



PROGRAM AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

**Tuesday, April 6, 2021
5:30 pm – M.S. Teams
AGENDA**

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Business Arising from the Minutes
4. New Business:
 - 2020-2021 Mental Health and Well-Being ReportMichael St. John,
Amanda Sherman, Jessica Moro
 - Elementary Virtual Tutoring Partnership with Brock University Marian Reimer Friesen &
Melanie Sendzik
5. Other Business
6. Adjournment
7. Next Meeting: Tuesday, May 4, 2021 at 5:30 p.m.



DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF NIAGARA REPORT TO PROGRAM AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

April 2021

2020-2021 Mental Health and Well-Being Report

Background

Mental health and well-being impact one's ability to form healthy relationships, maintain physical health, engage in learning, and achieve academically. Thus, at the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN), we recognize that mental health and well-being are crucial components of student success. Supports and services are made available to all DSBN students to *promote* positive mental health, *prevent* mental health challenges from developing, and *intervene* early for students presenting with mental illness.

The DSBN's mental health and well-being supports and services are guided by the board's three-year Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. School boards develop their strategies with direction from School Mental Health Ontario (SMH-ON) through each board's Mental Health Lead and Superintendent responsible for mental health and well-being.

This school year, we have progressed with our mental health action plan within the context of a global pandemic. Although this year has been challenging on many levels, we have capitalized on the professionalism of every member of our team, the support of the Board, collaboration with administrators and teachers in our schools and extra supports received.

Mental Health Promotion Supports

Mental health promotion work in schools involves classroom programming and board-level initiatives designed to meet the needs of all students, regardless of their level of risk for mental health concerns.

1) Advancing Caring Conditions for Learning

- PD is routinely provided for educators on topics related to advancing caring conditions for learning, including the promotion of SMH-ON's high-quality educator resources
- Collaboration with Equity Team on February board-wide staff meeting PD on mentally healthy conversations about race-related issues in classrooms
- Collaboration with Equity Team on system messaging around bullying prevention and awareness

i) During the Summer Period

- Two virtual PD sessions for summer school teachers to provide guidance on how to support student mental health and well-being remotely

ii) During the Return to School Period

- Developed elementary and secondary versions of A Parent's Guide: Preparing for a Mentally Healthy Return to School
- Pre-recorded Mentally Healthy Return to School webinar viewed by all DSBN staff during September 1st-3rd PD Days. Accompanied by Educator Guide that included the First 10 Days (and Beyond) resource from SMH-ON's Mentally Health Return to School Toolkit

iii) For Students Learning Remotely

- Developed tip sheet for Supporting Student Mental Health: Educator Conversations with Students Learning Remotely

2) Building Student Social and Emotional Skills and Mental Health Literacy

- Team of 20 elementary youth counsellors deliver a suite of evidence-based classroom programs and curricula to K-8 classes in their allocated schools

- Youth counsellors received formal training to deliver two new SEL programs – Unlearn and Merrell’s Strong Kids
- From September to March, 558 elementary classes have received SEL programming
 - i) During the Summer Period**
 - Ten-week Summer Learning Programs offered to students entering Grades 1 to 12, based on Merrell’s Strong Kids/Teens and MindUP. Twenty-one groups were run, with a total of 149 students
 - SEL At Home resources and links were posted on the DSBN website for parents
 - ii) During the Return to School Period**
 - Youth counsellors trained and supported by IT department in joining in-person classes virtually, adapted programming for a virtual format
 - Teachers encouraged to focus more in-class time on mental health promotion, including incorporating everyday mental health practices into their daily routines
 - iii) For Students Learning Remotely**
 - Youth counsellors delivered digital citizenship curriculum to all 214 Virtual School classes
 - Widget created for secondary e-learning platforms to allow students to engage in help-seeking and to increase awareness of effective and appropriate supports and resources

Mental Health Intervention Services

Mental health early intervention services are provided to students who are at risk for, or who are experiencing, mild to moderate mental health or substance use concerns.

- Team of 30 social workers led by the School Social Work Services Lead provide assessment, engagement and service planning, and brief individual or group structured intervention
- From September to March, 824 elementary students and 736 secondary students have been referred to a social worker
- The top three areas of student mental health concerns for elementary and secondary students are 1) anxiety, 2) self-regulation, and 3) support for navigating community mental health services, and 1) low mood, 2) anxiety, and 3) support for family issues, respectively
- From September to March, 227 suicide risk assessments were completed by social workers
 - i) During the Summer**
 - In June 2020, social workers ensured that all active cases referred to community services
 - The social work team operated a DSBN Summer Wellness Line for July and August
 - ii) Return to School Period**
 - Hired School Social Worker for Indigenous Students, K-12
 - Hired two youth counsellors with specialized experience working with high-risk youth to support students in the Reducing Incidents of Suspensions and Expulsions (RISE) program
 - Elementary social workers formally trained to deliver Emotion-Focused Family Therapy (EFFT) to parents and caregivers
 - iii) Students Learning Remotely**
 - Created tailored process for social work referrals to Virtual School students
 - Social workers formally trained by SMH-ON in using Brief Digital Interventions (BDIs) with students
 - iv) COVID-19 Enhancements**
 - Prioritized enhancing suicide prevention efforts

- Social worker training updated by SMH-ON in suicide risk assessment and management with youth in school-based practice
- Social workers formally trained in Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS)
- Two new social workers added to the social work team – allowed for two secondary schools to move from half- to full-time support and most elementary social work allocations reduced by at least one school
- Community & Inclusion Social Worker role created

Attendance Intervention Services

Attendance counsellor services are provided to students who are chronically and persistently absent throughout the school year. These services, with the goal of reengaging absent students, are delivered by the board attendance counsellor who is a social worker.

