

DATE: October 23, 2018

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Strategic Plan Update: Student Wellness and Citizenship

ORIGINATOR: Nancy Petersen, Managing Director, Strategic District Supports

**RESOURCE
STAFF:** Marlene Hanson and Regan Holt

ISSUE

The purpose of this Strategic Plan Update report is to provide the Board of Trustees with an overview of efforts in support of Priority 2, Goal One: A Focus on Well-being and Student Citizenship, with the outcome that students and staff in the District have the right to learn and work in an environment that promotes equality of opportunity, dignity, respect and recognition of diversity.

BACKGROUND

In 2014, Edmonton Public Schools formally launched its District Strategic Plan for the 2014-2018 term. The District Strategic Plan has three priority areas with supporting goals and outcomes. The plan provides common direction and alignment between the work of the Board of Trustees, the Superintendent of Schools and District staff. The plan serves as the foundation for a District culture of evidence-based decision making, assurance and accountability.

To demonstrate the District's commitment to transparency and accountability, Strategic Plan Update reports were introduced in 2016–2017 as an extension of the Annual Education Results Report (AERR). The reports are intended to provide the Board of Trustees with detailed progress towards the goals and outcomes of our Strategic Plan.

CURRENT SITUATION

This report supports the District's launch of its Mental Health Framework.

KEY POINTS

Strategic Plan Update reports, introduced in 2016-2017, provide an extension of the AERR.

The attached report is focused on the District's work in support of building student wellness and citizenship.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Strategic Plan Update: Student Wellness and Citizenship

NP:mh

Strategic Plan Update:

Student Wellness and Citizenship

October 23, 2018

INTRODUCTION

This Strategic Plan Update Report provides the Board of Trustees with an update in support of Board Policy, AE.BP Welcoming, Inclusive, Safe and Healthy Learning and Working Environments. This policy was created in 2017, as a foundational policy to reflect the Board's commitment to providing working and learning environments that respect diversity, foster a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self. Specifically, this report provides the Board of Trustees with an update on the District's Mental Health Framework, [*Navigating Mental Health*](#), launched District-wide on World Mental Health Day, October 10, 2018.

WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

The District has data that informs two aspects of how we look at mental health across our organization. District Feedback Survey and Alberta Education Accountability Pillar data tell us how we are doing in terms of fostering welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy learning and working environments. There are several questions on both the District Feedback Survey and Alberta Education's Accountability Pillar in support of Priority 2, Goal One A *Focus on Well-being and Student Citizenship*. Preliminary results from the District Feedback survey are highlighted below. These results, along with this year's Accountability Pillar data, will be further analyzed for 2017-2018 when they become available this fall.

A second source of data is that of stakeholder voice. This data signals to us that mental health is an area of focus that requires our care and attention in terms of building capacity and being responsive to the needs of our staff and students. Teacher voice came primarily from the Teacher Collaboration Committee held with the Superintendent in April 2016. Student voice emerged from the Student Senate's peer engagement process at the start of both the 2016 and 2017 school years. Mental health emerged as a priority area for District youth and was adopted by the Student Senate as a key project for their work plan in both years.

Both sets of data provide evidence that the newly released District Mental Health Framework will serve as a meaningful resource for District staff as they strive to foster welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy learning and working environments and support the mental health needs of themselves and students.

2017 District Feedback Survey

The 2017 District Feedback Survey provided responses that were categorized into themes of Welcoming, Inclusive and Safe Environments; Health and Well-being; and Citizenship and Leadership. On themes of safety, health and well-being, 91.59 per cent of elementary students and 70.28 per cent of secondary students indicated that they can access the support needed for their mental and physical well-being. A similar result to that of the secondary students was evident from the parents who responded, with 70.13 per cent of parents indicating a positive response.

In addition, 95.71 per cent of elementary students indicated that they know at least one adult in their school to whom they could go for help. In the secondary grades surveyed, 82.95 per cent indicated agreement with this question.

In recent years, the District has been intentional in creating awareness around the importance of identifying key contacts within schools, as health champions for both students and staff.

