

Rocky Mountain School District

Mental Health in Schools Strategy

Background Information

Within the *Mental Health in Schools Strategy* (2020) the BC Education System is identified by the Ministry of Education and Child Care as the foundation in the provincial system of mental well-being, or positive mental health. In Rocky Mountain School District (RMSD) we recognize schools as playing a lead role in supporting the mental health of children and youth in schools through mental health promotion, and as watchful intervenors guiding individuals in distress along a pathway to care. RMSD strives to reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness and supports students and families in accessing appropriate care.

Mental Health Defined

“Mental Health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community.”

World Health Organization http://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/

Mental Illness Defined

Mental illnesses are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood or behaviour associated with significant distress and impaired functioning. Examples of specific mental illnesses include:

- Anxiety disorders
- Mood disorders eg. Depression
- Eating disorders
- Psychotic disorders e.g. schizophrenia
- Personality disorders
- Gambling disorder
- Substance-related disorders

Public Health Agency <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cd-mc/mi-mm/index-eng.php>

Foundation: Compassionate Learning Community

In RMSD we recognize wellbeing is a shared responsibility throughout the organization. Through individual and collaborative action employees work together to promote health and well-being for all. Students learn best in a safe and encouraging environment where adults understand and care about themselves and others. Compassionate Systems Leadership in education guides children, youth and adults through supportive relationships and creative opportunities leading to student success.

Objectives:

- Encourage, empower and nurture employees through meaningful professional learning, mentoring and networking opportunities, and leadership development to grow their understanding of a trauma informed compassionate learning community.
- Foster a stigma free culture that encourages self-care and mutual support for well-being amongst colleagues across the School District.
- Introduce all educators to *MindUP for Educators: The Science and Practice of Self-Care and Mindful Teaching* to learn, reflect, and develop strategies to help manage stress and support mental well-being.

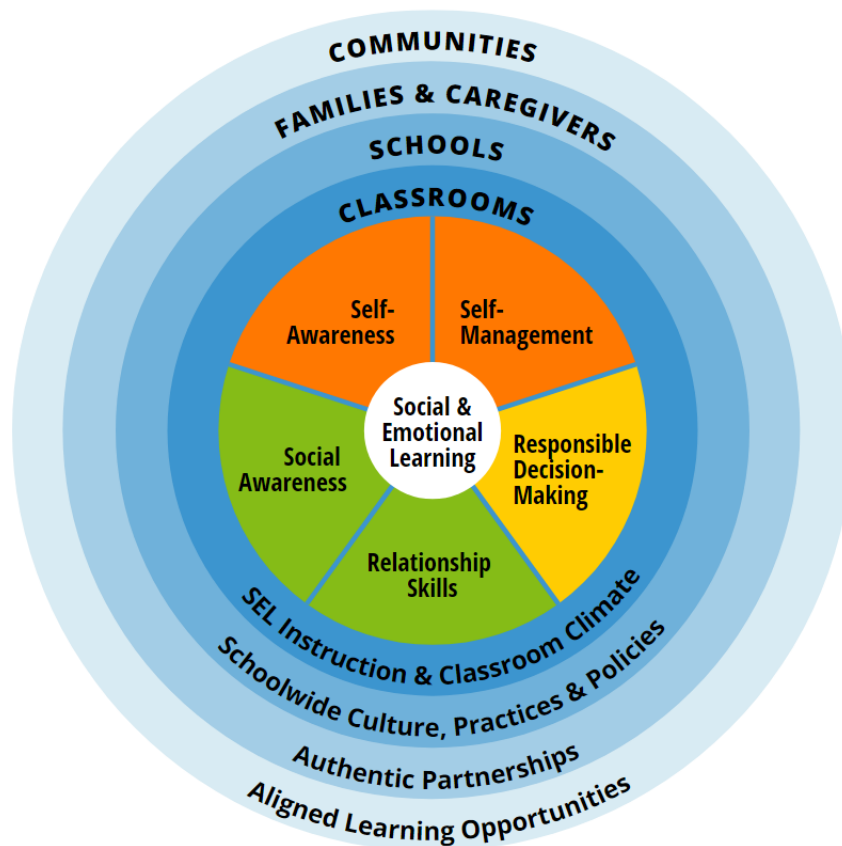
Actions	Anchor resources
Encourage Compassionate Systems Leadership Network, comprised of professionals from all levels of the organization, to, where possible, identify and implement systemic actions that can support staff well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • erise – Compassionate Systems Leadership
Well at Work Champions present in each school and each department to promote staff health and wellness programs and initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EdCan Well at Work Community of Practice
Professional development offered to all educators on the topic of Well-Being and Mindful Teaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MindUP for Educators: Well-being and Mindful Teaching: Part 1 • MindUP for Educators: Well-being and Mindful Teaching: Part II

