



# YRDSB **Student Mental Health and Addictions** Strategy

A Holistic Approach to Mental Health

***Within Us, Between Us, Around Us***





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# Message from the Director

The mental health and well-being of our students and staff is a top priority for our Board. Creating safe, healthy and inclusive learning and working environments where all know they matter and belong is paramount to the success of individuals.

When our students and staff walk through the doors of our schools and workplaces, we must ensure that they feel affirmed, safe and have a sense of belonging that fosters positive mental health. When an individual feels that they are honoured, included and have a sense of belonging, we create the conditions to ensure they can focus on their success.

The pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges that have affected the mental health of many. Now more than ever, we must centre mental health to ensure that we create the conditions to improve student success and well-being.

To do this, we must understand the uniqueness of all identities and focus on creating conditions and supports that acknowledge and celebrate our diversity. Our Board is taking a holistic approach that seeks to address the many parts of mental health, which are within, between and around individuals.

These three priorities focus on individual lived experiences, relationships, environments, communities, past trauma, beliefs and spirituality so that we can address mental health concerns while also looking upstream to create the conditions to prevent illness.

By focusing on the needs of individuals, we can continue to learn what supports are needed to ensure we are meeting the needs of people where they are by providing them with culturally responsive and reflective learning environments and services that address their specific needs.

Fostering positive mental health is not a one size fits all approach, and we are committed to ensuring that each individual receives the support they need.

## **Louise Sirisko**

Director of Education

York Region District School Board

# Message from the Chair

Every four years, the Board of Trustees for the York Region District School Board establishes a Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) to guide system direction. One of the priorities of the current MYSP is to foster well-being and mental health by creating safe, healthy and inclusive learning and working environments.

Over the next four years, this work will be guided by our new YRDSB Student Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, which focuses on three interrelated priorities. I know this work was guided by consultations with staff, students and community members, and I want to thank everyone who took the time to contribute to these important discussions and the development of this strategy. In reflecting the voices of our community, we are better able to ensure we can meet the diverse needs of our students.

This strategy takes a holistic approach to mental health that meets individuals where they are and takes into account their unique lived experiences to create supports that are specific to each individual. Mental health looks different for everyone and our approach centres the needs of each individual to ensure each person receives the support they require to succeed.

Through the approach this strategy takes we will ensure that students in our Board can enter our schools feeling affirmed, safe and included. The healing-centred approach will focus on the changes that need to take place in the community, school and class environments to foster positive mental health.

Through collaboration with students, staff and families, we will continue to meet the needs of all individuals and ensure that the supports and resources we put in place are identity affirming, culturally responsive and honour the unique lived experiences of each individual.

## **Allan Tam**

Chair of Trustees

York Region District School Board



# Overview Statement

One of the priorities in the Trustees' Multi-Year Strategic Plan (MYSP) is to **Foster Well-Being and Mental Health** in both our students and our staff members, with the ultimate goal of improving student success and well-being.

The YRDSB Mental Health and Addictions Strategy also supports the system actions laid out in the Director's Annual Plan, which highlights the goal of **building safe, healthy, and inclusive learning and working environments where all feel they matter and belong**.

## Mission and Strategy Priorities

To advance students' mental health and well-being through promotion of health, enhancing capacity, prevention of illness, and support when needed, in a way that honours the student where they are, fosters inclusion, inspires belonging and builds community.

The 2022–2026 YRDSB Student Mental Health and Addiction Strategy focuses upon three interrelated priority areas:

### Within:

Provide identity affirming, culturally responsive, and relevant mental health promotion, illness prevention, and intervention.

