



Advisory

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) is an advisory and consultative organization composed of the CEOs of each of the 72 District School Boards in Ontario; Public, Catholic and French Language.

School-Based Mental Health and Well-Being

What is important to understand about school-based mental health and well-being?

Educators and school districts support the mental health and well-being of children and youth. During the past decade, issues related to school-based mental health and well-being have received significant attention provincially, nationally, and internationally. In 2006, the Canadian Senate Committee released the report, *Out of the Shadows at Last*. This report made specific recommendations about the need to develop school-based mental health programs and services. In 2009 the report, *Taking mental health to school: A policy-oriented paper on school-based mental health for Ontario* was released. The following excerpt from that paper describes today's realities.

"Epidemiological studies indicate that up to one in five children and youth suffer from a diagnosable mental disorder including substance abuse. Many more students experience mental health difficulties that cause significant problems. These disorders and difficulties impose considerable barriers to the normal academic, emotional and social-developmental tasks of childhood and adolescence....

Mental health and substance abuse issues are recognized as critical for school systems. ...A paramount concern is the recognition that mental health disorders and difficulties are closely associated with declining academic performance."

Santor, D., Short, K., & Ferguson, B. *Taking mental health to school*. p. 5

Responsibility for child and youth mental health and well-being crosses many sectors. While education does not assume primary responsibility for developing and delivering mental health services for children and youth, school system leaders have an important role to play in ensuring that school personnel have appropriate knowledge, skill, and training to support the larger system of care in the community and the province.

Children and youth experiencing mental health issues are much more likely to encounter difficulties both educationally and socially. Schools and boards are in a position to outline program options and available resources to parents. Working together, parents and educators can help to address the educational impact of student mental health concerns.



Links to Additional Information

Taking mental health to school: A policy-oriented paper on school-based mental health for Ontario. 2009

http://onthepoint.smartsimple.biz/files/237865/193069/policy_sbmh.pdf

Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy. 2011

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/publications/ministry_reports/mental_health2011/mentalhealth_rep2011.pdf

Mental Health Commission of Canada

<http://www.mentalhealthcommission.ca/english/pages/default.aspx>

Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health

<http://www.excellenceforchildandyouth.ca>

Children's Mental Health Ontario

<http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca>

eMentalHealth.ca

<http://www.ementalhealth.ca>

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

<http://www.camh.net>



What does the Ministry of Education stipulate about school-based mental health and well-being?

The Ontario government recognizes the importance of school-based mental health and well-being in the work of many ministries. In June 2011 the Ontario government released *Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy*. The report identifies the roles and responsibilities of several ministries including Health and Long Term Care, Children and Youth Services, and Education. The document describes the government's commitment to providing a comprehensive mental health and addictions strategy beginning with children and youth.

Starting with children and youth places the focus where it needs to be. For 70 per cent of adults living with mental health problems, their symptoms developed during childhood or adolescence. But most do not receive the treatment they need early enough. Families often struggle to navigate services and get the right support for their children and youth.

Open Minds, Healthy Minds describes the benefits of school-based programs and services and how the government will support building school-based capacity.

For children and youth, the first signs that they are struggling with mental health issues may be at school—in the form of changes in behaviour, an inability to focus, or a drop in their marks. To help schools and teachers see those first signs and act, the following strategies are being undertaken:

- implementing mental health literacy and cross-sectoral training on early identification and intervention for educators;
- implementing programs through schools and community-based agencies to enable early identification and referral for treatment; and
- enhancing mental health resources in schools.

How do school district leaders create the conditions to support effective school-based mental health initiatives?

District leaders across the province have been working collaboratively with community agencies, parents, youth, and provincial organizations to develop and/or implement programs and services to address the mental health and well-being of children and youth. The following key principles have been identified to support the delivery of effective, evidence-based programs and services.

Systems of Care

Effective programs and services to address school-based mental health and well-being are provided on a continuum that recognizes that all students require varying degrees of support at different times and in different ways throughout their school career. Recognizing that the school system is part of a larger community system of care, district leaders work collaboratively with parents, community service providers, and coterminous boards to develop a comprehensive local approach to the provision of programs and services.

Organizational Development

Senior leaders create the conditions necessary for effective delivery of school mental health and well-being programs and services. These conditions include: facilitating the development of a board mental health strategy that is based on local data about

resources and needs; ensuring that there is a board team in place to coordinate and implement the strategy; supporting the development of processes for selecting relevant capacity-building and promotion/prevention programming; and supporting students along the pathway to care. District leaders also have a responsibility for contextualizing multiple child and youth mental health ministerial mandates and other initiatives within the educational context.

Alignment

School-based mental health and well-being programs are aligned with system initiatives. Ideally, these efforts are embedded within board and school plans, and demonstrate integration with other priority areas. There is natural alignment with many existing Ministry initiatives, such as: Student Support Leadership Initiative, Student Success Initiative, Special Education, Safe and Caring Schools, and Parent Engagement. Ensuring alignment requires ongoing dialogue and collaboration with system staff, school mental health professionals, and community agency colleagues.

Effective Communication

Effective communication with system and community stakeholders is crucial. Communication with community agency partners is an integral component of an effective school-based mental health program. Intra- and inter-organizational communication protocols must be established at every level.

