



The following Letter to the Editor was sent to the Telegraph Journal on Tuesday, August 25, 2015 in response to an Editorial that was printed in that publication on the previous day:

Student Attendance a Collective Responsibility

The Editorial “Principals, teachers on hook for student absenteeism” published in the Telegraph Journal on Aug 25 makes simplistic and plainly biased contentions about an incredibly complex and vital issue. The comments lay full blame on teachers and educators for student attendance, completely ignoring well-established contributing factors such as child-poverty, mental health issues and lack of support services for children and families. It contends that the jobs of school staffs should be on the line because, “In the business world, having one-fifth of your workforce absent everyday would not be tolerated.” This assumes that the employees themselves, or in this case, students and their parents, are absolved of any responsibility in the matter. Some seven year- olds miss 25 or more days of classes in a school year. Surely, this is also a societal concern. Addressing the causes of student absenteeism is one of the major goals of the New Brunswick Teachers’ Association, and we pushed all political parties for action on this issue prior to last September’s election. In 2013, we hosted a forum that included representatives from seventeen diverse stakeholder groups, including five government departments. From this meeting, it was clear that student attendance is a challenging, collective, societal responsibility, requiring integrated responses to get youth and their families the help they need, whether from social workers, psychologists or school counselors. Educators have a role to play in improving student attendance. However, effective solutions require support from many others.

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