

## FOSTER WELL-BEING & MENTAL HEALTH

*The YRDSB believes in fostering well-being and mental health by promoting cognitive, emotional, social and physical well-being. We will create healthy learning and working environments and strengthen resiliency.*

What can the school board do to foster well-being and mental health in schools and workplaces?

1. Learning opportunities about positive Mental Health and Well-Being (MHWB) provided by the Board
  - a. Provide learning opportunities for students about healthy lifestyles and life skills including:
    - i. MHWB concerns (e.g., what depression looks like);
    - ii. Nutrition and healthy eating habits;
    - iii. The importance of physical activity;
    - iv. Life skills (e.g., resilience, collaboration, confidence, self-regulation, empathy and social-emotional learning);
    - v. Strategies for school and learning (e.g., study strategies, metacognition); and
    - vi. Activities that support positive MHWB (e.g., yoga, mindfulness, meditation, breathing exercises).
  - b. Provide professional learning opportunities for teachers and other school staff to support students MHWB (e.g., supporting students with special needs and MH concerns, equity and inclusive practices).
  - c. Provide opportunities for teachers and staff to learn about looking after their own MHWB.
  - d. Provide opportunities for parents to learn to support their children (e.g., supporting student MHWB, mindfulness, learning/study strategies, presentations from experts).
  - e. Reduce the stigma around mental health concerns through education and increase awareness.
2. Environments that Support Positive MHWB
  - a. Create safe learning environments through:
    - i. Anti-bullying measures (e.g., more protection of students, understanding of consequences);
    - ii. Increased support for students with special needs (e.g., emphasis on those who cause disruptions in classes, more support staff and specialized classes); and
    - iii. Holding students accountable for their actions.
  - b. Create positive and supportive student learning environments through:
    - i. Spending more time outdoors (e.g., nature/outdoor education, importance of fresh-air and outside activity);
    - ii. Creating a quiet space or room available to students for prayer, meditation, or self-regulation;
    - iii. Welcoming and inviting buildings and physical environments (e.g., comfortable sitting areas, clean facilities, less portables);
    - iv. Increasing number of staff available in schools to support students (e.g., EAs, SERTs, Guidance Counsellors, lunchroom monitors); and

- v. Interrupting systems/processes that cause students additional stress (e.g., less homework, greater focus on learning/growing than grades/tests).
- c. Nurture healthy working environments
    - i. Support for work-life balance (e.g., email times, modeling from board leaders)
    - ii. Flexible workspaces and schedules (e.g., flexible work hours, working from home or other sites)
    - iii. Reducing practices that lead to additional stress (e.g., reducing number of board initiatives, teacher/principal administrative tasks, teaching assignment practices).
  - d. Create equitable and inclusive learning and working environments.
3. Relationships that Support MHWB
- a. Strengthen student relationships with teachers and other school staff (e.g., building trusting and respectful relationships, valuing student voice, kindness and empathy to student needs, having a role-model or someone to talk to).
  - b. Encourage student relationships with each other (e.g., creating opportunities for students to feel connected, school spirit).
  - c. Improve parent-school communication and collaboration (e.g., teachers and the board transparently communicating with parents and valuing their input into their child's education, collaborating on supporting students with MH concerns)
  - d. Strengthen inter-staff relationships (e.g., creating a culture of respect and caring, transparent communication, teachers feeling supported by Board leadership).
4. Support for those with MH needs
- a. Provide more MH professionals in schools (e.g., psychologists, social workers, counsellors, CYWs).
  - b. Connect students, staff, and families with MH resources and supports (e.g., increased awareness and access to care-pathways, resources available for those impacted).

## CHAMPION EQUITY & INCLUSIVITY

*The YRDSB is a champion for equity and inclusivity. We enable equitable access and create safe spaces to develop personal excellence and achievement.*

What can the school board do to champion equity and inclusivity in schools, workplaces and communities?