- From September to March, 209 elementary students (non-Virtual school), 567 elementary Virtual School students, and 460 secondary students were referred to the attendance counsellor
 - i) **During the Summer**
 - Two-week virtual group program developed specifically for students transitioning to Grade 9 who were absent for 50 or more days prior to March Break
 - ii) **Students Learning Remotely/COVID-19 Enhancements**
 - Two attendance counsellors were hired to support Virtual School attendance

Next Steps

The DSBN’s three-year Mental Health and Addictions Strategy will be renewed in the 2021-2022 school year. Key priorities for the next three years, dependent on budget allocations and the evolving needs of the system, will include:

- Supporting school communities and students in recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Developing a culture of trauma awareness and sensitivity
- Ongoing collaboration with the Equity Team to highlight the intersection of equity and mental health
- Consulting and coaching for classroom teachers to increase capacity for wellness promotion and social emotional development at school
- Opportunities for student mental health leadership
- Refining our model of school social work services delivery to ensure consistency across the system in delivering high-quality and timely school-based early intervention services
- Working closely with key community mental health partners to develop protocols for system alignment and cohesion

Conclusion

The DSBN is dedicated to supporting the mental well-being of all members of our school communities. We continue to provide timely and high-quality mental health supports and services to students, families, and schools.

Recommended Motion:

“That the 2020-2021 Mental Health and Well-Being Report be received.”

Respectfully Submitted by:

M. St. John



DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD OF NIAGARA
REPORT TO PROGRAM AND PLANNING COMMITTEE
Elementary Virtual Tutoring Partnership with Brock University

Background:

Historically, the District School Board of Niagara's Elementary Curriculum Team has used Ministry *OFIP* and Board-funded *Tutors in the Classroom* resources to support the hiring of in-person, school-based tutors across the board. After tutor hours were allocated to schools, a lengthy process followed in which Administrators were responsible for hiring tutors and completing all necessary paperwork. Curriculum Support Services staff would then ensure the tutors were processed through Human Resources and Payroll before tutoring could begin. Some schools struggled to find tutors due to their geographic location while others spent a significant amount of time training tutors since they were new year after year.

Current Situation:

Like many aspects of education, COVID-19 had provided us with an opportunity to re-think our practices. We are thrilled to have partnered with Brock University to re-imagine tutoring in DSBN:

- ❖ Students in the 3rd year Reading and Literacy Development course at Brock gain unpaid tutoring experience as part of their course requirements. These tutors began working in January with Virtual School students and will finish the first week of April.
- ❖ Brock posted the paid tutoring positions to their 4th through 6th year Concurrent Education teachers as these students have already completed the 3rd-year Reading course.
- ❖ Brock has also taken on the responsibilities for all HR and Payroll aspects of the program.
- ❖ Experienced DSBN staff along with Brock professors provided professional development to the newly hired tutors to familiarize them with the intervention program.
- ❖ Paid tutors began working mid-February and will continue through May 30th.
- ❖ Brock tutors are working with students in 28 'in-person' schools and in the Virtual School.

Outcome:

A great deal of gratitude has been expressed by school staff, students, parents/guardians and Brock University for this partnership. The many benefits of this program include:

- ❖ We continued to offer reading intervention to over 175 elementary students during the pandemic.
- ❖ We are building the instructional capacity of pre-service teachers by offering them the opportunity to tutor for a total of 3 years - 4th, 5th and 6th year of their Concurrent Education program. This year, 55 Brock students gained this experience.
- ❖ We have reduced the burden on our DSBN HR, payroll, and school staff since Brock is taken on the hiring, training, and payment of tutors
- ❖ We have found a way to ensure our geographically remote schools can access tutoring via MS TEAMS.
- ❖ We are gathering data on the impact of virtual literacy tutoring and believe that not only has it improved reading skills, it's also had a positive impact on students' attitudes towards and confidence with reading.

Future Considerations:

Next year, we are planning for in-person tutoring to resume where possible and that virtual tutoring be offered to remote locations. This will ensure equitable access to tutoring across our system, while also minimizing driving and expenses incurred by Brock students. We look forward to welcoming back tutors in their 5th and 6th years and supporting tutors who will be moving from unpaid positions (3rd year) to paid positions (4th year).

Respectfully Submitted,
Marian Reimer Friesen
Superintendent of Curriculum and Student Achievement (K – 8)