



DECEMBER · KESIKEWIKU'S · DECEMBRE



REGIONAL UPDATE

Monthly Newsletter of the South Shore Regional Centre for Education

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SSRCE Schools Receive Outdoor Classrooms from WestFor

Classrooms throughout SSRCE have been moving outside more than ever this year. The importance of outdoor learning has recently been highlighted in Nova Scotia's Back to School Plan and while getting outdoors has become the recommendation of public health because of COVID-19, the idea of outdoor classrooms isn't a new one.

Jennifer Meister is a School Health Promoter with SSRCE and says there has been ongoing work to create additional outdoor learning spaces over the last number of years. This fall, the project was fast-forwarded because of the pandemic.

"It is important to us that we create areas that are conducive to learning, get classes outside, and make teachers and students a bit more comfortable," says Meister. "Outdoor learning is an overall healthy behavior and we are thrilled to see these classrooms come to life."

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Thanks WestFor Management Inc.



Nearly all the schools in the SSRCE have received an outdoor classroom thanks to the generosity of WestFor Management along with a number of their partners.

Spencer Coulstring is a Community Engagement Coordinator with WestFor Management Inc. She says much of the thanks for these outdoor benches goes to their local contractors who heard about the need for outdoor classrooms and donated all their time and materials, cutting, milling and delivering benches.

“We take two to four staffers to construct them on site,” says Coulstring. “We take a pine/spruce/poplar slab and connect it to two stumps with spikes. It takes a little physical labour, especially when we do more than one in a day, but it is worth it when we get pictures from smiling teachers and students.”

Most of the outdoor classrooms consist of six-foot plank benches that sit atop stumps. A couple schools have received an amphitheatre style classroom.

“We are so grateful for the willingness and dedication that Nova Scotian educators and parents have for the safety and education of the children in our province,” says Coulstring. “This is the very least that we could do. While none of us are educators, we have best friends, parents, siblings, and partners that are.”

WestFor would also like to extend thanks to Carriers, RC Weare, Freeman Lumber, Elmsdale Lumber, Ledwidge Lumber, Back Country Farm & Forestry, Maibec Canexel, Brian Sweeney and his daughter, as well as Groupe Savoie. “These mills, truckers, contractors, and individuals have donated their blood, sweat, and tears to create log benches for students and teachers to use,” says Coulstring.

SSRCE sends a sincere thank you to WestFor and all those mentioned above as well.

About WestFor

WestFor was established in 2016 by the Provincial Government to increase the efficiency of forest management on Crown Land in Nova Scotia. We assist 13 mills in their day to day operations while also assisting the government, the people, and the forests. Our goal is to practice sustainable forestry that benefits future generations to come, both environmentally and economically.





"These are just two examples of the generosity of our students, staff, and school communities."

- PAUL ASH

**SSRCE REGIONAL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

A Message from the Regional Executive Director

Our school based staff along with the regional staff, have had a busy few weeks preparing for the holiday break. As you know, last week, the province announced an extension to the break. In order to make sure students were still able to celebrate the holidays, schools were filled with hustle and bustle as they squeezed in theme days and festive events.

This year, celebrations looked a bit different. While schools weren't permitted to have traditional activities like, Christmas concerts or school events that needed extra volunteer help, our staff put their heads together to come up with innovative ways to mark the holiday.

I'm proud of the creativity I've seen and the commitment a number of schools have demonstrated to carrying on their traditions of giving back. Hebbville Academy filled 26 Christmas hampers for local families and at Forest Heights Consolidated School, students took time to create Christmas cards for the residents of Shoreham Village. These are just two examples of the generosity of our students, staff, and school communities.

Staff throughout SSRCE have also been working diligently preparing for a variety of learning scenarios that we may need to shift to throughout this school year. While there's been no indication that a pivot to online learning is near, we know it's important to prepare in the event a case of COVID-19 is identified in one of our schools or if the epidemiology changes.



Above: students from Hebbville Academy prepare Holiday Hampers.

Below: students from Forest Heights Consolidated School write cards for local seniors.



