

# kids & learning



Fall 2011

## first

Back-to-school  
newsletter  
for parents



## Young Students Succeeding in Reading

**Is your son or daughter struggling with reading and writing?**

Succeeding in Reading, aimed at primary and grade 1 students this year, should help turn that struggle into success.

Children who are having difficulty reading can get focused, daily support. Since children often learn best with other children, an early literacy teacher works closely with the classroom teacher to support small groups of children (usually two or three) for about 30 minutes a day.

The literacy teacher can work with your child one-on-one, if that's needed.

"When reading difficulties are identified early on, effective instruction and support can clear the path for reading success," said Kathy Stockman, program and assessment co-ordinator, Tri-County Regional School Board. "That is the goal of Succeeding in Reading."

Beautiful new books, selected to inspire a wide range of young minds, are in classrooms. Other hands-on activities, such as problem-solving with a jigsaw puzzle with friends or acting out stories with hand puppets, will encourage children to talk more and develop their language skills. Materials are also available to parents to help you help your children, through play, to expand their vocabulary and spark interest in learning.

The relationship between your child's classroom teacher and the literacy teacher is also critical. Together, they link what is happening in the small groups to what is happening in the classroom, to improve children's reading, writing, and language skills throughout the day and the school year.



"Children benefit from having lots of opportunities to talk with and listen to each other and the adults around them," said Donna Robson, teacher and vice-principal, Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board. "Succeeding in Reading recognizes the importance of such conversations in the classroom and in the child's home as supports for reading and writing development."

Succeeding in Reading is expected to extend into grades 2 and 3, helping teachers help students build on the progress they made in primary and grade 1.

**The province is investing more than \$6 million in Succeeding in Reading to support kids and learning first in our schools.**

## Welcome back!

Each new school year brings excitement and promise for parents, teachers, staff, volunteers, and most importantly—our students. It is especially exciting for our primary students and bittersweet for those who will graduate.

Together, we share responsibility for helping every student do their very best. This year, we will work with you on a focused plan that reflects our shared priority: kids and learning first.

Our youngest students will get the foundation they need to do well in later grades. Older students will be better prepared for continuing education, good jobs, and life after high school.

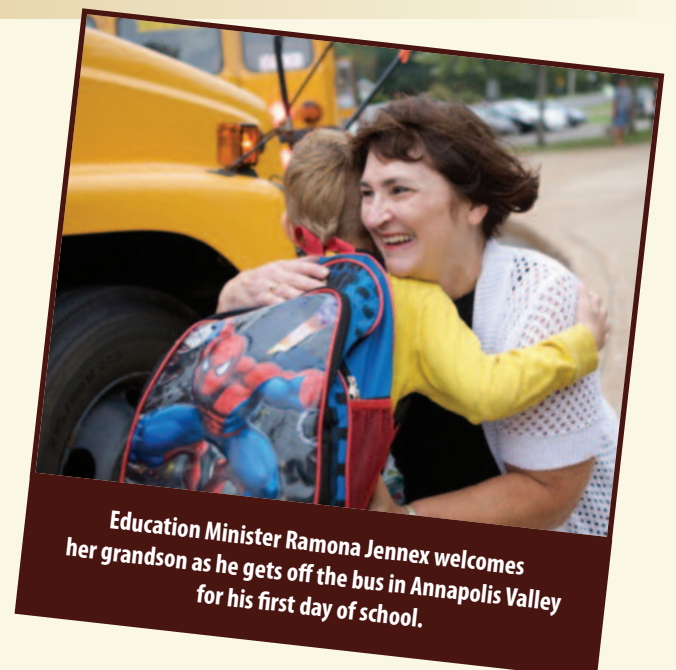
Parents recognize and value the difference that great teachers make in the lives of their children. We will work with teachers to ensure they have the time, tools, and teamwork they need to help students succeed.

We will strengthen the sense of community within our schools. Teachers will have more opportunity to work in teams focused on the learning success of every student. Parents and community members will be in the school often, at events, as volunteers, or to see and work with students. And more services to help kids and families will be available through more schools.

