

Winter 2019-2020

Leaders & Learners

The official magazine of the Canadian
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TOWERS AND TURRETS

Your castle isn't looking very castle-like yet. That's because it still needs towers and turrets! Turrets are towers with cone-shaped roofs. These are easy to make from cardboard tubes.



WHAT YOU NEED

- Four strong, wide cardboard tubes, such as poster tubes or potato chip tubes
- Scissors and a craft knife
- A pencil and, a ruler, and a compass
- Card stock
- Strong glue or a glue gun
- Sticky tape (invisible if possible)
- Wooden skewers or toothpicks
- Paper
- Felt-tip markers
- Paints and paintbrushes

Paper towel tubes will work too, but they will make narrower towers and won't be quite as strong.

1 Cut your tubes into four towers, each about 4 inches (10 cm) taller than your castle walls. If you're using long poster tubes, you may be able to cut two or more castle towers from each one.

2 Hold one tube against your castle wall and mark the height of the wall all around your tube. Turn the tube upside down and draw marks that divide the bottom circle into four equal parts. Choose any two marks that are next to one another. Draw a straight line up the tube from each mark to the line marking the height of your castle wall.



3 Carefully cut out this shape with scissors or a craft knife. Repeat steps 2 and 3 for the other tubes. The towers should now fit over the corners of the castle walls.

4 Draw battlements around the top of the tubes and cut them out. You can also draw arrow slits on the towers and cut these out too. Arrow slits are tall, narrow windows from which arrows could be shot.

5 Draw four circles on a piece of card stock by tracing around the end of a tower. Use a compass to draw a 3/8-inch (1 cm) border around the outside of each circle. Cut out each larger circle and cut slits around it to the inside and cut make tabs. Fold at the tabs down and glue them inside the top of the towers, below the battlements.



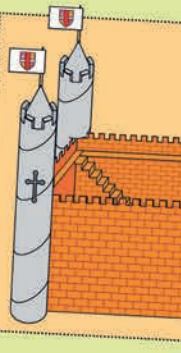
6 Use your compass to draw two circles on card stock that are twice the width of a tower. Draw a 3/8-inch (1 cm) border around the outside of both circles and cut them out. Cut each circle in half. Cut into the curved edges to make tabs. Curve each piece around to make a cone that will fit inside the towers. Use tape to hold it in the cone shape.



7 Fold in the tabs and glue them onto the card stock circles inside the tops of the towers. Make flags using wooden skewers or toothpicks. Glue a piece of folded paper to the top of each stick. Decorate the flags and push the flagpoles into the top of each turret.



8 If you like, paint or decorate the towers. When they are dry, fit them over to the corners of the castle. Use glue to hold them in place.



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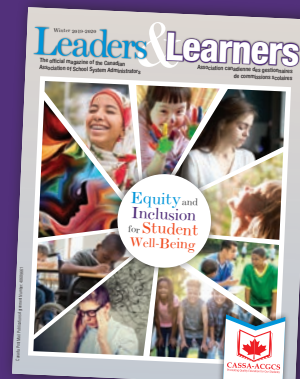
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Being Mindful of the Devaluation Snare

At the end of October, I had the opportunity to visit the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and once again I was reminded of how fragile rights and freedoms are. In one section of the museum, I snapped pictures of titles and descriptions of some of the rights for which Canadians have had to fight.

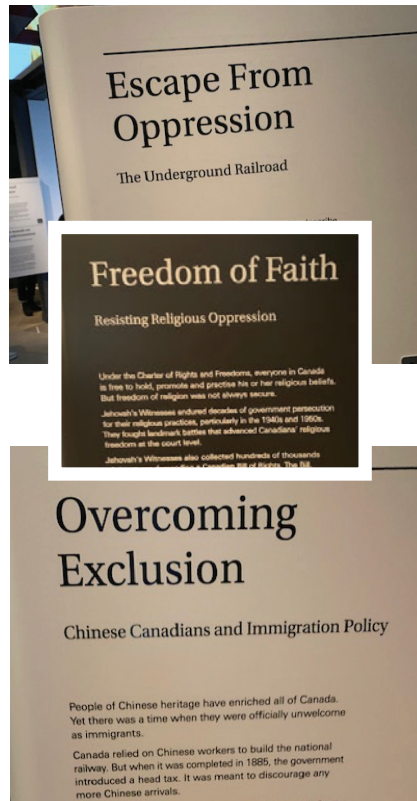
My visit and pictures reminded me of two articles I had read years ago, one by David Race entitled “Social Role Valorization and the English Experience,” and the second by Wolf Wolfensberger entitled “A Brief Introduction to Social Role Valorization.”

As I reflected on the stories in the museum and the articles, I found greater clarity again on how we as human beings evaluate others, which often takes the form of social devaluation. It is frightening in that it is commonplace in all societies and is practised by all of us in a variety of ways. It comes in many shapes and forms and is often accepted as the way in which we interpret the world, make sense of our place in the world and the place of others in the world.

Social devaluation exists in our subconscious as well as our conscious. Each of us carries out social devaluation in different ways based on our experiences, our view of right and wrong, our thoughts on what is fair or unfair and the influences of our upbringing. If we, as system leaders, understand its importance in our workplace, then we will be able to respond to our own actions of social devaluation, and our system could be strengthened.

Social devaluation, in its simplest form, involves a person or group of people judging another person or group and determining, based on that judgment, they are of less value. Everything perceived by our senses, consciously or unconsciously, is judged as either positive or negative.

Negatively judging a person or group means that we will attribute a lesser value to them, and social devaluation will have



Images like these, which Reg took at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, show just how fragile our freedoms are.

occurred. Social devaluation is only done by the perceiver in whose mind a judgment is formed about an individual or group with whom they come in contact, creating lesser expectations of those observed.

At the heart of the devaluation process is the perception of difference. If a person or group of people are, or become, different in any way and are valued negatively, then they become not only different but also devalued. Much of it is so engrained that we often take it as the norm of how we do our work in education.