Capacity-Building

Ongoing, collaborative capacity-building activities are available for staff at the system and school levels. Boards have a key leadership role in creating the environment and providing the resources for that learning. Capacity-building themes include: understanding roles and responsibilities, reducing stigma, promoting mental health and well-being, recognizing signs and symptoms of mental health problems, supporting tiered intervention, talking with students and families about mental health, and helping students along the pathway to care. Ontario government ministries including School Mental Health ASSIST, community agencies, and other provincial, national, and international organizations can provide advice and resources to assist with capacity-building efforts.

Collaboration

Effective collaboration at the school, district, and community level is critical to delivering school-based mental health programs and services. Some essential elements of collaboration include: defining roles and responsibilities; developing and nurturing relationships; fostering understanding of each other's priorities, language, and services; and co-creating processes and protocols to strengthen pathways to care.

What are the effective practices in building and co-ordinating a school-based mental health and well-being strategy?

School-based mental health and well-being programs and services need to be seen as an integral part of staff and student learning. The following are some key elements of effective programs and services.

1. The district develops a mental health and well-being strategy that is based upon a tiered continuum of support and identifies key internal and external resources and partners.
2. A tiered approach to providing evidence-based programming across the continuum is developed, implemented, and monitored regularly.

Coalition for Children and Youth Mental Health. OPSBA http://www.opsba.org/index.php?q=advocacy_and_action/coalition_for_children_youth_mental_health

School-Based Mental Health and Substance Abuse Consortium <https://kec.mentalhealthcommission.ca/partners/sbmhsa>

“Introducing the National School-Based Mental Health and Substance Abuse Consortium: Building Awareness, Mobilizing the Field” in CODE Chronicles. Issue No. 7. June 2010

http://www.ontariodirectors.ca/pages/CODE_Chronicles/june2010.html

“When Something’s Wrong: Strategies for Teachers”, Healthy Minds Canada www.cprf.ca/education/youthproject.html

“ABC’s of Mental Health – a Teacher’s Resource”, Hincks Dellcrest Centre www.hincksdellcrest.org/Home/Resources-And-Publications/The-ABC-s-of-Mental-Health.aspx

Ministry of Education Commitment to Student Mental Health

Through *Open Minds, Healthy Minds*, the Ontario government has made several key commitments, across ministries, which will begin in 2011–2012. For its part, the Ministry of Education will fund new Mental Health Leaders – senior clinicians who will develop, coordinate, and implement board mental health strategies,

beginning in 15 selected school boards. Working alongside the Mental Health Leaders is a provincial implementation support team, School Mental Health ASSIST, that will help boards to (1) create conditions to support effective school mental health and well-being initiatives, (2) support capacity-building for system leaders and school staff, and (3) provide direct support to facilitate the selection and delivery of evidence-based mental health promotion and prevention programming in boards.

School Mental Health ASSIST will help to create and share mental health awareness resources with all 72 school boards, but will have a particular emphasis on developing strategies to support the first 15 focus boards. It is anticipated that by the end of three years, all boards will participate in this more intensive level of support. In addition to these efforts, the Ministry of Education will make changes to the Ontario curriculum, to include more complete coverage of student social/emotional learning, and will work collaboratively with other ministries to ensure an integrated roll-out of initiatives.

For information about ASSIST:
http://www.kidsmentalhealth.ca/documents/Res_TAI_MH_Literacy_Overview_Advisory_Council.pdf

3. Multi-disciplinary teams are in place at the system and school levels to identify program and service needs and resources.
4. Programs and services are regularly reviewed and modified in light of new evidence.
5. Parent engagement strategies include resources related to the mental health and well-being continuum.
6. Trustees and the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) receive regular program briefings from staff. These briefings highlight effective, evidence-based practices at the school and system levels.
7. An integrated, community-based leadership structure is in place to address issues related to alignment, roles and responsibilities, decision-making, system/school practices, protocols and procedures, and potential collaborative community/school supports.
8. Regional and provincial collaboration is encouraged and supported.
9. Coterminous boards work collaboratively with each other and community agencies to develop a coherent system of care.
10. A feedback and evaluation process is in place whereby service delivery is monitored on a continual basis. Feedback is sought from staff, clients, and other organizational and community stakeholder groups. Evaluation data is used to monitor progress, determine strategic directions, and support next steps.

If as a supervisory officer, I have concerns and need assistance, what should I do?

Supervisory officers have several sources of expertise to assist in the delivery of effective, evidence-based school mental health and well-being programs and services.

At the System Level:

- Colleagues on the system leadership team
- System multi-disciplinary team members
- Community agency officials and service providers
- Colleagues in coterminous boards

At the Provincial Level:

- Ministry of Education Regional Office contacts
- Special Education Policy and Programs Branch, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and Ministry of Health and Long Term Care staff
- Ontario School Mental Health ASSIST
- Regional Special Education and Curriculum Council colleagues
- Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health

At the National Level:

- School-Based Mental Health and Substance Abuse Consortium
<https://kec.mentalhealthcommission.ca/partners/sbmhsa>
- Mental Health Commission of Canada