

**DATE:** May 8, 2018

**TO:** Board of Trustees

**FROM:** Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

**SUBJECT:** Strategic Plan Update: Student Wellness and Citizenship

**ORIGINATOR:** Nancy Petersen, Managing Director, Strategic District Supports

**RESOURCE STAFF:** Stacey Hannay, Marlene Hanson, Regan Holt, Kerry Maguire

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**ISSUE**

The District's Strategic Plan includes Priority 2, Goal One: A Focus on Well-being and Student Citizenship with the outcome that each student and staff member in the District has the right to learn and work in an environment that promotes equality of opportunity, dignity, respect and recognition of diversity. That goal comprises a very broad body of work and is being supported by a multitude of projects across the District—far too many for one report. The purpose of this Strategic Plan Update report is to provide the Board of Trustees with an overview of efforts being taken by the Comprehensive School Health unit in support of student mental health and well-being. Future Strategic Plan Update reports will provide insight into progress on other initiatives supporting student well-being and citizenship.

**BACKGROUND**

In 2014, Edmonton Public Schools formally launched its District Strategic Plan for the 2014-2018 term. The District Strategic Plan has three priority areas with supporting goals and outcomes. The plan provides common direction and alignment between the work of the Board of Trustees, the Superintendent of Schools and District staff. The plan serves as the foundation for a District culture of evidence-based decision making, assurance and accountability.

To demonstrate the District's commitment to transparency and accountability, Strategic Plan Update reports were introduced in 2016–2017 as an extension of the Annual Education Results Report (AERR). The reports are intended to provide the Board of Trustees with detailed progress towards the goals and outcomes of our Strategic Plan.

**CURRENT SITUATION**

This Strategic Plan Update report reflects the work of schools and central services in support of building student wellness and citizenship and is in direct response to Priority 2 Goal One of the 2014-2018 District Strategic Plan.

**KEY POINTS**

Strategic Plan Update reports, introduced in 2016-2017, provide an extension of the AERR.

The attached report is focused on the District's work in support of building student wellness and citizenship.

**ATTACHMENTS and APPENDICES**

ATTACHMENT I Strategic Plan Update: Student Wellness and Citizenship

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# Strategic Plan Update:

## Student Wellness and Citizenship

May 8, 2018

## INTRODUCTION

Priority 2 of the District’s Strategic Plan 2014-2018 calls for the District to *provide welcoming, high quality learning and working environments*. In March 2017, a new umbrella Board Policy [AE.BP Welcoming, Inclusive, Safe and Healthy Learning and Working Environments](#), was created as a foundational policy to reflect the Board’s commitment to providing learning and working environments that respect diversity, foster a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self. The Board recognizes that each student and staff member in the District has the right to learn and work in an environment that promotes equality of opportunity, dignity, respect and recognition of diversity. There are numerous initiatives to provide such environments happening across the District. They include everything from Infrastructure’s design of new schools to the Board’s support of a CASA research chair. All of the work is exciting and helping us move toward our goal; however, it’s also too much to review in one report. Therefore, this report provides an update on initiatives primarily undertaken by the Comprehensive School Health unit that focus on students’ mental health and well-being.

This focus on students’ mental health and well-being reflects the District’s alignment to the [School Act](#). In June 2015, the *School Act* was amended to emphasize the importance of creating supportive learning environments in an inclusive education system (Alberta Government, 2017, p. 7). Specifically, the amendment reads that, “Students are entitled to welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environments that respect diversity and nurture a sense of belonging and a positive sense of self.” Further, in learning environments where positive, healthy relationships are fostered, and where expectations are clear, students feel supported in their learning.

Two key performance indicators of the District’s progress in this area are the District Accountability Pillar Survey Results (2016-2017) and the 2017 District Feedback Survey.

### District Accountability Pillar Survey Results (October 2017)

On the Accountability Pillar Survey, a key category measured is in relation to whether school environments are perceived by students, teachers and parents as being safe and caring. This category of measures continues to demonstrate high confidence in the District’s ability to provide safe and caring environments, with 89.8 per cent of teachers, parents and students indicating that they felt that: *students are safe at school; are learning the importance of caring for others; are learning respect for others and are treated fairly in school*. District results are slightly higher than provincial results and show an overall upward trend when comparing from 2013 to 2017.

