

DATE: May 17, 2022

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Allocation from Surplus for Mental Health Supports Update

ORIGINATOR: Kathy Muhlethaler, Assistant Superintendent

RESOURCE STAFF: Lisa Butt, Ian Crichton, Tracy Mastrangelo, Ann Parker, Jana Pedersen

REFERENCE: [Approved Board Minutes - May 25, 2021](#)

ISSUE

At the May 25, 2021 Board meeting, the Board of Trustees passed the following motion:

That the Board allocate up to \$1 million dollars within operating surplus funds for mental health supports and programs for the 2021–2022 school year. Additionally, it was requested that Administration report back on the use of these funds.

BACKGROUND

The operating surplus funds provided by the Board have been used to hire additional staff to provide mental health and wellness supports and programs for the 2021–2022 school year. As a result of these funds, the following positions have been added to the Specialized Learning Supports (SLS) Decision Unit for the current school year:

Position	Full Time Equivalent (FTE)	Unit Cost
Social Worker	4.2 FTE	\$482,887
Wellness Coach	7.0 FTE	\$584,021
Total	11.2 FTE	\$1,066,908

Mental Health Capacity Building (MHCB) Initiative

The Mental Health Capacity Building initiative is a three-year partnership agreement with Alberta Health Services. The 2021–2022 school year is the second year of this partnership.

The MHCB health program is guided by the understanding that mental and emotional well-being for children, youth and families can be developed, nurtured and supported through promotion and prevention programming delivered by wellness coaches based within school communities. Wellness coaches connect with catchments to provide universal programming in Division schools that align with

Alberta Health Services' [Tier Model of Addiction and Mental Health Services](#) and the Division's [Coordinated Approach to Mental Health](#).

During the 2020–2021 school year, which was the first year of the MHCBC initiative, the Division was able to hire 13 wellness coaches and a program coordinator through the funds provided by AHS for this initiative. Thirteen wellness coaches provided one wellness coach for each catchment school group. While the full funds for the year were provided by AHS, wellness coaches were not in place at schools until mid-way through the year due to the time it took to finalize the contract and hire staff. This enabled the Division to hire more wellness coaches for half the year than if the program had begun in September. It was anticipated that for the 2021–2022 school, the MHCBC funds would provide approximately half the number of wellness coaches for the entire school year.

CURRENT SITUATION

Wellness Coaches

The 2021–2022 school year is the second year of this three-year partnership with AHS. With the Board's allocation of \$1 million operational surplus funds for mental health support, the Division has been able to continue to contract 13 wellness coaches with seven coaches being funded through the access to operational surplus provided by the Board. MHCBC funds have provided for six wellness coaches and one program coordinator in alignment with the MHCBC contractual agreement.

Wellness coaches promote positive mental health in children, youth and families in the communities where they live. Their research-based best practices demonstrate that mental and emotional well-being can be developed, nurtured and supported through promotion and prevention efforts. MHCBC programming builds capacity of knowledge and skills through universal supports and services including:

- School-based programs and sessions using AHS resources
- Catchment-based wellness presentations on topics such as healthy relationships, conflict resolution, self-care, stress awareness, mental health literacy
- Parent information sessions related to mental health and wellness topics
- Staff learning sessions on mental health including: Psychological First-Aid in a Pandemic and Go-To Educators Mental Health Literacy.
- Student programming during spring and summer breaks
- Consultation with school teams and SLS colleagues to support students with social-emotional-behavioural/mental health needs including sharing resources and strategies with teachers and/or parents
- Support referrals to outside agencies where applicable—connecting to community mental health service providers

The table below reflects the services and supports from September 2021 to present, provided through the additional seven wellness coaches funded through operational surplus:

Students served: 21,995	Staff served: 812	Parent/Community Members served: 670
<p>Student Presentation Themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships with Ourselves and Others • Stress and Your Brain • MH Prevention • Wellness Capacity Building <p>Student Programs – Evidence-Based, approved AHS programming:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worry Woos • Kimochis • Rainbows: Grief and Loss • Wolf Pack - healthy masculinity • Grl Pwr - confidence building and leadership skills 	<p>Staff Capacity Learning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go-To Educators: Mental Health Literacy • Psychological First Aid in a Pandemic • Mental Health through Circles • Staff Wellness 	<p>Community Agency Connections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Enhancement - mental health supports for individuals on the Autism Spectrum • Digital Literacy - parent sessions on social media influence on children and youth • CNIB - mental health impact and supports for individuals experiencing vision loss <p>Parenting Sessions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kids Have Stress Too • Circle of Security • Triple P Parenting

Feedback gathered indicates a positive ripple effect occurring as information and strategies are shared during sessions and supports offered by wellness coaches.

Principals shared:

“In the past 2 years we have had the opportunity to address student mental health and wellness in a more proactive way. By providing responsive PD, supports for students via online presentations and in-class presentations we have provided general support for many students. Also, when specific cases that require additional support arise from either students asking for help after these sessions or directly to the teacher, we are able to streamline them to services (SLS, etc.) faster. The result is that we have been able to reduce the number of students in crisis and have also increased the attendance of students last year who were often away due to anxiety and other mental health needs.”

“The MHCBC coaches have been able to impact a greater number of students... for a variety of reasons. The ability of the coaches to meet as a group and develop expertise and skill sets that complement each other allows for a broader range of quality services to be available to students and staff. The practice of inviting multiple classes to online presentations has resulted in more students accessing services and information. The flexibility of the model has ensured that services are provided in a timely manner. The capacity building approach allows classroom teachers and school personnel to gain knowledge and skills to recognize and address issues and concerns at the tier one and tier two level of pyramid of intervention.”

Social Worker Supports

Social workers provide support to schools through our nine school-linked teams, which every school can access to address student needs. These school-linked teams are assigned to a group of schools and work directly with principals when students or families require a wide range of specialized supports. One of the primary responsibilities of these social worker roles is to work with principals and school staff to support students with social, emotional, behavioural and mental health needs. This includes family support, identifying and removing barriers to access learning, as well as the provision of connecting families to other comprehensive supports.

For the 2021–2022 school year, the additional surplus funds were used to add 4.2 social worker consultant positions to the school-linked teams resulting in 13.5 social workers available to support the nine school-linked teams.

These additional 4.2 social worker consultants have responded to 167 referrals so far this school year, providing supports and services including direct student mental health intervention, suicide risk assessments, supporting families in crisis, addressing barriers to school engagement, critical incident responses, and consultation with school administration.

For the 2022–2023 school year, the Division plans to retain the additional 4.2 social worker positions within SLS in alignment with the provision of targeted and specialized mental health supports for schools as a priority. The funding for these positions exists within the projected SLS budget for 2021–2022 as a result of a surplus in the funds targeted for external service contracts.

KEY POINTS

- The \$1 million operational surplus funds were used to hire seven additional wellness coaches and 4.2 social workers to provide enhanced mental health supports to schools.
- Wellness coaches continue to promote positive mental health by creating connections in schools in order to increase the capacity of staff, students and school community members.
- Social worker consultants' broad scope of work provides the skill and ability to meet many needs within a school, including the provision of targeted and specialized supports.
- Next year, there will be a reduction in the number of wellness coaches due to the discontinuation of access to operational surplus funds. It is anticipated that six wellness coaches and a program manager will continue to support schools in alignment with the funding provided through AHS for the third year of this contract.
- The 4.2 social workers positions will be continued for the 2022–2023 school year as a priority to provide access to targeted and specialized mental health and wellness support.

JP:kd