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TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Strategic Plan Update Report: Well-being and Mental Health

ORIGINATOR: Nancy Petersen, Managing Director, Strategic Division Supports

RESOURCE

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ISSUE

This Strategic Plan Update report highlights the ongoing work and intentional efforts made by the Division in the 2021-2022 school year to support Priority 3 of the [2022-2026 Division Strategic Plan](#), *“Promote a comprehensive approach to student and staff well-being and mental health”*.

BACKGROUND

In 2022, Edmonton Public Schools launched the new Division Strategic Plan for the 2022-2026 term. The Division 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 Division staff. The plan serves as the foundation for a Division culture of evidence-based decision making, assurance and accountability.

To demonstrate the Division’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 Division Strategic Plan.

CURRENT SITUATION

While factors surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic have led to increased levels of stress and anxiety for many, the Division has remained steadfast in working with partners to support the well-being and mental health of students and retain a focus on high-quality teaching and learning. In light of the pandemic, now, more than ever, schools are a critical space for students to develop their sense of belonging through positive interactions with their peers and the adults around them.

As the Division continues to navigate the evolving context of pandemic recovery, the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan prioritizes mental health with an emphasis on relationships and building learning environments that support a sense of belonging. This Strategic Plan Update Report provides the Board of Trustees with an overview of the collective efforts made within the Division and through partnerships with the community during the 2021-2022 school year to:

- Support student well-being and mental health through utilization of the Comprehensive School Health approach, resilience science and the provision of a range of universal, targeted and specialized supports (i.e., a Pyramid of Intervention).
- Support staff well-being and mental health, highlighting the employee assistance program and the potential flexibility of the Division calendar and work arrangements

- Build staff capacity to support student and staff well-being through the provision of professional learning and training focused on supporting student well-being and mental health; building staff efficacy and leadership skills; and building skills to support staff's own well-being .

The report concludes with a discussion of the Division's ongoing commitment to supporting student and staff well-being over the coming years, including planning for future key initiatives and recognition of the importance of advocating for adequate, predictable and stable funding in support of well-being and mental health.

KEY POINTS

This Strategic Plan Update Report provides the Board of Trustees with an overview of the Division's comprehensive approach in support of student and staff well-being and mental health in support of Priority Three of the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan.

ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES

ATTACHMENT I Strategic Plan Update Report: Well-being and Mental Health

NP:sa



Strategic Plan Update Report

Well-being and Mental Health

June 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	2
BACKGROUND	2
STUDENT WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH	3
Pyramid of Intervention	5
Pyramid of Intervention: Universal Supports	6
Focus on Resilience Research	6
Menstrual Hygiene Product Initiative	8
Mental Health Capacity Building Wellness Coaches	8
Division Created Support Materials for the Physical Education and Wellness Curriculum (K-6)	9
Student Senate Projects on Well-being and Mental Health	9
Pyramid of Intervention: Targeted Supports	10
School-Linked Teams	10
Mental Health Capacity Building Wellness Coaches	10
Critical Incident Support Services Team	11
Wraparound Supports	11
School Nutrition	12
Pyramid of Intervention: Specialized Supports	12
Mental Health Transition Team (MHTT)	13
STAFF WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH	13
Employee Family Assistance Program	14
School Calendar and Scheduling of Breaks	14
Flexible Work Arrangements	15
BUILDING STAFF CAPACITY	15
LOOKING AHEAD	16
REFERENCES	18

INTRODUCTION

Edmonton Public Schools uses a collaborative and comprehensive approach to support students and staff well-being with the intent of helping students and staff to grow and thrive in their learning and working environments. This Strategic Plan Update Report provides the Board of Trustees with an overview of the Division's efforts to support student and staff well-being and mental health as the post-pandemic context continues to evolve. The report reflects the goals of Priority 3 of the [2022-2026 Strategic Plan](#) to “Promote a comprehensive approach to student and staff well-being and mental health”:

- Goal 1 - “Support students and staff in building skills, strategies and relationships that contribute to positive mental health”.
- Goal 2 - “Support students and staff so they experience a greater sense of belonging and social, emotional and physical well-being”.

The report outlines the Division’s intentional efforts toward student well-being in the 2021-2022 school year. In addition, the report discusses the Division’s strategies and actions in place for staff well-being. An overview of the Division’s efforts to build staff capacity to support student and staff well-being is also provided. The report concludes with a discussion of the Division’s ongoing commitment to supporting student and staff well-being in the coming years.

BACKGROUND

The Division’s responsibilities for well-being and mental health are grounded in Alberta’s [Education Act](#), which directs school authorities to provide welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments for students and staff. Additionally, the [Alberta Education Teaching Quality Standard](#) requires all teachers to be aware and able to facilitate “*responses to the emotional and mental health needs of our students.*” The Division further formalizes its role and responsibilities in the development of Division Board policies, administrative regulations and practices or procedures.

As the world emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, there are increased complexities associated with well-being and mental health as a result of the pandemic’s disruption to family, school and personal life. Pandemic-related research indicates that this has impacted the mental health of both children and adults, resulting in increased symptoms of anxiety, depression and mental disorders. (Bignardi et al., 2020; Calvano et al., 2021; Cost et al., 2020; Schwartz et al., 2021; Statistics Canada, 2021).

