



Director's Dispatch: MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS

Mental health awareness has become an increasingly important area of focus for stakeholders in public education locally, provincially, nationally and internationally. There is a consensus that we need to protect and nurture the well-being of students, staff and school communities.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) – Canada's largest mental health and addiction teaching hospital, and, one of the world's leading research centres in the area of addiction and mental health – explains that the terms 'mental health' and 'addiction' refer to a wide range of disorders that affect an individual's mood, thinking and/or behavior (from mild to severe), including: depression and anxiety, as well as substance abuse and gambling. The CAMH further shares that, with appropriate support and/or treatment, most individuals with mental illness will recover.

"In any given year, one in five Canadians experiences a mental health or addiction problem...By the time Canadians reach 40 years of age, one in two have – or have had – a mental illness." ~ Smetanin et al. (2011) in *The life and economic impact of major mental illnesses in Canada: 2011-2041*, prepared for the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

I am inspired by the care and consideration our students and staff exhibit in their daily interactions with one another, and with members of the broader community, in support of mental health awareness and well-being. In fact, our [RCDSB 2017-2020 Strategic Plan](#) highlights 'safe, caring, inclusive and respectful environments' as a key guiding principle of our collective work...with the building of healthy bodies and minds and compassionate hearts in teaching and learning environments that promote and develop all of the benefits of wellness, equity and inclusion as the goal. Specifically, our [Mental Health & Well-Being Strategy 2017-2020](#) emphasizes the importance of positive mental health through strength-based relationships, tiered support and access to services. The strategy provides school communities with capacity building opportunities and implementation supports – using a tiered framework (from classroom to school to system) of research-informed and sustainable practices – in order to lead mentally healthy and thriving school communities.

In particular, [Year 1 of the Action Plan](#) linked to the strategy outlines three key goals:

- to strengthen organizational leadership and conditions for leading mentally healthy and thriving school communities;
- to promote capacity building in sustainable research-informed practices that supports our 'Pathways to Thrive' Framework and tiered mental health and well-being; and,



- to enhance system coordination for meaningful engagement and evaluation in 'Pathways to Thrive', tiered mental health and the needs of specific populations.

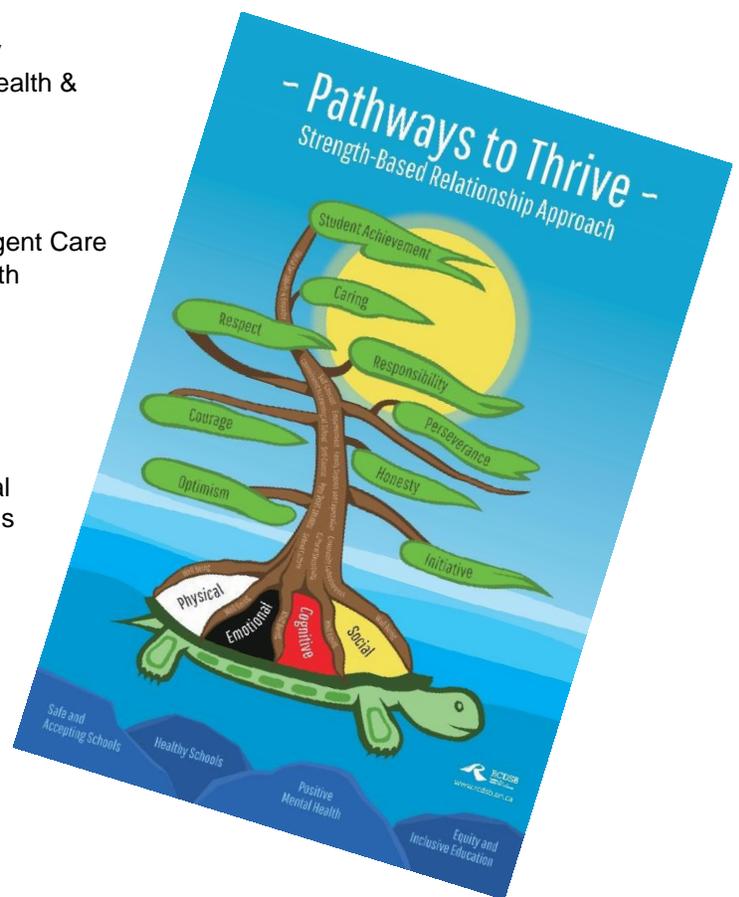
The action plan has led to changes in the way we think about and talk about mental health and well-being as an organization. We have included the topic of well-being as a standing item on agendas for all of our meetings of senior administration (supervisory officers, principals, vice-principals and managers), for instance, with a commitment to a consistent interval for sharing and reinforcing messages related to mental health awareness. This provides an exemplar for our administrators to follow if/as appropriate in sharing key messages with staff and students at their schools and/or central sites, as well. We are working diligently on the development, implementation and/or refinement of administrative procedures to formalize standard processes for Suicide Prevention, Intervention, Postvention and Tiered Mental Health Response....accompanied by annual training sessions and professional development on the topic for our staff. In addition, through the guidance of our Mental Health Lead, Lisa Lariviere, we are working closely with our School Support Counsellors, Guidance Counsellors and Student Success Teachers to continue to build in-school supports for students, including piloting promising practices and evaluating the value of various programs such as Conscious Discipline and Mindfulness, for example.