### Between:

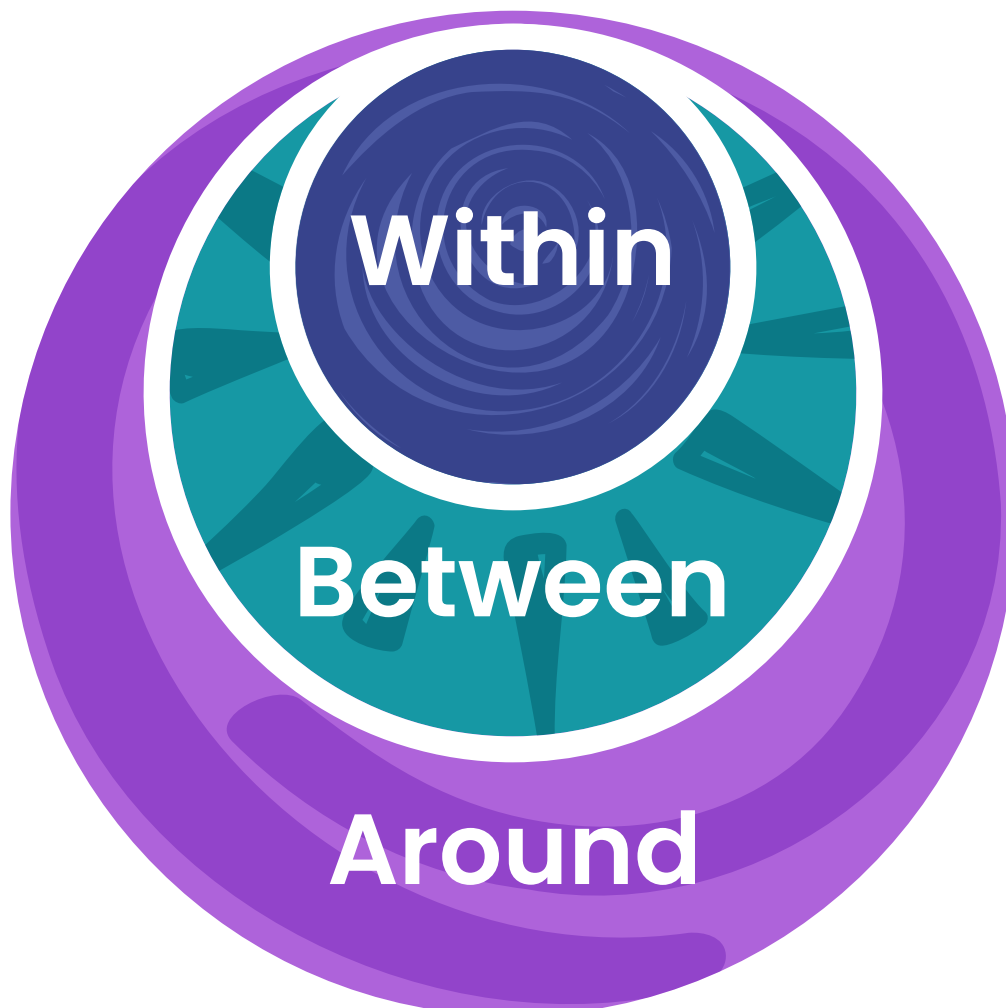
Build capacity, understanding and resources with people, families, and communities in YRDSB to address trauma, racial trauma and other forms of harm, while supporting healing and growth.

### Around:


Build safe, mentally healthy, and inclusive learning environments where students feel they matter and belong. Create Identity Specific collaboration and care and pathways that are responsive to students and families.

# Vision Statement

Mental Health and wellness have many different meanings, understandings, and expressions across and within cultures, and communities. It is something we all have. Our mental health can be shaped by our experiences (past and or present-lived or living) as well as many other factors. Mental Health is neither good nor bad. At different times/phases in an (student) individual's life mental health and wellness can look and feel different, and this is okay. Our mental health is enhanced when an individual can develop a sense of meaning, mattering, belonging, hope and connectedness within communities, schools, and families. It involves the ability to feel, think and act in ways that enhance one's unique ability to enjoy life and navigate challenges. A holistic approach to mental health acknowledges the many parts of mental health. These are interrelated parts that lie Within an individual, parts that lie Between individuals such as in relationships, and the parts that exist Around individuals and groups, such as in community and the learning/social environment.