The November 2020 Strategic Plan Update report on [Re-entry Mental Health and Wellness of Students](#) found that some of the challenges and complexities for students and staff included: sudden shifts from in-person to online learning, limited socialization with others, loss of extracurricular activities, increased utilization of technology for both learning and connecting with others and disrupted access to wrap-around resources and supports for students.

While the pandemic caused more feelings of isolation, it also brought awareness to the important role schools play in helping children and youth in relationship building and being connected to others. Schools are a critical space for students to develop their sense of belonging through positive interactions with their peers and the adults around them. The warm, welcoming learning environments along with the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with others that came with a return to in-person learning were critical to support the well-being and mental health of students. This was also true for staff, as through the Division Feedback Survey (DFS) many shared their hope for connecting once again with their colleagues and students.

As the Division continues to navigate the evolving context of pandemic recovery, the [2022-2026 Strategic Plan](#) prioritizes well-being and mental health with an emphasis on relationships and building learning environments that support a sense of belonging.

STUDENT WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

The Division’s work in support of well-being and mental health for students is grounded in the internationally recognized [Comprehensive School Health](#) (CSH) approach.

The Division works in partnership with Alberta Health Services (AHS) around this approach; AHS hosts a [virtual hub](#) of health-related resources for schools.

CSH serves as the foundation to a whole school approach to well-being and is structured around four key components highlighted in Figure 1. This work includes engaging with families and community partners while supporting universal student health and well-being. Table 1 provides some examples of how the CSH Framework comes to life across Division school communities.

Figure 1: Comprehensive School Health Framework

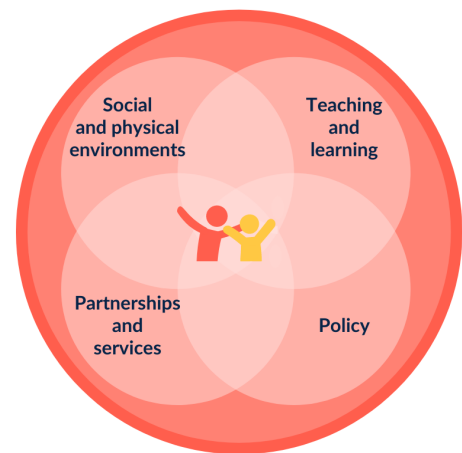


Table 1: Examples of the CSH Framework in Schools

Social and Physical Environments

- **Welcoming spaces** have a positive impact on student well-being. Schools and classrooms make intentional efforts to create a sense of belonging for students by ensuring that students see themselves in the halls and walls of their schools.
- **21st century learning environments** are supported through new school construction, revitalization and infrastructure and technology upgrades.
- **Air quality** has been enhanced through a variety of actions including the provision of portable air filtration (HEPA) units for every classroom and learning space in the Division.

Teaching and Learning

- **Curricular instruction** in the areas of physical education, career and life management and health and wellness courses teach about and engage students in activities that promote wellness.
- **Field trips** provide the opportunity for students to participate in experiential learning connected to curriculum and be exposed to new activities, skills and interests.
- **Extracurricular activities** in schools provide students the opportunity to participate in a range of activities that enhance well-being such as sports, choir, music, the arts, diversity clubs and cooking.

Partnerships and Services

- Schools work with many partners and agencies in the community to support the CSH model. Examples of key partner agencies that provide programming and services that enhance well-being include:
 - Action for Healthy Communities
 - Africa Centre, The
 - Alberta Health Services
 - Apple Schools
 - Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society
 - Boys and Girls, Big Brothers, Big Sisters Edmonton
 - e4c
 - Family Centre, The
 - Food for Thought
 - Free Play
 - RAJO
 - United Way

*This list is just a small sample of the many groups and organizations that work and volunteer alongside Division staff. Schools have identified over 600 community connections in support of students.

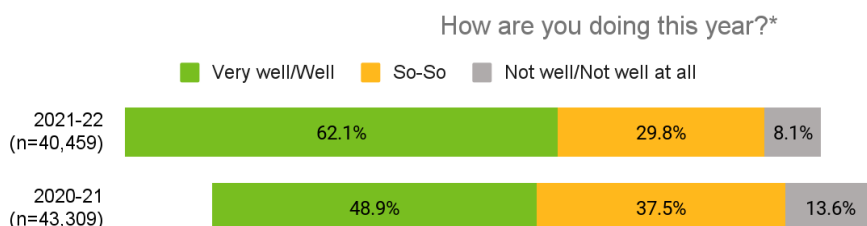
Policy

- **Board policies and administrative regulations** provide guidance and direction to support student and staff well-being, for example through: Board Policy AE.BB.BP Wellness of Students and Staff; Administrative Regulation FBCA.AR Respectful Working Environments; and Board Policy HF.BP Safe, Caring and Respectful Learning Environments.
- **2022-2026 Strategic Plan** provides multi-year direction for the Division and includes the prioritization of mental health and wellness.
- **Frameworks and guiding documents**, both internal (e.g., Navigating Mental Health Framework) and external (e.g., Alberta Daily Physical Activity Policy, the Canada Food Guide) serve as a resource for staff in their work to support student well-being and mental health.

In addition to the evidence-based approach of CSH, the Division, in partnership with Dr. Michael Ungar, is deepening its understanding around the importance of resilience science and the implications for both students and staff well-being. Using a resilience approach within a school community includes intentional language and actions for teachers in their work with students that supports and promotes student well-being in a manner that builds out their capacity and strength. The Division’s work related to resilience is further addressed under Universal Supports (page 6).

