

# ST. AGNES JUNIOR HIGH PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

## El Jones

We were thrilled to connect with Poet Laureate El Jones in November. El is an accomplished author and co-hosts a radio show called Black Power Hour that showcases cultural, social, and political issues relevant for Black people in addition to supporting people in prison. She currently teaches at Mount Saint Vincent where she earned a Chair in Women's Studies since 2017.

Through various forms of expression including spoken word poetry, El spoke to our students about socially relevant issues including anti-racism, our individual responsibilities within a global context, and how each of us can create opportunities for positive change.



## Volleyball

St. Agnes's female-identifying volleyball team has just finished an exceptional season! Their dedication, teamwork, and skill led them to the championship game, having won all but one of their regular season games. The team consistently demonstrated incredible sportsmanship and determination throughout the season, securing a well-deserved second place overall in the Tier 1 Citadel division. The players, coaches and supporters can all take pride in the team's achievements and the positive impact they've made on and off the court. Great job Gators!



## School News

### Student of the Month

To promote success in and out of the classroom, St. Agnes promotes a student of the month award. This award is designed for staff to nominate and select students who promote and take pride in St. Agnes Junior High School and in themselves. Our student of the month for November was Tia Panopolis.

Tia is a consistent leader in the classroom and support for her peers. She is a dedicated member of Student council, SAC and has volunteered multiple afternoons to do the score sheet for the volleyball games. She is respectful, kind, and always willing to lend a hand in the classroom. Congratulations Tia!



### St. Agnes Speaks

In considering strategies to support our well-being goal at St. Agnes, staff unanimously felt that hearing from students was critical. Incorporating student voices in decision-making processes regarding well-being within a school setting is pivotal for establishing a supportive and inclusive school environment. Students are not just recipients of policies and practices; they are key partners whose perspectives, experiences, and insights are invaluable.

Now in its 5<sup>th</sup> week, St. Agnes Speaks asks students a weekly question using a QR code to open a Google Form. Each form will include a question about aspects of well-being at St. Agnes. The responses provided by students are consolidated the following week by our school admin team and used to inform both interventions and future programming. Thus far, student feedback has indicated that discrimination is an area of concern for students.

*Discrimination can negatively impact the self esteem and confidence of students, especially if it is primarily based on something that cannot be changed. In most cases, discrimination/racism goes unnoticed by teachers due to how it is executed (subtle remarks, offensive communication, taunting jokes, hushed giggling, etc)*

In response, we have recently trained a group of staff to reestablish the St. Agnes Equity team. The team will function to create preventative programming for classroom teachers and respond to instances of school-based discrimination, racism, homophobia & transphobia.

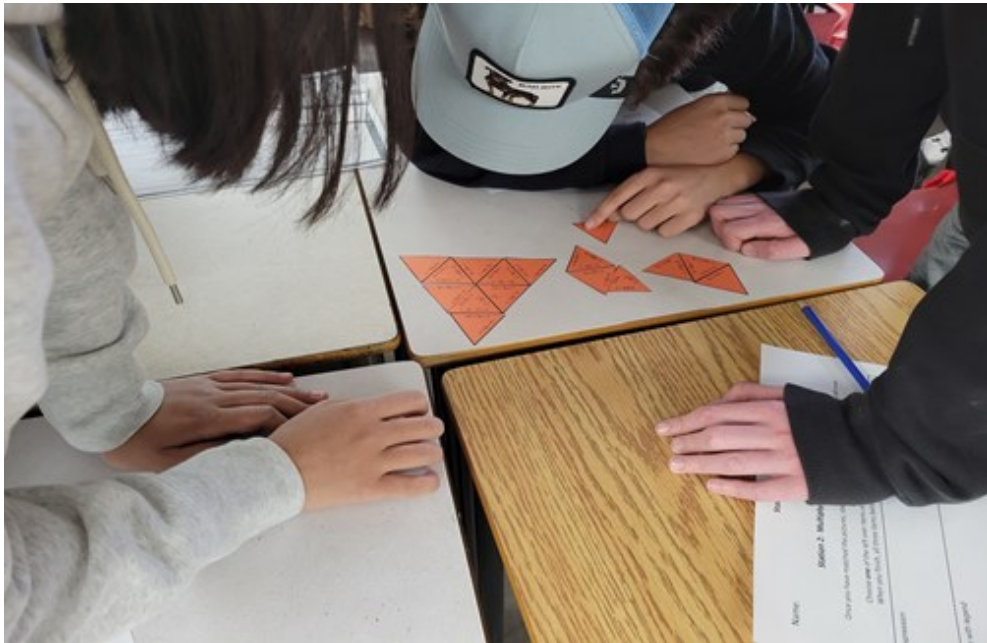
By actively involving students in discussions, we feel that staff will gain a deeper understanding of the challenges our students face, their unique needs, and the most effective ways to address them. Moreover, it empowers our students, instilling a sense of ownership and responsibility for their well-being, leading to increased engagement and a stronger sense of community.

