



Beyond the Binder

Towards More Systemic and Sustainable Approaches
to Mental Health and Wellbeing in K-12 Education

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Grounded in discussions that took place at two National Roundtable events, this paper outlines why and how K-12 system leaders and their partners must move beyond one-off interventions, programs, and professional development towards an approach where mental health and wellbeing is integrated in the core mandate of public education.

In Canada, K-12 education systems have a key role in developing strategies to support the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff. While stand alone programs have provided useful content for educators in addressing mental health and wellbeing, it is increasingly recognized that more systemic and sustainable solutions are required to address these issues over the long-term.

Many jurisdictions have made great strides in taking a more systemic approach, by attending to enablers such as:

- ✓ **Commitment and culture**
Sustained focus on mental health and wellbeing in the face of competing priorities, political change and policy shifts
- ✓ **Shared leadership**
Mobilizing engagement and support from key leaders and working towards shared responsibility and distributed leadership
- ✓ **Indigenous engagement**
Respectful, thoughtful engagement of Indigenous voices and ways of knowing
- ✓ **Student and family engagement**
Connection between school and home life, and meaningful engagement of student and parent voice
- ✓ **System Coordination and Coherence**
Role clarity among partners, clear jurisdictional boundaries, and thoughtful coordination under conditions of limited resources
- ✓ **Funding**
Dedicated funding for upstream mental health and wellbeing programming, training, and ongoing implementation support
- ✓ **Measuring impact**
Organized systems for measurement and evaluation, with strong use of data and evidence to drive decision-making

Beyond the Binder

Executive Summary

Based on a review of evidence, and emerging practices in Canada and internationally, the paper also presents seven Recommended Actions and Next Steps:

- 1 Take time to build the ramp**
We need to approach the work with hope that we can achieve systems change, and empathy for where each school, district, and system is at on their journey.
- 2 Develop provincial/territorial leadership structures**
Provinces and territories need to invest in implementation support and take consistent leadership on this issue.
- 3 Develop and/or leverage cross-sectoral policy frameworks**
Developing new or leveraging existing cross-sectoral leadership and policy frameworks can help to establish role clarity and coherence across the system.
- 4 Build a culture of wellbeing in schools and systems**
Wellbeing should be reflected as a priority in our policies, structures, resource flows, and school cultures.
- 5 Embed wellbeing competencies into K-12 curricula**
Wellbeing competencies are teachable and should be embedded as cross-cutting learning objectives in core K-12 curricula.
- 6 Include a meaningful staff wellbeing component**
The wellbeing of teachers, staff and leaders needs to be addressed as part of a whole-school, whole-system approach.
- 7 Establish a pan-Canadian network focusing on mental health and wellbeing in K-12 education**
Building stronger pan-Canadian networks can support the exchange of learnings and best practices across jurisdictions.

Context

Introduction

In August 2018 and May 2019, the McConnell Foundation hosted two meetings with a diverse group of school mental health and wellbeing experts, system leaders, implementation scientists and policy makers from across Canada (see Appendix A for a full list of participants). The meetings were co-hosted by School Mental Health Ontario and the University of New Brunswick's Health and Education Research Group, respectively, and were designed to be a space for a national conversation on upstream, systemic, and comprehensive approaches to integrating mental health and wellbeing into K-12 education. The August 2018 session concluded with a commitment to share the key ideas behind a system-wide approach to mental health and wellbeing in K-12 education in a discussion paper that could inspire the development of a more cohesive and consistent approach to school mental health and wellbeing in Canada, further informing the work of different jurisdictions across the country.

Drawing from leading practices across Canada and broader research in the field, this paper aims to:

- Communicate the rationale for integrating evidence-based approaches to mental health and wellbeing as a core component of 21st-century education in Canada
- Elaborate on why we need to go 'beyond the binder' and towards system-wide, sustainable approaches to promoting mental health and wellbeing in K-12 education
- Identify common challenges and enablers in leading systemic and sustainable approaches
- Provide broad directions to inspire further conversations with a wider range of education stakeholders, in relation to systemic and sustainable approaches to mental health and wellbeing in K-12 education systems.

This paper is proudly endorsed by:



Two Stories: Student and Administrator Perspectives

Though wellbeing is increasingly being recognized as an important goal in K-12 education, we struggle to find sustainable and equitable solutions. Decades of research and wisdom accumulated over millennia have made the case for a more holistic approach to education. Now, more than ever, is the time to integrate wellbeing as a core component of a 21st-century education that enables all students and staff to flourish. Through this discussion paper, we aim to inspire conversations at the federal, provincial/territorial, and regional levels that shift thinking and investments away from short-lived one-off initiatives, and towards system-wide approaches to mental health and wellbeing that is embedded in everyday school life.

Different people in a school community experience the impacts of wellbeing approaches in different ways. The following case studies illustrate two of these experiences:

From the Student Perspective

Naya loves school. She wakes up excited about what she'll learn today, and what new experiences she'll get to share with her friends and teachers.



When Naya arrives at school, her teacher and the principal greet her by her name. They even know her favourite colour (purple), AND her favourite activity (judo). When she's struggling, she feels comfortable reaching out for help from adults at the school. At her school, she learns and practises important social and emotional skills like empathy and self-regulation. These skills help her to calm herself down when she gets worked up, work through disagreements with friends and find ways to support her classmates when they're not feeling good. Naya's school helps her and her classmates to feel like they belong, and that they all have the opportunity to make a difference. Naya can't wait to see what's next.

How can we help give more Canadian children a positive school experience like Naya's?