Acknowledging that there are many different individual and community understandings of the parts of mental health:

## Within:

can be further explained as the gifts and assets of our self/spirit, various intersecting identities, and traditions, as well as our cognitive and emotional well-being;

## Between:

can be further explained as the social aspect of the relationships we have with other people, our families, and communities;

## Around:

can be further explained as the families, communities, and learning/social environments that surround us. This also encompasses experiences of different life events, as well as systemic factors such as oppression, colonialism and racism, discrimination and marginalization. In addition, it includes access to culturally representative, and responsive support and resources.

# Values and Principles

## **Inclusivity** (adapted from the [YRDSB Mission, Vision and Values](#))

We demonstrate equity and inclusivity in all that we do. We demand an environment in which all students, staff, parents, and our community feel valued and have a sense of belonging. We expect empathy, mutual respect and understanding to be demonstrated in our words and actions. We are inclusive of varied understandings of concepts such as wellness, mental health and healing and aim to be inclusive of multiple ways of knowing in our mission.

## **Relationships** (adapted from the [YRDSB Mission, Vision and Values](#))

We value positive, meaningful relationships with students, staff, parents, and our community. We value diversity of opinion, sincere dialogue, and community engagement.

## Upstream Thinking

We focus on the creation of conditions that foster mental health and well-being through proactive planning, community collaboration, and person-centered approaches.

## Culturally Responsive and Reflective Services

We provide and partner with services that acknowledge and are responsive to students' intersecting identities of race, age, gender, abilities, language, socioeconomic status, and faith.

## Healing Centered ([Dr. S. Ginwright](#))

There are many social/political contexts that can contribute to a student's experience of trauma or harm. To foster healing, this approach focuses on the changes that need to take place in the community, school, and class environment. A healing-centered approach is holistic involving culture, spirituality (sense of self), civic action and collective healing. Trauma is not only experienced at the individual level so a more holistic/collective approach to fostering well-being is needed.





# Priority Area Strategy Actions

## Within:

Provide identity affirming, culturally responsive, and relevant mental health promotion, illness prevention, and intervention.

### System Actions

#### **1.1 Promote student voice and agency to deepen the understanding of mental health promotion, prevention and interventions that are identity affirming and culturally responsive.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Implementing mental health promotion initiatives that are identity affirming and anti-oppressive.
- Providing ongoing mental health professional learning for educators and staff emphasizing upstream, mental health-promoting classroom practices, and the understanding of mental health from a social framework that acknowledges the impact of systemic oppression and colonialism.
- Enhancing and extending of student leadership and voice which is identity affirming and supports student agency.

#### **1.2 Create and promote mental health services, support pathways and service protocols that are culturally responsive, identity affirming, and trauma informed.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Providing YRDSB mental health supports that are culturally responsive, and trauma informed.
- Developing and communicating clear pathways for accessing support and service (to care, through care and from care).
- Utilizing service protocols to help support students during critical incidents such as suicide intervention and traumatic event responses.

### Priority Area: Within

**1.3 Promote reciprocal relationships with communities and families to empower and promote learning from and with communities and families about student mental health and how to support holistic ways of healing and growth.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Continuing to build and maintain partnerships and collaborations with community agencies/groups that are identity affirming, culturally responsive and linguistically reflective of community needs.
- Raising the mental health literacy of all, ensuring reciprocal interrelationships.
- Learning from each other about the importance of community voice and input.
- Through mechanisms such as community forums, to share understandings and frameworks used to support student mental health.

## **School Actions**

**1.4 Design and engage in identity affirming, culturally responsive mental health focused school planning processes.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Supporting schools in developing and implementing School Improvement Plans (SIP) that focus on mattering and belonging through the use of evidence-based data, and student and family experiential data.
- Implementing the YRDSB School Well-Being Reflection Tool to support school well-being teams in considering and actioning all aspects of student well-being in school planning and improvement.
- Enhancing school staff members as Mental Health Liaisons to champion mental health initiatives at the school level.