With significant enrolment declines, we must pursue options, such as expanding our virtual school and protecting small schools, so every student has access to a high quality education reasonably close to home.

I look forward to sharing the kids and learning first plan later this fall. I wish everyone a safe, happy, and successful year!

**Honourable Ramona Jennex**  
Minister of Education



Education Minister Ramona Jennex welcomes her grandson as he gets off the bus in Annapolis Valley for his first day of school.

# Protecting Youth from Cyberbullying

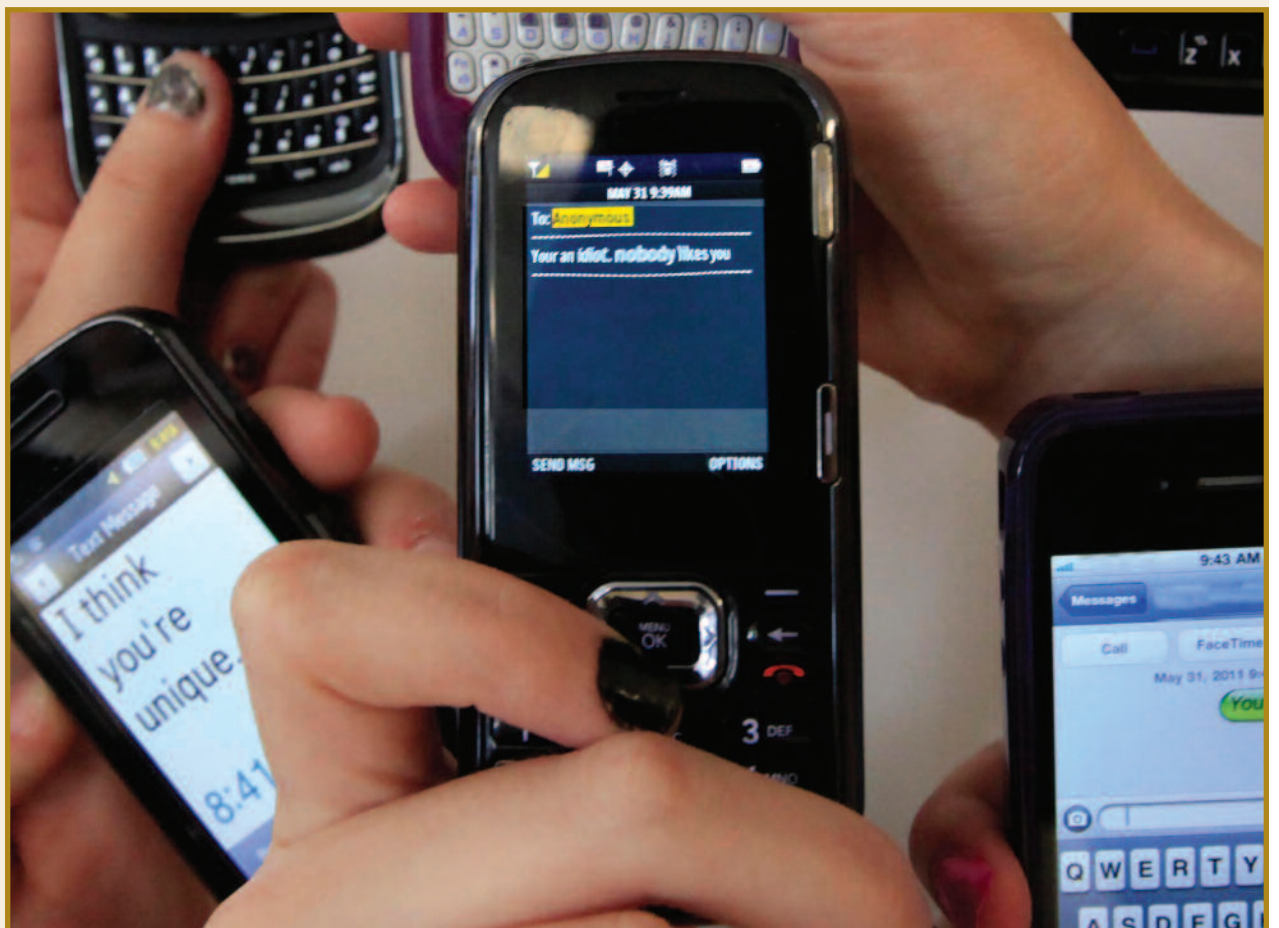
The Cyberbullying Task Force is exploring ways to fight bullying over the Internet and mobile devices. Our goal is to find solutions that the province can use to protect children and youth from harm.