From the Administrator Perspective



Julie is an assistant superintendent in a mid-size school district. The district is struggling to meet the needs of students who report feelings of anxiety and distress. At an education conference, Julie hears about a mental health and wellbeing program that might solve her problem. She is able to free up the budget for the initial three-day training, but has no funds for ongoing support.

Feedback from the training was mixed. Some teachers loved the opportunity to build their skillsets, others resented having to fit another overly prescriptive activity into their already packed schedules. Though the program seemed to have positive impacts on students, it's becoming difficult to sustain into the next school year. Two champion teachers are leaving to teach at another district, and budget cuts are forcing senior management to make tough decisions about additional programming. The initial momentum for the program seems to be working against the tide of priorities in the broader system.

What can Julie do to have a longer-term impact on student mental health and wellbeing in her district?

Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing in K-12 Education

The Role Of Schools

Over the past few decades, rapid changes to our social, digital and natural environments have challenged our education systems to keep up. The experiences and skills students need to succeed in the 21st century are largely different than in previous generations, a fact that is being recognized increasingly in global education spheres. Frameworks such as the OECD's Learning Compass¹ acknowledge that 21st-century education systems have an explicit role to play in fostering a culture of wellbeing and developing students' and staff's capacity to flourish. Mental health and wellbeing, therefore, is not simply another priority to be tacked on to the existing system, but a core component of a re-imagined education system.

K-12 education systems across Canada are increasingly recognizing their key role in developing strategies to support the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff. Schools are optimal settings for:²

- Encouraging hope, purpose, and belonging
- Enhancing social-emotional skills and self-care strategies, and supporting healthy behaviours
- Building mental health literacy and reducing stigma
- Supporting youth voice and leadership
- Partnering with parents/caregivers to enhance wellbeing
- Identifying mental health problems early, and connecting to more intensive services when needed

Investment in high-quality approaches to promoting mental health and wellbeing in K-12 education has far-reaching benefits (see figure 1).

Multi-Level Benefits



Broader Societal Benefits

- Reduced healthcare costs
- Increased educational attainment
- Increased employment



Benefits to K-12 Educational System

- Reduced staff turnover, leave for illness
- Reduced premiums, costs of insurance and benefits programs
- Increased graduation rates



Benefits to Educators

- Greater teacher engagement, performance
- Increased social and emotional competence
- Improved relationship with students
- Reduced impact and feelings of stress



Benefits to Students

- Increased social and emotional competence
- Reduced incidence of violence, bullying, conduct problems
- Reduced incidence of anxiety, depression, suicide
- Improved achievement in academics (on average 11% increase)

Figure 1 – multi-level benefits of effective mental health promotion in K-12 (full research references in appendix B).

¹ OECD (2018). Skills for 2030. Retrieved from: https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/skills/in_brief_Skills.pdf

² Adapted from School Mental Health Ontario (2018). The Promise of School Mental Health: Strong Returns on Upstream Investment. Retrieved from <https://smh-assist.ca/wp-content/uploads/SMHA-ROI.pdf>

Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing in K-12 Education

Beyond the Binder

As educators and leaders came to recognize the importance and value of attending to mental health and wellbeing, many simultaneously found themselves at a loss for the expertise and capacity to be able to address these issues. Programs, which are typically developed outside the school setting and then marketed to schools, filled this void by providing instructional content on how to teach social and emotional skills, introduce wellbeing initiatives or activities in the school or address student mental health and wellbeing needs. When such programs are proven to be effective and well implemented, they can lead to promising improvements in the wellbeing of students and staff. However, there can be significant challenges to program dissemination, including:³



High cost of training and implementation



Replication of impact in real-world settings



Adapting to diverse cultural contexts



Sustaining impact on students over time

Most of all, programs implemented at a small scale and in isolation from the broader school context do not provide a comprehensive solution for the problems that educators are trying to solve.

After decades of advocacy for evidence-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs in K-12, evidence from the U.S. shows limited take-up—under 8% of all the things we call SEL in schools are indeed evidence-based, and among those, only half are implemented with reasonable fidelity to their original model.⁴ Similar research has been conducted in Canada, showing even lower saturation of evidence-based approaches.⁵ Typically, these efforts have also been limited to the classroom level, which, without broader district support, can show lackluster effects.⁶

It has become increasingly clear that to have sustained impact, we need to move ‘beyond the binder’—from an approach that is overly reliant on program dissemination to one in which significant investments are made in system change for mental health and wellbeing in K-12.⁷

³ Embry, DD; Biglan, A (2008). Evidence-based Kernels: Fundamental Units of Behavioural Change. *Clin Child Fam Psychol Rev* 11:75–113.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, Prevalence and Implementation Fidelity of Research-Based Prevention Programs in Public Schools: Final Report, Washington, D.C., 2011.

⁵ Leblanc, JC., Parkington, K., Varatharasan, N., Donato, A., Bilsbury, T. (2013). *Socio-emotional Learning Programs for Schools*. CPSC Atlantic: SEL Toolkit. V1.1.

⁶ Social and Character Development Research Consortium. (2010). *Efficacy of schoolwide programs to promote social and character development and reduce problem behavior in elementary school children*. Washington DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute for Education Sciences. Retrieved from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncer/pubs/20112001/pdf/20112001.pdf>

⁷ Storey, K.E. (2019). *Beyond the Binder – Why Manualized Programs and Quick Fixes Don’t Work*. 2019 Provincial Wellness Conference, Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada. May 2, 2019

Shifting our Lens

As a sector, the focus of our collective work and inquiry needs to shift from ‘how can we get evidence-based programs into more schools?’ to:

“how can we support K-12 education systems to evolve so that they can effectively integrate mental health and wellbeing as a core priority?”

