

COVID Impact: Amplifying Inequities in our NB Public School System?

Ardith Shirley,
NBTA Staff Officer



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If there is one lesson I have learned repeatedly over the last eleven months, it is to take nothing for granted. The number of times I have paused to yearn for a return to even that which vexed me in our pre-COVID world astounds me. Today's hardship can quickly become tomorrow's longed pleasure as public health, and operational plans unfold following each GNB news conference.

Over the years, your NBTA has consistently advocated for appropriate funding for our K-12 public education system to mitigate the many challenges due to societal inequities in our province. We know that schools are microcosms of the populace. As such, teachers see first-hand the struggles faced when adult-sized problems of poverty, hunger, homelessness, mental health, relationship breakdowns, violence, abuse, and many other challenges impact our children and youth.

Layer a pandemic on top, and gaps that already exist become amplified. When schools closed in March, too many of our teachers knew that children's well-being would suffer if they didn't act quickly. We heard stories of teachers feeling compelled to deliver food from their own cupboard to doors of their students, writing COVID operational plans so that school breakfast and backpack programs could continue, feeling helpless as they informally counselled families when, during our COVID 'check-ins', we became even more acutely aware of families struggling with significant mental and physical health concerns.

At the other end of the continuum, teachers were also asked to advise families as they purchased technologies, listen to frustrations about trying to access the internet with too many devices in a home at once, or not having a prom. Regardless of the concern, we responded. In so many ways, New Brunswick's teachers became a lifeline for students and their families, not just for learning but for life. (All of this while negotiating our own uncertainties associated with living through a pandemic.)

Your NBTA continues to strive to amplify your teacher voice in public, in the media, with politicians and other decision-makers. We also work within our membership to share our members' sometimes conflicting personal views as we endeavour to maintain a strong collective and professional voice.

When we became aware of the research being conducted at UNB on the impact on our teachers of responding to COVID-19 by Dr. Casey Burkholder and Dr. Matt Rogers (see page 8), we were quick to invite them to meet with your NBTA Executive and staff. Their research affirmed the stories we have heard of your heartbreak and heroism on the front lines. We will continue to follow their research and keep collecting your stories from the front lines as we work hard to amplify your professional voice at the provincial level.

As we navigate the multitude of challenges over the weeks ahead, we encourage you to continue sharing your wisdom with us, with the researchers at UNB, and with each other. There is strength in learning together as we help shape what New Brunswick education and our province will eventually look like in a post-COVID world.

Take care,

Book Give Away:

Congratulations to last month's winner, **Suzanne Robertson Wilson, Saint Rose School, ASD-S.**

Up for grabs this month is a copy of "**Student Learning Communities: A Springboard for Academic and Social-Emotional Development**" by Douglas Fisher, Nancy Frey, and John Almarode.

Sound intriguing? Send me an email at ardith.shirley@nbta.ca with 'Book Draw' as the subject line!

