

Corner Brook Status of Women Council

NEWSLETTER - September 2020

Back to school

Back to school makes me reminisce about all the firsts my children have experienced over the years - first smile, first tooth, first step and next week first day of school during an out of control global pandemic. I must remember to get the littlest one a blue mask so that his eyes sparkle in that, first day of second grade, picture.

Just like all of their other milestones I'm full to the brim with excitement and anxiousness. Excited because after six months the entire family wants their own independent lives again and anxious because, well call me crazy, but I don't want to experience my child's first breathing tube. Too unlikely? Maybe, but I don't want them to experience their grandparent's last breathing tube.

Despite my worst fears, at this moment, in Corner Brook, Newfoundland, the probability of the children coming into contact with the virus is very low. Low enough that returning to school was a certainty, but I was hoping that the NLESD and provincial government would have done more and sooner.

In a nutshell, the plan is to cancel a bunch of extra-curricular activities, have the kids and the teachers wear masks (but only in common areas), open the windows, and tell 7000 children they no longer qualify to ride the bus.

With zero cases on the West Coast, this plan might pass with a push for safety, but it furthers the educational and quality of life divide between privileged and underprivileged students. Decreased busing equals decreased attendance for students lacking reliable transportation and for students whose parents do not have the luxury of flexibility in their work. 1.8km may not be a great distance to walk in the summer, however, we have up to six months of snow here and during that time we do not have sidewalks.

The stoppage of extracurricular also unfairly affects under-privileged students who may only have access to school sponsored sports and enrichment. Privileged students have the means to adapt, they meet with their teams on zoom for strength and conditioning training, they attend their music lessons as usual, just online.



Should the school boards minimal precautions suddenly not be sufficient and children be required to return home the class divide only intensifies. During the first shutdown the poor suffered the most in all areas; with any previous resources depleted, a second shutdown will devastate the poorest among us.

The issues and inequalities are far too massive and too numerous to correct in the next nine days, but a lot could have been accomplished had six months not been squandered.

Upcoming:

Monday September 7th - Labor Day - This holiday officially celebrates workers and the labour union movement. Our office will be closed on this day.

Tuesday September 8th - International Literacy Day - this day serves to recognize the importance of literacy and acknowledge the need to create a globally literate community.

Thursday September 10th - World Suicide Prevention Day. In lieu of the annual walk, a virtual event will be broadcast. Stay tuned for details

Sept 18th - Take Back the Night. Details will be released soon for this year's socially distanced event.

Monday September 21st - International Day of Peace - A day devoted to strengthening the ideals of peace, through observing 24 hours of non-violence and cease-fire.

In the news:

Local: As expected, Andrew Furey, won the provincial liberal leadership race and was sworn in as our 14th premier. Lacking much substance or vision in his campaign, Furey promised to find experts to advise him in all areas.

Furey's first act as premier was to shuffle the cabinet and break his promise to find experts. Some of his experts: Minister of Education, Tom Osbourne, businessperson with no experience in education; Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour, Gerry Bryne, has not worked outside of politics in over 24 years; Minister of Environment, Climate

Change and Municipalities, Derek Bennet, has a background in recreation, not science. Not impressed.

Globally: September isn't globally recognized as back to school time. Many children around the globe have already returned to school, giving us an opportunity to learn from their mistakes.

In the USA, schools have been reopening throughout August. With significant community spread across the United States it is not surprising that many schools reopened, only to return to virtual classrooms within days or weeks.

Much further away, students in Israel returned to school in late May. Their return was not accompanied by social distancing, reduced classroom sizes or improvement in ventilation. Shortly after case numbers exploded.

I guess our planners need to learn from their own mistakes.

The Final Word:

If all of the above is too much, let's refocus on the positive. The federal government has introduced new recovery benefits that will protect your income. The recovery sickness benefit and the recovery caregiver benefit will make it possible for employees to stay out of the workforce and isolate when they are sick and stay home to care for their children if schools or daycares close. For more information about these benefits please go to:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2020/08/supporting-canadians-through-the-next-phase-of-the-economy-re-opening-increased-access-to-ei-and-recovery-benefits.html>