Adolescence is an important developmental period characterized by considerable social, emotional, behavioural, physical and educational transitions (Kutcher & McDougall, 2009) underscoring the importance of creating increased awareness of "go to" supports with secondary school students. Resiliency research indicates that students will advocate for resources and supports when their social environments (e.g., schools) make resources known and available through staff members that students deem as safe (Ungar, 2010; Grace, 2015).

The work of both Kutcher and Unger demonstrate the importance of mental health literacy within a school community. It is the intention of the District that the Mental Health Framework will improve school mental health literacy for educators and students alike.

Teacher Collaboration Committee Summary

Conversations about needing a common language and shared knowledge about supporting student mental health emerged in April 2016, following the Teacher Collaboration Committee on Mental Health. Teachers shared their experiences, observations and opinions about mental health issues in schools and classrooms. ([TCC Mental Health Summary](#)). Teachers spoke candidly about observations related to student mental health, including anxiety, depression, anger management, pressure to do well, trauma, self-harm and addictions. It was noted that teachers did not always distinguish between what was considered a mental illness or what was a mental health issue. Essential topics identified as needing to be addressed included stigma, the lack of mental health literacy built into the curriculum and the importance of developing healthy relationships. Schools also identified many supports already in place. Teachers reported a wide range of school-wide approaches, supported by external partnerships such as APPLE Schools, The Way In, Healthy Families (Alberta Health Services) and many others. They recognized the importance of events such as Bullying Awareness Week and Pink Shirt Day, and of school clubs, in helping to promote mental health strategies. Partnerships and access to specialists were included as positive supports for schools - counsellors, mental health therapists, family therapists, psychologists, social workers and other consultants.

Teachers gave examples of numerous universal strategies used within their classrooms, to create and nurture healthy learning environments. Daily check-ins with students, circle dialogues, reflective writing practices, stretching and mindful breathing were among the examples provided, which increasingly support the emerging research around the importance of the brain-mind-body connection. (van der Kolk, 2015; Siegal & Bryson, 2011; Perry & Szalavitz, 2011)

The Teacher Collaboration Committee conversation also surfaced proposed solutions to supporting mental health in schools. These included developing shared language and protocols across the District, fighting stigma, compiling evidence-based programs and strategies and sharing of strategies and resources among catchments.

At the time of the TCC on Mental Health, it was noted that numerous District actions were created to support schools. These included the establishment of a mobile Mental Health team to support transitions to or from tertiary care, staff training in Mental Health First Aid and the Go-To Educator mental health literacy training.

The TCC provided a representation of teacher voices from across the District, to help inform the development of a mental health framework.

Student Senate Youth Engagement

During the first year of Student Senate in 2016-2017, Senators from across District schools gathered youth voice about the most important education-related topics for students. Through this engagement, the topic of mental health emerged as one of three priority topic areas. To support this area, the 2016-2017 Student Senate organized the first District student conference on mental health, “We Know it Exists, Now What” with a focus on raising students’ overall awareness about mental health.

The 2017-2018 Student Senate again reached out to their peers around important education-related topics; 1,545 comments were gathered and themed. This work revealed that mental health remained a priority topic for District students. To address this priority area, Student Senators organized a second student mental health conference, “Stepping Forward Together” with a focus on reducing the stigma of mental health through providing students with a range of strategies to talk to others about the topic of mental health.

Staff working on the District's mental health framework worked closely with the Student Senate both years to support their mental health conferences. This collaboration also served to bring a youth perspective to the development of the mental health framework.

CREATING A MENTAL HEALTH FRAMEWORK: BACKGROUND ON THE PROCESS

Beginning in the fall of 2016, a committee was formed consisting of principals, key school staff, central leaders, and Alberta Health partners, to begin the process of creating a Mental Health Framework for the District. The intent of a District Framework for mental health was to:

- Clarify language; to build a common understanding and vocabulary related to mental health.
- Define and articulate a model of support from prevention to intervention through the lens of a "continuum of care."
- Articulate the scope of supports, services and resources available within the District and the larger community.

The committee indicated that the Pyramid of Intervention already provided an important backbone to their understanding of levels of supports. This became pivotal in exploring the relationship between education and health sectors as they work in partnership, and thus informed the basis of the District Framework.