It can be as simple as the employee who is always on time and at work compared to the employee who is often late and is frequently absent. We value attendance and punctuality and devalue absence and coming in late. Our social devaluation of the one employee has



Reg Klassen
CASSA/ACGCS President

subtle implications of how we respond to them and their issues.

As a system leader, devaluation becomes very significant if we who devalue have power over the individual being devalued. To approach our work as system leaders from this perspective indicates that a devaluing judgment of anyone by us has a far more negative impact than a devaluing judgment by colleague to colleague.

I think we would all agree that our workplace should be a place or institution for teaching, learning and instruction – a place established for leading education. Our workplace should be defined as a place that welcomes all individuals who are employed, without regard for differentiating factors such as religion, ethnicity, first language or anything else that distinguishes them from their fellow citizens.

The irony is that one of the tasks of being a system leader is leading others in a way that teaches them how to get along in our democracy and how to work together. Social devaluation runs counter to this goal; therefore, it is important for system leaders to understand what social devaluation is so that we can avoid imparting it on our employees and recognize when others participate in it.

Social devaluation occurs in all sections of society, including education, and we seem to have no escape. However, system leaders have an obligation to be consciously aware of our own tendencies, as well as those of whom we lead, and how easily they can negatively affect our lives and the lives of others. On a personal note, I have become more aware of my own judgments. It is a sobering experience when a person stops to take stock of how they might have engaged in social devaluation.

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Promoting Positive Mental Health and Well-being



Ken Bain

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

“Inclusive education is a pairing of philosophy and pedagogical practices that allow each student to feel respected, confident and safe so he or she can learn and develop to his or her full potential. It is based on a system of values and beliefs centred on the best interests of the student, which promotes social cohesion, belonging, active participation in learning, a complete school experience and positive interactions with peers and others in the school community.

“These values and beliefs will be shared by schools and communities. Inclusive education is put into practice within school communities that value diversity and nurture the well-being and quality of learning of each of their members. Inclusive education is carried out through a range of public and community programs and services available to all students. Inclusive education is the foundation for ensuring an inclusive New Brunswick society.” (New Brunswick Education and Early Childhood Development)

“Participating in and contributing to a safe, respectful and positive learning environment is both the right and responsibility of children and youth, their parents/caregivers, school personnel and all community members. Schools, acting in partnership with their communities, can create and maintain these environments that foster a sense of belonging, enhance the joy of learning, honour diversity and promote respectful, responsible and caring relationships.” (Newfoundland and Labrador Education and Early Childhood Development)

Every provincial and territorial government is committed to the principles of equity and inclusion and their connectedness to student well-being. I excerpted only two to highlight the shared commitment across the country. This issue of *Leaders & Learners* furthers the conversation as we examine promising practices in districts, schools and classrooms in the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Ontario and Quebec.

Please plan to join school system leaders and educational professionals as we explore

this topic at our annual conference from July 2 to 4, 2020 in beautiful St. Andrew’s, New Brunswick. Continue to check into the conference website for opportunities to present and attend (<http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca>).

I want to express my appreciation to the contributors to this issue for taking time to provide articles that highlight the excellent work to promote inclusion and student mental health and well-being.

I know that there are hundreds, if not thousands, of examples that could have been highlighted. To those of you who share CASSA’s commitment to equity, inclusion and student well-being, I offer my profound thanks.

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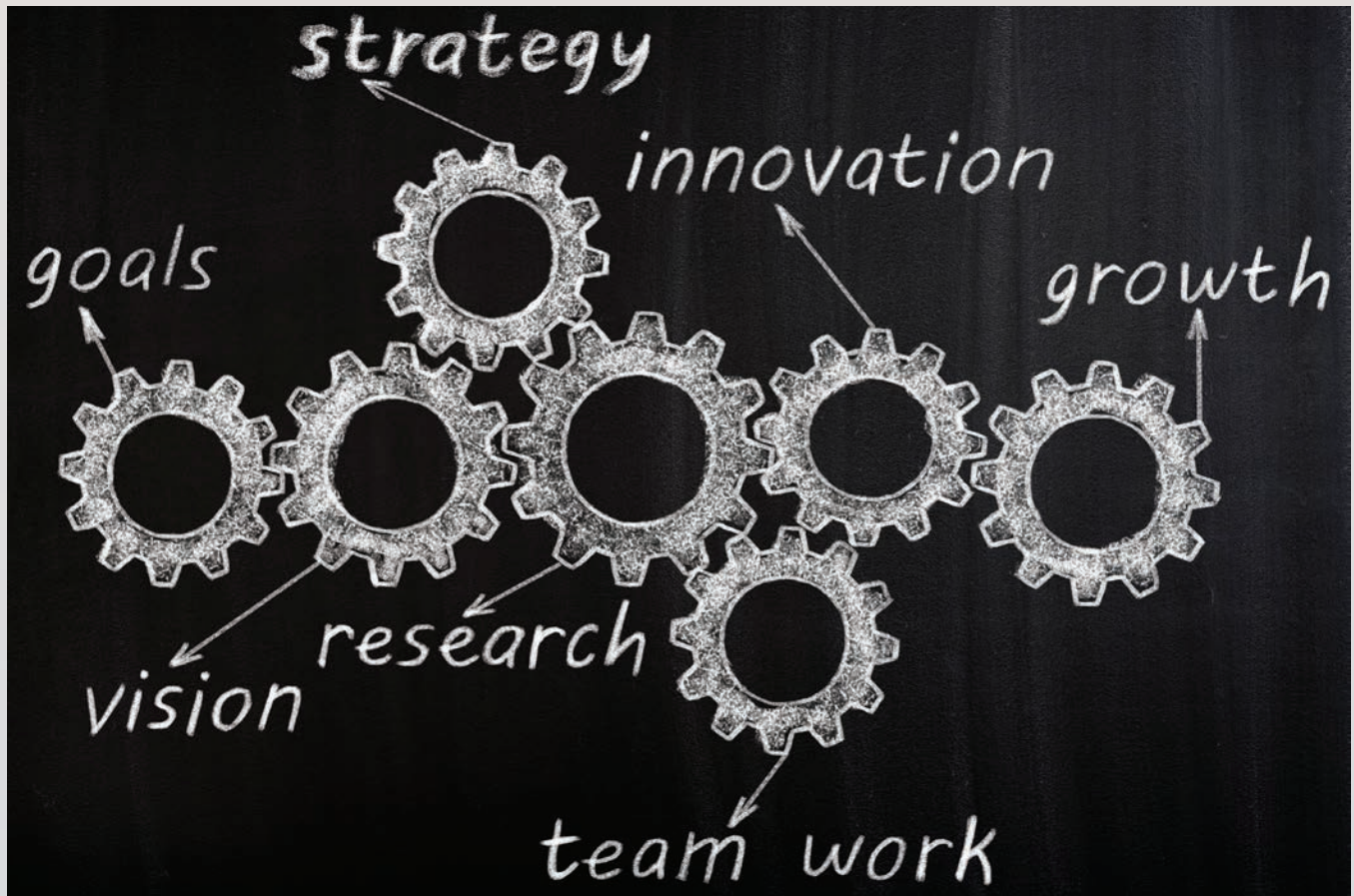
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Supporting All Learners by Abandoning Best Practices



