



## Memorandum

To: Board of Trustees

From: Tracy Barill, Director of Education

Date: April 22, 2024

Subject: **Together for Mental Health Report**

Origin: Paula Sorhaitz, Superintendent of Education, Safe Schools

## Purpose

To inform the trustees of the work being done during the 2023/2024 school year that aligns with the priorities of Durham Catholic District School Board's (DCDSB) Mental Health Strategy: [Together for Mental Health: Everyone, Everyday.](#)

## Background

The three-year Mental Health Strategy and its yearly action plan reflect the Durham Catholic District School Board's commitments to Listening, Learning and Living in Faith. As well, it aligns with the board's Strategic Plan: **Inspire 2026, 2023-2026** in the areas of **Supporting Faith and Well-Being** and **Advancing Human Rights and Equity**.

Our overall goals are to create a positive school climate that supports students' feelings of belonging and safety, to build capacity in Mental Health, Equity, and Inclusive Education, Safe and Accepting Schools and Healthy Schools for all members of the DCDSB community and to ensure consistent use of evidence-informed practices, strategies and programs that are data driven.

Together for Mental Health: Everyone, Everyday, highlights four strategic priorities and the following features some of the work being done in these areas this school year:

**Priority 1:** Amplifying the promotive and protective influence of schools by creating culturally responsive, mentally healthy schools and classrooms.

- Each school has designated a Mental Health Champion educator which has supported the streamlining of communication to school staff of mental health information.

- Ministry Mandated Mental Health Modules have been introduced for grade 7 and 8 students. Educators were offered professional development to support implementation of these modules. As of February, 87% of our intermediate classes had integrated these lessons into their classes.
- Secondary Student Mental Health Leadership Summit to be held during Catholic Education/Mental Health Week to support student engagement and leadership.
- Child and Youth Counsellors are providing Tier 1 implementation support to educators in order to assist the delivery of 15 different evidence based SEL programs with the addition of culturally responsive programming.
- A sharing of excellence series: Creating a Mentally Healthy Classroom based on the Aligned and Integrated Model of school mental health, was offered to all staff.

**Priority 2:** Identifying and addressing emerging and escalating student mental health problems.

- Opportunities have been provided for educators and support staff to engage in professional development focused on noticing signs and providing support in the classroom:
  - Mental Health First Aid
  - Supporting Minds Series: Mood, Anxiety and Attention
  - Prepare, Prevent Respond Suicide Intervention/Life Promotion
- Partnering with Pinewood Centre of Lakeridge Health to develop and offer a workshop centred on Youth Engagement and Substance Use due to increasing concerns re: marijuana and vaping use.
- Introduction of DCDSB's Let's Talk Day and supporting lessons and materials to encourage help-seeking behaviours.

**Priority 3:** Mobilizing focused support for those disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and/ or those with more serious mental health and addiction concerns.

- Child and Youth Counsellors offered a lunch bunch in September to support the transition of students returning from the Virtual Secondary School
- Implementation of a new group intervention at Fr. Donald MacLellan- Dialectical Behavioural Therapy Skills in Schools: Skills Training for Emotional Problem Solving for Adolescents
- School mental health professionals have attended trainings focused on mental health and supports for students disproportionately impacted by racism and/or oppression.

**Priority 4:** Building and sustaining strong safety nets through family and system collaboration.

- Strengthening the safety net around suicide prevention and intervention through ongoing training opportunities for staff and parents, families, and caregivers
  - Suicide Prevention and Life Promotion Workshop to be offered to parents during Catholic Education and Mental Health Week.
  - Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training offered to gatekeepers.

- Prepare, Prevent Respond Suicide Intervention/Life Promotion offered to all educators.
- Sharing of information and learning opportunities with families:
  - A video series centring on various mental health topics has been shared through the DCDSB news and the DCDSB website.
  - Mental Health information shared through the DCDSB News
- Partnerships created with community agencies to support specific populations.
  - Black Mental Health Day Event engaged various community agencies (e.g. Women's Multicultural Resource Centre, Taibu, etc.)
  - Pinewoods Centre of Lakeridge Health to support PD, as well as the student summit.
  - Collaborating on various Coalitions (e.g. Talking About Mental Illness, Durham Youth Drug Awareness Committee, Youth Suicide Prevention Committee).

As this is the first year into the three-year Mental Health Strategy, DCDSB will continue to expand the focus on the above priorities. As well, the Ministry of Education has introduced [PPM 169](#) in January which outlines the requirements for school boards and school authorities, to provide culturally responsive, evidence-informed student mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention services that respect students as complex individuals and provide appropriate supports for their diverse needs. Together for Mental Health: Everyone, Everyday, aligns with the expectations set out by the Ministry, ensuring that all requirements are met.

TB/PS/pw