The latter is a truly complex endeavor, both in scope and scale. There are 13 public education systems in Canada, in addition to private schools and federally-funded First Nations schools. Each has a unique curriculum and policies, as well as its own cultural, demographic, and geographic context. Canada spends over \$40B annually on primary and secondary education, employing over 300,000 educators and reaching over 5 million students.⁸ A broad shift towards a more holistic, future-oriented model of education that values mental health and wellbeing requires a strong collective effort from government, community and education partners. Meeting these challenges requires us to draw on the best evidence on which practices teachers are able to implement in the classroom as well as how to establish the conditions within the system for this work to flourish. Implementation science shows that for this to happen, we need evidence-based innovations, strategies to implement them (e.g. coaching, continuous improvement and risk mitigation), and a favourable organizational climate to support their growth and sustainability (see Figure 2).

But what does this look like in practice, and what are the barriers we face to making this a reality? The following section identifies common issues, along with strategies to overcome them.

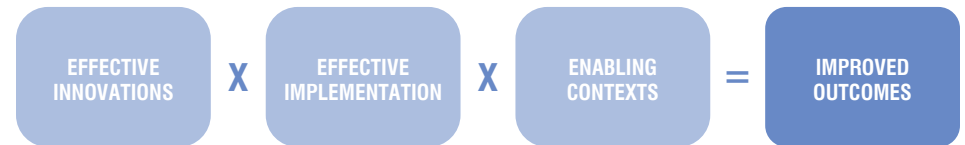


Figure 2 – Components of successful mental health and wellbeing strategies⁹

⁸ CMEC. Education in Canada: An Overview. Retrieved from: <https://www.cmec.ca/299/Education-in-Canada-An-Overview/index.html>

⁹ Adapted from NIRN website @ <http://implementation.fpg.unc.edu/>

Key Enablers in Leading Systemic and Sustainable Approaches

While schools and districts are already making great strides in taking a more systemic and sustainable approach to mental health and wellbeing, there are common issues that arise that can restrict progress if not addressed thoughtfully. Participants in the two national conversations hosted by the McConnell Foundation identified a number of these recurring issues, and, building on lessons from their own jurisdictions, discussed effective and proactive ways to overcome them. While not intended to be a comprehensive account, the section below describes these key and common issues identified by the group, and highlights ways we can move past barriers to achieve better outcomes.

Commitment & Culture

Faced with financial and political pressures, education systems often have difficult decisions to make in establishing priorities. Despite the strong evidence of impact, sustained commitment to investing in both upstream, positive mental health efforts while attending to ongoing student mental health needs and can be challenging to maintain in the face of competing priorities.

Even when new structures are put in place (e.g. redesigned curriculum), old practices often persist. Making change in education requires a long-term vision that recognizes and acts on the complexity of shifting the culture and practice of a large institution such as K-12 education.

Ways Leaders Can Support

- ▶ Identify and leverage legislation and policy that supports the case for this work
- ▶ Bolster the essential/organizational conditions for the work to thrive¹⁰
- ▶ Design opportunities for broad engagement (students, parents, teachers, staff, other leadership) in the development and implementation of wellbeing strategies
- ▶ Demonstrate visible commitment to mental health and wellbeing alongside academic priorities at all levels of the system

¹⁰See School Mental Health Ontario model: Top Ten Organizational Conditions, and Storey et al. Essential Conditions for the Implementation of Comprehensive School Health

Key Enablers in Leading Systemic and Sustainable Approaches

Shared Leadership

When leaders are not adequately engaged, or don't support this work, strategies for promoting mental health and wellbeing are unlikely to succeed over time. Their key role in designing structures, systems and processes must be leveraged to efficiently and effectively integrate approaches to promoting mental health and wellbeing¹¹

While it is critical for senior leaders to offer support for integrated approaches to mental health and wellbeing, leadership should be distributed among students, teachers, and staff throughout the system to support a sustainable approach to the work.

Ways Leaders Can Support

- ▶ Create a district-level mental health and wellbeing leadership team to develop and implement a specific plan for wellbeing promotion and prevention of mental health problems at school.
- ▶ Embed a focus on mental health and wellbeing into professional development of system, school, and classroom leaders
- ▶ Embed a focus on mental health and wellbeing into district-wide strategic plans and create a similar expectation at the school level
- ▶ Engage school board trustees effectively
- ▶ Provide opportunities for student and family leadership in mental health and wellbeing promotion

¹¹ Roberts, E., McLeod, N., Montemurro, G., Veugelers, P.J., Gleddie, D., Storey, K.E. (2016). Implementing comprehensive school health in Alberta, Canada: the principal's role. *Health Promotion International*, 31(4):915-924.

Key Enablers in Leading Systemic and Sustainable Approaches



Indigenous Engagement

The history of colonization in Canada, including the legacy of residential schools, and the systematic exclusion of Indigenous people's voices in education, provide important context for establishing effective approaches to promoting mental health and wellbeing in K-12 education. While there were many positive developments made during the release of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation commission¹² and many have been made since, engaging Indigenous communities continues to be a challenge and opportunity for the future. Inconsistent knowledge, capacity and professional development of educators continue to stand in the way of effective integration of Indigenous voices and ways of knowing and being into K-12 education. Given Indigenous leadership in the area of mental wellness,¹³ there is an opportunity to create space for learning as consideration is given to issues of mental health and wellbeing integration in K-12 education.

