

NEWS RELEASE

COVID school closures across Atlantic Canada lasted 95 to 125 days minimum; imposing life-long costs on children

Sept. 07, 2023
For immediate release

HALIFAX—The prolonged COVID-19 school closures across Atlantic Canada from 2020 to 2022 imposed life-long costs on children, despite evidence available to policymakers early on that closures wouldn't slow the transmission of COVID-19 and that the harms could outweigh any possible benefits, finds a new study published by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

“There was information available to policymakers early on showing school closures would do more harm than good, but schools were closed up until 2022 anyway, and Canadian children will be paying for it the rest of their lives,” said Paige MacPherson, associate director of education policy at the Fraser Institute and co-author of *The Forgotten Demographic: Assessing the Possible Benefits and Serious Cost of COVID-19 School Closures on Canadian Children*.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020, entire populations halted socializing, schooling and commerce. Quickly, however, data emerged regarding virus transmission and the realistic risks of COVID-19 by age, showing school closures were unnecessary. Further evidence showed they would have significant, negative effects on children's academic performance and mental health:

- **Prolonged closure periods:** K-12 schools in Atlantic Canada were closed for a *minimum* of 95 days in New Brunswick, 100 days in Newfoundland and Labrador and on Prince Edward Island, and 125 days in Nova Scotia (the longest of any province outside of Ontario), including into 2022.
- **Spike in mental health problems:** Research shows that 64 per cent of Canadians aged 15-24 had self-perceived poor mental health during the pandemic – higher than any other demographic.
- **Learning loss:** Early test score data in Nova Scotia show a decline the share of students meeting the provincial expectation in reading and a significant decline in math, across all grades tested, following school closures.
- **Increased inequality:** School closures result in a loss of a students' lifetime effective years of basic schooling, which in turn likely reduces their lifetime earnings—possibly exacerbating the inequality faced by girls, ethnic minorities and disabled children.
- **Lower risk group:** Evidence shows that children faced lower health risks from COVID-19 than did any older age group.

“We won't know the totality of the damage done by the school closures for some time, but what is clear is that governments didn't use the best information available to them when deciding to close schools, and students have already suffered and will continue to pay the price,” MacPherson said.

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