
"We want students who are willing to commit to change, and want to get the most out of their experience here," says Peppard. "We support kids all the way through once they're in the door, but they have to want to challenge themselves."

"We are here to help students discover their best possible self, but they have to be ready to do it for themselves. When students can discover that for themselves, they can carry that on to reintegrate with their home school, contribute to the community, and succeed in life," says Irvine.

For students who are ready and willing to rise to the challenge, their hard work yields amazing results. Peppard knows of many experiential school students who would have otherwise ended up in the justice or community services systems, who have gone on to post-secondary education and successful careers. As you can see, these HEC students feel positive about their potential:

"It has only been about a week here and I have made so many goals for myself, as well as loving friends and good relationships with staff [...] For the short time I've been here I've felt more motivated for education and I feel like I am going to succeed. I am very much looking forward to this year and my growth." - HEC student Mikala

"When I came to HEC, I was so close to not passing, but they pushed me through. Gave me the ingredients for a positive mindset. They have helped me and others in every which way possible." - HEC student B.S.



SHOULD MY KID STAY HOME FROM SCHOOL TODAY?

Regular school attendance is important. Missing school time can have a negative impact on a student's academic progress.

However, when your child has an illness, like a cold or flu, that might spread to others or prevent them from taking part in class, sometimes the best thing to do is stay home for a day or two. That way, they can return to class feeling better and ready to learn.

SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD SHOULD STAY HOME FROM SCHOOL:

- Has a temperature higher than 38°C
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Was up sick during the night and is too fatigued for school activities



TAKING MEDICATION AT SCHOOL:

School staff cannot give medication to your child without certain consent forms and plans in place. If your child needs medication at school on an ongoing basis, staff will work with you to make a plan.

If your child is taking a short-term prescription, like an antibiotic, it is best to plan the dosage schedule for administration at home.

Get in touch with your principal any time if you have questions about attendance or medication at school.

PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF ILLNESS:

- Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds before eating, after work/school/play, and after using the washroom.
- Avoid touching your nose, mouth and eyes.
- Cough or sneeze into your elbow or a tissue. If using a tissue, throw it out after using it and wash your hands.
- Clean frequently touched surfaces like phones, tablets, remotes, door knobs, light switches, car interiors, etc.



FEDS Program Partnership Enhances EA Skills, Supports for Students

In March, 25 AVRCE Educational Assistants (EAs) will start the fifth cohort of the Foundations in Educational Support Program at NSCC (FEDS), while a previous cohort is scheduled to graduate from this two-year training program in June.

Developed through a collaboration between AVRCE and NSCC, the FEDS program provides focused, job-specific training to increase the skills of EAs in our region, which translates to enhanced support for students and inclusion.

EAs who chose to enroll in this program take classes during their own time outside of work hours, which is a tremendous commitment. We appreciate and thank all of our EAs who have graduated from or are currently enrolled in the FEDS Program for their dedication to students and to advancing their professional skills.

Interested in being an EA? We want to hear from you!
Visit www.avrce.ca/jobs

TIME TO REGISTER FOR PRE-PRIMARY AND PRIMARY

Have you heard? All schools with elementary grades will offer Pre-Primary starting in September 2020, with transportation available for eligible children at all locations!

Pre-Primary is a play-based early learning program that helps children learn, grow and get ready for school entry.

If your child will be turning 4 years old (Pre-Primary age) or 5 years old (Primary age) before December 31, 2020, get in touch with your local school as soon as possible to register for Pre-Primary or Primary.

Registering now helps us plan bus routes, classrooms and staffing for the new school year.

Plus, schools are hosting important registration and orientation sessions between now and May for incoming Pre-Primary children, Primary students, and families. These sessions help school staff get to know new children, and allow your child to get familiar with their new school.

To find your school, use the "Catchment Search" button at www.avrce.ca/our-schools or call our Transportation Division at 902-538-4641 (toll-free 1-800-850-3887).



Get in touch with AVRCE

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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.