### **Priority Area: Within**



### **1.5 Implementing identity affirming, culturally responsive mental health focused school-wide classroom practices.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Extending the ABCs of Mental Health (Acknowledge, Bridge, Connection) to support identity affirming practices that honour the lived and living experiences of all identities and focus on personal and community assets and strengths to connect.
- Creating identity affirming and safe spaces where students can access a variety of supports, healing, and growth. For example, mental health support; access to prayer/faith rooms/spaces that are safe, comfortable, affirming and created with student and family input; access to All Access Washrooms that are barrier-free, non-gendered, single-stall washrooms that are easily accessible.

### **1.6 Engage in identity affirming, culturally responsive mental health focused professional development for staff.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Promoting the principles of positive identity formation and identity affirming practices.
- Providing ongoing professional learning for educators on mental health prevention and early intervention at the system and school level.
- Providing resources and psycho-educational information and tools to help ensure classrooms are identity affirming.

## **Student/Classroom Actions**

### **1.7 Provide identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused counseling.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Implementing counseling through identity affirming and culturally responsive practices.
- Continuing the enhancement of Collaborative Relationships with External Services (CRES) partnerships and collaborations to support identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused counseling.

## **Priority Area: Within**

### **1.8 Enhancing and promoting identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused student leadership.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Enhancing and developing a board-wide grade 6-12 student leadership for mental health initiative that is identity affirming, and promotes agency, voice, and leadership for all students.
- Supporting the development of a YRDSB Student Leadership Framework that will provide co-constructed vision and direction with student leaders.
- Exploring collaboration and learning with existing student mentorship and leadership movements across York Region and beyond.

### **1.9 Implementing identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused whole class/school practices that promote mental health literacy, as well as substance use/misuse education.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Supporting the promotion of mental health literacy in developmentally appropriate, culturally responsive ways. This will include exploration of healthy relationships among peers as well as support of grief and loss with a culturally responsive approach.
- Focusing on mental health literacy regarding substance use/misuse and the impact on mental health through a harm reduction approach.
- Building awareness regarding the impacts of screen time overuse and how to establish online use practices that promote mental health and safety.

### **1.10 Engage in identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused professional learning and training.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Continuing anti-oppressive professional development for all YRDSB psychology and social work staff.
- Deepening our understanding of oppressive ideologies that impact mental health and how to counteract these with identity affirming approaches.

## **Priority Area: Within**

# Family/Community Actions

## **1.11 Developing and supporting identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused supportive gatherings for families to promote mental health.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Collaborating with family and caregiver groups to learn how to best support culturally responsive gatherings and learning opportunities for families.
- Enhancing the use of existing family and caregiver pathways for gathering and learning such as School Council Forums; Parent, Family and Community Engagement Advisory Committee and others.
- Continuing to partner with community groups to develop and offer mental health promotion events and initiatives that are culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive. Promoting identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused reciprocal communication and partnering with families.

## **1.12 Promoting identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused reciprocal communication and partnering with families.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Creating a shared understanding of mental health using a holistic, identity affirming mindset with ongoing conversations for sustainability.
- Enhancing the mental health newsletters for families by exploring additional communication modalities such as social media and podcasts.
- Promoting the mental health feedback page on the public facing website.



### **Priority Area: Within**





# Priority Area Strategy Actions

## Between:

Build capacity, understanding and resources with people, families, and communities in YRDSB to address trauma, racial trauma, and other forms of harm, while supporting healing and growth.

### System Actions

- 2.1 Developing and implementing professional learning and resources that intentionally decolonize past practices and interventions in order to build capacity for identity affirming and culturally responsive mental health practices for all.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Providing trauma-informed and healing-centered professional development that incorporates an understanding of how oppressive ideologies can negatively impact mental health.
- Providing professional learning for Psychological Services and Social Work staff that decolonize systemic past practices through an anti-oppressive lens.
- Setting trauma-sensitive best practices and capacity building for educators by providing inclusive practices that are culturally responsive to the students' social identities and lived experiences.

- 2.2 Encouraging and supporting identity affirming, culturally responsive, student leadership for mental health initiatives (grades 6 -12).**

This will be accomplished by:

- Enhancing and developing a board-wide grade 6-12 Student Leadership for Mental Health initiative that is identity affirming, promotes agency, voice, and leadership for all students.
- Supporting the development of a YRDSB Student Leadership Framework that will provide co-constructed vision and direction with student leaders.
- Exploring collaboration and learning with existing student mentorship and leadership movements across York Region and beyond.