Mental health promotion in RMSD is built upon three core elements:

1. Social Emotional Learning – schools, along with families and communities, have a role to play in teaching students the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need to navigate the world independently.
2. Mental Health Literacy – the knowledge held by individuals to care for their own mental well-being, or to support the well-being of others. Mental health literacy seeks to identify the risk factors and signs of mental health challenges and invite conversation, reducing the stigma around the topic of mental health and the benefits of seeking support.
3. Systems of Support – when a child, youth or adult is in distress, schools play an important role in supporting an individual along the pathway to care within collaborative and integrated support services.

Core Element 1: Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

SEL is the set of competencies that students develop to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve goals, show empathy for others, maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.



The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2020) addresses 5 broad categories of skills that enhance psychological and academic outcomes within classrooms, school, families, and community. These include:

Self-Awareness : The ability to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behaviour across contexts.

Self – Management: The ability to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviours effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.

Social Awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures & contexts.

Relationship Skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.

Responsible Decision-Making: The ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions across diverse situations. (CASEL, 2020)

Children who participate in SEL instruction are shown to have improved classroom behaviour, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and improved academic achievement (Durlak et. al, 2011). Additionally, teachers who provide regular, predictable instruction in social emotional skills can expect to realize a correlated benefit to their individual well-being (Schonert-Reichl, Whitehead & Baelan, 2023).

Objectives:

- Implement explicit, systematic instruction in social emotional learning as a universal mental health promotion strategy to build resilience in all children.
- Teachers will develop competence in providing instruction and assessing social emotional skills.

Actions	Anchor Resources
Adopt SEL Framework articulating the developmental continuum of Social Emotional Skills for students Pre-K to grade 12.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RMSD Social Emotional Framework
Train teachers and other staff in social emotional skill instruction using anchor resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BC Educators MindUp for Life • <i>The MindUp Curriculum: Brain-Focused Strategies for Learning - and Living</i> • Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Educators (EASE)
Liaison with Indigenous partners to ensure social emotional learning and mental health supports are culturally safe and responsive to local community.	

Core Element 2: Mental Health Literacy

Teachers are responsible for contributing to the growth and development of children and youth in their care, including the mental health of students. The goal of positive mental health awareness is to help students and staff understand mental health, and the tools and strategies that strengthen mental well-being. A comprehensive school health approach encourages healthy lifestyle choices and recognizes that schools can impact healthy behaviour over time.

Mental illness most often begins in adolescence, yet people who work with youth daily do not recognize and understand mental illness and how it impacts young people in a school setting. When students experience challenge, supportive adults will recognize distress and provide information and resources to students when they need them. Improved understanding of wellbeing can decrease stigma of mental illness and reduce barriers to treatment.

In a recent national survey 70% of Canadian teachers identified a need for more knowledge about mental health and illness (CTF, 2020). SD6 will seek to equip teachers with the knowledge and resources that they need to support all members of our school communities. Teachers will develop a common language and understanding of mental health.