By Simone Gessler and Pat Sullivan, Yellowknife Catholic Schools

The path forward is paved with good intentions; however, good intentions are rarely the key ingredient in any recipe for success.

Yellowknife Catholic Schools' three-year vision for student-centred learning identifies priorities for innovation and inquiry, inclusion, culture and faith. These priorities were the backdrop for designing professional development and project planning to support our educators as learners for the last three years. The goal has been to disrupt traditional practices of instruction and classroom environment, fostering innovative learning models and flexible, self-regulated learners.

To support these efforts and move forward with school change, professional learning has been offered in numerous areas. Using the many structures in place, the district worked to provide more personalized opportunities for development related to these strategic priorities.

This approach included collaborative team learning, led by educators in areas of interest, as well as additional layers of learning through special funding initiatives from our department of education. Of course, we had professional development days to add into the mix, all of which allowed us to engage teachers in opportunities to enhance instruction.

While our ambitious goal was to offer a variety of learning opportunities for staff, we were grappling with the management involved in continuing projects that targeted specific curricular areas or pedagogical practice, while

also meeting the needs of all learners, using so many different strategies. The reality was apparent that this well-meaning approach had grown into a fragmented and logistical burden.

In reviewing the structures we had in place, the decision was made to abandon past practices and organize something entirely new. The question became how might we meet the needs of our students while honouring the diverse professional development needs of staff at the same time? Some distinct patterns – the well-being of our students and how to more effectively engage students in the learning process – began to emerge from our discussions.

Our challenge was figuring out how to support a purposeful, multifaceted approach to student well-being while continuing to focus on our goals of innovative learning. As a result,

we developed a comprehensive blueprint that would streamline professional development and the existing collaborative learning structures to provide in-depth knowledge and the opportunity to go deeper in two main areas of focus: student wellness and student agency.

After defining sub-categories related to both topics, including mental health, self-regulated learning, trauma-informed practice, restorative circles, as well as innovation and inquiry, voice and choice, and modern learning models, the staff was surveyed to determine the level of interest in each focus area. Teachers were chosen to serve as leads on each team, with the primary responsibility of working with their colleagues to adapt, refine or develop new ways of supporting students in the two main areas.

Capitalizing on the many systemic opportunities we had in place, we developed a systemic structure that has already impacted classroom practice. Strengthening Teacher Instructional Practice (STIP), which is a Northwest Territories initiative, and Student Success Initiative (SSI) funding, which is an Education, Culture and Employment initiative, has allowed us to intertwine professional learning and collaborative team planning to support our team leads in their role as facilitators. The dedication of committed and focused exploration and design time has created a system of internal professional learning networks that have full days to learn and create together.

Of course, given the breadth of topics associated with student wellness and student agency, expertise from beyond the district has been essential to help guide the teams.

For example, Dr. Susan Hopkins led our student wellness team through a workshop on the meaning behind creating safe learning environments for all students. Although Dr. Hopkins is considered to be an expert on self-regulation, she assisted the team in integrating other topics. She connected the principles of self-regulation to student mental health, trauma-informed instruction and restorative practices – all issues raised in our initial PD planning discussion.

Empowering students to be advocates of their learning also promotes wellness; therefore, fostering an environment that encourages students to share their voice while being mindful of personal needs will create an optimal learning environment. To support learning in the area of student agency, Education Strategist Holly Clark is coaching our team leads in building infused classrooms and engaging students by making learning visible.

This system allows the collaborative team leads to come together with these expert facilitators to dig deep into the subcategories of student wellness and student agency through SSI project funding. The team leads then facilitate collaborative learning opportunities and the planning of classroom integration, resource implementation and lesson development during STIP time with their teams.

We understand we can support student wellness only by being well ourselves. In fact, “put your life jacket on first” is a common refrain at Yellowknife Catholic Schools. It was with this thinking in mind that we kicked off our focus on student wellness in 2019-20 with a PD day session on staff wellness.

At a time of diverse school populations and social change, it is essential to reinforce a message of how important it is for staff to maintain optimal levels of wellness so that they can serve the many needs of our students. For this particular day, expert facilitators from beyond the district offered sessions that set the foundation for future learning opportunities.

While the wellness message may not have been new for many of our staff, the

day was the beginning of a new process and a targeted approach to be purposeful in our focus on student wellness by making it a priority. We will maintain this approach for the next two years, with numerous opportunities for staff to provide feedback for adjustments as necessary.

The plan will repeat in 2020-21, with teams flipping and participating in the learning opportunities offered by the other focus group to support all staff. In addition, we will have the added benefit of learning from the first-year experience so we can move forward together in our goal of student-centred learning. ○

Simone Gessler is the new Superintendent of Yellowknife Catholic Schools. She has previously been Assistant Superintendent of Learning, Principal, Assistant Principal and Classroom Teacher. Follow her on Twitter @simonegessler.

