

HEADING BACK TO SCHOOL IN 2020-2021

With back-to-school being on the forefront of parents' and students' minds, we asked two professionals within our education system a few questions to help everyone prepare to head back this fall in the "new normal".

Hanwell Herald: *How can parents help prepare their children mentally for this new school year?*

Julie LeGresley: Students' attitudes, feelings and opinions about the new school year starts at home. Kids of all ages are incredibly perceptive and are paying very close attention to their parents'/caregivers' conversations surrounding back to school. Families can help prepare the return to school by talking about the year in a positive way, appropriate to the age of their children; talking about safety at school through hand washing stations, new water bottle filling water fountains, a different schedule, new technology in the schools/classrooms, etc.

Kids are resilient and strong. Many times, they take things in stride that we adults would have concerns about!

Lucas Candy: Remember that kids are far more resilient when we give them credit for, they will take their cues from us as adults. If parents stress about it they will follow your lead. I would read your school's safety plan and make sure they are well aware of it, this will remind them of what to expect. Just remind them that while it will be a little different, focus on all of the things that will be the same as last year. Frame it as a normal year with a few extra procedures. Encourage them to be excited for the new school year.

Hanwell Herald: *What do you consider to be the top 3 talking points parents should cover when discussing school during COVID-19 with their children?*

Julie LeGresley: I love the idea of a family conversation around expectations in a COVID-19 school year that will look different in several ways (different school hours, bussing, water bottles, hand washing stations, etc.). Often, an adult's idea of important topics varies from what a kid thinks is important! A great way to start the conversation would be to ask kids what the top three things they would like to talk to the family about. This is a great way for kids to feel safe in bringing forward things that are at the forefront of their minds. Also, coming back to this conversation more than once in the fall is a great way to check in with kids about their thoughts and feelings about "the new normal".

Preparedness is a good topic to talk about this fall: how do kids feel about wearing their mask, what's the school's policy on scent-free hand sanitizer from home, do kids feel like they are missing anything in order to make them feel safe while at school are great questions to have family conversations about.

Lucas Candy: I would remind them of 3 things:

- 1)The new procedures will feel strange at first but by the end of September , they will be used to them.
- 2)What most students actually love about school is the relationships, with teachers and fellow students and those will be the same.
- 3)This is a season, as much talk as there is of the "new normal" in reality these procedures will relax with time and eventually a vaccine.



Resources:

Return to School : September 2020

<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/ed/pdf/ReturnSchoolExecutiveSummary.pdf>

Return to School : Guide for Parents and the Public

<https://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/ed/pdf/return-to-school-guide.pdf>

Learning at Home: Resources for Families

https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/learning_at_home.html

Mental Health and Coping During COVID-19

https://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/ocmoh/cdc/content/respiratory_diseases/coronavirus/mental-health-and-coping-during-covid-19.html

Hanwell Herald: *How can parents ease their child's worry to help them cope with the stress of going back to school?*

Julie LeGresley: Allowing kids the time and space to talk about anything that may be on their minds is important! My kids ask questions sometimes when I least expect it, and sometimes I'm not prepared to answer them. Sometimes kids want to talk about things that are on their minds at times that is not always easy, but acknowledging their concern or question when it's addressed goes a long way in reassuring them that what is on their minds is important and valid.

It's important to recognize if a child is stressed or not and acknowledging that a bit of stress is a normal part of life. Normalizing concerns and stress surrounding the school year by either echoing their question ("I'm wondering the same thing about class/gym/cafeteria/schoolwork too") has a way to reassure kids that they are not alone in their concern, but then following up the question or concern with something like "let's think about who we can ask to find the answer to" is completely OK.

Lucas Candy: Remind them that while there will be some new procedures most of the school day will run the same as previous years. Remind them that every year brings change with a new teacher, a new classroom, and new classmates, this is just one more "new thing" to add into that mix.

Hanwell Herald: *What will the first week back to school look like for students and what are some of the differences this year?*

Julie LeGresley: Schools and teachers are working hard to make the re-entry to school as seamless, fun, and positive as possible! Some of the changes that will be noticeable for kids will be the water bottle filling stations, hand washing stations and mask wearing (in applicable grade levels). There may also be changes to the day's schedule (including drop off and pick up time), cafeteria/lunch time and access, as well as outdoor play, although schools are still working on their plans as we speak.

Also, most schools have staggered entry, meaning that each grade level has a specific day they start back on that first week, instead of the whole school back on the first day. Bussing will be different for many kids, and some schools have their start and end times modified to fit the new bussing schedule.

Schools have been implementing Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies for a long time now, and families can expect to see a lot more intentional, targeted instruction of these concepts this year. These life-long skills are important in building resiliency and communication skills in students!

Lucas Candy: The first week back will be devoted to teaching students the new routines and procedures. Elementary teachers are especially good at teaching routine as it is the best way to run a class smoothly. This is actually how every year starts, this will just be a new set of routines.

Hanwell Herald: *What are common signs to look for in children that could indicate that they are struggling, emotionally and academically?*

Julie LeGresley: Communicate, communicate, communicate! Teachers are always at the ready to hear from families about how kids are doing outside of school! Kids often behave in a completely different way between home and school, and often both perspectives are needed to understand what the child is experiencing!

Students can also tell the adults in their lives how they are feeling and will look to talk about it with trusted people in their lives. Higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and other feelings will often show themselves in kids as changes in behavior. Kids may appear short tempered, be not as patient or kind to other family members, want to be left alone more frequently, not sleep as well, have changes to their appetites, lose interest in favored activities, or work hard to please family members, etc.

Checking in with each other and making this part of a regular parent/caregiver and child conversation is a great way to say "hey, I'm noticing (this different behavior) lately, can you tell me more about this?". These types of open questions start conversations in a safe and supporting way.