We are also collaborating with several community partners in the area of mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention. Community partners include:

- Ontario Provincial Police
- Family and Children's Services of Renfrew County
- Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) Mental Health & Addiction Nurses
- Phoenix Centre for Children, Youth and Families
- Petawawa Military Family Resource Centre
- Mental Health Services of Renfrew County
- Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) Urgent Care
- CHEO YouthNet Mental Health Promotion for Youth
- Tele-Mental Health
- Renfrew County District and Health Unit
- Renfrew County Youth Network
- Renfrew County Parenting Network
- Boys and Girls Club of Renfrew County

'[Moving on Mental Health](#)' is one of the emerging provincial initiatives through the Ministry of Children and Youth, and is part of the province's mental health and addiction strategy. Locally, the Phoenix Centre is the lead agency that guides the initiative and works with various sectors in the community. We are pleased to represent the education sector in this initiative, and, look forward to working with community partners to implement the plan for Renfrew County.

"The plan will help children, youth and families get mental health services in their communities that are accessible, responsive and meet their needs. Strengthening the community-based system for delivering mental health services brings people and organizations closer together locally and benefits everyone." ~ *Moving on Mental Health*, Ministry of Education Ontario, 2018



I am a firm believer that achievement and well-being are inextricably interwoven. I do not feel that one must come, or always comes, before the other. In fact, I have witnessed first-hand the confidence, motivation and well-being of a student soar when they first achieve academic success in school. I have also observed the remarkable growth in achievement for a student as a direct result of the sensible, thoughtful supports collaboratively put in place by home and school for their welfare. From my perspective, it is the attention we give to this constant interplay between achievement and well-being, as well as the collectivity of our individual and team efforts, that will have the greatest impact in moving us forward in this important area of focus.

By *Leading with CARE – Creating A Responsive Environment* – our District’s approach to mental health and well-being establishes a purposeful, systematic, tiered pathway in order to respond appropriately to the needs of our students, staff and school communities. Information sheets provided to staff, for instance, delineate aspects related to each of the tiers and share crises helplines and other supports for students in the interaction between achievement and well-being as described above.

Although there is a great deal of work ahead as an organization in order to reach our long-term outcome of improved mental health and well-being, as well as fully-coordinated access to resources, we are proud of our efforts to date as a District and are collectively determined to continue to address this key area of focus. Continuous quality assessment and evaluation of our progress, through measures such as the *Our Schools Survey*, is a key aspect of our strategy in order to monitor improvements in student outcomes over time. Further, the insights and perspectives of our dedicated, diligent staff in the upcoming ‘*Employee Engagement Survey*’ to be launched on the Professional Activity Day on 27 April 2018 will provide invaluable advice and feedback from our professionals on how to better serve their needs in their daily work in schools and central sites.

As our District embarks on a journey toward great well-being for students and staff, I look forward to working with each and every one of you.



Pino Buffone
Director of Education



Staff Information ~ Crisis Helplines and Support for Students

Lead with CARE: Tiered Pathway for Mental Health Response

RCDSB is increasing awareness of crisis line resources within school communities as part of a tiered approach to student mental health.

- **Tier 1** involves the role of the caring adult in students lives and the integration of daily mental health promotion in the classroom and school community. Student academic success is enhanced when students learn about how to take care of their bodies and minds through healthy coping and lifestyle choices. Learn more about [Supporting Minds](#), [Kids Have Stress Too program](#), and other resources for mental health promotion through the staff site, under Departments/Mental Health & WellBeing/ Educator Mental Health Resources.
- **Tier 2** involves awareness of and connecting students with school resources for more targeted support. Talk to the School Support Counsellor, Principal or Vice Principal if you are concerned about a student’s mental health in your class.
- **Tier 3** involves increasing awareness and connecting students with mental health services. If you are concerned about mental health in your class, always talk to the School Support Counsellor, and/or Principal/Vice Principal. A Crisis Helpline is a tier 3 resource that provides students with a safe, anonymous and confidential space to gain support and learn about mental health resources in the community. The following recommended crisis helplines are staffed with trained professionals that are available 24/7, 365 days a year to support children and youth.

KIDS HELP PHONE

A resource for elementary and secondary school age students. Click [here](#) for the Kids Help Phone Website. [Order Free Resources](#) from Kids Help Phone for your classroom and/or school.

GOOD 2 TALK

A resource for students transitioning to post-secondary. Focused on supporting students between the age of 17 - 25. Click [here](#) to check out the Good 2 Talk website. [Order free resources](#) for your classroom and/or school.

Tips for introducing helpline resources in the school community:

School communities can increase awareness and promote crisis line resources by:

- Hanging posters in the school;
- Having wallet cards available in selected locations; and
- Modelling, through rehearsal behavior, increases the likelihood that the resource will be used. An example of rehearsal behavior is taking time to call the crisis line and ask about the resources they provide. Rehearsal behavior can be done with staff as a group, as well as within classrooms with students (recommended for age 12 and up). This will increase familiarity with the resource as well as provides an opportunity to ask questions.

“Approximately 70% of mental health problems have their onset during childhood or adolescence... Young people aged 15 to 24 are more likely to experience mental illness and/or substance abuse disorders than any other age group... 34% of Ontario high-school students indicate a moderate-to-serious level of psychological distress (symptoms of anxiety and depression)...and... 14% indicate a serious level of psychological distress.” ~ *Mental Illness and Addictions: Facts and Statistics*, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, 2018.