Ways Leaders Can Support

- ▶ Support a process to identify and build relationships with local Indigenous partners who can play a leadership role in this work
- ▶ Build understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, as well as intergenerational trauma and the impact of the social determinants of health, amongst school mental health professionals, school and system leaders, and educators
- ▶ Make commitments to (or continue to support) calls to action in the Truth and Reconciliation Report
- ▶ Include Indigenous wellness practices in schools and classrooms, including those that are land-based and focused on cultural identity and language, in consultation with community leaders
- ▶ Create opportunities for framing approaches that include families and communities

¹²Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action 2015

¹³Health Canada (2015). First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework.

Key Enablers in Leading Systemic and Sustainable Approaches

Student & Family Engagement

Engagement of key stakeholders is critical to successful implementation of sustainable mental health and wellbeing strategies. This includes meaningful engagement of students and their families to help ensure that wellbeing approaches continue beyond the school environment, and to help provide additional opportunities to apply new tools and lessons in homes and community settings.¹⁴ Students have great interest in mental health and wellbeing and have much to say about this topic, including how they want to learn, and how they want to help. These efforts should have clear purpose, and contain strategies that provide low-barrier opportunities for all parents and students to engage (not just those who are already engaged).

Ways Leaders Can Support

- ▶ Develop structures and opportunities to explicitly engage students and parents in the development and implementation of mental health and wellbeing strategies and approaches
- ▶ Convey systematic approaches to addressing issues when engaging families
- ▶ Ensure plans are in place to address barriers to participation (e.g. transportation, childcare, parents' work hours are taken into consideration)
- ▶ Mobilize student voice to further raise awareness about mental health and wellbeing
- ▶ Support effective and safe methods for peer helping, encouraging boundaries and articulating clearly when to engage other adults members of the circle of support to help a friend

Key Enablers in Leading Systemic and Sustainable Approaches

System Coordination and Coherence

Promoting mental health and wellbeing in school settings is a multi-level, multi-sector responsibility that is part of the mandate of a diverse range of organizations and government branches (e.g. municipal, provincial, and ministries of health and education). Lack of role clarity among partners, complicated jurisdictional boundaries, and competition for limited resources can result in a fragmented approach. Disparate organizational mandates can incentivize working in silos. The complexity of this ecosystem necessitates solutions that cut across stakeholder boundaries and put students and staff at the centre. Many jurisdictions have led a call for an all-of-government approach to mental health and wellbeing because so many sectors and levels are needed to ensure cohesive leadership and accountability. When we work together with a common vision, and coordinate efforts and investments, change is more likely to lead to benefits for all Canadian students, not only those lucky enough to be in a short-lived pilot project.

Ways Leaders Can Support

- ▶ Develop partnerships with local health authorities and establish role clarity with involved parties
- ▶ Coordinate coherent mental health and wellbeing strategies following a dual pathway model¹⁵: supporting positive mental health for all, and directed support targeting mental health needs
- ▶ Deepen our understanding of how to build and sustain successful collaborations
- ▶ Seek out connections to provincial networks or other communities of practice
- ▶ Make use of key intermediary organizations who can be an “honest broker,” supporting the selection of complementary and locally relevant strategies that align with the vision and strategic goals
- ▶ Avoid the lure of purveyors who have difficulty seeing beyond a single product or approach to supporting student wellbeing

¹⁵Keyes (2002) The mental health continuum: from languishing to flourishing in life.

Key Enablers in Leading Systemic and Sustainable Approaches

Funding

Another common enabler is consistent and dedicated funding for upstream mental health and wellbeing programming. As a core condition for successful implementation of school-wide approaches¹⁶, this funding should cover training and implementation of evidence-based approaches, as well as the necessary resources for developing conditions “beyond the binder” that support effective implementation of these approaches (e.g. dedicated roles, committees and coaching for mental health and wellbeing). Another key resource constraint often cited is time for thoughtful implementation. While appropriate in the short-term, the desire to react quickly to emerging issues and have some “quick wins” can distract school system leaders and their partners from establishing the conditions and systems needed to sustain this work over time. Recognizing these types of changes can take years to implement can work in tension with expectations from funders for impacts within shorter time horizons. Funding that is provided incrementally, and requires successful short-term implementation and deliverables to be scaled up over time, is a practical approach that ensures successful outcomes for students.

Ways Leaders Can Support

- ▶ Work with provincial/territorial partners to identify opportunities for funding and collaboration to close gaps
- ▶ Develop multi-year strategies for mental health and wellbeing, and allocate appropriate resources
- ▶ Within your multi-year strategy, develop both long-term and short-term objectives, and discuss these with funders to make the case for both.
- ▶ Seek opportunities to leverage existing resources

¹⁶Storey, K. E., Montemurro, G., Flynn, J., Schwartz, M., Wright, E., Osler, J., Veugelers, P. J., & Roberts, E. (2016). Essential conditions for the implementation of comprehensive school health to achieve changes in school culture and improvements in health behaviours of students. *BMC Public Health*, 16, 1133

Key Enablers in Leading Systemic and Sustainable Approaches

Measuring Impact

While an increasing number of schools and school systems collect information on student and staff wellbeing, their ability to use this information to measure impact and adjust strategies varies significantly. Identifying and assessing the changes realized through their sphere of influence is often challenged by schools' limited capacity for evaluation, and by a lack of a definition of short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. Establishing processes for school systems to use research evidence to inform practice, and to evaluate and learn from their local innovations, is a key condition for successful implementation of approaches to mental health and wellbeing.¹⁷ Further efforts are needed to recognize the appropriate role of school systems in this process, and build their capacity for strategic learning.