Pat Sullivan is the Assistant Superintendent of Learning for Yellowknife Catholic Schools. He has previously served the district as a principal, Student Support Coordinator, and Program Support Teacher. Follow him on Twitter @patsullejs.

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Promoting Mental Well-Being in the Vancouver School District

Mette Hamaguchi and Jiana Chow, Vancouver School District

Mental health impacts many Canadians. Mental health concerns and complex behaviour challenges are on the rise in the last few years, particularly amongst students and schools.

The Vancouver School District is dedicated to the equitable and meaningful educational experiences of all students.

In 2019, the British Columbia Ministry of Education implemented a provincial strategy for mental health. In support of the ministry's direction, one of the District's main priorities this year is to raise awareness about mental health and implement mental well-being strategies.

Partnering with Child Youth Mental Health (CYMH) services, a division of Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), the District and CYMH launched a multi-pronged mental wellness initiative. Its goal is to support students and staff across a continuum of mental health, from promotion to prevention to intervention.

First, a social emotional learning team comprised of teachers, school counsellors and a CYMH counsellor was established. Together with staff expertise and best practices, a mental health toolkit was designed to support and promote mental wellness in the classroom. The team took a phased approach to this. The first phase addresses mental well-being in elementary classrooms, specifically primary students from kindergarten to Grade 3. Once complete, the plan is to design another toolkit specifically for intermediate students (Grades 4 to 7). The final phase will involve the creation of a toolkit for secondary students.

Mental Well-Being for Students

As part of the first phase of this initiative, 350 toolkits were delivered to primary



classrooms. Each toolkit consisted of 20 items including:

- Interactive games to teach children self-regulation, kindness, mindful breathing and positive peer-to-peer interaction;
- Fine motor activity toys to increase students' ability to attend to tasks. Research shows these types of activities can increase student focus as they provide young learners with an opportunity to release energy; and
- Teacher resource books to understand the philosophy behind best practised strategies and to support implementation of effective strategies in the classroom. These include practising self-regulating behaviour and emotions.

Before the toolkits were distributed to primary classrooms, the social emotional learning team identified mental wellness champions for each elementary school. In total, more than 40 school counsellors were selected and trained to use the mental health toolkits.

These counsellors service all 90 elementary schools in the District. Once trained, champions facilitated workshops with teachers to teach them how to use the toolkit and learn about the strategies behind promoting mental well-being and preventing mental illness.

With almost 90 elementary school, the Vancouver School District is the second largest school district in British Columbia. Identifying champions was the most effective way to reach all primary teachers in a timely manner. Champions could support teachers in implementing the toolkits in their classes, with the ultimate goal of teachers effectively and independently implementing good mental health strategies as part of their daily curriculum.

The District is a learning organization. At the end of the school year, District staff intend to survey all teachers who used the toolkit to understand the effectiveness of the kits. Based on feedback, plans will be adjusted if necessary for phase two (intermediate students) and phase three (secondary students) of this initiative.

In addition, the District also implemented an online portal designed for teachers of intermediate and secondary students. These include self-directed and facilitated mental wellness programs, parent support information, podcasts and apps that are related to managing mental well-being.

The online resource also includes a directory of referrals for outside agencies in the event extra support is required. This toolkit is a hub of resource materials and provides teachers with strategies they can access anytime, anywhere to include in their curriculum.

Mental Well-Being for Employees

With approximately 20,000 employees, Vancouver School District staff play a vital part in keeping the city's public education system operating smoothly. As part of the Mental Health Initiative, it was important to support staff as much as students in maintaining and promoting good mental health. With most staff spending more of their waking hours at work than anywhere else, addressing issues of mental health at work is a top priority for the District.

Using the Working Mind program (<https://theworkingmind.ca/working-mind>), an education-based program developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the District trained all managers and administrators under the guiding principles of the Working Mind. The goal of the program is to "train the trainer" to address and promote mental health and reduce the stigma of mental illness in the workplace.

Participants learned how to recognize and understand a positive working environment while also identifying early signs of mental illness. They were also equipped with resources required to manage and support employees.

More than 200 supervisors, managers and administrators attended this mandatory program, with the intention to apply the newly learned mental well-being strategies with their direct staff. Stakeholder leaders, such as union representatives will also be trained with the same program in the coming months.


The second part of the Working Mind program involves a mental health first-aid session for employees who were interested in understanding how to manage critical situations related to mental illness. So far, 60 employees attended the voluntary training

session. The District's goal is to provide this training to 25 per cent of employees every year, throughout four years, with the ultimate goal to have all employees trained by 2023.

The District's mental health initiative is a multipronged, systematic and proactive approach to implement mental well-being strategies in classrooms and the workplace. Designing an initiative that addresses mental health for students, staff and leaders means tackling the issues from all facets and, ultimately, growing mental health awareness as a whole. ○

This article was written in collaboration with the Learning Services team at the Vancouver School District. Learning Services supports students with diverse learning needs and is comprised of four areas: student support, learning support, social emotional learning and prevention programs and alternative education. Its goal is to support the learning needs of all students and to ensure equitable opportunities to achieve success in schools and programs, through support for students via direct services as well as training and support for staff.

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TOGETHER WE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Physical Education: Enhancing Student Mental Health and Well-Being

By Reg Leidl, Saskatchewan Physical Education Association

In May of 2017, I was privileged to present a session on adolescent mental health and physical education at the annual Saskatchewan Physical Education Association (SPEA) Conference in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. My presentation was on the importance of physical educators and the positive role they can play in supporting students living with mental health issues.

The room was overflowing with conference delegates, and it became acutely obvious that the teachers were attending my session for very valid reasons: concern for their students' mental health, their own ability to instruct in such an environment and the importance that physical education and exercise can have on a student's mental well-being.