Alberta Education Accountability Pillar	Results (in percentages)					Evaluation		
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Achievement	Improvement	Overall
Percentage of teacher, parent and student agreement that: students are safe at school, are learning the importance of caring for others, are learning respect for others and are treated fairly in school.	89.3 (n= 27,854)	88.7 (n= 50,439)	90.0 (n= 28,117)	89.5 (n= 27,937)	89.8 (n= 29,498)	Very High	Improved	Excellent

Accountability Pillar Results October 2017

### 2017 District Feedback Survey

The 2017 District Feedback Survey provided related responses that were categorized into themes of Welcoming, Inclusive and Safe Environments; Health and Well-being; and Citizenship and Leadership.

On themes of safety, health and well-being, the majority of students surveyed indicated that they can get the support needed for their mental and physical well-being, with 91.59 per cent of elementary students and 70.28 per cent of secondary students surveyed indicating agreement. A similar result to that of the secondary students was evident from the parents who responded.

To the question that they know at least one adult in their school to whom they could go for help, 95.71 per cent of elementary students indicated agreement. In the secondary grades surveyed, 82.95 per cent indicated agreement to this question.

### **Analysis of Results**

There is extensive research showing that school culture has a profound impact on students' mental and physical health (Thapa, Cohen & Guffey, 2013). Feeling safe and supported in school promotes student learning and healthy development (Devine & Cohen 2007). Research also documents the benefits of training school staff as "go-to" persons who can offer support to students facing adversity and challenges (Han & Weist, 2005; Poynter & Tubbs, 2007; Wei & Kutcher, 2014). Through a focus on healthy relationships, go-to staff provide safe spaces by acting as allies and as access points for health enhancing information and services.

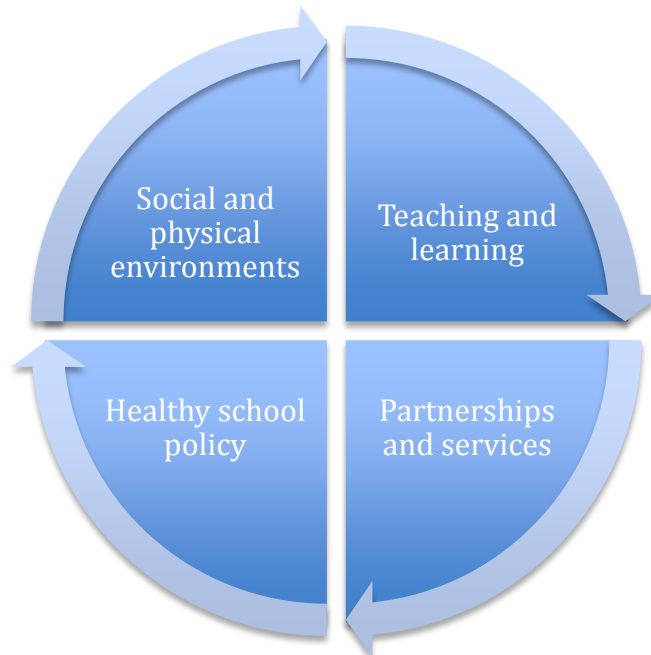
In recent years, the District has been intentional in creating an awareness of the importance of identifying key contacts within schools, as health champions for both students and staff.

Given the difference in organizational structures between elementary and secondary schools, it is not a surprise that a larger percentage of students in elementary schools indicated an awareness of these supports. Elementary students generally have a single homeroom teacher, a smaller group or circle of classmates and fewer and more consistent adults supporting their learning. Secondary students typically do not have homerooms and may have different classmates and teachers for the majority of their classes.

Adolescence is an important developmental period characterized by considerable social, emotional, behavioural, physical and educational transitions (Kutcher & McDougall, 2009) underscoring the importance of creating increased awareness of go-to supports with secondary school students. Resiliency research indicates that students will advocate for resources and supports when their social environments (e.g. schools) make resources known and available through staff members that students deem as safe (Ungar, 2010; Grace, 2015).