To help gain a better understanding of how students were doing during the pandemic, the DFS included questions specific to well-being. In 2021-2022, the majority (62.1 per cent) of student respondents indicated they were doing very well or well this school year; 30 per cent indicated they were doing “so-so”; and 8 per cent responded that they were doing not well or not well at all (Figure 2). This is an encouraging improvement from the 2020-2021 school year, where only 48.9 per cent of students indicated that they were either doing well or very well during the pandemic.

Figure 2: 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 DFS student mental health responses



* 2020-2021 DFS student question: How are you doing during the pandemic?

In 2021-2022, 59 per cent of student respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their school provides good supports related to mental health, while 22 per cent were unsure and 18 per cent of students disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement (Figure 3). These results are reflective of the specific role and limited capacity that schools have in providing mental health supports to students, and it is also likely that results for “unsure” would also include students who did not feel a need to access mental health supports through their school. This question was unique to the 2021-2022 DFS.

Figure 3. 2021-2022 DFS student mental health supports responses



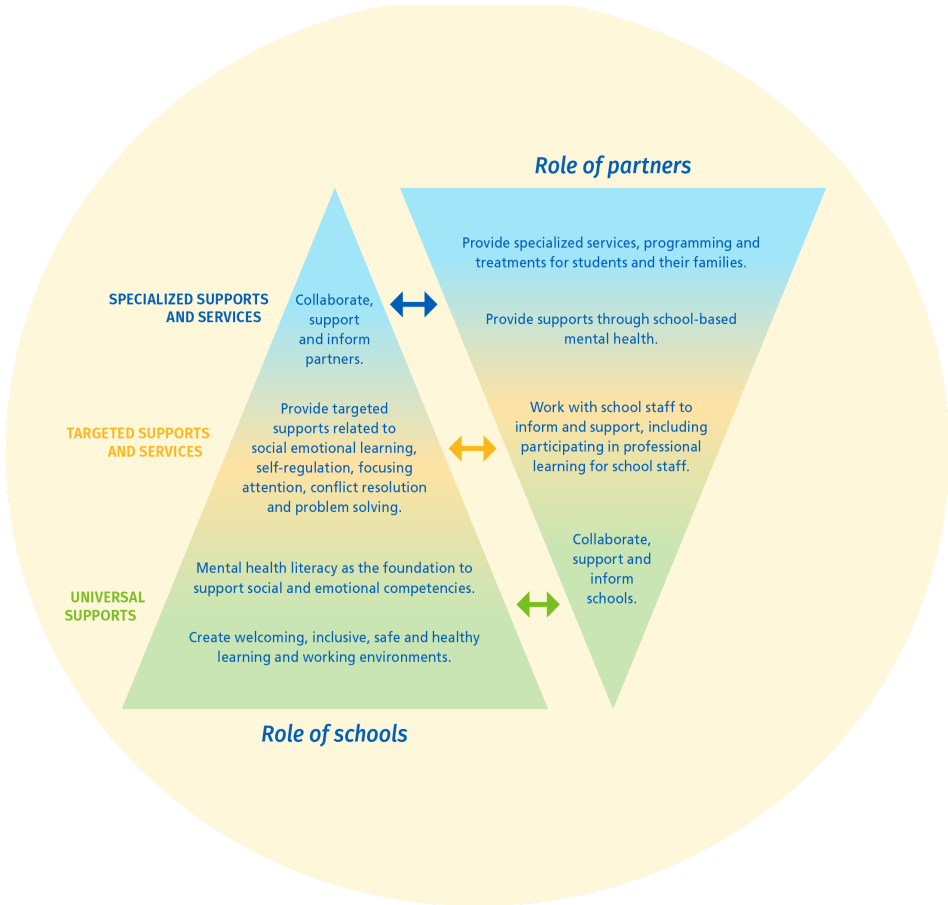
Pyramid of Intervention

The Division’s model of support for well-being and mental health is framed through the lens of the Pyramid of Intervention. The Pyramid of Intervention is an evidence-based, multi-tiered framework based on three levels of support and services: universal, targeted and specialized. The model is designed to address learning, social/emotional and behavioral growth and development by collaborating with partners to deliver a range of programs, supports and interventions based on student need. It is used to identify pathways through services and a continuum of supports, including mental health promotion, early identification, interventions and specialized services.

As mental health needs of students increase in complexity, schools require targeted and specialized support from Division professionals and partners to help provide the appropriate and supportive learning environment for students. Schools build meaningful relationships with specialized service provider partners that can be found within the Division and the community. The role of partners is integral to the success of students as schools work to support student well-being across all three tiers of the Pyramid of Intervention.

The role health professionals play towards the well-being of a student increases proportionately to the level of intervention required. Figure 4 from the Division’s document [Navigating Mental Health](#) demonstrates the interplay between education and health through the framework of the Pyramid of Intervention; this figure demonstrates the importance of health and education working together and the role healthcare partners play in supporting student well-being at the targeted and specialized supports tiers of the pyramid.

Figure 4: Pyramid of Intervention demonstrating the interplay between the role of schools and the role of health partners (Source: Navigating Mental Health)



Pyramid of Intervention: Universal Supports

Universal supports are provided through whole-school proactive/preventative approaches and support welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy learning environments. Universal strategies include: high quality instruction to support diverse learning strengths and needs, social emotional learning and regulation practices embedded into instruction and classroom activities, peer supports and school-wide screening. This work reflects the efforts of teachers and school staff in collaboration with families and is the first step in identifying students’ strengths and those who may be at risk.