### Priority Area: Between

### **2.3 Collaborating with identity-specific affinity groups, community partners and families to enhance identity affirming, trauma-informed and culturally responsive mental health initiatives.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Intentionally seeking and building relationships with identity-specific affinity groups to better understand how to enhance identity affirming, trauma-informed and culturally responsive mental health initiatives.
- Exploring and implementing ways we can engage in influencing a process of empowerment and rebuilding trust with families and students to avoid a power dynamic.

## **School Actions**

### **2.4 Examining and fostering school-wide identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health strategies that increase safer spaces for learning.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Promoting and explaining the Caring and Learning Plan, which contains assets-based information about “Knowing the Learner and Relationships”.
- Promoting the exploration of the professional development series “Understanding Anxiety from a Social Framework” which incorporates an anti-racist and anti-colonial approach to understanding anxiety and healing.

### **2.5 Implementing school-wide identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health professional learning and resources that is informed by school-based data and community voice.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Providing psychoeducation for school staff about how to notice when a student may be struggling with mental health and the early intervention and strategies that can promote wellness.
- Building an understanding of the continuum of substance use/misuse as well as harm reduction methods and how educators can support students to seek help/treatment.

## **Priority Area: Between**



# Student/Classroom Actions

## 2.6 Implementing identity affirming, culturally responsive mental health professional learning and resources in classroom programming, practices and strategies with critical reflection and refinement

This will be accomplished by:

- Using practices and resources with the understanding and recognition that students have internal and community assets, strengths, and gifts.
- Recognizing the importance of self-determination and self-advocacy.
- Designing resources and initiatives that acknowledge trauma, racial trauma, and other forms of harm as well as a healing-centered approach.
- Through collaboration and partnership with Indigenous elders and community leaders, promoting and sharing Indigenous ways of healing intergenerational trauma and substance misuse to inform an understanding of diverse approaches.
- Ensuring students have a safe and brave space to thrive – to ensure a power – with dialogue is created to influence one’s process of empowerment.

# Family/Community Actions

## 2.7 Implementing identity affirming, culturally responsive mental health professional learning and resources in classroom programming, practices and strategies with critical reflection and refinement

This will be accomplished by:

- Collaborating with family and caregiver groups to learn how to best support culturally responsive gatherings and learning opportunities for families.
- Enhancing the use of existing family and caregiver pathways for gathering and learning such as School Council Forums; Parent, Family and Community Engagement Advisory Committee; and others.
- Continuing to partner with community groups to develop and offer mental health promotion events and initiatives that are culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive.

## Priority Area: Between

# Priority Area Strategy Actions

## Around:

Build safe, mentally healthy and inclusive learning environments where students feel they matter and belong. Create Identity Specific collaboration and care and pathways that are responsive to students and families.

### System Actions

#### 3.1 Develop, implement and/or revise identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused protocols and policies.

This will be accomplished by:

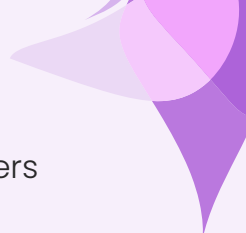
- Sharing and implementing the new Mental Health Response Guidelines with schools to support and understand the path to accessing YRDSB mental health supports and services.
- Sharing and implementing the new Traumatic Event Support (TES) with schools to support and understand the path to responding and supporting during a traumatic event.
- Promoting and implementing the new Anti-Sex Trafficking protocol.
- Sharing and intentionally using the faith-based accommodations Religious Accommodations: A Framework For Responding to Requests for Religious Accommodations (Policy 261.8) to support student identity and wellness.
- Developing a framework for responding/sharing system-wide realities that impact mental health, such as geopolitical conflicts, and hate crimes.
- Sharing and intentionally using the [Gender Identity and Expression Guidelines](#) to support student identity and wellness.

#### 3.2 Develop and implement identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused professional learning using board and other resources.