The Task Force and Working Group have been meeting each month to hear from researchers and experts on the issue of bullying and cyberbullying and to explore the scope and prevalence of the problem. This fall, we are conducting focus groups with students to find out what they think the province should do to fight cyberbullying. Updates and videos from the meetings will be posted online at [cyberbullying.novascotia.ca](http://cyberbullying.novascotia.ca), and information is available at your local library.

We owe it to our children to do everything we can to protect them and keep them safe.

As the work continues, I want to express my gratitude to all of our partners for getting involved. We appreciate the tremendous amount of support from students, parents, and people from communities all across the province.

*Best wishes for the school year,  
Wayne Mackay, Cyberbullying Task Force Chair*



[cyberbullying.novascotia.ca](http://cyberbullying.novascotia.ca)

## Canada Learning Bonds: Helping your child continue their education—and it's free.

**Are you a parent who gets the National Child Benefit Supplement? Have you applied for a Canada Learning Bond? It is worth up to \$2,000 for your child's education after high school.**

The Canada Learning Bond is an education grant that helps low-income families save money for a child's education after high school. You do not have to contribute any of your own money for your child to receive the Canada Learning Bond.

The bond is available to children born in 2004 or later. Your child gets \$500 deposited into a savings plan to use for college or university. Then your child gets \$100 a year up to age 15, as long as your family continues to receive the National Child Benefit Supplement.

The benefits of setting up an education fund for your child go far beyond the money saved. It sets an expectation that your child will train for a good job after high school. It shows your child that you believe they can pursue their greatest dreams!

Did you know that very few children who are eligible for this money are receiving it? In Nova Scotia in 2010, only about 5,000 of the 32,000 eligible children actually received it.

If your child is eligible, sign up today at [www.canlearn.ca](http://www.canlearn.ca).

[www.canlearn.ca](http://www.canlearn.ca)

## Back to School with Healthy Local Food

**Blueberries. Corn. Pumpkin. Broccoli.** The school year arrives with a healthy harvest of locally grown vegetables and fruit.

Canada's Food Guide recommends that school-aged children and youth eat five to eight servings of fruits and vegetables each day, but 79 per cent of children in Atlantic Canada aren't getting that much.

Many schools are including healthy recipes from Strive for Five at School! into school menus, breakfast, and snack programs. Strive for Five at School! features recipes made with local, in-season, nutritious fruit and vegetables—and the recipes are student tested and approved!

Try out the Blueberry and Rhubarb Crumble, Fresh Corn on the Cob, or Creamy Broccoli and Ham Salad. Including these recipes at home supports what students are learning about food in school and encourages them to try new things. Check out the Strive for Five website at [nshps.ca/downloads/striveforfive](http://nshps.ca/downloads/striveforfive). Or check out other healthy recipes for vegetables and fruit at [www.freshfrozencanned.com](http://www.freshfrozencanned.com).

It's also important to help keep kids active. That means no more than two hours in front of a computer or tv screen a day.

The province is doing what it can too, to help kids grow up healthy. The province is developing a childhood obesity prevention strategy. Visit [www.gov.ns.ca/growinguphealthy](http://www.gov.ns.ca/growinguphealthy) to learn more.



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### Pepita Harvest Pumpkin Bread

If you're looking for a quick, nutritious snack for lunch bags or after school, try this Pepita Harvest Pumpkin Bread.

- 1/2 cup whole-wheat flour (125 mL)
- 1/3 cup all-purpose flour (75 mL)
- 2 tbsp flax flour or flax meal (30 mL)
- 2/3 tsp baking powder (4 mL)
- 2/3 tsp baking soda (4 mL)
- 1 tsp cinnamon, ground (5 mL)
- pinch salt
- 3/4 cup pumpkin, canned (175 mL)
- 1 egg
- 1/3 cup canola oil (75 mL)
- 1/2 cup white granulated sugar (125 mL)
- 1/4 cup pumpkin seeds, chopped (50 mL)
- 1 tsp non-hydrogenated margarine (5 mL)

Preheat oven to 350°F.