Students struggling with their mental health were approaching their physical education teachers and seeking support. The teachers were, in turn, searching for instructional strategies and ideas to act and teach responsibly to meet the mental health needs

of their students. It was a very sobering experience in that the audience was in attendance because the mental health needs of their students was a real entity in their daily schooling and physical educators were on the front lines in terms of providing support, instruction and care for their students.

So, why physical educators? As a core subject area within the curriculum, physical education offers a learning and teaching environment that is conducive to supporting the affective domain while in turn enhancing the emotional, social, spiritual, academic and physical needs of children and youth.¹

Quality physical education programs are often able to enhance student mental health and well-being through physical activity initiatives, and quality physical educators are often the first adults to notice when students are starting to struggle with mental health issues.²

Physical educators also have the ability to teach within the affective domain so they have more opportunities to personally know their students and to identify signs of mental illness at an earlier onset. These learning and teaching opportunities provide an insight into the needs of the students. Supports can then be put in place to effectively meet the social and emotional needs of the students.

In March of 2019, the Ministry of Education in Saskatchewan formally

completed the new physical education 20- and 30-level curriculum for senior high school students in the province. The curriculum was developed over a period of time whereby educational and invested stakeholders in the area of physical education, physical literacy, sport, recreation and wellness were involved.

The writing team consisted of physical educators from across the province coming together to develop and synthesize the content area into a synergized living document that would address the learning needs of senior high school students. The writing team was specific in adding learning outcomes in both the 20- and 30-level physical education courses that covered student mental health and well-being.

In the 20-level course, the learning outcome has students examining the benefits of physical activity on mental health through research and participation. Students are encouraged to participate in physical activity and to understand that exercise has a positive impact on their own mental health.³ Being physically active improves brain function and ultimately enhances students' own personal health and wellness.⁴

In the 30-level course students are asked to investigate the psychological factors that impact participation in physical activities. Students have the opportunity to explore how beneficial physical activity is on improving a student's mental health, but they also get to see how mental training and positive mental health initiatives can improve athletic and physical performance.⁵

Strong physical education curriculum in Canada is foundationally constructed around the concept of physical literacy. Physical literacy is a lifelong journey that also parallels a student's mental health journey.

The strength of having mental health issues for students addressed in the



curriculum is that it ensures that students will have the knowledge and skills to identify mental health concerns and to take the appropriate action when needed. Students learn the importance of physical activity and how outdoor play enhances the benefits to positive mental health even more.

Although equity and inclusion are foundational constructs for all curriculum subject areas in the province, truly inclusive learning environments in physical education should provide the opportunity for all students to acquire and develop fundamental movement skills in an enriched, positive, motivating and safe setting.

Positive mental health activities revolve around physical education opportunities that encourage positive social interactions, friendship, teamwork, co-operation and resilience.⁶ Adolescent students need learning environments that will help to foster and develop positive mental health activities. The knowledge, development and opportunities to practise such initiatives is critical to a student's learning and emotional development.

Although physical educators have an impact on improving the mental health of their students it is also important to remember that teachers must look after

their own mental health as well. Self care is essential in allowing educators to be supportive and helpful to their students.

Improving student mental health also takes the initiative of all stakeholders within the school, home and community. A team effort is essential to ensure that the proper education, knowledge, communication and effective strategies are enacted.

Physical educators have the unique perspective of ensuring that physical activity and physical literacy can become part of their students' wellness and mental health

journey.⁷ The efforts of all involved are essential in ensuring that the positive mental health initiatives that our students undertake is well worth the effort. ○

Reg Leidl has been a physical educator for the past 38 years. Although retired from the teaching profession, he is still active in Saskatchewan as a mentor teacher in the areas of physical education, physical literacy, outdoor play, inclusion and student wellness. He recently completed his doctorate in educational leadership from the University of Phoenix.

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Exploring Equity



By Alison Kinahan, Ottawa Catholic School Board

In the province of Ontario, the Ministry of Education released the Equity Action Plan in 2017 to build upon the objectives of the 2009 Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. This release fostered reflections and renewed commitments to deepen the work of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the education sector.

The ministry's Equity Action Plan indicates, "We must find ways to detect structures or patterns of behavior that may negatively impact student achievement and well-being in order to begin to identify barriers" to address and eliminate harmful practices.¹ As a result, many schools, school boards and related organizations took on the challenge of enhancing their work in EDI in a variety of ways.

The Ottawa Catholic School Board (OCSB) became a community partner in the Réseau de Savoir sur l'Équité/Equity Knowledge Network (RSEKN) hosted by the University of Ottawa's Faculty of Education in the fall of 2017. This network, funded by a grant from the Ministry of Education, was created to enhance and mobilize knowledge of EDI work being done across the province and, specifically, in four geographic regions.

At these meetings, partners and members shared information and raised questions to foster discussion and action in regards to addressing and dismantling systemic barriers in schools, classrooms and communities that can adversely affect student well-being

and prevent today's youth from fully accessing opportunities and achieving one's full potential. It was through discussions and reflections at these sessions that the idea of a Professional Learning Network (PLN) focused on equity for teachers at the OCSB was formed, and embedding it in the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) was a logical and strategic place to position this important work.

Delivered by local school boards in partnership with the Ministry of Education and the Ontario College of Teachers, NTIP is a mandatory program delivered by local school boards to support the transition of educators from teacher education programs to permanent teaching careers. One of the mandatory components of the program is professional learning, which can take a variety of formats.

The purpose of the NTIP Equity PLN was twofold: for educators to build collective efficacy and personal confidence in sustaining equity and for the students of educators in the PLN to have increased well-being through affirmation and self-awareness due to rigorous study and high expectations.

In partnership with RSEKN partners, provincial leaders in EDI work and OCSB educational consultants and leads, NTIP teachers accessed and explored current research-based practices, including culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy. Dr. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, RSEKN co-director, acknowledged the PLN was "an amazing way to embed equity professional learning within their OCSB school system." On the day of the PLN launch,

educators started exploring the role of the educator in equity work.

