



Advancing wellbeing in schools

15 lessons about education,
philanthropy & systems change

Summary



WellAhead

WellAhead is a national philanthropic initiative that aims to improve child and youth mental health by integrating social and emotional wellbeing into K-12 education.

Our focus is on shifting culture, structures, priorities, and practices of schools and the education system at large. Working with stakeholders across Canada, WellAhead takes an emergent approach to test different levers for change, scale what works, and share learnings.

Following nearly two years of consultation, WellAhead launched in British Columbia (BC) in 2015, working with six school districts to test an approach that involved three elements:

- A community-led, participatory change process: drawing from the social innovation lab model as a way to create district ownership, buy-in and sustainability.
- A strategic focus on everyday practices: sustainable, scalable approaches to advancing social and emotional wellbeing that are easily embedded into the school routine and don't require significant resources or training.
- Adherence to a core set of values: collaboration, mass participation, collective ownership, transparency, and emergence guided WellAhead's approach throughout.

The WellAhead team supported districts through this process with tools and evaluation, while a Community Liaison (an existing staff person within the district) led the work at a local level. The process design, guided by MaRS Solutions Lab, had three phases:

Phase 1 Co-design	Phase 2 Prototyping	Phase 3 Scaling
Bringing diverse groups together to brainstorm everyday practices and decide which ideas to prototype in schools.	A low-risk way to test and improve ideas through rapid iteration. Educators implemented the everyday practices in their own way, reflecting on essential elements to be shared with others and how to integrate them into their work.	Building on learning from co-design and prototyping to scale their everyday practices and embed wellbeing as a priority for their district.
Aug–Dec 2015	Jan–June 2016	July 2016 onwards

Alongside this work with pilot districts, WellAhead played a role at the ecosystem level, listening to and learning from government, provincial organizations and networks, and other stakeholders to support existing work, make linkages, and catalyze action and conversations.

6
Districts

17
Schools

79
Classrooms

1600
Students



15 Lessons on:

Integrating wellbeing in schools



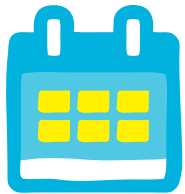
1. Efforts by school districts to prioritize wellbeing require dedicated time from a multi-level leadership team.



2. The value of a focus on social and emotional wellbeing needs to be clear to all those involved.



3. Involvement in prototyping promotes teachers' ownership of ideas and enables local adaptation.



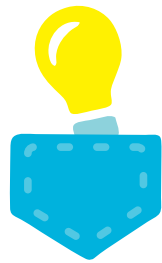
4. School-based initiatives should stretch beyond one year and fit with district calendars.



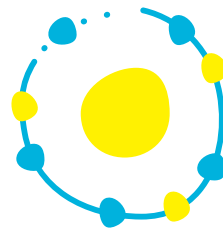
5. School leaders & decision-makers need to explicitly "permit" a focus on wellbeing.



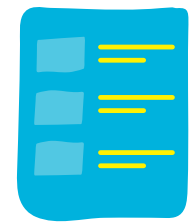
6. Peer mentorship and collaboration facilitates growth in teacher practice.



7. Ideas don't necessarily need to be new: consider how to leverage existing solutions.



8. Ideation should be grounded in a strong understanding of the problem's systemic context.

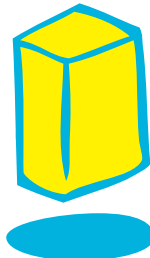


9. Implementing design criteria too early in the creative process stifles innovation.

Social innovation labs



10. Identifying 'core' elements helps develop the simplest, most scalable prototype.



11. Ensure that the ambitious demands of the lab process can fit your participant context.

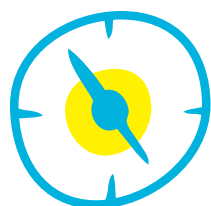
Philanthropy and systems change



12. Be a humble system player: don't assume you have a solution that merits replication.



13. Focusing on the immediate outcomes of discrete interventions can distract from bigger-picture systems thinking.



14. A defined set of values can serve as a compass for a strategy that evolves over time.



15. Philanthropic organizations have a unique role to play as connectors, convenors and supporters within ecosystems.

Everyday Practices



2 x 10: A Solid Foundation

Connecting through 10 personal 2-minute interactions. **SD 61 – Victoria**



Be in Nature

Taking learning outdoors to explore and connect with nature. **SD 70 – Alberni**



Circle

Building connectedness by sitting in a circle and sharing together. **SD 48 – Sea to Sky**



Wellness Wednesdays

Taking 10 minutes, every Wednesday, to focus on wellness. **SD 67 – Okanagan Skaha**



Mindful Pause

Pausing to take deep breaths and practice mindfulness. **SD 43 – Coquitlam**



Talking Circles

Gathering to share food, celebrate culture & build community. **SD 92 – Nisga'a**

Download the full report: wellahead.ca

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