1. In a bowl, combine the 3 flours, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, and salt.
2. In another bowl, combine the pumpkin, egg, oil, and sugar.
3. With a mixer on low speed, add the flour mixture to the pumpkin mixture. Mix until well combined. Fold in the chopped pumpkin seeds.
4. Lightly grease the 5" x 9" loaf pan with the margarine. Spread the mixture in the loaf pan.
5. Bake 40–45 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the centre comes out clean. Cool and cut into 12 slices.

# Attendance, Assignments, and More at Your Fingertips

**iNSchool improves parent-school communication and supports student achievement.**

More than 300 schools now offer students and parents access to real-time information on attendance, marks, assignment due dates, school bulletins, and teacher comments.

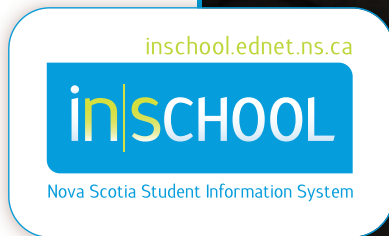
With the click of a button, the iNSchool system lets you see that your daughter has a 90 in math so far, a history paper due next Monday, and that she wasn't in class on Friday morning.

"The parent and student portals open a new avenue of communication between home and school," says Kendra Hall, a mathematics teacher at Bridgewater Junior High School. "I have received positive feedback from parents and students who appreciate the convenience of being able to access up-to-date attendance and school announcements online. As a teacher, I find home access to my gradebook and student information helpful while marking and planning lessons."

Teachers also have access to more information that helps them track the progress of their students more closely, and follow up more quickly on ways to support achievement.

The student-parent portal is gradually being expanded to all Nova Scotia schools. Each school is introducing it in a slightly different way. For example, some schools will post school announcements and attendance first and add assignment due dates and marks at a later date, while other schools will offer the full range of options right away.

Your school will keep you up-to-speed with its plan for the portal. All students and parents will have access to the portal by December 2012.



Key Dates		Oct. 10 Thanksgiving Day
Nov. 11 Remembrance Day	Dec. 19 to Jan. 2 Christmas Vacation	Jan. 26 & 27 Provincial Examinations
Mar. 12 to 16 Spring Break	April 6 Good Friday	April 9 Easter Monday
May 21 Victoria Day	June 15 to 19 Provincial Exams	June 29 Last day of school

## Homework

**How much time should students expect to set aside for homework each day?**

While teachers will use their own experience and judgment, based on the needs of their students, provincial guidelines are outlined below.

Primary to Grade 3	No set guideline
Grade 4	20–30 minutes daily
Grade 5	30–40 minutes daily
Grade 6	40–50 minutes daily
Grades 7, 8	60 minutes daily
Grades 9, 10	90 minutes daily
Grades 11, 12	120 minutes daily

[www.ednet.ns.ca](http://www.ednet.ns.ca)



## More Help for Families and Kids

**SchoolsPlus, a program that brings services into the school to help families and kids, will be available in every region this year.**

Services may include family resource centres, child care, youth health centres, recreation, and community outreach. SchoolsPlus is built on partnerships between government departments and community organizations.

Schools like Harbour View Elementary in Dartmouth have space for parents and families to meet with the SchoolsPlus leader and community outreach worker. Working together, they can identify available services that students and families need, and make a plan.

"SchoolsPlus is an amazing program," said Roseanna Cleveland, Chair of Take Action, a parent group at Harbour View. "It opens the door for parents to come freely into the school and makes it easier to get contacts for other organizations out there. SchoolsPlus makes it easier to have that relationship with the schools, with our kids, with our personal lives."



Families with children attending SchoolsPlus sites will learn more about "restorative practices," an approach that helps teachers and parents work with young people to resolve issues. The focus is on building positive relationships with children at home and at school that can help improve behaviour.