French writer Marcel Proust once said, "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes." At the launch, educators worked to understand their own biases and assumptions in relation to the students in their classrooms and the curriculum they teach. After this discernment, the educators set an intention and commitment to shift their stance and practice.

Over the next four months, 29 kindergarten to Grade 12 teachers from a variety of schools, rural, urban and suburban, met in large and small groups. In the large group settings, teachers explored various topics, including anti-racist education, differentiation strategies and equity, gender diversity, social emotional learning and the impact of residential schools.

Using the themes of RSEKN, the teachers self-organized into small groups and focused on one of six priority areas: anti-racist education; education for students with a disability; gender and sexuality; income inequality and poverty; and refugee and newcomer education, which grounded the learning in the small group settings.

"Every hour of our NTIP sessions led to the sharing of ideas you could use ... immediately in your class," said Crestina Pasco-Pacheco, a secondary teacher. "The Equity Network brought to light so many unconscious subtleties that many of us have simply accepted as the unquestioned norm or status quo."

Educators focused on their chosen priority and their own equity commitments and set to work, learning about and trying strategies to increase student well-being through various learning partnerships, learning environments and pedagogical practices.

The four core goals of NTIP are building confidence ("I can do it. I have the supports to be a successful teacher"); increasing efficacy ("My teaching makes a difference in the lives and learning of



Jodi Ashton, consultant in Leading and Learning at OCSB, challenges attendees at the network launch to change how they discover what their biases and assumptions are.



Attendees take part in the Kairos Blanket Exercise, facilitated by OCSB Indigenous Learning Partner and OCSB Indigenous Curriculum Consultant, on April 5, 2019.

every single student.”); using a variety of instructional strategies to respond to the diverse learning needs of students with an array of effective teaching strategies; and a commitment to continuous learning and growing as a professional in collaboration with students, colleagues, administration, school community and others.²

For Angela Safadi, an elementary teacher at an urban Ottawa school, the PLN helped her grow in confidence as a new teacher, allowing her to incorporate strategies to reach all of her students. She realized her personal commitment during the course of the PLN, saying she “placed a great deal of importance on making students feel accepted and supported throughout their days at school. One way I accomplished this was through talking circles where all were welcome to share and listen to one another. This promoted acceptance and empathy.”

She said the PLN inspired her “to have the opportunity to collaborate with a group of like-minded colleagues. I valued the time we had to connect during various sessions and to have sometimes difficult conversations with open hearts and open minds.”

In essence, the NTIP Equity PLN provided educators an opportunity to develop a greater awareness of how they influence EDI work in their classrooms by recognizing their own biases and assumptions and, in turn, challenging themselves. Jodi Ashton, Educational Consultant with OCSB, noted that the PLN “was so different than many other professional development sessions we had offered, as it was about the teacher becoming more aware about themselves, their unconscious biases, the narratives they didn’t realize they were

perpetuating in order to shift their practice to ensure all identities are celebrated and all students could see themselves in the curriculum.”

Senior administration at the OCSB saw such great value in the PLN that it has included the NTIP Equity work in its Equity Framework, ensuring future permanent teachers employed at the OCSB will be supported through engaging networks of learning.

“We must all lean in, challenge ourselves and be self-reflective, (and) as a board, it only seemed natural that our newest teachers, fresh into their careers, go deep into this conversation,” said Shelley Montgomery, Superintendent at OCSB. “The OCSB fully understands the importance, the dedication and the necessity of this work. We are proud to

be on this journey for the well-being of all OCSB students and staff.” ○

Alison Kinahan has been a classroom teacher for 20 years. In her teaching career, she has been a classroom teacher, resource teacher, student success teacher, curriculum lead and literacy learning partner. She is currently in her third year as Ottawa Catholic School Board’s Coordinator in the Leading & Learning Department.

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Cultivating Student Mental Health and Well-Being Across School Systems

By Dr. Gerry Weintraub and Dr. Elana Bloom, Centre of Excellence for Mental Health

There is a growing trend in the practice of school mental health to shift the lens from a problem-focused approach that tries to repair weaknesses to a strength-based approach geared to enhancing students' coping abilities and developing their resilience. Schools are able to enhance students' psychological and emotional well-being by creating welcoming and supportive climates, increasing understanding about mental health and illness, reducing stigma and supporting student voice and engagement.¹

Additionally, schools play an important role in teaching students the skills required for developing and maintaining positive relationships with peers and adults, understanding and managing emotions, social awareness and empathy and problem-solving social and emotional difficulties.

Given this framework, this article will outline three proactive initiatives in schools within the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) focusing on strength-based principles: solution-focused, a model of

trauma-informed practices and reducing stigma.

A Model of Building Capacity: Solution-Focused Approach

Based on the premise that people's strengths matter, that change is constant and that we all have the ability to devise our own solutions to our problems, the solution-focused (SF) approach in education² emerged from a therapeutic model known as Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT).

This pragmatic, strength-based approach emphasizes success and can be applied extensively in education, including classroom management strategies, parent-teacher conferences, team meetings and collegial support.³ When we shift the lens, we are open to see what students are capable of, paying attention to skills students already have and cultivating them.

There are a number of solution-focused principles:

- Explore solutions more, engage less talking about the problem;
- Focus on monitoring progress and goals rather than problem or difficulty;

- Highlight that no problem exists at all times – there are exceptions;
- Solutions are not found in the problem – they are revealed in the exception to the problem;
- Everyone has personal resources and strengths to draw upon; and
- Compliments build hope.

In this two-year pilot project at LBPSB, lead teachers and support staff from Edgewater Elementary are being trained and supported through small team coaching on realistic, pragmatic applications of SF principles. The lead team members then support and model the context-based practices to their peers, creating a domino effect.

One of the core principles of the SF approach, the importance of building what is strong rather than fixing what is wrong, is at the centre of this project. Rather than adding on to the staff workload, this project highlights and amplifies what is working well and, where there are difficulties and challenges, proposes new ways to approach the work they are already doing. This will significantly contribute to a healthy school climate and promote student and staff well-being.

