

**Ministry of Education**

Special Education Policy  
and Programs Branch  
18<sup>th</sup> floor  
900 Bay Street  
Toronto ON M7A 1L2

**Ministère de l'Éducation**

Direction des politiques et des  
programmes de l'éducation  
de l'enfance en difficulté  
18<sup>e</sup> étage, 900, rue Bay  
Toronto ON M7A 1L2



**MEMORANDUM TO:** Directors of Education

**FROM:** Barry Finlay  
Director  
Special Education Policy and Programs Branch

**DATE:** November 7, 2011

**SUBJECT:** **Mental Health and Addictions Supports for District School Boards**

---

This memorandum will provide details related to initiatives to support students and District School Boards (DSBs) that will be phased in over the next three years as part of Ontario's plan to improve services and supports for children and youth with mental health and addictions needs. These initiatives are in support of the recently released *Open Minds, Healthy Minds - Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy*.

All DSBs face challenges in addressing student mental health needs as it has been found that up to 20 per cent or more of children and youth experience mental health problems at any given time. Educators have indicated the need for additional strategies and supports focused on addressing the mental health and addiction needs of students in order to maximize student achievement and well-being. School boards have been responding locally to the needs of these students with support from community-based services and/or others (e.g., family physicians), and through access to professional learning and resources.

To build on the effective work being done by school boards to support students with mental health and addiction needs, the Ministries of Education (EDU), Children and Youth Services (MCYS), Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) and Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) are working collaboratively to:

- Implement mental health literacy and cross-sectoral training on early identification and intervention for educators;
- Hire new workers through schools and community-based agencies to enable early identification and referral for treatment; and
- Enhance mental health resources in schools.

A provincial focus on supporting children and youth will help us identify problems and intervene early and appropriately.

Beginning in the 2011-12 school year, all DSBs in Ontario will benefit from the following education-focused provincial initiatives such as a mental health and addictions resource guide, professional learning opportunities for educators, and the support of new mental health workers and nurses with mental health and addictions expertise. The supports and services through this strategy will start in the fall of 2011 and be phased in over three years.

- **Resource Guide**

In 2011-12, a draft K-12 Resource Guide and website will be developed to provide educators with information on promotion of healthy development, the early signs of mental health and addiction issues, and strategies that can be used in the classroom to support students.

- **Professional Learning Opportunities**

Resources to support professional learning opportunities focused on capacity building in mental health and addictions will be made available to DSBs to build on the effective work currently being done to support students with mental health and addiction issues. All 72 DSBs will be provided funding for release time of educators to support capacity building in 2011-12 related to the impact of mental health and addiction issues on student success and well-being, and effective strategies to support student learning. Each DSB will receive a contract for \$20,000 to support professional learning opportunities.

- **Provincial Webinar Session**

This fall, representatives from all DSBs will be invited to attend a provincial mental health awareness and capacity building webinar session. Further details about this session will be provided shortly.

- **Mental Health Workers (MCYS)**

Funded by MCYS, selected community-based agencies have been allocated resources to hire new mental health workers to support students to remain in and enhance achievement in school. These new workers will provide direct services to students, which may include counselling, therapy, brief and crisis intervention, group therapy and support for key transitions (e.g., from elementary to secondary school settings, transition back to school). The alignment of workers with school boards will be arranged at the local community level to respond to local and changing needs. Agencies who are hiring these workers will be consulting with all DSBs to discuss the new resources available.

- **Mental Health and Addictions Nurses (MOHLTC)**

Funded by MOHLTC, through the new Mental Health and Addictions Nurses in District School Boards Program, 144 Registered Nurses and/or Registered Practical Nurses with mental health and addictions expertise will be hired. The nurses will assist school boards in recognizing and responding to student mental health and addictions issues and will work with boards to help develop strategies to address student mental health and addictions needs in their region.

The program will include Nurse Leaders who will provide a supervisory role to the nurses, provide health related advice, support the development of board strategies and participate in systems planning and sector collaboration. Nurse Leaders will provide oversight for consistency in program delivery and communications involving the new Mental Health and Addictions Nurses within the DSBs.

- **Mental Health Leaders**

In the first year, fifteen (15) DSBs will be funded to hire Mental Health Leaders. These 15 diverse DSBs (including three French DSBs) reflect a range in student population and demographic factors as well as community capacity to address mental health needs, the availability of mental health resources and supports and relative size and geography.

These Mental Health Leaders will work with School Mental Health ASSIST (below) to provide leadership support in their board to develop a board level comprehensive strategy focused on effective school based delivery of mental health supports for students. The Leaders will use clinical expertise and collaborate with community and other partners to support evidence informed practice and system navigation for mental health and addictions services and supports in schools. Throughout the year, it is expected that Leaders will participate in regional and provincial discussions to inform future directions, (see Appendix A for list of 15 DSBs with Mental Health Leaders).

- **School Mental Health ASSIST**

The School Mental Health ASSIST team, under the leadership of Dr. Kathy Short, is being funded to help DSBs to build system and school capacity to support students with mental health and addictions needs. For all DSBs, the ASSIST team will support educator professional learning opportunities and board capacity building with online and paper resources focused on addressing mental health and addictions needs. Within this team, a francophone will work with the French-Language school boards.

ASSIST will support the 15 Mental Health Leaders to develop their comprehensive mental health strategies. ASSIST will provide resources that support system change and capacity building for addressing mental health and addictions in boards and schools, and participate in ministry level meetings to inform planning for years two (2) and three (3).

- ***Working Together for Kids' Mental Health (Working Together)***

The purpose of *Working Together* is to enhance outcomes for children and youth with mental health needs. This is through helping professionals in schools, the health sector and child and youth mental health agencies to identify and support these children and youth earlier, and direct them to appropriate services. The existing four (4) communities participating in *Working Together* will be expanded during the 2011-12 school year. MCYS, working with EDU and MOHLTC, will advise DSBs which communities have been selected. DSBs involved in *Working Together* communities will be funded for release time for educators to attend *Working Together* planning and training sessions.

As part of the first three-year focus on children and youth, all boards will be involved in supporting educators to effectively play a role in supporting shared goals for enhanced access to service, early identification and support, and help for vulnerable children and youth.

Over the next few years, through these initiatives, we will be working together to further support students with mental health and addictions needs and promote positive mental health. By working collaboratively across sectors, we can provide children, youth and families with fast access to high quality services, and identify and intervene in child and youth mental health issues early.

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 small dot at the end.

Barry Finlay  
Director  
Special Education Policy and Programs Branch

**APPENDIX A**  
**15 District School Boards Funded for Mental Health Leaders in 2011-12**

CSD des écoles catholiques du Sud-Ouest

CSD du Nord-Est de l'Ontario

CSD catholiques Centre-Sud

Toronto Catholic District School Board

Peel District School Board

Simcoe Muskoka Catholic School Board

Trillium-Lakelands District School Board

Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board

District School Board Niagara

Keewatin Patricia District School Board

Kenora Catholic District School Board

Algoma District School Board

Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board

Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board

Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board