The following section of the report provides an overview of the key initiatives that were in place across the Division for the 2021-2022 school year that promoted universal supports for student well-being.

Focus on Resilience Research

The Division is taking steps to build out a body of practice around resilience and a sense of belonging within the school community. The work is evidence-based and includes professional learning for staff, a youth resilience survey instrument and opportunities to link to curriculum and explore implications for school culture. This work is in partnership with Dr. Michael Ungar, Director of the Resilience Research

Centre at Dalhousie University.

In 2020-2021, the Division began using the Youth Resilience Survey instrument (YRS) as one indicator of student well-being in the areas of resilience and connection or engagement with school. The survey serves as a snapshot or one source of information and is not diagnostic in nature. Data from the survey provides schools with school level cohort data and individual student profiles; schools use the information from the survey, triangulated with other data, to help inform working with individual students and programming for the broader school community.

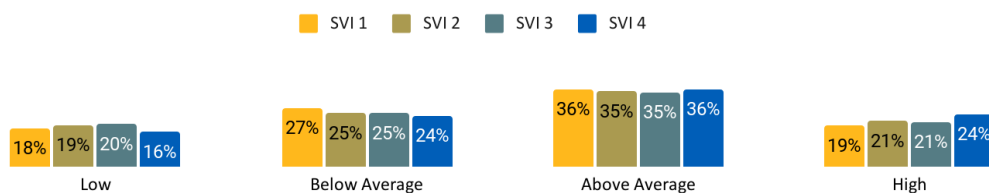
Key efforts by the Division and schools in 2021-2022 to support action in response to insights from the YRS included professional learning to assist schools working with their YRS data and to enhance staff understanding of resilience science within a school community. This included the introduction of a train the trainer approach and the development of resources to support teaching and learning long term.

Key insights from the 2021-2022 YRS results include the following:

- Overall, students with high resilience scores were more likely to have high engagement or connection to school scores. Conversely, students with low resilience scores were more likely to have low engagement scores. This trend points to the value of school-level approaches that address both resilience and engagement as important aspects of student well-being.
- Using Division Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) rankings¹, resilience and engagement scores for students from the most highly socially vulnerable schools (represented as SVI 1 in Figure 5) were overall very similar to results for students from school populations that generally experience the least social vulnerability (SVI 4 in Figure 5). These findings stand in contrast to academic achievement data across SVI groupings, where differences in academic success are more apparent in relation to social vulnerability. The similarity in results across SVI groupings suggests that students across the Division are equally connected to school, have similar levels of resilience and are able to benefit from initiatives that address student well-being and mental health.

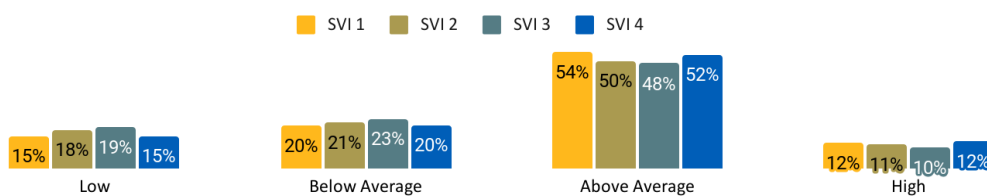
Figure 5. *Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) quartile comparison of 2021-2022 overall resilience/engagement scores*

Overall Resilience Scores - Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) Groupings (n=52,292)



¹ The SVI is an evidence-based measure calculated annually that incorporates student mobility (Division data), median family income (Canada Census data) and lone parent family status (Canada Census data). Research indicates that these three factors have a direct impact on school success. Using postal code data, all Division schools are then ranked, creating a listing of Division schools from most to least socially vulnerable.

Overall Engagement Scores - Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) Groupings (n=49,085)



Menstrual Hygiene Product Initiative

The Menstrual Hygiene Productive initiative was implemented in response to the [April 27, 2021, Board Motion](#). This initiative supports student well-being and is intended to reduce stigma by providing barrier-free access to menstrual products in school washrooms. Following a pilot with a small number of Division schools during the 2021-2022 school year, free menstrual products were made available to students across all Division schools in 2022-2023. Students from the pilot schools provided feedback that helped inform expanding to all Division schools for the fall of 2022. This feedback included information about the quality of products provided, as well as feedback around accessibility and awareness to support ease of student access. The introduction of barrier-free access to menstrual products was supported through a one-time allocation of reserve funds for the 2022-2023 school year. This initiative will continue through the collaborative efforts of schools and community stakeholders.

Mental Health Capacity Building Wellness Coaches

The 2021-2022 school year marked the second year of a contract between the Division and AHS through the Mental Health Capacity Building (MHCB) initiative. This project is focused on universal strategies that promote positive mental health in children, youth and families through the use of wellness coaches. The MHCB grant provides funding for six wellness coaches and a program manager.

In 2021-2022, the Board of Trustees approved an additional one million dollars from Division reserve funds to support mental health. This targeted use of reserve funding was an intentional investment in response to the unique circumstances and needs of students as a result of COVID-19. These funds were used to hire an additional seven wellness coaches and an additional 4.2 FTE social workers. The social workers were integrated into school-linked teams (further information around the work of these social workers is included on page 10 of this report in the School-Linked Teams section). The additional funding allocated to wellness coaches enabled the Division to provide a wellness coach for each catchment (catchments are Kindergarten to Grade 12 school groupings that work collaboratively towards educational outcomes for students). Each wellness coach worked out of a “core” school in the catchment and from there worked with schools from across the catchment.