A Model of Trauma-Informed Practices

Studies have shown that complex trauma greatly impacts behavior, academic performance and drop-out rates in schools.⁴ Considering the impact that trauma has on the brain, subtle/indirect external factors can create significant difficulties for students in the classroom that are not readily apparent to school staff.⁵

For example, if a child regularly experiences abuse or neglect in the home, they are more likely to be hyper-aroused due to experiencing such violence, even when they are at school.⁶ This is because the child's brain gets stuck in survival mode, and the child cannot discriminate between safe and unsafe environments, due to the unpredictable nature of the traumatizing events.⁷

The child's brain has learned that, in order to survive, it needs to remain in survival mode at all times. Unfortunately, the child has no control over the development of their brain. A brain that is developed to survive, left without intervention, will be a brain that has difficulty learning and developing relationships.⁸

A lack of understanding of the effects of chronic stress and trauma on the brain often leads to school staff perceiving trauma-impacted students as those with problem behaviors, rather than being seen as students in need of help who have made adaptations to survive trauma. Schools must shift their perspective to a trauma-informed lens.

In response to problematic behavior, rather than asking "What is wrong with this student?" the question should be "What

happened to this student?" This proactive approach of adopting trauma-sensitive language and infusing and teaching trauma-specific interventions to all students will have significant and sustained effects for those who have experienced trauma, yet will also benefit students who have not. This is an important element often overlooked with traditional pull-out programs, where interventions are provided in a contrived setting, are difficult to reinforce or replicate by teachers and lack the positive reinforcement by peers.

Given this mindset, and drawing from the attachment, regulation and competency and the response to intervention three-tier principles of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (PBIS) models, a holistic, multi-level, trauma-informed approach to addressing childhood trauma in schools is being implemented over a two-year period at Verdun Elementary.

The Healthy Environments and Response to Trauma in Schools (HEARTS)⁹ model's main objectives are to improve the well-being of all students, to respond to the particular

needs of children who have experienced trauma, to promote a work culture that reduces burnout and stress among staff and to use a culturally sensitive and equitable approach in order to reduce racial disparities in the use of disciplinary measures.

This universal, proactive approach aims to shift staff perspectives and knowledge of trauma, and impact their own wellness, enhance students' school engagement and wellness, decrease violent incidents and disciplinary measures and help to access specialized trauma services for those in need.

Reducing Stigma

In the area of reducing stigma, over the past year, leadership students across high schools voiced their concerns regarding classmates experiencing mental health problems and the need to develop initiatives to combat the stigma that makes their lives even more painful. This highlights the growing international movement of youth demanding to have a voice and to be heard.

As part of the LBPSB mental health and well-being initiative, students from several high

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**DO'S AND DON'TS OF A
TRAUMA-INFORMED
COMPASSIONATE CLASSROOM**

- 1


CREATE A SAFE SPACE
Consider not only physical safety but the children's emotional safety as well.



1

- 2


ESTABLISH PREDICTABILITY
Write out a schedule and prepare children for transitions. It helps create a sense of security and safety.



2

- 3


BUILD A SENSE OF TRUST
Follow through with your promises and in situations where changes are unavoidable be transparent with your explanations.



3

- 4

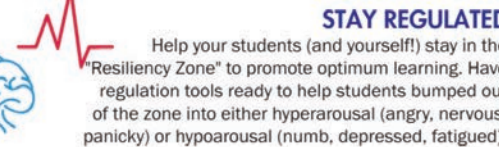
OFFER CHOICES
Empower students and offer "power with" rather than "power over" strategies.



4


- 5

STAY REGULATED
Help your students (and yourself!) stay in the "Resiliency Zone" to promote optimum learning. Have regulation tools ready to help students bumped out of the zone into either hyperarousal (angry, nervous, panicky) or hypoarousal (numb, depressed, fatigued).




5

There's really only one DON'T
Let's not punish kids for behaviors that are trauma symptoms.



DON'T



schools participated in the Headstrong summit or had presentations in their schools from Jack.org. The Headstrong model focused on peer-led activities and provided students with toolkits to help them plan and implement anti-stigma activities in their schools. The Jack.org model featured youth speakers who shared their lived experiences and encouraged students to set up Jack Chapters in their schools to promote anti-stigma activities. Preliminary evaluations of these initiatives suggest that the involvement of trusted adults to appropriately guide and support student activities toward realistic and constructive endeavours is a basic requirement.

Although significant advances have been made to reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems or illness, negative attitudes continue to hinder youth from seeking support. According to the Mental Health Commission of Canada, only one in six youth with a diagnosed mental health problem are willing to seek support due to stigma.

Given the central role schools play in the lives of youth, school-based initiatives are ideally suited to help youth develop a healthy understanding of their social-emotional difficulties, develop proactive coping strategies and seek appropriate support.



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Unfortunately, minimal evidence exists even amongst programs that have been tried in schools as to their effectiveness in influencing positive perspectives.

Best practices suggest encouraging results when youth are open to the lived experiences of peers who are willing to share their stories. However, it is important to note that speakers need to be trained and coached to focus their stories on hope and recovery. Other essential components are continuity and sustainability. One inspirational story, even from Lady Gaga, is not going to have the necessary impact that will produce significant and lasting attitudinal change. ○

Dr. Gerry Weintraub has been working as a school psychologist for over 30 years. Dr. Elana Bloom is a psychologist and co-ordinator of the Family School and Support Treatment Team at the Lester B. Pearson School Board. Bloom and Weintraub are the co-ordinators of the Centre of Excellence for Mental Health.

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Student Well-Being: Can School Districts Make a Difference?

By Kenneth Leithwood, OISE/University of Toronto, and Catherine McCullough, CMC Leadership

The answers to the question posed in the title are “yes” and “it depends”. How you define student well-being has a lot to do with which of these answers is likely for you.