SchoolsPlus staff act as advocates for families, and coordinate and schedule services to ensure a quick response to help students and families. Services are also available after regular school hours. In addition, SchoolsPlus arranges for guest speakers to talk about topics of interest to parents, such as nutrition, parenting, and student engagement.



**Children from Guysborough County communities attended summer science camps, organized through SchoolsPlus in partnership with Family Services, St. F. X., and the Strait Regional School Board. St. F. X. University science students led the program, making learning science a fun summer highlight! Children also used their artistic and creative talents, while improving their social skills through group work and discussion.**

# Preparing Students for Good Jobs

**High school students are getting more opportunities than ever before to help prepare them for good jobs here in Nova Scotia. They get to sample the work world while they are considering their career path and developing skills that will help them when they enter the work force.**

Co-operative education is offered in 83 schools across the province. Students get hands-on work experience with a wide range of employers who are committed to helping students connect what they are learning in the classroom to the workplace. Over 3,500 students participated in co-op education during the last year, with another 150 in the workplace this summer. Co-operative education has grown by 700 per cent in our high schools since 2006.

The Options and Opportunities (O<sub>2</sub>) Program allows students to learn in community and workplace settings. O<sub>2</sub> is available in 48 schools and is ideal for students interested in building a career in arts, culture, and recreation; business; health and human services; hospitality and tourism; information technology; or trades and technologies.

Skilled trades courses in transportation and construction promote career exploration and skill development. Students have an opportunity to look at various trades including automotive service technician, heavy duty equipment technician, motor vehicle body repairer, carpenter, construction electrician, floor covering installer, and plumber. Skilled trades courses are currently offered in nine schools across the province.

Students enrolled in skilled trades courses can also take co-op in grade 12. This allows students to work with a certified trades person and earn apprenticeship hours.



Monique Robicheau (left) and Gabrielle Miller (right)—2010 Techsploration team students, Digby Regional High School.

*The goal of Techsploration is to increase the number of women working in science, trades, technical, and technology-related occupations by assisting young women from diverse backgrounds to explore a wide range of career options in these fields.*

**“Co-op students are focused on learning and getting all they can from the program. We are facing a real shortage of skilled trades people, and these co-op students could fill that gap.”**

— Peter Graves, Graves Electrical, Yarmouth  
(This company has already hired one of its former co-op students.)

**“This is the best experience I have ever had in my life! I came from a different province, and I could not believe a high school can offer this to their students. Others must take this same opportunity. It has set me up for life!”**

— Ty Huskison, Shelburne High

## Investing in Kids and Learning First

**The province invests well over a billion dollars a year to educate our children. That boils down to \$3.6 million every day, or \$41 a second.**

At the same time, enrolments are declining significantly—by almost 30,000 students over the past 10 years. This fall, we have 2,500 fewer students in classrooms, compared to last. Enrolments are projected to continue dropping until at least 2020.

**How do we ensure that our significant investment is helping every student in every region succeed?**

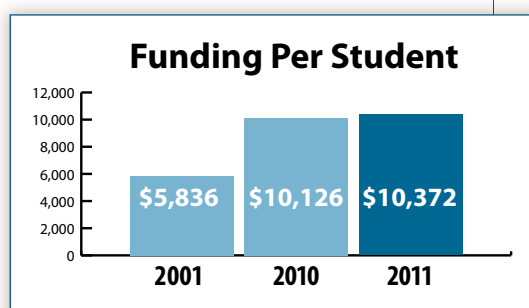
This fall, we will work with teachers, support staff, parents, school boards, students, and others on a focused plan that reflects our shared priority: kids and learning first.

Here is a snapshot of where we are now.