Through a variety of initiatives or strategies, the wellness coaches provided mental health capacity building for students, families and catchment and school staff. In total, the MHCB initiative was able to support 51,779 students, 900 families and 3,748 staff members. These capacity building supports included:

- The provision of a range of evidence-based programs for:
 - **Students:** Workshops, presentations and resources related to the following themes:

- relationships with ourselves and others; social-emotional wellness; mental health prevention; wellness capacity building.
- **Families:** Triple P Parenting Seminars; Circle of Security Parenting Sessions; Digital Literacy (through the YMCA); Kids Have Stress Too; Resilience and Regulation.
- **Staff:** Professional learning including Psychological First Aid in a Pandemic; Mental Health Literacy - Go To Educators.
- Support for the delivery of AHS' Community Helpers Program and Headstrong Summit:
 - **AHS' Community Helpers Program:** Guided by a partnership with AHS, this training program for students over the age of 12 enhances mental health supports for peers and creates awareness and prevention strategies to help reduce the stigma surrounding mental health. The Community Helpers Program had 14 schools and 413 students involved during the 2021-2022 school year.
 - **The Headstrong Summit:** In collaboration with the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the Wellness Coaches were trained to facilitate the virtual delivery of the Headstrong Summit for students. Headstrong is a youth leadership initiative aimed at increasing mental wellness and reducing stigma related to mental health. The Headstrong Summit involved 264 students in 2021-2022.
- Student programming during spring and summer breaks.

Throughout the 2021-2022 school year, wellness coaches tracked indicators of capacity building with students, school staff and families. Wellness coaches observed behavioral changes such as students using mindfulness strategies on their own, an increase in requests to work with the wellness coaches from school staff and families reported that they used social emotional learnings from parent sessions at home with their children.

Division Created Support Materials for the Physical Education and Wellness Curriculum (K-6)

The Kindergarten to Grade 6 Physical Education and Wellness curriculum includes knowledge, understanding, skills and processes that support student well-being and mental health. Curriculum Learning Supports (CLS) created resources to support teachers in implementing new curriculum and identifying learning outcomes related to mental health and wellness based on the Physical Education and Wellness Kindergarten to Grade 6 Curriculum (2022).

Student Senate Projects on Well-being and Mental Health

The Student Senate serves as a youth engagement model to promote active student participation in youth governance within education and to provide the Board of Trustees with a meaningful way to access student voice. For the 2021-2022 school year, Senators created projects around themes that youth have indicated were important to Division students: stress management, transitions after high school, mental wellness and anti-racism. Projects included the development of a panel discussion video, an online blog, resources and a website. More information can be found on the official [Student Senate website](#).

Pyramid of Intervention: Targeted Supports

Targeted supports are intended for smaller groups of students who may require additional, more intensive and timely support when their ability to function is impacted across multiple contexts. These needs are identified in collaboration between school staff, staff from Specialized Learning Supports (SLS) and families and might include additional assessment, instructional accommodations and/or adaptations, supplemented or differentiated supports and small-group instruction. Tailored to meet the needs of individual students, these supports build on existing strengths to teach strategies that address emerging mental health challenges.

This following section outlines the key initiatives that were in place for the 2021-2022 school year that promoted targeted supports for student well-being.

School-Linked Teams

SLS has nine school-linked teams; each team with a range of staff disciplines that may provide targeted supports and services related to student well-being and mental health in addition to other specialized services and supports. For the 2021-2022 school year, these positions included social workers, school family liaisons, educational behavior consultants, occupational therapists, mental health consultants and psychologists.

School-linked teams provide multidisciplinary support to schools and their communities. Examples of supports and services available included (but are not limited to) providing programming recommendations, administering specialized assessments, delivering professional learning and providing consultative services to build the capacity of classroom staff to respond to the diverse and complex needs of their students. These roles provide a wide variety of targeted supports; see page 25 of the [2021-2022 AERR](#) for a more detailed overview of these supports and services.

For the 2021-2022 school year, there were 11,569 school referrals for multi-disciplinary supports and services completed. Of these referrals, 362 were specific to requests for mental health supports or services.

As described earlier in this report, the Board of Trustees allocated one million dollars of reserve funds to support mental health in 2021-2022; part of this funding was used to hire additional social workers. The additional 4.2 FTE social workers were integrated into school-linked teams. This increased support was critical for schools as they worked hard to remain connected to students who were isolated and not participating in in-person learning due to the pandemic. The additional social workers provided supports and services to schools including COVID check-ins, direct mental health intervention, suicide risk assessments, supporting families in crisis, addressing barriers to school engagement, critical incident responses and consultation with school administration.

Mental Health Capacity Building Wellness Coaches

Although Mental Health Capacity Building Wellness Coaches were primarily focused on providing universal supports, as is described earlier in this report, approximately 20 per cent of wellness coach time was flexible for allocation toward providing targeted supports to students within schools. Wellness coaches worked individually or with small groups of students who benefited from targeted supports. This

work was often done collaboratively with the Mental Health Transition Team; examples of this collaborative work in 2021-2022 included supporting students coming and leaving between hospital schools and their community school, school based requests and the sharing of resources, student talk throughs and professional learning.