So, we begin by exploring the meaning of well-being and then turn to the question of how districts might make a difference. We draw on several of our recent studies of effective districts that included well-being (along with student engagement and achievement in math and language) as an outcome or dependent variable.¹

Student Well-Being

Well-being, a feeling of happiness and success, is a disposition that many institutions feel responsible for nurturing among their clients. Conceptions of well-being vary from being multidimensional or holistic to very specific.

Our own research on effective districts adopted a domain-specific conception and measure of student well-being focused narrowly on the achievement mission of

schools. Students experience this form of well-being when they are successful at school and are happy about it.

There are two closely related reasons why a district choosing to establish well-being as a strategic goal should locate such a domain-specific view of well-being at the core of its responsibilities. One reason is the districts’ scope of institutional responsibility and accountability.

Many other institutions also are responsible for the well-being of children. While acknowledging interdependences among different forms of well-being, many of these institutions, like schools, have primary responsibility for domain-specific forms of well-being (e.g., physical well-being, social well-being, mental well-being).

The family is one of the very few institutions responsible for domain-general or “holistic” conceptions of children’s well-being, and they “contract out” much of that responsibility to others. Institutions with responsibilities for the well-being of their clients are held accountable for, and typically measure, how well their services contribute to well-being in the specific domain of

their primary responsibilities. Districts and their schools, we argue, should do the same, even if they chose to adopt a broader set of responsibilities and accountabilities as well.

A second reason districts should adopt a conception and measure of student well-being focused on the domain of academic achievement is the enormous scope of responsibilities now advocated for schools. Such expansion of responsibilities for schools has resulted in a long history of overpromising and underdelivering in response to external demands and that history has not served schools well.

The primary responsibility of schools has always been, at minimum, to nurture student achievement, so districts’ conceptions and measures of well-being should award priority to the most fundamental and unchanging part of public schools’ missions.

In light of these reasons for adopting a domain-specific conception of student well-being, why would a district take on more? This is the “it depends” answer to the question posed in the title of the article.

Perhaps for reasons of distance or underfunding, students in the district do not have

realistic access to institutions able to nurture student well-being in other domains – schools are the only institution children and their families can rely on for any kind of support contributing to other forms of well-being.

Or perhaps the district has developed exceptionally close working relationships with other relevant institutions and is sufficiently confident in the partnerships that it is willing to assume shared responsibility and accountability.

Or perhaps the district itself has managed to fund many non-instructional student supports that will develop multiple dimensions of student well-being. But if these are not your district's circumstances, be wary of promising more than your district can deliver.

How Districts Might Make a Difference

Our recent studies about the characteristics of especially effective district suggest two closely related strategies that districts might use to foster student well-being.

One strategy is for districts to help school leaders identify, diagnose and improve those features of their schools with the greatest influence on student well-being. Results of our studies indicate, unequivocally, that districts are unlikely to be successful in improving student well-being directly. Districts aiming to improve student well-being should support and provide as much guidance as possible to schools for improving student achievement.

Results of our recent studies also suggest that many districts will need to engage with school leaders in quite different ways than is typical – most districts in our studies had essentially no effect on the work that school leaders did to improve student outcomes, including well-being.

Among the dozen school, classroom and family conditions with significant direct effects on students and that can be influenced by school leadership² three stood out, in the results of our research, as especially important: academic press or emphasis; teacher trust in parents, colleagues and students; and collective teacher efficacy.

Academic press or emphasis includes most teachers in the school setting high but achievable goals, students responding positively to the challenge of these goals and school leaders and parents supplying

the resources and encouraging students to accomplish those goals. This alignment of values provides students with coherent messages about the importance of their schoolwork, contributes to their motivation to learn and results in greater learning and, as a consequence, their sense of academic well-being.

Teacher trust in parents, colleagues and students has been linked positively to many valued outcomes in addition to student well-being. When trust is high, teachers are more likely to engage in productive collaboration with one another, and students are provided with the freedom to exercise more control over what they learn and how they learn it. Parents develop a better understanding of the school's expectations for their children (and vice versa) and how they can add value to the school's efforts in the home.

Collective teacher efficacy, the third condition, is a belief on the part of a staff that they can make a difference. This results in higher expectations for student learning, a willingness to consider more innovative approaches to instruction and a "never give up" attitude toward students struggling with their learning. Collective teacher efficacy is strongly associated with greater student learning, and greater student learning is the direct cause of students' feelings of academic well-being.

The second strategy is for districts to track success in improving well-being with formally collected data. We appreciate that not everything important can be measured. But if it can be measured it will attract much more attention and effort, and a domain-specific conception of student well-being can be measured.

For our recent studies, we created reliable measures of student well-being from provincially administered student survey questions. We did not collect the data ourselves – it was readily available in provincial websites although almost entirely unused by most districts and schools in our studies. The results of administering such measures over time will offer practical information about progress in fostering student well-being.

Conclusion

Districts, we have argued, should focus their strategic efforts on a conception of student well-being closely aligned to the learning of their students. Direct efforts

to improving this domain-specific conception of student well-being are unlikely to be successful, however. But school leaders are able to directly influence many conditions in their schools that make contributions to student growth.

So, district leaders should help their school leaders learn how to diagnose and improve the status of three of those conditions, in particular academic press, teacher trust in others and collective teacher efficacy. Increasing the status of those three conditions should improve not only student well-being but also student achievement and engagement. ○

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References

1. Evidence in support of all claims in this paper is cited in our recent studies of effective districts including: Kenneth Leithwood, Jingping Sun and Catherine McCullough, "How School Districts Influence Student Achievement," *Journal of Educational Administration* (2019); Kenneth Leithwood and Catherine McCullough, *Strong Districts and their Leadership*, (Toronto, 2017); Final report of research to the Council of Ontario Directors of Education (August); Victoria Handford and Kenneth Leithwood, "School Districts Contributions to Students' Math and Language Achievement," *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership* 14, no. 9 (2019).
2. For a full description of these conditions and their effects on students, see our recent district studies as well as Kenneth Leithwood, Jingping Sun and Katina Pollock (editors), *How School Leaders Contribute to Student Success: The Four Paths Framework* (Springer International Publishers, 2017).

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