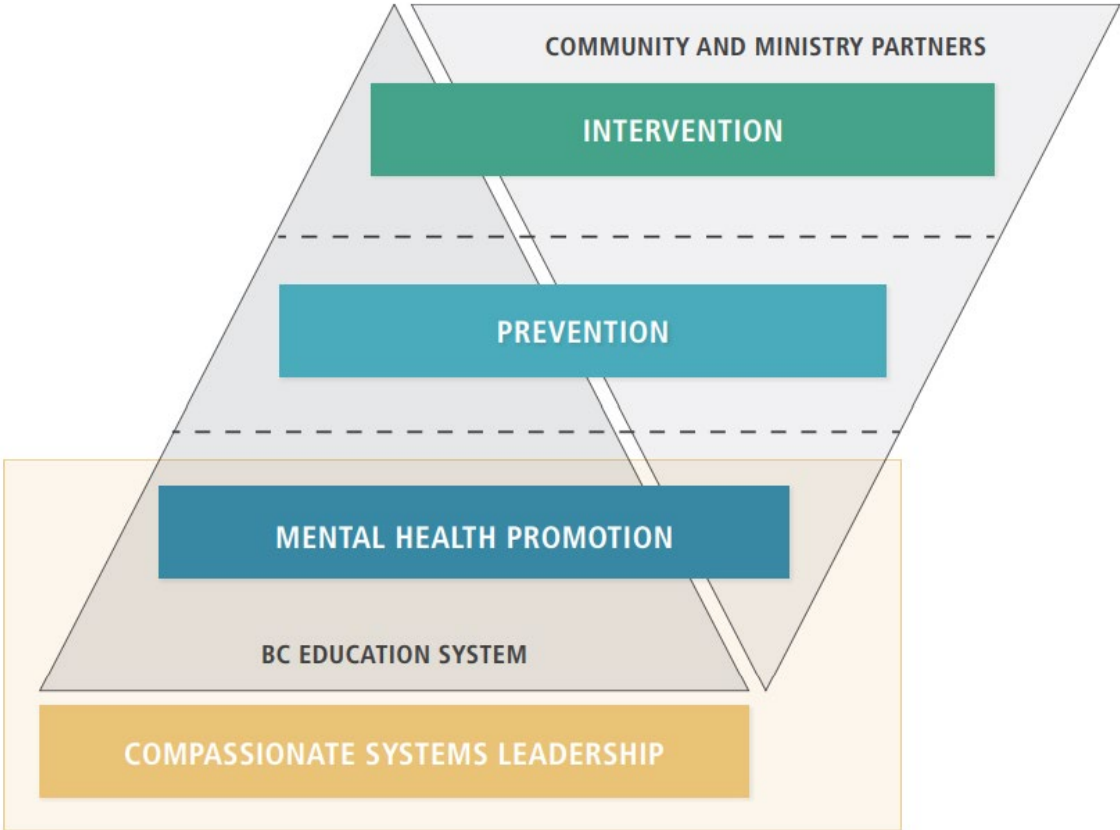
Youth, as friends and peers, are often the first responders to young people who are experiencing a mental health challenge. Mental Health Literacy instruction for students will improve their health and well-being, their understanding of stress and how to manage, as well as grow their personal capacity to seek mental health support for themselves or in support of a peer.

Mental Health Literacy is not only addressed in Physical and Health Education. The K-12 Curriculum identifies Personal and Social Core Competencies. These competencies, related to mental wellness, are embedded across learning environments.