## School News

### Grade 8 Math Initiative

Since September of 2021, all junior high schools have focused on improving Math achievement for Grade 8 students. Using a variety of data sources and through the implementation of short cycle planning to determine strategies and measure impact, St. Agnes has been successful in increasing achievement levels of our students.

In September we identified 37 students who were not meeting grade level expectations. In response, the Grade 8 team focused on increasing formative assessment practices rooted in observation and conversation. Through targeted student-teacher conferencing, teachers determined that 9 students demonstrated understanding of the outcome. As December 1<sup>st</sup>, St. Agnes has 28 students working toward grade level. Through the implementation of equitable and high impact strategies, we will continue to make positive gains with our students.



### Literacy Initiative

The Grade 7 English team has embarked on a new teaching approach to support improved Literacy scores for their students. After introductions to both short cycle planning and data driven decision making, the team completed an analysis of Grade 6 RWM scores as well as current work samples to determine that writing conventions should be the focus of their work. Now in its fifth week, the team will determine the impact of using prompts from a variety of provocations, images, and ideas to complete a weekly free write. The teachers have supported growth in conventions via mentor text and exemplars as well as student-teacher conferencing as a formative assessment strategy.

## School News

### Equity Team Training

Several staff from the school recently participated in Equity Team training facilitated by the HRCE diversity team.

By engaging in training rooted in cultural competency, our team gained valuable insights into recognizing biases, understanding cultural differences, and implementing strategies that support marginalized students. This training also supported our collective ability to address disparities in education, diminish discriminatory practices, and ensure fair opportunities for all learners.

Over the coming weeks, the team will engage in an additional training day where they will examine school-specific issues and design lesson plans that can be proactively build awareness & understanding or actioned following incidents involving racism, discrimination, homophobia & transphobia.

Through the St. Agnes Equity Team, we hope to create a more cohesive and supportive school community where every student feels valued and respected.

### Lunch & Learn Sessions

In September St. Agnes staff took time to examine the data from the Student Success Survey and discussed ways that we could support our students with respect to student engagement, safety, and inclusion. From our work we created the well-being goal:

*Create a safe & inclusive school environment in partnership with our community, prioritizing student success and actively disrupting barriers.*

Knowing that our community plays a key role in the success and well-being of our students, time, and opportunity to draw upon community expertise was essential to build professional capacity. From this understanding, our team committed to involving various community partners via Lunch & Learn sessions.

Lunch and learn sessions for teaching staff serve as invaluable moments of professional development, fostering an exchange of instructional and assessment strategies. These gatherings provide a venue for educators to delve into various teaching methodologies and explore approaches to engage diverse learners. Beyond classroom techniques, these sessions become an avenue to understand the array of community supports available for students.

# School News

## PD Sessions

On November 24, St. Agnes staff engaged in a half day professional development morning in advance of Parent-Teacher interviews. In alignment with our well-being goal of creating a safe & inclusive school environment in partnership with our community, prioritizing student success and actively disrupting barriers, two presenters to St. Agnes to share their experiences and insights within our school community, our day included the perspectives of two community agencies.

Our first presenter was Donna Sutton, Executive Director of the Bayers Westwood Family Resource Centre. The Resource Centre is a non-profit organization housed in the Bayers Westwood subsidized housing development and offers various family-oriented programs to help build a stronger and healthier community for many of our students and their families. Donna spent the first part of the morning providing our staff with an understanding of the lived experiences of many of our students and how poverty influences the academic achievement and overall well-being of students, creating a challenging backdrop for educational success. Donna also shared her suggestions on how staff can build positive and meaningful connections with community and how we can collectively work to disrupt the cycle of poverty in support of student's holistic development.

Our second presenter for the morning was Morris Green, a health educator and health education consultant who has worked extensively throughout HRCE. Moe spoke to staff about Guys Work, a school-based prevention/education initiative to help disrupt harmful masculinity norms and his perspectives on a trauma informed approach, detailing how lessons learned may be applied to other classroom spaces.

## Grade 9 Course Selection

Conversations with Grade 9 parents about Grade 10 course selection has already started. Our School Counsellor, Rhonda McLean, hosted a drop-in session for Grade 9 parents and guardians during the evening portion of Parent Teacher visits. The slides and video of last spring's presentation has been posted to our school website for any parents/guardians who want to review this information early, and Rhonda will ensure that Grade 9 households continue to be kept informed of further parent information sessions as well as the timeline for the course selection process.