## A COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL HEALTH MODEL

To support school and District leaders in their work to focus on well-being and student citizenship, the District continues to promote a Comprehensive School Health (CSH) approach. This internationally recognized approach is based on the foundational understanding that healthy students learn better and achieve more. Schools play a significant role in influencing student health and behaviours by encouraging healthy lifestyle choices, promoting student health and well-being and integrating health holistically into all aspects of school and learning. The four interrelated components of the Comprehensive School Health Model serve as foundational supports for action. These four areas are:



Increasingly, health and education sectors are working collaboratively in partnerships to bring these four areas to life within the school community and to promote healthy, active lifestyles across the whole school community for both staff and students. Mental and physical well-being are increasingly recognized as essential contributors to student achievement and to the development of healthy, lifelong habits. Comprehensive school health focuses on creating, 'healthy school communities' (Gleddie & Robinson, 2017).

### Priority Focus on Mental Health and Well Being

At the District level, there are numerous ways staff from Central and schools can work collaboratively towards creating and promoting learning environments that are welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy. These include:

- Attending to the physical environment
- Creating a sense of belonging among students, staff and parents
- Building healthy relationships
- Ensuring that there are effective protocols and practices in place for managing behaviour and dealing with conflict
- Creating classrooms that are culturally responsive and inclusive
- Promoting healthy practices that contribute to personal well-being as students develop, learn and grow in their educational journeys

From a focus on the importance of play in the early years, to developing self-regulation and healthy social skills, to helping students develop the motivation, confidence, competence, knowledge and understanding to create goals for their own healthy lifestyles, this is a learning process that spans a student's entire educational experience and beyond.

## Building District Capacity for Creating Healthy School Communities

The District has invested significant resources to towards supporting Priority 2 and the provision of welcoming, high quality learning and working environments. These targeted efforts have included a focus on building staff awareness and capacity, collaborating with community partners to bring additional expertise and supports into the school community and extending District supports and services to reach a broader group of students. The following are examples that speak to the importance and scale of this investment of both community and District resources:

- Between the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years 1.2 million dollars of Central Equity funds have been allocated to provide supports to schools for mental health and physical literacy resources and training
- For the 2017-2018 school year a total of \$2,432,312 of school-based Equity funds were identified to support projects related to mental health supports or initiatives
- For the 2017-2018 school year over 50 District schools partnered with the Family Centre to have their staff work directly in schools to support student and family well-being
- To date in the 2017-2018 school year, through the Regional Collaborative Service Delivery model, mental health therapists from Alberta Health Services attached to school linked teams have provided services to over 785 District students and an additional 93 students remain on the active wait list

Schools across the District are building capacity to address student mental health concerns and to be responsive to sensitive developmental phases and environmental conditions that can impact mental health and well-being. Schools have participated in a range of mental health related professional growth activities intended to increase awareness and knowledge and inform how the school can recognize and respond to students exhibiting potential signs of mental disorders. Many schools worked with their Inclusive Learning team and/or staff from Comprehensive School Health to support students using strategies that reflect the Pyramid of Intervention. Schools are building understanding and capacity in the areas of trauma informed practice, the emerging brain science, resiliency, social-emotional learning, physical literacy and self-regulation. Many catchments or schools are reaching out to community agencies to bring front line mental health supports, such as mental health therapists and success coaches, directly into the school community.

In 2016-2017, Comprehensive School Health lead teachers were identified in schools to support curricular instruction and the development and implementation of strategies to create and maintain a culture of wellness for students in accordance to the *School Act* regulations and the *Guide to Education*. Comprehensive School Health partners with the Alberta Healthy School Community Wellness Fund (School of Public Health, University of Alberta) to provide resources and professional learning for school-based lead teachers. This includes a learning day titled *Are We Healthy and Wise?* This day offers an opportunity for school-based lead teachers to network, learn from, with and alongside community partner organizations and community members invested in healthy school cultures.