1. Build capacity and leadership in equity, inclusivity, and oppression through learning opportunities.
  - a. Develop a clear, shared understanding of what Equity and Inclusivity are and are not within an educational context.
  - b. Model equitable and inclusive attitudes, principles, and values from the top-down through decision-making and actions.
  - c. Develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to use an anti-oppressive approach to education by providing mandatory ongoing learning for all frontline staff, teachers, administrators, and management on:
    - i. Assumptions and bias, social identity, power, privilege, microaggressions, and discrimination;
    - ii. Oppression, anti-Indigenous racism, anti-Black racism, antisemitism, Islamophobia, ableism, classism, homophobia, transphobia, and intersectionality; and
    - iii. Anti-oppression, cultural competency, culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy, and allyship.
  - d. Develop understanding and encourage the respect for, value of, and celebration of the diversity of staff, students, their families and communities, by providing ongoing learning opportunities:
    - i. For students on respect, empathy, equity, and inclusivity; and
    - ii. For parents, guardians and families on the differences between equality and equity, and building an understanding and awareness of the various social identities reflected in their school communities.
2. Identify, intentionally interrupt and eliminate barriers (e.g., physical, social, environmental, financial) to equitable and inclusive learning and well-being within schools and workplaces.
  - a. Provide learning opportunities for staff on using and analysing school and board level data to identify, examine, and address systemic inequities and barriers that impact students' well-being and achievement.
  - b. Ensure consistent implementation of policies and procedures for all stakeholders across the Board.
    - i. *Accountability*: Hold staff responsible for their actions in terms of any violations of policies and procedures. Ensure consistency in addressing all forms of oppression.
    - ii. *Transparency*: Communicate any progressive discipline staff receive for policy and procedure violations within legislation.
  - c. Ensure engagement of parents, families, Elders, and communities through consultations on the development, review, and revision of policies and procedures.

- i. Actively elicit input and feedback from parents, families, Elders, and community members, paying particular attention to marginalized groups and those who have not previously been active in schools.
  - d. Provide schools with additional resources (e.g., culturally relevant and responsive materials, additional staff [EA's, SERTs, CYWs]) to support needs of underserved learners (e.g., ELL, vulnerable, marginalized, minoritized, students in rural communities, and students with exceptionalities).
    - i. Ensure equitable allocation of, and access to resources.
- 3. Integrate equity and inclusivity throughout our teaching, research, community engagement, and governance.
  - a. 'Know our learners' and centre the identities of students by implementing culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy.
  - b. Hold positive and affirming views of students, their ability to learn and achieve academic success, and their families.
  - c. Develop more inclusive curricula, teaching practices and school practices that reflect the diversity of our student population.
    - i. Create an advisory panel that is made up of various stakeholders (educators, parents, community members), which reflects different cultures, ethnicities, races, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, religions, languages spoken, and nationalities.
    - ii. Develop curricular content that includes the histories and contributions of Indigenous cultures.
  - d. Allow school-based decision making to be less top-down. Instead of inviting people to share their thoughts, and then do what one person thinks is best at the end of the day, actually allow for community decision making.

## EMPOWER ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

*At the YRDSB we believe in empowering ethical leadership. We expect growth and encourage curiosity, develop innovative and courageous leaders, and elevate student voice.*

What can the school board do to empower ethical leadership in schools and workplaces?

1. Rebuild trust in current leadership through accountability and transparency.
  - a. Audit current hiring and promotion practices.
    - i. Develop a clear, transparent, and accountable process that eliminates nepotism/favouritism and ensures representation of the diversity of students and school communities (e.g., race, ethnicity, ability, religion, sexual orientation); and
    - ii. Demonstrate accountability for this new process.
  - b. Review current performance appraisal process:
    - i. Implement a performance review questionnaire as part of the performance appraisal process that engages a broad range of stakeholder input for all staff;
    - ii. Include student and parent voice, as applicable; and
    - iii. Demonstrate accountability for the new process.
  - c. Establish a safe and confidential reporting system for all stakeholders to convey concerns or issues. Demonstrate accountability for responding in a timely manner.
  - d. Provide ongoing and differentiated opportunities for students, staff, parents and communities to express concerns and issues (e.g., town halls, forums, surveys). Respond in a timely manner.
  - e. Take meaningful steps toward reducing the impact of colonialism, such as including Elder voice as a permanent and equal member on the Board of Trustees.
  - f. Communicate fully, transparently and in a timely manner with plain language, do not use political double-speak, do not hide behind policy, and do not avoid responding.
2. Build staff leadership capacity.
  - a. Develop a shared, research-based understanding of Ethical Leadership, taking care to minimize the Eurocentric ideals that influence our perspectives. Consider the following areas as part of this understanding:
    - i. Accountability – courageous, monitoring, risk-taking, ownership, apologies, responsive
    - ii. Transparency - timely, proactive, disclosing; ongoing between school and family; budgetary details;
    - iii. Respectful relationships - build through visibility, approachability, rapport, heart, caring
    - iv. Communication – timely, consistent, authentic listening
    - v. Equity – inclusive, understands/values rights of others, fair, unbiased, justice-oriented, has a fair consistent process to handle exceptions
    - vi. Integrity – trust, loyal, honest, open, authentic
  - b. Provide ongoing professional learning for staff in:
    - i. Ethics - ethical behaviour, doing the right thing even when it is hard; ethics course (like engineers/lawyers); morality versus ethics; lessons learned, global best practices