Following the first year of the committee work, a subcommittee of central leaders was formed, to write the document and to seek opportunities for engagement and feedback from staff. Significant feedback opportunities were provided across the District, including with the following groups, from 2016-2018:

- A multi-disciplinary committee consisting of Inclusive Learning staff, school leaders and central leaders
- School counselors' Community of Practice
- Inclusive Learning Focus group consisting of psychologists, mental health therapists, social workers and other specialists
- High School Principals' group
- Student Senate
- Dr. Stan Kutcher and team from Dalhousie University
- Alberta Health Services
- Research and Innovation
- ESL Consultants and Intercultural Services cohort
- Directors and Managing Directors
- District Support Team
- Board of Trustees

In June 2017, the Alberta Government released [*Working together to support Mental Health in Alberta Schools*](#), a cross-ministry provincial guiding document. District staff had contributed to the development of this provincial resource, which helped to inform the development of our District Framework.

OUR DISTRICT FRAMEWORK: NAVIGATING MENTAL HEALTH

Edmonton Public Schools is committed to a shared language and understanding of mental health and equitable access to resources, learning and supports. This vision guides our shared responsibility to support students, through *Navigating Mental Health*, the District's mental health framework, which was launched internally on October 10, 2018, [*World Mental Health Day*](#). The framework aims to help educators and District staff foster a shared language and feel confident navigating the pathways of mental health supports for students.

The framework is organized around the following themes:

- Collaboration between schools and partners
- What is mental health?
- The Pyramid of Intervention and knowing when to refer a student for support
- The [whole-school approach](#) and the four pillars of healthy school communities
- Guidelines for supporting students with mental health challenges
- How to build a school action plan for mental health
- Mental health terms
- Professional learning opportunities

NEXT STEPS

- A multi-disciplinary steering committee will be established to explore how to best support school-based mental health in our District.
- Assessment tools to evaluate the uptake of the Framework are under development, supported by the Research and Innovation unit. Data will inform steering committee work. A healthy school planner will also be developed for schools (adapted from the [Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health](#)'s Healthy School Planner).
- Consultant support will be made available to guide school action planning using the Pyramid of Intervention and to support the [Teacher Quality Standard](#) (TQS, 2017).
- *Maximizing our Mental Health*, lessons on mental health are being adapted from [teenmentalhealth.org](#)'s Mental Health Curriculum (2017). These lessons are linked to the cross-curricular competencies of Alberta Education's concept-based curriculum and the language highlighted in the Framework. Professional learning targeting teachers of Grades 7, 8, and 9 students will roll out in December 2018 to support the teaching and learning.
- Professional learning opportunities will be offered throughout the school year to guide universal supports for school-based mental health (e.g., restorative practices, social and emotional learning, physical literacy, self-regulation, trauma-informed school cultures). The District will also continue to build staff capacity through Go-To Educator and Mental Health First Aid training and Communities of Practice (counsellors, physical literacy).
- Established networks including the Comprehensive School Health (CSH) lead teachers and emerging leader cohorts will be accessed to support catchment capacity building. CSH lead teachers will be provided with opportunities to develop universal and targeted brain-based approaches to teaching and learning. A CSH google community will be linked to the District's Intranet to provide updates to toolkits, resources and professional learning opportunities.
- Tip sheets, posters and related District and community resource lists will be developed for District staff that identifies targeted supports and specialized services.
- District representation will be provided on local and provincial committees that can increase service delivery in schools (e.g., City of Edmonton's Living Hope Community Plan, Edmonton Regional Post-Secondary Mental Health Committee).
- External launch of the District's Mental Health Framework in early 2019 to engage community partners and stakeholders.
- Caregiver videos developed in collaboration with Edmonton Catholic Schools and the Regional Learning Consortium will be made available to support school staff with talking about mental health with caregivers/parents. Topics include: stigma; what is normal anxiety; healthy relationships; toxic stress and tolerable stress; technology and the brain; self-regulation; play your way to positive mental health; and love, empathy and connection.
- Networking opportunities will be organized that can connect community partners and services to caregivers and school stakeholders.
- Regular newsletters and tips sheets for staff will be developed to identify District and community services and supports.

- Mental health web page will be linked to the external District site to provide increased access to key messages, resources, information, and toolkits.

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