Extreme Heat in NS Schools: Solutions for our Kids
Briefing Note, May 2026

Climate change is increasing the frequency, intensity, and duration of extreme heat events across Nova Scotia. In May 2026, temperature records were shattered across the province, rising above 32 degrees in some areas. Once experienced in July or August, extreme heat is now happening increasingly earlier in the spring and later in the fall, having a direct impact on students, teachers, administrators and educational support staff.

Physicians and researchers warn that excessive heat over 26 degrees indoors negatively impacts physical health, emotional well-being, cognitive functioning, concentration, learning outcomes, behaviour, and mental health. Many schools across Nova Scotia still lack adequate ventilation, cooling systems, shaded outdoor spaces, and climate-resilient infrastructure necessary to provide safe learning and working environments; as a result, teachers and support staff face an increased burden to regulate classrooms, monitor student safety, respond to heat-related illness and dysregulation, and provide emotional and physical care to children and youth in classrooms that regularly reach unsafe and unhealthy temperatures.

What's more, extreme heat disproportionately harms marginalized and low-income communities, including students and families without access to air conditioning, cooling centres, shaded green space, reliable transportation, or adequate housing conditions.

Safe and accessible actions to adapt to climate change are urgent. Closing schools when it gets too hot is not a solution, especially when safe conditions do not exist in all homes. Making schools - some of the most important public infrastructure in many rural communities - climate resiliency centres and cooling spaces should be prioritized for the health and safety of students, teachers and the wider community, including seniors.

Extreme heat is both an educational equity issue and an occupational health and safety issue affecting the working conditions of teachers and the health and learning conditions of students. Addressing the issues in the short and long term are necessary for everyone. Reducing heat stress in schools requires a multi-layered approach that combines immediate operational adaptations with long-term infrastructure upgrades. Effective strategies include implementing forecast-triggered schedule adjustments, retrofitting facilities for passive cooling (like shaded windows and cool roofs), and prioritizing localized mechanical cooling. A robust plan should address both the built environment and the daily routines of students and staff.

Ultimately, Nova Scotia needs long-term climate-forward adaptation policies for resilient and safer communities. Prioritizing extreme heat solutions in schools is a critical step to ensure our children can safely learn and thrive.

To learn more about For Our Kids' hot schools campaign visit: https://www.forourkids.ca/hotschools

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