

Engagement Matters

Parent, Family and Community Engagement Advisory Committee Newsletter



Save the Date

May 18	PEAC Application Submission Opens
May 24	PEAC New Member Information Session
June 15	PEAC Public Meeting

In this edition we take a closer look at the new mental health and addiction strategy for the York Region District School Board and what it means to take a "*Within, Between, and Around*" approach when supporting mental health challenges. We also share important reminders for school councils, as well as key dates and application information for parents, guardians and community members who are interested in becoming a PEAC member.

Attending a PEAC Public Meeting

PEAC meetings are open to the public and all are welcome to attend. In addition to Board and PEAC updates, there are also special interest presentations at each meeting. Non-PEAC attendees are in listen only mode.

Date...	June 15, 2023
Time...	7 pm to 9 pm
Location...	Virtual
Meeting Link...	Connection instructions can be found within the meeting agenda, which is posted before the meeting date on the YRDSB website .

New strategy takes holistic approach to student mental health

At a time when mental health is declining among Canadian youths, and Ontario schools are struggling to support afflicted students, the York Region District School Board hopes its 2022-2026 Student Mental Health and Addiction Strategy will make a difference. At the center of the new strategy is an intentional focus on identity-affirming and culturally responsive supports. This holistic approach will aim to bolster emotional connection at this critical point in time.

The YRDSB shared its plan to address mental health among the approximately 126,000 students at its 213 schools in a presentation at its CEC West School Council Forum on Feb. 13. Patricia Marra-Stapleton, a certified Psychological Associate and the board's Mental Health Lead, explained the strategy's holistic approach that acknowledges the interrelated parts within an individual, between individuals as in relationships, and around individuals, e.g. community and the learning/social environment.

Strategy Priority Areas

The 2022-2026 YRDSB Student Mental Health and Addiction Strategy focuses on 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

"The YRDSB Student Mental Health Strategy, Within Us, Between Us, and Around Us, will provide students and families with a holistic approach to mental health in a way that honours that many expressions and understandings of mental health across and within communities," Marra-Stapleton says.

YRDSB Mental Health Strategy

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The strategy is especially critical at a time when, according to Statistics Canada's latest Canadian Community Health Survey, the percentage of those ages 12-17 who reported having good or excellent mental health dropped to 61% in 2022 from 73% in 2019.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in which students endured more than two years of school closures, virtual learning and social isolation, continues to affect young people.

The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health's 2022 survey of 2,225 Ontario students in grades 7-12 found that since the pandemic, 59% of students feel depressed about the future and 39% report having worse mental health.

In February of 2022, the Ontario government announced it would invest \$90 million in mental health supports for 2022-23. Yet evidence shows this funding falls short for what schools actually need to adequately help students in mental distress. People for Education's 2022-23 Annual Ontario School Survey of principals at 1,044 schools across all 72 publicly funded boards revealed that 95% of schools reported needing some or more supports for students' mental well-being.

The province-wide survey by the non-partisan advocacy group also found that the percentage of schools with no access to psychologists has doubled in the last 10 years. Only 9% of schools reported having regularly scheduled access to a mental health/addiction specialist or nurse, while 46% indicated having no access at all.

The YRDSB does assign a psychologist and social worker to each school. In mental health emergencies, clinicians head to a school as soon as they receive a call. For non-acute cases, psychologists and social workers conduct a triage process in order to respond to students by level of need, which means some students may wait longer than others for service.



*Patricia Marra-Stapleton,
YRDSB Mental Health Lead*

YRDSB Mental Health Strategy

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At the December 2022 meeting of the YRDSB's Parent, Family and Community Engagement Advisory Council (PEAC), CEC West - Postsecondary representative Sharon Aschaiek asked Sue Ball, Chief Psychologist for the board, how the YRDSB should improve mental health services, and she replied: "I would like the board to hire more psychologists and social workers."

As one Southwestern Ontario school principal commented in the People for Education survey: "Mental health challenges among students, families and staff have significantly increased. Having, at minimum, a full-time (not once a week/once a month) social worker and psychologist available at all schools would be hugely beneficial. There is so much support required for students, families, and staff."

Supporting Mental Health

For more information about ways to support your child's mental health, please visit the [YRDSB Mental Health webpage](#) for complete access to tools and resources designed to help you navigate these important topics

Did you know?...

- YRDSB has **over 1,000** staff members trained on mental health strategies
- YRDSB has **more than 50** school-based social workers and psychologists

Tips for supporting mental health:

- Exercise and eat healthy
- Maintain good sleep habits
- Practice gratitude and mindfulness
- Encourage daily face to face time with family and friends
- Prevent and manage stress when it happens



Interested in Becoming a PEAC Member?

What is the purpose of PEAC and its members?

PEAC members support, encourage and enhance parent engagement at the Board level to help improve student achievement and well-being. They represent the collective voice of parents who have children attending public schools in York Region.

What are the membership expectations?

Members are expected to attend a minimum of five meetings each year and are encouraged to participate on PEAC sub-committees.

How to apply?

Interested applicants are asked to submit an application using ONE of the methods listed below once the application period **opens on May 18, 2023**:

- Submit an [Online Application Form](#)
- Email [Leadership Development and Engagement](#) to request a copy
- Call Leadership Development and Engagement at 905-727-0022 ext. 3650

How to learn more about the opportunity?

Interested applicants are invited to join us for a virtual information session on May 24, 2023. The meeting link will be posted on the PEAC webpage. You may also visit the [PEAC Application Process FAQ](#) posting for answers to some of the most common questions by candidates.

Thank you for taking an interest in PEAC. We wish every candidate the best of luck!



Join the Edsby Group for School Councils Chairs and Co-Chairs



It is great to see our School Council Chairs leading the way and sharing ideas on our Edsby School Council Hub! Thank you for your on-going participation.

Our Edsby School Council Hub is the place to...

- stay up-to-date on school council topics and current affairs;
- share inspiring ideas and helpful suggestions for fundraisers and events;
- learn about training sessions and public meetings,
- plus so much more!

Your engagement with this group helps create a supportive network for school councils across our Board. We look forward to growing this group together!

Helpful Hint: *To ensure that you receive important messages, update your notification settings by following the step-by-step instructions in the “Knowledge” section of the group.*

Reminders...

Four important things school councils can do now to finish the year strong and be prepared for the following year:

- Prepare the school council's annual report
- Review and update the principal profile
- Review your council's election process and update the constitution, if needed
- Plan a staff and volunteer appreciation event or recognition

More details can be found in our [June 2021 newsletter](#).