This will be accomplished by:

- Promoting board-wide implementation of mental health promotion that is identity affirming and delivered in anti-oppressive practice approaches, for example, ABCs of Mental Health (Acknowledge, Bridge, Connection).

### Priority Area: Around

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- Building understanding of the oppressive ideologies that create barriers to mental health.
  - Working closely to build literacy and awareness that staff mental health impacts students' mental health through a variety of means such as joint mental health acknowledgment campaigns, professional development, and newsletters.

### **3.3 Create and support identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused committees/structures.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Implementing the YRDSB Well-Being Steering Committee to help promote the four components of Well-Being (Positive Mental Health, Safe and Caring Schools, Healthy Schools, and Equity and Inclusion).
- Collaborating with Student Services and Special Education Teams to support students' differing abilities via partnerships and committee work to create inclusive practices and spaces.
- Aligning and collaborating with the [Indigenous Education and Equity Strategy](#) where possible, as well as the [Dismantling Anti-Black Racism Strategy](#).

## **School Actions**

### **3.4 Design identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused learning environments and spaces.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Promoting the maintenance of visible prayer and contemplation spaces as spaces for mental health healing and growth.
- Promoting the incorporation of gender inclusivity into school environments (washroom, gyms, health classes, etc.) and developing practices that are more inclusive and welcoming.
- Building inclusive and healthy learning environments for students that reflect multiple identities in building displays and presentations.

## **Priority Area: Around**



### **3.5 Create and support identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused school-based teams.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Continuing to support School Well-Being Teams (Well-being is comprised of Caring and Safe Schools, Inclusive Schools, Healthy Schools, Mental Health).
- Enhancing school staff members as Mental Health Liaisons to champion mental health initiatives at the school level.
- Supporting schools to understand and counteract oppressive ideologies (e.g., deficit thinking, universalism, pathologization) and developing practices that remove these oppressive ideologies which create barriers to mental health.

### **3.6 Collaborate and engage with communities in identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused ways.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Actively engaging with families in a culturally responsive and relevant manner to promote positive connections between home and classroom and to create a sense of belonging for all students.
- Making introductions and promoting relationships with elders and leaders in the communities which surround the school.

## **Student/Classroom Actions**

### **3.7 Create and support identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused Student Leadership for Mental Health.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Supporting existing “Healthy School Champions” (students) to develop and create mentally healthy spaces within the classroom through the sharing of sample healthy practices.
- Developing Student Leadership for Mental Health “Youth S.P.A.C.E.” (Students Promoting Awareness, Connection and Empowerment) for grades 6-12, an identity affirming, youth agency and leadership initiative.

## **Priority Area: Around**

### **3.8 Design and use identity affirming, culturally responsive, mentally healthy practices.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Providing students information and support when worrisome local and global events occur.
- Promoting inclusivity through the accommodation of mental health activities in the “healthy living” section of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum in ways that allow for multiple entry points so as to include students with differing cognitive abilities.
- Providing support for newcomers and those with refugee backgrounds through internal YRDSB mental health supports and partnerships, and collaborations with groups supporting newcomers in our communities.

## **Family/Community Actions**

### **3.9 Build and support identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused partnership with families.**

This will be accomplished by:

- Providing communication materials to families that are easily translated and use accessible language and terminology that is more culturally reflective.
- Collaborating with family and caregiver groups to learn how to best support culturally responsive gatherings and learning opportunities for families.
- Enhancing the use of existing family and caregiver pathways for gathering and learning such as:
  - » School Council Forums,
  - » Parent, Family and Community Engagement Advisory Committee (PEAC),
  - » and others.
- Continuing to partner with community groups to develop and offer mental health promotion events and initiatives for families and caregivers that are culturally and linguistically relevant and responsive.

### 3.10 Promote and engage in identity affirming, culturally responsive, mental health focused collaboration and wraparound support.

This will be accomplished by:

- Promoting and pursuing cross-departmental collaboration to support the multiple needs contributing to student mental health. For example, working across all four components of well-being: Inclusive School and Community Services, Caring and Safe Schools, Healthy Schools, and Mental Health.
- Collaborating with the Community Care Social Work Team to promote identity affirming support system wide.