- ii. Equity - social identities, biases, oppression, removing barriers, cultural sensitivity, diversity training
    - iii. Leadership - effective communication, motivation, team building, management skills
  - c. Model ethical leadership from the top down.
  - d. Provide leadership opportunities that:
    - i. Ensure representation of diverse communities;
    - ii. Develop mentorship programs;
    - iii. Develop alternative career pathways other than the current teacher → VP → Principal career pathway (e.g., Master Teacher); and
    - iv. Create opportunities for teachers to collaborate and co-teach within schools.
- 3. Value Student Voice.
  - a. Listen to student voice on an ongoing basis to inform decision-making at all levels.
  - b. Create opportunities for a diversity of voices to be heard and valued; listen, do not dismiss even when it is difficult.
- 4. Design Student Instruction.
  - a. Provide leadership learning and access to leadership opportunities for all students.
    - i. Identify leadership opportunities and explicitly encourage students with special education needs, students of minoritized groups and shy students to participate.
  - b. Incorporate leadership instruction into the curriculum,
    - i. Including the following content:
      1. Ethics, morals, character matters, doing the right thing;
      2. Modern Learning: creativity, curiosity, problem-solving, innovation, skills necessary to be successful, critical thinking, how to think, higher-level thinking;
      3. Equity, fairness and awareness of the rights of others;
      4. Resiliency, not afraid to fail, advocacy, relationship building;
      5. Communication, public speaking; and
      6. Real world, outdoor education, climate change.
    - ii. Using the following processes:
      1. Group discussions within and between schools;
      2. Case studies and examples, practise decision-making;
      3. Community/professional-led workshops or talks;
      4. Conferences, seminars;
      5. Volunteer opportunities, experiential learning;
      6. More extra-curricular opportunities (e.g., sports, art, clubs, debates, fairs, Me to We, spoken word); and
      7. Diverse role models.

## BUILD COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

*At the YRDSB we will build collaborative relationships by nurturing a culture of trust and respect. We will honour diverse perspectives in decision making and ensure we are accessible and responsive.*

What can the school board do to build collaborative relationships within and between schools, workplaces and communities?

1. Establish a collaborative relationship built on trust and respect.
  - a. Rebuild trust through frequent communication that is clear, honest, and transparent.
  - b. Model open and honest communication from the top down.
  - c. Ensure consistency of messaging (e.g., between classrooms, across the system).
  - d. Provide differentiated two-way options for all aspects of communication between students, staff, parents, and community.
  - e. Provide learning opportunities for school staff to communicate effectively with parents and communities.
  - f. Collaborate with parents to better understand students' needs and strengths.
  
2. Ensure YRDSB is accessible and responsive.
  - a. Provide multiple methods of communication and make it easier for ALL parents to connect to schools and the Board.
    - i. Ensure rules and guidelines are accessible and easier for parents to understand.
    - ii. Implement varied methods for participation in Board, Committee and School Council meetings (e.g., face-to-face, web conferencing, teleconferencing).
    - iii. Develop mobile-friendly school and Board websites.
    - iv. Create online communities and forums for discussion.
    - v. Continue to support parent / teacher communication (e.g., Remind, Edsby, Google Classroom, Bloomz, digital, phone, Social media, newsletters, email, more direct communication, Gathering Under One Tree).
  - b. Demonstrate active listening by responding to solicited input and openly communicating with all stakeholders (i.e., Board members, senior staff, administrators, educators, staff, community partners, parents, and students).
  - c. Demonstrate accountability by taking complaints seriously, accepting critical feedback, responding in a timely manner and providing supports to families in disputes with schools.
  