Critical Incident Support Services Team

While the Division has many proactive measures in place to support the well-being and safety of students and staff, incidents may arise within schools that require a specialized response. Critical incidents can include any event that makes staff, students and families feel unsafe, vulnerable or anxious such as tragedies in the school community, cyberbullying and other incidents that threaten the well-being of students and staff. The Division provides support to school students and staff in response to these incidents through the Critical Incident Support Services (CISS) Team. The CISS team helps guide school administrators and staff through the process of a response, including:

- Communication about the incident to staff, students and families.
- Incident debriefing and crisis support for individuals or groups impacted by the event.
- Follow-up support for a memorial at a school (if appropriate).
- Referrals for follow-up supports for staff or students as needed.

In the 2021-2022 school year, there were 29 critical incidents at 26 Division school sites that triggered a CISS team response.

Wraparound Supports

School-based wraparound supports bring a broader range of supports and services into a school community and are made available to students and families through school-linked teams and collaboration with partners. Wraparound supports involve coordinated and collaborative efforts to assist service navigation and delivery for students and their families in areas outside of educational programming, such as nutrition, mental health, mentoring or family supports. Although students and families from all schools would benefit from access to wraparound supports, there currently is not a predictable provincial funding model that allows for wraparound supports to be provided universally across all school communities.

The All in for Youth (AIFY) initiative is one example of school-based wraparound support. AIFY is a locally funded initiative and is delivered in collaboration with a group of community partners. AIFY schools and partners provide a range of innovative and flexible services to meet student and family needs, including success coaching for students, out-of-school time programming, nutrition support, Roots and Wings family support, mental health therapy and mentoring. The majority of these supports are co-located within the school community, with agency and school staff working closely together and taking a shared responsibility for the well-being and success of students. For 2021-2022, seven of the Division's most socially vulnerable schools participated in the initiative. AIFY also supports one Edmonton Catholic School.

In respect to the impact of AIFY, the [AIFY's Year 6 Evaluation Report \(2021-22\)](#) indicates that 1,435

students and their families accessed one or more targeted AIFY support in 2021-2022². Additionally, the evaluation found a range of key outcomes and impacts linked to being an AIFY school community that enhanced quality teaching and learning, supports for families and student well-being (both in and out of the school community).

School Nutrition

Historically the majority of Division schools have offered some form of school nutrition support for students. This has ranged from keeping food on hand to support a small number of students each day to a full scale school nutrition model where the majority of students eat one meal a day through the school nutrition program. In recent years the need for access to school nutrition programming has increased within the community. In recognition of this increased need, partnerships and school-driven initiatives are in place across Division schools in varying capacities.

In 2021-2022, there were six Division-coordinated school nutrition programs in place, offered through partnerships with school nutrition sector partners (both funders and service providers). Fifty-two of the Division's most socially complex schools provided nutrition support for students through at least one of these programs. Other schools provided nutrition support for students through a variety of school-initiated means and partnerships, including donations from community members, businesses or service clubs; collaboration with the Edmonton Food Bank; use of Parent Council funds; and allocations in school budgets. Schools used these funds in response to the needs of their students. Examples include the provision of breakfast, milk programs, fruit bowls, and "on hand" lunches and snacks.

Alberta Education provides a targeted allocation for school nutrition; this funding supports a morning meal for 34 Division schools. Additionally the Division sits at the Alberta table, along with a group of school nutrition stakeholders, to provide feedback and advocacy to the exploration of a federally funded school nutrition model.

Pyramid of Intervention: Specialized Supports

Specialized mental health supports sit at the top of the pyramid and are intensive and individualized supports for a small percentage of students with specific and complex needs. The work to support students at the top of the pyramid is supported by staff from SLS, Hospital School Campuses and schools who work closely with mental health partners and families.

Division staff often help make initial referrals and support families and students with access to mental health services, which may include assessments or placements in tertiary care settings. School and health professionals often work together, alongside families, on a plan that includes strategies for school success.

The Mental Health Transition Team plays a critical role in the Division's work with partners to provide specialized support for student well-being and mental health. This section highlights the work of this team in the 2021-2022 school year.

² The majority of these students and families were EPSB students and families, as seven of the eight schools participating in AIFY are Division schools.

Mental Health Transition Team (MHTT)

Students who require a complex level of mental health support may transition to and from their school and a tertiary care setting multiple times over the course of their education. These transitions can be pivotal to their long-term well-being and success in school. The MHTT is designed to support students to, through and from tertiary care/services with the overarching goal of facilitating long-term positive mental health outcomes and enhanced school engagement.

The MHTT resides under Hospital School Campuses (HSC) and is housed in tertiary care sites, which has been critical to the success of the team. Close proximity to psychiatrists, psychologists and other medical team members allows accessibility to case conferences, conversations and working in partnership alongside one another. In the 2021-2022 school year the MHTT expanded its team by seven members to ensure that team members are available to support students and their families for 12 months of the year. The MHTT links directly to schools or SLS teams and is a Division resource that is responsive and mobile.

In 2021-2022, the MHTT provided support for 226 students across Division schools. This included ongoing support for eight Division schools with Behaviour Learning Assistance programs. School staff feedback described the following key strengths and impacts of working in partnership with the team:

- A high degree of MHTT expertise and communication in supporting navigation of complex systems.
- A consistent focus on child mental health throughout the process.
- Connection to the MHTT team as a critical support for taking timely action when necessary.