Planning for different learning scenarios

As we have seen with the previous cases of COVID-19 in schools, each situation has a different set of circumstances and these factors play a role in the direction of Public Health. While we certainly hope our schools remain open as they have since September, we have worked through a variety of scenarios, including changes to class sizes and staffing. SSRCE along with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development have also been preparing should Public Health advise us to move to an at-home learning model. In that case, all schools would close and teachers from all grade levels would deliver online classes where students would participate in a combination of real-time instruction along with self-directed learning.

Devices & technology upgrades

In November, the Province of Nova Scotia announced an investment of \$21.5 million dollars for Chromebooks and technology updates. SSRCE has already started distribution of these devices and currently, all students in grades 7 to 12, who were identified as needing a device, now have access to one. Additional devices have been ordered and students in grades 4-6 who require a Chromebook will have access once the shipment arrives.

As we wrap up 2020, I wish you much health and happiness in the coming year. I hope your holidays are filled with warmth, loved ones, and delicious treats.

Sincerely,
Paul Ash

SSRCE Regional Executive Director



Donations collected by Wickwire Academy.

HOLIDAY GIVING IN SSRCE



South Queens Middle School collected the food donations (above).



New Germany Regional High School donated toys to the IWK Toy Drive.



Liverpool Regional High School filled stockings for the food bank.

Festive Photos from Across the Region



Aspotogan Consolidated Elementary students dressed in red (left). At Bluenose Academy (above) students dressed in Christmas colours as well.



Students and staff get into the holiday spirit, creating pastel candy cane art at Forest Heights Consolidated School (above).

Staff at Wickwire Academy show off their ugly (or beautiful!) holiday sweaters.

Festive Photos from Across the Region



Hebbville Academy students enjoy theme days in the lead up to the holidays (left and above).



Bridgewater Elementary School students (left) and fun from Petite Riviere Elementary School (above).



Thank You

SchoolsPlus thanks the Free Masons for their generous donation to the SchoolsPlus Emergency Fund.

THE HEALTHY *Hangout*

Tips to Manage Holiday Stress

The holidays are typically a time for gatherings and celebrations when many get together with friends and family. It can also be a time when many people feel alone and disconnected, and this will likely be a feeling even more experienced this year as we live through a pandemic.

The stresses of the season combined with COVID-19 may feel overwhelming and it's important we focus on our wellbeing and mental health. Here are some tips from Red Cross Canada:

Try these relaxation techniques:

- **Hobbies.** Discover a new pastime or take part in an activity that you enjoy.
- **Physical activity.** It has countless benefits for your health and wellbeing that go beyond better stress management.
- **Yoga, breathing exercises and meditation.** All these techniques are highly effective for managing stress.
- **Visualization.** Visualization techniques tap into your ability to form positive mental images.
- **Massage therapy.** Many types of massages exist, and some have a particular focus on relaxation.

How to take care of yourself:

- Understand what causes stress and recognize your own feelings.
- Be patient with yourself and those close to you – it takes time to manage feelings.
- Learn how to manage your reactions to these experiences.
- Focus on the things you have control over.

Additional Resources:

kidshelpphone.ca or 1-800-668-6868
Provincial Mental Health & Addictions
Crisis Line 1-888-429-8167



CONTACT TRACING IN SCHOOLS

What steps does Public Health take when a case of COVID-19 is reported in a school community?



- STEP 1:** Public Health receives notice a person connected to a school community has tested positive for COVID-19.
- STEP 2:** Public Health starts a case investigation. This includes identifying close contacts of the person.
- STEP 3:** Public Health finds out if the person could have passed the virus on to others while at school.



IF YES, Public Health contacts school principal and local RCE/CSAP/MK* to let them know we are investigating.



IF NO, there is no further action required for the school community.

*RCE: Regional Centre for Education / CSAP: Conseil scolaire acadien provincial / MK: Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey

- STEP 4:** Public Health collects data and looks closely at the COVID-19 risk for the school community.
- STEP 5:** Public Health prepares a general notice for the principal to send to the entire school/staff/parent community.
- STEP 6:** Public Health finds out who was in close contact with the person who tested positive for COVID-19 in school.



FOR CLOSE CONTACTS, Public Health prepares a letter for the school to send to close contacts only. Public Health interviews the close contacts and provides direction for isolation and testing.



FOR PERSONS NOT IN CLOSE CONTACT, no further contact is made.



When there are no additional cases, Public Health closes the investigation.

Updated Oct. 26, 2020

For information visit: novascotia.ca/coronavirus

