

Ministry of Education

Special Education Policy
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MEMORANDUM TO: Directors of Education
Secretary Treasurers of School Authorities
Director of Provincial Schools Branch

FROM: Barry Finlay
Director
Special Education Policy and Programs Branch

DATE: February 25, 2015

SUBJECT: **Mental Health and Addictions Resources for Educators**

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide an update on resources available to build educator capacity, and implement curriculum related to, mental health and addictions as part of *Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy* (Strategy).

Further Enhancements to the Curriculum to Support Healthy Development and Mental Health

A new preface has been added to the beginning of recently revised curriculum documents entitled "Supporting Students' Well-Being and Ability to Learn." This section sets the context for the educators' role in promoting and supporting healthy development for all students and includes a sub-section entitled "The Role of Mental Health." This preface is included in the recently released revised *Health and Physical Education, Grades 1 to 8 and 9 to 12, Social Studies, Grades 1 to 6, History and Geography, Grades 7 and 8; Social Sciences and Humanities, Grades 9 to 12; Canadian and World Studies, Grades 9 and 10 and French as a Second Language, Grades 1 to 8 and 9 to 12* curricula and will continue to be included in curriculum documents as they are revised and released as part of the curriculum review cycle.

English- and French-language video resources and viewer guides (resources) have also been developed for K–12 educators to show how K-12 educators are supporting student learning about mental health and well-being, using the Ontario curriculum. These resources can be used to stimulate discussion and thinking about planning instruction to support learning about mental health and addictions, as part of professional learning for educators.

The English-language video resource is approximately 35 minutes in length, and the French-language video resource is approximately 26 minutes in length (total time). Each video resource has been segmented into short, 3-9 minute clips. This segmented structure will allow educators to view some or all of the resources, and target their learning to meet local needs and learning goals. Each of the English- and French-language video resources are closed captioned and have transcripts available.

Viewer guides have been developed for educators to accompany their viewing of the video segments and provoke thought by posing questions to consider before, during and after viewing. These guides also provide a short overview of each segment to allow educators to grasp the essence of each clip at a glance. Segment-specific viewer guides have also been developed for professional learning facilitators, identifying key concepts included in each segment, and a time-coded structure to support quick access to specific clips for professional learning activities.

While the primary target audience for the resources is classroom educators, it is important for school board and school leaders to be aware of the resources in order to incorporate them into board professional learning activities. The resources are available on the mental health domains of [EduGains](#) and [EduSource](#), along with links to the below resources.

School Mental Health ASSIST

[School Mental Health ASSIST](#) is a provincial implementation support team that is designed to help all district school boards and school authorities to enhance system and school capacity to promote student mental health universally, and to support students with social-emotional and addictions needs. From 2011-2014, School Mental Health ASSIST has focused on providing resources and coaching support related to:

1. Building organizational conditions, such as infrastructure, protocols and role clarity for effective school mental health;
2. Enhancing staff capacity to support student mental health; and
3. Selecting and implementing evidence-based mental health promotion and prevention strategies and approaches.

By maintaining this scope, and attending to principles of implementation science, significant foundational work has been accomplished in school boards across the province. For example, all boards now have a Mental Health Leadership Team and a three-year Mental Health Strategy (and one-year Action Plan) to guide their ongoing work, and most now have a clearly articulated youth suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention protocol in place to support their most vulnerable students (for a related resource, please see [Youth Suicide Prevention at School: A Resource for School Mental Health Leadership Teams](#)). The community of practice built to support Mental Health Leaders and Superintendents with responsibility for mental health has allowed for sharing of best practices and ongoing professional learning related to **system leadership** in school mental health (for a related resource, please see [Building District Conditions for Effective School Mental Health webinar](#)). Resources have been co-created with provincial stakeholders to support professional learning related to **school leadership** in school mental health (for a related resource, please see [Leading Mentally Healthy Schools: A Resource for School Administrators](#) and the related presentations from the [Summer Institute on Leading Mentally Healthy Schools](#) co-hosted with the three Ontario principal associations).

The 2014-2017 Strategy for School Mental Health ASSIST deepens work in these areas, with emphasis on practical resources and supports at the school level. For example, over the next three years, this team will:

- Continue to co-create facilitated professional learning materials to enhance mental health literacy for school leaders and classroom staff
- Offer professional learning at an expertise level for school mental health professionals who serve our most vulnerable students

- Release a suite of decision support tools to help schools and boards to navigate challenging areas like selecting appropriate and safe mental health awareness activities for students and identifying core elements of evidence-based mental health promotion programming
- Conduct a series of innovation pilots related to embedded and sustainable mental health promotion and prevention programming at school, including a focus on substance misuse prevention
- Provide leadership related to mental health concerns within specific populations (e.g., LGBTQ mental health, indigenous mental health, early years mental health)
- Support boards in their collaborative work with community partners as part of ***Moving on Mental Health***, the wider system transformation in the child and youth mental health system of care
- Continue to offer implementation coaching to each district school board through the Mental Health Leader and Superintendent with responsibility for mental health

If you have questions or suggestions about the activities of this team, please feel free to contact Dr. Kathy Short, Director, School Mental Health ASSIST at kshort@hwdsb.on.ca.

Supporting Minds: An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Student’s Mental Health and Well-being

The Ministry of Education developed a K-12 educator resource guide on mental health and addictions entitled [*Supporting Minds: An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Mental Health and Well-Being*](#), with the draft being released for consultation on the Ministry website in late August 2013. The Ministry is currently accepting feedback on this draft document.

Supporting Minds was developed to promote healthy development and provide educators with information on early signs of mental health and addictions issues, along with strategies that can be used in the classroom to support students. The guide has been created with the assistance and input of the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) and Children and Youth Services (MCYS) and has been reviewed by leading experts in the field of child and youth mental health and addictions.

Mental Health Leaders

Mental Health Leaders were phased in over the first three years of the Strategy (2011-12 to 2013-14). Following the successful roll out of these critical positions, funding for Mental Health Leaders has been included in the Grant for Special Needs (GSN), beginning in 2014-15.

Mental Health Leaders are senior clinicians who are working closely with School Mental Health ASSIST to provide leadership support in their school board to develop and implement a coordinated, comprehensive board-level student mental health and addictions strategy. Mental Health Leaders are also collaborating with key school boards and community stakeholders to promote a proactive, integrated system of care, with clear pathways to service for students in need.

Thank you for your on-going commitment to helping all Ontario students reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Finlay', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Barry Finlay
Director
Special Education Policy and Programs Branch

c. Mental Health Leaders
Superintendents with responsibility for mental health