“Not only have our students benefited greatly from the support of this team our teaching team has as well. It takes a team to support our students and that team needs to consist of many lenses- social work, health care team, educators, administrators, families and much more...The support of this team has been essential for us to be able to support our students through a trauma informed lens and with more knowledge about the entire child medically, emotionally, socially and academically.”

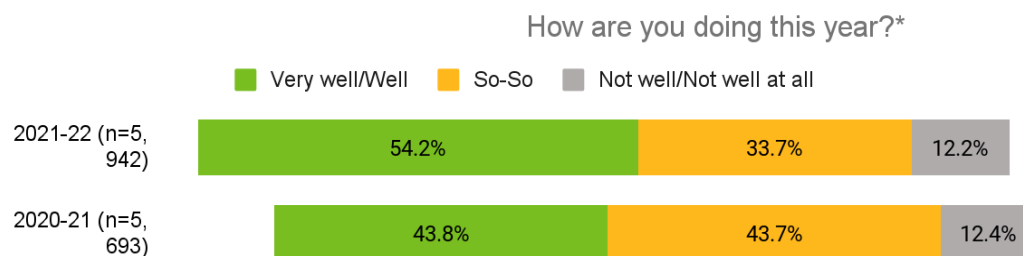
- MHTT feedback from EPSB staff member

STAFF WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Division staff prioritized providing welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments for students as the pandemic evolved in 2021-2022. Staff had to adapt to remote learning, hybrid teaching/working and new safety protocols that magnified an already challenging and complex workload, all while navigating the stress and uncertainty of the pandemic. This work was done with the support and collaboration of the various staffing groups.

The unique challenges faced by staff are reflected in 2021-2022 DFS data, where 54.2 per cent of staff respondents described themselves as “very well” or “well” during the school year (Figure 6). However, it should be noted that this result was a 10.4 per cent improvement over the previous school year, where only 43.8 per cent indicated that they were doing well or very well.

Figure 6. 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 DFS staff mental health responses

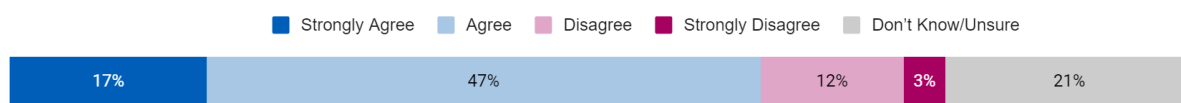


* 2020-21 DFS staff question: How are you doing during the pandemic?

When asked whether the Division provided high-quality mental health supports and services for staff, 64 per cent agreed or strongly agreed (Figure 7). There were an additional 21 per cent of staff who were unsure; this signals the opportunity to explore communication and awareness tactics.

Figure 7. 2021-2022 DFS staff mental health supports responses

Based on your experience, the Division provides high-quality mental supports and services for staff (n=5,640)



Through qualitative comments shared in the 2021-2022 DFS, staff expressed appreciation for a number of measures implemented to adapt to the pandemic, including appreciation for the COVID-19 safety measures, the opportunity to work from home for some staff, the support for virtual meeting options and online professional learning sessions and parent-teacher conferences.

The following section outlines the key initiatives that were in place for the 2021-2022 school year that supported staff well-being and mental health.

Employee Family Assistance Program

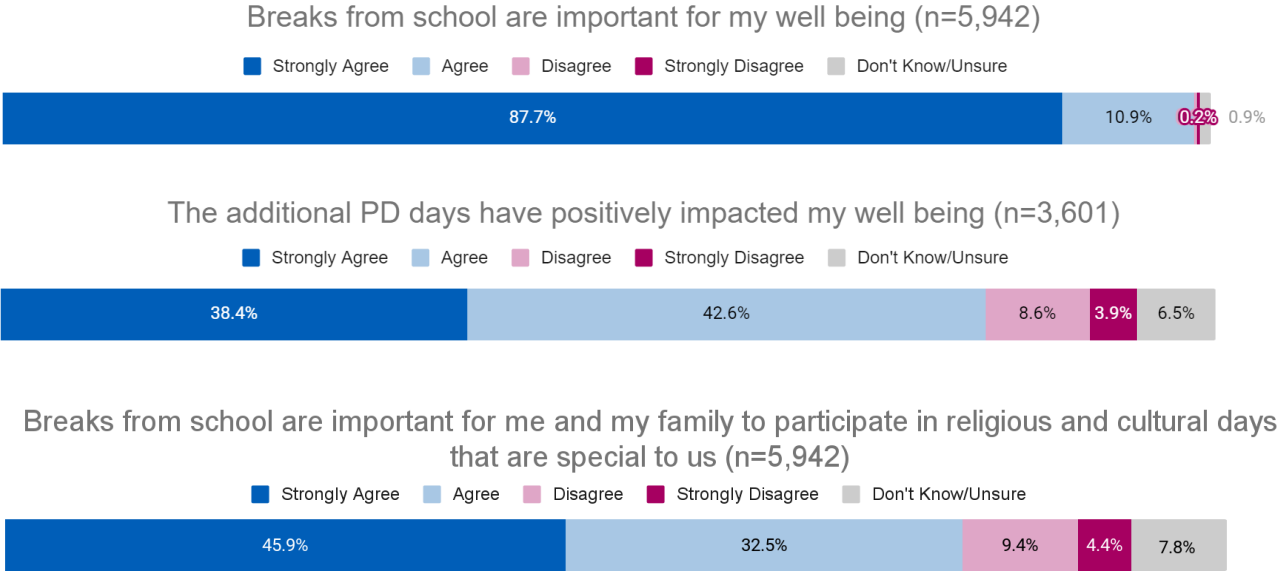
Alberta School Employee Benefits Plan (ASEBP) has a new partnership with [Inkblot](#) to provide staff with accessible support for a wide range of personal, work and mental health services. Inkblot offers targeted therapy sessions and provides wellness resources based on an individual's needs and preferences. Inkblot also offers staff a crisis support line, which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