Ways Leaders Can Support

- ▶ Support a shift to a culture of inquiry to support improvement and sustainability, rather than accountability measures
- ▶ Build system capacity for evaluation through professional and staff development
- ▶ Seek out partnerships with researchers, unions and provincial government to support evidence generation and use
- ▶ Identify what information to seek (e.g. status of student/staff wellbeing, culture and climate), and then identify tools and services that can serve that purpose
- ▶ Mobilize data collected in meaningful ways and reporting back on practices employed

¹⁷ See School Mental Health Ontario model: [Top Ten Organizational Conditions](#), and Storey et al. [Essential Conditions for the Implementation of Comprehensive School Health](#)

Recommended Actions and Next Steps

- ▶ Take time to build the ramp
- ▶ Develop provincial/territorial leadership structures
- ▶ Develop and/or leverage cross-sectoral policy frameworks
- ▶ Build a culture of wellbeing in schools and systems
- ▶ Embed wellbeing competencies into K-12 curricula
- ▶ Include a meaningful staff wellbeing component
- ▶ Establish a pan-Canadian network focusing on mental health and wellbeing in K-12 education

There is no one solution to promoting mental health and wellbeing that ‘works’ across the diverse contexts of K-12 education in Canada. Building on the best evidence we have from research and practice, however, participants in the two cross-provincial meetings agreed that we need to move ‘beyond the binder’—beyond one-off interventions, programs, and professional development - and towards an approach where mental health and wellbeing is integrated in the core mandate of public education. Looking at the best of what is already happening across jurisdictions to establish effective, systemic and sustainable approaches is a great place to start, and a bold, collective effort is required to move all our systems along that path. A flourishing future for the K-12 education system, and the students it serves, depends on it.

Based on review of the evidence, and the collaborative cross-provincial dialogue, key recommendations are offered to support next steps for the K-12 systems across Canada, and their partners in mental health and wellbeing.

Recommended Actions and Next Steps

Take time to build the ramp



Why?

Provincial/territorial and school jurisdictions' readiness is a key factor underlying successful and sustainable approaches to mental health and wellbeing. We need to approach the work with hope that we can achieve systems change, and show empathy for where each school, district, and system is at on their journey.

How?

Assessing the conditions that support student and staff wellbeing can help districts and their partners understand not just what activities to lead, but how to lead them. School Mental Health Ontario's Top Ten Organizational Conditions¹⁸ or Dr. Kate Storey's Essential Conditions for Comprehensive School Health¹⁹ are two examples of tools to help understand and build readiness.

¹⁸ <https://smh-assist.ca/wp-content/uploads/Organization-Conditions-Booklet-School-EN-Print.pdf>

¹⁹ [http://www.appleschools.ca/files/ESSENTIAL_CONDITIONS_FOR_THE_IMPLEMENTATION_OF_COMPREHENSIVE_SCHOOL_HEALTH_\(1\).pdf](http://www.appleschools.ca/files/ESSENTIAL_CONDITIONS_FOR_THE_IMPLEMENTATION_OF_COMPREHENSIVE_SCHOOL_HEALTH_(1).pdf)

Recommended Actions and Next Steps

Develop provincial/ territorial leadership structures



Why?

Achieving lasting change by embedding mental health and wellbeing as a priority in K-12 cannot be accomplished with one-off investments, or optional implementation. To establish high-quality approaches that reach all students and staff, provinces and territories need to take consistent and determined leadership on this issue. One way of doing so is to invest in a provincial/regional/system strategy, include coaching at the district/school level, co-create resources with education stakeholders, foster relationships across and within sectors, communicate research findings to inform policy makers and practitioners, and engage in ongoing progress monitoring.²⁰

How?

One example of this is School Mental Health Ontario (SMHO), a province-wide implementation support structure that works with Ontario school districts to support student mental health. Their support is provided through evidence-based leadership and coordination, resources, and implementation coaching support.²¹

²⁰Bullock, H.L., Lindencrona, F., Belkin, G.S., Vanderpyl, J., Watters, N., & Hennessy, K. (2014). Improving Global Knowledge Exchange for Mental Health Systems Improvement. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 5(1), 1-9. Retrieved Day/Month/Year, from (<http://www.gjcpp.org/>).

²¹<https://smho-smso.ca/>

Recommended Actions and Next Steps

Develop and/or leverage cross-sectoral policy frameworks



Why?

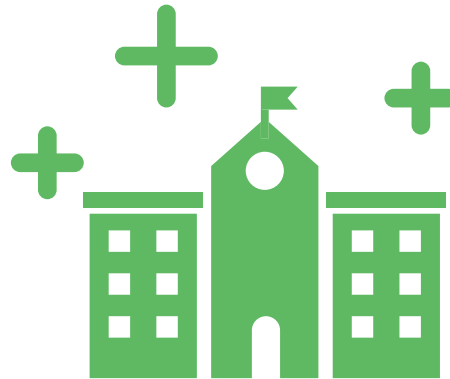
Considering the complex and intertwined set of experiences that affect student wellbeing, it is clear that mental health and wellbeing cannot be the sole responsibility of schools. Health, community and other partners all have a role to play. Cross-sectoral leadership and policy frameworks can help to establish role clarity and coherence. Ideally, these frameworks should include details on how the approach will play out or cascade through multiple levels of the system (province/territory, district and school).

How?