## School News

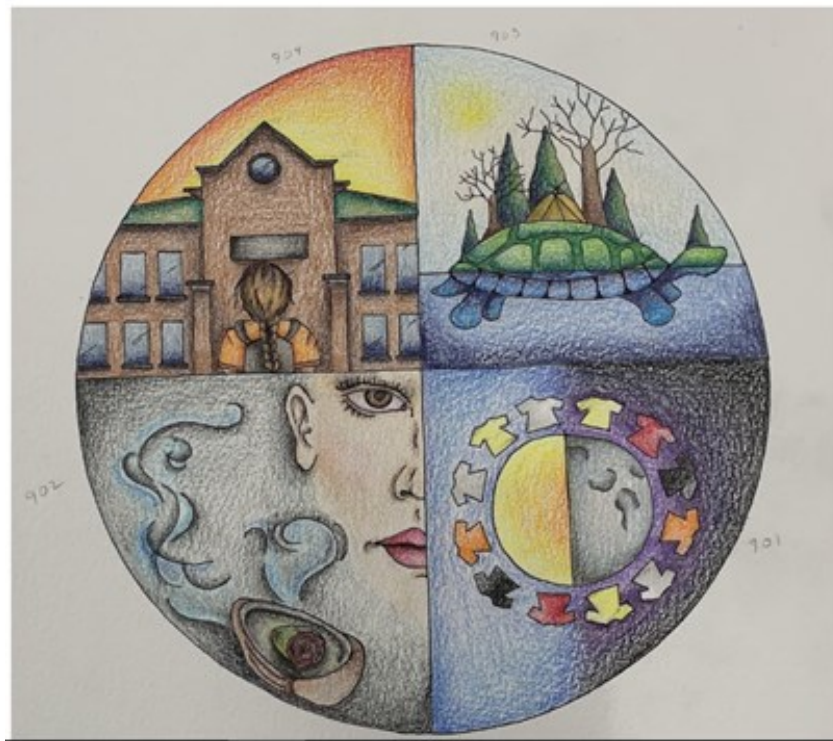
### Truth & Reconciliation Art Installation

To celebrate the diversity of our school community and to better reflect the lived experiences of our students, our reclaiming the walls project continues this year. Our first piece for this year is an installation acknowledging Truth & Reconciliation. This ambitious project was created by grade 9 classes with the guidance of Colin Briggs, Halifax Regional Arts (HRA) Fine Arts Specialist with an Indigenous Focus and supported by our Visual Arts teacher Dr. Karyn Harrison. The piece recognises and honours the importance of the circle in Mi'kmaw culture and teachings, its connection to nature and creation.

This eight-foot circular painting is divided into four equal pieces representing the four aspects of Truth & Reconciliation as interpreted by the students. Each grade nine class was responsible for one quarter with included the following:

- 901: Represents cycles of the sun and moon, using the colours of the medicine wheel and orange shirt
- 902: Face & smudging ceremony - eyes to see truth; ears to listen and take in information; lips to speak truth
- 903: Turtle - Acknowledgement of being part of Turtle Island
- 904: Recognition of Residential School truth

While a location has not been selected, this powerful piece will recognize the tragic legacy of residential schools & acknowledges the rich cultures, voices, experiences, and histories of Indigenous peoples.



## Recent Events

### Newcomer Play: Stories of Refugee & Immigrant Children

Halifax Theatre for Young People visited St. Agnes in November to present the play *Newcomers: Stories of Refugee and Immigrant Children*. This production shines a light on what it's like for a child to be a newcomer to Nova Scotia. Composed of short plays and monologues by newcomers from all over the world including; Kenya, Hong Kong, China, Jamaica, Bolivia, Nigeria, and more, this production, is designed to build empathy and understanding of others' experiences, while allowing newcomer students to see themselves and their stories reflected on stage.

As a diverse school with many new Canadians, the play resonated with our student population and provided an important message to all with respect to empathy, understanding and inclusion.



## Recent Events

### Remembrance Day Ceremony

Our annual Call to Remembrance ceremony took place on November 10th as a full school assembly. Our student council and members of the cadet program hosted a wonderful ceremony that included poems, a presentation on the history of the Royal Canadian and a message from Air Force Major Cameron Hillier, Public Affairs Officer from the army's 5 Division.

St. Agnes will look to reimagine the Call to Remembrance ceremony in 2024 by acknowledging the diverse impacts of war and conflict. To achieve this, we hope to broaden the presentation by incorporating various voices and experiences, recognizing the contributions of soldiers from different cultures, and honoring the civilian impact of conflicts. Additionally, we hope to incorporate moments of reflection that encompass not just the sacrifices made in wars but also the pursuit of peace and reconciliation.

Many thanks go to the students who all who organized and participated in this year's ceremony, and to everyone for taking the time to remember.



### Youth Project Presentation

Brody Weaver, the Educational Coordinator with the Youth Project, will visit St. Agnes in December to meet with our grade 7 classrooms. Brody is a leader in helping youth create spaces of learning which celebrate diversity while creating environments for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth to thrive and become change makers in their communities. She will facilitate 1-hour workshops with our Grade 7 students to support their understanding of the necessity and beauty of creating safe and inclusive spaces for all at school. This is a critical piece of Citizenship education that we are proud to be bringing to the youngest members of our St. Agnes school population.