Actions	Anchor Resources
All staff will be provided with the opportunity to participate in <i>Learn Mental Health Literacy</i> , presented by the University of British Columbia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learn Mental Health Literacy UBC
In collaboration with Interior Health, coordinate initiatives across SD6 to teach that healthy choices influence, and are influenced by our physical, emotional and mental well-being.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• BCPHE Curricular Learning Standards related to Personal Health and Safety (K-10)• <i>Health Promoting Schools</i> (Interior Health)• Healthy Schools BC• wellbeing.ca
Scope and sequence of BC Physical Health and Education (BCPHE) Curricular Learning Standards Related to Personal Health and Safety (K-10) with supporting resource materials made available to school staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Scope and Sequence of BCPHE Curricular Learning Standards Related to Personal Health and Safety (K-10).• Mental Health Literacy (High School)

<p>Coordinated initiatives across RMSD to support consent in healthy relationships and the reduction of gender-based violence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scope and Sequence of BCPHE Curricular Learning Standards Related to Personal Health and Safety (K - 10). • Scope and Sequence of consent education for all RMSD high school students in grades 11 and 12. • BC Ministry of Education and Child Care erase – Gender-Based Violence
<p>Identify helpful resources for youth supporting youth with well-being and access to care when in distress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mental Health Literacy • Student Mental Health Toolkit • erase Reporting Tool • Balancing Our Minds – Mental Health Toolkit for Youth by Youth

Core Element 3: Systems of Support



The Ministry of Education recognizes schools as playing a key role in building resilience and supporting the mental health of children and youth. Schools collaborate across Ministries and through community to support a student in distress along a pathway to care.

RMSD will actively engage with community partners to promote school connectedness and the capacity of staff to harness protective factors for all students. As a trauma informed District, staff in RMSD will endeavour to understand the complex issues facing students and support safety, choice, and control to promote healing.

Objectives:

- Continuous networking, coordination, and collaboration between SD6 staff and community partners to build capacity to ensure students access services and more intensive support as needed.
- Active promotion of student and family resources offered across government Ministries for individuals seeking care.
- Work with students and families to evaluate and inform mental health priorities and evaluate and measure system improvements.

Action	Resource
Intentional design of safe, caring and stigma free learning environments.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma Free Society • Continuum of Student Supports in each RMSD school.
Implementation of Community Care Teams to cooperatively address the needs of children, youth and families who require support for mental health and wellbeing and to consider community collaboration in the provision of care.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Resource Guides available in communities across the District.
Develop student knowledge of community support services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Health and Well-Being tab on District website to feature student resources. • erase Report It Tool.
Support parent knowledge of community support services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Health and Well-Being tab on District website to feature parent resources • erase Report It Tool.
Build relationships between multi-disciplinary partners to intervene when there is a concern in regard to school safety.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Violence Threat Risk Assessment Protocol Guide for B.C. • erase: School Safety

Anchor Resources

Anchor resources provide all supportive adults within RMSD with the foundational knowledge they need to support health and well-being. Additional or supplementary learning is always encouraged.

Social Emotional Learning
MindUp RMSD Social Emotional Framework (<i>In Development</i>)
Mental Health Literacy
UBC Mental Health Literacy (Grade 8 – 10) Mental Health Curriculum Guide (8-10) Mental Health Curriculum Guide (Grade 6 – 8) (<i>In development</i>)
Comprehensive School Health
Healthy Schools BC
Professional Development Resources
Anchor Resource (Teacher): <i>Using the SEL Framework to Support Behaviour Intervention Planning. (In development)</i>
Anchor Resource (Administrator): <i>Using Mind Up as A Social Emotional Learning Program</i> available to administrators.
Anchor Resource (Teacher): <i>The MindUp Curriculum: Brain-Focused Strategies for Learning-and Living.</i>

Additional Resources Staff

UBC Social & Emotional Learning Resource Finder
Heart-Mind Online
Everyday Anxiety Strategies for Educators (EASE)

References:

CASEL (2020).

BC Ministry of Education and Child Care. (2020). [Mental Health in Schools \(MHIS\) strategy.](#)

Canadian Teacher’s Federation. (2020). [Teacher Mental Health Check-in survey.](#)

Schonert-Reichl, K., Whitehead, J. & Baelen, R. [Implementing a Mindfulness-Based Social and Emotional Learning Program with Early Adolescents During COVID: Lessons from the Field.](#)