One example of this is the Integrated Service Delivery (ISD) approach in New Brunswick, which involves close collaboration among team members and participating departments (Education and Early Childhood Development, Social Development, Health, Public Safety, school districts and regional health authorities). ISD Child and Youth (C&Y) Team members work closely with student services staff in schools and provide a variety of services in schools and community settings.

Recommended Actions and Next Steps

Build a culture of wellbeing in schools and systems



Why?

School culture is shown to have a measurable impact on wellbeing, and is reflected in the level of trust, relationships and connectedness between students, teachers and staff. A whole-school or healthy schools approach recognizes the impact of the school environment and the student experience with that environment on their wellbeing.

How?

Many provinces and territories have developed mental health and wellbeing strategies that go beyond teaching students specific skills. For example, Alberta Education's report: Working Together to Support Mental Health in Alberta Schools is framed as an invitation to consider "how the promotion of mental health and well-being can be more effectively embedded in school and system policies, practices and services".²²

²² https://education.alberta.ca/media/3576206/working_together_to_support_mental_health.pdf

Recommended Actions and Next Steps

Embed wellbeing competencies into K-12 curricula



Why?

Twenty-first century education is leading us towards a new moral imperative—that learning, purpose, and wellbeing are equal goals of a thriving education system.²³ Developing wellbeing competencies (e.g. collaboration, empathy, emotional regulation skills) are key for students' success in 21st century careers.²⁴ Students' development of these competencies should not be left to chance—they are teachable and should be embedded as cross-cutting learning objectives in core K-12 curricula.

How?

Several provinces, such as Ontario and British Columbia, have begun to embed social, emotional and mental wellbeing competencies into their curricula. These provinces have also looked at how to implement this curriculum through supports and resources for educators.²⁵

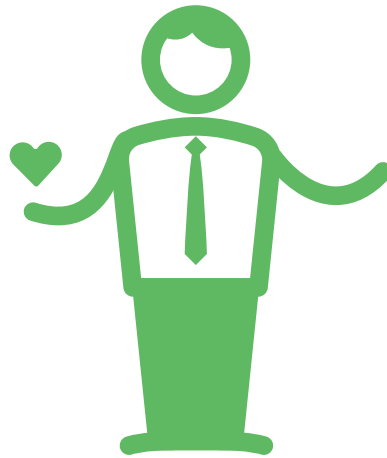
²³ Fullan et al (2019). Going Deeper: What today's teens need most from schools is learning that fosters engagement and connection. That may mean changing everything. ASCD Educational Leadership.

²⁴ OECD (2018). Skills for 2030. Retrieved from: https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/teaching-and-learning/learning/skills/in_brief_Skills.pdf

²⁵ https://guides.library.queensu.ca/mental-health-resources/curric_docs

Recommended Actions and Next Steps

Include a meaningful staff wellbeing component



Why?

The research is increasingly clear: to support student success and wellbeing, we need healthy staff and healthy K-12 workplaces. Strategies for mental health and wellbeing should include evidence-based organizational and individual approaches, and consider policy implications as well.²⁶

How?

Many schools and school districts are recognizing the link between student and staff wellbeing, and are finding ways to address workplace wellbeing in more meaningful ways. This can include integrating staff wellbeing into strategic plans, hearing from staff about stressors and finding ways to address them at an organizational level, and organizing professional development opportunities for staff to learn self-care approaches.

²⁶ Infographic: The importance of teacher and school staff wellbeing. Retrieved from: <https://www.wellahead.ca/resources/2018/7/26/infographic-why-focus-on-teacher-and-school-staff-wellbeing>

Recommended Actions and Next Steps

Establish a pan-Canadian network focusing on mental health and wellbeing in K-12 education



Why?

While there is no unique 'Canadian' education system, there is much to be gained from connecting across systems. Strengthening networks to share promising approaches across jurisdictions can prevent 're-inventing the wheel,' and inform more streamlined, impactful development and implementation of mental health and wellbeing strategies in K-12. For the organizations that support schools in this work, this means working beyond the boundaries of our immediate network, and acknowledging and building on the value of the frameworks, strategy and expertise of other players in the space.

How?

Partnerships like the Joint Consortium for School Health²⁷ and the Canadian Alliance for Healthy School Communities²⁸ work to connect K-12 school and health partners across the country and support them with resources to go system-wide with strategies to improve wellbeing.

²⁷ <https://www.jcsh-cces.ca/index.php/about>

²⁸ <https://phecanada.ca/activate/healthy-school-communities/canadian-alliance-healthy-school-communities>

Recommended Actions and Next Steps

This paper came out of conversations among a small group of K-12 system leaders, with the intention of further informing the efforts of those stakeholder groups involved. Recognizing that deeper change towards a systemic and sustainable approach to wellbeing in K-12 would involve a much broader group, we invite you to consider how each of the Recommended Actions resonates with you, and what you think needs to be done to move in these directions:

Take time to build the ramp - What this means for me:

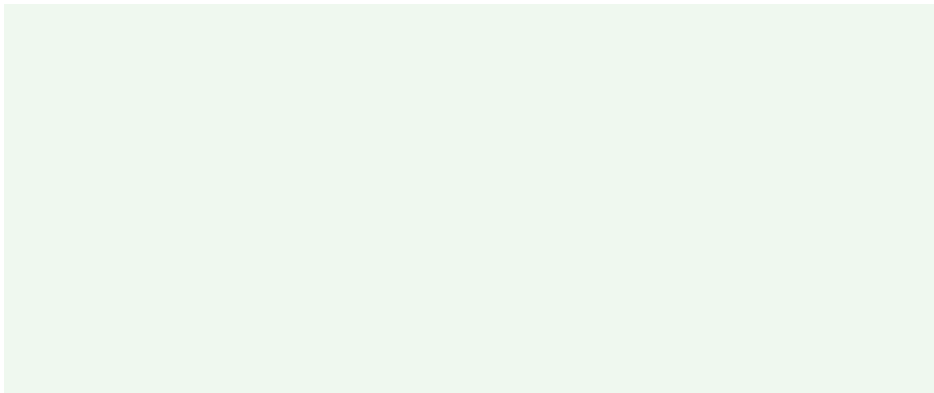
Develop provincial/territorial leadership structures - What this means for me:

