

January 12, 2021

Memorandum to: Chairs of District School Boards
Directors of Education
School Authorities

From: Stephen Lecce
Minister of Education

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister of Education

Subject: Student Mental Health Action Kit and Resources for Staff Well-Being

We recognize the incredible efforts of educators, school and school board staff who serve students daily in classrooms across Ontario, working in partnership with parents. Thank you for all you have done and continue to do to create welcoming and inclusive classrooms, whether physical or virtual, that help our students learn and grow.

We are writing to provide you with additional information to support educators' efforts to promote student mental health and well-being at school during these difficult times, as well as resources for staff well-being.

The mental health and well-being of students and staff is of critical importance. Schools are an ideal setting for mental health promotion, prevention, early identification and intervention. Students who report feeling mentally well, are more ready to learn, feel a stronger sense of belonging at school, and perform better academically.

Although educators are not mental health professionals, they have an important role in creating mentally healthy classroom environments, noticing students whom they may be concerned about and teaching students about maintaining good mental health.

School Mental Health Ontario, school board mental health leadership teams, and other partner organizations have mobilized a series of lesson plans, resources and supports designed to help educators with this important role.

Student Mental Health Action Kit

The ministry asked School Mental Health Ontario to develop a Student Mental Health Action Kit, which will be launched on Tuesday January 12, 2021. This Action Kit will be available on the [School Mental Health Ontario website](#). In addition to learning resources for educators, the Action Kit includes student-friendly tools that can help students prepare for learning related to mental health.

In the coming weeks, the Action Kit will also be populated with resources and lesson plans that educators may use as appropriate, to support student mental health literacy and to encourage help-seeking during this challenging time. These practical resources will focus in three key areas:

1. Promoting Wellness During Challenging Times
2. Supporting Student Mental Health Learning
3. Encouraging Early Help-Seeking When Mental Health Problems Arise

We recognize the importance of ensuring that educators are prepared to support this learning. School Mental Health Ontario will help educators with implementation supports offered in collaboration with school board mental health leadership teams and other partner organizations.

As you know, the ministry is providing additional one-time funding for school boards to support student mental health which may be used to help facilitate implementation. More details regarding funding will be provided soon.

Ongoing Commitment

This Student Mental Health Action Kit is just a starting point. School Mental Health Ontario will continue to develop new resources and further training will be offered based on the evolving mental health needs of students. Coaching support for school board mental health leadership teams to deepen the work locally will also continue to be available from School Mental Health Ontario.

As students continue to navigate a challenging school year, we want to ensure that they have the tools they need to support their mental health and well-being. Educators are very well-positioned to help promote student mental health each day at school and maintain a sense of hope during these difficult times.

The resources and lesson plans are being developed for both elementary and secondary students. Educators are not required to conduct formal assessment and evaluation of student work related to these resources and lesson plans unless the materials are directly connected to particular curriculum expectations. It is the ministry's expectation that educators will continue to support learning on student mental health throughout the school year. These classroom resources and lesson plans are available for educators to use, as appropriate.

Resources for Staff Well-being

We are well aware that the mental health and well-being for students, staff and families are inextricably linked, particularly at this time.

We are pleased to inform you about some additional resources to support staff well-being. The Psychiatrist in Chief at Sinai Health and her team have developed a series of videos in response to the pandemic.

These videos were created as peer-to-peer resources – one professional to another – that offer practical tips and strategies that can be shared with educators and also model strategies that adults may use with students. These relevant strategies would be beneficial for both staff and students. These videos are available on the [Sinai Health](#) website. These videos were not funded by the ministry and were independently developed by Sinai Health. The audio dialogue in the videos is available in English only; however, transcripts are available through the video settings in English and French. To access transcripts, users can turn on transcripts, and then select English or French language for subtitles from the settings button.

Professional learning materials that highlight a variety of supports for the mental health and well-being of students, staff and parents/families are available for staff on the ministry's Virtual Learning Environment.

Boards may choose to allocate funds from the Mental Health and Well-Being Bundle to support other staff well-being needs and initiatives.

Thank you for the ongoing partnership as we continue to keep schools safe and contribute to stopping the province-wide spread of COVID-19 during this time.

Sincerely,

Stephen Lecce
Minister

Nancy Naylor
Deputy Minister