This partnership also supported the Student Senate Student Leadership Conference on Mental Health. Hosted on a professional learning day, the student led conference provided opportunities for student leaders to network, learn and create school-based action plans with mental health professionals and community partner organizations. This is the second year that student voice has seen mental health and well-being emerge as one of the top areas of priority amongst District students. Both years the Student Senate has chosen to host a youth focused learning day around this topic to help build awareness, remove stigma around mental health and empower youth with the knowledge and confidence to navigate and manage their own wellness.

With an ongoing focus on building capacity to support training in mental health and physical literacy, communities of practice were held regularly for teachers and guidance counselors. Activities include collaborative learning, book studies, community partnership updates and presentations and training to support their work in schools.

Catchments have been working with Inclusive Learning and Comprehensive School Health to offer professional learning that focuses on a variety of topics to support schools in creating welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy school cultures. Evidence-informed universal approaches, practices and strategies are provided to school staff through catchment PD days, professional learning cohorts and staff meetings. Planning for professional learning is an ongoing process that, in the past, has brought together more than 40 partner organizations in support of Board Policy AE.BP Welcoming, Inclusive, Safe and Healthy Learning and Working Environments. These partners include: Alberta Education–School and Community Supports, Addiction and Mental Health Education Team and Health Promotion Coordinators–Alberta Health Services, Alberta Mentoring Partnership, Canadian Mental Health Association, Canadian Red Cross, ChildTrauma Academy, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Ever Active Schools, The Canadian Centre for Child Protection, The Centre for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, The Centre for Race and Culture, University of Alberta Education Faculty and Zebra Child Protection, among others.

Catchment capacity building has also been supported through the Go-To Educator model developed by Dr. Stan Kutcher (Dalhousie University) and funded by Alberta Health Services. Go-To Educator training is a one-day workshop designed for staff in schools. It is evidence-based training designed to develop mental health literacy through common definitions, brain based research and an understanding of mental disorders. Comprehensive School Health works with Andrew Baxter, a mental health therapist with Alberta Health Services, to offer Train the Trainer workshops as well as the one-day certification training. At present across the District there are more than 50 core trainers, who have been trained by Andrew Baxter within a train the trainer model, to provide the one-day certification training. Through the work of the core trainers within their catchments, approximately 500 additional District staff have completed the one-day workshop with certification. Accompanying the go-to training is the Teen Mental Health Curriculum designed for students. Planning for professional learning to support the implementation of this resource in schools is currently underway. In addition, a research project to gather data related to the impact of this training in schools is currently under development.

Additionally, our District continues to ensure that every school has at least one Safe Contact in support of Board Policy [HFA.BP Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity](#). Training continues to be offered at both introductory and advanced levels, with resources shared to help support students and staff. Training for Gay Straight Alliance (GSA)/Queer Straight Alliance (QSA) Advisors is offered annually to provide an opportunity for advisors of the more than 70 GSAs operating in K-12 schools to connect with one another, share successes, navigate challenges and learn about available resources. In the spring of 2017, a cross provincial Alberta–British Columbia educator network was formed between Edmonton Public Schools, other Alberta school districts, with support from the ARC Foundation of British Columbia and the Stollery Foundation in Alberta. The purpose of this initiative is to create a network for educators to share policy, resources and best practices. This network will also provide resources (video clips, presentations and facilitation guides) to help strengthen the training of our Safe Contacts, capacity building District-wide and education for parents.

Professional learning on physical literacy was another Comprehensive School Health initiative. Physical literacy is a universal whole school approach to teaching physical education. Physical literacy moves beyond a focus on individualized sport development activities and towards a games-based approach to promote self-sufficiency, self-regulation and social-emotional learning (Castelli, Barcelona, & Bryant, 2015). District staff were provided opportunities to gain instructor certification in Dance Play, Move and Play, High Five Social Emotional Learning, PLAY Superhero training and National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) in physical literacy. In addition, a two-day Nuts and Bolts of Physical Literacy workshop is offered to K-12 educators and Inclusive Learning staff, and provides assessment certification, guidance in working with the current physical education curriculum and access to evidence-based resources. In the 2016-2017 school year, 153 staff were certified, and 16 schools received classroom based coaching and mentoring supports through Curriculum and Resource Support and Comprehensive School Health.

The Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD) has also partnered with the District to provide school staff with professional development presentations to increase awareness and knowledge of mental health challenges that children and adolescents may experience. These presentations provide evidence-based strategies from mental



health professionals and include topics such as trauma-informed classrooms, supporting students who experience anxiety, understanding and building executive functioning skills, supporting self-regulation, a review of ADHD and practical strategies, and understanding depression and self-injurious behavior. Through the Caregiver Education Series, the RCSD offers similar presentations to parents and caregivers in District school sites. Under development, and in partnership with Edmonton Catholic Schools and the RCSD, videos for parents and caregivers are being created. Conversation guides and strategy tip sheets will be included with the videos. Topics for the videos will include, but are not limited to:

- Tolerable stress vs. toxic stress
- Stigma and mental health
- Serve and return relationships
- Technology and the brain
- Play your way to mental health
- Healthy sleep habits
- Empathy and connection

A learning day was provided for District teachers and pre-service teachers on teaching sexual health through a welcoming, inclusive, safe and healthy approach. The intention of the learning day was to provide participants with the opportunity to think about the teaching of sexual health through an approach that reflects the comprehensive, evidence-based, scientific and inclusive education that aligns with and supports Board Policy AE.BP Welcoming, Inclusive, Safe and Healthy Learning and Working Environments. The District partnered with the following agencies to plan and deliver this day: the University of Alberta Education Faculty, The Canadian Red Cross, Compass Centre for Sexual Wellness, PRIDE Centre of Edmonton, Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services, HIV Edmonton, The Sexual Assault Centre of Edmonton and Zebra Child Protection.

Schools are provided with regular updates via a Comprehensive School Health e-newsletter, which includes information about professional learning, supports and services, supporting District guides, school grant opportunities, lesson plans and school-based exemplars of integrating a Comprehensive School Health approach. This past year the *Teaching Sexual Health and Supporting Healthy Relationships Toolkit (Bullying Prevention)* guides were also revised with updated resources that reflect the *Amended School Act*.

The District's work is complemented and supported by several initiatives or resources related to health and well-being that are sponsored and delivered by the broader community. Mental Health Awareness Week is May 7 to 11, 2018. Schools have been invited to take part in [Hats on! For Mental Health](#) to raise awareness on the importance of caring for mental health and confronting stigma. Stigma continues to be the lead reason children and youth do not access services and supports. Numerous resources have been shared with schools to support their work, including [canwetalk.ca](#), a website sponsored by the Alberta Teachers' Association and the Canadian Mental Health Association; and the following websites:

- [211 Resource Lists](#)
- [Action Schools! BC: Promoting Health Living](#) website
- [Alberta Education's Mental Health Matters](#) website
- Alberta Family Wellness Initiative - [Brain Development, Lifelong Health Topics and Videos](#)
- [Caregiver Education Series](#) and [Professional Learning Series](#)
- [Children's Mental Health Learning Series](#)
- [Elementary Mental Health Toolkit](#) (aligns with current Program of Studies)
- [Glenrose Family 2 Family Discussions](#)
- Heart-Mind Online website
- [Junior High Mental Health Toolkit](#) (aligns with current Program of Studies)
- [Kids Help Phone](#) website
- [Mental Health Provincial Teacher Resource List](#)
- [Supporting Every Student Learning Series](#) for staff (supported by conversation guides)



District direction will continue to be shaped by supporting implementation of Board Policy AE.BP Welcoming, Inclusive, Safe and Healthy Learning and Working Environments, as well as through emerging directions from upcoming new curriculum implementation, implementation of the new *Teaching Quality Standard* (September 2019) and by further analysis of areas of success and areas for growth as identified through District feedback.

The District's work in this area to date has increased awareness and confidence amongst staff and given them a better understanding of mental health and well-being. However, the need for services in the area of student mental health is great. The work to build capacity within the District will be ongoing. This work is not that of Education alone. With this in mind we will also continue to build relationships with our health partners in the community to help ensure that every District school has access to the supports and resources they need to support their students' well-being and success.



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