### Priority Area: Around

# Accountability Framework

The successful implementation of this strategy depends on an effective and clearly defined accountability framework. Accountability for implementing this strategy will also help to create a lasting climate of commitment to student mental health and improving the outcomes for students.

This accountability framework includes both internal and external mechanisms. Within the organization, the Director of Education and Board of Trustees have key responsibilities for oversight, allocating resources and monitoring implementation. Families and caregivers and community are also an important external mechanism that will play a role in the monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of this strategy.

This framework is therefore designed for implementing the actions in the strategy in a way that will create better outcomes for students. The framework includes an evaluation that allows senior leaders and community members to assess the impact of the strategy on outcomes for students; effectively monitor and make course corrections as needed; and identify gaps and emerging opportunities. This framework also establishes the use of key performance indicators to measure progress as well as regular public reporting to allow for community engagement.


## System Level

### Student Well-Being Steering Committee

The Student Well-Being Steering Committee will play an active leadership role in supporting the implementation and evaluation of the Student Mental Health and Addiction Strategy. The steering committee will continue to meet regularly and receive updates and information from YRDSB staff regarding implementation of the strategy.

### Trustees

The Director of Education will update the Board of Trustees on the progress of implementation of the strategy and the resulting outcomes for students. These updates will be provided throughout the school year so that trustees can stay informed of the Board's progress toward achieving its goals, keep their constituents informed, and recommend adjustments to be made to the implementation plan as



needed. As a point of access to the school board for members of the public, trustees are encouraged to share information with communities in York Region about the strategy and its implementation. Ongoing communication between trustees and the community will also help build public trust in education and help the Board to develop stronger relationships with the communities they serve.

## **School Level**

### **School Improvement Plans**

One of the primary ways in which local schools can be held accountable for ensuring the implementation of this strategy is by reporting on how the actions in this strategy will be implemented in their School Improvement Plans. Schools will be invited to use the School Well-Being Reflection Tool to help identify opportunities and gaps to address in their School Improvement Plans. These plans will be reviewed to identify the system-wide support needed as well as opportunities for schools to collaborate.

## **Individual Level**

### **Director's Action Plan**

The Director's Action Plan (DAP) sets out goals that align with the strategic plan and the Board's mission, vision, and values. The DAP focuses on raising the achievement of students who are underserved and underperforming. The Director of Education's responsibility for implementing the Student Mental Health and Addictions Strategy will be included in the DAP, through which the trustees will hold the director accountable.



# Key Performance Indicators

Student outcomes will be monitored through the YRDSB Every Student Counts Survey which includes questions regarding student mental health and well-being.

In addition to any information about the implementation of particular actions, several key performance indicators (KPI) will be developed and used to assess the progress that has been made. Reporting on this data at both the system and school levels will identify where system-level and school-specific initiatives are needed. It will provide school leaders with a clear, accurate and useful understanding of the degree of inequity present in their own schools. It will also allow the YRDSB to target its resources for maximum impact. The use of these key performance indicators will:

- Focus school board attention on opportunity gaps;
- Provide accountability data for use by the community;
- Assess the impact of the initiatives contained in this strategy; and
- Identify whether and where adjustments to this strategy are needed.



# Glossary

**Colonialism:** “Colonialism is the historical practice of European expansion into territories already inhabited by Indigenous peoples for the purposes of acquiring new lands and resources. This expansion is rooted in the violent suppression of Indigenous peoples’ governance, legal, social, and cultural structures. Colonialism attempts to force Indigenous peoples to accept and integrate into institutions that are designed to force them to conform with the structures of the colonial state. ‘Colonialism remains an ongoing process, shaping both the structure and the quality of the relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples.’”