Develop and/or leverage cross-sectoral policy frameworks - What this means for me:

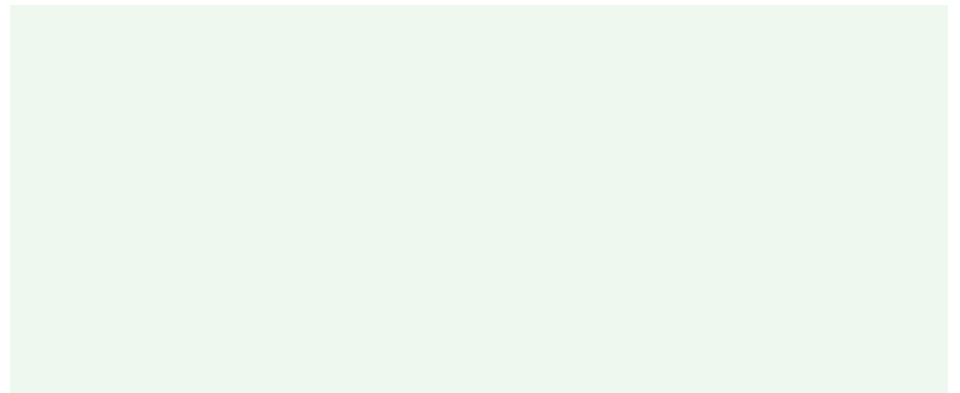
Build a culture of wellbeing in schools and systems - What this means for me:

Recommended Actions and Next Steps

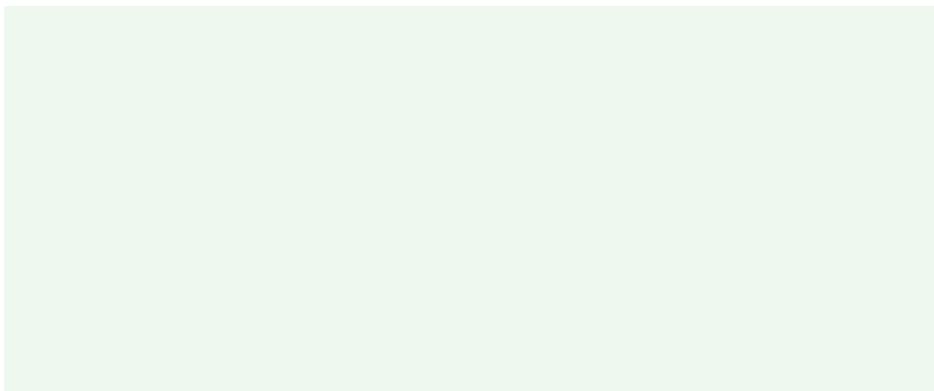
Embed wellbeing competencies into K-12 curricula - What this means for me:



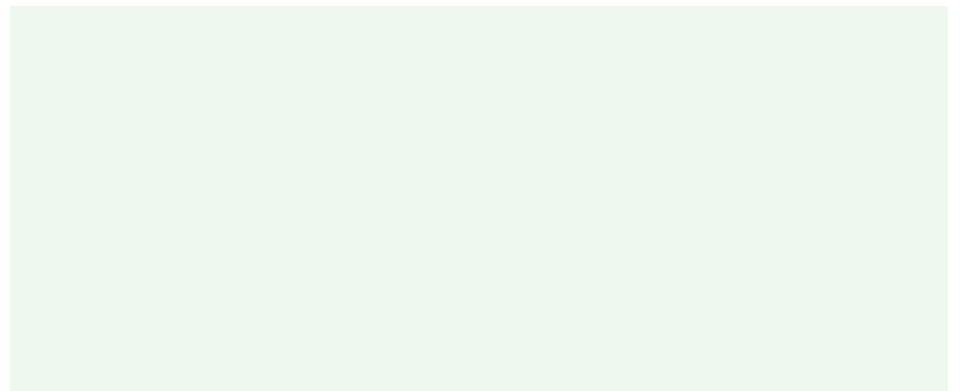
Include a meaningful staff wellbeing component - What this means for me:



Establish a pan-Canadian network focusing on mental health and wellbeing in K-12 education - What this means for me:



Other reflections:



Recommended Actions and Next Steps

What Next?