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Continued, Julie LeGresley: As for academics, it's important to recognize that this is a new transition period: from this spring's distance education, to summer vacation, and now back to a September school year. This type of transition has never happened before, and no one is in a rush to "get things back on track" - that old track doesn't exist anymore, and we are building a whole new track together! Teachers have their students' wellbeing - both emotionally and academically - at the forefront, at all times.

Lucas Candy: Each child will exhibit different signs of stress. Mood-swings, changes in sleep patterns, even physical symptoms like complaining of a sore stomach could all be signs of stress. More extroverted kids will be excited but possibly nervous to see friends again. More introverted kids may have a more difficult transition back to school. Parents will know when their child is acting out of the ordinary, they just need to be patient and keep lines of communication open.

Hanwell Herald: *What should parents do if their child shows signs they are struggling to get back into 'school mode'?*

Julie LeGresley: Time and patience will be two important things to keep in mind this fall. Communicating with teachers is always welcomed and if a parent/caregiver feels that their child is struggling, and conversations at home about what a teacher may be noticing in class is equally important. Often, teachers will recommend involving the school resource teacher or guidance counsellor to help a student work through any given situation. Families, students, teachers, and school personnel are all on the same team and all want kids to succeed!

Lucas Candy: They should talk to their child about it, find out what is bothering them. There is always a bit of "culture shock" when they switch from free wheeling Summer mode to a more structured school environment and they have been out of school more twice as long as usual, so this will be a factor for some. Allowing them to talk through how they feel can make a big difference to help them process the challenge. It also never hurts to touch base with the teacher.

Hanwell Herald: *If you would, please share a few organizational and time management skills that will assist in setting up students for a successful school year.*

Julie LeGresley: As great and useful as technology is, sometimes things "sink in" better when we write them down! Many schools provide day planners or agendas - encourage your child to write in it, especially the longer assignment and project dates! As the old saying "out of sight, out of mind" goes, if we don't see an important date coming up, it can sneak right up to us!

Then, I always suggest to families that a 2- or 4-month wall-mountain planner is a great way to organize a student's (or family) assignments in one central spot. These dry erase types of posters are great to plan time needed to complete long-term deadlines. Putting it in a visible location is a great reminder of what's coming up and makes it easier to plan time to complete assignments.

Also, kids thrive on routine! Establishing clear and consistent times for homework, reading, sport and leisure, family and dinner time is a great way for families to have structure to the day and typically helps ease discussions about homework not completed!

Lucas Candy: For older students, have them create a management system. A management system involves a calendar, a task manager, a storage system, and other items. This will help them organize work, home, and sports commitments. Each student should find or create a system that suits their needs. Some students will prefer a paper based system, while others prefer a digital one, others use a hybrid. There are lots of examples online of many systems people use. But remember a system is only as good as your ability to actually use it so choose a system that fits your personality.

Hanwell Herald: *How can students stay on track during their in-home class time?*

Julie LeGresley: It all comes back to scheduling, but also allowing for the acceptance that at-home learning is not on the same schedule as would be in-school. In-home class times are sometimes directed by Teams video calls, or multiple people needing the computer/laptop/tablets in the home. Flexibility is the name of the game!



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Lucas Candy: It is important to set aside a place in your home that is your designated work space. When students enter a classroom they know it is class time with a specific set of expectations, the challenge with working from home is that sometimes our “get to work” switch does not flip as easily. It is very helpful for students (and adults) to have a specific place they only use for work. Having a schedule is also helpful, while flexibility is nice, students (especially younger ones) usually do much better where there is a set schedule to follow.

Hanwell Herald: *What type of resources would be available to both parents and students who are struggling?*

Julie LeGresley: It can be sometimes hard for students and/or families to say to school personnel that they are struggling, but it's important to remember that school personnel are there for their students. Often, a quick phone call or email to the teacher, guidance counsellor or principal or vice principal is a great way to start the conversation, and often we will have suggestions or solutions that can be immediately impactful.

Also, the Child and Youth teams are always at the ready to help support school teams, as well as families needing extra support outside of the home. This branch of the Integrated Service Delivery means that school-based support teams can refer students or families to other professionals in order to address learning disabilities, mental health, or other types of needed support.

Lucas Candy: This will vary from school to school, be sure to read any communication from the school carefully and remember that your child's teacher is an excellent resource often they can help you, or if not they are able to point you towards excellent resources.

Hanwell Herald: *Is there anything else you would like to share to assist both parents and children during school 2020-21?*

Julie LeGresley: I love hearing about families that have goal-setting conversations at the start of the school year! These conversations can range from how many books a child can read this school year, to a targeted grade for a class, and success in being more positive and forgiving of themselves and others. Talking about a child's goals for the school year, writing them down, and revisiting them through the school year is a great motivator for success!

New Brunswick has done a great job at staying ahead of the COVID curve. We are starting the new school year with changes from a typical year, as well as more changes surely to come as we move forward into the fall and winter. Flexibility, patience and understanding for ourselves, our families, our children, and those who support them will be even more important moving forward.

Lucas Candy: The name of the game this year will be flexibility, the only thing certain in life is change, and this is especially true in 2020. Be patient with your child, your child's teacher and your school. I promise they are working hard to do their very best for your child. Teachers and schools will be taking this a week and a month at a time and won't always have answers for you. Try to extend grace when things are frustrating, I guarantee they are doing their best just as you are in what can be a stressful time.

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TRANSPORTATION INFORMATION

Anglophone West School District

<http://web1.nbed.nb.ca/SITES/ASD-W/transportation/Pages/default.aspx>

District scolaire franco-
phone Sud

<https://franco-phonesud.nbed.nb.ca/vie-scolaire/transport-scolaire>