School Calendar and Scheduling of Breaks

The Division calendar informs scheduling for teaching and learning and also addresses wellness for staff and students as it identifies breaks from school and professional learning days. The Board policy on the school year calendar is currently being reviewed by the Board of Trustees, with a focus on consideration to days of significance, as the Division acknowledges the importance of celebrating diverse days of significance to support well-being and a sense of belonging for all students, staff and families.

Questions were included in the 2021-2022 DFS to understand staff, family and student perspectives on potential changes to the school year calendar. A significant number of staff responses shared that breaks are important for staff wellness and mental health (Figure 8). Responses from staff indicated that the inclusion of additional professional learning days helped provide them with the ability to enhance their professional practice, collaborate with colleagues and access high quality professional learning opportunities. Additionally staff indicated positive support for the inclusion of days of significance for both themselves and for their peers.

Figure 8. 2021-2022 Staff DFS school calendar responses



Flexible Work Arrangements

The Division has offered the Earned Day Off (EDO) program, where feasible, as one option that provides staff a flexible work arrangement. During the 2021-2022 school year the Division engaged with staff around the concept of a work from home hybrid model as a result of emerging global human resource trends coming out of the pandemic. Staff comments via the 2021-2022 DFS expressed support for a hybrid working environment and/or work from home opportunities when feasible (e.g., teachers working from home during professional learning days) and for professional learning workshops and learning sessions to continue to be offered virtually.

BUILDING STAFF CAPACITY

The Division works collaboratively with partners to provide a range of professional learning and training that builds staff capacity in supporting student well-being and mental health across all three tiers of the Pyramid of Intervention. Training opportunities are offered through the lens of supporting student wellness and focus on a range of topics encompassing wellness promotion, addressing social and emotional needs, building resilience, supporting positive behaviour, addressing dysregulation and

complex behaviour and preventing and responding to crises.

For the 2021-2022 school year, examples of professional learning opportunities to help staff in supporting student well-being and mental health include:

- Complex Behaviour Training:
 - Module A: Universal positive behaviour supports
 - Module B: Trauma informed practises and strategies to support self regulation
 - Module C: Specialized behavior supports
- Nonviolent Crisis Intervention Training
- Mental Health Online Resources for Educators (AHS)
- Collaborative Proactive Solutions Training (Dr. Ross Greene)
- Go To Educator Mental Health Literacy Training (AHS)
- Mental Health Through a Cultural Lens
- Psychological First Aid
- Building Resilient School Communities
- R2 Resilience Expert Training

To support staff in building capacity, efficacy and leadership skills as well as awareness of skills for their own well-being and mental health, the Division provided a range of professional learning and training opportunities for staff in 2021-2022. Research indicates that staff well-being can benefit from authentic opportunities for professional learning, as increased learning can potentially lead to career progression, enhanced personal skills, increased confidence or simply to be able to experience joy of learning (Watson, et al. 2018).

For the 2021-2022 school year, examples of professional learning opportunities focused on staff well-being and mental health included:

- Nurturing Resilience: Finding the Personal Qualities and Social Supports We Need to Thrive
- Classroom Wellness, Grief and Trauma and Educator Self Care courses
- Unpacking Staff Wellness
- Leadership Development Framework
- Professional Improvement Program, Teacher Development Program and ATA Teacher Development Fund

LOOKING AHEAD

Beyond what has been highlighted in this report, during the 2021-2022 school year the Division took several steps to explore and plan for future initiatives that would enable us to be responsive to the needs of students. These include planning to support:

- The introduction of a new collaborative team approach between HSC and SLS for the fall of 2022. The new Mental Health Team creates efficiencies, connects families to community resources and supports and provides targeted and specialized tier support for students.
- The introduction of a new mental health classroom at J.A. Fife School in partnership with Child Adolescent and Family Mental Health (CASA). The CASA classroom is intended to launch in the fall of 2023 and will support students in Division II. The CASA mental health classroom will address the

need for services closer to students by bridging a child's mental health and school needs, through a coordinated approach by a mental health team and a teacher.

- The 2022-2023 opening of a Division-led mental health classroom at Aldergrove School to support students in Division II who are exhibiting mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Students and families are supported through access to a mental health team that works alongside the educational team.
- The introduction of the R2 program for the 2022-2023 school year. R2 is an expansion and deepening of the student resilience work in partnership with Dr. Ungar. R2 extends professional learning in the area of resilience and provides the opportunity to explore connections between resilience factors and the curriculum.

The Division remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting the well-being and mental health of both students and staff. This work is complex, dynamic and a shared responsibility between students, staff, families and external partners. The Division will continue to anchor its efforts in the direction set out by the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan. As we strive to be responsive to the needs of all students, there also exists the opportunity for advocacy to support the provision of adequate, predictable funding that recognizes the interplay between education and health partners in support of children and youth thriving in both life and school. Within the evolving context of pandemic recovery, the need for sustainable funding in support of well-being and mental health is more critical than ever.

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