3. Take responsibility for actively engaging parents, families, Elders, and communities.
  - a. Identify and remove barriers to engaging marginalized families.
    - i. Use multiple strategies to reach out and engage families and communities as partners in student learning (while taking into consideration their lived experiences).
    - ii. Provide opportunities for trustees, staff, students, parents, and the community to learn about diverse cultures in our communities.
    - iii. Formally consult diverse families to understand and respect their diverse needs.

- b. Model behaviour that promotes collaborative relationships among trustees, staff, students, parents, and the community by using knowledge of the unique diversity of YRDSB to create a safe and welcoming school/work environment.
    - i. Leverage the expertise of parents and communities to support learning in our schools (e.g., support curating instructional materials that accurately reflect students' identities, relevant guest speaker).
    - ii. Leverage the expertise of parents to collaboratively develop student success action plans to redress negative impacts experienced by marginalized communities within a Canadian educational context (e.g., anti-Black racism, Islamophobia).
4. Honour diverse perspectives in decision making.
- a. Invite and support marginalized voices to inform decision making - listen to ALL voices.
  - b. Initiate and support more frequent opportunities for diverse parents and communities to guide the Board's direction in various ways before making decisions that impact them (e.g., continue with Town Halls, surveys, round table discussions).
  - c. Review the membership of School Councils and ensure they are diverse and represent all identities in the community.
5. Model and provide opportunities to learn how to build effective, meaningful, collaborative relationships through engaging experiences in and out of the classroom.
- a. In school: Model and provide opportunities for students, teachers, classrooms, and grades throughout the school to work together.
    - i. Inter-student: Provide opportunities to connect, build relationships and work together.
    - ii. In class: Talk about collaboration; provide more group work and encourage students to get to know each other before engaging in group work.
  - b. Inter-school: Provide students and teachers opportunities for inter-school experiences (e.g., social events, learning projects with other schools; day in another school).
    - i. Create structures that allow teachers to visit classrooms at other schools to build understanding and capacity.
    - ii. Provide educators opportunities for collaboration and communication - sharing promising practices, learning from each other.
  - c. Within community: Engage students in relevant community issues and opportunities to make connections to the land, environment and community.
    - i. Connect core curriculum to outside world.
    - ii. Visit shelters, food banks, community centres, libraries, elderly, farmers market.
  - d. With parents, families, Elders, and communities
    - i. Provide parents more opportunities to connect and build relationships within the school and Board.
    - ii. Invite Parents and Community Partners into class/school (e.g., Diversity learning; Workplaces representatives; Community reps: police, EMTs, local government).

## POLICY

Policy was mentioned throughout the four questions. Use of the term policy was often used broadly to mean policy, procedure or guidelines. Some requests were made to change Ministry policy such as the Health and Physical Education Curriculum. Specific mention was made to a number of YRDSB policy documents calling for review and/or accountability in implementation:

- Policy 158.0 Information Access and Privacy Protection
- Policy 238.0 Parent, Family and Community Engagement
- Policy 242.0 Standards of Conduct
- Policy 261.0 Equity and Inclusivity
- Policy 360.0 Special Education: Identification, Placement and Review Committee
- Policy 532.0 Recruitment and Promotion
- Policy 668.0 Caring and Safe Schools

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Some stakeholders expressed:

- a disconnect between the four strategic priorities and what they identified as primary goals of schooling - academic achievement and performance, teaching and learning;
- disappointment and concern around academics being left out of the strategic priorities for the Board;
- an expectation that the strategic priorities would focus on student learning explicitly, in areas such as: higher levels of academic achievement (e.g., math performance, science, technological education), more focus on literacy, supporting students transitioning to Grade 9, and preparing students as local and global learners; and
- a desire to have current assessment practices reviewed in relation to student identity, learning, mental health and well-being, and equity.

There was also some expression of concern around the current Health and Physical Education curriculum. This suggests the need for better clarification of parent/guardian rights regarding Program Accommodations for Faith Purposes as well as the Board/Ministry distribution of responsibility.