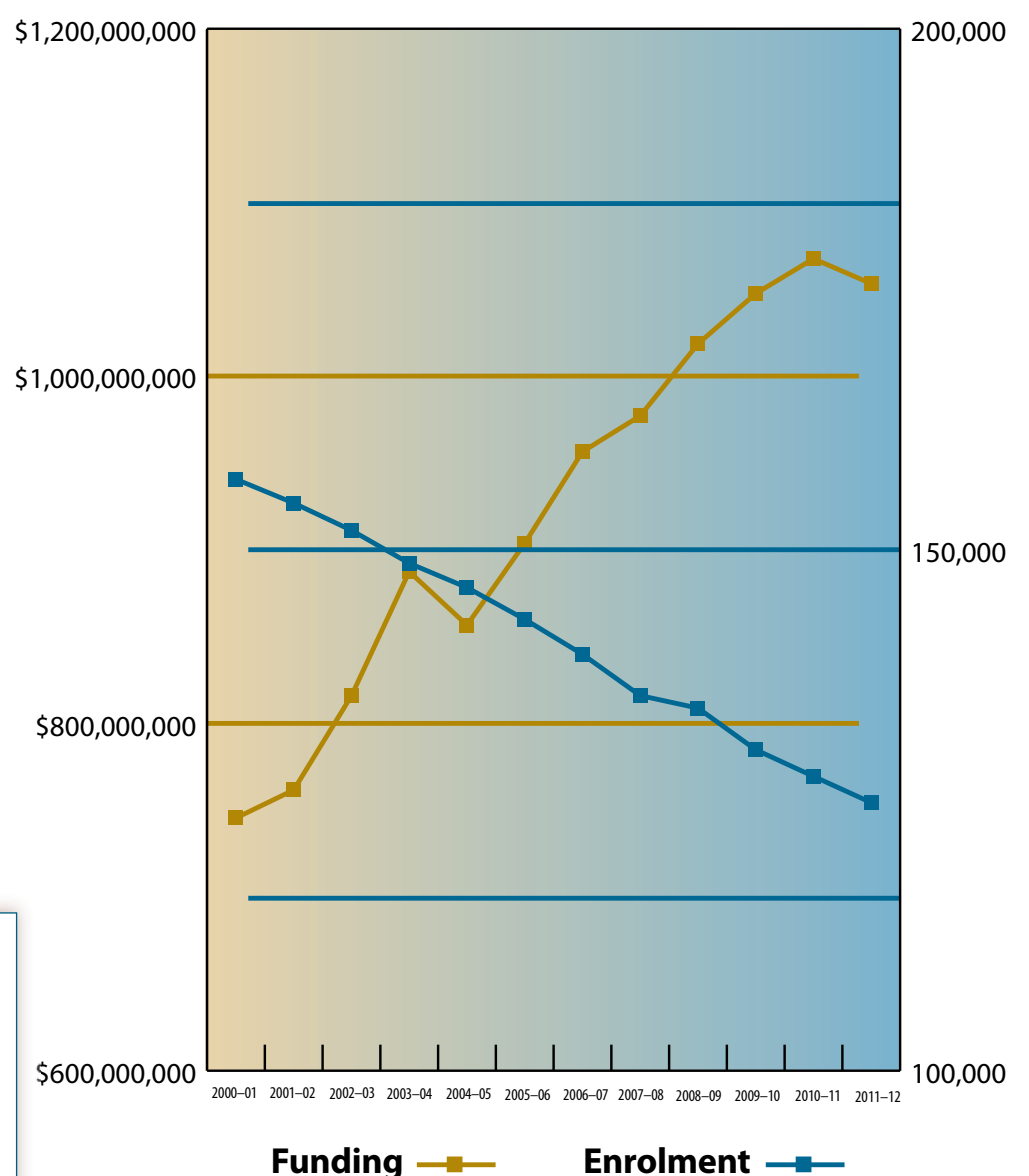
**Smallest class size in 20 years:** This year, the average class size for elementary is 21.8.

**Teacher numbers stable:** The number of teachers in classrooms today is about the same as it was 10 years ago when there were almost 30,000 more students.

**Higher per student funding:** This year, per student funding is \$246 higher than last.



### Funding Versus Enrolment: 2000–2012



## We want to hear from you

- Did you find this newsletter interesting?
- Do you have questions or ideas about anything you have read?
- Email [KidsAndLearningFirst@gov.ns.ca](mailto:KidsAndLearningFirst@gov.ns.ca)
- Call (902) 424-3757
- Follow us on Twitter @nseducation