K-12 education continues to play a very strong role in shaping the future for Canada's youth. We hope the ideas and resources provided in this paper can help to improve it for the better. Thank you for the support you already provide, and for taking the time to engage with the ideas in this paper. We encourage you to:



Share ideas with
your colleagues



Find ways to
take action



Share your learning journey with the
broader pan-Canadian network

Appendix A: References for Fig. 1 - Multi-level benefits of effective mental health promotion in K-12

Stat	References
Reduced healthcare costs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Durlak, J., Weissberg, R., Dymnicki, A., Taylor, R., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions. <i>Child Development</i>, 82(1), 405-432 Kellam, S. et al (2011). The Good Behavior Game and the Future of Prevention and Treatment. <i>Addiction Science and Clinical Practice</i>. 6(1) 73-84. Merrill, R. M. & LeCheminant, J. D. (2016). Medical Cost Analysis of a School District Worksite Wellness Program, <i>Preventive Medicine Reports</i>
Increased educational attainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Durlak et al. (2011) Heckman, J.J. and T. Kautz (2012), "Hard evidence on soft skills", <i>Labour Economics</i>, Vol. 19(4), pp. 451-464
Increased employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moffitt. (2011). A gradient of childhood self-control predicts health, wealth, and public safety. <i>Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America</i>, 2693-2698. Jones, DE, Greenberg, M, Crowley, M (2015). Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness. <i>American Journal of Public Health</i>. 11: 2283-2290.
Reduced staff turnover, leave for illness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aldana, S.G., Merrill, R.M., Price, K., Hardy, A., & Hager, R. (2005). Financial impact of a comprehensive multisite workplace health promotion program. <i>Preventive Medicine</i>, 40, 131–137.
Reduced premiums, costs of insurance and benefits programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uborcev, A. & Dorgan, P. (2013). A model plan: improve organizational health with a measurable return on investment to manage future benefits plan costs. <i>Benefits Canada</i> pp: 43-46. Aldana (2005).
Increased graduation rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kautz, T. Heckman, J.J. et al. (2017) Fostering and Measuring Skills: Improving Cognitive and Non-Cognitive Skills to Promote Lifetime Success. The National Bureau of Economic Research. Retrieved via https://www.nber.org/papers/w20749.pdf
Greater teacher engagement, performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Montgomery, C., & Rupp, A. A. (2005). A meta-analysis exploring the diverse causes and effects of stress in teachers. <i>Canadian Journal of Education</i>, 28, 458–486.
Increased social and emotional competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Durlak (2011)
Improved relationships with students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jennings, P, Greenberg, M. (2009). The Prosocial Classroom: Teacher Social and Emotional Competence in Relation to Student and Classroom Outcomes. <i>Review of Education Research</i> 79 (1): 491-525.
Reduced impact and feelings of stress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verhoeven, C., Maes, S., Kraaij, V., & Joeke, K. (2003). The job-demand-control-social support model and wellness/health outcomes: A European study. <i>Psychology and Health</i>, 18(4), 421-440.
Increased social and emotional competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jennings, P et al. (2017). Impacts of the CARE for Teachers program on teachers' social and emotional competence and classroom interactions. <i>Journal of Educational Psychology</i>, 109(7), 1010-1028.
Reduced incidence of violence, bullying conduct problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moffitt (2011). Kellam, S. et al (2011)
Reduced incidence of anxiety, depression, suicide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kellam, S. et al (2011)
Improved achievement in academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Durlak 2011

Appendix B: Participants List

	Brian	Andjelic	College of Alberta School Superintendents
*	Mali	Bain	McConnell Foundation
	Ken	Bain	Canadian Association of School System Administrators
	Mike	Borgfjord	Seine River School District
	Leanne	Boyd	Government of Manitoba
	Kate	Buium	Human Early Learning Partnership
	Heather	Bullock	McMaster University
	Max	Cooke	EdCan Network
	Gillian	Dawe-Taylor	Government of Northwest Territories
	David	DeRosa	British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association
	Barry	Finlay	Independent Advisor
	Cindy	Finn	Lester B. Pearson School Board
	Kathy	Georgiades	McMaster University
	Suzanne	Gordon	Ontario Ministry of Education
	Susan	Hornby	Joint Consortium for School Health
	James	Hughes	McConnell Foundation
	Barb	Isaak	Manitoba Association of School Superintendents
*	Vani	Jain	McConnell Foundation
	Rob	Lampard	BC Ministry of Children and Family Development
	Isabelle-Andree	Lang	Government of New Brunswick
	Robert	Laurie	University of New Brunswick
	Ian	Manion	Institute of Mental Health Research
	Lisa	Lumley	Ontario Ministry of Education

	Chris	Markham	Ophea / Canadian Alliance for Healthy School Communities
*	Paul	McArthur	McConnell Foundation
	Jennifer	McCrae	BC Ministry of Education
	Marlien	McKay	Government of New Brunswick
	Jim	McLellan	College of Alberta School Superintendents
	Tim	Monds	College of Alberta School Superintendents
*	Bill	Morrison	University of New Brunswick
	Judith	Nyman	Ontario Public School Boards Association
	Deborah	Pawar	BC Ministry of Children and Family Development
	Marni	Pearce	Alberta Education
	Patti	Peterson	University of New Brunswick
	Sylvia	Reentovich	New Brunswick Department of Education
	Brenda	Restoule	School Mental Health Ontario
	Nancy	Reynolds	Independent Advisor
	Barbara	Riley	Propel Centre
	Tanya	Roy	Government of New Brunswick
*	Vania	Sakelaris	School Mental Health Ontario
	Rob	Santos	Manitoba Education
*	Kathy	Short	School Mental Health Ontario
	Kate	Storey	University of Alberta
	Brian	Torrence	EverActive Schools
*	Kim	Weatherby	DASH-BC
	Leslee	White-Eye	First Nations With Schools Collective

An aerial photograph of a soccer field, overlaid with a green circle and lines. The field is green, and the lines are white. The circle is centered on the field, and the lines form a grid pattern. The background is a solid green color.

Beyond the Binder

Towards More Systemic and Sustainable Approaches
to Mental Health and Wellbeing in K-12 Education