*TRC Final Report, 2016 What We Have Learned: Principles of Truth and Reconciliation cited in Government of Ontario, 2021.*

**Culturally responsive:** Gay (2000) and Villegas and Lucas (2002), use the terms “Culturally Responsive Teaching” ...to describe teaching that recognizes all students learn differently and that these differences may be connected to background, language, family structure and social or cultural identity. Theorists and practitioners of culturally responsive pedagogy more than acknowledge the “cultural uniqueness” of each student; they intentionally nurture it to create and facilitate effective conditions for learning.

**Deficit thinking:** This refers to the notion that students fail in school because such students and their families have internal deficits that thwart the learning process. It ‘blames the victim’ rather than examining how the schools are structured to prevent students who have been marginalized from learning.

[YRDSB Caring and Learning Plan 2021.](#)

**Discrimination:** Discrimination is the distinction between individuals not based on legitimate terms; refers to arbitrary bias for or against an individual or a group, or the unjust and inequitable treatment of an individual or group. Discrimination can be based on age, birth, socioeconomic class, colour, creed, ability, ethnicity, familial status, gender, gender identity, language, marital status, political or other opinion, race, religion or faith belief, sex, or sexual orientation.



**Harm Reduction:** Harm Reduction is an evidence-based, client-centered approach that seeks to reduce the health and social harms associated with addiction and substance use, without necessarily requiring people who use substances from abstaining or stopping.

[CMHA](#)

**Identity Affirming (Spaces):** This ensures that all stakeholders (students, staff, and community) feel represented, welcomed and belonging in our spaces. The dimensions of identity are complex and far-ranging. They might include ethnicity, gender, friendship circles, race, talents, language(s), social media involvement, expectations of self, aspirations, beliefs, spiritual beliefs, socio-economic situation, degree of self-awareness, passions and interests, sense of self-efficacy – in fact, all the factors that form the unique person in the classroom. There is a rich repertoire of possibilities for inclusion, for drawing each individual into the classroom. Through feedback and conversation about several aspects of students' lives, teachers facilitate personal investment in learning.

[Building Capacity Series Secretariat Special Edition #20](#)

**Intergenerational trauma:** Intergenerational trauma refers to trauma that is experienced by more than one person or group of persons and extended from one generation to another. First recognized as high levels of distress found among children of Holocaust survivors.


[www.health.com](http://www.health.com)

**Marginalization:** "Marginalization is a long-term, structural process of systemic discrimination that creates a class of disadvantaged minorities. Marginalized groups become permanently confined to the fringes of society. Their status is perpetuated through various dimensions of exclusion, particularly in the labor market, from full and meaningful participation in society."

*Government of Ontario, 2021*

**Oppression:** Oppression refers to "a situation in which people are governed in an unfair and cruel way and prevented from having opportunities and freedom."

[dictionary.cambridge.org](https://dictionary.cambridge.org), 2021



**Oppressive Ideologies:** An oppressive ideology is an ideology that perpetuates and reinforces oppression. Oppression is defined as systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; when some people are denied something of value while others have ready access.

*[YRDSB Caring and Learning Plan 2021](#)*

**Pathologization:** The practice of seeing a symptom as indication of a disease or disorder. In mental health, the term is often used to indicate over-diagnosis or the refusal to accept certain behavior as normal.

**Racial Trauma:** Racial Trauma or race-based traumatic stress is a cumulative emotional pain or stressful impacts of experiencing or witnessing discrimination, racism, and institutional racism.

*Carter, 2007*

**Trauma:** A traumatic event involves a single experience, or enduring repeated or multiple experiences, that completely overwhelm the individual's ability to cope or integrate the ideas and emotions involved in that experience." (Source: [Trauma Informed Toolkit, p. 9](#)). It is important to remember that responses to trauma are involuntary. Trauma lives in the nervous system. The body reacts immediately to perceived danger before our brain can accurately name what is going on. These responses are triggered by cues in our daily lives that may not be associated with the original distressing events. External cues such as loud noises, the look on a loved one's face, or other incidents can further affect people impacted by trauma.

**Safe Space:** The term safe space generally means a place or environment in which a person or category of people can feel confident that they will not be exposed to discrimination, criticism, harassment or any other emotional or physical harm.

**Universalization:** The process of making something universal or generalizable to others.